



Being with God: Session 7 – Facilitator’s ppt script.

The numbers correspond with the slides. This is an edited version of the Content booklet. ① indicates an animation click is needed.

1. Intro slide

2. What quality of life does God want for me?

3. Jesus revealed God’s hope for us when He said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” St Irenaeus is famous for saying, “The glory of God is the human person *fully alive*.” But both the story and teaching in the Bible show that life in all its fullness does not necessarily mean a trouble, pain-free existence. Instead, God has always invited His covenant-partners to be with Him so that we can be fruitful. We are made for *fruitfulness* – not just existence. God’s first command in the Bible to human beings is, ① “Be fruitful...” In the parable of the servants who are given talents to look after while their master goes away (Matthew 25:14-30) it is the servant who fails to grow his talents that is condemned – He is missing out on life in all its fullness. Human beings are designed for fruitfulness. The Content Booklet outlines how God looks for fruit in our ① *character*, in our *work* and in *discipling* other people.

4. Why is being with God at the heart of fruitfulness?

5. The practices of worship, prayer, study and meditation we have looked at draw us into ‘being with God’ and also become the “training exercises” which help us *give space for God’s Spirit to change us from the inside out*. The kind of fruitful life God wants *cannot come from us alone* – instead it is a *partnership* with God in which in our daily lives God delights to work in and through us, if we invite Him to. Speaking of growing disciples, ① Paul had a deep sense that all true fruitfulness comes from God’s work: “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but *God has been making it grow*.” (1 Corinthians 3:6) ① While human beings have a part to play, *God is the one who grows fruit*. In His picture of the vine in John 15 Jesus reinforces this by reminding His disciples that their fruitfulness depends on being rooted in Him: “Remain in me, as I also remain in you. ① No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

6. As disciples, fruitfulness that doesn’t spring from being with God is impossible. We are not gifted, talented, or eternal enough to be fully fruitful in ourselves. We can see this in our own lives as disciples if we experience ‘religious burn out’. Instead, ① God’s partnership with us as disciples is a life of *balance* – between being with God and doing; between listening and responding; between being active and stopping (for example, none of the fruits in our character like love, joy or peace can be achieved by rushing); between giving out from what we have first received. ① This session is about living into simple rhythms in our daily lives and each week which enable this balanced life to be part of our lived experience. They are rhythms which God gave His people throughout Scripture and which we see in the life of Jesus. They are rhythms that not only give God’s Spirit space to make us eternally fruitful, but, in a stressed and anxious culture, help us to live peacefully and be a non-anxious presence in a hurting world.

7. The Content booklet explores how in a world of ① ‘Hurry Sickness’ this can be a challenge. ① We cannot get more time than we have. But we can make choices to shape time differently around the things that matter for ever. None of us want to experience discipleship as superficial, or to settle for less than God’s offer of life in all its fullness. But it is worth acknowledging that it can be easy for us to be distracted or over-busy, and that living fruitful lives of being with God will inevitably come up against cultural barriers and call us to make choices about how our time is used.

8. Why is Sabbath so important for being with God?

9. The Sabbath (meaning rest) is a complete day of rest in Scripture. Today, even Christian disciples might struggle to have a rhythm of a day of rest every week, but the *balance we need for fruitfulness is established at the beginning of the Bible* where in Genesis, even God rests from His work. Right from the start there is a regular weekly practice in the way the world is that sets out both work and rest. The Sabbath is first named as an explicit commandment by God – the fourth of ten – after He rescues His covenant-partner people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. It is a holy day – to be set apart as vital and important – on which the people specifically remember that they are free – they are not slaves anymore. (Deuteronomy 5: 12-15) ① Being able to rest on Sabbath is about *freedom from slavery* – from overwork, from being defined only by being productive, from other people’s expectations or control. It is a *gift*, as well as a commandment, because it says *there are limits on how much is expected of us*. (In a consumer society this can be a way of saying, “I am, or I have enough.”) ① The word Sabbath can also be translated as to worship or delight. God establishes a regular time when, together, we offer praise to Him. The Sabbath is also a taste of what is to come in our experience of eternal life, when we see God face to face. God gives it as a way of remembering the freedom He has already given us, but also *looking forward to our ultimate freedom*.

10. What are the benefits of Sabbath?

- 11. Rest to refresh the whole week.** God wants us to 'be with Him' more than one day a week, but the Sabbath creates a day which opens us to a different way of living *which can spread into the other six days*. To symbolise this at the end of the Sabbath Jewish people will take the light from the Sabbath candle, representing the rest they have been experiencing, and use that flame to light six other candles for the coming days of the week. Sabbath rest, worship, and being with God is being taken into the week that is to come. Whereas for some a day off may be a time to escape, or recover after a busy period, for disciples ① Sabbath as God intended can offer the possibility of *working from rest*, as opposed to resting from work. We cannot be fruitful without rest. This reflects the first experience of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis. As Mike Breen writes, "... on the first full day of existence for Adam and Eve, God rested. All of creation took a well-deserved break in activity. This was our first full day, a day of rest. Then the work began. From this we see an important principle of life: we are to work from our rest, not rest from our work." Regular Sabbath rest can train us to be more restful every day of the week.
- 12. Not having to be in control and knowing our limits.** The writer Marva Dawn says, "A great benefit of Sabbath keeping is that we learn to let God take care of us – not by becoming passive and lazy, but in the freedom of giving up our feeble attempts to be God in our own lives." Sabbath is taking a day a week to remind ourselves that we did not make the world and that it will continue to exist without our efforts. Stopping in order to be with God reinforces the truth that only God can truly satisfy our desires in a way that our career, possessions or reputation cannot. It is a way of living into the belief that our reputation is God's business, when we remember *that we are loved just because we exist*. It reminds us as well that many of the things we may strive to attain are only *loaned* to us. When the businessman John D. Rockefeller died his accountant was asked by a curious person, "I know that Mr. Rockefeller was an immensely wealthy man, just how much did he leave behind?" The accountant quickly replied, "Everything." Through Sabbath we can find out how much of our efforts can be about *earning something we already have*.
- 13. Being re-created.** Sabbath can create space so that we can "taste and see that the Lord is good." One of the translations of the word is 'to delight'. Part of being with God is being able to slow down to a speed in which we can *notice and enjoy His goodness* and do things we enjoy with gratitude. A good way to approach Sabbath might be to list the things that you could do for a day that would bring you joy and make you want to praise God. Sabbath re-creates us because ① it aims to help us to appreciate and savour the present moment. According to many spiritual writers, and particularly to Jesus, this is the main secret of living without anxiety. In Matthew 6 Jesus asks His disciples, "Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" In order to illustrate His point, He points to the birds and the flowers who are here today and gone tomorrow – they have no guarantee of an easy life – and yet are content before God because they live in the present moment.

14. How do I practise a fruitful Sabbath?

- 15.** There are four translations of the Hebrew word Sabbath which give a framework for a fruitful Sabbath: stop, rest, delight and worship. It is not necessary to include all these elements in a structured way, but none of them should be completely missing from your lived experience. **Stop.** Even if in the midst of busyness Sabbath means stopping from working, and, as much as possible, from all the thinking and worrying that work can mean. This means making choices not to attend to messages and communications that can distract us, perhaps by turning devices off. ① **Rest.** This can be physical – simply enjoying sleep. It can be mental and emotional – giving ourselves time to process things that are happening. It can be spiritual – deliberately resting in a sense of God's love and closeness. It is worth being aware that at first, if we are not used to it, resting like this can lead us to feeling low, as our mind, body and spirits settle into a different way of being with God. ① **Delight.** Doing unplanned things as they come into your mind or heart. Or doing things that create joy, happiness and gratitude – meals, music, games, fun, friends, nature. Doing something creative that isn't your job but that needs no justification. Appreciating the beauty God has made. Delight in people by having time for relationships. ① **Worship.** While we can worship God in all the above, Sabbath gives us the opportunity to share in praise and adoration of God, offering our life and the coming week to His glory. ① **Preparation.** The key thing is to seek a 24 hour period every week to practise Sabbath – it doesn't need to be a particular day of the week. As we have noted, the idea of a full day's rest to be with God may seem hard, and may be something *we have to work towards, rather than arrive at in one go*. We may need to acknowledge that there is never a moment when all our work feels done. Sabbath is a day for stopping in the midst of the busyness of our lives, not for when we are no longer busy. We will have to make choices, perhaps finding it helpful to *schedule our rest* before we schedule work. If we go on holiday or a trip there is always a lot to do beforehand in getting ready. No one just walks out of their house without packing at least one bag. Similarly, the Jewish people had to have a day of Preparation for the Sabbath. It's interesting that even in a culture where it was so established, there was a recognition that a full day to stop and be fully present to God and others required effort and choices.

16. How did Jesus (and others in the Bible) experience 'being with God' in solitude and silence?

- 17.** While Jesus practised Sabbath, he would also frequently withdraw from people to be with God on His own at other times, and sometimes for extended periods. This was intentional time to be alone with God, and to listen to His Father. Disciples down the centuries have imitated these two practices of solitude and silence, particularly at times of change or challenge, in order to grow in being with God. ① **Solitude** is being apart from others and from 'external noise' with the

purpose of being with God. It is not seeking 'emptiness' which can lead to loneliness. Instead it is time on our own *intentionally focussing on God with the aim of leading to being fulfilled by His presence.* ① **Silence** is needed for solitude. It is not just 'not talking', but waiting for my internal chatter and thoughts to stop so I can be in a better place to receive what God might want to communicate. Both go together.

18. Look at these two paintings of Jesus in the desert, in silence and solitude. What do you think He is thinking? What do you think He is feeling?

19. As we read the accounts of Jesus it is striking how often He would go to a quiet place to be with His Father – at the beginning of His ministry He spent forty days with His Father in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11). Before choosing his disciples He spent the night alone (Luke 6:12). There is a regular pattern of seeing Jesus withdraw, sometimes with His disciples, when things got busy. This echoes a strong pattern throughout the Bible of ① God meeting people in the "wilderness" – a place where they encounter Him in more intense ways. The Greek word for such a place is 'eremos' and occurs 48 times in the New Testament!

20. **What are the benefits of solitude and silence?**

21. The Content booklet outlines this in more detail but the principles are: **In solitude we can be strengthened by experiencing the truth that only God matters.** ① **In solitude the ways in which we are being pruned can become fruitful.**

22. **In silence we can express and deepen our trust in God.** The writer John Main puts it like this, "To be silent with another person is a deep expression of trust and confidence and it is only when we are unconfident that we feel compelled to talk. To be silent with another person is truly to be with that other person." ① **Through silence our words and actions can count for more.** The French philosopher Blaise Pascal is famous for saying, "All of humanity's problems stem from a human being's inability to sit quietly in a room alone." In silence *we can ensure that we have listened before we act*, giving ourselves space to slow down and pay attention to God so that our first decisions can be wise. Similarly, if our words are a thermometer of our hearts, they will have more value after silence with God, and may be more wisely chosen. ① **In solitude we can value and love others more.** Thomas Merton said that one of the fruits of solitude can be to increase our sensitivity to and compassion for others because "It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers and sisters...*Solitude and silence teach me to love them for what they are, not for what they say.*"

23. **How do I practise solitude and silence?**

24. As well as modelling withdrawing from others to be alone with God, Jesus commended it to His disciples as a normal way of praying: "...when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." It goes without saying that your circumstances and personality will affect the length of time and the way in which you are able to grow in practising this. Nevertheless, if being with God is the foundation of discipleship, these first thoughts may help: ① **Knowing God wants to draw near to us.** Our desire to withdraw to 'be with God' is increased when we connect with how much God wants and promises to be with us. "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." (James 4:8) ① **Working towards regular times of being silent before God...it is unlikely that we will develop times of solitude with God unless we have an intentional rhythm ① ...but also being aware of the season we are in.** In John 15 there is a balance between times of being fruitful and times of remaining in God. In our lives it may be hard to regulate what is necessary in a strict way. It may be more a case of becoming aware of the season we are in. Growth cannot occur without remaining in the vine, or without pruning. So, for example, if we are aware that we are not seeing much fruitfulness in our lives, it may be a prompt to us that we need to have a season of withdrawing to be with God. ① **Using the opportunities we already have.** While having a special place and time can be helpful, it is possible to find moments of solitude and silence in the normal run of a day. It is better to start as we are than wait until we change circumstances. Driving more slowly, pausing before meals, taking a brief walk, getting up a few minutes earlier, turning off our devices can all offer opportunities within the structure of our existing lives for a moment of silence in which we pay attention to the present moment, knowing that this kind of daily being with God is, as Christian doctor Paul Tournier said, "mostly about waiting for God's presence."

25. **How can the practices which train me to 'be with God' and pay attention to Him move from idea to reality?**

26. All the practices we have looked at in this module are the exercises we do *directly*, in order to grow *indirectly*. It is impossible to exercise, or start new exercises, *without effort and change*. But the way to genuine peace is found in using the time that God has given us in the best way possible *to enable the things we really want to happen in our lives.* ① Practices move from idea to reality when we make choices about how to do them in our daily lives. As a closing exercise to this module, you are invited to think about how you experience these practices, and what the next steps might be that God is calling you to do in living them out. To support one another, you are invited to meet up with someone else and share your intentions with them. The handout 'Rule of Life' leads you in doing this. ① It's an ancient idea adopted by many Christian communities down the centuries as a way of creating space for discipleship in our lives in a way which echoes our deepest longings and choices. ① While the word 'rule' may seem strict, the word comes from a Latin term meaning 'supporting scaffold', like a trellis which lifts a vine off the ground, enabling the fruit to grow. *The rule is not an end in itself*, it is the means by which we can experience life in all its fullness. It is important that any rule can be life-giving and not a burden – the Content booklet unpacks how to approach developing a rule in a positive way.