

Keep Growing!

Introduction

This series is based on a toolbox to help us grow as disciples – followers of Jesus Christ, whatever stage we are at on our journey.

The toolbox contains a set of tools based on the way that Jesus encouraged his disciples to grow, which can also be seen elsewhere in the Bible. This particular toolset is called 'Life Shapes'. It doesn't aim to cover all aspects of discipleship, but it is a simple visual way to help us remember a few of them.

Here, we are looking at the first 4 of the 8 Life Shapes. The full set have been developed initially at St Thomas Crookes Church, Sheffield and subsequently used by many churches here and in the US.

To go with these notes, I have put the pictures of the Life Shapes themselves into a separate document, which you can download from the website.

I hope you find the series helpful – do let me know what you think!

Toby

Further Reading

If you want to read more about Life Shapes, the best books are 'A Passionate Church' or 'A Passionate Life' (2005) by Mike Breen. Unfortunately, they are both now out of print. The Life Shapes are also included in a book published in 2014 covering wider issues for church leaders, 'Building a Discipling Culture' also by Mike Breen.

Growth Group Notes

April-May 2015



Keep Growing!

1: A Circle

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

The Easter Story is one of death & resurrection. What have been the best/worst moments in your life over the Easter period?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Sing a song or hymn based on the good news of Easter

WORD

Explain the Series – either from what you've heard on Sunday or using the introduction to this series of notes.

Use the separate document showing the Life Shapes. It will help if everyone can see a copy of the first one today (The Circle).

Read Mark 1:14-20

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- What do you think the 'Kingdom of God' is like? And how was it 'near' when Jesus turned up? (v15)

Growth Group Notes

April-May 2015



- Jesus says: 'Repent', 'Believe' and 'Follow me'. Which of these do you find it easiest or hardest to obey? Why?

Look at the Life Shapes circle (in the separate document)

- Take a few moments to explain the circle to one another – hopefully the sermon will have helped!
 - * Which bits do you like or not like about this picture?
- **In 2s/3s:** Think of a time recently when something significant has happened in your life (good or bad). Talk about how you reacted. For example: Continue as normal, work out who's responsible, spend time reflecting on it, work out a plan of action, consult others, seek answers etc.
 - * What is your most common natural reaction to significant events?
- **Together or in 2s/3s:** God doesn't cause all the significant events in our lives, but he can still teach us through them, if we choose to learn.
 - * Have there been times in your life when you have done this?
 - * How easy do you find it to see things God's way and to grow?
 - * Do you feel you grow more through good events or bad ones?
- How could you use the circle to help you?
- Share your thoughts as a whole group.

WHAT NEXT?

- As a group: Our country is about to come to a significant point. Talk & pray about the election... What is God saying? How should we respond?
- **During the week:** Set aside some time to look back over your life. Write down a few of the significant events. Which did you learn & grow from? Are there still things you could learn from those events? Spend time talking to God about these.

Keep Growing!

2: The Semi-Circle

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

All share: In your opinion, what are the best and worst things about growing older?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Each take a pen & paper and draw a picture representing 'Growth' of some sort. Talk about what you've drawn. Say short prayers asking God to help you grow in a positive way.

WORD

This week we're looking at a 2-sided Life Shape – a semi-circle. Make sure everyone can see a copy of the picture. It's in the pictures document on the website downloads page.

Read Mark 1:9-15

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- Jesus is baptised at the start of his ministry, then immediately 'sent into the desert' by the Holy Spirit (v12). How do you feel about Jesus' ministry starting in this way? Why did God do it?

Growth Group Notes

April-May 2015



- How do you feel about starting with rest and time with God before doing the work that God has given you to do... rather than just recovering or retreating afterwards?

Read John 15:1-8 and look at the 'Semi-Circle' Diagram

- Take a few moments to explain the diagram to one another.
 - * What do you like/not like about it?
- In John 15, Jesus talks of abiding (remaining) in him and of bearing fruit. What does he mean by these words?
- Jesus also talks of God pruning us when bear fruit, so that we bear more fruit. How might God do that in our lives?
- **In 2s/3s:** What patterns would you like to have in your life of working, resting and setting aside times with God? Daily / weekly / monthly / annually / over longer?
 - * What patterns do you actually have in practice?
 - * What achievable steps could you take to improve?

WHAT NEXT?

- Each share one thing you will be doing tomorrow. Pray for one another in those places.
- Pray for one of the Far Out organisations that we're connected with as a church. If you haven't already, choose one to support as a Growth Group and nominate someone to keep the group updated.
- **Challenge!** If you would like to spend time growing deeper in your faith with 2-4 other people, then why not try 'Growing Stronger'. Ask your Growth Group Leader or Toby for further details. There's also a leaflet on the website downloads page.

Keep Growing!

3: A Triangle

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

We're looking at a series of geometric shapes in this series.

Each share: What is/was your favourite subject at school and why?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Read Psalm 145, going round the room reading one verse at a time. – allow people to pass if they need to. Then, in a minute of silence, encourage each person choose one or two verses and use them as a silent prayer to God.

WORD

This week, we're looking at the 3-sided Life Shape – a triangle. The picture is in the pictures document on the website downloads section... although Up-In-Out will hopefully be familiar to many people!

Read Mark 12:28-31 and Mark 1:29-39

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

Growth Group Notes

April-May 2015



- Jesus tells us the most important commandment (12:30). Give as many quick examples as you can of what it could mean to live like this in practice.
- The triangle reminds us to grow in our love for God (Up), for other Christians (In) and for everyone else (Out). Which of these do you find easiest and hardest? Why?
- Each on your own: On a piece of paper draw two triangles labelled Up-In-Out. Mark one May 2014, the other May 2015. Score yourself out of 10 in each direction for where you feel you were/are.
 - * Now, in 2s or 3s: Explain what you've drawn and why.
 - * Then talk about practical achievable ways you could try to grow in each direction. Please be encouraging to one another!

Read Mark 1:29-39

- Here, Jesus spends time with his closest followers (v29-31), with the crowds (v32-34, 39) and alone with God (v35). In-Out-Up.
 - * For each of these elements (Up, In, Out): How would Jesus' ministry have been different if he had missed it out?
 - * If you were one of Jesus' followers in v35-37, and the crowds were banging on the door looking for him, how would you have felt when you discovered he'd gone? What would you have said to him when you found him praying (v37)?
 - * How good are you at encouraging others to make God a priority in their lives?

WHAT NEXT?

- **Pray:** Take Up, In & Out in turn. For each, share as many things as you can think of that we do as a church. Pray for these activities.
- A Challenge! How can you encourage one another as a group to grow Up, In and Out on an ongoing basis?

Keep Growing!

4: A Square

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Each share: What is your favourite shape (any shape) and why?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

In preparation, find some prayers by famous saints on the internet or in books (St Francis, St Patrick, St Anselm etc). Let different people read them out slowly and join with the Amens. You could listen to one that has become a song, such as 'Make me a channel of your peace' You might like to talk about what you like/dislike about them afterwards.

WORD

This week we're looking at a 4-sided Life Shape – a square. Make sure everyone can see a copy of the picture. It's in the pictures document on the Growth Group part of the website downloads page.

Read Mark 1:16-18; Mark 8:1-10; Luke 9:1-10; Acts 2:1-4 & 14

Discuss your initial reactions to the passages:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- How did Jesus train his disciples to do the things that he was doing?

Growth Group Notes

April-May 2015



- How do you think the disciples felt in each story?
 - * How did they grow?
- It's been said that 'We are all sheep from the front and shepherds from behind'. On your own, write down your answers to...
 - * Who have you followed in your life? Think of a few people. It may help to think about: Who influences you? Whose opinion do you care about? Who sets you an example or gives you advice (good or bad)? Whose decisions affect you?
 - * Who has followed you? To help: Who listens to your opinions? Who copies your example (even if they don't admit it!) Who are you responsible for caring for? Who does it affect if you say or do something good or bad?
 - * Discuss in 2s/3s some of your answers
- How could you have a more positive effect on those who you influence – helping them to grow closer to God? (however far away they are now)
- What could you do to ensure that you are influenced more by people who help you grow closer to God and less by those who don't?

WHAT NEXT?

- Looking back over this series, talk about which shape has been most helpful to you. Then pray for one another.
- Share any 'God-news Stories' For example... things that God has been doing in your life recently or times when you feel you've grown closer to him or he's guided you or helped you – or someone you care about, or a time when you've shared your faith in word or action.
Pray together about these times & pray for more!
- Don't forget to find out about Growing Stronger if you want to spend a bit more time growing closer to God with others.