

#LIVE LENT



***Notes & questions
for small groups***



Diocese of Toronto
Anglican Church of Canada

These notes by Dean Stephen Hance are designed to be the basis for seven small group meetings, one for each week of Lent, including the week that includes Ash Wednesday. You could use these as the basis for an existing small group's Lent meetings, or form a special group for these weeks.

The notes refer to the Eucharistic lectionary readings for each Sunday (plus Ash Wednesday) and also to Hannah Steele's book, which is quoted in the daily reflections, designed to accompany these small group discussions. Do encourage all participants to use those daily reflections as well.

Meetings will work best if they are led by a reasonably confident group leader, but there is little preparation to be done. The key is to be flexible and not to worry if your discussion goes off in a surprising direction, or if you don't finish discussing all the questions. Other points to bear in mind:

- Start and finish on time.
- Start and finish with prayer.
- Encourage the quieter members to speak, but don't pressure anyone to do or say more than they want to.

Session 1: The Greatest Story of All Time

Week of Ash Wednesday

Readings

Joel 2.1-2, 12-17

Psalm 103.8-18

2 Corinthians 5.20b-6.10

Matthew 6.1-6, 16-21

Summary

This session explores the story of Jesus and how evangelism is rooted in the resurrection. It aims to encourage you to think about how the first disciples heard and told Jesus's story and what that means for evangelism today.

Scripture

Read the Gospel passage (above) and perhaps one of the other readings too. Ask someone in the group who is a good reader to read out loud, or perhaps take turns to read a verse or a short paragraph. Don't rush but take your time and leave a few minutes silence afterwards. Give each person time to share what strikes them from what they have read.

2 Corinthians 5:20 says, "So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

What do you think it means to be reconciled to God? How are we called to be ambassadors of that message? Is that a 'discipline' that we can learn during this season of Lent? Reflect together.

Featured Passage, *Living His Story* by Hannah Steele chapter 1

“The gospel of Jesus Christ is a story. It is a story about God that can be told and recited, studied and analysed, debated and discussed. Robert McKee is a lecturer in storytelling who has coached many Hollywood screenwriters and he says this about our sense of connection with the idea of stories: ‘Our appetite for story is a reflection of the profound human need to grasp the pattern of living, not merely as an intellectual exercise, but within a very personal, emotional experience.’

The gospel of Jesus Christ is a story, but it is quite unlike any other story we will ever encounter. In fact it is not something that we simply hear and understand but a reality in which we live and find our sense of belonging. His story is the living story that makes sense of all the other stories in our lives.”

Discussion Questions

1. How did you first come to hear Jesus’ story? How did his story help you to make sense of your own?
2. What are the fears or concerns that hold you back from evangelism? Has this chapter made you think differently about them?
3. We’ve heard that personal invitation is still the most effective form of evangelism – who first invited you to the church and into the story of God? How did they do it? What can you learn from the people that helped you on your journey of faith?
4. How can you connect the story of the gospel to people in your local community?

Close the gathering with prayer.

Session 2: Catching Up with God

Week of Lent 1

Readings

Deuteronomy 26.1-11

Psalm 91.1-2, 9-16

Romans 10.8b-13

Luke 4.1-13

Summary

This session lays out God's mission in the world and our involvement in that mission. Our role is to respond to what God has initiated and to partner with the Holy Spirit. The session aims to increase your awareness of what God might be initiating in your life and your confidence to join in.

Scripture

Read the Gospel passage (above) and perhaps one of the other readings too. Ask someone in the group who is a good reader to read out loud, or perhaps take turns to read a verse or a short paragraph. Don't rush but take your time and leave a few minutes silence afterwards. Give each person time to share what strikes them from what they have read.

Romans 10:12-13 says; "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'" What do you think it means to be 'saved'? And if a person needs to 'call on the name of the Lord' for that to happen, how can we help people to do that? Reflect together.

Featured Passage, *Living His Story* by Hannah Steele chapter 2

"Central to the notion of evangelism is this simple yet profound theological truth: God loves. The overarching narrative of Scripture is that God loves people. Evangelism, then, finds its ultimate motivation not in the crisis of a church in decline that needs to act in order to prevent its own extinction. Evangelism is always only and ever because God is love. Our witnessing, therefore, is only ever in response to the invitation that God has already made."

Discussion Questions

1. How might God be already inviting people, and how could you join in?
2. Have you ever felt you were just the person God wanted in a particular situation? Did later events confirm that in some way?
3. How do you think you might become more aware of God at work in relationships and conversations you are involved in?
4. How would your witnessing to Jesus be changed by a deeper experience of his love, for you and for others?

Close the gathering in prayer.

Session 3: Jesus was in the transformation business

Week of Lent 2

Readings

Genesis 15.1-12, 17-18

Psalm 27

Philippians 3.17-4.1

Luke 13.31-35

Summary

This session explores the transformational power of stories. Jesus was, and is, in the transformation business. As a result, we have powerful stories of what Jesus has done to share with others. The session aims to embolden you and give you the tools you need to tell your story.

Scripture

Read the Gospel passage (above) and perhaps one of the other readings too. Ask someone in the group who is a good reader to read out loud, or perhaps take turns to read a verse or a short paragraph. Don't rush but take your time and leave a few minutes silence afterwards. Give each person time to share what strikes them from what they have read.

Philippians 3:21 says; “[Jesus] will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.” What do you think it means to be transformed? How can the story of Jesus transform us and those around us? Reflect together.

Featured Passage, *Living His Story* by Hannah Steele chapter 3

“One of the most remarkable stories of instant transformation is in Jesus’ dealings with the demoniac in Mark 5. Jesus travels by boat to an area called the land of the Gerasenes. It is one of the first encounters that we see Jesus having in Gentile territory. In this remote place, Jesus encounters a man who is possessed by multiple demons. The transformation undergone by this man was complete: from chaos to peace, from danger to security. This miracle is one of many instances in the Gospels when encounter with Jesus brings complete and utter transformation and freedom.”

Discussion Questions

1. Think of a story of encountering God that you have shared with others or others have shared with you. What did you learn from the experience?
2. In what practical ways might you express God’s love to a neighbour this week? How might that love be transformative?
3. At this point in your Lenten journey, be still for a while and imagine Jesus gazing into your eyes in love. How do you find yourself responding?

Close the gathering in prayer.

Session 4: Communicating Like Jesus did

Week of Lent 3

Readings

Isaiah 55.1-9

Psalm 63.1-8

1 Corinthians 10.1-13

Luke 13.1-9

Summary

This session is all about relationship and conversation. The gospel writers often depict Jesus in conversation with others. By examining the primacy of relationships for evangelism and the nature of Jesus' conversations, this session aims to equip us to converse like Jesus did.

Scripture

Read the Gospel passage (above) and perhaps one of the other readings too. Ask someone in the group who is a good reader to read out loud, or perhaps take turns to read a verse or a short paragraph. Don't rush but take your time and leave a few minutes silence afterwards. Give each person time to share what strikes them from what they have read.

Our readings today are quite tough in some places. 1 Corinthians 10:9-10 says; "We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer." While this is hard to hear, it reminds us that our speech is powerful, for good or for ill. How do you think our conversations can be honouring to God and a blessing to others? Reflect together.

Featured Passage, *Living His Story* by Hannah Steele chapter 4

“While Jesus deals differently with each of the people before him in such a way that it would be impossible to construct ‘Jesus’ seven-stage approach to evangelism’, he does always seem to know what the next step each individual needs to make. I have found it helpful to think in terms of ‘steps’ in my own encounters with people. What is the one thing I can helpfully say to this person now that might help them to think Christianity is worth further exploration? What one comment might I make about Jesus that might make them intrigued to explore more about him?”

Discussion Questions

1. Taking your personality type into account, think of three natural ways you might share your faith. (These may not involve speaking explicitly of spiritual matters.)
2. Have you ever experienced an interruption that turned out to be a God moment? How might you become more prepared for interruptions in your everyday life?
3. What strikes you most about the way Jesus interacted with people? How might you learn from his approach?

Close the gathering with prayer.

Session 5: Passing on the story of Jesus

Week of Lent 4

Readings

Joshua 5.9-12

Psalm 32

2 Corinthians 5.16-21

Luke 15.1-3, 11b-32

Summary

This session attempts to scratch the surface on the many ways that the Holy Spirit enables us to share the good news, from miracles, to dreams, to giving us the words to say. By the end of the session, you will have explored some of the ways the Holy Spirit inspires and releases our evangelism and will be encouraged to step out in faith.

Scripture

Read the Gospel passage (above) and perhaps one of the other readings too. Ask someone in the group who is a good reader to read out loud, or perhaps take turns to read a verse or a short paragraph. Don't rush but take your time and leave a few minutes silence afterwards. Give each person time to share what strikes them from what they have read.

2 Corinthians 5:17-17 says; "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation."

What does it mean to you to be a 'new creation'? How does the Holy Spirit play a part in this? Reflect together.

Featured Passage, *Living His Story* by Hannah Steele chapter 5

One individual who follows where the Spirit leads is Philip. The Spirit prompts Philip to go to the desert road to Gaza where he meets the Ethiopian eunuch, a person of great influence. Philip finds that the Spirit is at work in him enabling him to explain the Scriptures so that that this Ethiopian Chancellor of the Exchequer can hear and understand the good news of the risen Jesus. When we stumble across a chance conversation with someone on the train or the bus, we cannot know the impact our words may have or the seeds sown that will bear fruit in places and locations other than our own.

Discussion Questions

1. This session encourages us to think globally. How can you perceive the Holy Spirit at work in the world today?
2. The Spirit often 'propels us out of our comfort zones'. Have you ever surprised yourself by speaking boldly, or can you think of someone else doing this with remarkable results?
3. Our liturgy speaks of the power of God who "can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine." Can you think of a situation which has been transformed beyond imagining by the work of the Holy Spirit?

Close the gathering with prayer.

Session 6: Echoes of the story of Jesus in our world

Week of Lent 5

Readings

Isaiah 43.16-21

Psalm 126

Philippians 3.4b-14

John 12.1-8

Summary

This session explores how we can discern the outlines of God's story in the world around us, and how our communication of the Good News can connect with those echoes in the culture.

Scripture

Read the Gospel passage (above) and perhaps one of the other readings too. Ask someone in the group who is a good reader to read out loud, or perhaps take turns to read a verse or a short paragraph. Don't rush but take your time and leave a few minutes silence afterwards. Give each person time to share what strikes them from what they have read.

Isaiah 43:18-19 says; "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" Our faith is founded on the revelation of God in the Scriptures and in the person of Jesus. But God is also at work today by the Spirit, doing new things in the church and the world. Where can you see signs of that creative work of the Spirit?

Featured Passage *Living His Story* by Hannah Steele chapter 6

“Paul’s visit to Athens in Acts 17 shows us an example of intelligent and imaginative evangelism. He speaks the good news of Jesus in the synagogue but also in the marketplace. It is not long before Paul is creating a stir and arousing the interest of the philosophers of the day. Whether they wanted to argue against him and disprove his new and unfamiliar teaching or whether they were intrigued by the possibility of Paul’s new teaching, they all wanted to hear more and so brought him to the Areopagus, a place where the latest ideas were discussed and debated. Despite the apparent pluralism of Athens, Paul’s teaching about Jesus and the resurrection caused a stir and people were intrigued. Paul is still passionate and zealous but now resolute to show that the deepest desires of the Athenians can only be adequately met by the risen Jesus. Paul is determined to show this with wisdom, grace and clarity. In so doing, he provides us with an effective model for how we can present the gift of the gospel in such a way that it relates to people’s deepest longings and connects with the culture around us. The gospel cannot be delivered in a vacuum but is always spoken in a particular language, clothed in particular phrases and concepts.”

Discussion Questions

1. The story of the gospel is an answer to four fundamental human questions:
 - a. Who are we?
 - b. What is wrong?
 - c. What’s the solution?
 - d. What’s the future?

How do you think the Gospel addresses these questions?

2. Can you think of books, films, plays, music etc which raise these question, or seek to provide an answer?

Close the gathering with prayer.

Session 7: Encountering Jesus

Holy Week

Readings

Isaiah 50.4-9a

Psalms 31.9-16

Philippians 2.5-11

Luke 23.1-49

Summary

People look at Jesus and choose to follow, reject, or ignore him. This session explores the different responses people make to Jesus, and unpacks the implications of this for our models of evangelism.

Scripture

Read the Gospel passage (above) and the reading from Philippians also. Ask someone in the group who is a good reader to read out loud, or perhaps take turns to read a verse or a short paragraph. Don't rush but take your time and leave a few minutes silence afterwards. Give each person time to share what strikes them from what they have read.

Jesus was seen by many when he walked about on the earth. Some welcomed him with hosannas. Some ignored him. Some cried for his death: "crucify him!" Why do you think people respond to Jesus in such different ways, then and still today?

Featured Passage from *Living His Story* by Hannah Steele chapter 5

Hannah writes about St. Paul's interrogation by King Agrippa in Acts 26.

"Paul's response in this situation was, as on numerous occasions, simply to tell the story of God's work in his life. What is particularly striking in this testimony is the boldness with which Paul directs his question to the King himself: 'King Agrippa, Do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.' One can imagine the shock at the brazenness of Paul's question to the King, demonstrating that all those years in prison have in no way dampened his courage. The King's reply is similarly feisty, questioning Paul: 'Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?' Suddenly the attention is not upon Paul's story but on the King's reaction to it. It is evident that Paul's testimony leaves the 'what about you?' question lingering in the air. Paul's response reveals a profound truth about the ways in which people come to faith: 'Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that not only you but also all who are listening to me today might become such as I am – except for these chains' His use of the phrase 'quickly or not', indicated what Paul had learned about the variety of ways in which different people made the journey of faith. For some, their experience would be an instant moment of conversion, but for others it would take more time, a slowly evolving movement towards faith in Christ."

Discussion Questions

1. This Lent, reflect upon your own faith journey and ask yourself: What are the key moments that stand out? Who has influenced and helped you?
2. How do you feel the story of your journey to faith affects others? How do those of others affect you?
3. What are some of the ways you might be able to help gently nudge people along the pathway to faith in the crucified and risen Lord this Easter?

Close your gathering with prayer.