



Loved Called Gifted

Facilitator's Guide

Catherine Cowell and Sean Kennedy

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Our Website

The *Loved, Called, Gifted* website is the place to go for all our resources. Please make participants aware of the website, because there are lots of resources there that will enhance their learning and their experience of the course. There, you can find:

Course materials including pdf files of the facilitator's guide, the course handbook for participants, which we call the Companion Guide and slides to accompany the course.

The online version of the course. If you have never done the course yourself, in person, we highly recommend that you complete the online course yourself.

Details of other resources we have produced.

How to access **coaching, training, spiritual direction and other services** we provide.

The Loved, Called, Gifted blog which has lots of short articles relevant to the course.

Contact details for the team. We are always delighted to hear from you, with your thoughts, comments, questions. Happy to chat and be helpful if we can.

The Podcast

The *Loved, Called, Gifted* podcast is a great resource and adjunct to the course. There are episodes that look more deeply at the themes of the course and at related concepts that there isn't time to cover during the course. There are also interviews with a wide range of people talking about life, their spiritual journey and their calling. Please make your course attendees aware of the podcast. It's a great resource and will enhance their learning.

Video Resources

There are a number of videos that accompany the online course, which you might find useful to watch and possibly to share with your participants. There are links to these on the course pages of the website: lovedcalledgifted.com

Suggested breakdown of sessions

Loved, Called, Gifted is designed to be used flexibly. You are free to divide it into sections as you want. You may decide to just take particular exercises to use with a particular group or individual. It works well as a two day or weekend course. Or you can do an abridged version in a day. It really is up to you.

If you would like to do the course weekly, the following breakdown into sessions works well. This is assuming seven sessions of around two hours each, which also allows time for refreshments. Page numbers are from this, the facilitator's guide.

Session 1: Loved (pages 7 - 23)

Session 2: Doing and being (pages 25 to 36)

If you find you have time to spare in this session, you could also cover calling myths here rather than in the next session.

Session 3: Life journey and calling myths (pages 37 - 46)

Session 4: Called (pages 47 - 58)

Session 5: Gifted (pages 59 - 66)

Session 6: What gets in our way? (pages 67 - 76)*

Session 7: Next steps (pages 79 - 90)

Session 8: Reflection and celebration

*it is important to make sure that all the material in 'what gets in our way?' happens in one session with time allowed to offer people extra prayer and support should they need it.

Factoring in an eighth session for celebration is not strictly necessary and you may choose not to, but celebration is good and it allows some flexibility should you need it.

Introduction to the Facilitator's Guide

Loved, Called, Gifted is designed to take people on a prayerful journey of discovery that will help them to deepen their experience of being loved by God, understand their life calling better and uncover their gifts. None of these things are ever a 'one time only' event, but rather they are things we find ourselves needing to revisit and to understand more deeply at various times in our lives.

This guide is in two parts. Firstly, you will find guidance to help you facilitate the various activities that make up the course. In the second half is more general wisdom about facilitating effectively and space to record notes from the facilitator's course.

As you will discover, the thoughts and activities of which the course comprises are only part of the picture. Of as much, if not more importance, is *how* the course is delivered. In other words, you, the values you bring, the environment you create, and the way you facilitate the course will be as important as the course material itself.

As a facilitator, you are inviting participants on a journey. You will be a guide and companion on that journey. To be a good guide, it is vital that this is a journey with which you are familiar. If we are going to be guided into unfamiliar territory by someone, we ideally want to know that they have been there before and understand the terrain. So to facilitate this course you need to have done it yourself, or something very similar. We also ask that you have attended one of our training courses. We highly recommend that you read our book, *Loved, Called, Gifted* (by Sean Kennedy and Catherine Cowell) which covers the same ground but in much greater depth and breadth.

One of the underlying assumptions of this course is that it is we should, as Christians, be seeking to discover what God is calling us to do with our lives and helping one another to discover and live out our callings. If we are serious about this, it has implications for the way in which we lead people and organise our churches. We look at this question and what to do about it in detail in our book *Church Uncorked* (by Catherine Cowell and Sean Kennedy). If you are doing this course with your church, we recommend that you read *Church Uncorked*.

The course is designed to be a guide and a help, not a strait jacket. Some people, when running courses, like very clear guidelines and all the details spelled out. If this is you, then our intention is that there is everything you need, in your facilitator's pack, to enable you to know what you're doing and feel confident. If you

prefer to be a little more flexible, then we hope there is space for that too. Many of the activities work well by themselves and can also be used on a one-to-one basis. We often do just that. If you find a way of doing things, or an activity that works particularly well, please let us know so we can share your wisdom. Contact details are on the back page of this guide.

On a practical note, pages in this font with are for your information

Whereas pages in the companion guide, for participants are in this font. Page numbers displayed like this *Page 3* are the page numbers for the companion guide.

There is a powerpoint to accompany the course, should you choose to use it. With a smaller group, or a less formal setting, you may choose just to use the handbooks.

So. Without further ado, let's get on with course...

Creating the right environment

Whether you choose to run a course in a weekend or over the course of several evenings, you want to create an environment that helps people participate fully.

We want people to leave each session understanding that they are loved, valued and precious. We want them to know that they have something valuable to offer and that they are worth listening to. Taking some time to choose the right venue and create the right environment will really help people to take on board these important messages and participate in the discussions and conversations which comprise a vital part of the course.

We all know that it is easier to feel relaxed and to chat in some places than it is in others. You want your course to be an easy place to relax and chat and the physical environment you create will make a big difference.

We have found that an informal, cafe-style set up, with people sat in small groups around tables, can work extremely well. It provides automatic small groups for discussions, somewhere to lean your companion guide, when recording your thoughts and somewhere to put your coffee. It also means that there are tables you can dress, to make them look nice.

Food is a great way to help people relax and socialise, so you might want to consider eating together during the course, either a full blown meal or finger food to munch as you go along. If that's a logistical step too far, then think about the little touches that will make people feel looked after. Could you break open the decent biscuits? Put bottles of water and bowls of sweets on the tables? Do you have people who like prettying up the environment?

It is also worth thinking about how you are going to present the handouts. You might want to bind the handouts into a booklet, if you have the resources to do so. Or you might like to buy some nice folders to put them in. The participants will be recording their dreams and hopes in their handouts, so you want them to be presented in a way that reflects their value.

And while we are on the topic of recording things, there is a reason that people like posh pens. Writing with something nice, feels good. So before you wheel out the usual stock of dodgy, scratchy, unreliable pens sitting in the back of a cupboard somewhere, you might want to invest a small amount on some that actually write and are pleasant to use.

Exactly what will work, will obviously depend where you are doing your course and who with. This might all sound like window dressing, but it isn't. It makes a big difference. So it is worth putting some time and thought into getting the set up right.

To think about...

What participants do you plan to run your courses with?

What kinds of things, thinking of the physical environment, refreshments, equipment, would your group/s find particularly helpful? Is there anything they might find unhelpful?

If you could choose any venue for your group, where would it be and why?

What venue do you think you'll actually use? What challenges might your venue present? What might you do about those challenges?

If you were attending, what physical things would help you to know you were loved and valued and precious?

Welcome and introduction

Exactly how you welcome everyone and introduce yourself is up to you. You will, of course, have offered everyone the chance of a cup of tea, or other suitable beverage so that everyone is comfortable and settled and feeling welcome. Here are some ideas for starting off on the right foot:

- If you have been asked to run the course by someone that the group already knows and trusts, then it helps if they can introduce and recommend you. Otherwise, introduce yourself.
- It's a good idea to begin with some prayer that gives people an opportunity to commit their journey throughout the course to God.
- Explain a little about the course, what people can expect and how it will run.
- Take care if you ask people to introduce themselves, unless you are confident that it will work well for the group. Being asked to introduce themselves often makes people feel nervous. It can also take a long time if someone decides to tell their life story and everyone else follows suit. On the other hand, it can be a lovely way of allowing you and the participants the chance to get a feel for the group. If you do ask people to introduce themselves, let them know it needs to be short. You could ask them to do it 'briefly' or 'in just a sentence or so'.
- You might like to ask everyone to indicate whether they think by talking (extrovert) or like chance to think before they talk (introvert). You might decide to separate the introverts and extraverts so that during the activities, the introverts get chance to think before they are expected to speak.

Ground Rules

Explain the purpose of the ground rules is to help everyone feel safe, comfortable and able to participate.

As you read through the ground rules, this is your opportunity to make sure you have permission to steer the group when you need to move things on.

Ask if people are happy with the ground rules. Ask for comments and suggestions for any additional ground rules they would like. Once you have agreement, move on.

Blurb and small print

Please note:

To help make sure that this course is a good experience for those who take part, we recommend that facilitators have experienced the course themselves and undertake facilitator training before using these materials with others. Information about this can be found at refuelnetwork.org where you will also find out how to get hold of the facilitator's handbook.

Limit of liability/Disclaimer of warranty:

The aims of the authors/course leaders are only to offer information of a general nature to help inform and educate people in their quest for life purpose, meaning, emotional and spiritual well-being. In the event that any techniques, questions, psychometric tools, information or ideas contained or stemming from this course are used, the authors/course leaders assume no liability or responsibility for any actions and their resulting consequences. The participant is personally responsible for clearly thinking through and assessing any course of action resulting from this course and considering all its possible consequences. Where significant risk is involved it is recommended that participants consult a suitably qualified professional (for example, a physician, coach, mentor, consultant, experienced expert) and/or any legally responsible carer to assist them to carefully consider the risks and potential consequences any intended course of action has before embarking on it.

There are certain values and assumptions that this course takes for granted. They are:

- * everyone is equal
- * everyone is precious
- * everyone has something valuable to offer
- * everyone deserves to be listened to
- * each person is valued and accepted just the way they are
- * it's fine to disagree with one another - we can learn interesting things from people with different opinions to ours - so long as we express our views respectfully
- * nobody is perfect
- * mistakes are great opportunities to learn
- * judging other people is unhelpful
- * we can all learn from the wisdom and knowledge of the people around us
- * you are the expert on your own life: you don't need other people to tell you what to do
- * you are responsible for your own life and the decisions you make
- * you have the power to change yourself
- * you can influence others, but you can't change them

The course is based upon biblical Christian values, beliefs and spirituality. It draws on knowledge from a variety of disciplines, including psychology, counselling and coaching. Everyone is welcome, whatever their background or opinions and we expect to learn from one another.

Ground Rules

Here are some guidelines we suggest to help everyone feel comfortable, valued and able to take part. Is there anything we would like to add? There is space at the bottom.

- Everyone is welcome as they are and everyone is equal.
- No one has to speak or share if they don't want to.
- Everyone deserves to be listened to.
- There is no such thing as a stupid question. All questions and comments are welcome.
- Facilitators have permission to move things along when necessary.
- We will avoid giving one another advice or telling people what we would do if we were them. Instead we will try to ask questions that will help the other person think for themselves.
- We respect what each person thinks, feels and believes - even if we don't agree.
- Emotions are good and normal.
- What is said in the room stays in the room. Confidentiality is key. *(This is confidentiality, not secrecy. In the highly unlikely event that someone reveals they or someone else is in danger, or that a serious crime has been committed, you will need to discuss with the course facilitators what action to take.)*



Loved, Called, Gifted: a reflection

For you

This activity:

- Introduces the basic concepts and shape of the course and gets people to think about it.
- Allows the possibility of people disagreeing with the statements and gives opportunity to talk things through if needed.

The activity:

Ask people to turn to the first page / cover of their manual.

Read through the statements.

Give everyone a few minutes to write or draw their thoughts and feelings in response to the three words and statements in the thought bubble

Reflection:

Ask people to share their thoughts, if they'd like to, either with the whole group or with the people sitting near them.

Loved

(I am unique, precious and deeply loved by God)

Called

(I am called to partner with God to do something interesting and exciting)

Gifted

(I am gifted and talented. I can do the things God is calling me to do)



Loved

For you

This is the foundation of the course. Our primary calling is actually not to do anything. It is to be the beloved of God. So this is where we start. For some people, the major outcome of the course will be a new assurance of being loved by God.

Our experience is that many Christians find understanding and believing that they are loved very difficult. In Christian circles, where we are all expected to know that God loves us, admitting that we find this hard to believe or experience can seem almost impossible. We can assure people that struggling to accept God's love is normal. There are good reasons for it. It is not something that we need feel guilty about. Most of us find it hard to believe that we are completely, unconditionally loved. Learning to live in that truth is perhaps the greatest and most important challenge of our discipleship. The freer we become, over the years, to accept God's love, the more we will live it out in our lives and share it with others. It will flow through who we are and into the world.

Throughout *Loved, Called, Gifted*, we want people to grow in their sense that who they are, right now, is loveable and acceptable in God's eyes. The key message is that it's OK to be you. Yes, we all want to grow and mature and become more like Christ. But we are already loved, right now, just as we are. Brennan Manning, who writes a great deal about God's love, talks about 'living in the wisdom of accepted tenderness'. In other words, accepting that God loves you tenderly and living in the light of that.

Before leading this part of the course, reflect honestly on how much God's love is a reality to you. Do you find it difficult to comprehend and sense for yourself? If you do find it difficult, or if you have in the past, what do you think the causes of that might be? If you have grown in your awareness of God's love over time, think about how that has happened for you. There might be things from your own story that you would like to share. We strongly suggest that before you run the course, you make welcoming God's love for you a focus of your own spiritual life and prayer. We want the atmosphere of the whole course to be one of deep love and acceptance. Your own love for and acceptance of yourself and others will be the main thing that creates that atmosphere.

You are loved!

This course is entitled 'Loved Called Gifted,' in that order, for a reason. You are loved first. You might not believe it. Part of your brain might wish to dismiss it, but it is true. This is the most important thing for you to know and it is the foundation of everything else in your life. Here is the good news. God has already decided that you are loved. That you are precious and important.

What God most wants from us, is us. He loves us and delights in us as we are. We were created to be loved and to love. That is the most important thing of all. Our primary calling is to be in loving relationship with God. We are called to be before we are called to do.

We get glimpses of the joy of simply being in some of our relationships with one another. You might have known it as a parent, gazing at the child in your arms. Perhaps you have been in love, maybe you still are, and know the joy of being together doing nothing in particular. We don't need reasons to spend time with good friends, we do it simply because we enjoy one another.

The God who has existed in perfect loving communion with Himself from all eternity, is inviting us to be with Him. That is our destiny. The image of the final fulfilment of God's plan for humanity in Revelation, is of the church, me and you, married to Christ (Revelation 19:5-10).

For us broken, fallen people, truly understanding that we are loved like this takes time. It is our life's work. There are always more depths of God's love to discover. As we walk through our lives with Jesus, His love heals, restores and renews us. We become more fully ourselves. We become the people we were always created to be.

"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power...to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Ephesians 3:16-19

You are fearfully and wonderfully made!

Psalm 139:14

You are made of up of 70 to 100 trillion cells. In the last second a hundred thousand chemical reactions took place in each one of them.

Your brain is the most complex thing in the universe. Each brain cell is connected with up to 100 thousand others. By the age of 3 your brain had 1000 Trillion connections or synapses.

He chose us in him before the foundation of the world. (Ephesians 1:4)

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. (1 Peter 2:9)

Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (Matthew 10:30)

Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God. (Romans 8:38-39)

What about you?

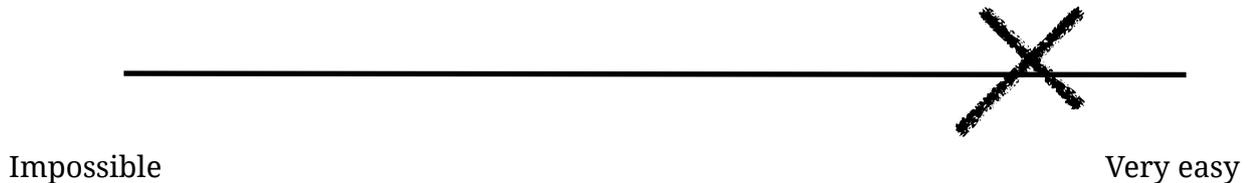
The activity

Give people opportunity to reflect by themselves and answer the questions before opening things up for discussion.

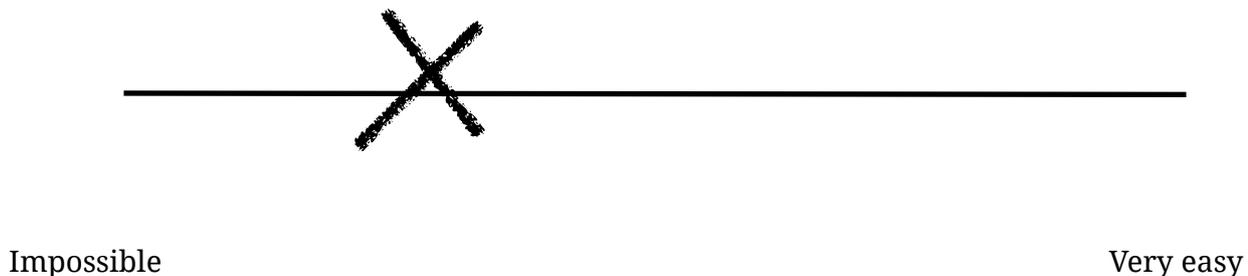
Things to highlight to the participants

Most people find it easier to believe that people, generally, are precious and loved than they do to believe it about themselves. So a very typical response looks something like this:

How easy do you find it to believe that each human being is precious and deeply loved by God?



How easy do you find it to believe that you, personally, are precious and deeply loved by God?



The power of this question is that it immediately reveals the lack of logic in the way many of us see ourselves. Am I really going to say that everyone on the planet is precious and deeply loved except for me? Once I can see how silly this way of thinking is, I can begin to challenge it in myself. I can see that simply seeing myself as a normal member of the human race means that I am precious and deeply loved. To see myself that way is not arrogance, it's just logical.

There are many people who believe themselves to be of less value than those around them. If we think this way, it affects how we see ourselves, how we speak and how we act. How

many people do you know who seem to be able to find time for everyone except themselves? Or who could stand up for someone else's rights but won't defend their own?

Begin to look out for the things people say and do that reveal something about the way they view themselves. Look out for the way that you speak about and treat yourself. What does it tell you?

For you:

Understanding self worth

The obvious question, then, is how do so many of us end up with such a wonky view of ourselves? Some people will quickly be able to answer this question. Others may never have thought about it before.

There is a brief explanation in the companion guide as to why people struggle with self worth in this way. There is more about this in the book *Loved, Called Gifted*. The most important influence, by far, on the way we see ourselves is our very early childhood. From the moment we are born, even before we're born in fact, we seek to develop a strong emotional bond with someone who cares for us, who will meet our physical and emotional needs. This is called attachment. A carer (most usually a mother) who is loving, who responds reliably to our needs and who creates a calm, stable emotional environment enables us to create a good emotional bond (attachment). That relationship becomes the safe base from which we can explore the world. It is the basis for normal psychological development including confidence, self worth and our ability to form healthy relationships.

Not many of us have perfect childhoods. Most of us have somewhat dented self worth and confidence. For those who experience particularly neglectful or abusive early childhoods the impact can be profound.

The beliefs we form about ourselves and the world in childhood we tend to carry with us into adulthood often without us questioning or even noticing them. When we become Christians, those beliefs impact the way we understand what God is like and how God views us. People who have had a difficult or abusive childhood usually find it far harder to believe that God loves them unconditionally.

One of the ways of changing the way we view ourselves and the world is to notice our beliefs, expose them to the clear light of day and then use our adult logic to help us decide whether these beliefs make any sense and whether they are still useful to

us. We can decide to leave behind unhealthy, unhelpful beliefs. Sometimes it can take a while, but we can change our minds if we want to. If others have said things to us that are not true or helpful, we don't have to believe them. We can take what other people say, weigh it up, decide what's useful to take on board and ditch the rest.

It's a journey

Understanding that we are precious and that we have value, despite what other people think, often takes a lifetime. We get there in little steps. Each step we take in the direction of loving and valuing ourselves brings more confidence, freedom and inner peace. But change often comes slowly and haltingly. We need to have self compassion and be patient with ourselves. God's healing in this area usually comes gradually.

What about you?

Think about these two questions. Place a cross on the line in the place that best reflects how you feel.

How easy do you find it to believe that each human being is precious and deeply loved by God?

Impossible

Very easy

How easy do you find it to believe that you, personally, are precious and deeply loved by God?

Impossible

Very easy

Is there a difference between the way you view other people and the way you see yourself? What do you think might be causing that difference?

Even when we believe that people in general are precious and loved by God, we can sometimes have trouble thinking that about ourselves. We might believe that other people are valuable but that we're not.

So how do we come to that conclusion? Usually, it is because things have happened to us in life that have left us feeling unloved or worth less than other people. Most of us have experiences in life that leave us with emotional wounds and scars and cause us to doubt that we are precious. Sometimes people say things that leave us with unhelpful beliefs about ourselves.

Experiences very early in life are particularly important. Our most basic sense of being loved and loveable is something we learn from our parents or the people who took care of us when we were babies and children. If they were good at showing love and acceptance then we will grow up with a secure sense of our own self worth. When we become Christians, the relationship we had with our parents when we were young inevitably has an impact on how we relate to God and how we view God. Once we understand that, we can begin to gently challenge our own unhelpful beliefs.

Your inner voice

For you

This is where we begin to help people to challenge the way they think. We live with our inner voice all the time. Most of us barely notice that we talk to ourselves. Far less the way that we talk to ourselves. The point of this activity is to help us to firstly notice the way that we speak to ourselves. Our self-worth, or lack of it, is often played out in the way we speak to ourselves. Many of us, when we start to notice our inner voices, realise that we can be incredibly unkind to ourselves.

In the last section we asked questions about how easy we find it to believe that we are precious and important compared to how easy we find it to believe that others are precious and important. Here is one of the ways that our answers to those questions play out in real life. Many of us are prepared to speak to ourselves harshly and unkindly. But if we heard someone speaking to our friends the way we speak to ourselves, we'd be outraged!

Drawing your inner voice helps you to notice what it's like. Drawing often reveals things that are on the edge of our awareness that we don't quite have words for yet. Having a picture for your inner voice or voices also adds a little humour and helps you to begin to take control of what you are saying to yourself.

Some of us have lots of different ways of speaking to ourselves. We might imagine what significant people in our lives might say about certain things. Mothers, fathers, teachers and friends can all make up what is sometimes called an 'inner committee'.

Our less friendly ways of talking to ourselves, the 'negative voices', are there for a reason. They are often the voices of the broken, wounded parts of ourselves. We need, therefore, both to be gentle with our inner voices and show them some compassion, while still making sure that we challenge the way we speak to ourselves and learn to be friendlier and kinder.

Key Principle: We are not at the mercy of our thoughts and feeling Page 25

One of the lies we are prone to believe is that we cannot change the way we think or feel. We can. It's not easy. It takes time and practice, but we can.

Key Principle: Being compassionate to yourself

Changing the way we think and feel begins by noticing what is happening inside us. Not trying to change it. Not telling ourselves we shouldn't feel or think this way. Just noticing. Noticing compassionately. Just as you might notice that a good friend seems to be angry or sad or upset. If you're an empathic sort of person, you might sit your friend down with a cup of tea and gently tell them what you've noticed and then simply sit with them for a bit while they work out what's going on. Or if a young child is upset, you might just sit with them, hold them in your arms and let them know that they are loved and safe and that it's OK to feel the way they feel. You might name the feeling for them.

This is what we can do for ourselves. Simply compassionately noticing what is going on, sitting gently with our own thoughts and feelings. Simply being with ourselves compassionately in this way helps us to work through difficult feelings. When we fight with ourselves, we either end up burying feelings that then just sit around unhelpfully in our subconscious or we make ourselves feel worse. We just add feeling guilty and silly about how we're feeling to the difficult emotions we're already experiencing.

We need to know that it is OK to feel the way we do. Emotions are always there for a reason. We are never 'just being silly'. Once we have properly noticed and compassionately accepted what is going on inside us, we can choose to think or feel differently if we want to. We can change our focus to something else. But we need to notice and accept what is going on inside us first. This is a core principle of mindfulness (and contemplative prayer) which neurological research is finding can have a profound impact, physically changing the structure and circuitry of the brain in a positive way.

Jesus came as Emmanuel. God with us. As we spend time with God, we grow in our understanding that we are loved and understood as we are. The more we experience God's compassion for us, the more able we become to show compassion for ourselves. The Bible is full of examples of people being honest with God about

the way that they feel. Psalms, Job and Lamentations are just three examples of books in the Bible that are full of honest emotion.

The activity

Talk through the activity and the reasons for doing it. Tell people your own experience of noticing your inner voice or voices. Share what they look like. I have a funny picture of a very bossy looking woman who is very like the negative voice in my head that I share. It's great if you can share your own 'voices' picture. If you are bad at drawing, that's fantastic. Seeing your picture will encourage people that they don't need to be a budding Van Gogh to do drawing activities.

When people have done their drawings, encourage them to share the results. Talking about our inner voices helps us to feel we can be in control of them.

When it comes to changing the way we speak to ourselves, telling ourselves to stop thinking something is usually pointless. Much better to gently acknowledge the negative thought and then replace the unhelpful voices with more helpful ones. A helpful NLP trick is to imagine turning the volume down on unhelpful thoughts and then turn up the volume on helpful thoughts. In this instance, when you notice an unhelpful inner voice, you can picture it in your mind. Then imagine turning a dial and making that inner person get smaller and quieter and imagine the inner voice you want instead getting larger and louder.

Your inner voice

We all talk to ourselves. Most of us do it in our heads. Some of us do it out loud.

Think for a moment about the voices in your head. What are they like? Would you be happy to hear your best friend spoken to in the way your inner voice speaks to you? If you would, that's great. If you wouldn't, maybe it's time to give him or her the sack and employ someone different.

You hear your own voice more than you do anyone else's. So you might as well make sure it's a voice you actually want to hear. One that builds you up and gives you hope and courage.

Draw the person who speaks in your head. There might be more than one. If you don't like them very much, then draw the person or people you would like instead.

Over the next few weeks, notice the voices in your head. Compassionately acknowledge the unhelpful ones. Use the friendly voice, that you want more of. Gently tell your negative voice that everything is in hand. Then, if you need to, imagine the unhelpful voice getting smaller and quieter and use your imagination to turn up the volume on the voice that you want to listen to instead.

Doing and being

For you

Talk through the cycles of being and doing and then give opportunity for discussion. You will want to make sure you are familiar with them first and understand the principles. Here are some thoughts to help you.

We live in a world where most people get their sense of worth through what they do and what they possess. Their sense of worth comes not from within but from what they believe will have worth in the eyes of other people. Our culture thinks more highly of people who are very obviously successful. The trouble with this is that if we stop doing or if we fail, our sense of self worth becomes very vulnerable. We either have to keep striving in order to feel good about ourselves or we discover that we can't match up to the standards that either others have set for us or that we have set for ourselves and we end up feeling worthless.

This is one of the reasons that losing a job, perhaps through redundancy or retirement, can be so devastating. If we find our sense of identity and self worth through what we do, then a loss of a job is not just a loss of a job, it's a loss of identity and self worth.

The cycle of doing can leave people endlessly striving to achieve. There is always more to do, another hill to climb, another achievement to grasp for. If our sense of worth is reliant on our own efforts then there never comes a point when we have 'arrived'. We all know the stories of famous people who really have got to the point where they have achieved all that could possibly be expected of them in our society and then discover it isn't enough. Sometimes the sense of despair is so great, they end their own lives.

Being a Christian does not automatically free us from the cycle of doing. Sometimes, rather than leaving behind the cycle of doing, we simply swap secular activities for religious ones. We can end up swapping secular striving and success for seeking success and status in the Christian world. How many sermons and Christian books have you encountered that have left you feeling that you're not quite good enough?

That you need to pray harder, evangelise more, read the Bible more, be a better parent, attend church more diligently, give more money away etc etc. While it is good to be challenged about how we live, it is very easy to pick up the message that we need to do more and be more in order to be acceptable and loved, that we are not good enough Christians, especially if our sense of self worth isn't very good.

Christians in leadership can be particularly at risk of getting trapped into a cycle of doing. Not only is there plenty to do as a leader, but there can also be a great deal of pressure to be 'successful'. After all, the Christian conference circuits are full of speakers who have seen their churches grow in unusual ways or who have achieved a measure of status and fame. Faithful, loving ministry in small churches doesn't get celebrated very often.

Sometimes people have such a profound sense of worthlessness that even attempting to do anything seems pointless. They find themselves going round the bottom of the cycle of doing. They see no point in trying. But not doing anything leaves them feeling more worthless.

The glorious truth is that we are all already loved, before we've done anything at all. We can choose to stop chasing ourselves round the cycle of doing and trust that we already exist in the cycle of being. In God's eyes, we already have immense worth, even if we choose to sit on the sofa all day watching daytime television and eating biscuits.

Ironically, when we start with the knowledge that we are already precious and we don't need to strive for a sense of worth or for affirmation from other people, when our sense of worth comes from within and not from external sources, we are free to do whatever we choose. We can do the things that are an expression of who we are. We often end up working hard because we love what we are doing. We might find that we are far more productive than we were when we chasing ourselves relentlessly round the cycle of doing.

And we can stop and rest when we need to.

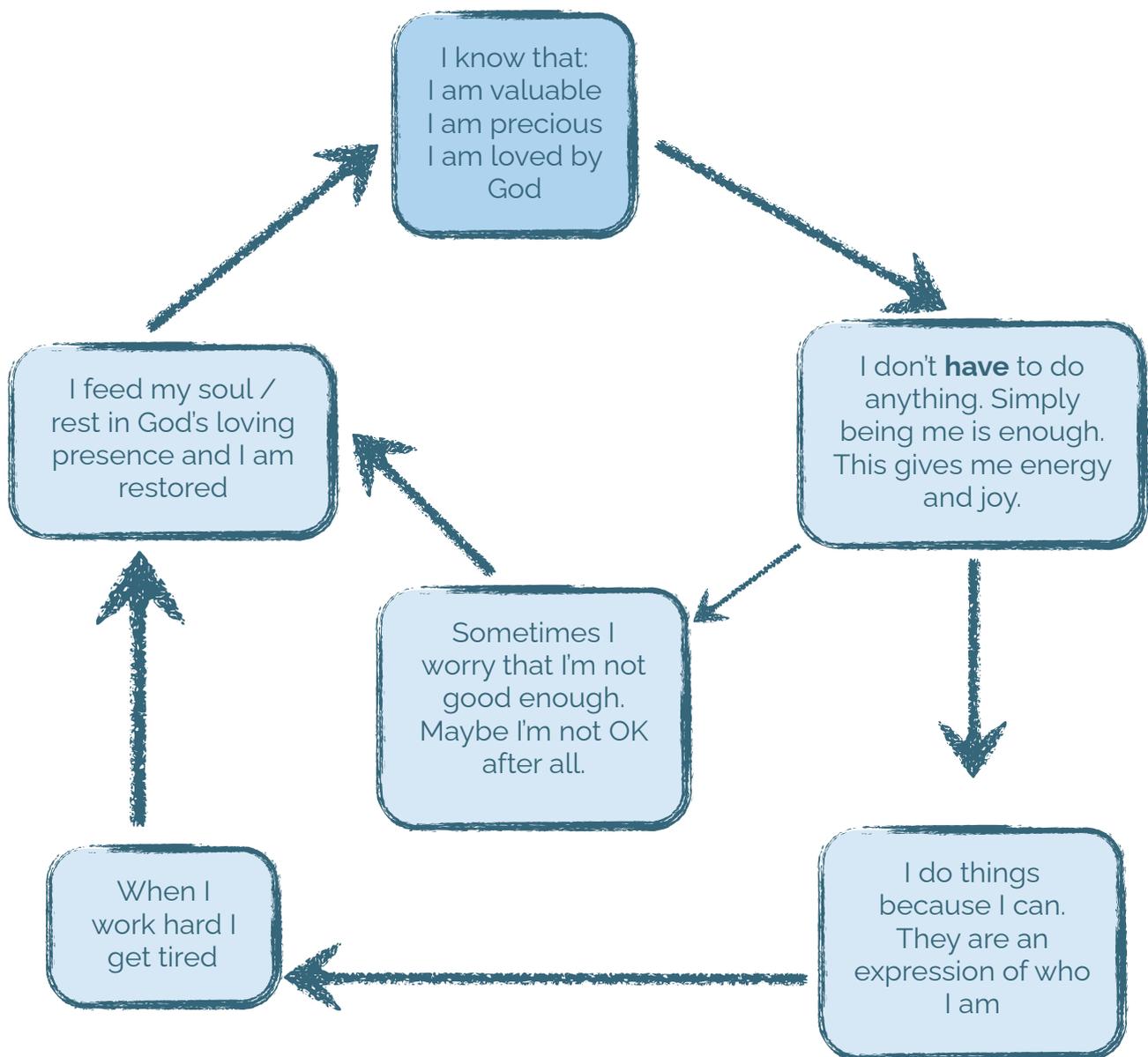
A huge amount of emphasis, in our culture, is placed upon what we do. It is where we tend to get our self worth. We are valuable if we achieve something, if we have a healthy bank balance. We go through our lives being judged by the people and culture around us.

We are all unique. We are loved by God just as we are. We need to know that it's OK just to be and that we don't **have** to do anything. Then, when we do decide to do things we can act with far more freedom and joy. We can do what makes sense for us and not just what other people expect.

The Cycle of Doing: I am what I achieve



The cycle of being: I do because I can!



What causes us to get stuck in the cycle of doing?

What are the symptoms of getting stuck in the cycle of doing?

Feeding your soul

For you

This material is designed to help people to identify what it is that helps them to connect with God. This helps us to find practices that enable us to remain in the cycle of being.

It is important to facilitate this section inclusively, emphasising the fact that we all connect with God in different ways. It is entirely appropriate to share your own perspective and what it is that feeds your soul, but you need to do so in a way that makes it clear that this is your experience and your viewpoint and that we are all different.

Aims

- help people identify the things that nourish their souls, so that they can seek out more of the things that help them.
- help people do less of the things that are spiritual blockers for them.
- help people see that it is OK to be who they are and that we are all different.

If we have been surrounded by people who engage in spiritual practices that we don't find helpful, it is easy to feel inadequate or as if we are getting things wrong and it would be fine if we could just try harder. This activity helps to rid people of that sense of inadequacy and enable them to focus on the things they do find helpful.

The activity

Talk through each of the potential spiritual connectors and blockers, inviting people to highlight in their companion guides the things that help them and the ones that don't as you go through. Numbers one to six are mainly about how we engage in spiritual practices. Nine to 18 are more about the kinds of spiritual practices that are helpful to us. Seven and eight are partly about practice and partly about the kinds of circumstances that we tend to find helpful or unhelpful. For all of us, there

will some things that really help us to connect with God and that we find easy and natural. There might be other things that, rather than helping, actually act as spiritual blockers, leaving us feeling less connected with God than before we started! Some things, of course, will be fairly neutral. There are 18 in total, so you will need to be brief! They are:

- 1. Solitude:** Some of us are nourished by quiet, solitary space. That could be anything from walking the dog by yourself or snatching quick cup of coffee on your own to going on a lengthy silent retreat. The silence outside helps to create for us, silence within, which becomes a connecting point between us and God. For others, solitude is excruciatingly difficult and draining.
- 2. Company:** Conversation. Being with others. Engaging in spiritual practices with other people. Although, of course, some people's company is more restoring than others. For some of us, being with other people is hard work.
- 3. Discipline:** Creating structure, routine and predictability in the way we nurture our souls works really well for some of us. For others, even if we think, theoretically, routine and discipline is a good idea, in practice, it quickly becomes stifling and dull. Traditionally, Christians have been encouraged to be disciplined and structured in their spiritual lives. Praying and reading the Bible at the same time each day, for example. If discipline is a spiritual connector for you, this will be immensely helpful.
- 4. Spontaneity:** Taking spur of the moment opportunities to nourish your soul. Enjoying variety, flexibility and surprise. Going with the flow. If you like spontaneity, you may find that you need to make sure that feeding your soul is high on your list of priorities, so that it actually happens.
- 5. Down to earth:** This one, and the next, are partly about the way we like to think and learn. You will probably be drawn more to one than the other. If you are helped by things that are down to earth, then you probably like your spirituality practical and rooted in everyday life. You might like a book that tells you, practically, exactly how to pray. New ideas and grand visions leave you cold if you can't see what real difference they are going to make to your life.

6. **Wonder:** Grand theories, possibilities, making connections between things, imagination, philosophy, basking in the wonder of the universe. If this is your thing, you might find yourself bored and frustrated by sermons that are heavy on practical ideas that seem obvious to you. You want vision. You want new ideas, new ways of understanding things.
7. **Stormy weather:** You find that you grow as a person and connect with God when things are hard. You like challenges that take you to the end of yourself. Some people actually seek out hardship, like polar explorers or people who take part in iron man challenges. You might enjoy mission trips that involve danger or hardship.
8. **Blue skies:** You thrive and grow when things are good. When life is going well. Comfort and pleasure restore you. Perhaps a nice bottle of wine, good food, an hour in your favourite warm and cosy coffee shop will create the environment where you can connect more easily with yourself and with God. Of course, life is not always easy. Stormy weather inevitably comes our way and we face challenges. Recognising that you are someone who connects spiritually more easily when things are good will help you to understand why during difficult times you feel farther from God, when other people might be saying that trials deepen their faith. God will be doing a good work in you through hard times, but it might be harder to connect to God in the midst of them. If life is hard, you will find it helps your spiritual life if you can create little islands of pleasure to support your spiritual life. That might mean taking your Bible and your journal to your favourite coffee shop. Or sitting in your favourite chair with your favourite mug.
9. **Beauty:** Arts, creativity, excellent music, beautiful things. You might create these things or just enjoy being around them.
10. **Nature:** The natural world. Being outside. Connecting with animals. Walking in the hills. Hugging a tree. Watching the sea crashing against the rocks. Gardening.
11. **Service:** Practical action that helps people and makes a difference in the world. That could be helping a friend to do some DIY or doing volunteer work.

- 12. Justice:** Fighting for a cause. Politics. Social activism. Living in a way that is ethical or ecologically responsible.
- 13. Mind:** Thinking, studying, learning new things.
- 14. Tradition:** Ritual, ceremony, ancient traditions, traditional patterns of spiritual observance. Finding comfort in knowing that things have worked in the same, unchanging way for a long time. Using the same prayers or rituals over and over again. Finding great meaning in a yearly pattern of feasts, fasts and festivals.
- 15. Song and dance:** Singing or dancing, especially with others.
- 16. Heart:** Enjoying a loving, emotional connection with God. You might be drawn towards spiritual journaling or contemplation.
- 17. Charismatic:** Enjoying practices that result in a tangible spiritual experience. Lively church worship with great music. Finding spiritual meaning in everyday events and coincidences, supernatural gifts and insights, connecting with the Holy Spirit, prayer for healing.
- 18. Monastic:** The things we would traditionally associate with a religious order. So simplicity, poverty, simple, uncluttered surroundings, self denial, a focus on the inner life.

Give people time to use the questions to reflect on their learning. Create opportunities for people to share their insights with one another. Get people to look at how their spiritual connectors and blockers work together. The possibilities are endless.

For example, someone who finds stormy weather and nature are both connectors for them, might feel particularly close to God on a long, arduous hill walk or mountain climb, while someone who identifies blue skies and nature, might connect with God on a gentle stroll on a sunny day or while watching the birds in the garden.

The blue skies / stormy weather dynamic might also influence people who identify service or social justice as connectors in deciding what kind of service they feel drawn to or how they seek social justice.

To take another example, two people who like song and dance might prefer different kinds of worship, depending whether or not beauty is important to them. One person might enjoy just about any sung worship, regardless of what the songs are like or how talented the musicians are whereas someone for whom beauty is important might be more choosy.

Feeding your soul

If we want to stay in the Cycle of Being, we need to learn to feed our souls. We need to connect with the God who is Love, the source and centre of our being.

We are all different. What gives life to one person's soul might be completely off-putting to someone else. It's about finding what works for you. I know a lady whose husband feels closest to God when he's walking in the hills. That doesn't work for her at all. She says, "when we go walking together, he's having this wonderful spiritual experience and all I can think is 'I'm cold! My feet hurt. Where's the cafe?'"

Sometimes, if we have been surrounded by people who connect with God in a way, that doesn't work for us, we can reach the conclusion that we are somehow spiritually inadequate. Not at all! We just need to experiment and find the way that works for us. The point is that you are unique and so is your way of connecting. The message to take from this is that it is okay to be you.

It is healthy to experiment and try different things sometimes. It is also not unusual to be drawn to different spiritual practices during different seasons of our lives. We should not be surprised if God wants to connect with us through some of our less preferred spiritual connectors from time to time.

Identifying your Spiritual Connectors and Blockers

On the following page is a list of different things that people find feed their souls and help them to grow. Which ones work for you? Tick the things that are connectors for you and put crosses next to the ones that are blockers, that actually leave you feeling less refreshed or further from God. If something is really helpful, give it lots of ticks. If it is really unhelpful, give it lots of crosses. If you're indifferent about it, leave it blank. Some of these are things you can control. Others are often outside our control, such as the season of life we are in.

Solitude

Quiet, solitary space.

Company

Interaction.
Conversation.
Being with others.

Discipline

Spiritual routine and structure.
Predictability.

Spontaneity

Spur of the moment.
Variety. Inventive.
Intention, not routine.

Down to Earth

Practical. Facts.
Based in real life.
"How to..."

Wonder

Imagination.
Possibilities.
New ideas.

Stormy Weather

Hardships.
Challenge. Tragedy.
Difficulty.

Blue Skies

Good times. Blessing.
Life going well.
Comfort. Pleasure.

Beauty

Arts. Creativity.
Excellent music.
Beautiful things.

Nature

Being in nature.
Great scenery.
Watching the birds.

Service

Practical action that helps people and makes a difference.

Justice

Fighting for a cause.
Politics.
Changing the world.

Mind

Thinking. Study.
Learning new stuff.
Fresh understanding.

Tradition

Ritual. Ceremony.
Following the seasons.
Acting things out.

Song and Dance

Singing or dancing.
Especially with others.

Heart

Emotional.
Awe, love and affection for God.

Charismatic

Enjoying the Spirit.
Prophetic words and images.

Monastic

Simplicity. Poverty.
Fasting. Silence. Inner life. Self denial.

Reflection

What have you noticed about yourself, doing this exercise?

What are the key things that feed you spiritually / help you to connect with God?

Do you feel you get enough of these things, or is there something you would like more of? How could you make that happen? Is there something it would be helpful to avoid?

If you are interested in discovering more about Christian prayer, we recommend these books:

Dr Myra Perrine, *What's Your God Language?* (Saltriver, 2007).

John Ortberg: *God is closer than you think* (Zondervan)

Gary Thomas: *Sacred Pathways: Discover your soul's path to God* (Zondervan)

Teresa A. Blythe, *50 Ways to Pray: Practices from many traditions and times.* (Abingdon Press).

Patricia D. Brown, *Pathways to Prayer: Finding your own way to the presence of God.* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass)

A brilliant book that can help you tune into God in many different creative ways is: Brad Jersak, *Can you hear me?* (Oxford: Monarch, 2006).

If you are interested in silent contemplative prayer try: Beningus O'Rourke, *Finding your hidden treasure,* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 2010).

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.
We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually,
who are you not to be?
You are a child of God.
Your playing small doesn't serve the world.
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure
around you.
We are all meant to shine, as children do.
We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.
It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone.
And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do
the same.
As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.*

Marianne Williamson

Our Life Journey

For you

Introducing this activity is an opportunity for you to share something of your life journey with the group. Being open and honest about your own journey and the struggles you've experienced, creates a sense of openness that will make it easier for everyone else in the room to be honest with themselves and others. If you feel safe enough to be honest about the bad times as well as the good times, you will make it safe for others as well. That's important because the more honest people can be with themselves, the more they will discover and the more transformational the course will be for them.

You can either show your picture of your life journey or you can simply talk about a few of the things you would include. When you are sharing, it is important that you do so in a way that leaves people with hope. So take the positives out of the difficult times. Talk about the things you've learnt and the ways in which you've grown as a person. Your aim is to be honest and open but not in a way that leaves everyone feeling depressed! You also want to keep your story quite brief, so it is probably better to just give highlights.

The kinds of things it can be helpful to pick out from your own story (if you happen to have examples you are happy to share) include:

- difficult times and failures that you've learnt and grown from and the way they have shaped you.
- times when you discover a passion or a love for something or found out what you're good at.
- times when life has brought you to a bit of a standstill for some reason, perhaps through periods of illness or joblessness or because you had to care for someone. Often we emerge from those times having changed or grown.
- difficulties that have made you determined to make things better for other people.
- experiences of doing things that you really enjoyed.

If you are currently experiencing challenges, it is fine to mention those, along with your sense of how you are growing as a result of them. Or your honest hope that you will have learnt something, even if you can't quite work out what it might be right now! If we only ever share difficult things from the past that have been resolved, that can leave us looking like our lives are very neat while those we are journeying with might feel like they are in a terrible messy muddle by comparison.

More about our calling journey

This is background reading for you and not necessarily to share with your group.

Life is a learning journey. As you look back at it you will no doubt have ups and downs. Our spiritual journey is no different. We sometimes we labour under the misunderstanding that our life with God is meant to always heading towards higher and higher planes of faith and bliss until, as the car-sticker would have it, we are “Too Blessed to be Stressed.” When the reality turns out to be somewhat different, we can become confused and even disillusioned. Normal spiritual growth, consists of valleys as well as mountaintops and twisted paths as well as straight ones. God has good purposes for us in all of it.

Seasons Valleys and Mountains

Sometimes our journeys are marked out for us. We can see our direction. It is like driving along the motorway. Everything is clearly signposted and you can move along without much trouble. At other times, it is like following a trail through dense woodland. The path may seem to end and you have to look carefully to find it. Sometimes the path may lead to a clearing, which may be a time of reflection or a place to wait.

On your journey, you will have to climb mountains and walk through valleys. Valleys are low points, but often they are fertile places. They have rivers running through them and are surrounded by water meadows and rich pastures. There are lots of trees and plenty of cover. Our difficult, valley times, when it feels like life has stopped, we can't see the way ahead and we only have the energy and resources to get through each day, are often, actually, very fertile times.

So what is God doing in the times of difficulty? Why all the struggle, uncertainty and pain? God is, I believe, inviting us on an adventure of discovery and growth. This is a discovery of ourselves and of God. It is an adventure of becoming that takes the whole of our lives. If we are to be ‘changed from glory into glory’ (2 Corinthians 3:18) something needs to happen. It turns out that being ‘Too Blessed to be Stressed’ is really not terribly helpful in this process. It just encourages us to stay put. We often need a certain amount of disruption to encourage us to break camp and move on in our journey with God.

Moving on, somewhat counter-intuitively, often starts by staying still. Valleys are places of soul making; of becoming. We run out of them at our peril. Just as the caterpillar needs to retreat, to cocoon, in order to become a butterfly, sometimes so do we. The re-ordering of ourselves that happens in these seasons of waiting, can be

scary, painful and disconcerting. In our hurry addicted world, just stopping and waiting can be terrifying. But if we want to fly, we sometimes need to go through those soul-making seasons of waiting, surrendering and trusting. These are times when our darkness, our questioning and our pain are calling us to a deeper and ultimately more satisfying place.

Our experiences are very individual but there are common themes that we can identify. The first is that these times of waiting and surrender are very normal. Many people in the Bible seem to go through something like this. Jesus waited 40 days and nights in the desert before he began his ministry, Joseph famously waited in prison and David waited on the run from Saul for many years between his anointing and becoming King. So if you are in a valley just now, take heart. God is doing a good work in you.

Common patterns people experience

Tony Stoltzfus, a leading Christian coach and trainer in the US has researched the different life stages leaders go through. In his book 'The Calling Journey' he identifies various life stages that many people experience. You may well recognise some of these.

Some time after becoming a Christian, people often encounter a **Valley of Dependence**, where the realisation hits that we need to depend more on God than ourselves. Later in life we can meet a **Valley of Wholeness** where God challenges us to face some of our wounds and brokenness so that we can be healed, refined and strengthened. There is often a **Valley of Identity** where we discover our true self, realising that much of what we had taken to be us, our roles, gifts, talents, strengths were really simply scaffolding that helped us to grow. In the valley of identity, we are challenged to let go and allow God to take down the scaffolding and enable us to emerge as our true selves.

Our Mountain experiences also tend to follow patterns. Mountains are high exhilarating places where you can see long distances. They are times of vision and fruitfulness. Mountains can also be challenging and can test our courage, but they usually feel like good places to be.

Stoltzfus identifies **The Natural Promotion Stage** as a high place where we begin our Christian life. For many this can be an extraordinary time where God opens doors and encourages us in the way we might encourage a toddler taking their first steps - even though they may be far from perfect.

There is a **Preparation Stage** people go through. Stoltzfus' finds that people are prepared either inside their area of calling or outside in what might seem a very different role. Either way God is helping develop the key skills they will need later.

The Releasing Stage is often joyful release into our area of calling, possibly moving from one role or job to another that is closer to where you feel called to be. Now is a time of increased productivity where we really start to use and further develop the skills and talents God has given us.

The Fulfilment Stage generally occurs later on in life when our family responsibilities lessen. Here it is no longer about me, but about God and other people. It is a time where our role starts to really fit like a glove. Stoltzfus says there is a shift in us that "frees us from our need to accomplish great things for God and begin finding our greatest success in others." This is where we get to leave a legacy that will last beyond us. It is about Jesus, his redemptive work, helping other people transcend who and what they currently are.

In his book Stoltzfus shows how many biblical characters such as Joseph and David went through similar life journey patterns.

Just knowing about these stages is useful in helping us to understand what God has been doing in our life thus far and also what He might want to do with us next. If Stoltzfus' model doesn't fit you exactly do not worry. He is careful to explain that these stages are just a loose model. Reality is often more complex, but his model does aid our understanding. Your stages might happen in a different order or some may appear to blend together.. Stoltzfus' research indicates that our calling is very much a lifetime's journey rather than a destination we suddenly reach one day. He notes that some people are aware of some of the details of their calling early on in life. For others, it comes late on.

Our Life Journey

As we begin to think about where we are headed next in our journey, it is good to stop and think about where we've been. Life has high points and low points. There are times when all seems to be going well and times when we feel that we are in a dark place, going nowhere.

Everything we go through changes us. Sometimes our most difficult experiences teach us new things, build our character and enable us to face the future with new skills and greater strength.

We go through seasons. There are times when it is right to be energetic and active, making a difference in the world.

There are other seasons when we need to step back. Perhaps we have young children or frail relatives to care for. It might be that we need time to rest, recover from difficulties and re-evaluate our lives and where we're headed.

In these seasons, it might look to us and to other people as if we are standing still, but God is at work. We are growing and changing, becoming more mature and often stronger. We are also losing our addiction to doing all the time and learning that it is OK to simply 'be'. Sometimes our priorities change and when it is time to re-engage with the world we find we want to head in a different direction and try something new.

Take some time to draw your life's journey.

Draw the ups and downs. Think about the things that have shaped you and made you the person you are today. As you do, invite God to remind you of important things and help you to understand your life so far.

Reflection on your life Journey

How have the difficult times shaped you? If you are having a difficult time at the moment, in what ways might it be changing you for the better?

What have you learnt on your journey that feels important for now?

Is there baggage of hurt or unforgiveness that you have picked up along the way? Perhaps this seems the right time to let those things go, so you can be freer to continue the journey?

What was happening and what were you doing when you felt most alive and engaged with life?

What clues does the past give you about what you'd like to do in the future?

Here are some books and resources that deal brilliantly, but in very different ways with the different seasons of life.

Sue Monk Kidd. *When the Heart Waits* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990).

This is a beautiful, poetic and deeply personal account of the journey into, through and out the other side of a mid life spiritual awakening.

Richard Rohr. *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the two halves of life* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2011)

Richard Rohr is deeply profound and tells us about the difference between the first and second halves of our lives. A good read if you like something to challenge your thinking and give your brain and your soul a bit of a work-out.

Susan Isaacs. *Angry Conversations with God. A Snarky but Authentic Spiritual Memoir* (New York: Faith Words, 2009).

When Susan Isaacs hit a time of doubt, struggle and questioning in her Christian journey, she responded by taking God to Couples' Counselling. I love this book. It is an easy, amusing and profound read. A very different take on the journey through one of life's valleys and out the other side.

Calling myths

For you

Before we get into the part of the course that helps people to explore their calling, we need to start by dispensing with a few deeply unhelpful myths about calling that people who have been Christians for a while sometimes pick up along the way.

Most of the material is in the companion guide. Talk through the myths fairly briefly and then allow some space for discussion and reflection. The hope is that this will help people to leave behind unhelpful untruths, leaving them freer to explore their own calling. There are elements of truth in all these myths, which is why people believe them in the first place.

If people want to defend any of the myths, then allow space for that debate. Acknowledge the truth in what people are saying and then also gently point out where there are misunderstandings.

Notes:

Whatever God wants me to do will be terrifying

For more information about the panic zone, see the section about ***comfort, stretch and panic zones*** in the 'next steps' part of this guide. There is an activity there which you could choose to do at this point if you wanted.

The need is the call

If you want some Biblical references to the fact that Jesus didn't meet everyone's needs (see 'The need is the call'), even when they were obvious:

Mark 1: 29-39: Jesus heals many in a particular village. Then he goes to pray. When he comes back, people are looking for him. Presumably they felt need of his presence but he moves on to other villages and towns.

John 5: 1-15: Jesus visits the pool at Bethesda. It was where the sick gathered. But as far as we know, he only healed one man there.

Matthew 26: 6-13: When Jesus was anointed with expensive perfume, people moaned that the money could have been spent on the needy. And they had a point. There would have been poor people who were in need of food or shelter. Jesus

arguably didn't need perfume on his feet. But he defends the woman who is doing a beautiful, generous thing for him. Calling is not just about meeting needs.

Calling myths

Before we move on to exploring our life calling, there are a few myths about calling that you might have picked up along the way. These are ideas that can make us feel fearful about discovering what God is calling us to do. Let's send these unhelpful ideas packing.

Whatever God wants me to do will be terrifying.

Lots of us find ourselves paralysed by the idea that if we pray about God's call on our lives, we will be told to do something utterly terrifying. There is no evidence to suggest that God's plan is to terrify his children. Quite the opposite. Nowhere in the Bible do we find any instructions to be afraid.

We are at our best when we are being stretched and challenged, not when we are panicked. When we are in a state of terror (sometimes called 'the panic zone') we actually don't function very well. Our bodies get ready for fight or flight and our brains shut down their logical, thinking functions leaving us to act on instinct to protect ourselves. That's not a place that God is calling us to.

So why do we get the idea that God's call on our lives will be terrifying? Perhaps it's because the grain of truth in this myth is that sometimes God does ask people to do difficult things. However, we need to remember that God knows each of us intimately. He knows who to ask to risk imprisonment by smuggling Bibles into China and who to send to the single mum next door with home made biscuits. As we learnt from the section on spiritual connectors and blockers, there are people who absolutely thrive on high levels of challenge and adversity. And, of course, what one person finds a stimulating challenge, someone else might find terrifying.

Don't tell God you don't like hot weather or curry or he'll send you to India.

In other words, God will have you doing all kinds of stuff you don't like. We really wouldn't think much of a parent who signed their kids up for clubs doing stuff they hated. So why do we believe God would do that to us? As we will discover, God made us all individuals with different passions and gifts. The things we love are a really big clue to our life calling.

Occasionally, God does call people to do things that they wouldn't have considered and don't think they will enjoy. When this happens, in my experience, those people find that God knew them better than they knew themselves and they discover that they love the things they have been called to do.

Only the stuff you do in church really counts.

Churches sometimes have a habit of re-enforcing the idea that God is only interested in church organised mission and ministry. But we are called to serve and love the world. God's vision is wider than ours. It encompasses church, work, family, community and the world. Your calling can be in any of these areas.

My job is to fit in with the vision of my church.

Ultimately, you are the only person who can discover and fulfil your life purpose. You can't delegate that to anyone else. If your passion and calling matches the mission and vision of your church, that's brilliant. Go for it. But it might not. And that's OK. There can be a great deal of pressure to serve the priorities of a particular church community. Sometimes that pressure implies that not to do so is disloyal, rebellious or even sinful. Those are pressures you can happily ignore. You only have one life. If you get pressured into spending a lot of time and energy doing things that are not part of your calling, that will inevitably leave you with less time and energy for the things that are your unique contribution to the world.

We have no choice in God's plan.

We were created with free will. You don't lose it again when you become a Christian! God is interested in us becoming good decision makers.

If you take a wrong turn you'll miss out on God's best.

We all make unwise decisions sometimes. Learning from our mistakes part of life. Wrong turnings are simply part of the journey and our amazing, loving, creative God has ways of creating good out of our mistakes.

Traditional Persian carpets were designed by an artist and then made by hand by the carpet weaver. If the carpet weaver made a mistake, the designer would never ask her to unpick the carpet. Instead, he saw it as his privilege to find a way of adjusting his design to incorporate the error, with the carpet being at least as beautiful as originally intended.

That's a perfect picture of how God works with our lives. If you are holding onto regrets about past decisions, now is the time to let them go and trust that God is still making something beautiful from your life.

I've not been a Christian long enough to have a calling.

Not true. There may be some things that you are not ready to do yet, but God still longs to partner with you to help you grow and to share God's love with the world.

It's too late.

Not unless you're dead it's not. If you're using age as an excuse, it's time to stop. Obviously, there are some activities that are time limited. You might be too old to begin a career in the fire service or to pursue your dream of becoming an olympic athlete, but age brings experience and wisdom and if you are still breathing you can still partner with God to bring his love to the world.

It can't possibly be God's calling if you're having fun!

Sometimes people dismiss the very thing they are gifted and called to do as not being from God because they enjoy it. They believe that Christian service should be a sacrifice, so if it's not difficult and unpleasant they think it can't possibly be what God wants them to do.

The opposite is true. When we find the thing we were designed to do, it is usually satisfying and enjoyable. It's much easier to pour our energy and commitment into something we love than something that makes us miserable.

The need is the call.

Sometimes we are told that we don't have to think about our calling. If we spot a need, God is calling us to do something about it. This sounds very noble but it's not actually very helpful.

Firstly, there is an ocean of need in the world and we can't possibly respond to all of it. That's a recipe for guilt and exhaustion. Secondly, it's not the approach Jesus took. He didn't heal everyone. Sometimes he moved on from places even when people were wanting him to stay because they needed him. Thirdly, not every calling is connected to meeting obvious needs. You might be called to write or to paint or to play the violin. These are things that make life better for everyone but it is very hard to argue that the world needs violinists.

The truth in this statement is that we are often more sensitive to needs that relate to our calling. They touch deep places inside of us that other things don't. So, for example, if you have a call to work with lonely elderly people, you might know about the single mothers who are struggling on low incomes and the homeless people and the debt problems in your community and believe they are important issues but none of them move you as much as the old man in the bungalow at the end of your street who never has visitors and never comes out. Your calling might

enable you to spot needs that other people might not but just because you've spotted a need it doesn't necessarily mean you are called to do anything about it.

You only have one call in life.

This is true for some people, but it tends to be the exception. Most of us are called to different things at different stages of our lives, though there are often common themes and threads that we can see running throughout our lives. We can also have more than one call at once. Finding your calling is also not a one-time-only process. Our calling tends to shift and change over time. Sometimes the way ahead seems really clear. At other times, it's much harder to discern.

God calls some people and not others.

This is often rooted in poor self-worth and a belief that God wants other people and not us. Not true. It's not just ministers and missionaries and special people who have callings. We all have something unique to offer the world.

Reflection

What other calling myths have you come across?

Which myths have influenced you or held you back now or in the past? What mistaken beliefs about calling do you want to let go of?

Called

The next section helps people to explore what God is calling them to do with their lives. The activities are explained in the companion guide. This is designed to be a prayerful personal exploration. Encourage people to do each activity prayerfully, inviting God to be part of their exploration. Give opportunities for discussion and sharing as appropriate.

There is no guaranteed, quick way for people to discover what God is calling them to. There are a range of questions and activities because different things work for different people. There may be one activity that answers the question for someone or they might build up a picture by taking clues from their answers to many of the questions. People also sometimes need time to reflect on what they have written or drawn. They might find their answer several weeks or months later.

There is also hardly ever a 'once for all time' answer to finding our calling. We are usually drawn towards different things at different times in our lives. Often one experience is a stepping stone towards the next.

To help people understand how the activities work, it is always helpful if you have done them first and can demonstrate what is needed by showing your own example. This is particularly true for the 'what gives me life?' activity and for 'draw your dreams'.

Understanding motivation

Take a couple of minutes to talk to the group about motivation.

The purpose of this part of the course is to help people move away from what they think they ought to do, or feel they should do, towards something that energises them. When we find the things that really motivate us, we find joy and fulfilment. Research tells us that to be really, truly motivating, what we pursue, needs to fulfil these needs in us:

1. **Passion.** We need to love what we're doing.
2. **Purpose.** We want what we do to have meaning. We want to pursue a purpose that is bigger than us and that we find meaningful. We need something we believe in.
3. **Mastery.** We need to be doing something that we can do well and enjoy getting better and better at. That gives us confidence and a sense of competence.

4. **Autonomy.** We don't want to be told what to do all the time. We want freedom to explore for ourselves, to find a way of working that suits us, to put our stamp on things. We want to be free to make decisions and shape things.
5. **Community.** We stay motivated for longer and often work better if we are working with other people. We are social beings. We work best if we have a supportive community that cares for us and cheers us on.

Called

Next we are going to take some time to prayerfully think about our calling. There will be lots of questions and activities to help you with this.

What gives you life?

Some of the things you do, give you life and energy. Others leave you feeling drained and others are neutral. You do not mind doing them, but they are not exactly fun. Think about the things that you do and write them in the appropriate column on the table.

Here are some things to aid your thinking as you fill in your columns:

- Add to the first column, things that you have done before that have given you life and energy – this might include current or previous interests/jobs.
- Sometimes we are enjoying something so much, we get completely absorbed in what we're doing. We might lose track of time or stop noticing what is going on around us. What have you been doing in the past when you have experienced that feeling? That needs to go in the first column too!
- If there is something that you like some aspects of, but which you find draining in other ways, split it up into its components and write them down in the appropriate columns.
- It is possible to be drained by things that are incredibly noble and worthwhile! Make a note of them.
- If you are struggling to make sense of how you feel about something, it might help to close your eyes and imagine yourself doing it. Notice your feelings about it.

Here are some things to consider you may have omitted that it would be good to add to the appropriate column.

- What would you get up early or go to bed late for?
- What would you get out of bed to do, even if you had flu?
- What are the things that you are doing when you are at your best?
- What have you missed out because it is 'just for fun and not really important'?
- What have you invested in heavily that drains you?
- What do you dislike that you would be afraid to give up?

Things that give me life and energy	Things that are neutral	Things that drain me

Reflection

Have a look at your chart. What do you notice? What have you learnt or remembered about yourself?

It is said that long term people should spend 70% or more of their time doing the things that bring them life for the sake of their mental health. What percentage of time do you estimate you spend doing things that give you life?

What is draining you that you would like to have the courage to give up? What could you do about that?

What one change could you make to your life this week, to give you more of the stuff that gives you life or less of the stuff that drains you?

Just imagine...

Read these four invitations to imagine. Choose the one you like best and use the space on the next page to put your thoughts on paper. Talk it through with someone if that would be helpful.



i) Imagine you are 95 and sitting in your rocking chair looking back on your life to this point in time. You feel a huge satisfaction and joy at how you have lived your life. What are you proud of?

ii) Write your own obituary the way you would like someone else to write it. Talk about the things you did and achieved.

iii) If you could be remembered for making the world better in one single way, what would it be?

iv) Imagine you knew you had only two more years to live. What would you do to make sure you lived life to the full and made a positive difference to the world?

Just imagine...



Message to the world...

You have been given 3 minutes on global television to give your message to the world. It can be about anything. You can speak from your heart. What will you say?

Sometimes there are big clues in the things that make us angry. The things that are broken and we want to fix. The injustices we would like to see put right. The things we passionately believe should be different.

So. What makes you angry and why?

What do you think should be done about it? How should things be different in your view?

If you have identified a particular issue or cause, is your anger prompting you to take action? Or do you want to direct your energies elsewhere? Either is fine. To help you decide, take a moment to notice your gut reaction to the next questions.

Is there something you are angry about that you want to make a difference to?

On a scale of 0 to 10, how much energy and motivation do you sense you have to commit to this, at this point in your life?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(none)

(I'd give my all)

What does that tell you?

The things you love...

What do you love?

What does that tell you about your life purpose?

What has God already said to you?

God speaks to us about our calling in all sorts of ways. Ponder the questions below and answer the ones you can.

- What has God said to you in the past about your life purpose?

- What are your 'sticky verses?' These are Bible verses that keep coming back to you repeatedly over time. You might also have 'sticky' sayings, images, dreams...

- What prophecies have been given to you?

- In the Bible, there are lots of different names for God. People often gave God names that reflected who He was to them and what they were called to do. So for David, the shepherd, He was the 'Good Shepherd.' For Joshua, called to conquer the Promised Land, He was the 'Lord of Heaven's Armies.' A very creative friend particularly identifies with 'God the Creator'. If you were to give God a name, what would it be? What is it about that name that you identify with?

Draw your dreams

If I was short of time and could only do one activity, then this is the one I would choose. Drawing is an incredibly powerful way of getting beneath our hesitations and helps us to tap into our dreams.

People are sometimes hesitant to draw, either because they think they can't draw or because they don't know what to draw or how to start. Encourage people to just begin and see what emerges. Introduce the activity confidently. Explain how helpful it can be and the reason for using drawing and then simply assume that they will start drawing. Using colour helps with creativity, so make sure you have some coloured pens or pencils available. If people aren't choosing to use colour, I often wander around with coloured pens, asking people which colours they'd like.

Sharing your own 'draw your dreams' picture when you're explaining the activity can be very helpful. You can share your picture, even if it's not that good. In fact, if you're not very skilled at drawing people can take heart from the fact that their drawing will be no worse and possibly better than yours!

If anyone is unsure what their picture means, encourage them that this is OK. They might understand it some time later.

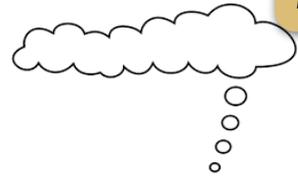
Afterwards, encourage people to share their pictures with one another. Talking through dreams helps to make them real. Then ask people to answer the reflection questions, if they can. It may be that they need more time to think and so need to take them away and do them later.

What would you like to do with your life? Draw it. You don't have to be great at drawing to do this, you just need to be able to find the pointy end of a pencil.

Here are some questions to help get you thinking:

- What would you do if you were unafraid?
- What would you do if you knew you could not fail?
- What would you do if someone offered to pay you a salary for the next three years, just to do what you really want to do?
- What would you do if you knew you had your friends and family's full support?

If you feel stuck just draw whatever seems right. You don't even have to understand what you draw. It is quite normal for people to draw things they do not understand until some time later. You may find God speaking as you draw.



Gifts and abilities

For you

Understanding our gifts and abilities helps us to understand how we can begin to put our dreams into action.

There are some myths about gifts and abilities that we would like to dispel.

The first is that in order to progress, we need to identify the things we are bad at and then spend time and energy improving our weaknesses. This is generally a waste of effort. We are far happier and far more productive doing things that we're good at than when we're slogging away at things we have no aptitude for. It is much easier to improve the things for which we have a natural talent and then find ways of making sure our weaknesses don't hold us back.

The second myth is that it is best to be good at a wide range of different things and having only one or two skills is a weakness. In fact, some of the most successful people have a narrow skill set. Because they focus on the one or two things they're good at, that's where they focus their energies and they become highly accomplished experts in those things. Having a wide range of skills is also good, just in a different way.

Thirdly, intelligence is generally misunderstood. Most of us believe that intelligence is measured by IQ tests and you've either got it or you haven't. In fact, IQ tests examine very particular, quite narrow, elements of intelligence. Intelligence is far broader than we have been led to believe. The question is not 'am I intelligent?' it is 'in what ways am I intelligent?'

Finally, we have a tendency to view some gifts and abilities as being more valuable than others. Education and culture work together to create a hierarchy of abilities that are seen as important. We often carry with us the hierarchy that was implicit at school, which usually puts reading and writing at the top and things like sports and woodwork at the bottom. If we have skills that feel as if they come lower down the pecking order, that can seriously impact our self esteem. We need to see the truth that all skills are valuable. The irony is that modern life would fall apart far quicker if we lost all the people with practical skills, who can build houses, resurface roads, mend cars, fix plumbing, install wiring, grow food and drive lorries than if we lost all the people who are good at reading and writing.

Spiritual Gifts

We have included a list of spiritual gifts. You will find this helpful if you have a group that is particularly familiar with the language of spiritual gifts. If your group doesn't understand the idea of spiritual gifts, you can leave this section out if you prefer, rather than spending a lot of time explaining the concept.

Our gifts and abilities determine how we go about things. Your 'how' will be unique to you and may be different from someone else's who might tackle the same activity in an entirely different way.

What are you are good at?

Think about your skills. What are you good at? Write your skills in the table below. In the 'Ease' column put the things that come naturally to you, that easily fit with who you are. In the 'Effort' column put the things that you have learnt to do but which don't feel so natural and perhaps are more likely to leave you feeling drained.

Add to your list by talking to other people in the room who know you and remembering what people have said to you over the years. After the session, you might want to ask other people who you trust and who know you well, to tell you what gifts and abilities they've seen in you.

Ease	Effort

When you've got your list, circle the abilities and gifts you most like using.

Looking for evidence

If you had difficulty identifying your gifts and abilities in the last activity, you will probably find this particularly useful. We can sometimes be really reluctant to state what we're good at. When that's the case, it can be helpful to find some evidence.

Start by looking back and thinking about some of your achievements. Are there things that you are particularly proud of? Or that seemed to impress other people? What have you done?

Think of two or three things that you have achieved. Then write down the things you did to accomplish that thing. Then think about the gifts, abilities and personal qualities that you needed in order to do what you did.

If you find it very difficult to think about your own achievements and abilities, hopefully this activity will help you to resist the temptation to put everything down to luck, other people or circumstances. It can be helpful to imagine that you are thinking about someone other than yourself. Imagine your best friend had achieved these things? What skills and abilities would you say they had?

What did you achieve?	
What did you do to achieve that?	What gifts, abilities and personal qualities did you need?

What did you achieve?	
What did you do to achieve that?	What gifts, abilities and personal qualities did you need?

What did you achieve?	
What did you do to achieve that?	What gifts, abilities and personal qualities did you need?

What type of intelligence do you have?

Everyone is intelligent, but we're not all intelligent in the same way. Read the list of different types of intelligence and give yourself a score out of 10 for each one.

Intelligence Type	Ability	Typical roles where these would be useful	/10
Bodily-Kinesthetic	Skilled body movement, control, balance, hand eye coordination.	Sports and athletics, driver, skipper, pilot, craftsman, artist, musician, building, surgeon, machine operative, armed forces, emergency services, dance, physiotherapist, nurse, etc.	
Musical	Skill in the performance, composition, and appreciation of musical patterns. An understanding of pitch tone and rhythm and how to use music to create emotions in the listener.	Playing music in a band or orchestra, singing, composing, song writing, leading worship, conducting, DJ, sound engineer, dance, speech and language therapist, voice coach, music producer/editor, instrument maker, instrument tuner	
Spatial	Ability to see, create, envision and manipulate images maps or diagrams in minds eye and reproduce them in physical or digital form.	Painter, sculptor, animator, photographer, game designer, film maker, interior designer, set designer, architect, engineer, product designer, computer aided designer, choreographer, fashion designer, beauty and makeup artist, etc.	
Linguistic	Ability to clearly communicate explain ideas, facts and verbally or in writing, understand and interpret words and language.	Interpreter, journalist, writer, presenter, teacher, translator, editor, trainer, etc.	
Logical-Mathematical	Ability to use logical reasoning, use numbers and formulas, understand cause and effect, diagnose and solve problems.	Lawyer, scientist, engineer, mathematician, statistician, computer programmer, systems analyst, company director, accountant, consultant, banker, trader, etc.	

Intelligence Type	Ability	Typical roles where these would be useful	/10
Interpersonal	Ability to read body language, recognise, understand and empathise with other people's feelings and situations.	Counsellor, therapist, psychologist, coach, mentor, medical practitioner, negotiator, mediator, sales consultant, politics, acting, leadership, pastoral carer, actor, fiction writer, interviewer, etc.	
Intrapersonal	Self-awareness of ones own thoughts, feelings, beliefs and values in relation to others and the world.	as above	
Naturalistic	Ability to see and understand the relationship between living things and their environment, identify and distinguish between species, rocks, clouds, landscapes.	Farmer, gardner, chef, botanist, biologist, forester, geologist, environmentalist/conservationist, vet, zoologist, atmospheric scientist, explorer, etc.	
Existential	Ability to think philosophically. To ask and ponder the deep and fundamentally important questions of life, the universe and God.	Philosopher, theologian, religious leader, politician, ethicist, environmentalist, etc.	

These intelligence types were identified by Howard Gardner a leading educational psychologist and Harvard Professor.

Spiritual Gifts

Read through the gifts listed in the table and answer the questions below.

Gift	Description
Counselling/ Mercy	I am attracted to people who are hurting. I listen with empathy and understanding to people's wounds and emotional difficulties. I am often able to help.
Giving	I am sensitive to the needs of others. I enjoy sharing my money, resources and possessions, without expecting anything in return.
Teaching	I enjoy studying/researching a subject and presenting it to an audience clearly in a way appropriate to the audiences age and level of understanding.
Encouragement/ Exhortation	I see when people are down and enjoy raising their morale. I can help people see situations in a more positive light. I help people feel good about themselves and encourage them in their relationship with God. God often gives me things to say to people to lift their spirits. Sometimes I feel a responsibility to take a tougher approach and challenge those that may be taking a misguided path.
Prophecy	I often hear God's voice for other people or the church which I deliver. These might be words of encouragement, hope, words of knowledge or words of warning.
Serving/Helps	I am sensitive to other people's practical needs and enjoy helping them.
Leadership	I enjoy bringing the best out in people. I develop people, facilitate action, help people envision the future. I bring hope, help and empathise with peoples struggles and can make necessary decisions.
Hospitality	I like to welcome or entertain others and introduce them to other people. I enjoy helping people find space and time to relax, unwind and enjoy themselves. I invite people into my home for coffee, a meal or a place to stay.

Gift	Description
Creative communication	I enjoy expressing ideas and truths to an audience in creative and unconventional ways.
Knowledge	I enjoy studying, finding out information, making sense of it and making new and meaningful connections (others might describe this gift as God telling you things about people/situations/subjects you would not otherwise know).
Creativity	I am physically skilled and enjoy making things/expressing myself creatively. This can be through art, dance, making or building things.
Music	I enjoy music, worship and singing. I can play instruments. I understand pitch, tone and rhythm.
Wisdom	I often know the right course of action. I often have the right words, reasons or explanations. People often ask me for advice.
Administration	I have the ability to plan the steps necessary to achieve a goal. I can organise ideas, resources, time and people. I can delegate jobs to the most appropriate people.
Apostleship	I have an entrepreneurial spirit that seeks to take the gospel / Kingdom of God to new locations and people. I like to pioneer new things to see the Kingdom grow.
Faith	I have the ability to trust that God will speak or act in difficult, dark or seemingly impossible situations.
Discernment	I can tell the true motivations/agendas of individuals, organisations, spiritual powers. I know when something/somebody is working in accord with God's will.
Evangelism	I enjoy/desire to tell people about Jesus and what he has done for us. I want to share God's love with a broken world. I sometimes take risks to do this.
Shepherding	I like helping others grow in the love of God, effectiveness and faith.
Intercession	I enjoy praying and asking for God's help for people, situations and ministries.
Miracles/Healing	God uses me to do things that are beyond a normal human ability.

Which spiritual gifts have you noticed yourself using? Give some examples.

Which gifts do you sense God might be developing in you?

How do you think your spiritual gifts might be related to your calling?

Further reading and resources

Here are some books that will help you discover more about your talents and strengths should you wish to explore further.

Tom Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007).

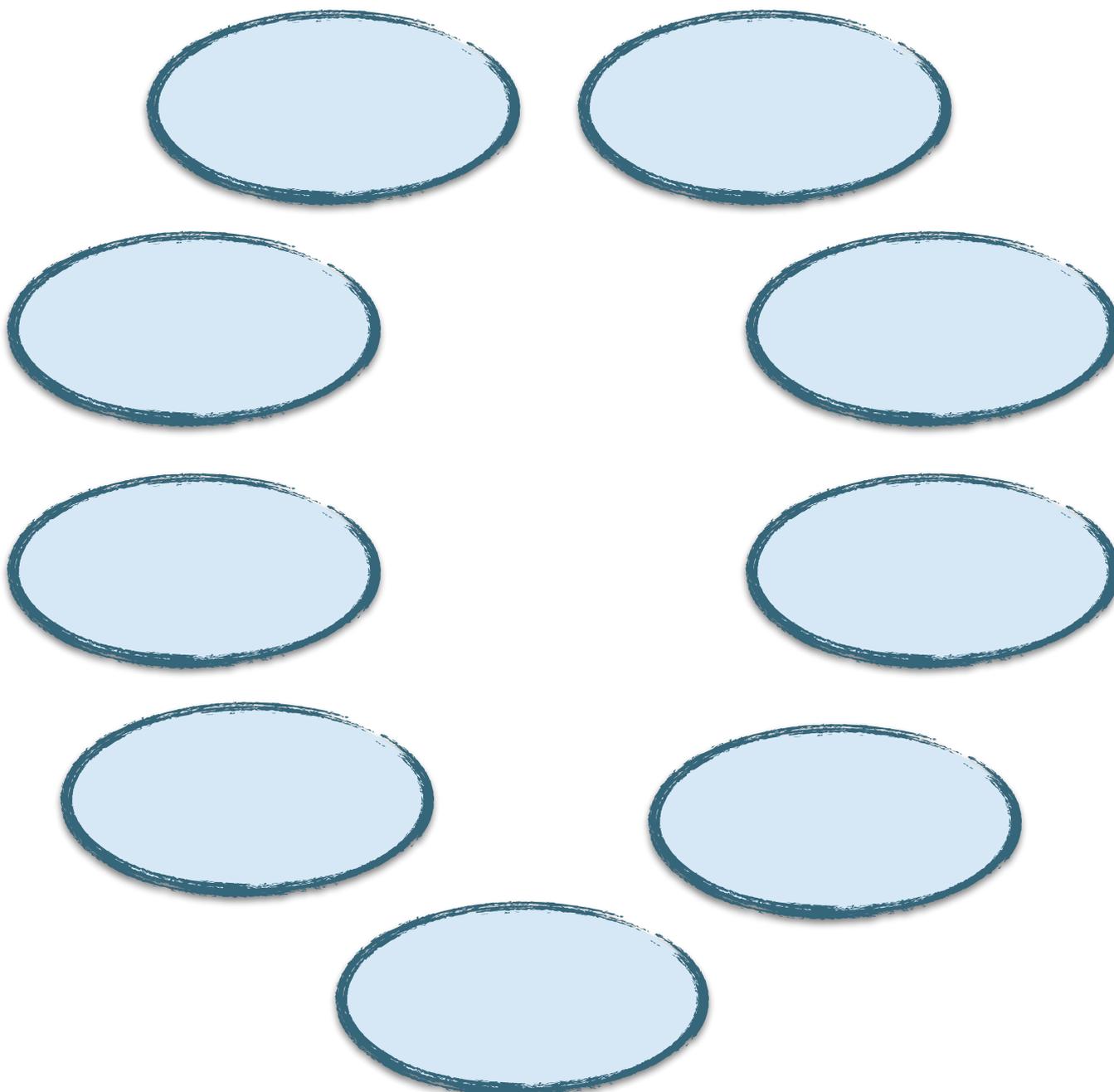
This is a short and easily read book (approx £12). The price of the book includes access to a scientifically validated online questionnaire that enables you to discover your top 5 key talents and gives you information about your talents and ways to develop them.

Paul Tieger and Barbra Barron-Tieger, *Do What You Are*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2007)

If you know your Myers-Briggs Personality Type, this book provides you with great information about the types of work and careers that people with your personality type find satisfying.

Putting it all together

Have a look through the information you have gathered so far, about your skills, experiences, the things you are passionate about and your life purpose. Write the things that seem most important in the circles below. Add more circles if you need to. Then see if you can write a sentence that sums up your life purpose in the box at the bottom. A personal mission statement if you like.



My life purpose...

What have you discovered that seems important?

What are you passionate about?

What do you want to do?

Who for and where?

How could you begin?

What Gets in our Way?

For you

All of us are held back by things within us that get in our way. This part of the course is designed to help people to take an honest look at the things that are barriers for them and begin to think about what they want to do about it. Often, simply acknowledging a barrier can help us to be less constrained by it. Sometimes we need to commit to putting some effort into dealing with our barriers.

It is important to manage this section with great sensitivity. We advise you to work out your timings so that you work through all the ‘What gets in the way?’ activities in one session. Make sure that you have sufficient support in running this session so that if people need to talk something through, or if someone becomes particularly distressed, you are able to support them.

Allow some time for prayer at the end of this session. There is some guidance around how to pray with people during the course, later in the handbook. We would generally encourage people to pray with one another, or by themselves, rather than making the course facilitators responsible for praying for everyone, but you will know your group and what is most likely to work.

We all have a tendency to blame our difficulties on outside influences. And, of course, life for some of us can be incredibly difficult and challenging. The truth is, though, the things that hold us back the most are often internal rather than external. If we can get rid of some of the internal stuff that interferes with our progress, we become more free to find creative ways around or through the external difficulties.

You can probably think of people you know or have known who seem to be terribly stuck in life. They often have difficult circumstances that they could quite legitimately blame for all their problems. They never seem to be able to change anything at all. If you suggest ways that they could possibly make life any better, or view things in a more positive light they immediately find reasons why your suggestions simply won't work. The reason? They have internal interference going on that is actually far more of a barrier than any of the external interferences they blame for never being able to change anything.

It can take great courage to face up to the things inside us that hold us back, which is why we can be so tempted to stay stuck and blame all our problems on our health or the outside world. Of course we need to be sensitive about people's difficulties in

life and have empathy for the challenges they face. Just be aware that the problem on the outside is often cleverly masking a far bigger barrier on the inside.

How do we help people to look honestly at their inner interferences?

We have already laid some of the ground work for this section in the earlier parts of the course where we looked at being loved. The idea that we can have some control over what goes on within us has already been introduced. People have already been encouraged to look at themselves, their feelings and their lives with honesty and compassion and are likely to have shared some quite intimate things with one another.

By now, you will have built up rapport, trust and a safe, friendly environment. So the scene is set.

Here are some ways you can facilitate this section sensitively and effectively:

- Treat the whole thing as being entirely normal. We all carry internal interferences. Nobody is so psychologically whole that they are never held back by what is going on inside of them.
- Share your own learnings from the activities. Show your own pictures and answers, or at least some of them. This helps to make the whole thing seem normal and safe.
- Make it clear that no one has to share what they have discovered if they don't want to.
- Be very obviously comfortable with people expressing their emotion openly, should this happen.
- Be gentle and hopeful.

People who need some extra support

There may be someone who is particularly emotional and needs some support at the end of the session. Just factor this into your planning and make sure that you there is time for people to talk afterwards if necessary. If the group is bonding well, people may well support one another.

Remember that while you need to be sensitive and supportive, just because you are facilitating the course, that does not make you responsible for sorting out everyone's problems. We all have responsibility for our own journey. Ask people questions that help them to work out what the next steps are for them and where they might get support. That helps them to remain empowered and helps you not to fall into the temptation of wanting to rescue somebody.

Some people, after this session, will need further help to address their issues. They may well benefit from some counselling, so it is helpful if you have an idea of what is available in your area, so that you can make suggestions about where someone might start looking for help.

Types of counselling

Not all counselling is equal. There are various different kinds that do different things. Here are three of the most common:

CBT (Cognitive behavioural therapy)

This is short term counselling that aims to change the way you think and behave in order to change the way you feel. It works on the basis that the things we believe and think, what we do and how we feel all impact on one another. It gives people strategies to help them challenge their negative thinking and behaviour patterns that are unhelpful. It provides a toolkit that most people would find helpful in managing their thoughts and feelings.

CBT is helpful for people with anxiety and depression that are caused largely by their present circumstances. It does not look in depth at the things that caused those difficulties and it does not allow much space for exploring feelings or looking at the past. CBT is often offered by the NHS because it is quick, relatively cheap and often more helpful than anti-depressants. It does not help in every situation, however, and it may well not be helpful for many of the issues that are likely to be identified through the activities in this part of the course.

Person centred counselling

For those who need space to think and talk through things that have been causing them difficulty, this is ideal. It is often used for people who have experienced grief and loss. Person centred therapy helps people to reflect on what is going on and how they are feeling by creating a space where they are listened to without judgement.

Psychotherapy

Psychotherapists use all the skills of person centred therapists and additionally have an in depth understanding of human psychology and relationships. They use the therapeutic relationship to help people to work through experiences and emotions that are causing difficulty in order to help people resolve them. Psychotherapists

are particularly interested in the experiences of early childhood that cause us difficulty later in life.

What Gets in our Way?

It is sometimes said that what we actually get to achieve and to be in life, is the sum of everything we are capable of minus the things that get in our way and slow us down or cause us to grind to a halt. In other words:

$$\text{Performance} = \text{Potential} - \text{Interference}$$

The stuff that gets in our way can be divided into two categories:

External interference

Or, in other words, circumstances. Things like time, money, resources, health.

Internal interference

The things going on inside of us that hold us back. The truth is that quite often we can blame external interferences for getting in the way, when actually, the bigger problem is the internal interferences. Often, once the internal interferences are dealt with, we can find creative ways of getting round the external ones.

What gets in the way of people fulfilling their life purpose?

What's stopping you in life?

Draw a picture of your goal/thing you want to do. Use metaphors or symbols if you like.

Draw another picture of what is stopping or hindering you. You may need more than one picture.

Write down what your picture means.

What needs to happen in order to overcome the thing that is stopping you? There may be more than one thing.

The rucksack and the miracle

The activities

For both these activities, we suggest that you invite people to imagine while you talk them through the scenario and then to make notes on what they discovered. You may well want to do this in your own way and in your own words. Here are our suggestions:

The rucksack

Get sitting comfortably. Close your eyes if you're comfortable to, otherwise just gently let them unfocus.

Take three long, slow breaths. As you breathe out, allow yourself to let go of the things you're thinking, feeling or worrying about, safe in the knowledge that you can pick those things up again when you need to.

You are out walking in the countryside. The sun is shining and the air feels warm and soft around you. You can smell the grass in the fields you are walking through. The occasional breeze rustles the leaves on the trees.

The path you are following begins to take you up a hill and as it gets steeper you realise that the rucksack you are carrying is actually quite heavy. Uncomfortably so. It is making the climb hard work and you are starting to sweat. It occurs to you that this path is your life and the rucksack is full of the things you are carrying.

Part way up the hill, you spot a tree. Underneath the tree, someone is sitting. You're not sure who it is yet, but you instinctively know this is someone wise who you trust. As you draw nearer, you realise it is Jesus and a sense of warmth and hope and peace begins to fill you as your friend stands up and waves and beckons you over, smiling.

You are expected and welcome and you flop down on the grass with relief. Your friend hands you a drink and something to eat and you sit quietly together for a while, simply enjoying one another's company.

Jesus points to the rucksack that you've dumped next to you, and says 'that looks really heavy. It looks as if it's weighing you down. It must be hard work carrying that all the time and this is a big hill. We could have a look through it together and see if there is anything you would like to leave here with me?'

You nod and together you look through the rucksack at the things that you are carrying in your life.

You notice some things that you want to take out of your rucksack and leave behind. As you take them out, your friend smiles.

When you are ready, you say goodbye to your Jesus, you pick up your rucksack again and continue up the hill. The break has refreshed you. Your rucksack feels lighter, there is a spring in your step and you are enjoying the climb.

The breeze rustles the leaves on the trees. You can smell the grass. The air is warm and soft around you and the sun is shining.

At the top of the hill is a bench. You sit yourself down.

And now you can feel your seat beneath you and your feet on the floor.

Notice your breathing and when you are ready, open your eyes and bring your attention back to the room.

Give people time to write or draw themselves some notes about what happened for them.

Allow some time for people to share and their experiences if they would like to. This would be a good point to take a bit of a break.

The miracle

Make sure you are sitting comfortably. Give yourself permission to relax. Let your body relax into the chair you are sitting on. Allow your breathing to slow down as your body relaxes.

You went to bed as normal last night and fell into an unusually deep sleep.

Now, as you wake up, you realise that a miracle has occurred. All the difficult things that have been getting in your way have been sorted out.

You are waking up refreshed and feeling energised, different and ready to live out your life purpose.

What do you instinctively know has changed for you?

As you go through the day, what will you notice that will tell you life has suddenly got better?

How are you different emotionally?

What new things do you believe about yourself? About the world?

What else has changed?

Now that the miracle has occurred, what is the first thing you are going to do with your new day?

When you are ready, return your attention to the room and record your thoughts in your notes.

The rucksack

Imagine you are walking up a hill. It is steep and the climb is hard work. You have a rucksack on your back, which is quite heavy. Some of the things you are carrying are necessary, but perhaps some are not.

Jesus is sitting under a tree part way up the hill and he invites you to come and sit with him. Together, you go through the rucksack, which represents you and your life. What needs taking out and leaving behind?

If talking to Jesus is not helpful for you, then imagine someone else you would like to have this conversation with.



The Miracle

You go to bed tonight as normal. You go into an unusually deep sleep and while you sleep a miracle occurs. All the difficult things that are getting in your way have been sorted out. You wake refreshed and feeling energised, different and ready to live out your life purpose.

What would be some of the things you would notice that would tell you life had suddenly got better?

What issues did the miracle sort out?

Practical

Situational

Emotional

Fears

Spiritual

Beliefs about yourself and the world

What is getting in your way?

What steps do you want to take to begin to deal with the things that are holding you back?

When will you take those steps?

What now? Next steps on the Journey

Reflection

Reflecting on our time together, what have you learnt about valuing and taking care of yourself and about feeding your soul?

What have you discovered so far about your life purpose and your next steps in life?

On balance, does this feel most like a season of doing, pushing forward with your life's purpose, or are you in a season where your focus needs to be on being, nurturing yourself and your relationship with God? Or maybe both?

This won't be news to you, but as you will have noticed by now, you are human. This means that you have limitations. You can only be in one place at once. You don't have unlimited time, resources or energy. There are some things you're not very good at and, as St Paul puts it, we are treasure in jars of clay. Physically, mentally and emotionally we go a bit wonky sometimes. And we all have life circumstances that put limitations upon us that we can't easily change.

When faced with our limitations and the difficulties of our life circumstances, we can be prone to making two opposite kinds of mistakes. The first is to become overwhelmed by our limitations or let them become excuses that stop us from doing anything. The second mistake we can make is to assume we can make our limitations go away by trying hard or praying hard or just pretending they don't exist. That can lead us to make unrealistic plans that are doomed before we start.

Of course, God does sometimes step in and miraculously change things. But often that's not what happens. St Paul, in one of his letters, recalls repeatedly pleading with God to get rid of what he describes it as a 'thorn in the flesh'. The problem didn't go away. Instead, God told him "My grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul discovered the reality of this. In fact, it became so true for him that he was able to say, "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) His thorn in the flesh helped him grow in humility and we can only imagine what a blessing that humility would have been to the people who experienced his ministry and leadership.

God has called us and already knows about our frailties. God can see how our limitations and weaknesses can be positive forces for good. The great news is that our limitations can become a source of strength and opportunity. They can push us to develop partnerships with others who bring strengths that we don't have. They can stimulate us to think creatively and do things in new ways. In short, your humanity is good news. So embrace it.

Take some time to consider the limitations you need to bear in mind:

What life circumstances do you need to bear in mind? What are you spectacularly bad at?

What physical or mental health challenges do you face?

What other limitations come to mind?

What skills, wisdom and experience do you have as a result of the difficulties you face?

In what ways are you growing as a person because of these difficulties?

As you begin to think about the ways that your limitations can creatively shape the way you pursue your calling, what ideas occur to you?

Partners, supporters and networks

For you

The purpose of this section is to help people identify potential partners with whom they can work to do the things they want to do. This is particularly relevant for people who have a good idea about something new they would like to do.

Many people will be able to engage in the things they are passionate about by joining in with things that are already happening. Others will be wanting to try something completely new.

Supportive partners don't necessarily need to have the same interests as us. There can be creative ways of working with others which draw upon different interests and skills. Recently, in my city, someone has set up a chess and baking club for children. An unlikely partnership between two things that we wouldn't necessarily think to put together. It pays to be imaginative.

If you are doing this course with church members, help them to see that partnerships and networks work across church boundaries. Calling is much wider than church. Christian mission does not have to remain within the organisational confines of one church. Finding people to work with who are part of their church might be hard but if it is, there is every chance that there are other Christians to work with elsewhere.

Activity

Give people time to answer the questions about their helpful relationships and networks and then to write the names that seem important on the diagram.

Then facilitate some networking and sharing of ideas. Get people talking to each other about their passion and calling and sharing knowledge about possible useful contacts. It may well be people can help one another to connect with relevant people and organisations. Or even discover that they would like to work together. Even if that doesn't happen, sharing our ideas and dreams with one another helps to make them real to us.

Partners, supporters and networks

We are not designed to journey alone.

- We benefit from having others around us for mutual support and encouragement. People who can cheer us on when we might be about to lose courage.
- We often need people who can share their knowledge, life experience and expertise with us.
- Critical friends are invaluable. They can ask awkward questions and help us to spot potential pitfalls.
- Working with others, drawing on one another's strengths creates new possibilities that would not exist if we were trying to go it alone.
- Our journey will have similarities to those of other people. Being able to tap into a network of people can give us access to ideas, help and contacts that we wouldn't otherwise know about. Often we discover we know someone who knows someone who could help.
- We often discover that others are already doing the things we are passionate about and we can join in.

Partners and **teams** are people we directly work with to achieve a joint goal.

Supporters are the people who will be cheering us on, the critical friends, the people who will put the kettle on or take us out for lunch when things are getting tricky and we need a chat.

Networks are our wider circle of people we know a bit, all of whom know other people. There are some people who are particularly good at creating networks and introducing people to one another - it can be really helpful to identify those people.

Your relationships and networks

Begin to think about your own relationships and networks.

Think about these questions. Then, when you have answered them, put the people who seem significant on the diagram on the next page. When you have done that, talk to the other people in the room. See if they have any suggestions about people or organisations it might be helpful to make contact with.

Who do you know who is passionate about the same things as you?

Who gets you and understands what you are about?

Who do you have a heart connection with?

Who do you work well together with?

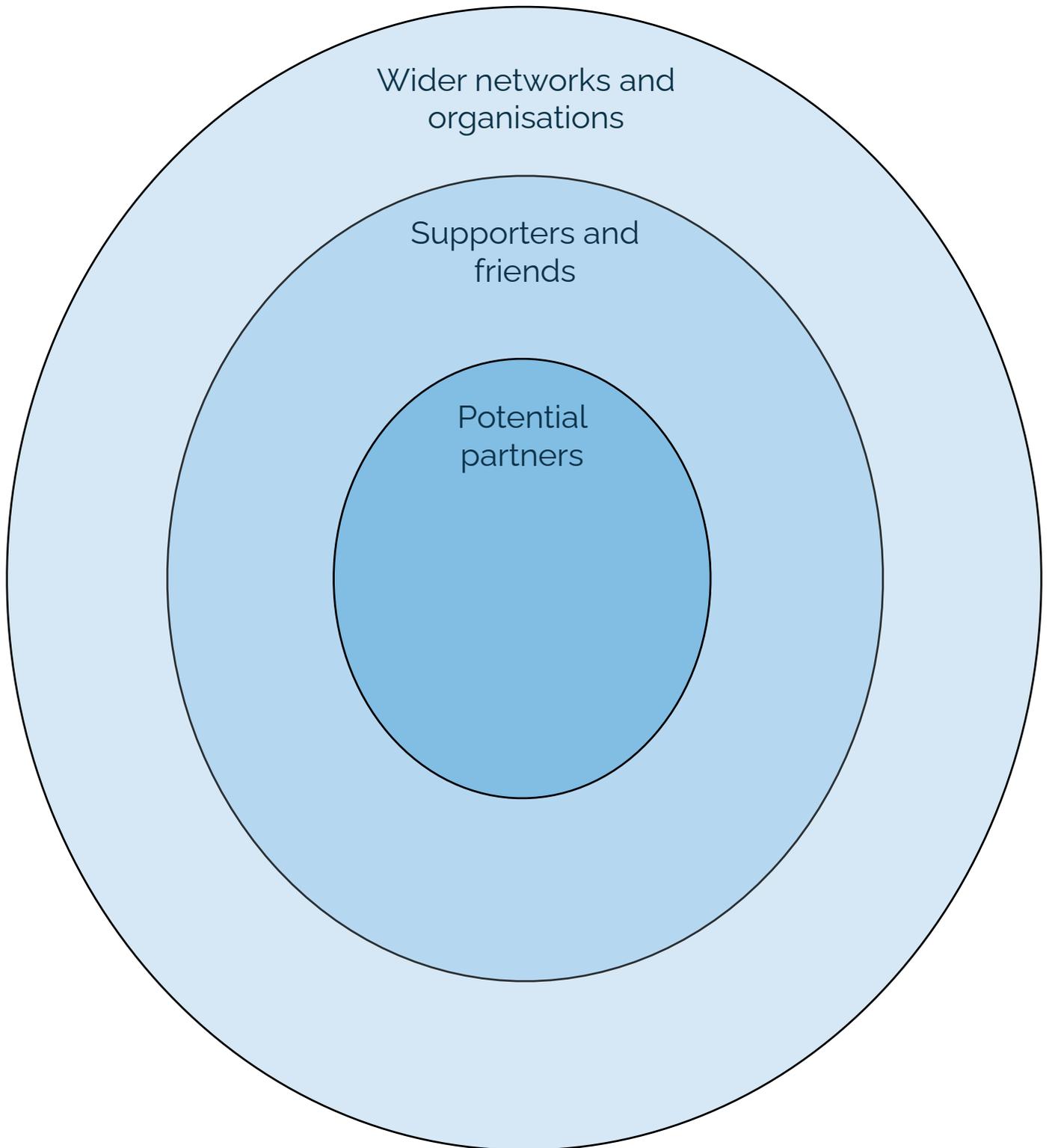
Who has skills and interests that are complementary to yours?

Who would you like to work with, even though it seems illogical?

Who do you know who is a good networker and might know people you can contact?

What organisations or companies are doing what you want to do?

Who do you know?



Next steps

For you

The final part of the course is to help people to think about the steps they want to take next. We don't get people to work out a detailed action plan. Instead we encourage them to think about the next two or three steps. The important thing is to start the journey. Often our ideas shift and change as we move forward anyway. We might not end up doing exactly what we thought we would but if we take initiative and give things a go, then very often interesting opportunities arise along the way.

A couple of things to bear in mind and to share if it feels right:

Risks, failure and mistakes

We can sometimes be held back because we want to be absolutely sure that we are doing the right thing and that it will be safe and will work first time.

Life simply isn't like that.

There are no guarantees. We all make mistakes sometimes. We start things and then discover that they don't work. We think things are going to work out a particular way and then the unexpected happens and blows us off course.

It is OK to give something a go and then discover that it doesn't work.

It is OK not to get things right the first time.

It is OK to try something and fail.

It is OK if your great new initiative doesn't last very long. In fact, it is better to allow something to run its course and then stop than it is to insist that it must go on forever.

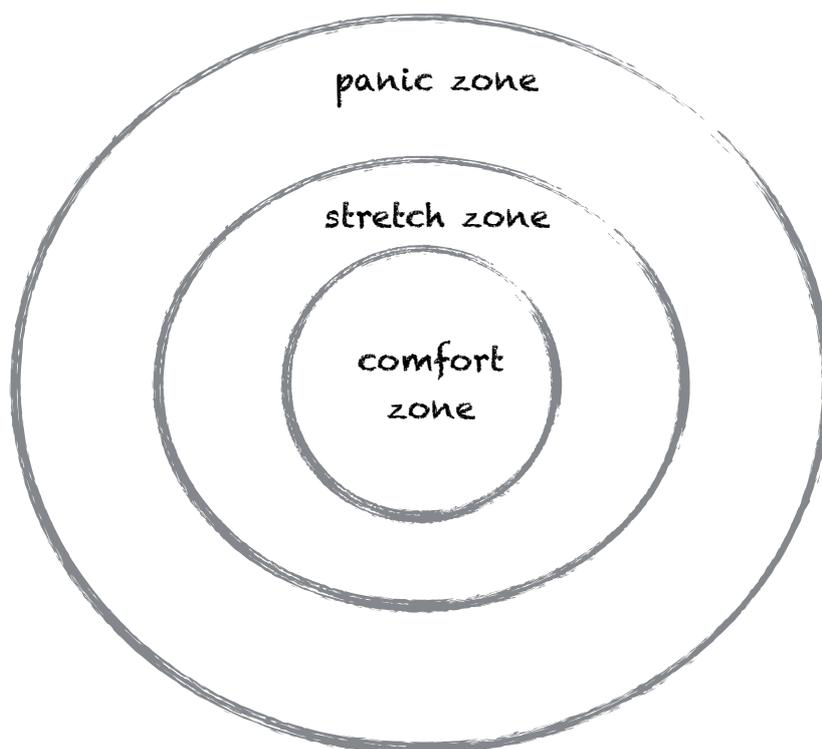
Sometimes we need to have courage to give things a go. If we know that we are loved even if things go wrong and whatever other people think of us, it can be easier to take that first step.

Comfort, stretch and panic zones

Moving forward in our lives usually means that we will be gaining new experiences, trying out new things and taking risks. We often need a great deal of courage.

When we start to talk about taking risks, some people can become very fearful. They think that taking a risk in order to move forward needs to entail doing something that absolutely terrifies them. In fact, doing things that completely terrify us is rarely a good idea.

It can be helpful to think of the things we might do in terms of falling within our comfort zone, our stretch zone or our panic zone:



When we are in our **comfort zone**, we are doing things that we find easy and that don't really challenge us. It's where the 'easy as pie' stuff sits.

Our **stretch zone** is where we learn and grow. We sense that things are difficult, but still within our reach. Our heart might be racing a little if what we are doing arouses a bit of anxiety, but it's manageable. It's the zone of healthy challenge.

Then there is the **panic zone**. This is where things are so scary we start to struggle to function properly. We go into fight or flight mode and serious anxiety and adrenaline kicks in. Once we are in the panic zone, our brain switches from rational thought to primitive survival mode. Unless we need to run away from a bear or fight off marauders, the panic zone is not a terribly helpful place to be.

So when people are deciding what to do, they need to bear in mind that it is good to be stretched but it isn't terribly helpful to be panicked. Our challenges need to be in

our stretch zone. If they are in our comfort zone, they are not challenges. If they are in our panic zone, we will experience terror but we won't function very well, we probably won't learn much and we are very unlikely to want to repeat the experience. In our stretch zone, we learn and grow. As we are stretched, our comfort zone grows and what was in our stretch zone is now in our comfort zone and we are ready for a new challenge.

Now. Here's the thing. Everyone has different comfort, stretch and panic zones. For me, standing on a chair to change a lightbulb is seriously at the edge of my stretch zone. Ask me to climb the ladder into the loft, and I am into my panic zone. I have never made it to the top. My 10 year old son, on the other hand, thinks nothing of scaling an 8 metre climbing wall. That seems to be entirely within his comfort zone.

We are all different and that's fine. We just need to work with who we are and resist the urge to compare ourselves with others.

If we want to do something that entails a challenge that falls in our current panic zone, then there are often ways we can make that challenge more manageable for ourselves. We can see if we can change the way we think about it. Challenging our fears by asking questions such as, 'what is it about this that makes me afraid?' or 'what's the worst that could happen?' can help us to reframe our thinking and bring our fear levels down.

Or we can see if we can break the difficult thing down into more manageable chunks. Or we can find a way of tweaking things so that they become less scary. Recently, I was asked to do a piece of work and for reasons I couldn't quite fathom, I realised I was actually very scared about it. It wasn't that different from things I had done before, so I could have got cross with myself for 'being so silly' and just tried to get over it. I didn't. Instead, I thought about what was making me panic and I noticed that I was feeling very isolated and alone. So I found someone I could work with on the project and the whole thing moved immediately from my panic zone to my stretch zone. It went from terrifying to interesting and fun.

Optional activity

Explain the concept of comfort, stretch and panic zones. Designate one end of the room 'the comfort zone', call the middle 'the stretch zone' and the other end of the room 'the panic zone'. List a range of different activities one at a time and ask people to go to the part of the room that best fits how they feel about that particular thing.

Suggestions might be:

- helping out with a youth club
- speaking in public
- cooking a meal for 20 people
- walking to the top of St Paul's Cathedral
- driving a minibus
- doing a parachute jump

The purpose of this is twofold. Firstly, it helps people to think about the concept and embed it in their thinking. Secondly, it helps people to see that we are all different. Things that scare one person are not a problem at all for someone else. That, in turn, helps people to be kind to themselves and to accept the reality that they find some things challenging.

Next steps

To finish, we have a guided coaching session to help people think about their next steps. The way this works is that you read out some questions, slowly, allowing people time to think and make notes in response to each one. The reason for working this way is that it really focuses the mind.

Get people settled and then simply take them through the questions, reading each one aloud and allowing people time to write down their thoughts. This could be an action to do with fulfilling life purpose. Or, for people who need to focus on being rather than doing at this point in their lives, it might be something to do with self care or dealing with psychological barriers.

What do you want to do?

Imagine we are sitting here in six months time. So it's (date in 6 months) and we are together again, looking back over the 6 months that have just passed. What do you want to be able to say you have done?

What needs to happen in order for you to do that?

What steps do you need to take to make that happen?

What first step will you take?

Choose something that is realistic. Choose something that is fun, that you will be motivated to do. Or a quick win, something you know you can't fail at. Or if you really like a big challenge, chose something that will stretch you.

What gifts and abilities do you have that will help you to take this step?

What resources/people will you need?

Where will you find these? Who might know?

What might stop you from taking your first step?

What can you do to stop yourself from being stopped?

When will you take your first step? On what date? At what time?

How confident are you that you are going to take this step? Give yourself a score out of 10.

What can you do to make that a 10?

How will you feel when you have taken that step? What will you say to yourself?

Note: when a person can successfully take the first step the second step barriers become much easier. The momentum and motivation of succeeding in the first step carries through to the second step. Starting with a quick win is particularly helpful for people with low self-esteem who benefit from the confidence boost of quick successes.

Feedback

Ask people to take a few minutes to complete the feedback form. **It would be very helpful if you could pass on thoughts and comments or issues you encounter to us at Refuel, to help us continue to improve the course. Please send feedback to:**

catherine.cowell@me.com

Ending

Get everyone together and ask everyone to share one closing thought. It is good to do this with a talking piece. Something that you can pass round the room. Give each person has the option to share a thought when the talking piece is given to them or simply to pass it on if they prefer. Let the talking piece pass around twice, so that if someone just needed a bit more time to formulate what they want to say, or to find the courage to say it, they have a second opportunity.

The end!

Finish with the 'and finally' thoughts, or something similar of your own.

Next steps

What do you want to do?

What needs to happen in order for you to do that?

What first step would you love to take?

What gifts and abilities do you have that will help you to take this step?

What resources/people might you need?

Where will you find these? Who might know?

What might stop you from taking your first step?

What can you do to stop yourself from being stopped?

When will you take your first step?

How confident are you that you are going to take this step? Give yourself a score out of 10.

What can you do to make that a 10?

How will you feel when you have taken that step? What will you say to yourself?

Sharing plans

Get people to share their plans with one or two people in the room that they trust and feel comfortable with. In a larger group, you could get people into groups of three.

Encourage people to make plans to tell one another how they are getting along, or to encourage one another. Maybe they could text one another to ask how they are getting on?

Continuing support and accountability can make all the difference in helping us to keep moving forward.

Feedback

Ask people to take a few minutes to complete the feedback form. **It would be very helpful if you could pass on thoughts and comments or issues you encounter to us at Refuel, to help us continue to improve the course. Please send feedback to:**

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The end!

Finish with the 'and finally' thoughts, or something similar of your own.

What did you think?

It would be great to have your feedback about the course to help shape future courses.
So...

What was great?

What could we change to improve things next time?

What difference has the course made to you? Have you changed as a result? If so, in what way?

What do you want to tell other people about this course?

Any other comments?

When people are thinking of using our courses, it is useful to be able to tell them about the experiences of other people.

Can we quote you in publicity about the course? Yes / no (circle as appropriate?)

If yes, how can we refer to you? Name:

Job / role:

And finally...

Remember that you are **loved**. You are incredibly precious to your Father God and there is no one in the world quite like you.

Remember that you are **called** to do something really worthwhile, something that will make a difference to the world.

No one else has your particular mix of gifts, talents, personality, experience and passion. You have something to offer the world that can be given by no one else.

You are loved, called and gifted. In that order.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.

Appendix 1: Questions to help you think through what to do next

Goal

What is your calling?

You don't have to be 100% clear about it, but go with your gut feeling.

Go with what you think you know.

Write down what it is you think it is.

Reality

What will happen if you do it?

What will happen if you don't do it?

What won't happen if you do it?

What won't happen if you don't do it?

What steps do you need to take in order to begin to fulfill it? List them.

What is the first step?

What would have to happen in order for you to take that first step?

What is missing from your situation you would like to have?

What have you done so far?

What obstacles or possible barriers are in your way that prevent or hinder you from moving forward?

What resources do you already have to help you go forward?

What strengths do you have you can draw on to help you?

What beliefs do you need to adopt in order for you to go forward?

Options

What is the first and most obvious step you need to take in order to move forward?

If you were really good kind and compassionate friend to yourself, what advice would you give yourself that would help you move forward?

If you knew what the right and obvious thing to do right now was, what would that be?

What would you do if money was not an object?

What else could you do if you didn't have to explain what you were doing or be answerable to anybody?

If you went to your line manager, friend or family member with this problem, what might they suggest?

If you secretly know what you should do, what would it be?

Way Forward – What I am actually going to do

What are you going to do? Which is the best option/s? What appeals most

Which is the most practical?

What would have to happen in order for you to.....

Who else needs to be involved in this list of actions you're going to do to complete?

When are you going to take these actions? What's the time-scale?

Whatever your first step is, can you think of any obstacle or barrier that might stop you from doing it?

How determined are you on a scale of 1 to 10 that you are going to do this?

What would make that 10?

Appendix 2: Sharing your ideas persuasively with others

If you want to persuade people that you have a good idea, you need to cover certain angles. People with different personalities look for different information.

Here are the four areas to cover in order to ensure that you have accounted for those differences. If you only talk about the things that immediately occur to you as important, you may well leave something out that someone else would see as vital.

The Big Picture

Some people ask: What is the big picture/overview? What are the connections?

Give an overview of what you want or what you are trying to achieve. Use inspiring pictures and quotations. As you go further into your discussion inspire people by exploring the, possibilities, links, connections, relationships and future implications.

The Details

Some people ask: What are the details? What are the practical realities of the situation? What will it mean for me? What will you actually be doing?

Tell people the specifics to show them you have really thought things through properly. Try and give as much detail as you can without boring your audience. A supplementary handout or appendix may be required if there is danger of this. Think about the costs, measurements, timescales, organisations involved, people needed, equipment needed, buildings, skills and training required, etc.

The Logic

Some people ask: What academic studies can be quoted that support proposal? What are the logical implications/consequences of plan? What are the cause and effects? What are the advantages? What are the flaws? What are the effects on organisation and the wider world. How will it effect efficiency, budgets, the bottom line, environment...

For these people, show that you have thought things through and have good reasons for your idea.

Some people ask: What will the effect be on the people? What will the emotional impact be? What effects will it have on relationships and morale? How will people be supported through the changes? How will it unite people or is there a danger of dividing people? Will it create community or destroy community? Will the proposals conflict with any strongly held values or beliefs? If so what can be done to make the proposal more acceptable?

For these people, show that you have considered the human impact of your proposal. If you are wanting to help people as a result of your idea, talk about this. If there are people for whom this could entail change and disruption, show that you have taken them and their feelings into account.

Course follow-up

Having attended the course, it is likely that many people will benefit from some kind of continued support to help them keep going with their plans and continue to value and cherish themselves. It may be that the people who came on the course already meet with one another and can naturally continue to support one another without you doing anything to organise it. If you want to set something up especially, here is one way you might do it.

A *Loved, Called, Gifted* coaching circle is a group of people who meet together to support each other by listening and asking questions that help one another to think and to move forward. It keeps with the values and approach of the LCG course and so is designed to be positive and focused around helping people to find their own answers.

The way that it works is that a group of people meet together (up to 6 people is a good number for a group but it will work with fewer) on a regular basis for around an hour and a half. Each time, someone will share a challenge they are facing or something they would like help with. Then, following the format on the next page, the group helps them to think through their issue and make some decisions about the action they will take.

In a group that works well, everyone benefits. Each person either gets to work through their particular challenge or to learn from others and hone their skills at asking questions. Most challenges are shared by all of us in one way or another. Because people are listened to and helped in such an empowering way, groups can form very strong, supportive relationships.

The reason for having such a tight format is that it helps the group to stay on track. Supporting one another by asking questions rather than giving advice or talking about your own problems is a skill and an art that takes time to develop. The structure helps people to learn how to do it.

Ideally, you want the group to be self-supporting, rather than needing to be organised by you. However, it may well be helpful for you to attend and chair the first few so that people get the idea and then help the group to become self supporting.

Format for *Loved, Called, Gifted* coaching circle

3 mins	<p>Opening Choose someone to be a time-keeper / chair. This needs to be someone who knows they do not have an issue to discuss this time. This person will take part in the conversation, but will also guide the group moves through the process and will bring things back on track if they are going off at a tangent.</p> <p>Quiet Take one minute to be silent. This is a chance to notice, with compassion, your own thoughts and feelings. Give yourself permission to set aside any hurry or worry you came with for the time you are together. If you are someone who prays, you might want to notice God's presence and invite God to be with you and to guide you during the session.</p>
3 mins	<p>Positive question Everyone briefly shares something they have done since the last time you met, that they are - or could be – proud of.</p>
5 mins	<p>Feedback Find out what has happened following on from the last coaching circle.</p>
5 mins	<p>Negotiation Decide whose issue you are going to discuss this time.</p>
5 mins	<p>Setting the scene Ask the person to outline their issue and what they are hoping for by the end of the conversation.</p>
3 mins	<p>Questions for Clarity The group asks any questions they need to, in order to understand the issue. Remember. You are not coaching at this point. You are just checking that you understand.</p>
3 mins	<p>Positive Feedback The group points out the things that they have noticed from the 'setting the scene' that impress them about the person who is sharing and the approach they have taken so far.</p>
2 mins	<p>Reflection Think about what you have heard. What open, thought provoking questions could help the person who has shared to make progress with their issue? You are aiming to come up with not more than 3 questions. Write these down if it helps. Remember. This is coaching not advice giving. Challenge one another to rephrase any questions which are actually thinly disguised advice.</p>

30 mins	Questions and discussion Everyone asks their questions. If it's your issue, listen to all the questions before you respond. Ponder the questions and use them to help your thinking. Focus on the questions that seem most helpful to you. Some people find it helpful to think out loud and discuss at this point. Others prefer to think quietly. Explain what you're thinking now. Further questions can be asked and answered at this point.
5 mins	What now? Ask the following questions: What step or steps have you decided to take that will help you move forward? When will you take that step or steps? What could stop you? How will you stop yourself being stopped?
2 mins	Ending Final thoughts. Make a date for your next gathering.

About Facilitation

What you bring

What gifts, skills, experience and personal attributes will you bring to the facilitation of this course?

In what ways would you like to hone your skills?

The philosophy behind the course

The magic of *Loved, Called, Gifted* is not just what is done on the course but how it's done. The 'how' is not just about technique, it's also a way of being which is embodied and modelled by the facilitator. The philosophy of the course is found on page 10 in the section 'What this course takes for granted' and is summed up in the title. We believe that people are loved, called and gifted. They are precious and deeply loved by God, they are capable of taking action and exercising power over their own lives and they have something unique to offer the world.

This is reflected in the way we facilitate the course. We will discuss how this works in more depth and in different ways, but to summarise and for those of us who find a cheesy acronym helpful, we want facilitation to be **A.C.E.** Full of **Acceptance, Curiosity** and **Empathy**. We start by offering ourselves acceptance, curiosity and empathy so that we arrive full of those things. Then as we offer acceptance, curiosity and empathy to each person in the room, we model for them how to give those things to themselves and to one another. One of the ways we do that is by avoiding and protecting against anything that **J.A.R.S.** We don't want **Judgement, Advice, Rightness** (yes, I have just made that word up - my apologies if it offends your linguistic sensibilities) or **Self-promotion**.

Acceptance

You will have noticed by now that again and again throughout the course we are helping people to see that it is good to be who they are. We live in a world that continually tells us that we are not good enough and that we don't fit in one way or another. The whole advertising industry is based around the premise that companies need to tell people that they are lacking something and then sell them a product that fills the gap in their lives that you've just told them about.

People are who they are. With all their abilities, quirks, faults and failings. None of us is perfect but all of us are beautiful and precious. Of course we want to grow and develop, but that is not possible until we have accepted with compassion who we are.

When you meet people, you will inevitably make judgements and assumptions about them. Sometimes we do this with the best of intentions, thinking that life would be better for someone if they would just change this or that. If you know that you have a tendency towards that kind of thinking, it is important to be aware of it and to work on swapping your criticism for acceptance. Remember, you can

communicate criticism with a look or a gesture far more effectively than you could ever do it in words, so be aware of your non-verbal communication.

Your role as facilitator is to communicate that you accept people as they are, in this moment. That includes accepting the emotions that they bring with them. Remember that it is not your responsibility to change anyone.

To make this work, you need to model compassionate self-acceptance. There is no need to put on a professional mask or project an image. A bit of down-to-earth openness and vulnerability goes a long way. If you are comfortable with yourself, you are communicating to others that it is OK for them to be comfortable with themselves. You are creating a space where being honest with ourselves is safe.

Curiosity

Curiosity is about being interested and excited about the people we are with. Curious about them and what they are experiencing and learning in the moment. Be curious about the people you are with. Hold back your desire to provide advice and information and watch and listen instead. More about this in the section on **attention**. Invite people to say more by ‘noticing’ and ‘wondering’ aloud. (*“I notice your eyes light up every time you talk about your allotment, but you seem to lose energy when you’re telling me about helping out at the community centre, even though you’ve said lots of times how much you believe in the community centre. I’m just wondering what that’s about...”*)

Empathy

Empathy is about *feeling with* someone. Help people to have empathy for themselves by having it for them. Taking their feelings seriously. Showing that you’ve heard with your heart as well as your ears.

When what you say, your tone of voice and facial expression reflect back to someone what they are feeling, then you are communicating empathy. You are letting them know that their feelings are noticed and legitimate. That they are accepted. We can accept our own feelings in a much more profound way when someone else holds them with us.

We most often associate empathy when we’re talking of emotions that are difficult. It’s just as important for positive emotions. There is nothing so demoralising as sharing your joys and enthusiasm with someone who pours cold water on your excitement with buckets of apathy. You encourage people when you share their enthusiasm for their emerging dreams and ideas.

Practising self acceptance

Sit quietly for a few moments, noticing your own thoughts and feelings. Don't judge. Simply notice with interest and affection. Sit with yourself as you would with a close friend you like very much. Sit with empathy and curiosity.

What did you learn and notice?

Judgement

We all have opinions about people and the world. Judgement is the opposite of acceptance. For this reason we need to resist it in ourselves and gently find non-judgemental ways of challenging it should one person on the course make unhelpful judgements about someone else.

The antidote to judgement is delight. Greg Boyle, a jesuit priest working with gang members in Los Angeles, talks about our ‘common call to delight in one another’. It would be very easy to judge gang members. But he doesn’t. He delights in them. He recognises that the reasons behind their behaviour are complex and often rooted in dreadful personal circumstances and experiences. One of the things that helps him to delight in those he works with rather than judging them is, as he puts it, ‘standing in awe of what people have to carry and not in judgement of how they carry it’.

Advice

So often we assume the quickest way to help someone is to give them some good advice. To tell them what we would do in their place. *Precious, Powerful, Passionate*, however, is an advice free zone. So let’s think a little about advice; what the problems are with it and what we can do instead.

In general, when you are having a conversation with someone who is experiencing difficulty and wants your help, what is your approach? Where, on the continuum between listening and advising, do you most naturally operate? Put a cross.

advice

listening and
open questions

If you like giving advice, you are not alone. Most of us do. The moment we think about what advice will do to the environment we want to create, we realise how toxic it can be.

What are the problems with advice?

Rightness

By ‘rightness’ I mean more than simply being right about something. I mean that urge that makes people insist upon their own perspective and closes down debate and willingness to listen to others.

There is no reason for you as a facilitator to engage in much spouting of opinions. The whole course is about helping other people to think. You may, however, sometimes have people on your course who feel the need to express opinions and give advice to others. These parcels of advice and rightness are bombs you want to defuse as safely as possible.

A useful approach is to listen, then to thank the person for the contribution making it clear that the perspective belongs to them and then throw open the opportunity to others to make different contributions. For example, on one course, when we were doing the ‘what feeds your soul’ section, one participant began saying that everyone definitely needed to engage in a particular spiritual practice that he found very helpful. To do anything else, he boldly told the room, was wrong. That particular bomb I defused by saying:

“Ah! That’s really interesting! So **for you** there is something incredibly helpful about silent meditation. That obviously feeds your soul. That’s something you want to continue to do. I wonder what different things work for other people?”

Then someone else explained that they didn’t find silent meditation at all helpful but they loved walking in the forest. Bomb defused.

Self promotion

Your role, when you are facilitating the course is that of a fellow traveller rather than an expert. You are a facilitator and not a leader. Sometimes we are led to believe that in order to inspire people, it is good to have a ‘larger than life’ persona. To do a good job, we mistakenly think that we need to put across a particular image.

To give people a sense of safety and confidence, of course it’s important that you do a good job. However, if you attempt to put on a persona of brilliance or behave in ways that creates distance between you and the people on your course, you stop being empowering and become intimidating. You don’t need people to believe in you, you need them to believe in themselves.

Often it is fear that leads people to step into a false role when they are taking on something like this. A need to create distance between themselves and the people

they are facilitating. A fear, perhaps, of being caught out as not quite good enough to be doing what they're doing.

As we have seen, we are inviting people to be honest with themselves. If we are not honest with ourselves, we will not be able to effectively invite people to face their own shadows. Everything you bring, including your struggles and weaknesses is valuable. So leave the image and the self promotion at the door and just be you. That's what people need.

Creating the right environment

Loved, Called, Gifted gives people space to reflect, to be themselves, to trust their own wisdom. When this happens, they can find ways forward in life that will help them to grow as people and to find fulfilment by doing things that flow authentically from who they are. For all this to work, they don't just need great activities and questions, they also need the right environment. And the person responsible for creating the right kind of environment to allow all this to happen is you.

We have already begun to talk about the values and philosophy that we need to embody. Now we are going to draw on the work of Nancy Kline, who has developed principles and practices that create what she calls a *thinking environment*. This will be helpful to you not only for the LCG course but for just about any situation where you need people to do their best thinking, reflecting and talking together.

Here, we will look at nine of the components Nancy Kline identifies. Being human and imperfect, these are things we aim towards rather than completely achieve. The very act of honestly striving for these things and having compassion on ourselves when we don't achieve them as well as we would have liked, gets us a long way in the right direction.

Attention is about being in the moment, undistracted. It's about being present with our whole selves.

We pay attention when we are interested. When we're watching a good film, we're interested not only in what is happening now, but what will happen next. When we're listening to people, the key is not just to be interested in what they are saying but what they will say next, what they will discover next, what next chapter for themselves and for the world they are creating.

While facilitating a group, you need to have attention on three things:

- There is the person who is speaking at this moment. Not just what they are saying, but what is left unsaid. Not just their words but what is going on around, between and behind their words.
- Then there is the group as a whole and the vibe and responses that are happening. Paying attention to the quiet people as well as the noisy ones, being curious about what the quiet, reflective people might say if they had space and courage to speak.

- Finally, you need attention on your own facilitating and what you are going to do or say next to move things along in a positive way. These three things weave together.

Paying attention is an act of love. Think of a mother with her newborn baby. When we pay attention to someone we communicate that they have worth. When we are interested in what they have to say, we are communicating that what they have to say is precious. That they are precious.

Attention in practice:

Equality means regarding everyone as peers. Fellow journeyers. Giving equal time and attention. Really, genuinely believing that every single person in the room is equally precious. Genuinely believing that we have as much to learn from them as they do from us.

We all think we believe in equality and it would be so easy to slide over this, believing we already know all about it. But inequality is deeply ingrained in our social systems and therefore into us. Comparison is something we get good at from a very young age. Many of our prejudices are inbuilt and we barely notice them. Organisations with equality policies have hierarchies that give decision making powers to a few at the top and ignore the thinking, the ideas and the creativity of almost everyone else (If you want to know why this is such a bad idea, you might be interested in reading *Church Uncorked* by Catherine Cowell and Sean Kennedy).

When we walk into a room of people we will inevitably bring our prejudices with us. There is no magic wand we can wave to make sure we leave them at the door.

We can, however, be aware of them. The more we are aware, the more we can stop our ingrained prejudices influence our behaviour.

To facilitate well, we need, in particular, to hold as precious the understanding that each person we are journeying with has the right and the ability to find make discoveries and decisions about themselves and their own lives.

The antidote to inequality is attention. When we give one another **attention** we discover that we are all equal after all.

Equality in practice:

Ease is what happens inside of us when we let go of our internal sense of hurry and anxiety. When we are free to simply be, in this moment. Ease says, ‘there is nothing else for me to do in this moment other than being with you.’

In practice, for ease to work, we also need boundaries. We need to be clear about our time boundaries and then be at ease within them. You might find it helpful to have a timer that makes a noise and indicates when a particular activity is finished. That way you don’t get torn between wanting to listen with ease but also wondering when you should stop listening and move onto the next thing.

What picture does the idea of **ease** create in your mind? Describe it, or draw it. Then take that picture with you in your mind when you are facilitating.

Appreciation. Did you know that praise increases the blood flow to certain parts of the brain and helps keep our hearts working in a healthy rhythm? Nancy Kline cites research that suggests it does. And that makes sense. Being appreciated has a serious feel-good factor. And when we feel good about ourselves we think better. So look for opportunities to verbalise your appreciation of people. Make it your habit.

Word of warning though. We frail, broken human beings sometimes find appreciation difficult to handle. We don't quite believe it. It doesn't fit with our negative view of ourselves so we look for ways to shrug it off. Many of us find it hard to take a compliment with a smile and a simple 'thank you'. Often we feel the need to explain how that isn't quite true. People have all kinds of subtle ways of brushing off praise. Practice giving some compliments this week and watch what happens.

To make praise and appreciation easier to take on board, use the three S's. Be succinct, sincere and specific.

Appreciation in practice:

Encouragement. This is about saying 'no' to the ridiculous game of competition and 'I must be better than you' that we are invited to engage in nearly all the time. Instead, encouraging one another; even when the people we are encouraging turn out to be better at stuff than us.

The very essence of facilitation is that it is about enabling others. However, being the person doing the facilitation puts us in the spotlight in a way that can lead us to want to appear like the most competent person in the room. There is no need. We can relax in the knowledge that what we offer is no more or less valuable than what anyone else offers. It's just different. We have nothing to prove.

You have probably met people who are so threatened by the fact that someone else might turn out to be better at something than them, that they become defensive and protective of their own position. That's toxic.

So let's decide to encourage everyone. It's easy when we think we're doing generally better than the person we are encouraging. Most of us are good at that. It gets harder if we think they are going to leave us behind or reveal themselves as more competent (notice the competitive language?). But let's do it anyway.

Encouragement in practice:

Feelings. The moment we do anything that includes people, we are working with emotions. Our own emotions and the emotions of the other people around us. Our culture has taught us to be suspicious of feelings. In so much of life, we are expected to operate on the basis of facts and logic. Or at least talk as if we do. Feelings are taboo in our culture. Interestingly, they were not taboo in the cultures of the old and new testament. Jesus cried in public. King David, in particular, was very open with his emotions. In one of the stories of the old testament, we are told that he and his men "wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep." (1 Samuel 30:4)

Because feelings are taboo in our culture, we are not used to dealing in feelings, particularly not in public. Here's the truth. We all have feelings. Some of us are better at noticing and understanding our own feelings than others, but we all have them. On LCG we want people to know that experiencing and expressing our feelings is OK. If someone cries, it is OK. It doesn't mean that something bad is happening. In fact, it often means that something good is happening.

So we need to create an environment where it is OK to feel things and express those feelings. Where it is seen as normal. An environment where people can experience their own emotions and discover what their emotions are telling them. Emotions give us rich information about what is going on for us, for others and between ourselves and other people.

Being at ease with our own feelings helps us to be at ease with other people's feelings. That means giving ourselves some space to feel and simply be with our feelings. Not telling them to go away. Simply compassionately being with ourselves and noticing what is going on allows us to decide what to do about it.

We can decide to be at ease with other people's feelings. We can help people to connect with their own feelings by paying attention to their non-verbal language and noticing for them what might be going on.

Feelings are rich with information but by themselves they are not always good pilots. We need to feel our feelings and then integrate what we feel with what we know and think. Together, our thinking and our feeling will give us the wisdom we need.

While it is important to be at ease with the expression of emotion, as facilitators, we also need to be aware of the way that certain kinds of expressed emotion can alter the dynamic of a room. So although we need to feel our own feelings, we need to stay in control of how we express them. We are the stable, safe presence in the room. The anchor. Us engaging in uncontrolled expressions of emotion would simply make everyone feel unsafe. We can be the anchor when others express emotion strongly. But no one wants their anchor adrift and sobbing in a corner.

Feelings in practice:

Diversity. Everyone is different and brings something unique to the world. We all see the world differently. We feel about the world differently. We have different stories and experiences. We have different goals and dreams. Valuing diversity

gives people freedom to be themselves, to value themselves and to express themselves.

Our brains are constantly wanting to simplify things. So when we meet someone, we manage all the complicated, diverse information that our brain is receiving about them by looking for categories we can fit them into. Old woman. Teenager. Refugee. Businessman. Often, we don't then think beyond the stereotype.

Culturally, we are conditioned to give some groups more respect and value than others. We assign stereotypes to particular groups. Then we have a tendency to see what we expected to see.

If we are aware of the prejudices that are at work within us we can choose to step away from them. Then we can use **attention** to discover who is really in front of us. If we are at **ease** with people, we don't need them to be like us or to think like us. We can allow them simply to be themselves.

Diversity in practice:

Place. Creating a physical environment that tells people they matter. We can do that in all kinds of ways and it doesn't have to cost lots of money. There is more about this at the start of this guide.

Questions make us think. They help us discover. When someone asks us a question (a good question. A question that tells us they are actually interested in what we have to say) they have already communicated to us that we have something interesting to say. Questions send our brains on voyages of discovery. *Loved, Called, Gifted* is made of questions. Questions are the perfect antidote to advice.

Avoiding advice

So often we assume the quickest way to help someone is to give them some good advice. To tell them what we would do in their place. *Loved, Called, Gifted*, however, is an advice free zone. So let's think a little about advice; what the problems are with it and what we can do instead.

In general, when you are having a conversation with someone who is experiencing difficulty and wants your help, what is your approach? Where, on the continuum between listening and advising, do you most naturally operate? Put a cross.

advice

listening

open

questions

If you like giving advice, you are not alone. Most of us do. The moment we think about what advice will do to the thinking environment we want to create, we realise how toxic it can be.

How does advice conflict with the thinking environment we have been discussing?

Questions

So. We don't want advice. We do want questions. Questions that help people think and move forward. There are lots of examples of great questions in the course. There is an art to asking a good question. A good question is not often a complicated, snazzy, clever sounding question. It's just the question that will help us to take the next step. It's the question that gives us space to think.

What questions have changed your life (in big or small ways)?

A powerful question is a question that turns a problem (the kind that tempts us to offer advice) into a question that points positively towards a solution.

Examples of powerful questions

Helpful stuff about questions

In no particular order, here are some great things to know about questions.

- Good questions are open questions. They give us room and freedom to think. Any question that requires a one word answer, like ‘Do you want a cup of tea?’ or ‘Are you going to study philosophy or economics?’ is not an open question.
- ‘Why?’ is a bad question word to use. Unless you want to sound as if you are accusing somebody of something or questioning their motives. Then it will work just fine.
- We can usually replace ‘why?’ with ‘what makes you..’ or something similar and essentially ask the same thing but in a softer, less threatening way. So, ‘Why do you think everyone hates you?’ becomes ‘what makes you think everyone hates you?’
- Our brains are programmed to look for an answer to the questions that we hear. Only if the question really doesn’t make sense or we can’t find an answer do we go back and question the validity of the question itself...
- ...this means we can slip all sorts of assumptions into questions. For example, ‘do you have any skills or talents that will help you achieve your goal?’ assumes they might not have and is likely to elicit the answer ‘no’ whereas ‘what skills and talents do you have?’ assumes that the person has skills and talents. And sends their brain out looking for them...
- ...we can use this feature of questions when facilitating to either get responses from the group, as in, ‘what questions do you have?’ or inhibit them, as in ‘does anyone have any questions?’ which is quite handy if you’re running out of time...
- ...we should never use this for evil. Like the estate agent who knows you’re not sure about selling your house and asks, ‘so are we putting it on the market for £180k or £195k?’
- Silence is a questioner’s best friend. Once you’ve asked a question, decide you will not be the next person to speak. If the pause is long, hold your nerve and get comfortable with the silence. Great thinking can happen in those pauses and an answer will come...
- ...although if the person you are talking with is hard of hearing and didn’t hear you ask a question in the first place, this might not work.

- ‘What else?’ is fantastic question. Our first answers are often only part of the story. Asking ‘what else?’ and then asking ‘what else?’ and continuing to ask ‘what else?’ helps people to dig beneath their immediate thoughts. For example, ‘what have you done this year that you are proud of? ... What else? ... And what else?...’
- ‘What will that give you?’ helps people to dig beneath what they immediately think they want to understand why they want it. You can keep digging until it’s obvious that you can’t dig any deeper, by repeating the question.
- It’s great if our questions can assume action, solution and positivity. ‘What great ideas have you got that will help you to solve this problem?’

The power of vulnerability

We’ve touched on this before, but it’s worth emphasising. Vulnerability has power. It creates relationship. We warm to imperfection. The child in the school play that everyone remembers is not the one who speaks their lines perfectly but the one who gets it wrong.

We all know that we’re frail and imperfect and if someone else has the courage to let their imperfections and vulnerabilities be seen, to let their humanity shine through, we can relax. We don’t have to hold up the facade of perfection either.

Vulnerability gives us courage. If we know that we are not the only ones who struggle, who are human and frail, who don’t get things right all the time, we don’t feel alone anymore. If someone else is owning up to their struggles, we can own up to ours. They don’t seem so shameful or silly anymore. We can give them words and when we give them words we rob them of their power and if we want to we can begin to find answers.

The mantra for professionals, for a long time, has been that they should not reveal anything of themselves to the people they work with. They can be friendly, but they shouldn’t get personal. Clients are the people who share their problems. Professionals are the people with the answers. We are asking you to take a different approach.

Of course we need to share in a way that is sensitive and helpful, that keeps our lives our responsibility and doesn’t make the group we’re meant to be facilitating our own personal therapy team. Of course we need to be sensible. But we do need to be prepared to be human and honest.

When we are vulnerable, we give others permission to do the same. Given that this course will only work if people have the courage to be honest with themselves and with others, our own openness is important.

Your thoughts about vulnerability

About theology and beliefs

To be effective, it is essential that LCG is a judgement free zone. LCG is not the place to talk to people about the correctness or otherwise of their Christian beliefs. It is not the place to comment on people's doctrine, however strongly you might disagree with them. It is also not appropriate to wait until after the course or another context to comment on what someone has said during the course.

It is our experience that people connect best with themselves and with God in an environment where they are free to explore for themselves and to be honest with themselves and with others. When we believe we need to hide parts of ourselves, it becomes far more difficult to explore and to draw close to God. It also gets in the way of relationships, leaving us feeling isolated.

Things that Christians sometimes believe they need to hide from other people include their doubts, questions, ideas about God and the Bible that they think their church will disapprove of and their struggles with faith. These things don't disappear if we hide them.

People need to know that they are safe to express their views without being disapproved of. If you disapprove of one person's faith, other people in the room are also at risk of feeling that they will be disapproved of if they are too honest. Our sense that other Christians will disapprove of us tends to quickly morph into a belief that God disapproves of us too. The whole point of LCG is to help people to know that they are loved for who they are. People with poor self-worth are particularly vulnerable to feeling disapproval and shame.

Creating an environment where people are free to explore, to ask questions and admit to doubts can be an incredibly healing thing. In order to grow in faith, we have to be free to explore.

If you place a great deal of importance on people having what you regard as right or biblical thinking, this could prove a challenge. So a couple of things to reassure you.

Firstly, because LCG is not about teaching people doctrine or studying the bible, you are not very likely to get involved in theological discussions. Secondly, it is worth remembering that LCG is a small part of someone's Christian experience. If God wants to challenge someone's theology, there are lots of other places that can happen. You don't need to feel pressured to sort out someone's theology. You can trust that God will do that if it's needed. Thirdly, we are not asking you to agree with

what someone else is saying, just that you need to listen with love and without judgement.

The one area of belief you do want to help people reflect on is their view of God. Some people have a distorted image of a God who is full of judgement and anger, or who is subtly disapproving or cold. If someone says something that indicates that they have a badly warped and negative view of God, then it is helpful if you can gently and respectfully help them to notice that their God is not very loving. You might do this by reflecting back to them what you think their view of God might be, perhaps saying something like, “when you said that, it made me wonder if you see God as....?” or “it doesn’t sound like you see God as being very friendly towards you? Have you thought about where your image of God might have come from?” So you’re not telling people that they are wrong, but you are giving them the opportunity to reflect. If they are ready to do that then they will. If they are not, then don’t push it.

About prayer

LCG is a prayerful journey. Most of the activities are designed to be opportunities for people to connect with and listen to God. Some sessions lend themselves particularly well to including some prayer in them. The session about the things that get in the way is one where you may well want to make prayer ministry available to people.

How you use prayer will depend on your own style of prayer and the prayer style and culture of the group. You might want to include some liturgy or some sung worship. You may wish to encourage people to pray with one another. How you handle this is largely up to you.

However you include prayer, it is important that you do so in a way that reinforces and fits with the ethos and values of the course.

Prayer ministry

One of the key things that LCG does is to create space, through the exercise, for people to listen to God for themselves. So if you are offering some kind of prayer ministry, it is important when praying with people for the emphasis to be on encouraging them to hear for themselves what God might be saying to them, rather than telling them what you think.

So when you are praying with someone, ask them what they think God might be saying to them and what they are sensing as you pray together. If you have a sense of what God might be saying, hold back from saying anything until the person you are praying with has had a chance to tell you what they are sensing. Then you can sensitively add your insights if it seems right to do so. Brad Jersak's book, *Can you hear me? Tuning in to the God who speaks* is full of helpful insights and practical tips around this kind of listening prayer.

You might also decide to encourage people to pray with one another or, if your church or group has a prayer ministry team, you might want to ask for their support.

Final thoughts about facilitating

This is a bunch of miscellaneous stuff that either doesn't fit anywhere else or is worth saying again.

- There are no perfect facilitators. So you are not going to be one.
- There is no failure, only experiments and experiences that help us to do things differently next time.
- You will like some people better than others. This is inevitable. Just do your best to treat everyone with grace and respect.
- Quiet, apparently unresponsive people, who you feel threatened by, are sometimes enthusiastically appreciative of what you are offering. Don't allow your fear to stop you talking with them.
- Some people are very difficult to manage in a group.
- If there are obvious conflicts, you need to find a way to address them for the sake of the group.
- Find creative ways to manage very talkative people. Like structuring and introducing discussions in a way that makes time limits obvious. Or doing more discussion in pairs and small groups that feed back, rather than as one large group.

Other hints and tips:

Further resources

The Loved Called Gifted podcast is hosted by Catherine Cowell and is available on all major podcasting platforms, including apple and google podcasts. It can also be accessed via the lovedcalledgifted.com website, where there are full transcripts of each episode.

Loved, Called, Gifted: A practical guide to unlocking your life's calling by Sean Kennedy and Catherine Cowell (published by Instant Apostle)

Church Uncorked: Leadership that releases our potential by Catherine Cowell and Sean Kennedy (published by Instant Apostle) This book explores how leaders and organisations can work in a way that is life-giving releases everyone's potential and creativity.

Mustard Seed Stories: Engaging ordinary people in practical mission by Catherine Cowell (A small group study guide with accompanying DVD designed for churches)

We have a version of this course, called ***Precious, Powerful, Passionate*** that, although still grounded in a Christian world view, does not assume that participants would describe themselves as Christian. It is designed to work for people of any faith or none. It's been run in secular community groups and by churches and Christian groups who are working within the community or who want to be able to invite a wide range of people to take part. Contact us or go to the website if you would like to know more.

We also provide one-to-one coaching for leaders and individuals and help for organisations to work in a way that makes space for everyone's gifts and creativity. We also offer spiritual direction. All these services can be found via the website, lovedcalledgifted.com where **there is also a self-guided, online version of this course.**

We would also recommend:

More Time to Think by Nancy Kline

Can you hear me? Tuning in to the God who speaks by Brad Jersak

Almost anything by Brene Brown, who writes and speaks very powerfully about the power of vulnerability. Her TED talk on the subject is a great place to start.

Other books and resources are listed in the companion guide.



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