

# Love for the Future: Being at Home on the Earth

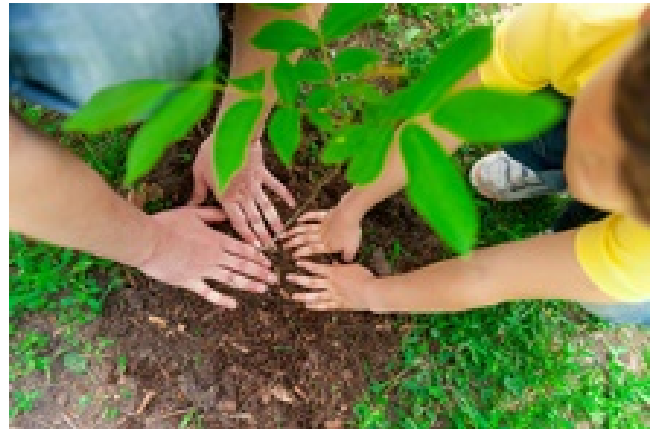
## Exploration Group

### Session 1 – Touching the Earth

The theme of this session is **wonder** and **humility**.

#### PREPARATION

Each day find a place to sit where you can see something of the living world and the sky: a park, a hillside, beside a window, beside a river or the sea. Give yourself a period of time in which to do this: say, ten or fifteen minutes. Do not talk or listen to music. First listen to what you can hear, perhaps with your eyes closed. Then open your eyes and pay attention to what you can see. Then what you can feel on your skin. Then what you can smell. When you find yourself thinking about other things (and you will) gently bring your mind back to what you have set out to do: hearing, seeing, feeling and smelling, and carry on where you left off before your mind went off elsewhere.



#### THEME: WONDER AND HUMILITY

We all spend a lot of time planning, rehearsing, and running through possible scenarios for some future time. We think about what might happen in ten minutes' time, or the next evening, or on a future holiday. Or our mind drifts into remembering what's happened already and reminiscing. We don't actually spend much time in the present moment.

Nor do we spend much time being where we are. We are engaged with ideas through conversations or discussions, or are lost in what we are writing or reading. We work with spreadsheets and formulae, statistics and graphs, words on the screen or in our heads.

But we are concerned about the world. Because we are part of the world. We are creatures on this small blue planet and life on the planet is in danger. Ecosystems are being irrevocably damaged.

The first thing for us to do is to get back in touch with the earth; with this thing we care about and which we are part of.

Our ideas, concepts, schemes, campaigns and plans are valuable. We cannot work for the earth's health without them. But they remain nothing more than mindgames and become detached from reality if we are not ourselves in touch with the earth.

And when we do touch the earth we open ourselves to two possibilities. One is wonder: that sense which is beyond words of the world in all its mystery, power, beauty and intricacy being there before us, around us, despite us, and beyond us.

We might say: 'Wow!' We might stay silent. We have probably all had such moments of wonder. Perhaps we had many of them when we were very young. We can open ourselves now to the possibility of wonder, and we need to do so.

Without wonder our actions are likely to be misguided, like a development worker who doesn't listen to the locals, or a carer who pays no attention to their client.

So the first movement in this course is to open ourselves through contemplation to the possibility of wonder. Contemplation is not an esoteric practice. It is something we probably all do occasionally. Contemplation involves looking, or touching, or smelling, or listening attentively to what is before us. Not thinking about it, or trying to alter it, or making plans for it, but just attending to it.

Then the second movement is to engage with the earth with our hands and our senses. Feeling and working with matter, be it wood, clay, soil or food, reminds us that we are not disembodied minds, detached from the earth, but are a part of the earth.

It also reminds us that we are not able to control the earth. We can only influence what happens by working with the earth, not by trying to overpower it: by 'going with the grain' of the earth.

Engaging with matter with our hands and senses can give us humility, which means fundamentally, being 'earthed', from the Latin word for soil: *humus*.

So the second movement in the course is to engage in some small way with real matter: soil, plants, food, rain, wind or the warmth of the sun.

## READING

David Osborne, *Love for the Future: a journey* (Glasgow: Wild Goose, 2013) chapters 1 and 2

Anne Richards *Sense Making Faith: Body, Spirit, Journey* (London: CTBI, 2007)

Any book about the natural world which will help you appreciate its variety, complexity and interconnection; *or* a book on painting, photography or architecture which will help you see what is in front of you; *or* a book on gardening, walking, sailing, cooking, or anything else which will help you be in touch with the world you are part of.

## GROUP SESSION

### 1. Begin by talking together about the theme:

(i) Who was able to do the preparation exercise? How did they find it?

(ii) If all the group members have read Chapters 1 and 2 of the book *Love for the Future*, or the introduction above, move straight to (iii) If not, read through the introduction now.

(iii) Discuss any or all of the following:

- are you clear about how the words 'contemplation', 'wonder', 'engagement' and 'humility' are being used?
- does the theory make sense?
- if you have problems with the theory can you still run with it for now?
- what, if anything, do you do already which is contemplative?
- can you recall a 'wow!' moment in your life?
- how do you 'engage' with the world? Cycling in rain? Walking? Gardening? Swimming in the sea? etc.

### 2. Do whichever of the following four things which you decided on in the introductory session:

(a) **prepare & eat a meal together.** Make sure that everyone in the group has some hands-on task to do in the preparation and the clearing up afterwards. As you are preparing the food notice the colours, textures and smells of the ingredients. It doesn't need to be anything grand. A pizza or a salad would do, though you might like to have something special to eat or to drink. When the food is served have a moment of silence before you start eating, to look at and to smell the food. And when you are eating pay attention to the smell, the textures and the tastes, not as food critics but to simply appreciate what you have.

After the meal discuss the possible truth of the statement, 'You are what you eat.' Find out what you can about the Slow Food Movement.

(b) **do some work together in a garden.** Find someone who would like you to do some gardening. It could be some delicate work, involving planting out or pruning, or it could be some heavy digging or cutting back of undergrowth: whatever this person needs and also gets you in touch with the soil and what grows in it. If you can manage without wearing gloves, do. And if it rains, don't let that put you off. Without rain we would not be alive!

Then, afterwards, over a drink or a coffee discuss the possible truth of the statement, 'from dust you were made and to dust you will return'.

(c) **make some bread by hand.** (i.e. not with a bread making machine!) Find a recipe and make bread together. Make sure everyone has a chance to do some mixing and kneading. And if you have a chance to eat some of it over coffee or tea afterwards, do. Try it on its own, as well as with margarine or butter. Taste and smell the bread itself, not just what's on it.

Bread features a lot in the Bible. As a group try to remember phrases or stories you have heard from the Bible which involve bread. What was the significance of the bread in each of these?

(d) **go for a walk together.** For part of the time don't talk. Look, smell, listen, feel the wind or the rain, and pay attention to what is around you.

After the walk have a drink together and tell each other about one particular image, or sound, or event from the walk that sticks in your mind. There is no need to explain why it was significant. Just share the memory.

Discuss together: walking can be contemplative, engaging and healthy; why do we not do it more?

**3. For the Next Session:** Have a look at what you will each be asked to do in preparation for the next session. Check out that you all understand what is involved.

#### **4. Close with a short contemplative practice**

Do any of the following four exercises but (a) is recommended unless a group member has an allergy to or intolerance of raisins.

(a) pass round a bowl of raisins. Each person take one and spend several minutes looking at the raisin closely, then smelling it. Then put it in your mouth but do not bite it: feel the texture in your mouth, and the flavour. Then slowly bite it and chew it, noticing the flavours. See if you can make the one raisin last five minutes.

(This exercise can be done with chocolate, but maybe not during Lent!  
See [www.franticworld.com/free-meditations-from-mindfulness](http://www.franticworld.com/free-meditations-from-mindfulness) for more information.)

(b) put a plant or flower in the centre of the group and in silence observe what you can see; notice the shape, the space it takes up, the curves, edges; look at the colours and how they vary, and how they blend; and go close and see how it smells.

(c) do the same with a glass of water. If you were painting it, what colours and shapes would you put on the paper?

(d) pass round a basket of small stones. Each choose one and for several minutes in silence look closely at your stone: its colours, shape, how it reflects the light; and feel it carefully, its weight, texture and temperature.

## **INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION AFTER THE SESSION**

On your own think about which you are most inclined to neglect in your life:  
contemplation or engagement.

Do you need to make time or a regular commitment to ensure you have more time for this?  
If so, how can you do that?

*Copyright: You are welcome to copy these materials as long as you acknowledge the source as "Love for the Future course - written by David Osborne and available from the Living Spirituality Connections website at [www.livingspirit.org.uk/lftf](http://www.livingspirit.org.uk/lftf)."*