The Rhythms of Grace: Small Group Material

Rhythm 3: By God’s grace, I will set aside time for prayer, worship and spiritual reading.

The Rhythms of Grace (10 mins):

Remind yourselves of the five rhythms of grace, by either reading them out loud in turn or reading them quietly to yourselves.

Rhythm One: By God’s grace, I will seek to be transformed into the likeness of Christ.
Rhythm Two: By God’s grace, I will be open to the presence, guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.
Rhythm Three: By God’s grace, I will set aside time for prayer, worship and spiritual reading.
Rhythm Four: By God’s grace, I will endeavour to be a gracious presence in the world, serving others and working for justice in human relationships and social structures.
Rhythm Five: By God’s grace, I will sensitively share my faith with others and support God’s mission both locally and globally.

REVIEW:
In a big group or in smaller groups, share your experiences since you last met.

- How did you get on with the spiritual exercise you committed to last time?
- Can you identify any new ways in which the Holy Spirit is at work in you?

The third Rhythm of Grace identifies three practices that will strengthen and give balance to our spiritual lives – prayer, worship and reading the Bible. They are not a menu from which we can choose; each is a necessary component. Together they feed and nourish us, in body, mind and spirit. In Rhythm 1 we thought about doing the ‘outer work’ while God transforms us from the inside; these spiritual disciplines are another essential way that we do the ‘outer work’ and invite God to transform us and deepen our relationship with Him.

[Note: There is a lot to cover in this section and all that can be done is merely to skim the surface of these huge areas. You probably won't manage to get through it all so you may need to concentrate on which areas will be most useful for the group, but do leave enough time to work through the ‘Living it out’ section and pray for each other at the end.]

a) Worship (25 mins):

Worship comes from the old English word ‘worth-ship’ meaning to attribute worth to someone or something, describing how worship is first and foremost about giving glory to God. The two main New Testament words used for worship are proskuneo meaning ‘to come towards to kiss’ and latreuo meaning ‘to serve or to minister.’

Before you do anything else, spend a few minutes in worship together. A suggestion is below, although you might want to do something different e.g. sing together or listen to some other music.

Material adapted from Byron Smith, J., Grayball, L. A Spiritual Formation Workbook (HarperSanFrancisco 1993).
Revelation 4: The Throne in Heaven.
Invite everyone to spend a short time in silence, with their eyes closed, quieting their hearts and coming into God’s presence. Ask one person to read Revelation 4 very slowly (You might like to play some suitable background music whilst doing this) and ask people to imagine joining the heavenly scene described in this chapter. After a suitable period of time, invite people to bring short prayers of praise to God either out loud or quietly in their own hearts.

Share: Briefly share together any reflections you have after the worship.

- Why do you think we are called to worship God? Does God need our praise?

Worship as a transforming encounter
James K.A. Smith in his book “Desiring the Kingdom” describes how worship can be a ‘transforming encounter’ which re-aligns and restores an individual’s desire back towards God, where the day-to-day secular pressures and influences around us have drawn us away from him. Like a magnet attracting a compass needle, every time we come to God in worship we re-shift and re-orientate ourselves towards God again.

- Does this idea make you think differently at all about worship? What do you think is happening in us as we worship?
- How do you worship God outside of Sunday services?

b) Reading the Bible and spiritual reading (20 mins)
Read: Psalm 119:1-16,105 & 2 Timothy 3:16-17

- Using these verses and your own experience, why is regular and consistent reading of scripture useful for us?
- Studying Scripture can simply increase our information and knowledge of God, without significantly transforming us to be more like Christ. Do you agree with this? If so, how do we, in our use of scripture, move from information to transformation? Share your own experiences.

Reflection on Scripture is the key discipline
Research carried out by Willow Creek Community Church across over 1000 churches concluded that “personal time reflecting on Scripture is far and away the most powerful catalyst for spiritual growth.”
(From MOVE: What 1000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth, G. Hawkins & C. Parkinson)

John Ortberg in his book “The Life you’ve always wanted” (chapter 11) reminds us that “the goal is not for us to get through the Scriptures. The goal is to get the Scriptures through to us.” He suggests one way of doing this is to carefully meditate on scripture (to “marinate” if you like in Scripture – Colossians 3:15), to allow scripture to truly transform us, wash and renew our minds (Romans 12:2).

He outlines a five stage process:
1. Take time to ask God to meet you in scripture
2. Read the Bible in a repentant spirit with a readiness to obey and put into practice what it says.
3. Meditate on a fairly brief passage or narrative, reading it slowly several times if necessary and allowing certain words to stand out and sink into your heart.
   - Ask the question “God what do you want to say to me in this moment?”
   - If you are reading a story you may want to imagine yourself as part of the scene
4. Take one thought or verse with you to “chew on” throughout the day.
5. Allow this thought to become part of your memory.

Material adapted from Byron Smith, J., Grayball, L. A Spiritual Formation Workbook (HarperSanFrancisco 1993).
Spiritual reading of course, encompasses more than just reading the Bible and you may well want to use a future small group session to all bring along a passage from a Christian book which has particularly inspired you and talk about it.

c) Prayer & setting aside time… (20 mins)

Prayer is ‘talking to God about what we are doing together.’ (Dallas Willard)

‘Prayer lays hold of God’s plan and becomes the link between His will and its accomplishment on earth. Amazing things happen, and we are given the privilege of being the channels of the Holy Spirit’s prayer.’ (Elisabeth Elliot)

‘Prayer has far more to do with what God wants to do in us than with your trying to “reach” or “realize,” still less “entertain,” God in prayer. This truth eliminates anxiety and concern as to the success or non-success of our prayer, for we can be quite certain that, if we want to pray and give the time to prayer, God is always successful and that is what matters. . . . What we think of as our search for God is, in reality, a response to the divine Lover drawing us to himself.’ (Ruth Borrows in Essence of prayer)

‘Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at His disposition, and listening to His voice in the depth of our hearts.’ (Mother Teresa)

- What do you think of these descriptions of prayer? How do you view prayer? Do you see prayer as you talking to God, or a two-way conversation?

Read Mark 1:35-39 & John 5:19-20

Jesus was a person of prayer who had an intimate relationship with the Father. Not only did he make it a priority to take time out from the crowds to find a quiet place to pray to his Father, he described how he could do nothing apart from God. In this passage from Mark we sense that everything he did led from his intimate relationship in prayer with his Father.

- How do you pray? Do you have a regular time of prayer or does it tend to be in response to things that happen? What have you found has helped you pray?
- Try to imagine how Jesus must have prayed (The Lord’s prayer gives us a starting point). What different types of prayer do you think he would have used? and what different types should we (and do we) use?

Live it out – exercises to help us to put this into practice! (15 mins)

In groups of 3’s and 4’s, look at the following exercises together before the end of the session. Each person is encouraged to select one or more of the following exercises to try to commit to in the following week or fortnight. Where possible, and where appropriate, share what you are committing to do with others in your group, and then pray for each other.

1) Commit to a daily time of prayer, Bible reading and worship

Set aside some time this week to read the Bible, praying and worshipping. If you are not used to this, then start simply – and use some of the suggestions below. If you are in the habit of doing this each day, try something a little more challenging or different this week.
Some Suggestions:

- **Bible Reading Notes.** For example *Daily Bread, Closer to God* or *Encounter with God.* These can be obtained from Illuminate, the Christian bookshop in town.
- **On-line resources (which also have Mobile phone and iPad apps)** which can be read or some have audio versions too:
    This is a great (and FREE!) on-line Bible which also gives you lots of different Bible plans to read the Bible daily, a verse for the day and many more things. Highly recommended for using the Bible on the move!
  - **Word Live** - [http://www.wordlive.org/Home/145653.id](http://www.wordlive.org/Home/145653.id)
    Daily reading guides from Scripture Union, with three different styles to choose from – classic, alt and lectio – with readings each day, things to reflect on and pray about.
  - **Word for today (UCB)** - [http://www.ucb.co.uk/word-for-today.html](http://www.ucb.co.uk/word-for-today.html)
    The on-line version of the UCB ‘Word for today.’
    Daily podcasts, more reflective and meditative.
  - **Sermon podcasts** – e.g. Holy Trinity Brompton ([http://www.htb.org.uk/talks-videos](http://www.htb.org.uk/talks-videos))
    or catch up with sermons from Trinity churches from the church website
  - **Meditation** Meditate on a piece of Scripture this week – using the John Ortberg method described above as a guide. Reading a psalm a day might be a good place to start.

2) **Rhythm of prayer**

Try incorporating a fixed rhythm of prayer into your life this week. It may help to set your watch or phone alarm to remind you to pray.

For example:
- **Morning** – read Psalm 63 or Psalm 95 to prompt a time of prayer.
- **Noon** – pray the Lord’s Prayer and spend two minutes in silence listening to God
- **Evening** – read Psalm 4, 91 or 134 to prompt a final time of prayer.

Alternatively you might like to use the **Community of Saint Chad’s morning and evening prayer booklets** (£2 from the church office), which will guide you through a structure for prayer.

3) **Enjoy spending some time with God and worshipping him** through painting, drawing, writing a poem, song or any other creative process you’d like to explore this week.

4) **Pray with the church prayer diary each day.** Use this great resource to help you pray.

5) **Journaling** – Try journaling this week where you spend some time each day writing your reflections on your time with God. Alternatively you could start using a prayer journal, where you make a note of what you pray for each day and how the prayers are answered.

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**Prayer for the week ahead**

End with the following prayer and commit to praying this prayer each day on your own throughout the next week or fortnight.

Father God,
By your grace, enable me to be set aside time to meet with you each day,
Teach me to reflect and meditate on your Word and give me the grace to be obedient to it,
Draw me into a deep encounter with you in prayer,
And may my whole life be a living sacrifice of worship to you,
In the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, Amen.

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