

Small Group
Booklet
August 2014

Breathing Under Water

BREATHING UNDER WATER

Compiled from the book "Breathing under water" by Richard Rohr

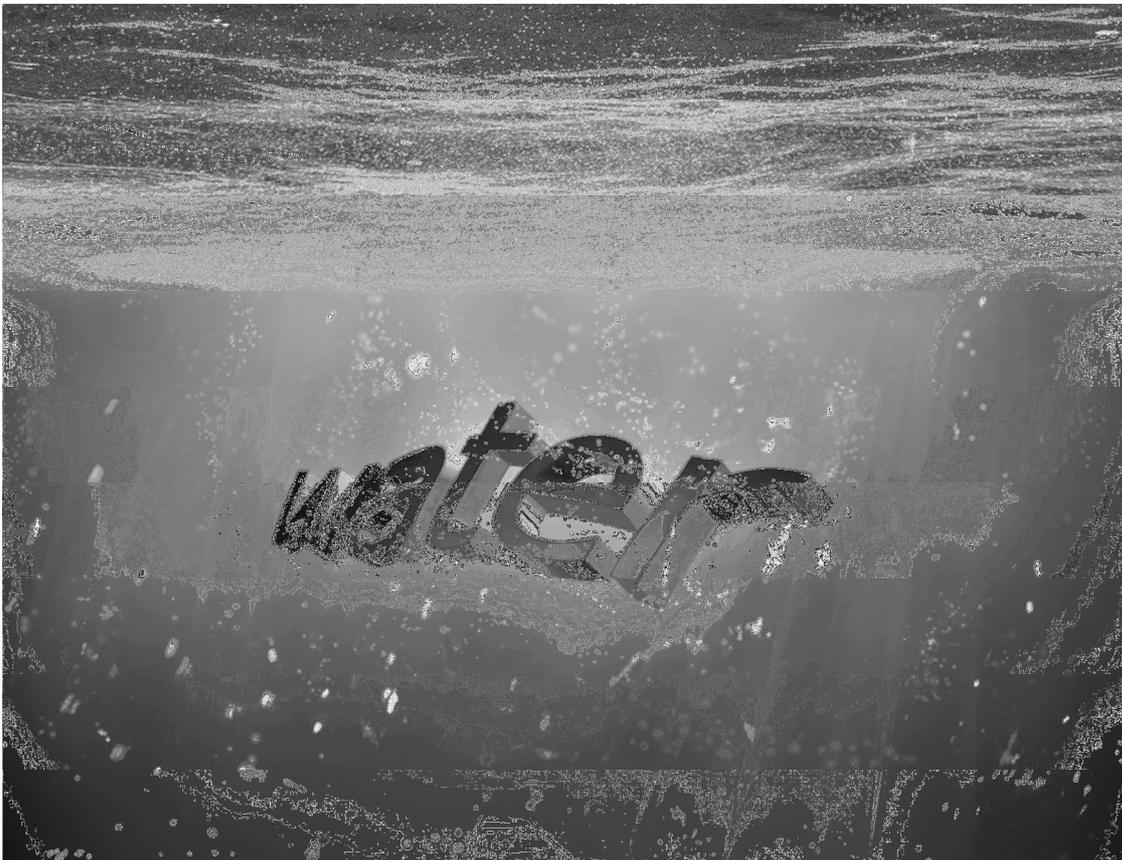
Dear Friends,

To some degree or other everyone wants to change, for we all have habits and patterns of behaviour which we would rather not have. Even though we try to change, we often have to admit that we are unable to do so in our own strength; and so we begin to believe that freedom from such unwanted habits can only be obtained in heaven. We repeatedly do the same things over and over again, even when we know they are wrong.

Some of this behaviour is out in the open – but some we may hide from others and even from ourselves. It is difficult for us to see our own personal bad habits as such and so we may deny that such behaviour even exists in our lives.

This series explores that possibility of how we may be stuck in a rut of behaviour we would like to change and asks the question as to how often we take these aspects of our lives to God and ask Him for His help. Some Christ-followers have never opened themselves up to God's touch or healing and have actually never had a life-changing encounter with God. He offers us healing and it is His will that we are liberated in this life from anything that may hold us back in our relationship with Him and the service we offer Him.

It is necessary to dig deep into our hearts and souls and develop a strong spirituality where we walk closely to God to make the most of His touch on our lives and so work towards the freedom that He offers us. We pray that you will encounter God in a new way as you work through this series.



STRIVING FOR TRANSFORMATION

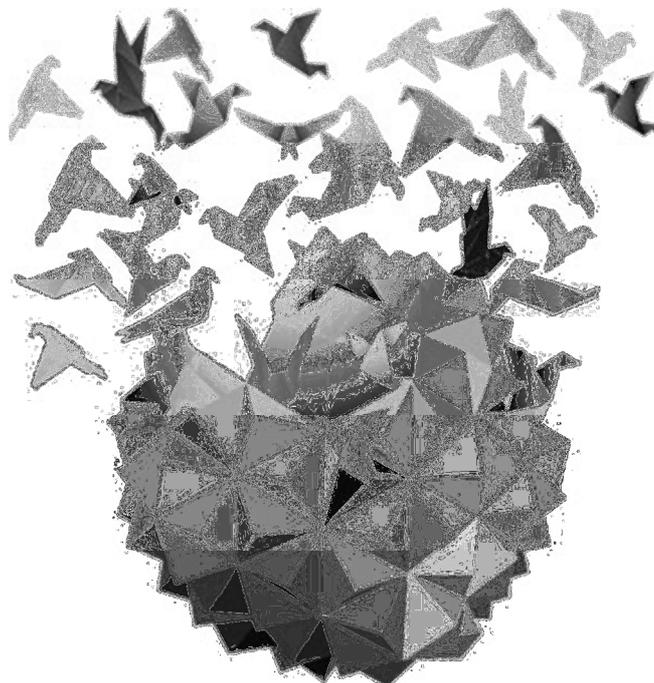
One of the greatest mysteries of God is that He seems to have hidden holiness and wholeness in a secret place where only the unassuming will find it. Those who fail are often the ones who break through to enlightenment and compassion as they strive to come right.

Many of us like to be in control – and when we are faced with challenges we cannot handle we work harder to maintain that control. Some people go to extreme lengths to change themselves using their own rules and their own strength. Jesus (John 12:24) and Paul (Galatians 5:19) recognized this and both understood that such behaviour does not change anything! It is only when we experience this personally for ourselves and touch rock-bottom, admitting that we cannot change ourselves that we are willing to reach out to God and hand over control to Him, asking for His help.

We do not find this easy for we often deny that change is needed and avoid taking any action. We do not enjoy change and we find it difficult to see that letting go will lead to transformation and happiness, even when our current circumstances are not good. If we want to unreservedly follow Christ with spiritual maturity we need to unlearn the habits that keep us bound and hold us back.

When we do surrender control to God we begin to discover a deep desire within ourselves for change to happen and to recognize the need to open ourselves completely to God. We need to open our minds through contemplation and meditation; our hearts so that hurts can be healed; and our bodies so that we can become fully present to those who are around us in the present moment. Jesus often used touch to heal people and He taught that body and soul are one. When we can be present in the moment in mind, heart and body we will always meet God and experience His presence (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Jesus insisted that surrender to God is vitally important in our faith journey (Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; Matthew 16:4). It is only when we realize that God is loving and merciful and that we are accepted – at no cost to ourselves – that we can surrender ourselves to Him, with no sense of duty or guilt but out of love, because Love first loved us (1 John 4:19). It makes it much easier to surrender when you know you will receive only love and mercy from the One to whom you yield.



DAILY DEVOTIONS

Psalm 13:1-6

When have you felt as if God is not hearing you so that you appear to be alone? Read on to the end of the psalm – and pray verses 13:5-6

Lord God, I praise You for Your faithfulness to me – even when I am not aware of Your presence with me.

Matthew 9:35-38

What situation is happening around you about which you feel helpless to do anything, even if you wanted to? Speak to God about it.

Lord, I know that You are all powerful. Intervene in this situation now that lives may change in the way You desire.

Romans 7:14-20

What do you do that you do not want to do – but cannot stop doing?

Abba, you know the struggle I have with this issue. Empower me with Your Holy Spirit's power that raised Jesus from death, I may overcome this struggle in my life.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Read this verse slowly. Read it aloud. Now hear someone who cares about you praying this prayer over you. How do you feel? What changes, if any, do you need in your life?

Lord, thank You for Your faithfulness. Help me to become the person You want me to be.

Philippians 2:12-13

God works in you. What, if anything, is holding you back from trusting Him more so that you can say 'I surrender'?

Lord, remove any obstacles that are holding me back. Help me to surrender my life more completely to You than I have ever done before.

Deuteronomy 33:27

Where do you need God as your refuge today?

Lord God, You are my refuge and my strength; my ever-present help in trouble. Today I surrender control of my life, and especially the issues about which I have been praying to You. I surrender, Lord.

Luke 8:24

If Jesus could calm the storm on the lake, He can calm any storms in your life. Tell Him about the specific storm you want to give Him today.

Lord God, here is the storm in my life that I want to give you. I place it at the foot of Your cross and as I start to turn away I hear You speak words of calm into the storm.

SESSION 1

Welcome:

What category do you think you fit into:

- A free spirit
- A rebel
- A people pleaser
- Other

Explain why you think this is so!

Worship

Spend time in worship together.

Accountability:

How goes it with your soul?

Word:

Read: John 12:23-26; Romans 7:1-20

1. None of us is perfect – we all have something in our lives that is contrary to the way Jesus wants us to live. What is preventing you from changing in this area of your life? Or perhaps you are trying to change now; what are your struggles?
2. How do you feel about surrendering your will to someone else?
3. What happens to those feelings when you consider surrendering your will to Christ?
4. What challenges you about this concept of surrender to Jesus?
5. How can you overcome these challenges?

Ministry to one another

Pray for one another and encourage one another to surrender your wills to Jesus Christ. Give Group members the opportunity to pray a prayer of surrender, either together or individually. For example,

Father, I have been stubborn wanting to do things my way and have resisted anything that may cause me pain. I am afraid, Abba. It is a frightening thing to turn over control of my life to anyone else, including You. Forgive me for my resistance. Give me Your peace as I try to say to You today 'I surrender.' I don't always understand why You ask me to take action in ways that do not make sense to me. But I know that You love me; and I know that You always have a reason. So even as I say these words to You today give me your strength and wisdom so that I may never turn back on them. Give me Your peace and a determination to do Your will. Lord I commit myself to Your loving care. I surrender all my life to You unconditionally. Thank You for Your peace and for all that You will do in and through me as a result of this prayer. Amen.

Reaching out

There is a hymn that goes 'I surrender all ...' Once when I was talking about faith with a mature Christian friend I said I would do anything for Jesus but not one certain thing – and they started singing 'I surrender half, I surrender half ...' That stopped me short! If you have prayed a prayer of surrender ask God to show you what He wants you to do that may be out of your comfort zone – and take action. If you were not able to pray it, spend time this week talking to Him about your reluctance and concerns – and then go and do something for Him that is also beyond your comfort zone. May He bless you as you surrender to Him.

SHADOWS

Many people object to looking within themselves. Richard Rohr, in his book *Breathing Under Water*, quotes John 8:32 *'the truth will set you free'* but adds *'but first it tends to make you miserable.'* Acknowledging our own failures makes us sad. However the goal of this introspection is that we become aware of our sin and take precautions against it. In this way we can look at our mistakes and limitations with honesty and humility and grow in faith from the increased awareness that develops.

Each one of us has a shadow self – a part of us that we wish was not there. We tend to deny its existence. Jesus speaks of this blindness to our own faults when He asks why we see the splinter in our brother's eye but not the log in our own eye (Matthew 7:4-5).

Ignatius developed a prayer practice to help us identify the things in our life which are wrong. This prayer is known as the Examen:

- Thank God for the blessings you have received;
- Ask for the grace to recognize your sins and turn away from them;
- Go through the events of your day methodically in order to reveal the cause and direction of your actions on that day;
- Ask God for forgiveness for everything you have done wrong;
- Resolve to change with the help of God's grace;
- Close with the Lord's Prayer.

As we do such an exercise we become increasingly aware of our own faults and recognize our *perception* of the faults of others. God uses our failure to draw us to increasing awareness of its existence. Once we become aware of it, He uses it for our own good.

Over time we have developed a limited picture of the Holy Spirit and have eased Him out of our lives, filling the gap with other things. In order to rectify this situation we need to reconnect with God and to be healed from low self-esteem, insecurity or anything we may have used to fill the gap. To do this we need to examine our consciousness which is where we discover our own soul – our deepest self; and where we are in touch with God. It is where we tap into the wisdom of the Holy Spirit (Romans 2:15) and attain the 'mind of Christ' (1 Corinthians 2:10-16). When we do this we gain a wider perception of life and a greater compassion.

This self-examination needs to be objective, calm and compassionate and can only happen once we understand that we are children of God, firmly rooted in Him. It enables us to admit when we are wrong. It also enables us to love again, for love is not possible when we are unconscious of who we are – and who we are not. Only then can we feel hope and joy and lose all fear of confessing our wrongdoings because we are once again at one with God and all of creation.



DAILY DEVOTIONS

James 3:13-18

What does God say to you through this passage today?

Lord, help me to be honest with myself and with You as I look at my inner self. May I receive Your wisdom.

Matthew 26:41

What is the biggest temptation that you are struggling with? Speak to God about it.

Lord, help me to focus on You and not to be tempted to wander away.

John 8:32

Are you hiding from any truth that is holding you down? Ask God to reveal this to you if you are not sure, and spend some time talking to Him about it.

Father, show me any truth that I am sub-consciously hiding from myself that I may be set free to serve You fully, for I know that the truth will set me free.

Matthew 7:3-5

What do you find irritating in those close to you? Look at your own life and check whether you display the same traits of behaviour. Spend some time in repentance and confession as you share your struggles with God.

Lord, show me myself so that I become aware of the things in my life that I find irritating in others – and help me to rectify these traits.

1 John 1:8-9

How do you feel about this passage? What is it that challenges you most in these verses?

Lord, help me to acknowledge that I am a sinner and that it is only through Your grace that I am set free.

Psalm 19:12-13

Spend some time with God today asking for forgiveness for your hidden faults. You may never know what they are but it is better to be free of them than have them hanging round your neck.

Lord, I know there are things I have done that are wrong. Forgive me, Lord, and help me to stop doing the same things again.

Romans 2:12-15

How lively is your conscience? Does it speak to you all the time, or is it quiet?

Lord, alert my conscience to right and wrong that the Holy Spirit may guide me through its voice.

SESSION 2

Welcome

What geographical, astronomical, biological (or any other category you may choose) truth have you recently discovered that has amazed you?

Worship

Spend time in worship together.

Accountability

How did you surrender a new part of your life to God and what action did you take as a result this past week?

Word

Read: Matthew 7:3-5; 1 John 8:1-9; Matthew 26:41.

1. Which passage spoke most clearly to you this week? (If some members of the group did not read them, go through them now).
2. Why did it make such an impact on you?
3. What action is it encouraging you to take?
4. How can God help you in this?

Ministry to one another

Pray for one another, especially in regard to any struggles people may be having with what they have discovered about themselves.

Reaching out

How can you help someone struggling with temptation this week?



OWNING MYSELF

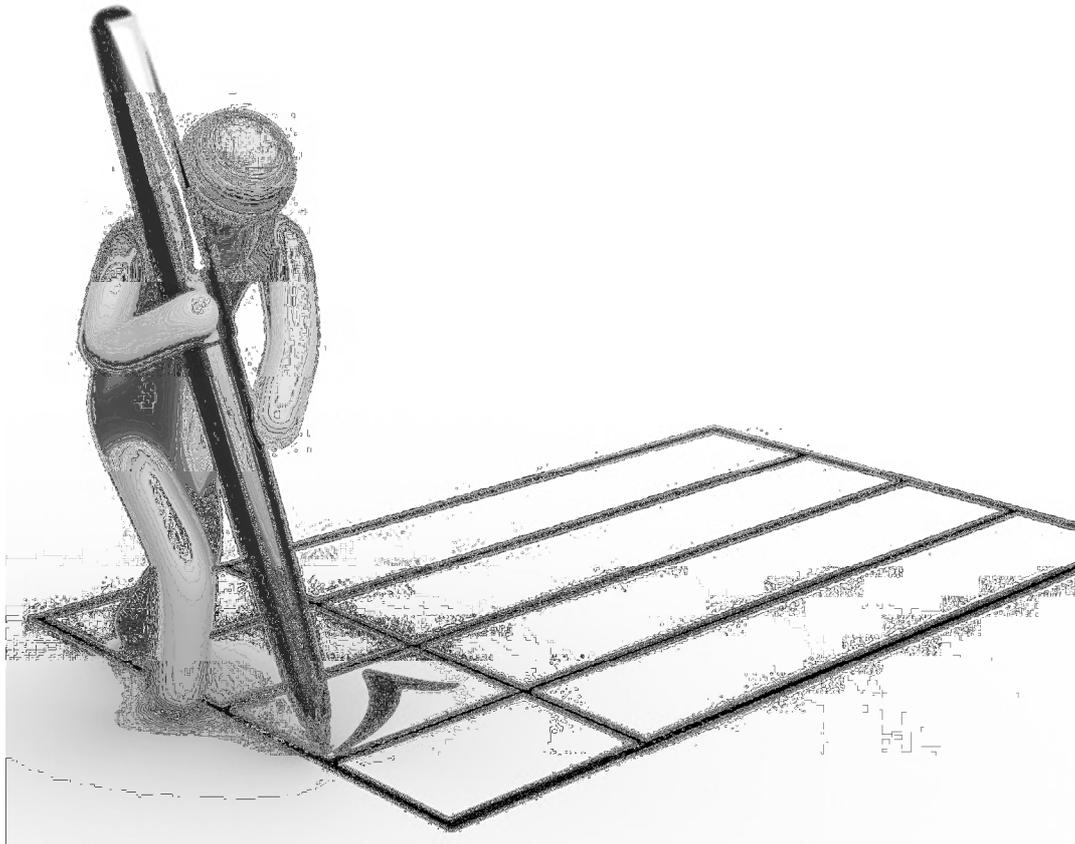
Over time, society has developed a system of punishment and reward (retributive justice), but this is not the Gospel way. The Gospel sees failure and sin as opportunities for change and insight which can transform the future (restorative justice). This is God's economy of grace which is becoming more acceptable in our time than it has in any previous generation.

As we acknowledge our shortcomings and accept accountability for them the path to healing and recovery is revealed to us; and when we admit such shortcomings to one another, both parties experience God's love.

God's grace leads to love and forgiveness, not to punishment. He keeps His side of His covenant with us. It seems as if God loves us more and more instead of punishing us for our sin – and such love leads us to change.

We do not find it easy to forgive ourselves, so when someone else speaks words of forgiveness to us we hear forgiveness spoken to us and are set free from whatever wrong actions bind us. In this way, restorative justice restores our relationships with others; reinstates our sense of our own personal integrity; and re-establishes communion with God.

It is as we take responsibility for our failures and are honest and accountable for past wrong actions that we are able to move forward. Sustainable change occurs and we begin to experience a wonderful sense of freedom as we accept the past for what it is, become accountable to one another, offer forgiveness to ourselves and one another and so receive healing.



DAILY DEVOTIONS

1 Kings 8:35-36

Confession changes lives and brings a sense of freedom. Ask God to show you whether there is anything in your life that you need to confess.

Lord, not only do I sin myself, but I am part of national, cultural and institutional sin too. Forgive me, Lord. Help me to be part of the solution and not part of the problem.

Ezekiel 16:59-63

How do you feel about God establishing His covenant with you in spite of any sin in your life?

Lord, here I am, awed at Your love and Your willingness to forgive no matter what I have done. Thank you.

Psalms 32:3-5

How do you feel when you have a 'guilty secret' or have said or done something to somebody that you know was wrong? What action do you take?

Abba, send Your Holy Spirit to give me the courage to rectify those things I have said and done which are wrong. Give me the wisdom to know how to do this.

James 5:16

Who do you have in your life to whom you could confess your sins? If you cannot think of anyone, ask God to lead you to someone when the need arises.

Father, thank You that there are people in my life to whom I can go to confess. Give me the wisdom to know who they are Lord, and give them Your assurance that they are the person to whom I can go at that time.

John 20:23

How does this responsibility make you feel? Who do you think (or know) you need to forgive? If you have trouble with this, tell God about it.

Lord, fill me so with Your compassion and love that I am able to forgive and not hold any grudge or bitterness against anyone. Help me to set them free, Lord.

Luke 13:1-9

'... unless you repent ...' 13:9 tells us that God is the God of second chances. Where do you need a second chance?

Abba, thank you for the second chances You give to me. I am grateful that I can always come to You again.

2 Peter 3:10-18

'Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation ... be on your guard ... grow in grace and knowledge ...' Ask God for His help in doing this. Remember John 3:16-17.

Lord, You gave it all for me. Help me to do the same for others as I grow in grace and knowledge.

SESSION 3

Welcome

Children copy their parents or teachers. What have you heard a child say that immediately makes you think of yourself or someone else in the family and that made you laugh?

Worship

Spend time in worship together.

Accountability

How did you help someone last week?

Word

Read Luke 13:1-9

1. How do you feel when someone apologizes for something they have done to you that has hurt you in some way?
2. Do you find it easy or difficult to apologize when you know you are in the wrong? Explain why you feel this way.
3. How do you feel about confessing your sins to another person?
4. How do you feel about someone else confessing their sins to you?

Ministry to one another

Pray for one another in regard to any struggles that have been mentioned. Ask God to help you to build trust within your group.

Reaching out

Every time we say sorry to someone it gets a little easier. Make an effort this week to apologize for the small things you do that irritate other people. Be aware of their feelings.



SURRENDER

Both Mary (Luke 1:38) and Jesus (Luke 23:46) prayed the same prayer: *'Let it be done unto me'*, surrendering themselves to God and giving Him the freedom to take over their lives. As the centuries passed, this became a prayer that we prayed in regard to salvation rather than any life-change. As a result our egos regained control and there was little change in the character defects in our life.

There are many paradoxes in our Christian faith. Scripture says we need to *'work for our salvation in fear and trembling'* (Philippians 2:12) but it also says that God's love is a free gift (Romans 9:11-12; 11:6; etc). Jesus is completely human – and completely divine; God is one and yet He is also three. In this case the paradox, as Richard Rohr states in *Breathing Under Water*, is: *'We must pray as if it all depends on us, and work as if it all depends on God'*.

As we acknowledge the shortcomings in our character we need to step back and allow God to do the work that is required. So we surrender and relinquish our control to receive the free gift of God's control. We need to wait and let God do what He desires in our lives.

We do not bring these (or any) requests to God to change Him but to change ourselves. We pray, not so that God will do something for us, but because asking develops a living, growing relationship with Him. We do not control God when we pray. God gives us the same answer to all our prayers: the power of the Holy Spirit. We can do none of this in our own strength. It is only God – the greater power – who is able to do this for and with us.

It is essential that we ask, seek and knock (Luke 11:19) in order to build and maintain an attitude of gratitude which precludes any sense of entitlement. When we ask and receive we recognize the gift that is being given and we increasingly grow our relationship with God. We need to ask God humbly for help to remove our shortcomings. We have no idea what needs to be changed, so we have to ask God to reveal our faults and remove them from us in His way. God will remove our shortcomings and expose them for the lie that they are, replacing them with an awareness of our true self – as He intends us to be.



DAILY DEVOTIONS

Psalm 51:1-2

Read these verses through several times. Use them as a prayer and wait in silence as God responds.

Thank You, Father, for Your answer to my prayer.

Psalm 51:10-12

Read these verses several times as a prayer.

Lord, I need Your cleansing in my life today; I need to be renewed; I need Your presence. Thank You for always being willing to restore Your joy in me and for sustaining me every day.

Romans 9:14-17

Where has God shown you mercy?

Father, thank You for the mercy You have shown me. I know that it is undeserved – and that makes it even more amazing.

Philippians 12:12-13

How do you see God working in you to will and to act according to His good purpose?

Lord God, You are changing me. I am grateful and ask that You will continue to do so every day.

Luke 1:38; Luke 23:46

How do you feel about saying this to God? Tell God about your feelings – willingness or reluctance – and ask Him for His help however you are feeling.

Abba, let it be done unto me ...

Matthew 7:7-8

What are you asking for, seeking, knocking on the door about? Tell God about it and listen for His answer.

Lord, thank You for Your answers to my prayers. May I recognize each answer as You give it.

Romans 8:26-27

We all have situations from time to time when we don't know what to pray. How do you feel about giving the Holy Spirit control over your prayers and asking Him to pray on your behalf, in accordance with God's will? What situation in your life do you have at the moment where you need His help?

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your gift of the Holy Spirit and for the prayers He offers for me. I know that You are at work in my life and I am grateful.

SESSION 4

Welcome:

How do you feel when you have to ask someone for help?

Worship

Spend time in worship together.

Accountability:

What apology did you make last week? How did you feel when you made it?

Word:

Read: Luke 1:38; 23:46; Matthew 7:7-8; Romans 8:26-27

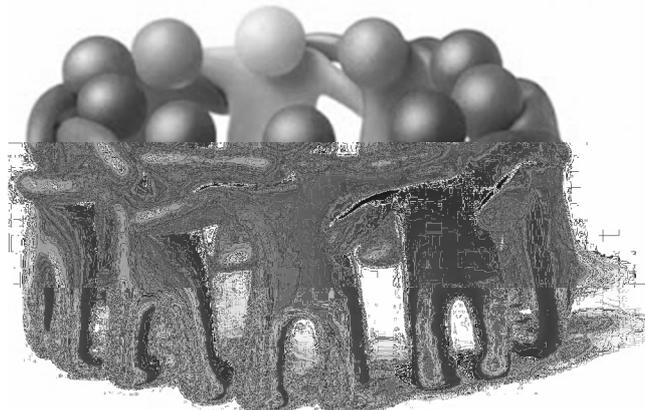
1. How do you feel about surrendering control of your life to God? Explain why you feel this way.
2. How open are you to stepping out of the way and allowing God to change you?
3. What does it mean to you to know that both the Holy Spirit and Jesus pray for you? (Heb 7:25)
4. Richard Rohr, in *Breathing Under Water*, says: 'When we ask and receive we recognize the gift that is being given and we increasingly grow our relationship with God.' Could this statement help you to deepen your relationship with God?

Ministry to one another

Pray for one another, asking God to help those who are struggling with the issue of handing over control of their prayer life to Him; placing your requests for one another before Him expecting Him to respond; and praising Him for answers that even now He is putting into place.

Reaching out

Watch the news this week and pick one event that is happening in the world about which you can pray. Keep up to date with how that event is unfolding and continue to pray for it – asking the Holy Spirit to pray on your behalf if you do not know how to pray. (This does not mean handing over responsibility to the Holy Spirit and forgetting about the matter – your prayers are valued too!)



MAKING AMENDS

As we surrender our lives to God we move towards the grace and mercy Jesus offers us. In doing so we need to make amends with those we have wronged so that we receive not only God's forgiveness but theirs as well. In this way we can forgive ourselves and both parties can experience healing in their lives and are able to move towards an open future.

Henri Nouwen states that every healer is a wounded healer. Only those of us who have been hurt in a specific way can empathize with the pain felt by another who is similarly hurt.

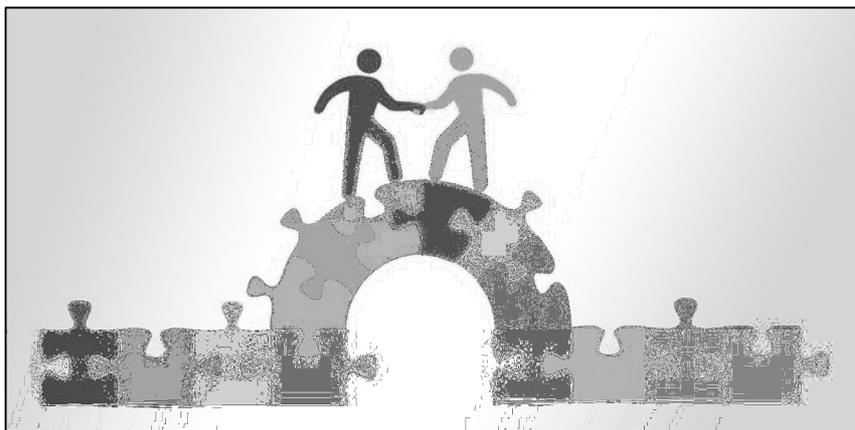
It takes courage to let the one we have hurt talk it through and then to offer our apology. A simple statement of facts as they are remembered is required together with a willingness by both parties to listen and to hear the other's side. Sadly we rarely give ourselves the opportunity to do this so a situation can escalate into conflict and sometimes even into violence.

How can we make amends? We need to begin by making a list of all whom we have harmed. Doing this lays aside our self-centeredness. Jesus told us we had to '*renounce ourselves*' (Mark 8:34) but many of us do not like to hear this. In *Breathing Under Water*, Richard Rohr states '*It is a self-serving concern to alleviate just your own guilt; it is a loving question to say, 'How can I free others from theirs?'*' Until we are concerned about others we cannot call ourselves Christ-followers. But learning how to make or accept an authentic apology can be a long process. The words of forgiveness can be said but unless the other person feels forgiven such words are empty.

Equally lengthy is the process of learning how to let go of the hurts that we have experienced without clinging to the need for revenge. It is not our task to be vengeful against ourselves or against others (Romans 12:19). To '*become willing to make amends*' means to become aware of people we have hurt rather than those who have hurt us – and then to try to put things right. If we pray about this and wait on God, He will show us the best way and the best time to take action.

The amends we need to make should be direct face to face encounters – an email or a tweet is not a good idea! Jesus often touched people when He healed them. In this way we open the door to reconciliation and, even if we are rejected, the door only closes when we choose to close it.

However there does need to be a word of caution here. This step should only be taken when we are sure it will not cause further harm. It is necessary to pray about what to say and whether the person to whom you are speaking has the right to hear what you say. Not everybody has the right to know everything – and it may be harmful if they did. Our perceptions of the 'truth' can be manipulated in destructive ways and may create a whole new set of problems.



DAILY DEVOTIONS

Mark 8:34

What is God saying to you through this verse today?

Lord, what do You mean when You say these words to me? Help me to put aside what is distracting me and to follow You.

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

1 John 1:10 says all of us are sinners. What is God saying to you in this passage from Ephesians today?

Lord, show me what You want to say to me through this passage and help me to hear Your voice and make any amends that You want me to make.

Proverbs 25:11-12

How do you react when someone criticizes you or gives you unasked for advice?

Lord, give me Your wisdom and discernment when I am criticized so that I may hear Your voice through words that are just and true; and discard any hurt through words that are harmful and inaccurate.

Luke 15:19

The son offers little detail and no excuses to the father as he apologizes – and yet the father accepts his apology. How much detail do you give when you apologize about something? Can detail sometimes make matters worse?

Abba, again give me Your wisdom that I may know how much to say and when to be silent that I may not do harm.

Luke 6:27-36

How would you put this into practice today?

Lord God, help me to be merciful.

Matthew 16:24

What is happening in your life at the moment that is preventing you from following Jesus wholeheartedly?

Lord, show me the things in my life, whether big or small, that are holding me back from serving you fully; and then help me to lay them aside.

Matthew 6:5-15

Read this passage through several times, then, paying special attention to verses 12-13 ask God for enlightenment as to where you need His help to do what you pray every time you say the Lord's Prayer.

Lord, there are times when I pray this prayer glibly, without concentrating on the words. Help me to hear what I am praying and to recognize Your answer when you respond to it.

SESSION 5

Welcome:

The 1970's film *The Love Story* contained a line – 'Love means never having to say you're sorry'. What do you think about this statement?

Worship

Spend time in worship together.

Accountability:

What event did you choose to follow this week for which you prayed with the Holy Spirit? What has happened in the week since you began to pray?

Word:

Read: Proverbs 25:11-12; Ephesians 4:25-5:2; Luke 6:27-36

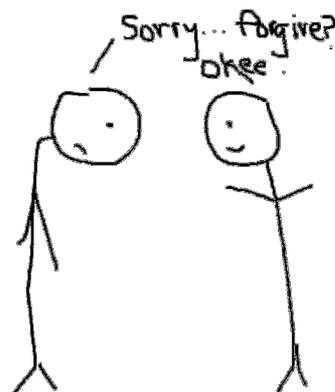
1. Apologizing to someone for a hurt we have caused is not an easy thing to do. Think of a specific incident in your life where an apology is outstanding (you do not need to share the details of this incident with the group). How does making the move to apologize today make you feel? Explain.
2. What could the long term result be if you apologize – and if you do not?
3. How do you feel when someone apologizes to you for something they have done? How easy is it for you to forgive them?
4. What is your greatest struggle with what you have shared during this session? How can the group help you?
5. How can the group help you in what you have shared during this session?

Ministry to one another

Pray for one another, especially in regard to the struggles that have been shared.

Reaching out

We all make mistakes and hurt others. Apologizing becomes easier with practice – it can even become second nature. This week make an apology to someone – whether big or small (your choice) whenever it is required. Be prepared to be accountable to the group next week when you meet about what happens. (No details are required of the incident – just about the apology).



PRAYER

God knows what we really desire (Luke 11:3; Matthew 7:11). To discover what He is showing us in this regard, we need to empty our minds and fill our hearts for when we use our conscious, calculating minds we see things through a small lens with filters that take into account our own private needs, hurts etc.

When we feel helpless and pray in these circumstances we use ourselves as the central reference point and we tap into God's power to help us get what we want. However this does not result in any change of perspective.

But when we pray in a relationship with God, such prayer puts an entirely different slant on processing life. It changes our thinking from a calculating exercise when we are in control – our natural inclination – to a contemplative exercise of surrender. When we do not know how to pray we struggle with the central issues of life: love, death, suffering, God and infinity; but as we join with the disciples and ask, '*Lord, teach us how to pray*' (Luke 11:1) we can begin to deal with such issues.

Prayer is being willing to let God change us and it is always answered (Matthew 7:7-11). When our minds are in tune with the mind of Christ, we know, understand, and accept God's answers; and we can see correctly, widely (beyond ourselves) and wisely. So our prayer becomes the prayer of God.

In Matthew 6:6 Jesus tells us to go into an inner room in secret where we will find the truth – a hidden place where God dwells. In a Jewish house with only one room the inner room was inside oneself. Jesus Himself often went into silence, into nature, and was usually alone when He prayed (Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 28-29; 11:1; and 22:41). Today we are accustomed to communal prayer and community worship, but we are not taught what to do with our minds when we are alone.

The silent, contemplative prayer of self-surrender occupies, touches and heals the unconscious. It is here that God lives hidden in our lives (Luke 17:21).

How we live within ourselves determines how we cope with things beyond us. If the only prayer we have is superficial and external there is no inner life to keep us honest and grounded.

Going off alone to pray in silence takes more courage and trust and is a bigger decision than merely attending a service in the company of others. It is what is within, in our hearts that makes us who we are and so we need the kind of prayer which transforms us from the inside. When we are willing to find God and let Him change us we implement our deepest and truest obedience to God's will.

An unknown poet wrote:

Watch your thoughts; they become words.

Watch your words; they become actions.

Watch your actions; they become habits.

Watch your habits; they become character.

Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.

DAILY DEVOTIONS

Psalm 46:10

Just do it. Let God bless you with His love and His presence today.

Lord God, thank You for the experience of silence – and for the awareness of Your presence there.

Matthew 7:7-11

Ask ... knock ... seek ... What are you asking for? Which door are you knocking on? What are you seeking?

Lord, whatever I ask or look for today, help me to stay focused on You – may Your will be done in my life this day.

Ephesians 4:22-23

Ask God today what you need to do to 'be made new ...'

Lord, it is only You who can make me new. Show me how I need to change and give me the strength, courage and determination to walk with you on this life-changing journey.

Mark 1:35

Where and at what time of day can you go into a solitary place to pray?

Abba, here I am in silence. I am listening, Lord ...

Luke 11:1-4

So often we say the Lord's Prayer without thinking about what we are saying. Say it slowly a few times today. Then pray it through expanding on each phrase so that each one is specific and relevant to your life at this time.

Lord, give me a fresh understanding

Matthew 6:6-8

Sit in silence again today in the presence of God. Listen to Him.

Lord, here I am...

John 14:27

Ask God to fill you with His peace. Open your heart and mind to His peace flowing through you.

Lord, as I open myself to Your peace, may it flow through me to the world around me.

SESSION 6

Welcome

How do you feel when the world is quiet at 03h00 or when you are away from the city?

Worship

Spend time in worship together.

Accountability

What action did you take that resulted in peace about one issue that was bothering you from your past?

Word

Read Matthew 7:7-11

1. What do you do when you are alone and it is silent? Why do you do this?
2. How can you see the progress of the poem quoted in the background for this session in your life? Do you feel the original thoughts have had a negative or positive impact on your character?
3. How willing are you to let God change you?
4. What suggestions can the group make for those who are not comfortable with silence?

Ministry to one another

Many people struggle with silence. Pray for one another in regard to the issues that have been raised during this discussion.

Reaching out

Go to a quiet place where you can spend some time alone with God. Whilst there, pray for someone outside the group who needs God's touch this week.



PAYING IT FORWARD

As we draw closer to God we discover that we can serve others for Him in two ways:

- By telling them about the Good News – Jesus knows we have to tell others in order to understand the Gospel ourselves;
- By action – the spiritual gifts we are given only develop when we use them to benefit other people.

The letter of James encourages believers to take action rather than just relax in their faith (James 1:23-25). Passive attendance at church does not lead to life. We cannot survive if we only breathe in – we have to breathe out too. It is the same with what we believe – to truly believe in Jesus we have to pass on what we learn to others.

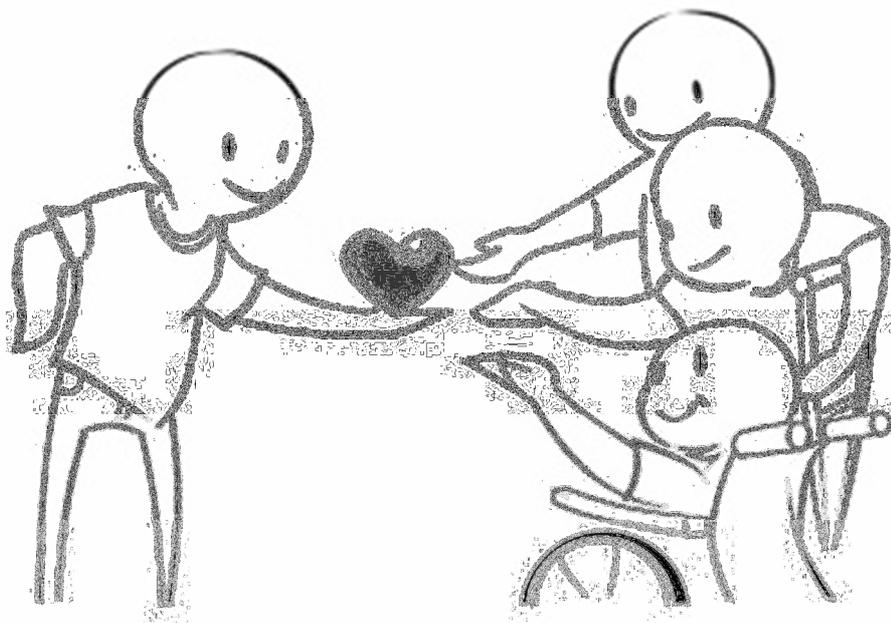
Someone who sits in church every week taking in information without any subsequent action or service on their part is not spiritually awake.

Spiritual awakening is God's plan for human deliverance and enables us to understand that:

- God is not bound by our formulas but is free to be God
- We ourselves are free to be who we are without constraint (Galatians 5:1).

This is an on-going process but when we allow God to be free and are free ourselves – even for a split second – it is the change that changes everything. It is an experience of the greatest love there is. Afterwards we know we belong and are held by God.

Our whole life changes and things are okay! Instead of trying to fill our lives with empty, fleeting experiences – shopping, eating, socializing, working etc. – we turn to God and the simplest things become delightful. Serving Him, in whatever way He calls us, becomes satisfying and fulfilling and we begin to do so with pleasure.



DAILY DEVOTIONS

Isaiah 38:15-20

How frequently are you able to praise God in the middle of adverse circumstances?

Abba, I know that You love me and are with me whatever I am going through at this time. I praise You today, in the middle of all that is happening around me: Praise the Lord, oh my soul, worship His Holy Name; Sing like never before, oh my soul, worship His Holy Name.

Psalm 78:1-7

Who can you tell about what God is doing in your life now? Make a point of doing so.

Lord, sometimes I am reluctant to speak of Your goodness and faithfulness to me. Remove all fear and give me the courage to tell others boldly about Your role in my life.

Luke 22:22-34

Read through these verses slowly and then again aloud. Hear Jesus saying the words to you. How does that change your attitude to the challenges and concerns you have at this time?

Lord, thank You for being in my life and for providing all I need. Forgive me for the times I forget You and worry – help me to remember You and to praise You in all circumstances.

Matthew 10:8

How can you pass on the blessings you receive from God to others today?

Lord, thank You for the blessings You freely give me each day. Help me to pass them on freely to others and not to hold them for myself.

Acts 3:6

What special gift do you have from God that you can pass on to others?

Lord, I know that You have given me gifts for the benefit of other people. Show me how You want me to use them for Your Kingdom.

Acts 20:32-35

Paul believed that it is more blessed to give than to receive. This has become a glib statement in our current use of language. How do you really feel about the statement?

Lord, help me to develop a generous nature so that I can unreservedly say with Paul, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive'.

John 14:26

How do you feel knowing that the Holy Spirit is there to teach you all things and will remind you of everything Jesus has taught? Does it increase your confidence in talking about spiritual matters? What, if anything, still holds you back from speaking freely about the Gospel?

Father, send Your Holy Spirit that I may have the courage to speak about the Gospel whenever I have the opportunity.

SESSION 7

Welcome

Who was your favourite teacher? Why was he / she so special?

Worship

Spend time in worship together.

Accountability

Where did you go to be in your quiet place during the week?

Word

Read Isaiah 38:15-20; Acts 20:32-35; John 14:26

1. Who do you mentor or teach on a regular basis because you have more experience, skill or knowledge than they do?
2. How can you use the blessings that God showers upon you to bless others? Think especially of things that do not include finance.
3. What simple things do you do that are more delightful now that you experience God's love in a real way than they were before?
4. What happens when life throws you a curve ball? How do you react? How do you praise God in adverse circumstances?

Ministry to one another

Pray for one another, especially for those who are struggling with any of the issues raised during the discussion.

Reaching out

You have discussed how you could use some of the blessings God has showered upon you. Pick one way to pass on one of these blessings to someone else.



ONLY A SUFFERING GOD CAN SAVE

It may seem that God appears to do nothing in the face of evil. He does not prevent genocide, abuse, imprisonment. He permits natural disasters like earthquakes and hurricanes. The concept overwhelms our rational minds. How can we see God as loving and sustaining His creation under these circumstances?

But if God is in the suffering, taking part in it just as creation does, then it begins to make sense. It is a breath-taking thought. When the experience is shared, we can begin to forgive such a God who has permitted such things and perhaps, even begin to trust and love Him.

When we realise that God does not desert us in our suffering, but rather shares it with us, we begin to reach a greater understanding and are able to get through whatever suffering we are experiencing. Throughout the experience those who suffer discover the depth of His love for them. They are transformed through a vital spiritual experience that is available to each one of us. Such transformation results in a deeper sense of salvation and all that it means. It is here that the suffering God and a suffering soul can meet – for here human suffering makes spiritual sense – not to the mind, but to the soul.

*Rohr states 'Suffering people can love and trust a suffering God;
only a suffering God can 'save' suffering people'.*

Suffering opens the channel through which all of life flows and by which all of creation breaths. Only someone who has tried to breath under water will understand how important breathing is and never take it for granted again. Only those who have been on the journey of suffering have felt the arms that held them close through it all, and have begun to understand the enormity and power of the obstacles that have been overcome; and so they thank God for seeing them through. For everyone else such a journey is mere speculation and theory. It is those who have met God in this place who can save others. Jesus went to the cross to draw all suffering people to Him; and here we find our identity and freedom for it is in His suffering that we are set free.



DAILY DEVOTIONS

Mark 8:31

Jesus spoke openly of His suffering. He knew what was ahead of Him. How do you feel about any suffering you may be experiencing, knowing that He has walked the same path too?

Lord, I thank You that You understand. May my awareness of this increase my faith as I walk my own life path.

John 3:16-17

Jesus gave up everything for you. What do you want to say to Him about His sacrifice?

Lord, how can I tell You what Your sacrifice and suffering means to me? Thank You, Jesus, for Your amazing love.

1 Corinthians 9:12

What are you prepared to put up with rather than hinder the Gospel of Christ?

Lord, give me the strength, courage and perseverance I need to put my own selfish desires aside and open the way to share Your Gospel with others.

1 Corinthians 12:26

How compassionate are you when you see anyone close to you suffering for some reason.

Abba, fill me with compassion when those around me suffer; give me a fresh understanding and empower me to help them in their suffering. Help me to share with them that You love them and suffer with them.

2 Timothy 1:3-12

Paul suffered for the sake of the Gospel – how do you feel about doing the same?

Lord, it is not easy to think of suffering for the Gospel – and yet I hear You say to me that ‘God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline’. Thank You that if the time comes, You will be with me – and that You understand.

2 Corinthians 2:14-17

What does it mean to you to be ‘the aroma of Christ’, because you are used by Jesus to spread your knowledge of Him far and wide?

May I be a sweet aroma to You, Lord Jesus, as I serve you day by day.

Revelation 22:12-13

The suffering Christ will return triumphant. What is God saying to you in these verses?

Lord, help me to hear Your voice and to do Your will. You are the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, and I worship You.

SESSION 8

Welcome

Which, of all your possessions, gifts, skills, talents, time etc., do you find most difficult to share?

Worship

Spend time in worship together.

Accountability

How did you bless someone else with some of the blessings you received this week?

Word

Read: Mark 8:31; John 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

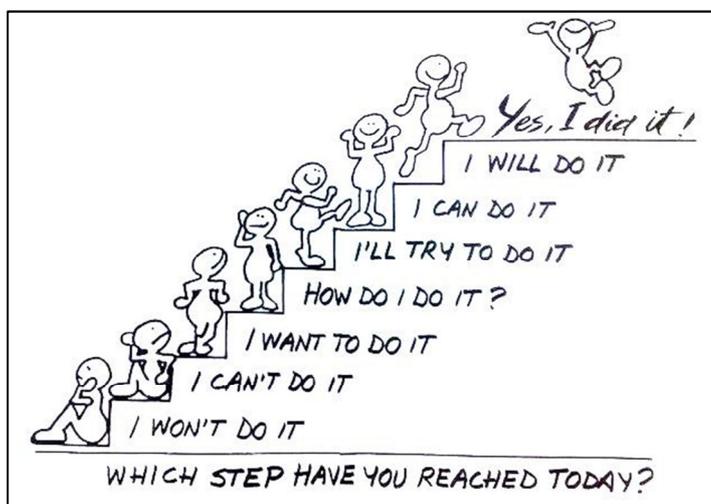
1. How do you react when you are suffering in any way? Do you tell everyone; ask for prayer from a select few; suffer in silence or react in some other way?
2. Does it help you to know that Jesus understands, and that God is in the suffering with you? Explain your response.
3. What have you learnt from times in your life when you have experienced suffering?
4. How has God helped you in these times?
5. Are you suffering in any way now? Briefly share with the group if you are.

Ministry to one another

Pray for one another, especially for those who have shared their suffering with you.

Reaching out

As a group, name and pray for those around you whom you know to be suffering, that they may be aware of God's presence in their suffering and that they may be drawn closer to God as they are on this journey with Him.



We are indebted to Richard Rohr for his book **Breathing Under Water**, published by St Anthony Messenger Press, Cincinnati, Ohio in 2011.

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