

FRUITFULNESS ON THE FRONT LINE

THE BIGGER PICTURE

'So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life - your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life - and place it before God as an offering.'

Romans 12:1, Message Version

Key Question: How am I already being fruitful on my frontline?

Aims of the Session: To see that everyone has a frontline. To begin to develop a rich understanding of fruitful living for God.

Core Text: Colossians 1:15-20

Materials Required: Bibles, pens, post-it notes, 6M prayer cards (see p.6) - one per person. These cards are available to print yourself or to order at www.licc.org.uk/fruitfulness.

Your Frontline is the place where you spend significant time through the week in contact with non-Christians.

Having been introduced to 6 expressions of fruitfulness, consider the following questions:

- How does the 6M framework broaden your understanding of what it means to be fruitful?
- On a post-it note, each write down the 'M' that you feel you are strongest at. Can you think of an example of this 'M' in action on your frontline to share with the group?
- Reviewing the group's post-it notes, where are the group's strengths? Where might you pray for particular growth over the coming weeks?

Bible Reflection - Colossians 1:15-20

This passage is part of a letter that Paul sent to the Christians living in Colossae, a small city in modern day Turkey. As the opening of Chapter 2 tells us, Paul is writing to ensure that the believers are not swayed by false teaching. In this hymn-like passage, Paul declares Christ's supremacy over the entire universe in order to set the scene for the very practical teaching that will follow. For us too, this big understanding of the lordship of Christ provides a rich foundation for our daily actions on our frontlines.

- Which words are repeated numerous times in the passage - what does this tell us about Jesus' lordship?
- As Christians, we believe that we have been reconciled individually to God through Christ's death. How might v19-20 expand our understanding of God's work of reconciliation?
- Many in today's society believe that faith should remain private and has nothing beneficial to contribute to workplaces, politics, family life or society in general. How might the fact that Jesus made everything and died to reconcile all things, change the way we see our frontlines?

Praying Forwards (10 mins)

Pray for an increased awareness that God is with you on your frontline this week and that Jesus is Lord in that place, whatever happens.

Pray for eyes to see where you are already being fruitful on your frontline and for greater confidence in God's promise to be at work in us.

Takeaway Action

Where might you place a 6M prayer card to prompt you to think and pray about the different ways that you can be fruitful for Christ this week on your frontline?

Modelling Godly Character

'I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation - the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ - for this will bring much glory and praise to God.' Philippians 1:9-11, NLT

Key Question: How might I model godly character on my frontline?

Aims of the Session: To see that our frontlines are an important place where godly character can be both developed and displayed in us.

Core Text: Galatians 5:13-26

Bible Reflection - Galatians 5:13-26 (20 mins)

In this well-known passage Paul lists nine characteristics of a life lived in the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These qualities of new life in Christ stand in direct contrast to the 'sinful acts of the flesh' associated with the old way of life. Rather than being a list of qualities that we must strive to attain, the fruit of the Spirit are outworkings of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives and spring from our identity in Christ.

- Look at the list of the fruit of the Spirit. Are there particular situations on your frontline where the rubber hits the road and these characteristics are tested?
- The fruit of the Spirit are characterised by inner assurance and selfless love. What can stop us from being others-orientated on our frontlines?
- Paul tells us that these fruit come from a life 'led by the Spirit' (v.18) and so are not a 'to-do' list, but rather characteristics of walking with God. What might it mean for us to 'keep in step with the Spirit' (v.25) on our frontlines?

Praying Forwards (10 mins - in pairs)

Having reflected on some of the good things about our weeks at the beginning of this session, thank God for these things and ask him to show more of his love for others through you in the week ahead.

Maybe you feel regretful about a time when you failed to model godly character? Ask for God's forgiveness for these times and thank him that he promises to continue to be at work in us.

Pray that God would shape your character on your frontline this coming week. You may like to ask for prayer for a particular situation coming up this week where you might find it more difficult to respond in a godly way.

Takeaway Action

Read through Galatians 5:13-26 again a few times this week and use it as a launch pad for praying for your frontline.

Making Good Work

'And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.' Colossians 3:17

Key Question: How might I make good work with God on my frontline?

Aims of the Session: To see that there is dignity and value in the work we do on our frontlines and that this can be done with and for God.

Core Text: Genesis 1-2

Work is a gift God has given us so we can serve other people. So when we use the word 'work', we're not just talking about paid employment, but rather the tasks that we each do on a regular basis, which may include voluntary work, housework, childcare etc

Thinking Back (5 mins)

In the last session we looked at Modelling Godly Character.

- Where have you seen the fruit of the Spirit in your life on your frontline this past week? Does one person have a story to share that will encourage the group?

Bible Reflection - Genesis 1-2 (25 mins)

As this is a long passage, you will probably find it helpful to split into two smaller groups for the following questions, with one group looking at chapter 1 and the other at chapter 2. After you have looked at the questions, feed back your main points to the whole group.

The opening chapters of Genesis provide a rich picture of God who designed work to be good for the human race. We don't earn God's love by our works; rather work is a gift and opportunity to join in with what God is doing - to co-work with him to make the world a better place. It's only later in chapter 3 that work becomes frustrating, marred by the consequences of the Fall. By looking at this original purpose then, we can begin to see how our daily tasks on our frontline can be part of God's good purposes for the world.

- Having made such an impressive world, what is the responsibility that God gives to human beings (see particularly chapter 1:27-28 and chapter 2:15)? To what extent are you surprised by how much responsibility he gives us?

- In our work on our frontline, we can reflect some of the ways that God works in creation, for example by: Bringing order - Making provision - Bringing joy - Bringing beauty - Releasing potential

- Which of the characteristics above do you most easily see in your own tasks?

- How might seeing your individual work as part of God's bigger plans for the world

affect

the way that you go about your tasks on your frontline?

- God reviewed his work and said that it was good (Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25).

What does 'good work' look like on your frontline? When are you ever tempted to give something other than your best?

Praying Forwards (10 mins - in pairs)

- It's often easy to turn to God in times of crisis, but how might we develop a rhythm of prayer that invites God to work with us in our day-to-day tasks so that we are always working in his strength?

- Pray for an increased sense that God is with you on your frontline. Pray for eyes to see how your everyday tasks matter and play a part in God's big plans for the world.

'Teach me, my God and King, in all things Thee to see, And what I do in anything To do it as for Thee.' George Herbert

Takeaway Action

Take a minute at the end of each day to jot down one example of good work on your frontline this week to praise God for:

Ministering Grace and Love

'We love because he first loved us.' 1 John 4:19

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Key Question: How might I minister grace and love to people on my frontline?

Aims of the Session: In light of the grace that God has shown to us, to see how we might minister grace and love to those we interact with on our frontlines.

Core Text: Luke 10:25-37

Thinking Back (5 mins)

In the last session we looked at Making Good Work,

- Take a minute to think back to what was covered - has anything that you talked about as a group had particular significance this week as you have been back on your frontline?
- Does anyone have a story to share of good work on their frontline that the group can celebrate?

Bible Reflection - Luke 10:25-37 (20 mins)

This is a powerful parable of a Samaritan man, who would have been despised by the Jewish people, ministering grace and love to someone considered to be his enemy. Jesus told this provocative story in response to an expert in the Jewish law who was trying to draw lines around the people to whom God expected him to show love. Through the story, Jesus seems to set an impossible standard for inheriting eternal life - we're not always going to succeed in loving others in this way. This passage is therefore an encouragement to radical love, but also a reminder that we will never be good enough to earn eternal life. Like the injured man, we too rely on mercy.

- Who are our difficult 'neighbours' on our frontlines and what are some of the reasons we find not to minister grace and love to them?
- If our actions are a reflection of what is in our hearts, in what ways did the heart of the Samaritan differ to the hearts of the priest and the Levite?
- In what ways were the actions of the Samaritan costly to himself? What can it cost us to minister generous love and grace to those on our frontlines?
- How do you think the expert in the law may have felt after Jesus' command to "Go and do likewise"? (v. 37)

Praying Forwards (10 mins)

Like the man by the side of the road, we have been shown lavish grace by Jesus - the ultimate Good Samaritan. Our love and grace towards others therefore springs from a place of thankfulness for the grace that we have been shown.

- Pray that God would reveal more of his grace and love for us.

Take a moment to reflect on what it might mean for you to "go and do likewise" on your frontline. Listen to God's prompting.

- Pray that God would give you a deeper awareness of how you could respond.
- Pray that, like Peter with his newspaper clippings, you would find increasing ways

to support one another on each other's frontlines.

Takeaway Action

Each member of the group might like to allocate a budget of £3 to be used this week to show love and grace to someone on their frontline. You could perhaps buy somebody a coffee or write a kind note in a card. How might you bless someone with your £3?

"Love is not a possession but a growth. The heart is a lamp with just oil enough to burn for an hour, and if there be no oil to put in again its light will go out. God's grace is the oil that fills the lamp of love."

Henry Ward Beecher

Moulding Culture

‘Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.’

Romans 12:2

Key Question: How might I begin to influence the culture of my frontline in accordance with Kingdom values?

Aims of the Session: To see the values that underpin the cultures of our frontlines; to see how we might affirm the good and think creatively about bringing positive change where needed.

Core Text: Matthew 5:13-16

Thinking Back (5 mins)

In the last session we looked at Ministering Grace and Love,

- How did you get on using your £3 to bless someone on your frontline this week? How did they react?

Bible Reflection - Matthew 5:13-16 (10 mins)

This passage comes towards the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus sets out the way of life for his followers. The ‘blessed’ sayings which come before (in 5:3-12) are not presented as high ideals we have to live up to so much as a signal that a different set of values is now in play. Such values characterise those who belong to God’s kingdom and inevitably impact the world in which God’s people live. When it comes to being ‘salt’ and ‘light’, notice that Jesus says ‘You are...’, not ‘You should try really hard to be...’ - a reminder that God sees us as those who really can ‘mould culture’ as we seek to live faithfully as disciples of Jesus.

- How might the images of ‘salt’ and ‘light’ help us think about what it means to influence our frontline culture?
- In 5:16, Jesus says, ‘let your light shine before others’. What could this look like for you, practically, on a daily basis?

exercise in Pairs (20 mins)

Come back to the things you wrote down about your frontline culture and then find a partner to talk through the following:

- Share with your partner a summary of what you wrote down.
- Is there one particular negative thing about the culture of your frontline that you would love to see change?
- Together look for a Kingdom antidote (alternative) that might address the negative thing you identified. How might God use you here to start to bring about change?
- Together, thank God for the positive elements of your frontline culture. Pray for each other that God will give you the wisdom, faith and courage to start influencing the culture of your frontline for his glory.

Praying Forwards - as a group (10 mins)

Take a moment to reflect on this quote from Reinhold Niebuhr, then pray it aloud together.

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Takeaway Action

Ask a couple of people on your frontline what they think is good and not so good about the culture of your frontline - their responses might spur you to action and may even open up opportunities for a conversation about the Christian faith!

Mouthpiece for Truth and Justice

‘Seek justice, encourage the oppressed.

Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.’ Isaiah 1:17

Key Question: How might I be a mouthpiece for truth and justice on my frontline?

Aims of the Session: To see where justice and truth are not being upheld on our frontlines and to grow in wisdom and courage to speak up where necessary.

Core Text: 2 Samuel 12:1-13

Thinking Back (5 mins)

In the last session we looked at Moulding Culture - influencing the way things are done on our frontlines

so that they become places where people can better flourish.

- Does anyone have any observations to share about the culture of their frontline this week perhaps something positive or something negative that you noticed for the first time?

- Did anyone have the opportunity to begin to make a small change to their frontline culture?

Group Activity (5 mins)

On our frontlines, all of us will have found ourselves in conversations where the person we are talking to

is saying something unkind (whether true or not) about someone else.

Are there any tactics that you have found useful in these situations that have enabled you to stand up for truth and justice?

Bible Reflection - 2 Samuel 12:1-13 (20 mins)

In 2 Samuel 11, David, the King of Israel, had done something terrible, breaking three of the Ten Commandments in dramatic fashion. First, he covets another man’s wife, as he watches Bathsheba bathe from the vantage point of his palace roof. Second, he commits adultery with her, having had her brought to him, and she falls pregnant. Then thirdly, having failed to cover up his part in Bathsheba’s pregnancy, he has her husband Uriah killed, in order that he may take Bathsheba to be his own wife. David’s ruthless plan succeeded because many people around him had simply obeyed orders and did not question his actions. It appeared he had got away with what he had done. However, after the birth of the child, the Lord sends the prophet Nathan to bring David face-to-face with his wrongdoing.

- Nathan could have found many excuses not to follow the Lord’s instruction. If you were Nathan, what are some of the reasons you might have given for not wanting to confront King David?

- How does the injustice in the story that Nathan tells about the rich and the poor man relate to King David’s actions?

- What do you think would have happened in King David’s life if Nathan had not taken this step of courageous obedience?

- Nathan speaks with great wisdom and is able to bring King David to the point of realising his own wrongdoing. How might we learn from Nathan’s example? What factors might be relevant for us when we are weighing up whether or not to speak out in our own circumstances?

Praying Forwards - as a group (10 mins)

Spend a few minutes in silent reflection. Think about the injustices and untruths that you see on your frontline - is God bringing one particular thing to your attention? Like Nathan, might there be things that God is prompting you to do about this and is there any particular wisdom you may need?

Share your reflections in pairs or as a group and pray together.

Takeaway Action

Take some time to meditate on Philippians 4:8 this week and ask God what this might mean for your particular frontline:

‘Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.’

Messenger of the Gospel

‘How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!”’
Isaiah 52:7

Key Question: How might I be a messenger of the Gospel on my frontline?

Aims of the Session: To grow in confidence and intentionality in sharing the good news of Jesus with those on our frontlines.

Core Text: 1 Peter 3:15-16

Thinking Back (5 mins)

Paper for exercise in pairs, large sheet of paper and pens for prayer

In the last session we looked at being a Mouthpiece for Truth and Justice

- Did the last session change the way you saw things on your frontline?
- Did anyone in the group have an opportunity to speak up in a particular situation?

Exercise in Pairs (20 mins)

Who in particular on your frontline might God be prompting you to reach out to? Take a few moments to pray and once you have identified someone, reflect on the following questions. Once you’ve jotted down some thoughts, talk them through with the person next to you.

- How would you describe this person generally? • What do you think is important to this person?
- What do you think they believe about God?
- What specific things could you do to bless this person practically?
- What specific things could you do to aid their spiritual development?
- What might you do: - In the next two weeks? - In the coming months?

Praying Forwards (10 mins)

Praying for our frontline friends to come to know Jesus is something we need to commit to doing over the long-term. It will be easier to persevere in prayer if we get into the pattern of doing it together as a group as well as in our own personal prayers.

- Using a large sheet of paper, ask each group member to write the names of one or two people they want to commit to praying for.

- Take some time to pray for one another and those whose names are written down.

You might like to pray specifically for the person your discussion partner told you about earlier.

- Keep the piece of paper in a safe place, and make a commitment to take some time to revisit it in some of your future sessions together. Be prepared to ask each other how these friends are doing, whether you have seen God at work in their lives and what opportunities you have had to talk with them intentionally.

Takeaway Activity: Bible Reflection - 1 Peter 3:13-16 (10 mins)

This letter was written to a group of churches spread throughout the region that today we call Turkey. Although the churches may not have been suffering ‘official’ persecution from the state, they were facing all kinds of opposition as they sought to live for Christ on their ‘frontlines’.

Peter knew that these men, women and children were really up against it and so he wrote to them. But the content of his letter is not just about ‘hanging on in there’; rather he encourages them to courageously continue to do good knowing that it would provoke people to ask questions. Not everyone would react well to their responses, but, importantly, some would.

- Imagine you were a Christian back then, facing persecution and opposition. How might you be tempted to respond?

- The broader sweep of 1 Peter makes it clear that verbal witness is intrinsically linked to the witness of our actions. People will be provoked to ask questions when they see our good deeds (see especially 1 Peter 2:11-12). What might you learn from this?

- In verse 15, what do you think Peter means by ‘always be prepared...’? How might you make sure that you too are ‘prepared’?

- Look at verses 15 and 16. In what manner are we encouraged to share the gospel?

Why do you think the way we share the gospel matters so much?

The Journey On

'When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?" the servant asked. "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of re all around Elisha.'

2 Kings 6:15-17

Key Questions: How has our journey through the 6Ms helped us to see our frontlines, ourselves and God differently? How can we ensure that what we have learned has an on-going impact upon our lives?

Aims of the Session: To share personal reflections from the past seven sessions and leave feeling affirmed and confident. To make some specific decisions that will help us to continue living with a 6M perspective.

Thinking Back (5 mins)

In the last session we looked at being a Messenger of the Gospel,

- Is there anything that you discussed in the last session that has been helpful to you over the past week?

Perhaps you could pray for the people on your frontline again at the end of this session.