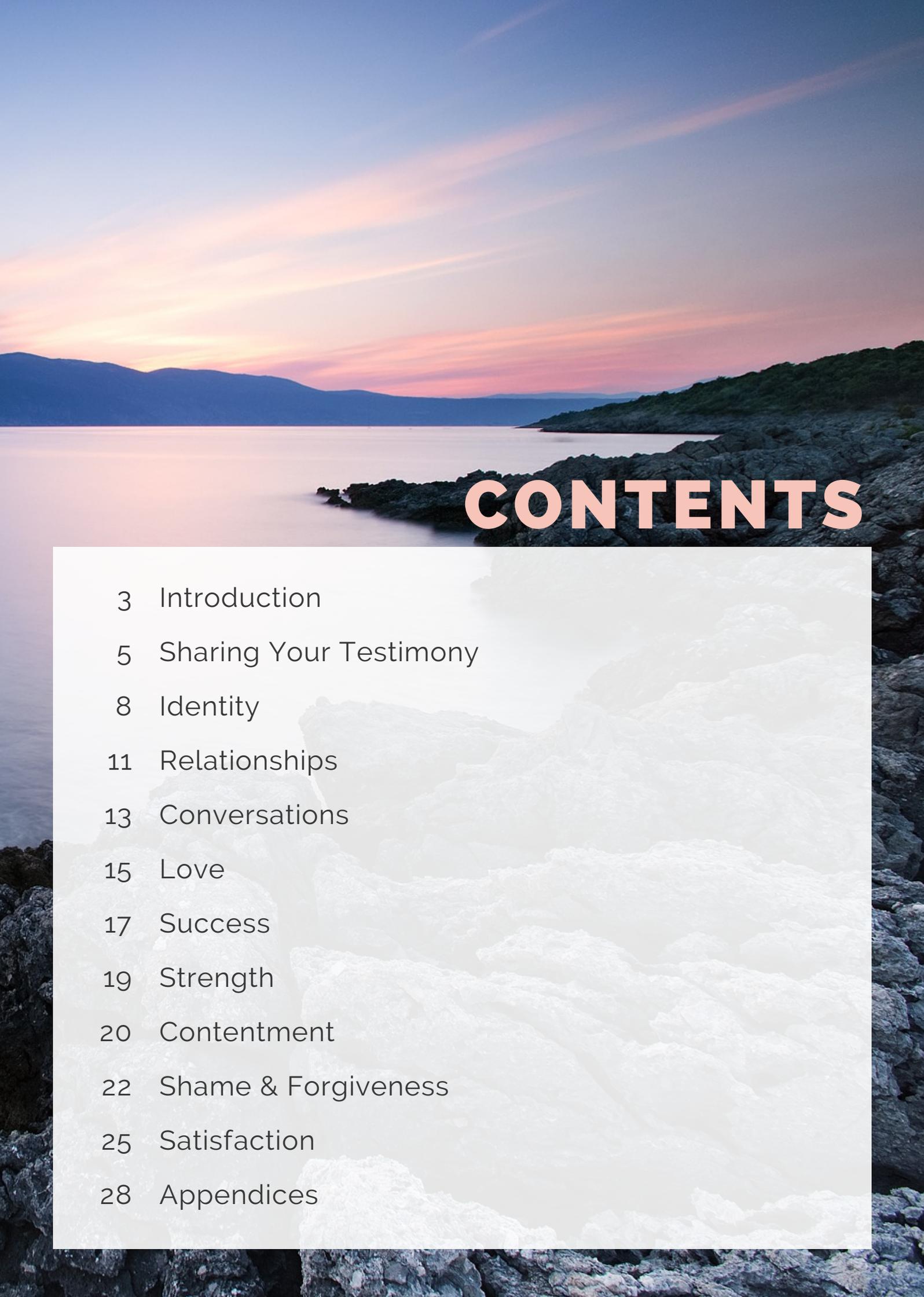


**AGAPÉ
STUDENT
LIFE**

WHAT WOMEN WANT

AN AGAPÉ STUDENT LIFE RESOURCE





CONTENTS

- 3 Introduction
- 5 Sharing Your Testimony
- 8 Identity
- 11 Relationships
- 13 Conversations
- 15 Love
- 17 Success
- 19 Strength
- 20 Contentment
- 22 Shame & Forgiveness
- 25 Satisfaction
- 28 Appendices

INTRODUCTION

As Agapé Student Life, we are committed to serving universities by helping students connect to God and connect to one another. We want to be a blessing to the university, engaging people where they are at and introducing them to Jesus.

What Women Want is a resource developed by Agapé Student Life Oxford, in the context of women's discussion groups with undergraduate students. The purpose of the groups is to create spaces for women to discuss topics relevant to all, and to provide an opportunity to explore them from a spiritual perspective too. The aim for us has been to raise spiritual curiosity amongst women who are not necessarily spiritually open or seeking, and have been trialled and adapted over a number of years, with a variety of different women. As the relationships grow over the sessions, we have found that people feel more comfortable sharing openly with one another and they begin to engage more deeply with what it means to have a relationship with God. It often leads to further conversations and opportunities outside of the group.

The sessions put together here are to enable you to run these groups in your own context. It is always advised that you use discernment to pitch the group content for the specific needs of your own group, and so there is no strict order in which the sessions ought to be delivered. Some content may be skipped or adapted for your own group.

The main thing to emphasise is that the groups should be a relaxing and safe space for the women attending, and that it is their time to reflect and discuss. Pray continually for the Spirit to open up opportunities to share Jesus' love with them, and be aware not to force conversations in the direction of the session plan if it seems like a different but still helpful conversation is arising.

It is really helpful to have at least one other Christian in the group besides yourself, to let them see the session plan beforehand, and to think through how they might answer some of the questions. This helps even out the dynamic of the group, and means there is someone to pray whilst the other is sharing.

Here is a description that we use for advertising/explaining the group to students:

What Women Want is a discussion group run by women, for women, to provide a fun, safe and comfortable environment to explore different areas of life that affect us all. Together we look at different topics such as identity, relationships, and success, sharing our own thoughts and experiences, and explore how our spiritual beliefs (e.g beliefs about the world, the existence of God, or similar) impact on those areas too. We'll use different creative media to explore each topic. It's a really relaxed way to get to know one another and yourself a little bit better.

What Women Want is run by Agapé Student Life, a society that seeks to promote the spiritual and social well-being of our uni. It's run by a few Christian students and is for anyone interested in exploring the bigger questions in life and what it might mean to connect with God.

SHARING YOUR TESTIMONY

In running What Women Want, we have found that personal testimonies are really effective at engaging people and sharing about how our relationship with God through Jesus affects specific areas of our lives.

What follows is a helpful way of preparing your testimony. It breaks your story into four sections, with different questions to prompt you as you think about structuring it. Your phrases obviously need to be true for you! If you started following Christ as a child, or cannot remember much about when or why you did so, you might find the (b) questions helpful. This is meant to be an outline, rather than a rigid structure – so use it to get you started rather than as a set of rules! You may find it helpful after writing your testimony to check that you have answered each question.

After the four general questions (which you can use any time you share your testimony), we've included some specific thoughts about the topics of identity and relationships to help you prepare your story for What Women Want. You should aim for your testimony to be around five minutes long, and certainly no longer than ten minutes.

1. (a) What was my attitude before I took Jesus Christ seriously? (e.g to life, other people, my ambitions, religion) or **(b) What were one or two things that used to characterise my view of life/God?**

- Your answer should help others identify with you (and vice versa) - particularly as you will have left certain lifestyles and approaches behind as a result of following Christ.
- Your answer will hopefully already suggest that your faith has resulted in important, noticeable changes.

2. (a) Why did I say 'Yes' to Christ? or (b) Why do I still want to put Christ first in my life?

- Summarise the key thing that made you recognise the importance of following Christ, or what makes putting Christ first so attractive. What motivated/still motivates you to follow Christ?
- Don't unwittingly reinforce the view that following Jesus Christ is a matter of blind faith, or putting your mind on the shelf.

3. (a) How did I say 'Yes' to Christ? or (b) Were there any particular points in my life when I reinforced my earlier decision to say "Yes" to Christ?

- Make it clear how you invited Christ to be the centre of your life; what you actually did, by way of response. Your answer should help others discover how they might say 'Yes' to Christ.
- Your answer should demonstrate that you have made a conscious choice to trust Christ, even if you cannot pinpoint a particular moment when you did so.

4. What difference does Christ make to my day-to-day life?

- Give at least one specific example of how having Christ at the centre of your life has resulted in changes in attitudes/actions at home/work. Beware of portraying 'no problems' Christianity.
- If you have been following Christ for a very long time and haven't thought much about this question, ask, 'How has Christ had an increasingly dominant influence in my life?'
- Your answer should show that Christ makes a tangible difference to the way you think and behave, not just that you now go to church or enjoy religious activity.

Here are some further questions to help you think about preparing your testimony on the topic of identity. You don't need to answer every question in your testimony, but you may find them helpful.

Before you knew Jesus:

- What things gave you worth, value and security in life?
- What was your experience when these things didn't go so well?
- What was your view towards God (whether you believed in Him or not) and how relevant did you consider Him to be to your life?

Since knowing Jesus

- How does the truth of the gospel (knowing God through Jesus) specifically impact your identity?
- What tangible changes can you see in where you look to for worth and security in life?
- What is your experience during difficult times?

If you'd like to contact us in Oxford, to ask any more about our experiences of running What Women Want, or to give us any suggestions and feedback that you have then we'd love to hear from you! Email us at oxford@mystudentlife.org.uk.

IDENTITY

Part 1 options:

- Post-it notes: Words to describe yourself/ways others have described you. Could be adjectives or factual e.g. 'single' 'relaxed'
- Polaroid collage: Take a Polaroid picture of each person and then they surround it with words to describe themselves. More scrapbook style as they can use crafts to add to the collage.

Part 2 options:

- Video 1: 'What do you see when you look in the mirror?' They may want to have pen and paper to scribble down notes of things they want to discuss further/comment on whilst watching the video

<https://youtu.be/kcSnUaGfm-A>

Key messages discussed in the video:

- The outward perception is not necessarily how I feel on the inside
 - We can connect with others through our appearance e.g. family
 - Accept who you are. You don't need to change
- Video 2: 'What's underneath': They may want to have pen and paper to scribble down notes of things they want to discuss further/comment on whilst watching the video

<https://youtu.be/iMfmGHSYis>

Key messages discussed in the video:

- People box us based on our image
- I don't know who I am, and clothes are a way of me exploring that
- Only you know who you really are
- We have a desire to be understood

Suggested questions for both videos:

- What resonated with you?
- What did/didn't you like?
- What does your style say about you?
- Have you experienced feeling boxed/others making assumptions about you?
- Do you see a difference between your inner and outer self?
When does this feel most reconciled/different?
If not your style, what do you think defines who you are?

Part 3 options:

- Soularium (<http://shop.agape.org.uk/soularium.html>) – Who we are is partly shaped by how we view the world and our part in the world, so exploring our spiritual beliefs can help us think about who we are too, such as whether we believe in God or nature or fate etc. We're going to use 50 photos with some questions to help us express what we believe or how we feel about our lives and our idea of God.
 - Could you choose a picture (or a few) that describes who you are?
 - Could you choose a picture that represents your spiritual beliefs about the world and God?
- 5 min testimony - explain from your own life how a relationship with God has changed your perceptions of your identity. Think about:
 - Where would you have placed your identity before?
 - How did you encounter Jesus in this area?
 - How has being a child of God impacted your sense of identity e.g. practical situations?

End options:

- Take a photo of the photo card that you chose to describe yourself so you can reflect on it more over the week if you want to. If anyone wants to do the full photo project over coffee sometime let me know!

- On some nice card, write down one truth about yourself that you want to put up on your wall or mirror to remind yourself of this week. It could be something that one of the people in videos said, or something you've already written about yourself, or something that this session has made you think of.

RELATIONSHIPS

Part 1 options:

- Post-it notes: What do you think are some important qualities and threats in relationships?
- Vulnerability quote:
'To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.' --C.S. Lewis, 'The Four Loves'
How easy do you find it to be vulnerable? Do you think it is necessary in relationships?

Part 2:

Most people would agree that no human is perfect, and so two humans in any form of relationship is going to mean an imperfect relationship! We all make mistakes, and if we cut off everyone who isn't perfect we'd probably end up pretty lonely. That's why I think forgiveness is such an important part of relationships; it's the process of letting go of the hurt that someone has caused you/that you've caused someone.

Definition: (Wiki) **Forgiveness** is the intentional and voluntary process by which a victim undergoes a change in feelings and attitude regarding an offense, lets go of negative emotions such as vengefulness, with an increased ability to wish the offender well.

- What do you think of this statement?
- Do you think it's easier to forgive or be forgiven and why?

- What can make it hard to give/receive forgiveness?
- Can you think of a time when you've been forgiven/had to forgive someone? How did that affect the relationship?

Part 3:

Corrie ten Boom story: Corrie ten Boom was a woman who lived in Holland during the Second World War, and was arrested and sent to a concentration camp for storing ration cards. She was actually also hiding Jews in her house, but they were amazingly never discovered. She's written a book about her life, called 'The Hiding Place', from which I'll read this extract she wrote about forgiveness (read article, found in appendices).

- How do you think you would have felt in Corrie's situation?
- What do you think the impact of Corrie's actions were on her and the man's lives? What could have been the difference if she hadn't done that?
- How do you think her relationship with God impacted her actions?

(It was an emotional battle, it wasn't just 'the Bible says I have to forgive him so I will'. She was aware of her own brokenness and need for forgiveness too)

End options:

- Think about something that you've been holding on to and feel like you might want to work on forgiving. Write it down - sometimes getting it out of our heads can be a helpful step - and think about what you would like to do regarding it over the week.
- Write down one thing you're taking away from what we've chatted about that you want to be reminded of this week.

CONVERSATIONS

Part 1: The purpose of conversation

'Conversation' in Latin means to abide with/ to be together.

- What is the point of conversations? (Write answers in the middle on a sheet)

Video: 'It's not about the nail.' <https://youtu.be/-4EDhdAHrOg>

- Why do we want conversations like this? If conversations are not about getting to conclusions, what are they about?

Grace at 'Empowering Her Voice' event in Oxford said:

'Conversation is a process of repair, to stop a wound getting bigger, not to heal it.'

- To what extent do you personally agree/disagree with this?
- What for you is crucial to having a good conversation?
- What do you love about conversations between women especially? What do you find difficult?

Part 2: Listening

Proverbs 18:2: 'A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.'

- To what extent can you relate to this quotation? Are you ever guilty of this?

Conversations only truly happen if we are speaking and listening to one another. (We have two ears and one mouth, use them in that ratio!) Otherwise is it really a conversation or just two people talking at each other? Do we listen with the intent to understand or the intent to reply?

- How good do you think you generally are at listening? What makes it difficult to listen to people? (sometimes a desire to help/empathise, or sometimes if we don't respect their opinion)

Part 3: Intimacy in conversations (and prayer)

Grace at 'Empowering Her Voice' said that conversations take place within intimacy.

- How would you describe the connection between conversation and intimacy in your own life?
- Is conversational intimacy parallel to other types of intimacy?
- Who is it that you want to talk to when you need to feel heard?

Soularium (<http://shop.agape.org.uk/soularium.html>): Which picture best represents intimacy to you?

For me, I find talking to God in prayer most helpful. He's the one person who is always available to listen, and there's a peace in knowing that He knows all about me and doesn't judge me, but loves me. That security gives me freedom to talk to Him about anything.

- If appropriate: Do you ever pray? Or something similar? If you did pray, what things do you think you would pray about?

End:

Write on some card something that you would most like to talk to someone about this week, or someone that you think might need someone to listen to them.

LOVE

Part 1:

What associated words/ideas do you think of when you think of love? (use post-it notes and/or Soularium)

Part 2:

How do you think society/the media portrays love (romantic or otherwise)? Does that reflect your own experiences?

(For this section, you could flick through magazines and pull out anything to do with love or relationships.)

Part 3:

'A deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. When those needs are not met, we don't function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick.'

-- Brené Brown

- What do you think about this quotation?
- Do you find it easy to be loved?
- What things make it hard to accept a need for other people?

Part 4: Different types of love

1 Corinthians 13 passage:

- Intro: Love can mean so many different things to each of us, but the Greek's have different words to describe different types of love, which can be helpful to understand:
 1. Eros – sexual love
 2. Philia – affection regard/friendship
 3. Storge - parents and child
 4. Agapé – the unconditional love of God for man
- Give out printed passage: This passage unpacks this idea of Agapé love and what it can look like. (Listen to YouTube clip

and give out written passage.) https://youtu.be/8Fg_A7XIU6k

- What do you think it would be like to experience being loved in this way? Does it seem achievable? (Example: The faithful husband at the end of The Notebook?)
- How do you think this description of love compares with what our culture says love is? (e.g. satisfaction vs selfless love)
- If God is real, how does this description compare with how you've thought of God previously?

"Enjoying a relationship with God then starts to impact on your relationships with one another. Jesus talks about the two most important things in life are to love God, and then love others in the same way that you want to be loved. So when I embrace this kind of love that I can receive from God, it helps me to love others better because I can try to emulate it."

Part 5: Love Languages

Can you think of a time when you really felt loved?

Go through the 'Five Love Languages' chart (from 'The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts' by Gary Chapman), found in the appendices.

- Which two best describe you?

Think of a friend/partner/family member that you love. What do you think their love languages might be? Think about how they show you that they love you, this might give you a clue.

What could you make/write/say/do for them this week to show them that they're loved? Write it down.

SUCCESS

Part 1:

Using Soularium:

- Which picture best represents your life right now?
- Which represents something that you wish were true of your life?

Part 2:

Who do you think of as a successful woman and why?

Forbes Most Powerful Women (<https://www.forbes.com/power-women>): Discuss the previous year's list and what features are highlighted about the women.

Part 3:

Video: 'Mona Lisa Smile.' (<https://youtu.be/rQ1xOOyENmw>)

Background: A teacher has come to a local school and is trying to motivate all of the girls to stay on at university, in a town where the tendency is to get married young and be a stay-at-home wife/mother. The scene focuses on the relationship between one star pupil and her teacher.

Discussion:

- Which character do you identify with more?
- Joan says "I know exactly what I'm doing and it doesn't make me any less smart". Do you think society looks down on women who choose not to pursue a career?
- What are your perceptions of stay-at-home mums? Did this clip reinforce or challenge those?

Part 4:

Choice of testimonies:

- Jeremy's testimony (found in appendices). This is a guy who graduated from Oxford a few years ago and talks about his pursuit of

'success' and how a change in his perception of God flipped that for him. Read it out to the group.

- Erin's testimony: (<https://youtu.be/SLr0s17q8f4>) Erin talks about her drive to succeed and figure out what that even meant, and how her perception of herself in God's eyes changed that.

Discussion:

- What can you relate to from Jeremy's/Erin's story?
- They talked about experiencing acceptance from God impacting on their desire to be 'successful' in the world's eyes. How much do you think acceptance and success are linked?
- What impact do you think having a relationship with God would have on your life if any?

End:

Write down anything you want to take away from this session, maybe the name of the person you aspire to be like, or even take a picture of the picture that you chose to represent something that you wish were true of your life.

STRENGTH

Introduction:

Over the last few years, Agape Student Life societies have been running Women Speak Out events across the country. A lot of the pictures have had messages to do with strength: what does or doesn't make you strong; what characterises strength; and how we get it. So I thought this would be an interesting topic to think about more together.

Part 1:

Look at Speak Out images to do with strength (find some examples at <https://www.facebook.com/oxfordspeakout>):

- What does 'being strong' mean to you? (Write down words as a whole group)
- Who do you think of as a strong woman? Why?
- Do you think there's a difference in your perception of strength between men and women?

Part 2:

VIDEO: Spoken word piece (<https://youtu.be/n2Xbn-sDVtg>)

- She says 'strength cannot be gained by our accomplishments; strength is a gift'. What do you think about that statement?
- She talked about her mother turning to God when she felt weak. Where/who do you go to when you don't feel strong? Do we always go to 'healthy/helpful' places? (You could maybe share a testimony example here)

Part 3:

How do you feel about accepting that you need help sometimes?

End:

Write 'I am a strong woman because...' and take that away with you. E.g. 'I have people around me' or 'I accept my weaknesses' or 'I say so!'.
so!'

CONTENTMENT

Introduction:

The latest global statistic shows that if one has a roof over his head and a meal on his table he is richer than 93 percent of the world's population. If a person wears a pair of shoes he is richer than 75 percent of the people in the world. King Solomon, the wisest and richest man who ever lived, said, "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless" (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

There's so much going on the world that suggests that we're discontent. So much striving for more but never seeming to have enough. It's interesting to step back and think sometimes about: what we're really striving for, and take stock of what we have already and how far we've come.

Part 1:

Soularium:

- Is there a picture here that represents a place/feeling of contentment for you?
- When was the last time you experienced this?

Part 2:

- What contributes to feeling contented? (Post-it notes)
- What sort of things cause you discontentment? (Maybe use the Soularium pictures again for this)
- Do you know someone who seems content at the moment? Do you know why that is?

Part 3:

Leader to share a short testimony about contentment. Example:

"I've been reading about Sabbath; the instruction from God to take a day to rest, not only because our bodies physically need it, but also as a way to step back from

the busyness of life and acknowledge that we can't be in control of everything, and that's okay. To be okay with taking our finger off the button is to acknowledge that the world does not rest on our shoulders, but on God's, and to learn to be okay with that, and eventually hopefully secure in that. So for me, my contentment grows when I acknowledge that even my little world doesn't rest on my shoulders, but that there is someone greater than myself, God, who is holding everything together. That frees me to notice more, to be appreciative for what I have rather than always fighting for the next thing. It enables me to rest!"

Part 4:

Give each woman a copy of the '50 ways to take a break' card (found in the appendices).

- Are there things on this picture that enable you to rest?
- What action could you take this week to grow in contentment/to learn to rest? Maybe write it down.

SHAME & FORGIVENESS

Part 1:

Imagination exercise. Ask the group to close their eyes if they feel comfortable to. You're going to give a scenario and some questions for them to think about. They're not expected to answer the questions out-loud.

"Imagine there's a book that contains everything you've ever done or thought or said. All the good stuff, but also all the ugly stuff, all the secret things, all those things that you regret. Now imagine that your best friend or closest family member was given that book to read. What would you feel most proud about? What would you be most embarrassed about them seeing? What would make you feel ashamed? What do you wish you could undo? What do you wish you'd never said? What secret do you hope no one ever finds out?"

Discussion:

- How did that make you feel?
- Would you want your best friend or closest family member to see everything you've ever done? Why/why not?

Part 2:

VIDEO: Brené Brown – Listening to guilt and shame.

(<https://youtu.be/psN1DORYYVo?t=14m>, watch from 14 minutes until the end.) She defines the difference between guilt and shame as guilt being about behavior (going against your own values) and shame being about yourself:

"Guilt is the feeling of wrong after going against your personal values of accountability e.g. do we owe an explanation to others? What are we responsible for? How important are different people? How have your values been shaped? What are some core values that you hold?"

- How much do you agree/disagree with these definitions of guilt and shame?

Brené talks a lot of the need to talk about shame in order to overcome it. Like lighting a candle in a dark room, it illuminates the whole room and makes things clearer. So, going back to that imagination activity at the beginning, she's saying that it's okay for people to know about our lives, and in fact accepting and experiencing forgiveness over those things is crucial to our health.

- Do you think it's possible to move on from those things/to forgive ourselves of the things we're not proud of? How have you experienced that?

Part 3:

Here's an interesting scene from the Bible when Jesus tackles the issue of shame head-on, with a woman caught in adultery.

<https://youtu.be/oylFgewaFcM>

Because of the public shame that she's experiencing here and the culture that she's in, it would be extremely hard for the woman to have thought 'well no one else defines me, I can do what I want, they can't shame me'. Sometimes we can tell ourselves that we don't need to feel shame (and fortunately we live in a somewhat less shame-focused culture now...ish), but in reality I personally find it much harder to deep down not experiences feelings of not being good enough, much like the woman in the story.

- How would you imagine the women felt throughout different intervals of the story?
- Did Jesus behave how you'd expect? Why/why not?
- What do you think happened to the man that was also committing adultery?
- What do you think Jesus wrote in the sand?

Jesus sees her feelings of shame and shows love to her instead of judgement which freed her from her guilt and shame. He showed her that it doesn't have to define who she is.

Part 4:

How do you think about the connection between shame and your own identity i.e. behavior vs who you are?

“Owning our story can be hard but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it. Embracing our vulnerabilities is risky but not nearly as dangerous as giving up on love and belonging and joy—the experiences that make us the most vulnerable. Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light.”

--Brené Brown

How easy do you find it to talk about your vulnerabilities/feelings of shame? Why is that?

End:

Write on a piece of card '(blank) does not define me'. If you're not ready to pinpoint something yet to fill the blank then that's okay, you can take the card away and think about it more.

SATISFACTION

Introduction:

More than 2,000 self-help books are published each year. Their message is that the only solution to the happiness-deficit is to get in touch with your true self and find out what makes you, personally, feel good. According to Ben Renshaw of the Happiness Project, which runs positive-psychology programmes, 'the major cause of unhappiness for women in the 21st century is a lack of meaning: What's the point? Too many people climb the perceived ladder of happiness and find it's leaning against the wrong wall. In a manic society, with a lot of external pressures, you're setting yourself up for failure unless you have a well-defined idea of happiness.'

Part 1:

Recent research from 'The Happiness Project' has whittled down happiness in to 5 simple steps; connect, take notice, be active, keep learning, and give. (Give each woman a copy of the 5 ways to happiness picture).

- Which of these do you think you spend most of your time focusing on and which do you think you neglect?
- Why do you think 'connecting' and 'giving' made the list? (Think about the importance of looking outside of ourselves for satisfaction. We are not made to be alone!)

Part 2:

One of my favourite stories looking at satisfaction is the description of an encounter that Jesus had with a woman who's name we never learn, but she turns out to be one of the most significant women in the new testament. It's a story about Jesus addressing the issue of satisfaction, and I thought it would be interesting to think about it together and see how it might relate to us. (Give out copies of the story from John 4 and have someone else read it aloud.)

- What is your initial reaction to the story; how does it make you feel? What do you like or dislike about it?

Before we reflect on it more I thought it would be helpful to just go over some of the background context of what's going on, to help us understand this interaction more. (Read 'Satisfaction - Jesus and the woman at the well'.)

- We're told that the woman in the story was looking to men to satisfy her. Is there something you can pinpoint in your own life that you often turn to for satisfaction? (Worth emphasising that these things often aren't in themselves bad things, they just often don't really fulfill us).
- How does Jesus in this story compare with what you thought about him before?
- If you have spiritual beliefs, how do they influence your concept of satisfaction?

Part 3:

Soularium: Which picture represents satisfaction to you?

End:

Either write down an ambition that you have for your life, something that you want to be moving towards, or take a picture of the picture you chose to represent satisfaction?

the demand will
not even increase
" However vast supply, supply
we must renew."



APPENDICES



“I’M STILL LEARNING TO FORGIVE”

CORRIE TEN BOOM

Corrie ten Boom and her sister Betsie had been arrested for concealing Jews in their home during the Nazi occupation of Holland in World War II. They had been sent to the concentration camp at Ravensbruck. There Corrie saw her sister die from the inhumanly cruel treatment they received.

Following the war, Corrie returned to Germany “with the message that God forgives.” Everywhere she spoke, she explained that when we confess our sins and repent, “God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever.”

After one of her talks, a man came up to speak to her. She recognized him as one of the guards from the concentration camp. He stood in front of her, thrust out his hand, and said: “A fine message, Fräulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!”

She recalls her reaction: “I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course - how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?”

“But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face to face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

“You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk,’ he was saying. ‘I was a guard there.’ No, he did not remember me.

“But since that time,’ he went on, ‘I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein,’ again the hand came out, ‘will you forgive me?’ “

“I stood there - I whose sins had again and again to be forgiven - and could not forgive. Betsie had died in that place; could he erase her slow, terrible death simply for the asking?”

"It could not have been many seconds that he stood there-hand held out-but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

"For I had to do it; I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. 'If you do not forgive men their trespasses,' Jesus says, 'neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.'

"I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and horrible as that.

"And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion; I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. 'Help!' I prayed silently. 'I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.'

"And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. "I forgive you, brother!' I cried. 'With all my heart!'

"For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely, as I did then."

(excerpted from "I'm Still Learning to Forgive," by Corrie ten Boom; reprinted by permission from Guideposts Magazine; copyright 1972 by Guideposts Associates, Inc., Carmel, New York 10512).

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned,[a] but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends.

1 Corinthians 13:1-8

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THE FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES

Words of Affirmation

Actions don't always speak louder than words. If this is your love language, unsolicited compliments mean the world to you. Hearing the words, "I love you," are important - hearing the reasons behind that love sends your spirits skyward. Insults can leave you shattered and are not easily forgotten,

Quality Time

In the vernacular of Quality Time, nothing says, "I love you," like full, undivided attention. Being there for this type of person is critical, but really being there - with the TV off, fork and knife down, and all chores and tasks on standby - makes your significant other feel truly special and loved. Distractions, postponed dates, or the failure to listen can be especially hurtful.

Receiving Gifts

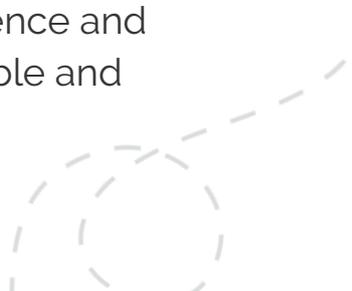
Don't mistake this love language for materialism; the receiver of gifts thrives on the love, thoughtfulness, and effort behind the gift. If you speak this language, the perfect gift or gesture shows that you are known, you are cared for, and you are prized above whatever was sacrificed to bring the gift to you. A missed birthday, anniversary, or a hasty, thoughtless gift would be disastrous - so would the absence of everyday gestures.

Acts of Service

Can vacuuming the floors really be an expression of love? Absolutely! Anything you do to ease the burden of responsibilities weighing on an Acts of Service person will speak volumes. The words he or she most want to hear: "Let me do that for you." Laziness, broken commitments, and making more work for them tell speakers of this language their feelings don't matter.

Physical Touch

This language isn't all about the bedroom. A person whose primary language is Physical Touch is, not surprisingly, very touchy. Hugs, pats on the back, holding hands, and thoughtful touches on the arm, shoulder, or face - they can all be ways to show excitement, concern, care, and love. Physical presence and accessibility are crucial, while neglect or abuse can be unforgivable and destructive.



LOVE LANGUAGE	ACTIONS TO TAKE	HOW TO COMMUNICATE	THINGS TO AVOID
Words of Affirmation	Spoken words; written cards and letters	Encouraging words; compliments; affirming spirit	Emotionally harsh words; undue criticism
Quality Time	Running errands; taking trips; doing things together; going on walks; sitting/talking at home	Quiet places with no interruptions; undivided attention; one-to-one conversations	Too much time with friends or groups; isolation; gaps of time between meetings
Receiving Gifts	Giving gifts; giving time; remembering special occasions; giving small tokens	Private giving of gifts; pleasant facial expressions	Materialism; forgetting special events
Acts of Service	Assisting with house chores; ongoing acts of helpfulness; exchanging of chores	Make a checklist; say: "What can I do for you?"; "I will stop and get..."; "Today; I did ... for you."	Forgetting promises; over-commitment of tasks; ignoring
Physical Touch	Hugs; pats; touches; sitting close	Pleasant facial expressions; mostly non-verbal	Physical abuse; corporal punishment; threats; neglect

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"THE SUCCEEDER" JEREMY'S STORY

I was lying face down on my bed. It was about 4am, one night in my first year at Oxford University, and I was feeling absolutely exhausted, but my heart was still pumping with the caffeine from red bull & pro plus.

I had just done another all-nighter to complete an essay for the next day. I had needed to do this because my life was so full of activity. I went to university and immediately got involved in helping to run the student newspaper and in lots of other clubs and societies. I even ran my own business whilst studying.

I did all these things because I was trying to build the perfect CV - to achieve as much as possible. I was constantly comparing myself with my classmates and trying to make sure I was doing better than them. I was trying to prove myself to the world. I had been bullied as a teenager and I was working hard so I could turn around to the bullies and say, "I'm better than you," or be so successful that they couldn't hurt me.

Fast forward to second year and my business was going well. In fact, I had achieved much of what I had set out to do. I was on course to be successful and wealthy. But I still felt unsatisfied; in fact, I felt as insecure as ever.

Although I had been interested in the idea of God in my teenage years, I had 'kept a distance' because I wanted to have control of my life and fulfill all the ambitions which were so important to me. However, when I saw that these wouldn't truly satisfy me, it was then that I turned to God.

At the end of first term in second year, after some thought, discussion, and a little prayer, I became a Christian.

After that, my life really started to change. I started to understand the message of God's unconditional love - that I was loved by him, regardless of what I'd done or achieved. I didn't need to prove myself to him. This meant I didn't need to prove myself to other people either!

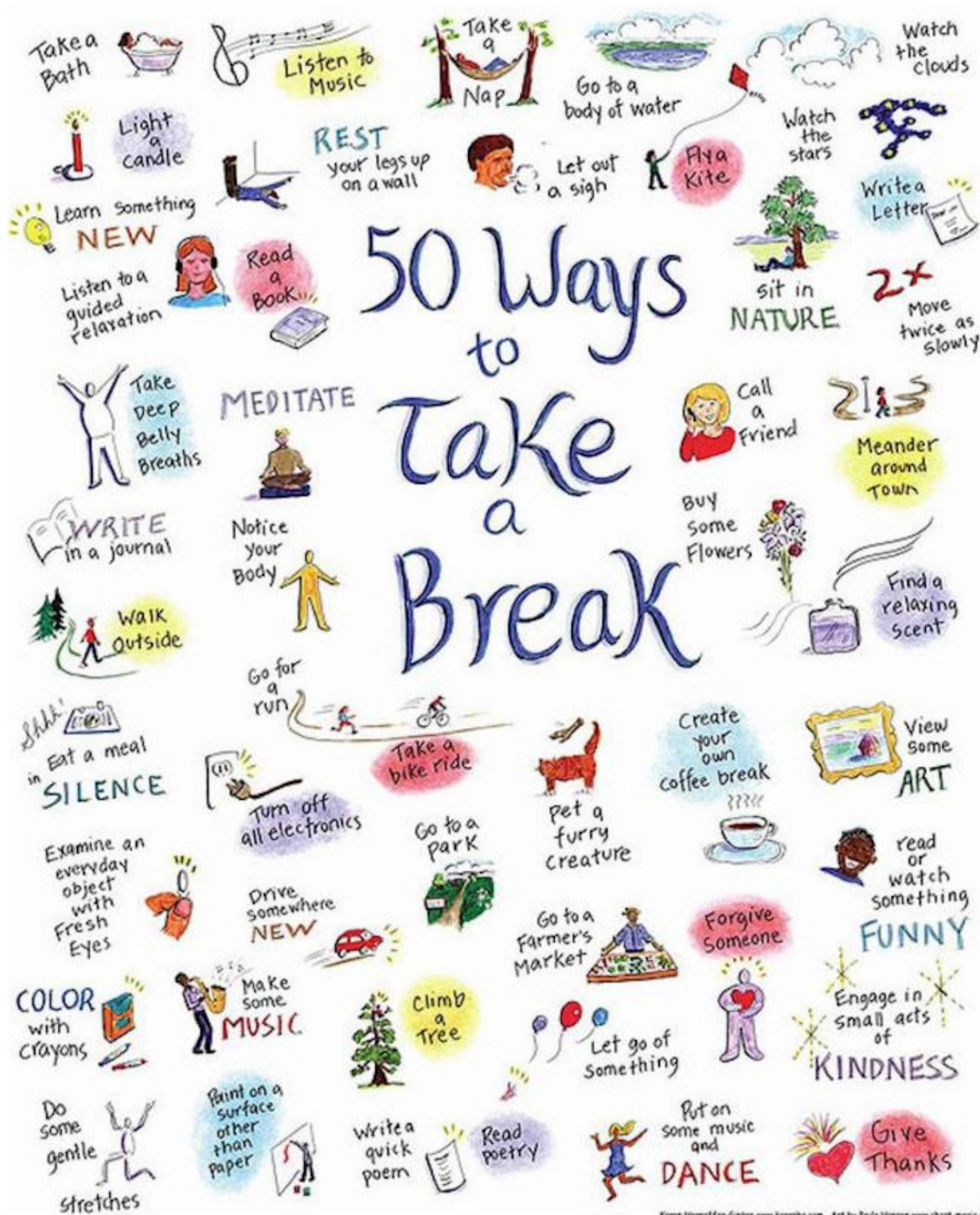
This had a significant practical effect. I felt I could let go of a number of my extracurricular activities and gave up my business. I started to live a more balanced life. I changed so much that my housemates were asking, "Who are you and what have you done with the guy we used to live with?"

I also started to relate to people very differently. God started to give me love for people around me in a way that I didn't have before. Previously, I had 'used' people to get ahead and be as successful as I could. Now, God helped me to see the value people had and I started to develop more meaningful relationships with those around me.

Most of all, as I started to develop a friendship with God, I came to experience a deep peace and a joy that I had never had before. God is real - and he's changed my life.

Jeremy Moses is an Oxford graduate who now works for his local church.





Connect...

With the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school, or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

Be active...

Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

Take notice...

Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

Keep learning...

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.

Give...

Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, as linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you.

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JESUS AND THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

At the beginning of the scene, Jesus is making his way north towards Galilee, passing through a place called Samaria, which was the home of the Samaritan people, who were a racially-mixed group of partly Jewish, partly non-Jewish heritage – they were outcast by both Jews and non-Jews of the time. Strict Jews of the day would have avoided Samaria altogether, and would have taken a longer, more difficult route to get around it. So those listening to it or reading 2,000 years ago would have instantly been alert to the significance of Jesus travelling through Samaria.

Another significant alarm bell to the original audience is the time. No one in the middle-east goes outside in the middle of the day, unless they have to, because it's so hot. Certainly, you wouldn't go to collect water at the middle of the day. All the women in the community would meet together early in the morning, or later in the evening when it is cooler, to go together to collect water. So why then, do we see this lone woman, struggling through the scorching midday sun to fill her water jar? We never even learn this woman's name, but this simple fact about the time tells us a great deal about her. She is not like the other women of her community. She is forced to walk alone, in the middle of the day, when no one else is going to be at the well. So as this outcast woman approaches the well where Jesus is resting.

For a strict Jewish man, being on your own with a woman who isn't your wife, mother or sister was a no-go. But being on your own with a Samaritan woman; more than that, a morally disrespected, outcast Samaritan woman; that was an unthinkable situation. A strict Jew would probably have left the place immediately. And yet, Jesus breaks every social and cultural boundary of the day and directly engages in conversation with her. He does not fit anyone's expectations at all.

By initiating conversation with her, and asking her for a drink, Jesus shows that he is interested in her, that he sees past the prejudice against her, and that he is even willing to put himself in a position of need to her. We see the astonishment of the woman herself. She says: "You are a Jew, and I am a

Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?" And this is where the conversation turns to satisfaction, because Jesus isn't interested in talking about social and cultural issues here, he has a much more important subject on his mind. He says to her "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who I am, you would ask me and I would give you living water." Jesus takes the conversation to a deeper and more personal level.

Then comes one of the key parts of this story, when Jesus looks right at the woman and says to her "People soon become thirsty again after drinking this water. But the water I give takes away thirst altogether. It becomes a perpetual spring within them, giving them eternal life." Jesus is getting to the heart of the matter now. He clearly isn't talking on a physical level; he is using a physical image and idea, that of water and thirst, to teach a spiritual lesson. Thirst is a desire for more, whether it's physical thirst for drink, or a deeper, more emotional thirst for something. Yet Jesus says to this woman that the water that he gives takes away thirst altogether. Whoever drinks of His water will never experience thirst again. That is a huge, some might say pretty audacious statement. Jesus says that he can satisfy in a way that no one or nothing else can. That he satisfies completely and eternally.

He points to himself as the source of this life, because he himself is God; God come to earth to pursue a relationship with the people he created and loves. And here, Jesus is saying that it is a relationship with God that can satisfy on a complete, eternal level.





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