

Beautiful Lives

sharing our faith with friends
and neighbours

a group course



Roger Morgan

ReSource

ReSource – helping to build a church which is diverse, local, renewed in the Spirit and effective in mission

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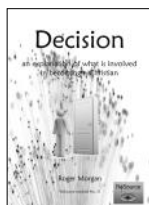
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Further information and support from ReSource

If you would like support from Roger Morgan or another member of the
ReSource team as you use this course, or if you would like to talk to us about
running outreach events or local missions, please do get in touch by email at
office@resource-arm.net or by phone on 01749 672865.

Additional resources to support your evangelism are available on our website:
Stay Evangelism (the booklet which accompanies this course), *Decision*
(probably the best short introduction to faith for new or potential Christians,
ideal for use with Alpha and outreach events and the *Oikos* prayer cards
(designed to help you to pray for friends who are not yet Christians).



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Beautiful Lives

‘May they be won over without a word.. when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.’ (1 Peter 3.2-4)

‘Beauty is commonly trivialized in our culture, whether secular or ecclesial. It is reduced to decoration, equated with the insipidities of “pretty” or “nice.” But beauty is not an add-on, not an extra, not a frill. Beauty is fundamental. Beauty is evidence of and witness to the inherent wholeness and goodness of who God is and the way God works. It is life in excess of what we can manage or control.’ (Eugene Peterson, *The Jesus Way*, Hodder 2007)



‘Beauty of life causes strangers to join our ranks. We do not talk about great things; we live them’ (Minucius Felix, Rome, 160-240 AD).

Beautiful Lives

A course to help ordinary Christian believers reach out to their friends and neighbours with the intention that some of these friends and neighbours will become believers too.

Introduction

Beautiful Lives is a group course. The notes contained in this book are for the group leader. Each week of the course involves homework, and this is contained in the separate course member's booklet which should be given to each participant.

Ideally the course leaders will be people who have a clear commitment to evangelism and feel reasonably confident about it. The intention from the beginning is that there will be some new Christians some time soon as a direct result of the course, and the group leaders should be committed to this as an aim.

This course lasts for eight sessions and can be done either weekly or fortnightly (if you feel the group needs to go more slowly, you could divide some of the sessions into two and make the course a bit longer). Each session lasts for 90 minutes. The assumption is that this will fit into a two hour period, giving 30 minutes leeway for coffee, waiting for late arrivals, going home early and so on. The course is written for groups of between four and ten people – larger groups should divide into two.

The course involves the planning and preparation of an event which will take place some time after the course has been completed. This is an event to which course members will invite unchurched friends.

Group leaders are welcome to adapt the notes as they see fit, as long as they cover the same ground as the course in each of the sessions. Those with relatively little experience in evangelism are probably best to follow

the notes fairly closely, but more experienced group leaders will want to bring something of their own experience to the sessions and they should feel free to do this.

The homework is designed to encourage and help the group to adopt a lifestyle which is outreaching, deliberately loving, and evangelistic. Each week the group members will enter into their normal lives with the determination to apply what they have learned on the course, and the members will report back to the group at the end of the week. It is essential that each member of the group should enter wholeheartedly into this homework.

The course will only be effective if there is a commitment by the group members to attend all eight sessions. Exceptions can be made to cover particularly difficult personal circumstances, but 100% attendance should be both the aim and the norm. If someone does have to miss a session, another member of the group should meet up with them and help them to catch up. The group members must also be committed to supporting the special outreach event which will follow the course.

Each participant should bring a Bible to the sessions, and the course leader will need a flip chart or whiteboard for some of the sessions. It is assumed that each session will begin with an appropriate welcome, for example with coffee and biscuits being provided as people arrive and greet one another.



Beautiful Lives Week 1

The growth of the Church in Acts

Introduction

(10 mins)

The group leader should ask the members to introduce themselves and then say something about themselves – where they live and with whom, what they do for a living and so on.

Note: The timings are important and need to be carefully watched by the group leader. Here, for example, if you allow 30 minutes for the introduction it will probably spoil the whole session. This is much more likely to be a problem if the group is large.

Evangelism

(10 mins)

Begin with a discussion of the word evangelism – a word which frightens some people. Remind the group that they have come to a course about evangelism and ask them:

- When you hear the word evangelism how do you feel?

Supplementary questions to get the group going might be

- Does the word evangelism make anyone here feel inadequate?
- Does the word evangelism make anyone here feel excited?

Assure the group that the course will make evangelism seem much more possible than it probably does right now.



A choice

(10 mins)

The first question for us to think about is “are we going to go for it?”

Say to the group:

- I want us to imagine that we have a choice. We can apply this choice to any group of Christians of which we are members. It might be our church, or this group, or any other Christian group to which we belong. This is the choice. Imagine that we can choose that five years from now the church (or group) will be exactly as it is now, except that everyone is five years older. Apart from this we will still be doing much the same things with much the same people. Alternatively, we can choose that the church will be twice the size that it is now and that the new people are all newcomers to faith and have been introduced to Christ through our efforts. Which of these options will we choose, and why?



Most groups will say that they would rather that their church or group had doubled in size. Assuming that this is the choice which your group makes, now ask them what they think it would cost them to achieve this end. As an example of what it might cost you could say

- If we had twice as many people, this would mean that each of us would become responsible for praying for and caring about all these new people.

Ask the group what other drawbacks they can see to making the choice to try to grow.

God's plan

(15 mins)

Assuming the group prefers the option of growth, point out that a further question naturally follows:

- Is the power in our hands – could we grow if we wanted to, or is evangelism too difficult in practice? If we were to try to grow are we likely to succeed or fail?

Explain that to answer this question you are going to begin with some Bible study. The point of this study will be to show that it is, and always has been, God’s plan that the Church should grow. It will follow that because this is what God wants, if we co-operate with him and rely on his resources then our evangelism will succeed.

Point out to the group that Christianity began with Jesus and at the beginning there was only Him. Since then the Christian faith has been expanding and expanding – in fact the biggest period of expansion since the time of the early church was the twentieth century.

- Ask the group to turn to **Mark 1.14**. Christianity began when Jesus came into the world and began to preach his message. What, according to Mark 1.14, was his message?
- Now divide the group into pairs and ask each pair to have a look at **John 1.35 – 2.11**. Each pair should answer the question “who were the first people to respond to the message of Jesus, and why did they respond?”

The growth of the Church in the book of Acts (25 mins)

Bring the group together again and ask them to turn to **Acts 1.15**. Say to the group:

- We have seen how it began when Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathaniel believed in Jesus and gave everything up to follow him. After that the number of disciples grew. Soon there were twelve male disciples and a number of women as well. On one occasion Jesus sent out 70 of his disciples to spread his message. These earliest disciples went through many adventures with Jesus, learning a lot and seeing a lot. Eventually they went through the terrible experience of



the crucifixion and then they became the joyful witnesses of the resurrection. By the time we reach Acts 1.15 there were 120 disciples meeting together. So it began with Jesus, and three years later there were 120 Christian disciples. From that beginning the Church has grown and grown until today.

Now tell the group that you are going to look at the early history of growth as it is set out in the book of Acts.

Divide the group into pairs again and ask each pair to work their way through the following verses (*NB this Bible study can be found on the first page of the course member's booklet, so make sure each person has a copy*).

- Acts 1.8 - Jesus tells his disciples that this will be his last physical appearance to them. Instead the Holy Spirit will come upon them and they will be his witnesses, first in Judea, which was where they were living, then in Samaria, which was the nearest place after that, and then to the world.
- Acts 2.1-4 - The Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples as Jesus had promised.
- Acts 2.22-24 - The disciples actively begin to witness as Jesus had told them to.
- Acts 2.41 - The 120 see 3000 people come to faith in Jesus on a single day.
- Acts 2.42-46 - The new community in Jerusalem, filled by the Holy Spirit.
- Acts 2.47 - Others see this community in action and also become believers.
- Acts 6.7 - The church grows even bigger.
- Acts 11.19-21 - The good news spreads to other cities including Antioch.
- Acts 13.1-5 - Paul and Barnabas are sent out by the church in Antioch to take the gospel to the rest of the world.

Allow about 15 minutes for this Bible study and then bring the pairs back together again. Say to the group: “We saw how, beginning with Jesus, the gospel reached 120 people in three years, and we have now seen how this expanded to include thousands of people in many cities over the next few years.” Ask the group how they think Jesus intended this expansion of the Christian faith to end? Then turn together to **Matthew 24.14**. The answer is that evangelism will continue until there are Christian disciples in every part of the world. Then Jesus will return.

This is God’s plan and we are part of it. At every stage in the last 2,000 years some Christians have done nothing about evangelism while other Christians have done everything they can to share their faith. Those who have worked at it have always succeeded, because God has always been with them. We ourselves are Christians because of their efforts.

Homework

(10 mins)

Explain that each week there will be homework, and that it will be essential for each person to complete it. Next week you will talk together about how the homework went.



Explain that in this week’s homework we learn the first lesson of all effective evangelism, which is that we cannot evangelise people unless we first learn to love people. To teach this lesson Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan. Ask the group to turn to **Luke 10.25-37** and invite someone to read the passage.

Ask the group to say what the difference was between the Samaritan (v 33) and the other two men (v 31-32). The answer is that the Samaritan was moved with pity - he really cared what was happening to the man who was hurt. The other two men seem not to have cared.

This week the homework challenges us to spend our days doing our best to live like the Good Samaritan. The homework notes suggest that to

achieve this we must first learn to go through life slowly. Many people today are always in a hurry and are preoccupied with themselves and their own business, and as a result never notice what is going on around them. Our task this week will be to go through life slowly enough to take in the people whom God has brought to us to share our world. During the week we will try to notice people - our families, our work colleagues, our neighbours, even the people we pass in the streets. Whenever we have the opportunity we will do what we can to help them.

Prayer

(10 mins)

Turn to **Acts 1.8** and remind the group of the historical context of this verse. Jesus is making his last appearance to his disciples. He is telling them what is going to happen next: they will go into the world and represent him as his witnesses. To help them to do this he will give them the gift of the Holy Spirit.



Ask the group to stand, form a circle and hold hands. Say to the group

- I would like the group to take the homework really seriously as we do this course. This week we are being sent out into the world to really love people. To do this we, like the earliest disciples, will need the Holy Spirit to warm up our hearts.

Ask each person to pray for the person on their left and the person on their right and earnestly ask that the Holy Spirit will come upon them and equip them for the task. This prayer can be made in silence but if you feel the group is up for it then ask everyone to pray out loud at the same time.