



40ACTS 2016

WEDNESDAY 10 FEBRUARY TO SATURDAY 26 MARCH 2016

40ACTS THEME 2016: JESUS AT OUR TABLE

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WELCOME TO 40ACTS

What is 40acts?

40acts is a generosity challenge which invites people to do Lent a bit differently.

During the 40 days of Lent, 40acts participants will be invited to take part in 40 simple acts of generosity which will challenge them to 'do Lent generously' in 2016.

Lent commemorates a pivotal point in the history of the church, when Jesus prepared to give himself up as a sacrifice. Traditionally we mark Lent by giving something up, but what if it could be more than that? What if Lent were a preparation for a lifetime of big-heartedness?

Small acts of generosity, performed by thousands of Christians across the UK and beyond, have the power to make a big change to our communities, to our churches and, ultimately, to our world.

How to use this resource

This course is divided into seven separate sessions and provides adaptable meeting guides, activity ideas and links to video clips. In order to follow the seven-week period of Lent 2016 (Wednesday 10 February to Saturday 26 March 2016), the course will work best when run on a weekly basis. Each session is designed to last approximately one hour.

The resource has been designed to suit a wide range of ages and interests. Group leaders should feel able to adapt or remove certain sections of each session to suit the needs and interests of their particular group.

All biblical quotes are taken from NIV unless otherwise stated.

An introduction to 40acts theme 2016: Jesus at our table

The theme of this year's 40acts small group resource is 'Jesus at our table'.

The sharing of food and being hospitable represents generosity at its most practical. Yet there is something even more fundamental at work when we eat together and welcome others into that fellowship. Sitting at a table to eat in Jesus' time was a sign not just of possible friendship but of acceptance into a totally new, forgiven, restored relationship.

Jesus ate with sinners and church leaders; he ate with a crowd of five thousand and with children. Table fellowship meant friendship, peace, acceptance and unconditional love: community.

The book of Acts describes the generous community of the early church: 'All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer... They shared their meals with great joy and generosity' (Acts 2:42-46 NLT).

But why Jesus at OUR table and not at his? At first glance this might seem presumptuous; who are we to invite Jesus to our table?

But that is exactly the point. During his ministry Jesus walked the earth without a physical home. Other people's homes became his. He invited himself and was invited to many tables, and indeed this still happens. That is the beauty of the gospel: expectations are reversed and new truths are born.

God, in his great generosity, seeks to sit at our, and at everyone's, table. And after sitting with us, we are promised a feast at his heavenly table (Psalm 23:5-6). 40acts this year asks you to invite others to share at the table. Jesus will be there. Welcome to 40acts 2016.

**WEEK ONE:
COMMUNITY**

Jesus at our table

Ironically, we begin this series Jesus at our table by looking at the absence of food. Jesus' time in the desert was about preparation. Just like us he could 'hunger' over temptations, and his time away was his battle with these human desires: desires that were completely opposed to the generous, sacrificial life that he gave.

→ **The aim**

- To think about the importance of community in our lives.
- To consider Jesus' time in the desert as a time of preparation.
- To reflect upon Jesus' temptations in the desert and the way in which the devil tried to break the community between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- To look at the idols and temptations we face in our lives and how they take us away from our communities.

→ **Preparation**

You will need Bibles, recent copies of your local newspaper, a large sheet of paper (the larger the better) and marker pens. Before the meeting, draw a simple outline of your locality on the sheet of paper (key streets and areas).

Activity/icebreaker

15 minutes

Introduce the map of your locality to your group. Ask people to mark the place where they live. Then ask them to flick through the newspapers, cutting out pictures, headlines or stories that show injustice, need or poverty in your area. Add them to

the relevant parts of your map. Do the same thing for any examples of stories that show positive examples of building community in your area: churches, youth groups, libraries, shops, etc.

Next, encourage people to think about the resources that they have – both individually and collectively. The list might include things like money, clothes, toys or household items they could donate, time they could use to support people, etc. Suggest people add these resources to the map. Have a time, either now or at the end of your session, to pray for the needs you have identified in your community and for the groups and organisations that are working to build community in your area.

Read

5 minutes

Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus is tested in the wilderness

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'

Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."'

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."'

Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."'

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.'

Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."'

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Reflection

10 minutes

We hear that immediately before and after his time in the desert Jesus is surrounded by his heavenly community.

At Jesus' baptism, we are told, the Spirit of God descends like a dove. What follows is its apparent absence in the desert. Then, as soon as the devil leaves Jesus at the end of his time of temptation, angels attend to Jesus and his heavenly community is restored.

Alone in the desert Jesus can only have community with the Father through the word. The word becomes his tool to resist temptation. He quotes it in answer to all three temptations and then the devil leaves him.

Community is important; its role is to support and sustain us. The test that Jesus faced in the wilderness had one purpose: by tempting Jesus to worship something or someone other than God the Father, it sought to break the community of God the Father, Son and Spirit. This close

relationship centres on each loving and adoring the other.

Satan's three temptations are not unlike the tests we face today. From placing our own needs above those of others to the desire to assert our status in society or to accumulate worldly power, we are all tempted to worship something besides God.

Anything other than God as the source of our worship is an idol. Idol worship is the ultimate self-centredness and is the complete opposite to building a healthy community.

Questions

15 minutes

Vital question:

- How can we stop our hearts creating idols? Jesus shows us: by feeding on the word of God.

Reflective questions:

Everyone is hungry in one way or another and it is that hunger that can lead us to be tempted.

- What kind of things are you hungry for? Money, love, acceptance, career, possessions?
- Do you think that your hunger for these things might be drawing you away from building relationships and community? What other things might get in the way?
- How did Jesus rely on the word during his time in the desert?
- How does the word transform our minds and hearts? How does it help us overcome the temptations and 'hungers' we have in our lives?
- How can you build the word of God more into your life?

Practical questions:

- Apart from your local area, what other types of community do you identify yourself with? Family, workplace, church, neighbours, clubs, online community? Why might these be important?
- What can you do to strengthen the communities in your life? Take a look at this week's 40act challenges; in what ways could you integrate these challenges into your working life this week?

Worship idea

10 minutes

Invite the group to listen to or sing this song.

'Be thou my vision'

Youtube link:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjLuG4sza3U/

www.youtube.com/watch?v=gExjYzULv9I

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee Lord;
be thou my great Father, and I thy true son;
be thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:

O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart;
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Pray

5 minutes

Father God, thank you for the communities in our lives – our church, our family, our workplace, our schools, our neighbours. Thank you for the way they shape, challenge and support us. We pray that we would spend more time with your word: the 'soul food' you have provided to overcome the divisions, distractions and temptations we have in our lives – the things that pull us away from community with you and each other. Allow our prayers to lead us into generous actions to bless others, build community and build your Kingdom.

In your name we pray, Amen.

This week's 40acts

Wednesday 10 February: Pray for the impossible to become possible

Thursday 11 February: Thank an inspiration/Blast from the past

Friday 12 February: Shop locally

Saturday 13 February: Emergency delivery

WEEK TWO:
PRAYING AND SHARING

Jesus at our table

Last week Jesus was alone in a desert. Now we move to another extreme where Jesus is on a mountainside with five thousand people. These people need feeding and there is not nearly enough food.

As we read the story of Jesus feeding five thousand people, a small boy offering his lunch may at first seem absurd, but by faith his generosity is multiplied.

Read
5 minutes

John 6:1–13
Jesus feeds the five thousand
Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?' He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, 'It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!'

Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 'Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?'

Jesus said, 'Have the people sit down.' There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, 'Gather

the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.' So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

Reflection
10 minutes

Five thousand people are hungry. A young boy offers his lunch; it consists of five small loaves of bread and two small fish. The disciples start to panic.

They see the impossibilities: a remote place, a large hungry crowd; the lack of bread, the cost to feed a large number of people. They see massive disappointment coming.

But then from one small, simple act of generosity Jesus blesses the crowd without limit. The food goes out and everyone is fed. There is even enough food left over to fill 12 buckets.

The boy is probably from a poor background: his loaves are made of barley – the poorest of loaves. But he empties his basket; he gives all his food to Jesus. He represents what we should do: empty ourselves, be childlike in faith and obedience. This is what Jesus wants us to do: to give what we have.

Being empty in this context is not a poor or negative position. It is a dynamic, regenerating condition. By giving everything away, the young boy is filled with wonder, expectation and hope. When we give what we have away, dynamite happens.

→ **The aim**

- To think about how God can perform miracles through our small everyday acts, and how we can be more childlike in our expectation of what God can do through us.
- To think about how doubt can stop us from seeing the blessing that can take place, and whether we have the faith to really believe that the impossible can be made possible.

→ **Preparation**

You will need Bibles and a small snack to share among the group (see Activity/icebreaker section). Read John 6.

Activity/icebreaker
10 minutes

Give the group a small biscuit/jellybean/mini chocolate bar on a plate. Ask them to divide it equally so everyone gets a piece; the more ridiculous the better.

Imagine you were at a meeting with Jesus and five thousand other people. It got to lunchtime and you were very hungry. How would you feel if you were told this biscuit/jellybean/chocolate bar was all there was to feed every person? What would be your reaction? Would you start panicking or trust that Jesus could perform a miracle?

Questions

20 minutes

Vital question:

- Do you have the faith that Jesus can work wonders through the smallest of acts?

Reflective questions:

- Jesus asked his disciples a number of questions in the passage. What was he testing? Their faith? Their imagination? Their ability to see the miracle in every little act?
- How does fear and doubt stop the disciples from seeing the blessings and hope? Is a lack of faith holding us back in any areas of our lives?
- Is it surprising that a child is the one to offer his lunch? Why, do you think, did the boy offer? In what ways can we be more childlike in hope and expectation of the wonders that Jesus can perform through our small acts?

Practical questions:

- How has Jesus blessed your life through the generosity and prayers of others? Invite the group to share stories and testimonies.
- How can we practically increase our faith?
- In what way can we pray and share with others this week? How can we go expecting that Jesus will work wonders through our small acts?

Worship idea

10 minutes

Invite the group to listen to or sing this song. The words speak of the

power of our Saviour, how Jesus can take us with all our fears and failures and fill us anew again.

'Mighty to save', Hillsong Worship

Youtube link:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Lab0SHGXkA

Everyone needs compassion,
love that's never failing; let mercy fall on me.

Everyone needs forgiveness,
the kindness of a Saviour; the hope of nations.

Saviour, He can move the mountains,
my God is mighty to save, He is mighty to save.
Forever, author of salvation,
He rose and conquered the grave,
Jesus conquered the grave.

So take me as You find me,
all my fears and failures, fill my life again.

I give my life to follow,
everything I believe in, now I surrender.

Saviour, He can move the mountains,
My God is Mighty to save, He is Mighty to save.
Forever, Author of salvation,
He rose and conquered the grave,
Jesus conquered the grave. (x2)

Shine your light and let the whole world see,
We're singing for the glory of the risen King ... Jesus (x2)

Saviour, He can move the mountains,
My God is Mighty to save, He is Mighty to save.
Forever, Author of salvation,
He rose and conquered the grave,
Jesus conquered the grave. (x2)

Pray

5 minutes

O Christ Jesus, when all is darkness and we feel our weakness and helplessness, give us the sense of Your presence, Your love, and Your strength. Help us to have perfect trust in Your protecting love and strengthening power, so that nothing may frighten or worry us, for, living close to You, we shall see Your hand, Your purpose, Your will through all things.

(A prayer by St Ignatius of Loyola, 1491–1556)

This week's 40acts

Monday 15 February: Pray Walk Talk/Word on the Street

Tuesday 16 February: Sidewalk chalk

Wednesday 17 February: Listen/Pay attention

Thursday 18 February: Share food

Friday 19 February: Pray for newsfeed

Saturday 20 February: Share a generosity story

WEEK THREE:
LOVING GENEROUSLY

Jesus at our table

Today we hear the story of Jesus being anointed by a sinful woman. This is the first time we meet Jesus at someone's table. Jesus was a wandering teacher with no fixed abode, so many people welcomed him and invited him into their homes. Hospitality and food were a powerful expression of friendship in first-century Palestine. It's not clear why the Pharisee called Simon invited Jesus to dine, but the event doesn't go to plan and – for Simon – ends with a surprising twist!

→ The aim

- To recognise that loving generously is costly.
- To discover how can we love in a way which overlooks our hurts and needs in order to meet the needs of others – looking to the source of generous love to find the answer.

→ Preparation

You will need Bibles, a copy of the film *Les Misérables* (2012) and a tablet computer or laptop. Read Luke 7.

Activity/icebreaker

15 minutes

Show the scene from *Les Misérables* where Valjean flees in the night after stealing the Bishop's silver. He is soon caught and returned to the church where the Bishop vouches for Valjean and gives him more valuables

(www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/les-miserables-2012/release-him).

At the start of the film we are introduced to Jean Valjean, whose

experiences have left him hard and bitter. After being released from prison, Valjean is taken in by a bishop, but soon repays the Bishop's kindness with theft. Whilst on the run, Valjean is caught by the police and expects judgment for his actions, but instead the Bishop pretends that he gave the silver to Valjean and offers two candlesticks for him to take as well.

Have you ever had an experience in which you were offered help that you felt you could never deserve or repay?

Have there been any occasions when you have come to God and asked him to supply what you could not? What happened?

Read

5 minutes

Luke 7:36–50

Jesus anointed by a sinful woman

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner.'

Jesus answered him, 'Simon, I have something to tell you.'

'Tell me, teacher,' he said.

'Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?'

Simon replied, 'I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.'

'You have judged correctly,' Jesus said.

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.'

Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.'

The other guests began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?'

Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'

Reflection

10 minutes

Simon, a Pharisee, has invited Jesus to his house to share a meal.

A sinful woman follows Jesus into the house. It is likely the woman has heard reports of Jesus' ministry and is desperate to see him.

As a host, it would have been customary for Simon to greet his guest with a kiss and to have his feet washed and his head anointed with oil. However, this does not happen.

Once the woman herself realises this she approaches Jesus, standing behind him. She hasn't come prepared with a bowl of water or a towel but washes and dries his feet with what she has: raw tears of emotion and her hair. Just as Simon should have kissed his face, the woman kisses Jesus' feet. Just as Simon should have anointed his head with oil, the woman anoints his feet with her perfume.

The woman's worship of Jesus comes at great personal cost. Her perfume was pricey and probably represented her life savings. As a sinner she would have been viewed as untouchable and socially unacceptable. She takes on the role of the lowliest servant and overcomes humility in order to wash, dry and kiss Jesus' dirty feet. Just by being present in Simon's house it is likely that she experienced contempt and rejection from the other guests.

Simon questions Jesus' credibility; if he were the prophet he professes to be, he would know that she was a sinner and want nothing to do with her.

Jesus uses a story to help Simon see beyond the surface to the source of this woman's extravagant generosity. In the story two men owe a debt to a moneylender; one owes ten times what the other owes. Jesus asks Simon 'Now which of them will love him more?'

Jesus' question to Simon goes to the heart of the matter: that acknowledging our debts have been repaid produces love and gratitude.

Simon was more focused on passing judgment on the woman than he was on God's judgment of him. In his mind, the woman was a greater sinner.

From Jesus' story, told around the table at Simon's house, we learn that those who are forgiven much love much. To love generously is a gift. Love that is able to absorb hurt and overcome barriers comes not through our own power but through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not, and never should be, we alone but Jesus in us when we lovingly forgive those who have hurt us or reach out to those in need.

Questions 15 minutes

Vital question:

- In what ways can you express to others something of the love and acceptance you've received from Jesus?

Reflective questions:

- Can you think of any reasons why Simon would not have offered the customary welcome to Jesus?
- To what extent do you identify with Simon or the unnamed woman in this story?
- Why might we find it hard to be generous to those we feel don't 'deserve' it?

Practical questions:

- In what ways does loving generously cost us?
- Just as the woman gives her best away as an expression of her gratitude, how might we give our best to those around us this week?

Worship idea

10 minutes

Invite the group to listen to or sing this song.

'Hosanna', Hillsong United

Youtube link:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7SMUf6QcyQ

Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest, (x2)
Hosanna in the highest.

I see the King of glory
Coming on the clouds with fire.
The whole earth shakes, the whole earth shakes.

I see His love and mercy
Washing over all our sin.
The people sing, the people sing

Hosanna, Hosanna,
Hosanna in the highest. (x2)

I see a generation
Rising up to take the place
With selfless faith, with selfless faith.

I see a near revival
Stirring as we pray and seek.
We're on our knees, we're on our knees.

Hosanna, Hosanna,
Hosanna in the highest.
Hosanna, Hosanna,
Hosanna in the highest.

Heal my heart and make it clean,
Open up my eyes to the things unseen,
Show me how to love like You have loved me,

Break my heart for what breaks Yours.
Everything I am for Your Kingdom's cause
As I walk from nothing to eternity.

Hosanna, Hosanna,
Hosanna in the highest.

Hosanna, Hosanna,
Hosanna in the highest.

Pray
5 minutes

Dear Lord,

You are the giver of life and source of generous love. Thank you that we don't have to rely on ourselves, but through the power of the Holy Spirit

we can love others in a way that absorbs hurt and overcomes barriers. Thank you for the abundance in which you love us and forgive us. Through Jesus we can lovingly forgive those who have hurt us and reach out to those that need help. May we be open to your healing and become a channel of your peace and joy.

In your name, Amen.

This week's 40acts

- Monday 22 February:** Love someone
- Tuesday 23 February:** Chocolate Tuesday
- Wednesday 24 February:** You first/be second/don't interrupt
- Thursday 25 February:** Give away box
- Friday 26 February:** Give your best away
- Saturday 27 February:** Adopt

WEEK FOUR: LIVING GENEROUSLY

Jesus at our table

40acts is a daily act of remembrance. In the challenges we've done we've offered to others each day a generous action in remembrance of Jesus. We have acted during 40acts in generosity because of our relationship with him. He is the bread of life. Life comes from being at his table. Act and give; eat and live. And remember.

→ The aim

- To make it a habit that can be sustained in our lives, living generously is something that has to be practised daily.
- To recognise that, just as it is important to maintain a healthy food diet, we need to be filling ourselves with the right things spiritually as well in order to maintain a healthy spiritual diet.

→ Preparation

You will need Bibles and a selection of food for your group that would represent a healthy diet. Read Luke 11 and John 6.

Activity/icebreaker

15 minutes

Lay out some food for your group members, a spread that would represent a healthy balanced diet, e.g. fruit, breads, cold meats, cheese, raw vegetables with dips, and a few sweet treats. It can be as simple or as lavish as you choose. You could even ask each person to bring along a specific item or possibly invite the group to share a meal together.

As you eat together, introduce the aims of today's session. Explain that, just as you eat a healthy balanced selection of food, it is important to remember what a good spiritual diet looks like. Ask the group how they start and finish their day. Where do they spend most of their emotional and head time?

Living generously and developing a good spiritual diet is something that needs to be practised daily. We need to spend time with Jesus every day and rely on him to provide our daily bread: daily sustenance for our lives.

Read

5 minutes

Luke 11:1–4

Jesus' teaching on prayer

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'

He said to them, 'When you pray, say:

"Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation."

John 6:25–35

Jesus the bread of life

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, 'Rabbi, when did you get here?'

Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that

spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.'

Then they asked him, 'What must we do to do the works God requires?'

Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.'

So they asked him, 'What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: "He gave them bread from heaven to eat."'

Jesus said to them, 'Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'

'Sir,' they said, 'always give us this bread.'

Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'

Reflection

10 minutes

Generosity is a discipline in both receiving and giving. It has to be seen, practised and lived out on a daily basis. We see this principle both in the Lord's Prayer and in the Old and New Testaments.

Jesus lived a generous life on earth. He healed and taught; he asked and listened; he mentored and coached. And then, in his last miracle on

earth, he forgave those who were torturing him.

In a busy life, when things are moving fast, when we are tired from the daily grind of living, slowing things down so we can live life fully and generously is essential. Jesus taught the disciples the Lord's Prayer. This prayer provides daily bread; daily sustenance for our lives.

Prayer empowers and enriches lives because when we say Jesus' words in prayer we are acknowledging the power of the Father's name and his kingdom ('... your name, your kingdom come ...'), asking for what we need to live fully ('... our daily bread. Forgive us our sins ...'), and then accepting our place in a wider community ('... for we also forgive everyone who sins against us ...').

This is what we need to do daily; it is our daily bread: acknowledge, ask, accept.

We are to ask and keep asking; we are to both receive and give. And we are to sit prayerfully at Jesus' feet in community with him and his people.

In Exodus 16 God fed his people in the desert daily with manna from heaven. The people ate daily and could not hoard the food past a day, as a physical reminder that we are to depend on and communicate with God daily.

In John 6:30–35 the people speak of the manna in the wilderness but Jesus points out that it is God who provides the true bread and that he – Jesus – is that bread.

But what does it mean to say that Jesus is the bread of life? The Bible explains that when we seek him daily, he will renew us day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16) in a life that is abundant (John 10:10).

40acts operates within this principle of a daily discipline: we acknowledge God's goodness to us, we ask for and receive our daily bread, and we share this with those around us – our community. Through a daily act of generosity we offer others a little bit of Jesus.

Sometimes the daily can become the mundane in our eyes. However, if we start to look with fresh eyes on the people we meet and the places we're put in every day, amazing opportunities open up before us, both to give and to receive.

Questions 15 minutes

Vital question:

- In what ways can you express to others something of the love and acceptance you've received from Jesus?

Reflective questions:

- What things in your life have you become good at as a result of consistent practice?
- What are the things that you do on a daily basis, whether out of habit, for enjoyment or because you are required to?
- Do you spend daily time with God? If so, when do you do it and what do you do during these times?
- What would you consider to be a 'healthy spiritual diet'? How does maintaining a healthy spiritual diet sustain us?
- What are the biggest obstacles keeping you from praying or studying the Bible on a daily basis?
- In what way could you develop a fresh habit of spending time with God?

Practical question:

- How could you connect with a person you see daily? It may be a colleague or a barista, a shop assistant or a bus driver. Find a way to encourage them – with a smile, a sincere thank you for what they do – or find a way to bless them. Acknowledge them as being part of your community and offer them some daily bread.

Worship idea 10 minutes

Invite the group to listen to or sing this song.

'Consuming fire', Tim Hughes

Youtube link:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUrWMREmuwY

There must be more than this
O breath of God, come breathe within

There must be more than this
Spirit of God we wait for You

Fill us anew we pray
Fill us anew we pray

Consuming fire, fan into flame
A passion for Your name
Spirit of God, fall in this place
Lord have Your way
Lord have Your way
With us

Come like a rushing wind
Clothe us with power from on high
Now set the captives free
Leave us abandoned to Your praise

Lord let Your glory fall
Lord let Your glory fall

Consuming fire, fan into flame
A passion for Your name
Spirit of God, fall in this place
Lord have Your way
Lord have Your way
With us

Stir it up in our hearts Lord, Stir it up
in our hearts Lord
Stir it up in our hearts, a passion for
your name (x2)

Consuming fire, fan into flame
A passion for Your name
Spirit of God, fall in this place
Lord have Your way
Lord have Your way
With us

Pray 5 minutes

Dear Lord

Thank you Jesus for all that you have given us. As we ask you for our daily bread, may we acknowledge that you are the sole giver of all we need: practically, spiritually and emotionally. Help us to have a simple faith that recognises that you will provide us with what we need for every area of our lives. Thank you that you came to give us life: a life that is real and eternal; a life that is far better than we could ever imagine. Help us to seek you daily and to practise a daily habit of being generous to others.

In your name, Amen.

This week's 40acts

Monday 29 February: Propose (something nice)

Tuesday 1 March: Donate the change

Wednesday 2 March: The person you see every day/take for granted ... bless them

Thursday 3 March: Smile

Friday 4 March: Look after the planet

Saturday 5 March: Provide a week's worth of something

WEEK FIVE:
THE BEST, NOT THE SCRAPS

Jesus at our table

Generosity is the antidote to selfishness and self-centredness but in the story of the rich man and Lazarus we see a table where Jesus isn't present, where there is no generosity, where not even the scraps are shared. God wants us to see those around us who are poor: in resources, time, energy, friends or money. They share our table. They deserve more than our scraps, they deserve our best.

tasks to a board or hang them on a line outside the room where you will meet. Doing this will signal that as they join others in the main room, they have left these things outside in order to give each other their undivided attention and to focus on the main thoughts of today.

Introduce the key themes of this meeting. Explain that today the group will be considering how we can give of our best, not just our scraps. One of the ways that we can do this is to give each other the gift of being fully present where we are, not being distracted or giving the scraps of our time.

When the meeting is over, each member of the group can collect their task list on the way out and take it home with them.

Read
5 minutes

Luke 16:19-31
The rich man and Lazarus
'There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

'The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire."

'But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us."

'He answered, "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment."

'Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them."

"No, father Abraham," he said, "but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent."

'He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

Reflection
10 minutes

A nameless rich man lives in luxury while at his gate a beggar called Lazarus sleeps rough, covered in sores. The rich man would have seen him every day. He lived in luxury yet did nothing to help the man in need.

In Proverbs 19:17 it says; 'Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done.'

The Hebrew word for poor here is dal. It does not just mean financially poor but includes those who are poor in resources, like time, energy, friends and money. This is who God

→ **The aim**

- To consider what 'giving our best' looks like.
- To think about how we are often tempted to give away the scraps in our lives and how we can turn giving these scraps into giving of our best.
- To reflect on the warning that Jesus provides when we are blinded by self-centredness and see only our own needs.
- To look at how generosity can be the antidote to this selfishness and self-centredness.

→ **Preparation**

You will need Bibles, pens, pieces of paper and either a pin board or a washing line with pegs. Read Luke 16.

Activity/icebreaker
15 minutes

As people arrive for today's meeting, give them some time to think about and write down their current life tasks or 'to-do' lists. This might include things they have to do, worries and responsibilities, or things they find hard to forget. Get them to pin the

wants us to give to; he desires that we recognise those who are around us who are 'dal'. Just like Lazarus, if they ask us for something they may only appear to ask for scraps, but we should go beyond our scraps and give our best.

The Bible tells us that at the time of death Lazarus is taken to be with Abraham, where he is comforted, whereas the rich man is taken to a place where he is tormented.

Here we are provided with an insight into life beyond death; an unbridgeable chasm separates the two men, yet the rich man is able to see Lazarus and calls on Abraham to have pity on his torment. Abraham reminds him that it is now too late to undo his life's work.

Whether a real-life story or a parable, Jesus uses this example to warn what happens when we don't 'see' others and are blinded by our own self-centredness. Are we prepared to share what we have - our resources, time, skills, money - with others in need?

Questions 15 minutes

Vital question:

- What does giving your best look like?

Reflective questions:

- How is the rich man described? How is Lazarus described? Can you imagine what modern-day versions of these characters would look like?
- Why would it be so utterly wrong to say that the rich man went to hell because he was rich and Lazarus went to heaven because he was poor? Is it a sin to be wealthy? What was the sin that sent the rich man to hell?

- Why was the rich man denied a messenger to warn his brothers about life in hell?

Practical questions:

- Who are the people like Lazarus in your life and what are their needs?
- At what times are you tempted to give away just the scraps in your life? What are the scraps and what do they look like? In what ways can you 'upgrade' the scraps and be giving your best?
- How could our generosity 'surprise' someone with goodness'?

Worship idea 10 minutes

Invite the group to listen to or sing this song.

'I will offer up my life', Matt Redman

Youtube link:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWXW_Hdgapjl

I will offer up my life in spirit and truth,
Pouring out the oil of love as my worship to You.

In surrender I must give my ev'ry part.
Lord, receive the sacrifice of a broken heart.

Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring,
To so faithful a Friend, to so loving a King?
Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung,
As a praise of Your name for the things You have done?

Oh, my words could not tell, not even in part,
Of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart.

You deserve my ev'ry breath,
For You've paid the great cost,

Giving up Your life to death,
Even death on a cross.

You took all my shame away,
There defeated my sin,
Opened up the gates of heav'n
And have beckoned me in.

What can I give, what can I bring,
What can I sing as an offering, Lord?
I want to please Your heart.

OR

Invite your group to close their eyes and meditate on the following passage as you read it aloud. Pause after each sentence for a moment to help people reflect on the words and how they may apply to their lives. You could play the above song by Matt Redman in the background or an alternative instrumental piece if you prefer.

Romans 12:9–21, The Message (MSG)

Love from the centre of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practise playing second fiddle.

Don't burn out; keep yourselves fuelled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.

Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody.

Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. 'I'll do the judging,' says God. 'I'll take care of it.'

Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good."

Pray
5 minutes

Father God,

Open my eyes to the people around me. I pray that I will see other people's needs, whether it is time,

money, resources or friendship. Help me to love these people in the way that you love them. May I give generously to them, just as you have given generously to me. When I might find it easier to give the scraps, when I am tempted to think of myself more than others, Lord I pray that you will convict me to give of my best.

In your name, Amen.

This week's 40acts

Monday 7 March: Give your last Rolo

Tuesday 8 March: Stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves

Wednesday 9 March: Pay it forward

Thursday 10 March: Give your favourite thing

Friday 11 March: Tip/Serve the server

Saturday 12 March: Give 110%

WEEK SIX:
OPEN INVITATION

Jesus at our table

From Pharisees to tax collectors, from sinful women to little children, from disciples to Roman soldiers, Jesus invites everyone to eat at his table. As we eat with him, we are all being transformed. We were all lost and if he had not sought us out we would still be lost.

We have no 'right' to sit at his table and in a sense we are all beggars crying out for mercy. Jesus teaches total forgiveness, and acceptance. This is the living generosity of God.

→ **The aim**

- To reflect on how Jesus invites everyone to spend time with him, to develop a relationship with him – no one is excluded – and to look at how we can apply the same principle to our lives.
- To consider how we were all lost, yet have received forgiveness and acceptance from Jesus, and to think about how that might affect our own response to others.

→ **Preparation**

You will need Bibles and some coins or dried pasta shapes: five for each person in your group (see Activity/icebreaker section). Read Luke 19.

Activity/icebreaker

15 minutes

Provide each person with five coins (or pasta shapes). Then introduce a pre-planned topic of conversation.

Each time someone contributes to the discussion, they have to use one of their coins. When they have run

out of coins, they can no longer contribute to the discussion. The conversation is only over when everybody has used all their coins.

This activity demonstrates in a simple way how everyone has a contribution to make. Everyone is invited to take part and have an equal role. No one is made to feel left out.

Make sure you introduce a topic of conversation that will suit the group: one that everyone will be interested in and can contribute to. Some ideas might be: to ask people's points of view on a recent news story, to consider how successfully the church relates to society today, to find out people's opinions on the role of work in our lives.

At the end, ask people about their experience of the activity. Did they purposely hold back more than usual from the conversation in order to let other people 'use' their coins? Did other people take part more than usual? Although perhaps forced, did they enjoy having the opportunity to take part more than they might usually?

Read

5 minutes

Luke 19:1–10

Zacchaeus the tax collector

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.' So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.'

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.'

Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'

Reflection

10 minutes

Zacchaeus was a wealthy man and a chief tax collector in Jericho, a city at the base of a long steep road leading up to Jerusalem. Its location made it a place of business and commerce. Great wealth passed through these streets.

Zacchaeus would have had a hand in taxing the people who lived in and went through the city. But why was he so despised?

The Roman Empire was an oppressive regime and Zacchaeus was collecting taxes on its behalf. He was a Jew working for the hated Romans. Not only was he a traitor, valuing personal wealth more than caring for his fellow Jews, but he even put wealth above his relationship with God. Zacchaeus was a leader within the group of tax

collectors who operated outside the norms of Jewish society.

But Jesus isn't put off by appearances. Early in his Gospel account, Luke records that Jesus was despised by the religious elite for being a friend of tax collectors and sinners. They complain to his disciples in Luke 5:30: 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?' Jesus replies: 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'

Jesus looks for signs of change in people, for those who are willing to live differently. Zacchaeus was lost, but Jesus finds him and invites himself to Zacchaeus' house as a guest.

Now having received forgiveness, Zacchaeus makes a public declaration of his new intentions through overflowing generosity of his own, not just promising to repay what he has taken illegally but repaying it four times over and giving half his possessions to the poor.

Questions

15 minutes

Vital question:

- All of us have been forgiven and accepted by Jesus. How does knowledge of that affect how we respond to others?

Reflective questions:

- The crowds around Zacchaeus deemed him unworthy of an encounter with Jesus. Are we guilty of making similar judgments on those whose lifestyles are outside the 'norms' of society?
- Zacchaeus was considered a traitor for the way he made a living, yet he was still a Jew, a son of Abraham.

His lifestyle suggested that he tried to separate 'who he was' from 'what he did'. As Christians, in what ways can we be tempted to do the same?

- The sycamore tree allowed Zacchaeus to rise above the crowds and see Jesus clearly; it removed anything that blocked a clear line of vision. In the same way what might 'climbing the sycamore tree' represent in our own lives?

Practical questions:

- How does developing our relationship with God, spending time with him and reflecting on his word transform us? Invite the group to share stories of how they have been or are being transformed through their relationship with God.
- This week, think about the openness of Jesus' invitation – are there people you would not normally spend time with or include in an invitation for coffee, lunch or a trip somewhere? How can you look beyond your usual circles for opportunities to bless others?

Worship idea

10 minutes

Play some instrumental music in the background, and invite people to close their eyes and meditate on the story of Zacchaeus again.

Read the story again but as below:

You live in the city of Jericho and hear that Jesus is passing through.

There are crowds everywhere. The air buzzes with excitement. People have heard of Jesus and are waiting for a chance to meet him. Many are rushing around trying to get the best spot.

Imagine that you are about to meet Jesus. How do you feel? Excited, or maybe a bit nervous?

There are lots of people you recognise in the crowd but some that you don't; you overhear that many have travelled many miles just to be in Jericho today.

One person you definitely do recognise is Zacchaeus the tax collector. And you're not alone, it seems. People are mumbling, pointing fingers, shaking their heads. Zacchaeus must feel awkward, surely? He must hear the whispers of disdain.

He's such a little man; he has no chance of seeing Jesus over the crowds. He tries to weave through the crowd but clearly no one wants to give way.

He disappears for a minute and then you spot him ... in a tree. He's managed to run up ahead and clamber onto a branch. He must be so desperate to see Jesus.

But you know that there is no way Jesus will want to stop and talk to him. Definitely not Zacchaeus ...?

The low murmurs of the crowd give way to eager shouts. Jesus has arrived; he's finally here! He stops to talk to people, so generous with his time to talk and listen. You can't look away as he makes his way along the crowd, and then he is here, right in front of YOU, talking to YOU. You see love in his eyes. What does he say? What are the words you say to him?

As Jesus moves on, you follow him through the crowd until he stops right under Zacchaeus and looks up. 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately,' Jesus says. 'I must stay at your house today.'

Well, this is a surprise. People are a little shocked, many are displeased. 'He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,' you hear some say.

Zacchaeus wastes no time; he hurriedly climbs down the tree and takes Jesus to his home. Never before has a man looked so excited and full of joy.

You and some others from the crowd follow Jesus and Zacchaeus into his home.

Zacchaeus is standing before Jesus, talking to him. You hear him say that he will give half of everything he owns to the poor. He also promises that to people he has cheated he will repay four times the amount.

This is amazing. The change in Zacchaeus is incredible; you can tell that he means exactly what he says. It also makes you think about your own life. How does knowing Jesus want you to change things in your life? Are there things you want to apologise for? Different directions or attitudes you want to take?

Jesus is joyous. 'Salvation has come to this home,' he says to Zacchaeus. You stay to hear more; it's hard to leave. So this is the reason why Jesus came: to find the lost such as Zacchaeus and to bring them back to salvation and a relationship with God.

And Jesus really did know exactly who Zacchaeus was, his history, his sins and his notoriety. Yet he went out of his way to spend time with him, the effect of which was life-changing.

OR

Invite the group to listen to or sing this song:

'This Is amazing grace', Phil Wickman

Youtube link:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFRjr_x-yxU

Who breaks the power of sin and darkness?
Whose love is mighty and so much stronger?
The King of Glory, the King above all kings.

Who shakes the whole earth with holy thunder?
Who leaves us breathless in awe and wonder?
The King of Glory, the King above all kings.

This is amazing grace,
This is unfailing love
That You would take my place,
That You would bear my cross.
You lay down Your life
That I would be set free.
Jesus, I sing for
All that You've done for me.

Who brings our chaos back into order?
Who makes the orphan a son and daughter?
The King of Glory, the King of Glory.

Who rules the nations with truth and justice,
Shines like the sun in all of its brilliance?
The King of Glory, the King above all kings.

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
Worthy is the King who conquered the grave,
Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
Worthy is the King who conquered the grave.

Pray
5 minutes

Dear Father God,

Thank you so much for your forgiveness, not only in our lives today but also in our past and in future lives to come. Help us spend more and more time with you, Lord, and as we do, may you continue to transform us. May our lives be changed; help us follow your example so that we show kindness, generosity, forgiveness and sacrifice to others. Sorry for those times when we have not treated others the way that we should. May your Holy Spirit guide us, nudge us, prompt us and empower us to do the things that make you smile.

In your name, Amen.

This week's 40acts

Monday 14 March: BOGOF

Tuesday 15 March: Donate the less obvious

Wednesday 16 March: Not just my tribe

Thursday 17 March: Love a randomer

Friday 18 March: Do something extraordinary

Saturday 19 March: Book a date and look for a mate

WEEK SEVEN:
COMMUNITY IN HARD
PLACES

Jesus at our table

Even at his death, Jesus came to serve the finest of wine: he serves forgiveness to all. He knows the Romans and the Jewish priests are all spiritually thirsty. Jesus' last miracle is to forgive them all. Why? Jesus thirsts for us. He longs to be in community with us, to develop a closer and deeper relationship with us. He experienced the ultimate in tough times.

→ **The aim**

- To understand the ways in which Jesus thirsts for us.
- To consider the hard places we can be led into when we are in a relationship with God.
- To reflect on how Jesus experienced the ultimate hardship – death on a cross - yet still maintained forgiveness and generosity to us all. How can we reflect a similar attitude in our own lives?

→ **Preparation**

You will need Bibles and a packet of cream crackers (Jacobs Cream Crackers or similar), enough for each member of the group to have three (see Activity/icebreaker section). Gather some writing paper, envelopes and pens, enough for each person. Read Luke 23.

Activity/icebreaker

15 minutes

The cracker challenge!

Provide three cream crackers to each member of the group. Set a stopwatch and then go! The winner

is the person who eats the cream crackers in the fastest time. Make sure you record the time of each person as they finish. The current world record stands at 34.78 seconds, according to the Guinness Book of World Records.

The rules: no water, no toppings, no stacking.

Introduce today's key theme to the group: explain that we will be considering how Jesus thirsts for us and longs to be in community with us. We reflect on the story of the crucifixion, where, as Jesus suffers intense cruelty and suffering, he still focuses on the needs and forgiveness of others.

Read

5 minutes

Luke 23:26–43

The crucifixion of Jesus

As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, "Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!" Then

"they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'"

For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?'

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed.

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals - one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One.'

The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.'

There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!'

But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.'

Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'

Reflection

10 minutes

In this hardest of places – on the cross – Jesus still intercedes on behalf of his persecutors and continues to offer forgiveness regardless of whether he is disregarded, mocked or accepted as saviour.

After being scourged, rejected and betrayed, Jesus is crucified. After

hanging for about three hours, his body is at its end.

The Roman soldiers have a jar of sour wine standing by the cross, a final act of cruelty; they know that the sour wine will only increase the thirst of a man already suffering.

Six weeks ago we began at the start of Jesus' ministry as he is thirsty and tempted in the desert. Now we end with Jesus once more thirsting and suffering on the cross.

This thirst can only be for one thing: us, his creation, his people, our salvation. He thirsts for communion with us and for us to be in community with him.

If we are to be in community with him, that will sometimes lead us into hard places: places where we need to forgive even though forgiveness is difficult; perhaps places where we need to serve even though service may be costly to us.

Very often it can be easy to defend instances of unacceptable behaviour by saying 'That was a very difficult time for me'. Yet in his own 'difficult time', as he experiences a slow and agonising death, Jesus maintains kindness, forgiveness and generosity for us all.

Questions 15 minutes

Vital question:

- In what ways can it be a struggle to maintain kindness, compassion and generosity in the difficult times of our lives?

Reflective questions:

- How does it feel to be reminded that Jesus died for YOU, thirsts for YOU, wants to be in community with YOU?

- What are the 'hard' places that you have been led into since being in a relationship with God?
- Jesus was innocent and righteous yet still faced extreme hardship and 'difficult times'. How can reflecting on Jesus' response in the face of death and pain help us in our own hard times?
- During his time on the cross, Jesus prayed for the very people who were involved in his crucifixion, that they would receive forgiveness. Who are the people in our lives who reject and hurt us that we can pray for forgiveness for?
- Is there anyone or anything that can't be forgiven?

Practical questions:

- Over the last six weeks, the 40acts challenges may have challenged you in different ways. Which ones did you find more difficult and why?
- How have you seen God working through the challenges you've done?
- Has your understanding of generosity changed as a result? Has this changed the way you give to others in your day-to-day life?

Worship idea 10 minutes

Invite the group to listen to the following song. As you play the music, encourage each member to think about the hard things they might have to do in their lives. Do they need to forgive, apologise, serve God in a different way or share their testimony, perhaps? Hand out writing paper and envelopes and ask them to write a letter to God thanking him for his forgiveness and stating the things they feel they need to do. Explain that the letters should be an encouragement, and a reminder to serve, love and forgive others as Jesus showed us.

'One thing remains', Jesus Culture
Youtube link:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGnpW09SLuk

Higher than the mountains that I face,
Stronger than the power of the grave,
Constant through the trial and the change,
One thing ... Remains. (repeat)

Your love never fails, never gives up,
Never runs out on me. (x3)

On and on and on and on it goes,
It overwhelms and satisfies my soul
And I never, ever, have to be afraid.
One thing remains.

In death, in life, I'm confident and covered by the power of Your great love.
My debt is paid, there's nothing that can separate my heart from Your great love...

Pray 5 minutes

Jesus thirsts for our salvation;
Jesus thirsts for community with us, his people;
Jesus thirsts and intercedes for us with the Father;
Jesus thirsts to transform our whole selves by the power of the Spirit.
Today, may WE be thirsty for our Refreshing, Living Lord.

(Adaption of a prayer by Marie Birkinshaw)

This week's 40acts

Monday 21 March: Post-it postman
Tuesday 22 March: Bake
Wednesday 23 March: Share your testimony
Thursday 24 March: #washday
Friday 25 March: Apologise/forgive
Saturday 26 March: ???

Acknowledgements

Author

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About Stewardship

We help people give. Since 1906 Stewardship has provided advice, guidance, inspiration and practical tools to make it easy for people to give easily and tax effectively.

Stewardship giving accounts are currently used by over 25,000 people in the UK with more than £53 million distributed to charitable causes from Stewardship accounts every year. Over 19,000 registered churches, secular and Christian charities and full-time Christian workers are currently supported with Stewardship.

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