

Broken

A course about real life
and real faith

Inspired by the BBC TV Series with Sean Bean

Devised and written by Bryony Taylor, Rebecca Tobin and
David Twomey

Preface

Broken, a six part drama written by Jimmy McGovern and starring Sean Bean as a Catholic priest was broadcast on BBC One in 2017. Three priest friends working in the North East, Bryony, Rebecca and David, when meeting up found that conversation quickly moved to talking about this powerful television programme. It was the first time they had seen an authentic portrayal of the life of a priest on television and the first time they had seen parishioners like their own grappling with issues from poverty to abuse to mental health. Conversation moved to talking about the lack of good resources for teaching the faith and helping people to grow in their faith when they are from communities such as the one portrayed in the programme *Broken*. Most confirmation courses are book-based and dry – they don't communicate with people from more ordinary backgrounds living in materially poor communities.

So, Bryony, Rebecca and David decided to see if they could write a course inspired by *Broken* that would work for Fr Michael's congregation (in the programme) – and in turn work for their church communities in Durham and Newcastle Dioceses and beyond.

Rev'd Bryony worked as a curate in Houghton-le-Spring in the Coalfields area of Tyne and Wear and is now Rector of Barlborough and Clowne in Derby Diocese, Mother Rebecca served her curacy in the Boldons in South Tyneside and is now a Prison Chaplain in Lichfield Diocese, Father David is the curate at St George's Cullercoats in Newcastle Diocese. Each of them are from slightly different Church of England backgrounds – Bryony and Rebecca are liberal catholic and David is a traditional catholic and they each work with a range of people from different social groupings and abilities. They wanted to create a course that would work in all these settings and would be flexible to different contexts.

The hope is that this course will go some way to plugging the gap in good resources to use with church communities in deprived areas particularly, but also in more affluent areas, to help Christians navigate the diversity of challenges we meet in life. The course subtitle is 'a course about real life and real faith'. The aim is that it is a course that helps people to engage with the realities of life and how they can be framed by faith in Jesus Christ. As Leonard Cohen said: 'there is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in'.

About the course

This is a flexible 6 week course designed to be used with small groups of people in a variety of settings.

Each session focuses on a theme that is raised by the BBC TV drama *Broken*. It is possible to undertake the course without watching the drama but the course does complement the series (which is available on BBC DVD).

The course could be used as a confirmation course, a discipleship course or would work well in Advent or Lent. Sessions can be used on their own as well – for example you could choose to just run the session on the power of Holy Communion as a one-off.

Given the diverse nature of congregations, the elements of each week's session include reflective prayer activities as well as time for group discussions that make no assumptions about people's educational background and seek to meet different learning styles and spiritual preferences. Each session, if all the elements are used, should take around an hour and a half to do.

Session structure:

- **Opening prayer:** a candle is lit and these words are said "This candle is to remind us of God's presence with us". Silence is then kept.
- **Introduction to the theme.** The theme is introduced using a quotation from *Broken* in a paragraph to be read out.
- **Bible Reading (*Lectio Divina*)** a passage is read slowly by different voices 2 or 3 times. Silence is kept for people to read along for themselves, seeing what ideas and images are standing out the most. After some time, each person is encouraged to share one word or phrase that stood out for them. The passage is read out again. Then each person is encouraged to share whether the same word or image stood out again or not and why.
- **Questions for discussion** a series of questions on the week's theme is provided that the group leader can choose from. The group discusses the questions and shares thoughts and ideas.
- **Response time** – following group discussion, simple prayer response activities are suggested.
- **Closing prayer**– using a prayer used by Fr Michael in the drama *Broken*.

The 6 sessions:

1. Beauty in the ordinary
2. Loving the unlovable
3. Guilt and shame
4. Impossible Situations
5. The power of Holy Communion
6. Is the church still relevant and needed today?

Session 1: Beauty in the ordinary – by Mother Rebecca Tobin

A candle is lit and these words are said:

‘This candle is to remind us of God’s presence with us’

Silence is kept

Introduction

Optional: watch Episode 1, clip from beginning to 3.12

The session leader reads this text out loud

Fr Michael lives and works in a community which would not be described as beautiful. The city, with its grey industrial landscapes, and grubby, littered streets, crowded with terraces, is the backdrop for the stories Fr Michael shares.

The settings for this drama mirror the lives of Fr Michael’s parishioners, which are often harsh, and messy. We see the poverty and pain of Christina reflected in the shuttered shops and closed-down businesses; the desperation and lost hope of Roz in the harsh, flashing, lights of the gambling machines; the anger and alienation of Vernon in the graffiti splattered walls.

Fr Michael, like the people he cares for, is careworn and tired. Grief, confusion, and pain, stain the lives and faces of Christina, Helen, Andrew, Roz. Hunger, poverty, and hopelessness take their toll on body and soul.

And yet, in the messiness, there are moments of profound beauty. The sunlight breaking in through the opening church doors; green shoots in cracks in the pavement; the soft glow of Fr Michael’s candle. Christina’s face as she watches her daughter delight in a new white dress; Helen’s visible gratitude to Vernon’s carers in the face of her own pain; Andrew’s moment of courage and truth, his relief at speaking out; Fr Michael’s sad smile.

What is it that makes the ugly, grey landscape a romantic backdrop? The strained, bruised face a wonder to behold? What has the power to turn the ordinary things of everyday life into rare beauty?

Bible Reading (Lectio Divina)

Listen carefully as someone reads this passage from the Bible, then take some time afterwards to reflect in silence on what you have just heard.

The passage is provided in two translations here, choose whichever version would work best with your group – or you may even wish to use both. Sometimes it is helpful to provide group members with a copy so that they can read along.

Song of Solomon 2.9b-14 New Revised Standard Version

Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice.

My beloved speaks and says to me: “Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance.

Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.”

Song of Solomon 2.9b-14 The Message

Look at him there, on tiptoe at the gate, all ears, all eyes – ready!

My lover has arrived, and he’s speaking to me!

Get up my dear friend, fair and beautiful lover – come to me! Look around you: Winter is over; the winter rains are over, gone! Spring flowers are in blossom all over. The whole world’s a choir – and singing! Spring warblers are filling the forest with sweet arpeggios. Lilacs are exuberantly purple and perfumed, and cherry trees fragrant with blossoms.

Oh, get up, dear friend, my fair and beautiful lover – come to me! Come, my shy and modest dove – leave your seclusion, come out in the open. Let me see your face, let me hear your voice. For your voice is soothing and your face is ravishing.

Listen again to the verses, read in a different voice.

Is there a word, or a sentence, that jumps out at you? Which of these words are for you today? Why?

Broken: A course about real life and real faith –by B Taylor, R Tobin & D Twomey

Either in pairs or in the main group, share with each other the word or phrase that stood out.

Read through once more with a different reader. Has that word or phrase changed?

Questions for discussion

Leaders may like to do one of the following:

- 1. Photocopy the grid of questions, cut them out, fold and place in a bowl. Encourage group members to take a question, read it out and discuss as a group. The randomness of this can help people to open up more than if the 'leader' asks the questions directly.*
- 2. Choose 1 or two of these topics and discuss them all together.*
- 3. Have small groups discussing one question, then feedback to the group.*
- 4. Break up into small groups/pairs.*

You may wish also to write some discussion questions of your own on this theme that will suit your context – some blank spaces are provided for this. Ideally, this section of the session should feel relaxed and informal.

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| <p>Can you feel the energy in the Bible reading? Why is it there?</p> | <p>Who is speaking in the Bible reading? Who is listening?</p> |
| <p>What or who do you find beautiful? Why?</p> | <p>Is beauty more about appearance, experience, or something else? What? Why?</p> |
| <p>Why is beauty sometimes hidden?</p> | <p>Which of your senses does beauty affect? How?</p> |
| <p>How can you be aware of beauty in life?</p> | <p>Does beauty matter? Why/why not?</p> |
| <p>Have you ever noticed beauty in an unexpected place or time? What did you experience?</p> | <p>Have you ever felt beautiful? Why?</p> |
| <p>Have you ever felt ugly? Why?</p> | <p>What do moments of beauty have in common?</p> |
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Response Time

Below are some suggestions for activities to respond to the bible reading and group discussion. You may wish to use one or a few of these suggestions or come up with an idea of your own. Appropriate music could be played to encourage a prayerful atmosphere. You may wish to begin and end with a time of silence.

1. Carefully and slowly, read the words of Psalm 19 out to another person, and have them read it out to you. Listen attentively.
2. Watch this meditative video of psalm 139:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5DkZTgfYPA>
3. Light a candle and say a prayer; giving thanks for beauty in your life.
4. Take a piece of rubbish from the recycling box. Use pencil, pen, paint, or fold it, to make it into something beautiful.
5. Take a photograph of the most beautiful thing you can see. No posing or positioning allowed!
6. Look at yourself in a mirror and consider, you are wonderfully and fearfully made, what makes you beautiful?

This session may have touched on some difficult, personal and painful themes for people. Invite a time of stillness so that people can think about something that they have found challenging or an action they need to undertake in response to this session.

Final Prayer

Spend some time in silent prayer praying for the person to your right. Then read this prayer in conclusion:

Lord, lift up our weary spirits

so that we might find rest and eternal peace within you;

May we stand upon mountains and walk on stormy seas.

Give us that unspeakable joy to dance in the rain.

Amen.

Session 2: Loving the Unlovable – Mother Rebecca Tobin

A candle is lit and these words are said:

‘This candle is to remind us of God’s presence with us’

Silence is kept

Introduction

Optional: watch Episode 1, clip from 26.33 to 27.47

The session leader reads this text out loud

Fr Michael lives and works in his community every day, not just on Sundays. He sees the people who come to Mass, on their best behaviour, but he also sees the people who come to church in fear, anger, and desperation, searching for answers. Fr Michael sees people at their best, but more often, he sees people at their worst, their lowest ebb. His work is to see these people, and not just to see them, but to love them.

Fr Michael ministers to Vernon, a young man with a mental illness, who most people find strange and frightening. He ministers to Roz, who looks beautiful, but hides ugly truths. He ministers to Carl, who faces prejudice and abuse because of his sexuality. He ministers to his own, damaged and angry mother, in her frailty and confusion.

Fr Michael is called to love and serve not just people who are clean, happy, and strong, but those who are damaged, angry, and unlovable.

Fr Michael ministers to a young woman, Christina, who has lost her job and is struggling to feed her children. Bruised, bloodied, and desperate, she rejects Fr Michael’s offers of help:

Fr Michael: Can I come and see you some time?

Christina: Um... Why?

Fr Michael: Because I think you’re in pain... [she shows him her bandaged hand] no, real pain

Christina: I’m just skint, Father

Christina is in terrible pain; her loud, angry words and her defensive and hostile demeanour stem from a terrible secret she is keeping. Everyone can see her bruises, her rudeness, anger, cheap clothes and un-brushed hair. Fr Michael sees through that unlovable exterior, he sees the real Christina, beloved child of God. Eventually, his steadfast care allows her to reveal her secret. Knowing that she is loved and supported, Christina is able to face the consequences of her actions.

Fr Michael loves the unlovable because God loves him. God's love is for everyone. Love comes from God, and there is more than enough to go round. God loves people who are angry, strange, and damaged. God loves people in prison, homeless people, starving people. God loves poor people, sad people, guilty people. No one is unlovable to God. God loves us. God loves you. God loves me.

Bible Reading (Lectio Divina)

Listen carefully as someone reads this passage from the Bible, then take some time afterwards to reflect in silence on what you have just heard.

The passage is provided in two translations here, choose whichever version would work best with your group – or you may even wish to use both. Sometimes it is helpful to provide group members with a copy so that they can read along.

I Peter 4.6-11 New International Version

For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

I Peter 4.6-11 The Message

Listen to the Message. It was preached to those believers who are now dead, and yet even though they died (just as all people must), they will still get in on the life that God has given in Jesus.

Everything in the world is about to be wrapped up, so take nothing for granted. Stay wide-awake in prayer. Most of all, love each other as if your life depended on it. Love makes up for practically anything. Be quick to give a meal to the hungry, a bed to the homeless - cheerfully. Be generous with the different things God gave you, passing them around so all get in on it: if words, let it be God's words; if help, let it be God's hearty help. That way, God's bright presence will be evident in everything through Jesus, and he'll get all the credit as the One mighty in everything - encores to the end of time. Oh, yes!

Listen again to the verses, read in a different voice.

Is there a word, or a sentence, that jumps out at you? Which of these words are for you today? Why?

Either in pairs or in the main group, share with each other the word or phrase that stood out.

Read through once more with a different reader. Has that word or phrase changed?

Questions for discussion

Leaders may like to do one of the following:

- 1. Photocopy the grid of questions, cut them out, fold and place in a bowl. Encourage group members to take a question, read it out and discuss as a group. The randomness of this can help people to open up more than if the 'leader' asks the questions directly.*
- 2. Choose 1 or two of these topics and discuss them all together.*
- 3. Have small groups discussing one question, then feedback to the group.*
- 4. Break up into small groups/pairs.*

You may wish also to write some discussion questions of your own on this theme that will suit your context – some blank spaces are provided for this. Ideally, this section of the session should feel relaxed and informal.

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| <p>Who do you love? Who loves you? Why?</p> | <p>Does God love you? How do you know?</p> |
| <p>How do you know you love someone?</p> | <p>Why is it so important to love one another?</p> |
| <p>How do you know you are loved?</p> | <p>What are the things that stop us being loving to one another?</p> |
| <p>Can you feel the urgency in this Bible reading from Peter’s letter? Why is it there?</p> | <p>How can God’s love help us to love others?</p> |
| <p>What does hospitality mean?</p> | <p>What can you do this week to be more loving?</p> |
| <p>Why is it important to offer hospitality?</p> | <p>What can you do this week to experience God’s love for you?</p> |
| <p>Who do you find difficult to love? Why?</p> | <p>Do you ever feel unlovable? Why?</p> |
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Response Time

Below are some suggestions for activities to respond to the bible reading and group discussion. You may wish to use one or a few of these suggestions or come up with an idea of your own. Appropriate music could be played to encourage a prayerful atmosphere. You may wish to begin and end with a time of silence.

1. Carefully and slowly, read the words of Psalm 139 out to another person, and have them read it out to you. Listen attentively.
2. Light a candle, and say a prayer, for someone you avoided today.
3. Turn to the person next to you and say something positive about them. Then discuss how that made you feel.
4. Watch the YouTube film 'People react to being called beautiful' by SHEA
5. Set up a mirror (or give each person a small hand mirror) spend time looking at yourself in the mirror as Psalm 139 is read.
6. Choose a stone or seed from a box of earth, wash it, clean it up, polish or paint it, see what a difference your care makes.

You may wish to close the response time by singing this chant or another suitable song:

Take, O take me as I am,
Summon out what I shall be,
Set your seal upon my heart
And live in me

(John Bell, Iona Community)

This session may have touched on some difficult, personal and painful themes for people. Invite a time of stillness so that people can think about something that they have found challenging or an action they need to undertake in response to this session.

Final Prayer

Spend some time in silent prayer praying for the person to your right. Then read this prayer in conclusion:

Lord, lift up our weary spirits

so that we might find rest and eternal peace within you;

May we stand upon mountains and walk on stormy seas.

Give us that unspeakable joy to dance in the rain.

Amen.

Session 3- Guilt and Shame – Fr David Twomey

Introduction

A candle is lit and these words are said:

‘This candle is to remind us of God’s presence with us.’

Silence is kept.

Introduction

Optional: watch Episode 1, clip from 26.33 to 27.47

The session leader reads this text out loud

Session three surrounds the topic of guilt and shame. This is a major theme in *Broken*. Fr Michael Kerrigan has his own struggles, due to his past experiences, especially in childhood. Later in the series, he meets Roz Dimichelis. Roz comes to him because she is a serial gambler who has been stealing vast sums of money from her employer in order to fund her addiction. Seeing no way out, she has resolved to take her own life.

Trying to stop her, Fr Michael reveals to her something of his own struggles with shame. She asks if anyone else knows about these and as they talk, Roz says:

‘Guilt is when you know about it. Shame is when everyone knows.’

People often think of guilt and shame as worrying about every little single thing that we have done or not done. But they are far more powerful than that. They are not so much about what we have done but *who we think we are*. All too often we can feel worthless. That may be because of the things we have done or not done. More often, our sense of worthlessness comes from other people and the things they say to us or the way they behave towards us. We internalise those and start to believe they are true.

We see something of this in the modern ‘Shame culture’. For example, if someone is judged to have been engaging in ‘anti-social behaviour’ an image can be shared online and commented on regardless of context or circumstance, bringing criticism, humiliation and profound distress. Bringing shame to other people is a powerful weapon. Maybe this has always been the case, but the

accessibility of the cyber world has taken shame and shaming to a whole new level of meaning and power.

In this session we will seek to respond to some of our own struggles with shame and explore what it means to forgive and be forgiven. That means forgiving ourselves for the things we may have done which cause us guilt. It also means letting go some of the hurtful things we believe about ourselves which cause us shame.

In doing so, may we discover the love that God, who created us in his image, has for each one of us.

Bible Reading (Lectio Divina)

Listen carefully as someone reads this passage from the Bible, then take some time afterwards to reflect in silence on what you have just heard.

The passage is provided in two translations here, choose whichever version would work best with your group – or you may even wish to use both. Sometimes it is helpful to provide group members with a copy so that they can read along.

Romans 7:15-25 (NRSV)

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Romans 7:15-25 (The Message)

What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. So if I can't be trusted to figure out what is best for myself and then do it, it becomes obvious that God's command is necessary.

But I need something *more*! For if I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't *do* it. I decide to do good, but I don't *really* do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.

It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge.

I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question?

The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different.

Listen again to the verses, read in a different voice.

Is there a word, or a sentence, that jumps out at you? Which of these words are for you today? Why?

Either in pairs or in the main group, share with each other the word or phrase that stood out.

Read through once more with a different reader. Has that word or phrase changed?

Information about this reading (to be read by the leader of the session if needed)

In this passage Paul is struggling with the meaning of Old and New ways of living. For Paul the Old is the way of the Law, with all its demands. The New is Christ, and a spirit of freedom. Many scholars think that the 'I' is not in fact Paul but those who hold onto to the old Covenant while trying to follow Jesus. However, it does sound as though Paul is reflecting on his own experience and the challenge of knowing the hope to which we are called, but still being drawn to what is safe, familiar and comfortable.

Perhaps we might find it encouraging that Paul struggled with that as well.

Discussion topics

Leaders may like to do one of the following:

- 1. Photocopy the grid of questions, cut them out, fold and place in a bowl. Encourage group members to take a question, read it out and discuss as a group. The randomness of this can help people to open up more than if the 'leader' asks the questions directly.*
- 2. Choose 1 or two of these topics and discuss them all together.*
- 3. Have small groups discussing one question, then feedback to the group.*
- 4. Break up into small groups/pairs.*

You may wish also to write some discussion questions of your own on this theme that will suit your context – some blank spaces are provided for this. Ideally, this section of the session should feel relaxed and informal.

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| <p>'I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do' (Romans 7:19) Do you find this to be true in your life and experience? If you feel comfortable, you might like to share examples with the group.</p> | <p>In <i>Broken</i>, Fr Michael ignores a phone call from Helen, asking for help with her son Vernon, who lives with mental illness. Vernon is then wrongly shot by the police. Fr Michael saves the phone message and plays it repeatedly. Do you think that's a helpful thing to do?</p> |
| <p>Do you think we live in a 'shame society'? What evidence can you see of it?</p> | <p>Is there such a thing as right and wrong?</p> |
| <p>Is there anything you regret not having said or done in your life? If you could go back, how would you change it?</p> | <p>Describe a time when you had to admit a mistake. How did it feel? What did you say/do? Was admitting it as bad as you thought it would be?</p> |
| <p>In <i>Broken</i>, Roz steals to fund her addiction. Is she a victim or the architect of her own downfall?</p> | <p>'Guilt is when you know. Shame is everyone knowing' (From <i>Broken</i>) Which is more powerful; guilt or shame?</p> |
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Response Time

Below are some suggestions for activities to respond to the bible reading and group discussion. You may wish to use one or a few of these suggestions or come up with an idea of your own. Appropriate music could be played to encourage a prayerful atmosphere. You may wish to begin and end with a time of silence.

You may also need to highlight the need for privacy and respect for other people's contributions.

If possible, there should be enough space for people to move, so as to maintain privacy and for 'time out' if necessary.

1. Invite people to (privately) write something which causes them most guilt or shame. Seal these in an unmarked envelope. Invite everyone to hold their envelope in their hands, as the leader reads Psalm 51. Then invite each person to come up and throw their envelope in a bin or watch as they are shredded. These could then be symbolically included in the ashes for Ash Wednesday or added into the Easter Vigil Fire.
2. Everyone designs an individual prayer flag based on the words 'I AM...' This is an opportunity for people to acknowledge their God-given qualities (i.e. I am brave, I am good enough, I am loving, etc...) Tie the flags together to make bunting and display them in Church. They could be used as part of intercessions in the Eucharist.
3. Invite people to draw an unwelcome expectation/belief about themselves in pencil. Ask them to look at the image, then rub it out. Pray that God may lighten our burdens and be with us in our journey.
4. Write something which causes us shame on a lollypop stick/tongue depressor using a sharpie pen. After a time of prayer and stillness, invite everyone to break their sticks into lots of pieces. If possible, work together to turn these broken sticks into work of art about the cross and/or resurrection.
5. Read Romans 7:15-25 again. Write down any words or phrases that stand out to you. Can you use these to make a poem based around the themes we have talked about today?

To bring together these prayer responses, the following prayer may be said.

Father, bless the work that I have done
and the work that is to be.

Father, bless the servant that I am
and the servant that I will be;
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

(David Adam)

You may wish to close the response time by singing this chant or another suitable song:

Calm me, Lord, as You calmed the storm.
Still me, Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease.
Enfold me, Lord, in Your peace.

This session has touched on some difficult, personal and painful themes. Invite a time of stillness so that people can think about something that they have found challenging or an action they need to undertake in response to this session.

Final Prayer

Spend some time in silent prayer praying for the person to your right. Then read this prayer in conclusion:

Lord, lift up our weary spirits
so that we might find rest and eternal peace within you;
May we stand upon mountains and walk on stormy seas.
Give us that unspeakable joy to dance in the rain.

Amen.

Session 4 – Impossible Situations – Fr David Twomey

Introduction

A candle is lit and these words are said:

‘This candle is to remind us of God’s presence with us.’

Silence is kept.

Introduction

Optional: watch Episode 3, clip from 06.51 to 12.35

The session leader reads this text out loud

Broken is filled with people in impossible situations.

In the very first episode of *Broken*, we are introduced to Christina, a struggling single mum of three. Disastrously, she loses her job for stealing from her employer. To make matters worse, her mum, who she lives with suddenly and unexpectedly dies. Christina doesn’t report her mum’s death, so that she can draw her pension, a decision which eventually leads her to be imprisoned.

Later on, we see Andrew, one of the police involved in Vernon’s death. He tries to tell the truth of what happened, but comes under immense pressure to change his statement. He is faced with the possibility of losing his job and risking his family’s future, or being involved in a cover up he knows is wrong.

In different ways, all of us face impossible situations in our lives, be it in our work life, our relationships or in our finances.

There are times when we just don’t have any choice about a course of action, even if we know that the potential outcomes will be really difficult or hurtful. There are other times when our choices are not clear-cut, when we do not know where to turn.

We hear in the Bible that ‘nothing is impossible with God’ (Luke 1:37). But what does that actually mean?

It is easy to see this or hear it as a slightly glib, easy response to really complex situations. We can also hear it as condemnation of our lack of faith; if only we

really believed, then everything would sort itself out. Sometimes wonderful things happen to people to help their situation. But not, of course, to everyone. This is not to deny the power of God, but it is to recognise the genuine reality of life.

Most of us muddle along on a balance of honest struggle and trust. Yet in the midst of all the challenges of life, our call is to hold onto the truth of what we know of God; His nature, his promises and his love are the same yesterday, today and forever. And holding onto that is immensely hard. But sometimes, it's all we've got.

Bible Reading (Lectio Divina)

Listen carefully as someone reads this passage from the Bible, then take some time afterwards to reflect in silence on what you have just heard.

The passage is provided in two translations here, choose whichever version would work best with your group – or you may even wish to use both. Sometimes it is helpful to provide group members with a copy so that they can read along.

Bible Reading (Psalm 69:1-4, 13-18, 29)

Save me, O God,
for the waters have come up to my neck.
I sink in deep mire,
where there is no foothold;
I have come into deep waters,
and the flood sweeps over me.
I am weary with my crying;
my throat is parched.
My eyes grow dim
with waiting for my God.
But as for me, my prayer is to you, O Lord.
At an acceptable time, O God,
in the abundance of your steadfast love, answer me.
With your faithful help rescue me
from sinking in the mire;
let me be delivered from my enemies
and from the deep waters.
Do not let the flood sweep over me,
or the deep swallow me up,
or the Pit close its mouth over me.
Answer me, O Lord, for your steadfast love is good;
according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.
Do not hide your face from your servant,
for I am in distress—make haste to answer me.
Draw near to me, redeem me,
set me free
I am lowly and in pain;
let your salvation, O God, protect me.

Alternatively, this version of the psalm may be read.

Save me, O God, for the waters have reached my soul.
I am stuck fast in deep mud, and there is nowhere to stand;
I have gone into the depths of the sea, and a storm has swamped me.
I am exhausted from crying out;
my throat is sore;
my eyes are worn out from looking expectantly for God.

By my prayer to you, O Lord,
it is at a time of your good pleasure, O God,
in the abundance of your mercy,
hear me in the truthfulness of your salvation.

Save me from the mud, that I may not be stuck fast in it;
may I be delivered from those who hate me,
from the depths of the waters.

Let the storm of water not swamp me, nor the deep drink me down;
do not let the pit close its mouth upon me.

Hear me, O Lord, for your mercy is kindly;
in the abundance of your compassion, look upon me.
Do not turn your face away from your servant,
for I am afflicted- hear me without delay.
Come near to my soul and redeem it.

I am poor and in pain,
but the salvation of your presence, O God, has supported me.

Translation from Fr Nicholas King SJ

Read this through once, followed by silence.

Information about this reading (to be read by the leader of the session)

Psalm 69 is filled with anguish and despair. For that reason it is often read on Good Friday, as it recalls how Christ thirsted on the Cross.

It is a powerful and visual psalm. Sometimes we feel like things rush in on us from every direction and overwhelm us. The psalmist has captured that aspect of our experience wonderfully. Spend a moment finding some of the different images used in this psalm.

At the same time, the psalmist also balances this harsh reality with a depth of great hope. God is there to be found, even in the midst of darkness.

- Change voice and read the passage again:

Is there a particular word or phrase that strikes you? What is it that speaks to you?

- Read through once more with a different reader. Has that word or phrase changed?

Discussion topics

Leaders may like to do one of the following:

- 1. Photocopy the grid of questions, cut them out, fold and place in a bowl. Encourage group members to take a question, read it out and discuss as a group. The randomness of this can help people to open up more than if the 'leader' asks the questions directly.*
- 2. Choose 1 or two of these topics and discuss them all together.*
- 3. Have small groups discussing one question, then feedback to the group.*
- 4. Break up into small groups/pairs.*

You may wish also to write some discussion questions of your own on this theme that will suit your context – some blank spaces are provided for this. Ideally, this section of the session should feel relaxed and informal.

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Which is more important- having morals or being realistic?</p> | <p>'Not everyone can afford morals' Do you think that's true? Can you still live a moral life without being rich?</p> |
| <p>Have you ever found yourself in an impossible situation? If you feel comfortable doing so, describe it to the group. How did you react? What feeling did it bring up for you?</p> | <p>Imagine you are talking to Christina or Andrew. What advice would you give them in their impossible situations?</p> |
| <p>When Christina's sister discovers that she has not reported their Mum's death, she is outraged and can't forgive. Is she justified?</p> | <p>Fr Michael is torn between a desire to protect a friend from hurting themselves and his duty to uphold the seal of Confession. Which do you think is the more important?</p> |
| <p>Is it ever o.k. to do something wrong in order to survive?</p> | <p>Would you rather: Have to say everything you think out loud or never be able to speak again?</p> |
| <p>Would you rather: See into the future or change the past?</p> | <p>Would you rather: Always have to tell the truth or always have to lie?</p> |
| | |

Response Time

Below are some suggestions for activities to respond to the bible reading and group discussion. You may wish to use one or a few of these suggestions or come up with an idea of your own. Appropriate music could be played to encourage a prayerful atmosphere. You may wish to begin and end with a time of silence.

You may also need to highlight the need for privacy and respect for other people's contributions.

If possible, there should be enough space for people to move, so as to maintain privacy and for 'time out' if necessary.

1. Making clay pots:

Everyone is invited to turn a piece of clay/playdough into a pot. As they do so, everyone is invited to reflect on the hard times of their lives and how they have shaped them into the person they are now. What were the new things we discovered about ourselves, new strengths, new wisdom?

Once this has been completed, everyone is invited to hold their pots as the leader reads 2 Corinthians 4:7-8.

2. Gethsemane Prayers

Write a prayer, person or situation on plant marker.

After a time of silence, the leader reads an account of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:31-41a)

In silence, everyone comes forward to place their prayer in some soil, making the shape of a cross.

You may wish to sing/hear the song 'Stay with me' (Taize).

3. Break into small groups.

Each person briefly introduces a situation that they are finding impossible at the moment.

After each person speaks, a moment of silence is held as everyone prays for that person.

Once everyone who wishes to has spoken, a final prayer may be offered.

4. Use some of the imagery in Psalm 69 to create a picture or painting that expresses:
 - How it feels to be in an impossible situation.
 - Where God might be found in those times as well.

5. Place an image or icon as Jesus, Light of the world in the centre of the space.
Use silver foil to create a 'river of light' flowing from that image, and place small electric candles around it.

Invite everyone to name/describe a time when Jesus brought light out of darkness into their lives.

They may wish to write it/draw it on a piece of card and add it to the 'river'.

This could be made into a prayer feature in Church.

6. Invite everyone to tie knots in two pieces of rope or string, each one representing a situation:
 - In the World
 - In the Church
 - In the Community
 - Amongst family/friends
 - In their own journey of life and faith

They could also remember others going through difficult times.
Make the string into a bracelet or necklace, as a reminder to pray.
Demonstrate how to pray using the knots.

Begin with:

- God make speed to save us
- Lord make haste to help us.

Invite everyone to name the situations they wish to pray for, either silently or aloud.

For each one pray ‘Lord, have mercy on...’

Conclude with:

‘Holy God, Holy and Strong, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us.’

*To bring together these prayer responses, the following prayer may be said.
The musical version from the Northumbria Community may also be played.*

Lord, You have always given bread for the coming day;
and though I am poor, today I believe.

Lord, You have always given strength for the coming day;
and though I am weak, today I believe.

Lord, You have always given peace for the coming day;
and though of anxious heart, today I believe.

Lord, You have always kept me safe in trials;
and now, tried as I am, today I believe.

Lord, You have always marked the road for the coming day;
and though it may be hidden, today I believe.

Lord, You have always lightened this darkness of mine;
and though the night is here, today I believe.

Lord, You have always spoken when time was ripe;
and though you seem silent now, today I believe.

Amen.

(Northumbria Community)

This session has touched on some difficult, personal and painful themes. Invite a time of stillness so that people can think about something that they have found challenging or an action they need to undertake in response to this session.

Final Prayer

Spend some time in silent prayer praying for the person to your right. Then read this prayer in conclusion:

Lord, lift up our weary spirits

so that we might find rest and eternal peace within you;

May we stand upon mountains and walk on stormy seas.

Give us that unspeakable joy to dance in the rain.

Amen.

Session 5 – the power of Holy Communion – Rev'd Bryony Taylor

A candle is lit and these words are said:

'This candle is to remind us of God's presence with us.'

Silence is kept.

Introduction

Optional: watch Episode 3, clip from 48.44 to 51.50

The session leader reads this text out loud

Saying Mass is at the heart of Fr Michael's life as a priest. As a result we see him with his congregation sharing communion in every episode of the series *Broken*. It is a constant backdrop to the action in the drama and it also becomes the crucible of Fr Michael's own struggles, particularly as he reaches the words 'this is my body', 'this is my blood'. Likewise, for many Christians, the sharing of Holy Communion is at the heart of our meeting together. Holy Communion or the Eucharist or Mass is a mysterious ritual meal during which we remember the giving up of Jesus' life on the cross for the whole world and the eternal life brought by the resurrection. We share bread and wine mindful of our need of God, remembering that, like Jesus, we too are a broken people somehow made whole again by the Holy Spirit.

There is a powerful scene in episode 3 in which Andrew, the police officer, attends church. Andrew struggles in this episode with a dilemma – should he protect his colleagues and lie, or tell the truth and risk losing his job leaving him unable to support his young family? He meets with Fr Michael to discuss this, Fr Michael naturally encouraging him to tell the truth. He leaves Fr Michael's house in anger. The next scene we are back in church during Mass. Andrew sits at the back, head in hands. The line moves forward as people get up to receive communion. Eventually, Andrew joins the line, there is a pause as he puts his hands out to receive the host from Fr Michael. Michael looks intently at him and then simply gives him the host saying, 'the body of Christ'. Later, Andrew knocks on the presbytery door and we encounter this scene:

Andrew: Why did you give me communion, Father?

Fr Michael: Why did you come up for it?

Andrew: Because I've never needed it so much in my life.

Fr Michael: That's why I gave you it.

It is often at those times when life is most desperate that we need not words, but actions, not words but something beyond that. That is what Holy Communion offers to us: the presence of God, in the bread and the wine, no words or explanations required, just the opening up of our hands and hearts to receive.

Bible Reading (Lectio Divina)

Listen carefully as someone reads this passage from the Bible, then take some time afterwards to reflect in silence on what you have just heard.

The passage is provided in one translation here, you may wish to use a different version (visit biblegateway.com to find alternative versions). Sometimes it is helpful to provide group members with a copy so that they can read along.

Luke 24:28-35 (NRSV)

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Listen again to the verses, read in a different voice.

Is there a word, or a sentence, that jumps out at you? Which of these words are for you today? Why?

Either in pairs or in the main group, share with each other the word or phrase that stood out.

Read through once more with a different reader. Has that word or phrase changed?

Discussion topics

Leaders may like to do one of the following:

- 1. Photocopy the grid of questions, cut them out, fold and place in a bowl. Encourage group members to take a question, read it out and discuss as a group. The randomness of this can help people to open up more than if the 'leader' asks the questions directly.*
- 2. Choose 1 or two of these topics and discuss them all together.*
- 3. Have small groups discussing one question, then feedback to the group.*
- 4. Break up into small groups/pairs.*

You may wish also to write some discussion questions of your own on this theme that will suit your context – some blank spaces are provided for this. Ideally, this section of the session should feel relaxed and informal.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“I’ve never needed it so much in my life”</i> – do you identify with Andrew’s words about communion?</p> | <p><i>“he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread”</i> Luke 24:35 – why do you think that it was at the breaking of the bread that the disciples finally recognised Jesus?</p> |
| <p>Andrew told Fr Michael he had decided to lie. Then he went to Mass. Should Fr Michael have given him communion? What do you think?</p> | <p>The Mass is at the centre of the life of Fr Michael and his parish. Do you see it as central to your life? Why/why not?</p> |
| <p>Why do you think we see the Mass being said in every episode of <i>Broken</i>?</p> | <p>What does it mean to you that the bread we receive at communion is broken?</p> |
| <p>Why do you think Jesus chose to use bread and wine to help us remember him?</p> | <p>What does having bread and wine at church mean to you?</p> |
| <p>Do you ever feel that you ‘need’ to go to a communion service? Why/why not?</p> | <p>The word Eucharist – often used to describe Holy Communion - means Thanksgiving. What one word would you use to describe Holy Communion?</p> |
| | |
| | |

Response Time

Below are some suggestions for activities to respond to the bible reading and group discussion. You may wish to use one or a few of these suggestions or come up with an idea of your own. Appropriate music could be played to encourage a prayerful atmosphere. You may wish to begin and end with a time of silence.

1. Place a loaf of bread/pitta bread and a cup of wine/juice in the centre of the room. Spend some time in silence thinking about how Jesus chose to make himself known through these two simple things. At the end of a time of meditation, taste the bread and wine in turn. End with this prayer:

Lord, we thank you that when we gather, you are here in the midst of us. We thank you that you spent time eating and drinking with your friends and that after you were gone, they recognised you in the breaking of the bread. Be with us now, your broken people. Help us to remember that you are always with us. Amen.

2. If it is the tradition of your church, arrange a service of Benediction or Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament to end the session.
3. Salt dough modelling. Give each person a piece of salt dough. Spend some time creating models from the salt dough in response to this session. You may wish to play some quiet meditative music in the background. Bake them so that participants can collect their creations at the next session.
4. Kintsugi Craft

Kintsukuroi is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold or silver so that the pot is more beautiful for having been broken.

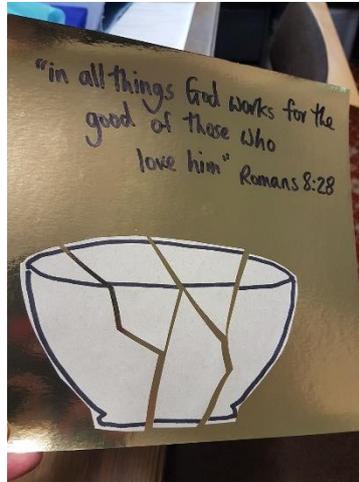


kintsukuroi

(n.) (v. phr.) "to repair with gold"; the art of repairing pottery with gold or silver lacquer and understanding that the piece is more beautiful for having been broken

For this activity you will need some gold and silver metallic card, some plain grey or white sugar paper, scissors and glue sticks. Give each

person a pot shape cut from the grey sugar paper. Tell them to cut the pot into pieces, thinking about how their lives have been broken at times. Then each person reassembles their pot, sticking the pieces to the metallic card. The final result should look something like this:



You may wish to close the response time by singing this chant or another suitable song:

In the Lord I'll be ever thankful;
in the Lord I will rejoice.
Look to God; do not be afraid.
Lift up your voices the Lord is near;
lift up your voices the Lord is near.

(Taizé)

This session may have touched on some difficult, and personal themes. Invite a time of stillness so that people can think about something that they have found challenging or an action they need to undertake in response to this session.

Final Prayer

Spend some time in silent prayer praying for the person to your right. Then read this prayer in conclusion:

Lord, lift up our weary spirits

so that we might find rest and eternal peace within you;

May we stand upon mountains and walk on stormy seas.

Give us that unspeakable joy to dance in the rain.

Amen.

Session 6 – Is the church still relevant and needed today? – by Rev'd Bryony Taylor

A candle is lit and these words are said:

'This candle is to remind us of God's presence with us.'

Silence is kept.

Introduction

Optional: watch Episode 6, clip from 12.40 to 19.00

The session leader reads this text out loud

Throughout the entire 6 episodes of Broken, Fr Michael and his church community bump up against all manner of societal problems. We see the poverty of a young mother in the first episode, who when her mother dies, keeps it quiet so that she can draw her last pension cheque to see her through for the week. We see a squeezed mental health service that can't keep a very sick man in hospital any longer and the staff choosing him over others in the same position purely because they know he is loved. Fr Michael comes up against the pressure on families to let their children be princes and princesses on the day of their First Holy Communion – paying hundreds of pounds they can't afford for a pretty dress or suit.

Fr Michael's life and ministry is not in a vacuum. He doesn't just spend his time saying mass. Saying mass is at the centre of his ministry but his ministry is in the centre of his community.

In the final episode of the series, Fr Michael preaches a sermon about righteous anger, pointing out the terrible damage that is done in his community by gambling machines, he says of Jesus' driving out of the money changers from the temple:

"As Christians, we are meant to try and emulate Christ, are we allowed to emulate that bit? Are we allowed a bit of righteous anger? I hope so."

Straight after mass we see images of men from the church smashing up the gambling machines in the street nearby.

Some people think that the church is completely irrelevant in the 21st century. Fr Michael's congregation is tiny. He is just one priest. Consider, though, would you say he is irrelevant? That he should give up, as he considers doing towards the end?

Is the church still relevant and needed today?

Bible Reading (Lectio Divina)

Listen carefully as someone reads this passage from the Bible, then take some time afterwards to reflect in silence on what you have just heard.

The passage is provided in two translations here, you may wish to use a different version (visit biblegateway.com to find alternative versions). Sometimes it is helpful to provide group members with a copy so that they can read along.

John 2:13-17 (NRSV)

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'

John 2:13-17 (The Message)

When the Passover Feast, celebrated each spring by the Jews, was about to take place, Jesus travelled up to Jerusalem. He found the Temple teeming with people selling cattle and sheep and doves. The loan sharks were also there in full strength.

Jesus put together a whip out of strips of leather and chased them out of the Temple, stampeding the sheep and cattle, upending the tables of the loan sharks, spilling coins left and right. He told the dove merchants, "Get your things out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a shopping mall!" That's when his disciples remembered the Scripture, "Zeal for your house consumes me."

Listen again to the verses, read in a different voice.

Is there a word, or a sentence, that jumps out at you? Which of these words are for you today? Why?

Either in pairs or in the main group, share with each other the word or phrase that stood out.

Read through once more with a different reader. Has that word or phrase changed?

Discussion topics

Leaders may like to do one of the following:

- 1. Photocopy the grid of questions, cut them out, fold and place in a bowl. Encourage group members to take a question, read it out and discuss as a group. The randomness of this can help people to open up more than if the 'leader' asks the questions directly.*
- 2. Choose 1 or two of these topics and discuss them all together.*
- 3. Have small groups discussing one question, then feedback to the group.*
- 4. Break up into small groups/pairs.*

You may wish also to write some discussion questions of your own on this theme that will suit your context – some blank spaces are provided for this. Ideally, this section of the session should feel relaxed and informal.

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|--|--|
| <p>Should Fr Michael have encouraged people to go and smash the gambling machines?</p> | <p>Are we allowed righteous anger like Jesus?</p> |
| <p>What difference would it make if there was no church at all?</p> | <p>Does congregation size matter? Fr Michael's church is small but what difference do they make?</p> |
| <p>Do you think priests should preach about politics?</p> | <p>Is violence sometimes the only way to make a point?</p> |
| <p>What do you think about the fact there are bishops in the House of Lords? Should they be there?</p> | <p>Do you think the church should be separate from the state? Why? Why not?</p> |
| <p>What would you say to someone who told you the church is irrelevant in today's world?</p> | <p>Is it a good thing that many churches run foodbanks?</p> |
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Response Time

Below are some suggestions for activities to respond to the bible reading and group discussion. You may wish to use one or a few of these suggestions or come up with an idea of your own. Appropriate music could be played to encourage a prayerful atmosphere. You may wish to begin and end with a time of silence.

1. Provide a selection of newspapers, spend some time cutting stories and pictures out and as a group make a collage in the shape of a cross.
2. Lay out a map of your community or of the country on the floor. Have a bowl of small pebbles or glass beads. Spend some time placing the beads on areas of the map and praying for those areas.
3. As a group, discuss an area of local concern, pray for it and combine your prayer with an action such as writing to a local MP or giving to your local foodbank.
4. Jesus made a whip out of cords and drove the money changers out of the temple. Try 'knotty intercessions' as a prayer activity. Give everyone a long piece of fabric that has been ripped. Play some quiet music if you wish and as the music plays read out these prayers (or similar):

Prayer is so much more than words.

You now have a strip of cloth. Hold it in your hands. Feel its texture.

Look at its colour: even a white piece of cloth has variation.

Each of these ragged cloths are different, they each have a different history and a different story to tell, just like you.

In the warp and weft of their making, they are the unique work of an individual, just like you.

Cloth can be used as a bandage, to protect an injury, or a rag to wipe a sweaty, fevered brow. It can be the raw material of a book or a banknote, or used to fasten something which should not be loose.

It was a larger cloth that held the Lord after his death, and was placed aside in the tomb, it was a cloth which wiped his tortured brow.

As you hold this cloth in your hand, pause for a moment in quietness. As you feel the texture in your hand, pass your prayers onto, and into the cloth.

Think about the events happening in the world: war and conflict, famine and inequality, oppression and injustice.

Quietly tie a knot in your strip of cloth as you call them to mind as you remember them.

Think about the places you are from: your home, your family, those you work with.

Quietly tie a knot in your strip of cloth as you call them to mind as you remember them.

Think about those who are sick, those who we love and see no longer.

Quietly tie a knot in your strip of cloth as you call them to mind as you remember them.

Think of those things we have to be thankful for: the many blessings poured out upon us, the people who surround us and make a difference to our lives: may we make a difference to the lives of others.

Quietly tie a knot in your strip of cloth as you call them to mind as you remember them.

We do not pray alone, and our knotted cloths are joined with all those of the angels and saints, and each other.

Tie your cloth to another, and quickly yet quietly, let us form a chain of prayer, linked across this whole sacred space: individual yet joined.

(Adapted from Fr Simon Rundell)



This session may have touched on some difficult, and personal themes. Invite a time of stillness so that people can think about something that they have found challenging or an action they need to undertake in response to this session.

Final Prayer

Spend some time in silent prayer praying for the person to your right. Then read this prayer in conclusion:

Lord, lift up our weary spirits
so that we might find rest and eternal peace within you;
May we stand upon mountains and walk on stormy seas.
Give us that unspeakable joy to dance in the rain.
Amen.