

# The Growing Season

Our Life with God takes time to grow.

We will all have different ways of nurturing our spiritual life, and growing in Christ. But sometimes it helps to do things together. Over the course of the summer, you are invited to share with the whole congregation in six challenges. Each challenge involves a commitment to do something specific, and should take about an hour during the week. At the end of the summer, there will be a meal at the rectory where you can share your stories and talk about what The Growing Season was like.

The six challenges will focus on:

- reading the bible
- prayer
- thinking about your life story
- different ideas about God
- talking about faith
- helping someone

## The Growing Season Challenge 1: Read the whole of a Gospel

Suggestions:

- read it in one sitting if you can so that you get a sense of the pace and shape of the story
- alternately, read it over a couple of days but try to keep the flow in your mind.
- consider reading a different translation to usual.
- Mark is a good starting point if you have never done this before.
- If you have read the whole of a gospel recently, you might want to try Acts instead.

**Why do this?** Most of the time we read the bible in small bits. When we read a whole book at once, the story has a chance to surprise us and the particular style and concerns of each gospel writer become clear.

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## Challenge 2:

### Spend 10 minutes a day in silence.

suggestions:

- find a quiet space where you won't be interrupted
- if you're at home, switch the phone ringer off
- dogs and cats aren't very good at this unless you've trained them to it.
- sit or stand, eyes closed or looking at one thing (a tree, the horizon...)
- take a few deep breaths, ask God to be present to you, and just be open to whatever you are feeling, whatever God is doing.

**Why do this?** Our relationship with God needs time and space without distraction. Prayer is nothing more than the desire to be with God—we don't always need words. Ten minutes stillness and silence also interrupts the patterns of stress and busyness that so many of us fall into.

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## Challenge 3:

### Draw a Life- Map

suggestions (adapt as need be):

- decide how you will do this: as a time-line? or by drawing your life as if it were a road (where is it straight, curved, hilly, flat) , or a river (what is it's source, where are the deep channels, rapids, wide shallows bits, where is it going?), or even as a tree (roots, branches, leaves...)
- sketch out key events, places, people, turning-points, concerns...
- where has God been? mark in times when God seemed close/far, when beliefs shifted, any key points of religious experience or change...
- feel free to use words or pictures or both

**Why do this?** It sometimes helps to look at the broad patterns of our life – to think about what has been important, to recognize how we have changed, and 'where' we are now. Sometimes it is also easier to see where God has been in retrospect – drawing a life map is like writing scripture: telling the story of our life with God and with other people.

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### **Challenge 4: Talk about God**

More specifically: Talk to a member of the congregation or another Christian Friend about your understanding of God (image of God) as a child, as a young adult, ten years ago, today.

suggestions:

- this one is mostly self evident.
- I suggest you combine the task with tea & cakes

Why do this?

...because it's good to articulate how our sense of God has change over the years, and to learn not to be embarrassed talking about it. It's also interesting to hear other people's stories.

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### **Challenge 5: Ask someone about their beliefs.**

This time the goal is to listen to someone who wouldn't readily identify themselves as Christian: maybe someone of a different faith, someone who says they are 'spiritual but not religious', an atheist or an agnostic. It should be someone who will be comfortable talking with you.

Three questions you might ask to help get started:

- 'What matters most to you?'
- 'What idea or beliefs would you actively defend?'
- 'Do you think that there is a spiritual dimension to life?'

You are simply there to listen — though you should also be willing to give your own answers if they ask. This is not about trying to convert or change someone else's mind (which is mostly God's business anyway), but a time to listen.

**Why do this?**

It's good to try to understand other viewpoints and to think about the commitments people make in life. It can also be a way of seeing what God is doing in the world, even if God is not being named.

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## **Challenge 6:**

### **Do Something for Someone**

Is there someone you've been meaning to ring or visit for ages? Is there a neighbour who needs a lift or practical help of some sort? Is there someone walking past you on the street whom you could help by carrying their bags? ...a stray cat who need attention?

This week's challenge doesn't involve doing anything unusual or extraordinary. It is simply about reaching out to someone because God is there — in the interaction, in the need, in the offering.

#### **Why do this?**

(It's self-evident this week, I suspect.)

#### **A Note on Method:**

The Growing Season first ran over the summer of 2007 in Holy Trinity, Dunoon and St Paul's, Rothesay.

Each challenge was printed on an A5 sheet, which had the introduction on the reverse. This was handed out with the pew sheet.

For every challenge, a poster went up with a sheet of gold stars next to it. The congregation was encouraged to put a gold star up whenever they completed that challenge. Most people liked this, and laughed about it. It helped all of us see which challenges the congregation found easiest, and which were avoided. It was different in each congregation.

Please feel free to use or adapt these as you wish. The idea is simple, and it seems to work.

If you come up with interesting challenges, please share them.