



CENTERED
A CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP EXPERIENCE

PARTICIPANT GUIDEBOOK



Centered: A Christian Discipleship Experience

Authors

Miriam McKenney
Way of Love Consultant

Jerusalem Greer
Staff Officer for Evangelism

The Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers
Canon to the Presiding Bishop for Evangelism, Reconciliation and Creation

With contributions from: (in alphabetical order)

The Rev. Isaiah Shabeequa Brokenleg
The Rev. Jenifer Gamber
The Rev. Canon Scott Gunn
Rebecca Hall
Ora Houston
Rachel Jones
The Right Rev. Frank Logue
Sr. Madeleine Mary
Miriam McKenney
Ellis Montes
Br. Keith Nelson
The Rev. Zack Nyein
The Rev. Canon Altagracia Perez-Bullard
Mildred Reyes
The Rev. Canon Robert Sihubwa
Ellie Singer
Mildred Reyes
The Right Rev. James Tengatenga

Learn more about Centered: A Christian Discipleship Experience at
<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love/centered/>. Share reflections and queries
by writing to wayoflove@episcopalchurch.org or on social media using #wayoflove.

Copyright © 2022 by The Episcopal Church
The Episcopal Church, 815 2nd Ave, New York, NY 10017

Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Centered: A Christian Discipleship Experience

Participant Guidebook

Welcome to Centered

Centered is a discipleship series guiding small gathered communities to get deeply rooted in love with God and one another, so that we all may grow to look, act, and love more like Jesus. The experience includes an initial three-session training for group facilitators, followed by nine core sessions during which church members, neighbors, and friends gather to share a meal and grateful prayer; a short film with related questions to discuss about God, belonging, and living a meaningful life; and support for each other in committing to intentionally follow Jesus and his Way of Love.

Like the Alpha and Via Media courses many Episcopalians and Anglicans have taken in the past, Centered is a faith-builder *and* a movement-builder. We hope it fuels a small group/circle movement that empowers lay people, transforms lives, and grows churches numerically and spiritually. A diverse team of disciples, spirituality leaders, and digital content creators across the Episcopal Church and in Anglican Communion have developed and filmed this suite of resources and tools. We hope it will be a blessing for generations to come.

Why Discipleship and Why Small Groups and Circles?

A disciple is one who learns and patterns her life after the life of the one she follows. We who take on the name “Christian” are disciples and followers of Jesus. Again and again, Jesus invited people to step onto the road with him, promising that if they followed, it would change their lives and the world.

He offered that invitation to the first disciples, the brothers and fishermen Simon Peter and Andrew. “Follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fish for people.” In Mark 2, he sees Matthew in the tax booth. “Follow me,” he calls out, and Matthew leaps to go. They follow because they sense the fullness of God in Jesus, and they want to experience that fullness for themselves. Christians have been answering that call for millennia.

Together, we disciples make up the Jesus Movement, the ongoing community of people who follow him and grow in loving, liberating, life-giving relationships with God, each other, and the earth, all in the pattern of Jesus. For many of us, church is so busy that we don’t have a chance to focus on following, being a disciple of, and growing in the Way of Love. There are so many details to tend to and meetings to attend, and that’s before considering the non-church responsibilities tugging at our sleeves. Getting to worship at all is an accomplishment, and we expect it to be the principal site for prayer, formation, scripture reflection, fellowship, and service. But when we get quiet, a lot of us admit to a yearning, to wanting more.

Back in the 1700s, John and Charles Wesley felt the same need. The brothers were good Anglicans – neither renounced their priesthood in the Church of England – but they agreed

that growing a full life with God takes edifying worship *and* intentional spiritual practice in small groups *and* service with the least of these. They craved the “strangely warmed hearts” and spiritual vitality of the early church. The Wesley descendants became Methodist Episcopalians, later known simply as Methodists, but their wisdom and the yearning behind it never really left the Episcopal and Anglican fold.

Across the Anglican Communion today, there is an energetic movement for intentional discipleship, what Anglicans everywhere call the “Jesus-shaped life.” The Episcopal incarnation of that movement is the Way of Love, an intentional commitment to following Jesus that is centered on seven habits (turn, learn, pray, worship, bless, go, rest) that shape us into his likeness. All these efforts spring from a common, growing, and urgent realization that being Christian is about having a God-saturated life. Not just inside the building. Not just for an hour on Sunday. Not just in meetings of the whole congregation.

There is no better way to grow and practice the Jesus Way than in our homes, in our day-to-day lives, with a circle of followers who love and mentor one another as apprentices in the Jesus Way. That has been true all along. (Note the practice of the church in the Book of Acts and its numerical and spiritual growth.) While some Episcopalians and Anglicans may have misgivings about small groups, we believe it is more than worth overcoming that resistance for the opportunity waiting on the other side. So please find the language that works best for you – small group, discipleship circle, small gathered community, neighborhood group, life group, cell gathering, or something else. Whatever the name, a small group or circle provides space for prayerful support and accountability as we seek to live the Jesus Way.

Particularly in this present moment, when pandemic has stripped away many of the trappings that usually surround the church, small discipleship groups and neighborhood circles may be the most effective and accessible way for us to walk the path to love, freedom, and abundant life that Jesus laid out.

Centered was created for just this purpose: to help participants to walk that path – not alone, but together in small groups and circles. Thank you for answering the call to take this life-changing journey.

With you on the journey,
Jerusalem, Stephanie+, and Miriam

Jerusalem Greer, Staff Officer for Evangelism
The Reverend Canon Stephanie Spellers, Canon for Evangelism, Reconciliation and Creation Care
Miriam McKenney, Discipleship Consultant

Getting Started

Centered is a nine-session experience. We encourage you to commit to the preparing fully and attending all nine sessions and bringing both an open mind and an open heart to the process.

How to Use This Guidebook

This guidebook is not required at the sessions. Your group leader has a much more detailed guide with suggestions for leading and enriching each session. This guidebook is a tool to help you to engage fully in your sessions and to reflect in the time around your gatherings. We hope you will use this guide to further explore the scriptures, themes, and questions that come up in your small group and to try on activities as part of your daily life. We also hope you will share any questions, “aha moments,” and insights you discover with your community – and beyond!

That said, it’s good for everyone to know the basic structure for each gathering. We’ve designed this model to create space for transformation, belonging, flourishing, and freedom. Groups can flex from 75 minutes with no meal to 90 minutes or two hours with a meal, depending on the time your group has scheduled. You can also adapt it to make room for specific content in any given session. The group may choose to appoint a timekeeper to make sure the gathering keeps moving and no section gets rushed or cut.

1. Meal (gather early and enjoy nourishment with one another)

The meal offers a time to share stories, build community, and deepen your relationship as a group. People tend to do this organically around food. Whether preparing a meal as a group, having a potluck, ordering takeout, or bringing a meal to an online meeting, coming together in this way actually places us in the footsteps of the early church.

If you’re sharing a meal, we encourage you to schedule your sessions for at least 90 minutes, with the first 30 or so minutes focused on the meal and check-in. You’ll need to experiment with the time and setting based on how your group handles meals.

2. Welcome and Prayer (3-5 minutes)

You can pray anytime: to start the meal, to center and focus the group and aid in transition, to close the session. If your group does not share a meal, start your meeting with a prayer. Your group might find different ways to incorporate prayer into your shared life.

The group leader may offer or begin the prayer at the first session. If you take turns hosting meals in homes, the host can offer a prayer. The host or co-host(s) can offer a prayer if you meet online. If you meet at a central location, group members can take turns bringing a prayer.

3. Small Group Covenant Review and Check-in (20 minutes, including about 1 minute per person to share)

You'll develop a Small Group Covenant in your first session. Going forward, you can review, revisit, and/or affirm it early in each session. Most of this time is devoted to check-in – the intentional time to connect briefly with each other around a specific question. Prompts could be as simple as (for the first session), "Why did you decide to join the Centered journey?" Or (for other sessions), "Where have you seen God moving in your life since our last session," or something else entirely.

Each person gets equal time to share – about 1 minute, depending on the size of the group. It will go fast, so please honor the timekeeper and the group and keep your responses brief. The group leader may at times arrange you in pairs or trios to facilitate longer sharing.

The group leader will also introduce the "talking piece," a physical object that a person holds while speaking. A gift from oral traditions, a talking piece might be a rock, a small cross, a poem on a card, a meaningful piece of jewelry, or anything that fits comfortably in hand. A talking piece is a great tool to remind everyone in the group to listen deeply to whoever is holding it. Even if you're gathering online, there are ways to incorporate a talking piece and practice attentive listening.

4. Content Engagement and Reflection (40-45 minutes)

Each session of Centered is anchored by two short videos (A and B) related to each session topic. Each topic is focused on Jesus and rooted in scripture, particularly the words and actions of Jesus. Remember that – even while the content is in front of you – the real point is not acquiring knowledge or sharing ideas; it's growing a more meaningful, authentic, loving relationship with God and one another.

We hope you'll be open to reflecting personally, taking some risks, allowing yourself to be honest and vulnerable, and welcoming other group members to do the same.

You may watch the videos ahead of time – especially Video A – but our experience is that something special happens if the group is able to watch together. Most online platforms make it possible for one person to play the video while all watch.

You can definitely reflect on the scripture, "wondering questions," and primer essay prior to and following the sessions. You'll find all this content in the session descriptions later in this guide.

5. Check-out and Prayer (5-10 minutes)

Closing well matters. We recommend groups go around and share **one word** about their experience in the session. For prayer, a prayer leader might invite you to go

around and say what you hope others will pray for on your behalf between sessions. The prayer leader might then sum up these hopes as part of a closing prayer, ending with a final prayer. Simple prayers like this go a long way to creating a spirit of love and unity within the group.

6. Make It Yours Engagement Opportunities (between sessions)

These simple optional activities help you to weave scripture and wisdom from the Centered sessions into your daily lives. You'll find them below, one set per session.

Are you ready? Let's begin!

Part I: **Living and Sharing** **Jesus-Centered Life**

 Sessions 1-3



Session I: Meeting Jesus and Each Other

Focus Prayer

As you begin this time of reflection on Session I, offer this prayer or the words of your own heart:

God, give me ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to know your love through my time here today. Amen.

Core Theme

Jesus – Who is Jesus Christ, why does he matter, and what's love got to do with it?

Scripture: John 15:1-11

Jesus said: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches.”

“Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

In a journal or with a partner, explore the following:

- In John 15:1-11, what words or phrases did you notice that illustrate who Jesus is? Who does Jesus say he is?
- In John 15:1-11, what kind of life does Jesus promise for those who follow him?
- Who is Jesus Christ, and why does he matter to you?
- Why does it matter that our lives, minds, and hearts center on Jesus?
- What difference has being “centered” on Jesus (“abiding” in him) made in your life? What difference do you hope it might make to your life going forward?

Closing Prayer

Close your reflection time with prayer, either with these words or your own.

I give thanks for the love of Christ, in and through all things. Amen.

Additional Engagement Opportunities

- Explore the practice of Turn from the Way of Love. How might you turn more fully and regularly to God?
- Between now and the next session, consider: “What part of your life needs to be centered or re-centered on Jesus?”



Session 2: Meeting Jesus and Sharing Life in Small Groups

Focus Prayer

As you begin your reflection time, offer this prayer or the words of your own heart.

God, give me ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to know your love through my time here today. Amen.

Core Theme

Small groups – Jesus gathered his disciples into a group of followers. We also flourish when we follow him as part of a small, intentional community where we experience belonging to God and to each other.

Scripture: Mark 3:13-19

Jesus went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons. So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

In a journal or with a partner, explore the following:

- What words or phrases in the passage from the Gospel of Mark did you notice that show how Jesus called people? What exactly did Jesus say and do?
- Have you ever been part of a small intentional group of followers of Jesus?
- How does following him in this way complement other parts of the Christian life (like individual and congregational)?
- How has being in a small group helped you or people you know to experience belonging to God and each other?
- How can you be intentional about your participation in Centered?

Closing Prayer

Close your reflection time with prayer, either with these words or your own.

I give thanks for the love of Christ, in and through all things. Amen.

Additional Engagement Opportunities

- Notice the people God has placed around you. How might you listen more deeply to

them and share more fully with them? Try deepening your connection with one person or a group of people in the time between Sessions 2 and 3.



Session 3: Following Jesus as a Way of Life

Focus Prayer

Before you begin this reflection time, offer this prayer or the words of your own heart.

*God, give me ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to know your love through my time here today.
Amen.*

Core Theme

Discipleship – We practice whole-life discipleship, that is, living and loving like Jesus in every part of our lives – not just on Sundays, but for our whole life long.

Scripture: Matthew 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, ““You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

In a journal or with a partner, explore the following:

- In the passage above, what word or phrase did you notice from Jesus’ first commandment? What word or phrase did you notice about the second commandment? Why do you think these stood out to you?
- How do you try to practice whole-life discipleship: living and loving like Jesus in every part of your life – not just on Sundays, but for your whole life long?
- What helps you to do this?
- What role do community and commitment play in living like this?

Closing Prayer

Close your reflection time with prayer, either with these words, or your own.

I give thanks for the love of Christ, in and through all things. Amen.

Additional Engagement Opportunity

Between now and Session 4, try to start each day with the “Morning Resolve” prayer:

Dear God: I will try this day to live a simple, sincere, and serene life, repelling promptly every thought of discontent, anxiety, discouragement, impurity, and self-seeking; cultivating cheerfulness, magnanimity, charity, and the habit of holy silence; exercising economy in

expenditure, generosity in giving, carefulness in conversation, diligence in appointed service, fidelity to every trust, and a childlike faith in God. In particular I will try to be faithful in those habits of prayer, work, study, physical exercise, eating, and sleep, which I believe the Holy Spirit has shown me to be right. And as I cannot in my own strength do this, nor even with a hope of success attempt it, I look to thee, O Lord God my Father, in Jesus my Savior, and ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Part 2:

Forming Loving Relationships with God, Neighbors, Fellow Disciples, and Ourselves

 Sessions 4-7



Session 4: Loving God Like Jesus Does

Focus Prayer

Before you begin your reflection time, offer this prayer or the words of your own heart:

God, give me ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to know your love through my time here today. Amen.

Core Theme

God – Jesus had an intimate, trusting relationship with God, his “Abba” (father) God, fostered through praying and turning again and again to God. We practice loving God by learning how God loves us and how God loves Jesus.

Scripture: Matthew 26:36-44

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.” And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, “So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Again he went away for the second time and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the exact words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

In a journal, or with a partner, explore the following:

- In the passage from Matthew 26:36-44, what word or phrase did you notice about Jesus' situation and his prayer? Why do you imagine this stood out to you?
- Consider the conversation from Matthew, but now between a child and parent. How do you imagine God responding to Jesus' prayer?
- Have you ever felt such a moment with God? Write or ponder on that story.
- What makes it hard to have intimacy with God? What helps you form that close, vulnerable, authentic relationship with God?
- How have praying, worshipping, and turning to God made a difference in your life?

Closing Prayer

Close your reflection time with prayer, either with these words or your own.

I give thanks for the opportunity to meet God in prayer. Amen.

Additional Engagement Opportunities

- Practice Learn and Pray from the Way of Love between now and Session 5 by engaging in daily prayer and scripture reading. Find the readings for each day at <https://prayer.forwardmovement.org/daily-readings>. Many people do this in the morning but choose the time best for you.
- Reflect to yourself or in your journal: If you had a vulnerable conversation with God, what would you tell God? What might God say or do in response? Try it out.



Session 5: Loving Neighbors and Strangers Like Jesus Does

Focus Prayer

Before you begin your reflection time, offer this prayer or the words of your own heart.

God, give me ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to know your love through my time here today. Amen.

Core Theme

Love neighbor – Jesus had a heart full of compassion for everyone he met, and that flowed out in healing, feeding, listening, humbly serving all, and seeking justice for the most vulnerable. We learn from him how to love neighbors and strangers alike through our words and deeds.

Scripture: Mark 6:30-44

The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.” But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” They said to him, “Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?” And he said to them, “How many loaves have you? Go and see.” When they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

In a journal or with a partner, explore the following:

- In the passage from Mark 6:30-44, what word or phrase that Jesus said did you notice? What did you notice about the disciples' words and actions? What about the actions of those who followed Jesus? Why do you think these stood out to you?
- What intention do you want to set to help you follow Jesus' example from this passage?
- What have you learned from the life of Jesus about loving neighbors and strangers?

- What does loving your neighbors and strangers entail (for instance, having a heart full of compassion for everyone you meet, healing, feeding, listening, humbly serving all, and seeking justice for the most vulnerable)?
- What helps you and your community to be like Jesus in this way?

Closing Prayer

Close your reflection time with prayer, either with these words or your own.

May I be open to opportunities to love my neighbors and strangers like Jesus. Amen.

Additional Engagement Opportunities

- Between now and Session 6, keep practicing Learn and Pray from the Way of Love with regular prayer and scripture reading.
- Reflect: How can you cross boundaries to love your neighbor? Journal or talk with someone about your reflections, and share them at your next small group session.
- Learn more about the Way of Love spiritual practice of Go. How can you cross boundaries, listen deeply, and live like Jesus this week?



Session 6: Loving Other Disciples Like Jesus Does

Focus Prayer

Before you begin your reflection time, offer this prayer or the words of your own heart. God, give me ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to know your love through my time here today. Amen.

Core Theme

Love other disciples – Jesus loved his friends; washed their feet; and invited them to tend, respect, forgive, and ultimately to LOVE one another. He shows us how to be in relationship and partnership with fellow disciples.

Scripture John 13:1-17, 33-35

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray him. And during supper, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

"Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

"Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the

Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

In a journal or with a partner, explore the following:

- In the passage from John 13:1-17, 33-35, what did you notice from Jesus’ words and actions? What did you notice about the disciples’ words and actions? What about the actions of those who followed Jesus? Why do you think these stood out to you?
- In this scripture, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet and invited them to tend, respect, forgive, and ultimately to LOVE one another. How does his example inspire you? How does he challenge you?
- What have you learned from the life of Jesus about how we should love fellow disciples and followers of Jesus?
- Have you ever found it hard to love other Christians? What helped you to love them as Jesus would?
- What helps you and your community love one another as Jesus did?
- What intention would you like to set to help you follow Jesus’ example this week?

Closing Prayer

Close your reflection time with prayer, either with these words or your own.

I give thanks for my siblings in the faith. May my love increase for all members of the Body of Christ. Amen.

Additional Engagement Opportunities

- Between now and Session 7, practice Learn and Pray from the Way of Love with prayer and scripture reading.
- Reflect to yourself or in your journal: How do your small group members love and care for each other. What are you willing to do for one another? How can you show love to everyone in the group, including people you don’t feel as close to or like as much as others?
- Learn more about the Way of Love spiritual practice of Bless. How does it differ from the practice of Go? How can you apply these practices in your life between now and the next session?



Session 7: Loving Ourselves Like Jesus Does

Focus Prayer

Before you begin your reflection time, offer this prayer or the words of your own heart.

God, give me ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to know your love through my time here today. Amen.

Core Theme

Love self – Jesus began his ministry hearing God proclaim him as “beloved.” Imagine if we saw and understood ourselves as beloved and honored our own and others’ belovedness?

Scripture: Luke 3:21-22

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

In a journal, or with a partner, explore the following:

- In the passage from Luke 3:21-22, what did you notice about what Jesus says and does? What did you notice about what God says and does? Why do you imagine these stood out to you?
- Jesus began his ministry hearing God proclaim him as “beloved.” How do you imagine that proclamation affected him?
- Have you ever been able to see and understand yourself as beloved by God?
- What would it look like to accept your belovedness and honor your own and others’ belovedness? What would it feel like?
- What is one way you can embrace your identity as beloved by God this week? Is there an action or phrase that would help?

Closing Prayer

Close your reflection time with prayer, either with these words or your own.

Thank you for calling me your beloved child. May I learn to love me as you love me. Amen.

Additional Engagement Opportunities

- Between now and Session 8, continue to practice Learn and Pray from the Way of Love with prayer and scripture reading.
- Learn more about the spiritual practice of Rest. How is practicing Rest a way to love

- yourself? How does turning to God help you to turn toward yourself in love?
- If you want to prep for the next session, check out page 1 of this handout on crafting a rule of life.

Part 3:

Grow in Love: Living an Intentional Life with God - Together

 Sessions 8-9



Session 8: Creating a Sustainable Rule of Life

Focus Prayer

Before you begin your reflection time, offer this prayer or the words of your own heart.

God, give me ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to know your love through my time here today. Amen.

Core Theme

Rule of life – Following Jesus takes intentionality and practice (one reason why the words “disciple” and “discipline” are so close). That’s why we need an intentional pathway like a rule of life *and* a community with which to live it out.

Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

In a journal or with a partner, explore the following:

- In the passage from Matthew 11:28-30, what do you notice about what Jesus says and does? Why do you imagine this stood out to you?
- Following and being genuinely centered on Jesus takes intentionality and practice. What covenants and commitments shape your life?
- Review the Rule of Life handout. Do you have a rule of life? Is your rule written on paper or in your heart, or is it not formed yet? What behaviors and commitments would you hope to include in your rule?
- If you have a rule of life, who and what helps you to honor and live it? How can this group help you be accountable to your rule?
- What would prevent you from creating, implementing, and living a rule of life?
- Why would having a rule of life make a difference for Christians?

Closing Prayer

Close your reflection time with prayer, either with these words or your own.

Thank you for the opportunity to create a Rule of Life rooted in the love of God. Amen.

Additional Engagement Opportunities

- Between now and Session 9, continue to practice [Learn](#) and [Pray](#) from the Way of Love with regular [prayer and scripture reading](#).
- Create a draft of your own rule of life. It can be simple or quite comprehensive. In

addition to reading the [Rule of Life](#) handout, you may use [Living Intentionally: A Workbook for Creating a Personal Rule of Life](#) by Br. David Vryhof of the Society of St. John the Evangelist. This short, practical tool has helped many people draft such a rule.

- Visit The Episcopal Church's [resource page on rules of life](#) for more tools to create a rule of life and resources to support your rule.



Session 9: Looking and Acting Like Jesus – Together

Focus Prayer

Before you begin your reflection time, offer this prayer or the words of your own heart.

God, give me ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to know your love through my time here today. Amen.

Core Theme

Community covenant – We gather, covenant, and commit to support and bless each other in the power of the Spirit, not just for a program but for a season and even for life. This is the only way we can hope to live and love like Jesus in everyday life. What we do in small groups supports our faithful living as individuals, members of congregations, and members of society.

Scripture: John 14:15-21

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

In a journal or with a partner, explore the following:

- In the passage from John 14:15-21, what do you notice about what Jesus says and does? Why do you imagine this stood out to you?
- What difference does having an intentional covenant and commitment make if you’re trying to live like Jesus and be centered on him?
- Share your rule of life with a friend or loved one this week, or connect with a member of your Small Group outside of your gathering time to share your rules with each other.
- How does the Holy Spirit guide or empower you to live what you’ve laid out?
- How can followers of Jesus gather, support, and bless each other to be centered in Jesus in all parts of their lives? What would it look like for your group to do that going ahead?

Closing Prayer

Close your reflection time with prayer, either with these words or your own.

*Thank you for placing me within a committed community and guiding me in the way of love.
Amen.*



For Additional Prayer and Support

Way of Love Covenant

Leader: Jesus' way is the way of love. In him, we find more love, freedom, and abundant life. You are invited to turn toward Jesus and to commit to follow his Way of Love in the context of Christian community, trusting in his power to change each of our lives and to change this world. After each bidding, all who desire to make this commitment should join in proclaiming: **By the Spirit's power, we will.**

Leader: Will you turn and center your life on Jesus, falling in love with our Lord again and again and again?

People: **By the Spirit's power, we will.**

Leader: Will you ground your life in the life and teachings of Jesus, as revealed in scripture? And will you pray and simply listen for God's voice in your life and in the world?

People: **By the Spirit's power, we will.**

Leader: Will you gather together in worship, to break bread and to thank and praise God? And will you bless this world with your story, your resources, and your labor?

People: **By the Spirit's power, we will.**

Leader: Will you cross boundaries and fearlessly become God's Beloved Community? And will you take rest, receiving God's gift of grace and restoration, and letting God be God?

People: **By the Spirit's power, we will.**

Leader: May the God who formed all things in Love draw you near to God's own heart, empower you by the power of the Spirit to live the Way of Love with fellow travelers, and send you to participate in the resurrection and healing of God's world. And may the blessing of our Lord – loving, liberating, and life-giving – be with us and remain with us forever and ever.

All: Amen.