

## Lent Study Materials for Individuals and Groups

### Introduction.

These materials will be focusing on wellbeing through 5 encounters with Jesus in John's Gospel. They have been prepared with inspiration from the book *'Renewable Wellbeing: Five culture shifts for the church'* by Ruth Rice.

Ruth Rice has a background in teaching and Baptist Church ministry, and is Director of Renew Wellbeing, a charity which runs simple café style spaces attached to a quiet room for support and prayer. These centres are open to all and are underpinned by 3 key principles, *Being prayerful, Being present, Being in partnership*. There are now over 160 Renew Wellbeing spaces across the UK and they are working nationally in partnership with the Church of England to provide training and resources. You can find out more about their work from their website; [Renew Wellbeing - Home](#)

Wellbeing is at the very heart of the gospel but, in well-intentioned efforts to keep activities running, are over busy churches simply burning-out and missing this peace of Jesus?

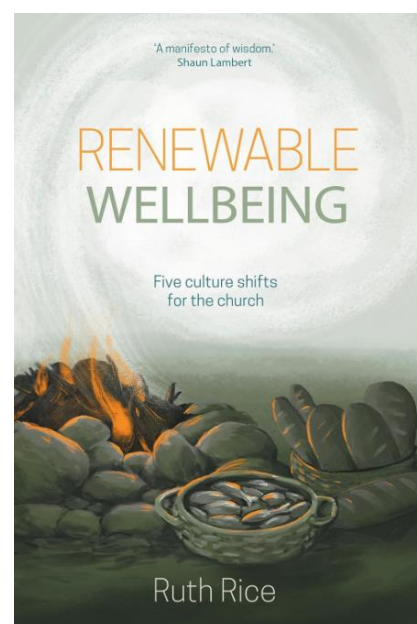
In the book Ruth states: *'We need to find ways of renewable energy, renewable hope, renewable love, renewable life if we are to be flourishing communities of wellbeing.'*

The five culture shifts she believes the church needs today to renew wellbeing in our churches are considered through five sessions: connecting with our identity, learning the new economy of the kingdom, getting active in community, taking notice of simplicity in our habits, and giving in renewable ways and sensing our call to serve.

These 5 shifts are also linked with the **5 Ways to Wellbeing** first developed by the New Economics Foundation and now widely used in healthcare, in education and employment and by Mental Health charities. [Microsoft Word - Five ways to well-being the evidence.doc](#)

### Renewable wellbeing summary of sessions

1. Identity, Connecting with God and with others  
Bible story – Wedding at Cana  
Link with connection
2. Economy of one Measuring Value and worth  
Bible story – Woman at the well  
Link with learning
3. Community, being present to others  
Bible story, feeding 5000  
Link with getting active
4. Simplicity, habits for fruitfulness  
Bible story – fruit of the spirit and true vine  
Link with taking notice
5. Vulnerability, giving sustainably  
Bible story – breakfast at the beach, Jesus and Peter  
Link with giving.



There are some short 5-6 min video talks from Ruth Rice to accompany some of these topics at [Renew Wellbeing - Resources](#) which you could watch after exploring the passage.

## Study 1 Identity, Connecting with God and with others

Ruth Rice says about connection

‘for me this is connecting with God first, then with myself and then with others in the world around me. How I connect with the big story, the character of God affects how I feel about everything else’

### Starter question

Are there any Bible characters whose stories have inspired you in the past? What do their stories suggest to us about the character of God?

### Read the passage John 2:1-11



<sup>1</sup>Two days later there was a wedding in the town of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, <sup>2</sup>and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup>When the wine had given out, Jesus' mother said to him, “They have no wine left.”

<sup>4</sup>“You must not tell me what to do,” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.”

<sup>5</sup>Jesus' mother then told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

<sup>6</sup>The Jews have rules about ritual washing, and for this purpose six stone water jars were there, each one large enough to hold about a hundred litres. <sup>7</sup>Jesus said to the servants, “Fill these jars with water.” They filled them to the brim, <sup>8</sup>and then he told them, “Now draw some water out and take it to the man in charge of the feast.” They took him the water, <sup>9</sup>which now had turned into wine, and he tasted it. He did not know where this wine had come from (but, of course, the servants who had drawn out the water knew); so he called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup>and said to him, “Everyone else serves the best wine first, and after the guests have had plenty to drink, he serves the ordinary wine. But you have kept the best wine until now!”

<sup>11</sup>Jesus performed this first miracle in Cana in Galilee; there he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

1. What jumps out at you from this passage about the character of Jesus?
2. What can we learn about Jesus from his comment *My time has not yet come*?
3. In the light of Jesus' comments to Mary in verse 4, why do you think she said to the servants ‘Do whatever he tells you’ Could it be that Jesus cared about his mother and wanted to help her friends?
4. What do you make of the fact that Jesus chose to perform his first miracle at this time and place?
5. This story suggests to us that Jesus cares about ordinary days and problems. Can you think of other examples of Jesus responding to requests for help from someone in need?  
(consider John 4:46-54, John 5:1-11, John 9:1-12, the story of Lazarus John 11)
6. What might it be like for Jesus to fill empty areas of your life or church's activities with new wine?
7. What do these stories help you to understand about how to connect with others around you?

### Being Prayerful

- Thank God for his character as you understand it. Name any new characteristics this story has helped you to understand.
- Picture an ordinary day or event and picture Jesus in it with you.
- Reflect on the words ‘do whatever he tells you’ and what this meant for the servants, what it means for you.

**Conclusions** – This story **links with connection** and gives us clues to the identity of God and his desire to be part of our everyday lives. When we connect with this God, we can also connect with ourselves and others.

## Study 2 - Economy of one: Measuring value and worth

### Starter Questions

Can you think of a time when you have planned an event or get together and were disappointed that fewer people came than you had hoped? Did something different than you expected come of it?



### Read the passage John 4:5-26

#### Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

<sup>5</sup>In Samaria he came to a town named Sychar, which was not far from the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup>Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

<sup>7</sup>A Samaritan woman came to draw some water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink of water." <sup>8</sup>(His disciples had gone into town to buy food.)

<sup>9</sup>The woman answered, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan — so how can you ask me for a drink?" (Jews will not use the same cups and bowls that Samaritans use.)

<sup>10</sup>Jesus answered, "If only you knew what God gives and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would ask him, and he would give you life-giving water."

<sup>11</sup>"Sir," the woman said, "you haven't got a bucket, and the well is deep. Where would you get that life-giving water? <sup>12</sup>It was our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well; he and his sons and his flocks all drank from it. You don't claim to be greater than Jacob, do you?"

<sup>13</sup>Jesus answered, "All those who drink this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup>but whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring which will provide him with life-giving water and give him eternal life."

<sup>15</sup>"Sir," the woman said, "give me that water! Then I will never be thirsty again, nor will I have to come here to draw water."

<sup>16</sup>"Go and call your husband," Jesus told her, "and come back."

<sup>17</sup>"I haven't got a husband," she answered.

Jesus replied, "You are right when you say you haven't got a husband. <sup>18</sup>You have been married to five men, and the man you live with now is not really your husband. You have told me the truth."

<sup>19</sup>"I see you are a prophet, sir," the woman said. <sup>20</sup>"My Samaritan ancestors worshipped God on this mountain, but you Jews say that Jerusalem is the place where we should worship God."

<sup>21</sup>Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the time will come when people will not worship the Father either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup>You Samaritans do not really know whom you worship; but we Jews know whom we worship, because it is from the Jews that salvation comes. <sup>23</sup>But the time is coming and is already here, when by the power of God's Spirit people will worship the Father as he really is, offering him the true worship that he wants. <sup>24</sup>God is Spirit, and only by the power of his Spirit can people worship him as he really is."

<sup>25</sup>The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah will come, and when he comes, he will tell us everything."

<sup>26</sup>Jesus answered, "I am he, I who am talking with you."

1. Jesus sat down at the well because he was weary. What can we learn from the fact that the conversation began with Jesus receiving water from the woman?
2. Look through the story again and identify all the ways that Jesus' interaction with the woman would have made her feel valued.
3. Jesus spent time in this 1-1 encounter. What reasons might Jesus' disciples have had, to suggest Jesus should have used his time differently?
4. Can you think of a time when you have been surprised by what you have learnt from sitting and talking with someone you did not know?
5. From the woman's perspective, what made her engage in the conversation and ask so many questions ?

### Being prayerful

- Thank God that he knows us all, with all our complications, yet values us as he valued this woman.
- Imagine seeing someone in need. See what gift they carry for you. Ask God to help you see them with Jesus' eyes.

**Conclusions** - This story is **linked with learning**. We need to learn from Jesus how to sit down when we are weary and ask for help. We need to learn from the woman to be brave and curious enough to ask questions, and we need to learn from others, and measure quality of interactions rather than using the world's criteria of success.

### Study 3 Community, being present to others

#### Starter Questions

Can you think of ways you share wellbeing habits with anyone in the wider community? Could our gathering together as Church look different if we communicated that the God of wellbeing is at the heart of it?

#### Read the bible passage John 6: 1-13

<sup>1</sup>Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), <sup>2</sup>and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing those who were ill. <sup>3</sup>Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. <sup>4</sup>The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

<sup>5</sup>When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming towards him, he said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?' <sup>6</sup>He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

<sup>7</sup>Philip answered him, 'It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!'

<sup>8</sup>Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, <sup>9</sup>'Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?'

<sup>10</sup>Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). <sup>11</sup>Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

<sup>12</sup>When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, 'Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.' <sup>13</sup>So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

1. What were the crowds expecting to witness that day? Why do you think Jesus did something different?
2. Why was it important to Jesus to start with the boy's gift of the loaves and fishes?
3. The disciples were initially reluctant to get involved with feeding the crowd. Why might this have been?
4. Can you think of any times you have been reluctant to get active serving people in the community around you, or any times when you have acted in faith as the disciples eventually did?
5. The boy in this story was not one of the disciples. Do we look out for the gifts and blessings in our community as well as the needs? How might you facilitate sharing of these?
6. Who can you identify with most, the boy who offered what he had, the disciples who initially lacked understanding of what Jesus could do, the crowd who received?
7. What can this story teach us about community?

You may want to look at the story in the other Gospels. It appears in Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17 and Matthew 14:13-21.

#### Being Prayerful

- Ask God to help you see the gifts in others and thank him for them.
- Talk to him about anything you find hard to hand over to him.



#### Conclusions

This story is linked with **getting active** for our community but using what we have, rather than what we don't have, recognising the gifts of others. It points to the need to sometimes hand over what we have to God, - but we don't *always* have to be the one/s carrying the picnic. Sometimes you can be the one who receives instead, surprised by God's abundance.

## Study 4 Simplicity: Habits for Fruitfulness

### Starter Questions

What is your favourite fruit, and do you know when it is in season? Can you detect *seasons* of fruitfulness in your life?

### Read the bible passage John 15: 1-17

Jesus the Real Vine

<sup>1</sup>“I am the real vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup>He breaks off every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and he prunes every branch that does bear fruit, so that it will be clean and bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You have been made clean already by the teaching I have given you. <sup>4</sup>Remain united to me, and I will remain united to you. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it can do so only if it remains in the vine. In the same way you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me.

<sup>5</sup>“I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me. <sup>6</sup>Whoever does not remain in me is thrown out like a branch and dries up; such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, where they are burnt. <sup>7</sup>If you remain in me and my words remain in you, then you will ask for anything you wish, and you shall have it. <sup>8</sup>My Father's glory is shown by your bearing much fruit; and in this way you become my disciples. <sup>9</sup>I love you just as the Father loves me; remain in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

<sup>11</sup>“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup>My commandment is this: love one another, just as I love you. <sup>13</sup>The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them. <sup>14</sup>And you are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup>I do not call you servants any longer, because servants do not know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose me; I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures. And so the Father will give you whatever you ask of him in my name. <sup>17</sup>This, then, is what I command you: love one another.

These words were spoken by Jesus to his disciples when he knew he would not be with them much longer.

1. Other versions of this passage replace the word ‘remain’ with abide. What does ‘remaining’ in Jesus mean for you and is ‘abiding’ in him the same?
2. In the image Jesus uses, why do some branches ‘dry up’? What are they missing?
3. Most vines in vineyards are trained, using trellising and pruning to control their growth and improve the quality of the grapes due to the access of air and sunlight needed for the fruit to ripen fully. (See the picture opposite) Ruth Rice invites us to explore what structures in our daily life and routine support our faith. Are these *simple, joyful and gentle*?
4. She suggests 3 simple values, *being present, being prayerful and being in partnership*. What might these mean for you? You might explore how these are applied by Renew Wellbeing through looking at their website [Renew Wellbeing - What we do](#)
5. What did Jesus mean by ‘fruit that endures’ in verse 16?
6. Try looking up the fruits of the spirit in Galatians 5: 22-23, - how might these be fruit that endure?



### Being Prayerful

- Thank God that he wants you to dwell in him and be fruitful.
- Consider the fruits mentioned in Galatians. You may want to pray for one to be more fruitful in your life.

### Conclusions:

We can link this passage with the way of wellbeing – **to take notice**. Jesus is calling his followers to cling closely to the source of life and fruitfulness and rely on him. This may mean **taking notice** daily of our rhythms and habits, and bringing ourselves back to the basics of our faith.

## Study 5 Vulnerability – Giving in a sustainable way.

### Starter Questions

Can you recall a time when you were glad of a hearty breakfast? Why did you need it?

### Read the bible passage John 21: 1-17

21 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee.<sup>[a]</sup> It happened this way: <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus<sup>[b]</sup>), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.<sup>4</sup> Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.<sup>5</sup> He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered.<sup>6</sup> He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.<sup>7</sup> Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. <sup>8</sup> The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>9</sup> When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.<sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” <sup>11</sup> So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

<sup>15</sup> When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”<sup>16</sup> Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”<sup>17</sup> The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.

1. What might we learn about Peter’s character from the first part of this passage? - (up to v14) How does this fit with other things you may know about Peter?
2. Jesus prepared breakfast for his disciples and invites them – ‘come and have breakfast’. Why might Jesus have prepared food for them at this time?
3. There is a pause in the story while they eat. What can you imagine taking place during this time?
4. Peter had denied Jesus before he died, - you may want to look back at John’s account of this in John 18. He must have been feeling very deeply that he had let him down. Why is the conversation between them here so important for Peter?
5. In the final verses Peter was being called to a life of service for Jesus. How had this encounter helped to prepare him?
6. Have you ever felt you have let Jesus down? Does the way he responded to Peter reassure you?
7. What good things does Jesus offer you to sustain you?

### Being prayerful

- Picture yourself seeing Jesus on the shore calling out to you in your weariness. Smell the breakfast. He invites you to bring what you have caught, what you carry. Hand these things to him. Your gifts, your skills, your failings.
- Reflect on Psalm 23:5 “You prepare a table before me.”
- Hear the call to feed his sheep, - ask him which sheep.

### Conclusions

This story **links with giving, but not beyond what we can receive.** Peter is being called to serve Jesus, but he is first given the resources by Jesus. He met with Peter, fed him and the disciples, and then gave him the reassurance of complete acceptance. The breakfast on the shore is the start, there is always more to sustain us.

