



from the Market Harborough Methodist Circuit

INTRODUCTION TO GOOD SOIL

When Jesus told the Parable of the Sower, he indicated that for the seeds of God's Kingdom to take root, grow strong and bear fruit, they needed to be planted in **good soil** (see *Matthew chapter 13, Mark chapter 4, and Luke chapter 8*). Christians have always realised that in order to grow in faith that is lasting and strong, we need to encourage and support one another, and find a place or a pattern that enables us to go deeper, ask questions and pray together, learning from each other and the traditions of the church.

We hope that these '**Good Soil**' resources will help and equip you to grow and be nurtured in faith, as part of the family of the church, in addition to weekly worship. They are meant to be flexible and optional, and to work in small groups, fellowship groups, families, with a friend, or can also be used as individual personal devotions. You do not need to use everything suggested. As you choose what is right for you, know that God is with you.

For the season of Lent:

Our Relationship with God in Suffering

Lent is a time for taking a closer look at ourselves, deepening our devotion to God, praying more, giving up bad habits, and also of journeying with Jesus to the cross. These three sessions through Lent cover some difficult emotions that Jesus experienced as he approached his death. Make sure that you have someone you can talk to about any difficult feelings this may bring up for you. Please do ring your minister or lay worker if you want to talk or pray about anything, or speak to your pastoral visitor.

Session 1.1: FEAR

INTRODUCTION: THINKING ABOUT FEAR

Fear is a natural human emotion, part of the human experience. A dictionary definition of fear is "an unpleasant, often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger." (Merriam Webster, Feb 2022)

We live in a very real world filled with hurt, pain and danger. Our natural response to the threat of imminent danger is built within us to "fight or flight" a situation that might be harmful. It is perfectly normal for our bodies to physically react to the emotion of fear by: increasing breathing and heart rate, among other things, this is known as the alarm stage. However, if we experience fear for a prolonged period this can have a detrimental impact on our health and well-being and prevent us from living in true freedom, peace and joy.

In the Bible, 'the fear of the Lord' is a good thing, meaning reverence, worship and respect, but God's people are told time and time again, by angels, prophets and Jesus himself: "**Do not be afraid.**" God said to Joshua as they were preparing to enter the Promised Land: "*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.*" (Joshua, chapter 1: verse 9, New International Version)

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Before you start, or before you go to your group, you might like to find **something that you can hold in your hand**: a stone, a holding cross, a small ornament, something that represents for you something solid, reliable, faithful. *Take this with you to the session.*

Preparing in prayer:

A breath prayer is one that you can incorporate throughout your day, when you may feel fear, as slow, deep breaths are particularly useful during these times. A classic breath prayer is “**Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me.**” Do not feel constrained to these words, but instead feel free to incorporate your own insights that you have discovered as you have spent time with this resource.

Breathe in and out, with the first part of your prayer coming to mind on the inward breath and the latter half connecting with the outward breath.

Continue your prayer for a set period of time or until you feel you have reached a sense of inner stillness as you dwell in the presence of God.

STARTING THE SESSION: OPENING PRAYER

Loving God,
as we start this time of Lent together,
may you help us to know your presence and peace,
and your Holy Spirit encouraging and inspiring us.
Thank you for this time we are spending with you.
Help us not to be afraid, but to trust in you,
because you are our rock and our hope.
May you open up your word to us,
bring the life of Jesus to our minds,
and your love and grace to our lives.
In the name of Jesus our Saviour, we pray.
Amen.

FINDING OUR ROOTS

Ask yourself or explore with others:

- are you a naturally fearful person?
- what fears do you bring to this session?
- how have you dealt with fear in the past?
- how has God helped you overcome fear?

READING THE SCRIPTURES

In this session, we will think about Luke’s account of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. It takes place after nightfall on what we know as ‘Maundy Thursday’ – the night before Jesus died. Jesus goes to the garden (on the Mount of Olives) with his disciples, and he is clearly troubled.

Read the passage slowly a couple of times and try to imagine what is happening, and what might be going through Jesus’ mind.

Luke 22: verses 39-46

Jesus came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ When he reached the place, he said to them, ‘Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.’ ⁴¹ Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, ⁴² ‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.’ ⁴³ Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. ⁴⁴ In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. ⁴⁵ When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, ‘Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.’

REFLECTING ON ART

Spend some time looking at this picture as you hold in your hand the object you have brought with you.

What do you notice in this picture?

How does it make you feel?

Is this a picture of fear or comfort?

Reflect on this picture quietly for a few moments.

Picture:

Gethsemane – His Will
by Lucy Dickens.

Copyright © Lucy Dickens.

www.LucyDickensFineArt.com

Reproduced by kind permission.



DIGGING DEEPER

Jesus chose a familiar place to take his disciples after their supper. In the cool of the evening, he asked them to pray as he went off alone. *Or was he alone?*

He prayed to his Father, our God, that the suffering he knew would come be taken from him. (That's what he means by 'cup'.) He was about to face something he did not want to go through.

His time of prayer probably went on for a long time. What we have here is only a summary. In another gospel, we read that he returned to his disciples several times and each time found them asleep. He was probably there for two to three hours. How many times might he have asked, over and over, for God to offer him another way out?

It says that *'in his anguish he prayed more earnestly'*. Imagine Jesus begging, pleading, for this thing to be taken away from him. And his sweat was like drops of blood. This is possibly a medical condition brought about by severe stress or anxiety. The Bible does not actually say Jesus was afraid, but he was clearly anxious about what was to come. Fear is very natural and nothing to be ashamed of.

Jesus' fear was mixed with knowing God's will. Fear was with him, but it did not control him. The will of God was the driving force.

Bear in mind that at this stage, from the Mount of Olives, Jesus and his disciples could have easily left Jerusalem and escaped without a trace. But Jesus stayed to go through with it.

It was a moment where the future of God's plans hinged on Jesus' decision: *stay and face what was coming, or run away for an easier life?* We know what Jesus chose; what he felt called to do. From this point on, Jesus' freedom would be in the hands of others.

Luke tells us that angels came and ministered to Jesus. God strengthened him. He found the strength from somewhere to get up and go on.

What do you make of this part of the story?

TALKING TOGETHER

Here are some questions to explore in the group, with a friend or visitor, or perhaps at church over coffee:

- *What do we call it when we are afraid but find the strength to go through with what we know is best?*
- *What do you think Jesus meant by asking the disciples to pray that they 'may not come into the time of trial'?*
- *What 'solid' thing was Jesus holding onto?*
- *What fears do you face in the coming weeks or months?*
- *Who are the friends who you ask to pray and keep watch for you?*
- *Who are the angels who strengthen you in your fear?*
- *Sometimes, God does not expect us to endure suffering; Sometimes, God actually desires us to escape or be set free. How can you tell the difference? What should be endured because it is right, and what should be named as wrong, called-out, or brought to an end?*
- *Who can you talk to about your fears?*

LISTEN TO A SONG

Chris Tomlin – *Whom Shall I Fear (God of Angel Armies)*

Available on YouTube using the link below:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOkImV2cJDg>

PRAY TOGETHER

- Bring to God any prayers for the group, or for the church;
- especially name anything that anyone has expressed fear about;
- Pray for the week to come, and the challenges you face;
- You might like to **say the Lord's Prayer**, thinking especially of the words '*save us from the time of trial*':

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.**

A CLOSING PRAYER

While Jesus was kneeling in fear and anguish about what was to come, he may have prayed this prayer, the words a Psalm he would know well. It begins in desperation, but ends in praise, because it remembers what God has done. You may find it helpful to hold on to your solid object and say these words out loud, knowing that God hears you and God is with you:

Psalm 71: verses 1-8

*In you, LORD, I have taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame.
In your righteousness, rescue me and deliver me;
turn your ear to me and save me.*

*Be my rock of refuge,
to which I can always go;
give the command to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.
Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of those who are evil and cruel.*

*For you have been my hope, Sovereign LORD,
my confidence since my youth.
From birth I have relied on you;
you brought me forth from my mother's womb.
I will ever praise you.
I have become a sign to many;
you are my strong refuge.
My mouth is filled with your praise,
declaring your splendour all day long. **Amen.***

MORE TO EXPLORE

You can also find versions of the Gethsemane story in **Matthew 26: verses 36-46**, and in **Mark 14: verses 32-42**, and told slightly differently in **John 18: verses 1-11**. What do the different authors bring out of the story? Why do you think there are differences? And what important aspects are the same?

ONLINE RESOURCE: MEDITATION

This a selection of encouraging Bible verses set to music, for you to pray or meditate with at home, especially when feeling fearful or needing courage:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=en2uR68uTg>

Good Soil: Material written and produced by Andrew Murphy & Melissa Wheeler
© 2022 Market Harborough Methodist Circuit (except where indicated).