

Your shape for God's service: meditation, bible study and worship

AIMS AND OUTCOMES

Help participants understand that

- their working lives are an integral part of their Christian lives
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RESOURCES

Hand-outs and pens

Meditation: Am I a particular shape? 10 mins

Leader to the group: I suggest you sit comfortably upright, relax and close your eyes. In the silences, listen to God and ask him to give you his insights and truth. Your thoughts are just between you and God. You won't have to tell them to anyone.

Pray briefly for the group: committing ourselves to God, and asking the Holy Spirit to work in our minds and hearts.

- a) What sort of shape do you see yourself as being?

(Pause for people to think for a moment)

I bet the first thing that came into your mind was the shape of your body! For most of us there's a part of our body which we wish was a different shape. But I want you to think of your shape more deeply than just the physical aspects.

- b) Now think of yourself as a whole person – mind and spirit as well as body. Think of everything that has shaped you and made you the person you are: your genes, your upbringing, your life-experiences, your gifts and abilities. What sort of person has it made you?

(Pause)

- c) What has your life been like?

Many people see the shape of their lives as fixed and fated. Others think everything is random chance and we are shaped by our own reactions and choices. The Christian belief is different from both of those. We aren't the product of chance – God has lovingly designed and created us in his image, for a purpose. But he doesn't fix the shape of our lives in advance either. He's made us free, so we can choose either to work with him in shaping the process or to turn our backs on him and to try to do it on our own. What has your response been?

(Pause)



d) Has God been involved?

- When you look at your life and your shape as a whole person, do you see God as having been involved in shaping you? (Pause)
- Do you ever pray, asking God to shape you? (Pause)
- Do you see the shape that you are, as being God's gift to you?

(Pause)

e) How do you think God sees you? What shape are you in his eyes?

(Pause)

Pray briefly and simply, aloud, on behalf of the group, thanking God for each person and asking him to shape us and the way we see ourselves.

Small groups: 15 mins

What does the Bible say about service and ministry?

- That all Christians are called to service and ministry (no exceptions!)
- That ministry grows out of just using whatever God has given you, to serve God and other people. As you do that, it will focus down into a few particular forms of ministry which God is calling you to be and do. An area of ministry, or a particular role, will develop around the particular gifts you have. Let's look at what the Bible says about it.

Distribute the hand-out: 'Am I called to ministry and to God's service?' and a pen

Allocate one Bible verse to each pair (there are eight different verses, so that's enough for up to 16 people).

Allow time for the pairs to discuss and to write in the right-hand column.

Go round the group, with each pair reading out their Bible reference and the phrase they have written.

(As you do this, encourage everyone to write down all the agreed short phrases, so they all end up with a complete sheet). Go briefly through the remaining verses, asking someone to read each out, and encouraging anyone to comment on its core message.

Hopefully, people will express roughly the following truths in relation to the verses: (if they don't, then nudge them towards it... but do not give the impression that you are testing them, or that there is only one "right answer"!)



In relation to the eight biblical verses:

1. I've been created to serve God
2. I've been uniquely chosen...
3. I've been given a gift to use in serving others. (Every Christian has gifts from God)
4. I'm authorised and sent by Jesus.
5. My gifts are to equip myself and others for ministry.
6. God has placed me here for a purpose and the Church needs me! Everyone's ministry is equally important.
7. I'm accountable to God for how I use my life (and must not judge others).
8. Do it for Christ, not to impress other people

Encourage the questions at the back of the sheet to be taken home for reflection and prayer.

Individual response: 'To think about' 15 mins

Give each person a copy of the John Powell text (hand-out two)

Invite people, on their own, to reflect on the words of this reading, and to write down anything they feel prompted to do, to say, to explore, to be, in response to God's call.

What might be the first step(s) you need to take?

What response might you want to make to God at this stage?

What help might you need from Him?

At the end of the time, invite people to fold up the paper like a letter, and to put their name on the outside. (This will be needed for the worship at the end)

Small groups: 20 mins

Reflect as a group on the same poem about the role of the church. What is God calling you as God's People to do, to say, to explore, to be in response to God's call.

What might be the first steps you need to take?

What help might you need?

Whole group discussion: 10 mins

Are we spiritually in good shape?

It's no good having dozens of dazzling gifts and knowing just what our shape is, if we are not in good shape spiritually. God is much more concerned about whether we are holy, faithful and Christ-like than about whether we are gifted and successful. In the Parable of the



Talents (Matthew 25), the master's words to the servant are, "Well done good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your Lord". We are to be faithful in using what we've been given, not to worry about comparing ourselves with other people and their gifts.

That sort of holy assurance and confidence depends on knowing deep down that God loves us, forgives and accepts us. None of this gifts business is any good unless we have a living and loving relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our desire to serve God must flow out of love, not out of duty or guilt or fear or a desire to prove ourselves...

So pray regularly that God will deepen your love for Him and others. Try to develop a habit of reading the Bible daily (if you haven't already). Join a regular Bible study, prayer or discussion group in the church. Do not fall into the trap of 'loving the Lord's work more than you love the Lord himself.'

Discuss this and ask whether there are any ways in which group members wish to grow spiritually and in their relationship with God.

If so, in what ways? And is there anything the church can do to help them?

This is tremendously important. Our spiritual health and maturity have a huge effect on how we are able to serve God.

Worship: 10 minutes

Invite people to place their 'letter' in front of themselves – this symbolises their offering of themselves to God.

Read Isaiah 41.8-10 and 13, allowing people to listen and pray. You may like to sing, say or listen to 'Here I am, Lord (I, the Lord of sea and sky)' or 'Take my Life'.

Read the Challenge and Prayer of Commitment:

Challenge (St Teresa of Avila)

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
No feet but yours, no hands but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ is to look out on a hurting world.
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless all now.

Prayer of commitment(Charles de Foucauld)

My Father, I abandon myself to you.
Do with me as you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you.
I am prepared for anything, I accept everything.



Provided your will is fulfilled in me and in all creatures
I ask for nothing more, my God.
I place my soul in your hands.
I give it you, my God, with all the love of my heart because I love you.
And for me it is a necessity of love, this gift of myself,
This placing of myself into your hands
Without reserve
In boundless confidence
Because you are my Father.