



Quiet

Last month we thought about our senses and read the Bible looking for the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and other details we often miss. This February, as we approach the day of contemplation 'Ash Wednesday', we are going to try a contrasting approach. Instead of looking to fill in the picture, looking for what is *present* — we want to change our focus to consider what is *absent*. What's going on in the pauses, the gaps, the information conspicuous by its absence, in what's left *unsaid*? What happens when we read the Bible alive to the quietness it contains, the mysteries. We also want to think about quietness more widely. Christians for thousands of years have used contemplative silence as part of their spiritual practice. The Bible often encourages living 'a quiet life'. What does that look like? Being withdrawn? Solitary? Dull? Not necessarily...

Perhaps a quiet life is one that is sensitive and open to God and to one another. A life that doesn't rush to fill all the silences; which takes time to notice others. A life that can pause and reflect — sometimes before taking action, sometimes after — with humility, grace and invention. A quiet life doesn't have to be a boring one. Many of the most heroic lives in history have been quietly determined. Living quietly can involve the shouts of frustration, the shrieks of joy, and the cries of courage but it also makes space for the whispers of reconciliation, the comfortable silences of love and the searching quiet of a restless soul looking for home. As we read the Bible together we will look for the silences, the shadows, the spaces where we can breathe and notice things we haven't noticed before — about scripture, about ourselves, and about our God.

The following discussion questions are designed to accompany the [A Quiet Life Resource Pack](#) to help adapt the material for small group work. They are divided into 4 parts to correspond with the 4 weeks of the Daily Worship theme. **These questions are just a guideline and there is no need to go through all the given questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose, or adapt to what interests your group.**

A Quiet Life

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Part 1: Living quietly

Conversation Starter

This week we are going to think about the idea of what it means to live 'quietly' or 'simply'.

How do you feel about quietness? Love it? Loathe it? Do you always have to have the radio on? Or do you long to get away from the hustle and bustle and get some peace and quiet?

As a group consider, what are some positive and negative examples of quiet? (Like an awkward pause in a conversation, or a deep content breath watching a sunset...)

Read Micah 6: 1-8

Sometimes when people are going through difficult times they put more pressure on themselves by repeatedly asking: *"Have I done enough?"* Or: *"Is there more I could do?"* Or: *"Is there more I could give?"* While it's important to reflect on our actions it can be easy to lose sight of what is 'enough' or what is reasonable to expect and to get carried away with ever bigger actions to try and make the situation right. Verse 7 of this reading shows the escalation of sacrifice: if a thousand rams isn't enough — is two thousand? What's the most I can possibly give? The second part of the verse is chilling.

In the middle of all this God hollers: "Hold up!" Or as we might say in Scotland "Haud the bus!" God doesn't require ever greater over-the-top sacrifices. God asks instead for the ongoing humble sacrifice of putting others before us, mindful of justice. It's not ever increasing loud displays, but quiet everyday actions that God asks for.

Where in your life could God be calling you to stop a minute, to "Haud the bus!" and go back to basics? To concentrate on getting on with simple quiet things that make the world a better place?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4: 9-12

Paul advises the Thessalonians to live simply and humbly. What do you make of Paul's advice? Are there any ways that you would like to simplify your everyday life?

Read Proverbs 30: 7-9

Of course not all who are rich disown God and not all who are poor steal — but this proverb recognises the pain that comes from having too much or too little. We are challenged by desperate need but also by decadent excess. If we have more or less than 'enough' we can begin to lose our sense of self.

But what is 'enough'? What is the sweet spot (not too much or too little) and how do we maintain it? And how do we make a society where people don't suffer from poverty or over-indulgence?

A Quiet Life

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Part 2: Quietness in context

Conversation Starter

A 'quiet life', which we are exploring this month, is not a 'silent life' — although it might feature times of silence. This quiet we are exploring is not so much about 'noise' as it is about living openly and graciously and with an attitude of simplicity and humility, tuned in to God and others.

When is it important in life to keep quiet? And when is it important to speak up?

Read Isaiah 58: 1-12

Living 'quietly' doesn't mean never raising your voice. We should not idolise spiritual disciplines like fasting while ignoring important social issues.

What are the injustices we could be shouting loudly about? And what are the simple actions behind the scenes that we could be quietly getting on with to work for justice and restoration?

Read Psalm 112

Lectio Divina is a traditional monastic way of reading the Bible in a four stage sequence. In the first step 'Lectio' the text is read slowly. Secondly in 'Meditatio' you reflect on the passage, open to what the Holy Spirit might want to show you. Thirdly in 'Oratio' you pray. Finally in 'Contemplatio' you spend some time in silence, just 'being' in the presence of God.

As a mini, unofficial *Lectio Divina* ask somebody in the group to read the passage above a second time slowly (pausing after each verse) while you meditate on the words. Don't worry too much about working out 'what the passage means', simply think about what stands out for you. As you listen you might want to ask yourself: What intrigues me? What puzzles me? What challenges me? What inspires me?

In a short time of quiet after this second reading, you could say a short prayer to God (not out loud, but instead in the quiet of your own mind) offering up your thoughts and feelings on this reading. Then as a group you could set a timer for a few minutes to sit in quiet simply resting in God's presence. (*Times of quiet in a group can be awkward when you're getting used to them, but relax and don't worry about doing or thinking 'the right thing'. Just take a moment to settle the mind and 'be', you could think back to your prayer or to the reading, or just enjoy the peace and quiet. God uses our words but also our times of quiet reflection to show us new things.*)

Read Exodus 14: 10-14

We will think particularly about the last verse (14): "The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." (NRSVA) How easy do you find it to be still? To do 'nothing'?

A Quiet Life

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Part 3: Walking quietly

Conversation Starter

A quiet life is not simply one of retreat and isolation. We can engage with the world — laughing and singing and shouting and lamenting, carrying a quietness with us — an alertness to God and one another. Seeking a quiet life means being open and sensitive to the world around us.

In public parks you sometimes see signs that say something along the lines of: “Take nothing but pictures and leave nothing but footprints.”

As we walk through the world what are the **pictures** we are taking and the **footprints** we are leaving? Or in other words — what are the **memories** we are treasuring and the **legacies** we are leaving behind? Or even, what do we want to **remember**? And how do we want to be **remembered**?

Read Matthew 5: 21-24

We are told to **go** and reconcile ourselves. Reconciliation here is not just a mental or emotional process, it's a physical action. We have to stop what we are doing and **go** and resolve the issue. On this walk the first step is often the hardest.

What helps you to take that first step towards reconciling with someone?

Read Psalm 23: 4

God does not promise us that we won't go through hard times. But we are never abandoned. Even in the bleakest moment God is there alongside us. God's presence is sometimes felt in specific thoughts, words, and actions. But it can also be felt in the quiet and stillness, in harder to express feelings.

Why does God quietly accompany each of us through our lives — even through difficult times?

Read 1 Corinthians 3: 1-9

In this reading, Paul reminds us that we are gardeners and not the sunshine! In the same way that a gardener can nurture and care for plants but not actually *make them grow* — we can nurture and care for one another's faith but we *can't make someone have faith*. (In the parable of the sower **we explored in September last year** — we explored this idea of nurturing the seeds that fall.)

Exploring this gardening metaphor further — what are other ways we can be like gardeners and tend to the lives of those around us? Think of how a gardener cares for their plants — and think how we could do some of those same things for the people round about us.

A Quiet Life

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Part 4: The transforming quiet

Conversation Starter

As the theme draws to a close, and in anticipation of **Lent** (the period of reflection in the Christian calendar before Easter) we consider those special moments when we step into the quiet heart of things. A place, set apart, where we open ourselves up to the power of the Spirit working in the quiet to change us. It might be a physical space like a sacred building or it might be a mental place of quiet contemplation with God. As we approach Lent 2020 — what are you hoping to discover anew this year about the Bible, about yourself, and about your God?

Read Matthew 6: 1-6

It's tempting to do good deeds as a 'humble-brag' for others to see and even more tempting to stop being 'pious' if there's no one there to see it! It's good to do good things but less good if we are just doing them so others can see that we are good... the motivation is all wrong. We are right in seeing our piety as part of a relationship — it is a relationship that involves God's grace and the needs of others — but it is not meant to be a way of feeling smug and superior.

What are some ways over Lent that we can be generous without getting the credit? Have a think together of things you can do to quietly bless others.

Read Isaiah 11: 1-9

A vision of mutually incompatible needs somehow being met — of the predator and prey relationship being transformed — of all getting along together in a peaceable kingdom. As a group, brainstorm other examples of transformed relationships like those in verses 6-8. These could be from the natural world or from our own society. 'The Labradoodle and the Grouse will eat quinoa together', or 'The Loanshark and the Bankrupt will have a water-fight'... Go mad!

Read 2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:10

This month we have been exploring the positives of living a quiet life — sensitive to God and to others. But quietness isn't always a choice. Sometimes it is forced on us against our will. But even in the horrible quiet of injustice and oppression God is there listening — waiting with the deeper quiet of the universe, a quiet that can hold our tears and that says the bound can be freed, the beaten can be lifted up, and the silenced can sing.

As a group you may wish to take an opportunity to have an open time of prayer where you pray for those around the world who have been silenced, ignored, or ridiculed. Someone could begin by saying **"We know Lord that you listen to all of your dear creation."** And as a group, each time an individual prays you could respond together: **"God listens to all."** Someone could end the prayer time by saying: **"Lord God we thank you for your love, patience, and care. Amen."**