

Session 3

Transforming Lives God who reveals



This week's session looks at some ways in which God makes himself known to us, and how we might get to know God better.

Opening prayer

Lord, you are in this place:

Fill us with your power.

Cover us with your peace.

Show us your presence.

Lord, help us to know:

We are in your hands.

We are under your protection.

We are covered by your love.

Lord, we ask you today:

To deliver us from evil.

To guide us in our decisions.

To defend us from all harm.

Lord, give us now:

Eyes to see you.

Ears to hear your call.

Hands to do your work.

And hearts to respond to your love. Amen.

Based on a prayer by David Adam, 'Tides and Seasons: Modern Prayers in the Celtic Tradition', Triangle 1989.

Starter

Yorkshire (along with New Zealand and Kerala in India) is famously described as 'God's own country'.

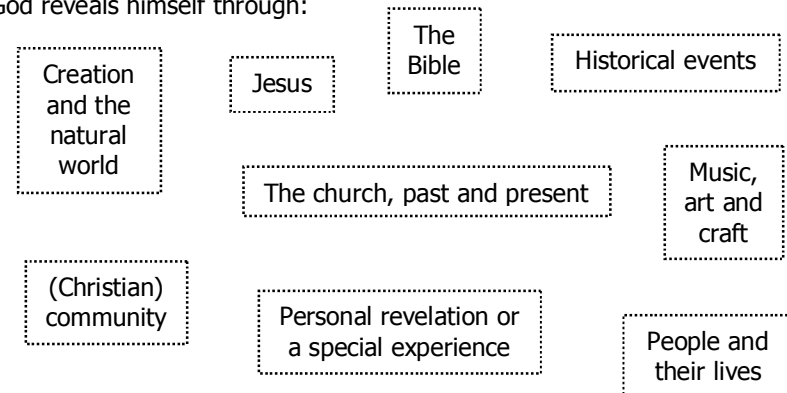
- What is your favourite Yorkshire place? Why? Share your thoughts with a neighbour or the whole group.

God revealed

- In what sort of places do you most easily find God - countryside, churches, coast, hills, towns, gardens ...? Do you have a special God-place? Share your thoughts with a neighbour or the whole group.
- Are there ways in which you feel God has especially made himself known to you? Maybe through nature, places, music, art, people, life events or particular incidents? Share your thoughts with your neighbour or within the group.

There are many ways in which God reveals himself to us, most especially through Jesus Christ.

God reveals himself through:



- Which of these have you personally found *most* helpful and *least* helpful? Discuss with a neighbour.

- Which of these do you think people **outside** the Church find *most* helpful and *least* helpful? Share your choices with the group, and discuss why you have each chosen as you have.

We have seen the Lord

This is a well-known Easter reading – Jesus appears to two disciples who were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, after the events of Jesus crucifixion and burial.

For this reading you will need a Narrator, a 'Stranger' and Cleopas. The reading is from Luke 24:13-34¹⁶.



- Narrator: Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.
- Stranger: "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"
- Narrator: They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him,
- Cleopas: "Are you the only person in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have happened there in these days?"
- Stranger: "What things?"
- Cleopas: "About Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of

our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him."

Stranger: "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

Narrator: And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly,

Cleopas: "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over."

Narrator: So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other,

Cleopas: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Narrator: They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.



Jesus revealed

- Look through the story and find just one thing – a phrase or a verse – that strikes you as interesting or helpful. Share this with the group, and say why you chose it.

Jesus revealed – in perplexity and sorrow

The two disciples had been devastated and confused by the events of the previous days. In their distress Jesus comes alongside.

- When have you most grown as a Christian, and discovered more about Jesus? In the good times or the hard times? Why is that? Share your thoughts and experiences with the group.

Jesus revealed – by talking together

As the disciples talked together and with Jesus and reflected on the scriptures their 'hearts burned within them'. Meeting other Christians and talking with them is an excellent way to strengthen our faith and deepen our understanding of God. This is what we are doing through Transforming Lives!

- Besides Transforming Lives, when do you meet other Christians to discuss your faith? How does your church encourage you to share your faith in this way?

Jesus revealed – in the Breaking of Bread

The disciples recognised the risen Jesus when he took bread, gave thanks and broke it. For many Christians Holy Communion, or The Eucharist or The Mass is a special point of meeting with God and of renewal in faith and service.

- Talk about what Holy Communion means to you. In what way – for you – is this 'communion' (meeting) with God?
- Share with the group any tips or ideas you have that help make communion 'special' for you and a point of meeting with God and of renewal.

The mystery of God

EITHER (try this)

Activity

Everyone in the group receives a piece of card. Look at your piece of card.

- Can you recognise what picture it forms part of? Share with the group what it might be.

In turn each of you put your piece of card on the table, tray or flat surface and you all try to reconstruct the original picture.

- What does it show?
- If there are pieces missing can you still make out what the picture shows?

God reveals himself in a different way to each person. Even if we put all our insights into God together there will be parts of God that are 'missing' from our picture of him – parts that will always remain a mystery.

Sometimes we fail to recognise what God reveals because we do not expect him to be there with us, as with the disciples on the Emmaus Road. When the disciples did eventually recognise Jesus, he disappeared from their sight!

OR (try this)

Some quotes

Look at the selection of quotes on the next page.

- Which do you find most helpful (or confusing!)? Talk about them with a neighbour.

This is a foundational Christian doctrine... that humans do not know all there is to know about God.
Bishop Tom Wright

If you find God with great ease, perhaps it is not God that you have found.
Thomas Merton

God has let me down. He said "I will never leave you nor forsake you", but he has me. No one cares about me.
Woman in Merthyr Tydfil, 1996

God hides, but he coughs.
Simon Mayo

Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God and Saviour of Israel.
Isaiah 45:15

The more a human being advances in the Christian faith, the more they learn, while advancing, that God is unfathomable.
Jean Francois Six, director of the National Mediation Centre of France

Is prayer not a glass that, beginning in obscurity... the longer we stare into, the clearer becomes the reflection of a countenance in it other than our own?
R S Thomas

- Which of these you find most helpful (or confusing!)? Talk about them with a neighbour.

- A friend or someone at work tells you that they are really struggling with God at the moment – God seems to have disappeared or gone far away. What advice would you offer to them?

The Fisher King¹⁷

In the Emmaus story, once the two disciples recognised Jesus, they raced back to Jerusalem to tell the others.

In Lent 2009 Transforming Lives will look more closely at how we share our faith. For now here is a poem that illustrates God in us and with us as we work and witness in the world.

Ask someone in your group to read this out loud.

The Fisher King

And I will make you, he said,
The fisher people.

I will go about among you
nameless and wandering
borrowing the boat of your life
to fling my love like a net
in a generous sweep over the water.
I embrace the sea of your suffering,
to draw in, hand over hand, the gentlest harvest.

And I will make you, he said,
The fisher people.

You will say much in few words,
feed thousands out of your poverty,
hear the symphony of heaven in silence,
sing in hard places.

Every day you will live beyond your resources,
but never beyond my grace.

And I will make you, he said,
The fisher people.



They will know you by your love;

love like the wide curve of the weighted net,
thrown from the prow of a boat on a swelling tide.

And I will make you, he said,
The fisher people.

They will know you by your hands and feet,
as you know me.

Weary feet, laden with the dust of roads,
torn by stones.
Scarred hands, drawing water for cleansing,
offering compassion like a towel.
Hands that can bleed, feet that can dance.

Worship

Some options for worship. Choose and use just some!

Father, you give us life,
Jesus, you give us love,
Spirit, you give us truth,
Holy God, you give us yourself.

Holy God, help us now –
**To give our lives,
To give our love,
To give our minds,
To give ourselves – to you.
Through Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

Pass the Parcel¹⁸

So many outer distractions can hide the real meaning of Christmas.

A small box, wrapped in layers of Christmas paper, is passed as Christmas music is gently played.

Everyone think of things that can block Jesus being revealed at Christmas (for example overeating and drinking, consumerism, the pressure to spend, stress and strain in families, loneliness). The box is passed and when the music stops, or someone wishes to, they name a 'block' or something that gets in the way between us and Jesus at Christmas, and then unwrap the next layer of paper as a prayer is said for this barrier to be removed. You may do this silently, or with appropriate words such as:

"Lord please take away this layer, and help us to see you more clearly this Christmas".

Finally think of someone to whom you would particularly like to pass Jesus this Christmas, and pray their name aloud or in silence.

The group might like to sing a verse or two of a suitable carol.

Prayer of St Richard of Chichester

Jesus, thank you for all the good things you have given me.
For all the pain and insult you took in my place.
Most merciful Lord,
my Redeemer, my Friend, my Brother,
Day by day, may I:
 know you more clearly,
 love you more dearly,
 and follow you more nearly,
For no other reason except your love for me. **Amen.**

God of power,
may the boldness of your Spirit transform us,
may the gentleness of your Spirit lead us,
may the gifts of your Spirit equip us
to serve and worship you, now and always. **Amen.**

Closing Prayer¹⁹ and Blessing

God our Father,
we dedicate ourselves to serve you faithfully,
and to follow Christ.
Send us out to work and to witness
in love and truth,
in the strength of your Holy Spirit,
and for the honour and glory of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**The creative power of God go with us.
The compassionate love of Jesus go with us.
The driving force of the Spirit go with us,
As we follow our calling to link God to his people. Amen.**