

cpas



making connections

Four sessions on
relationships

Andy Castle and Ruth Hassall

making connections



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introduction

Welcome!

Making Connections is a four-part teaching series looking at the key relationships in our lives. Each session is planned to last between one and two hours depending on the time you have available. Not all of the activities provided are necessary for the flow of the session - it's up to you to create your own pathway through.

Each session is divided into:



Aim



Bible



Way in



Worship / Reflection



Activity



And finally

We really enjoy producing these resources and hope you enjoy using them. Because of this we'd really value your feedback. Tell us if it's been good, but also tell us if it's been disappointing, and, if possible, why. Let us know if there are books or themes you would like to see tackled in future teaching resources.

Keep an eye on the website for new resources, and let us know what you think.

You can contact Andy at acastle@cpas.org.uk or Ruth at rhassall@cpas.org.uk. We look forward to hearing from you.

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session 1: friends



Aim

Introduction

Welcome to the first of four sessions on the subject of relationships. In this first session we are looking at relationships with friends, asking what Jesus means when he says that we're his friends and how that should affect our friendships with others.



Way in 15 mins

To set the theme for the session choose one or two of the following activities:

Human guess who

Select one person to be the guesser, send him/her out of the room. Everyone else selects one person who is 'it' and they all stand in a row (or rows if lots of people). The guesser comes back in and has to work out who 'it' is by asking questions as they would in the board game *Guess Who*. For example, they ask 'Is the person a girl?'. If no, then all the girls sit down; if yes, all the boys sit down. The guesser continues asking questions until they are in a position to guess who 'it' is. The person who guesses correctly in the least number of questions wins.

Best of friends

In small groups of 3 or 4, give each person a sheet of paper and some pens. Get the groups to fold the paper in half and then open it out again to give two halves to the page. In each half ask them to draw an outline of a person. On one outline write down what makes a good friend, and on the other what makes a bad friend.

They can use arrows if it relates to specific parts of the body e.g. ears for listening, or heart for caring etc. When finished, get the groups to explain what they have put and why. (This activity obviously has the potential for inappropriate comments and drawings! You might want to recognise that at the start of the activity, and invite them to enter into it maturely!)

Knowing me, knowing you

Get the young people to split into groups of 2 or 3 preferably with people they are friends with or know well. One person is selected in each group to form a panel that sits facing all the groups. The leader then asks a question of each group about their friend. For example, 'What is their favourite takeaway?'

Materials

- Bibles.
- Paper.
- Pens.
- Music.
- Refreshments.

'Strangers are friends
just waiting to happen.'
Anonymous

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session 1: friends

Then give three options (a, b and c). The groups then write down which they think their friend would have. When everyone has written their answers down get each panel member to say what they would choose. If their group guessed correctly they get one point. Repeat with a number of different questions.



Activity
10 mins

Master or friend?

Together read John 15:12-15. Then either:

- Chat in pairs about what the difference is between Jesus being our friend and Jesus being our master.
- Using the word FRIEND give each person a piece of paper and ask them to come up with something about Jesus' friendship which starts with each letter of the word e.g. F-faithful, R-real etc. Share at the end and turn these into prayers of thanks. Help those who aren't used to praying out loud by encouraging them to simply say 'Thank you Jesus that you are faithful, real ... Amen.'

Jesus' intention is that we should be like him in our friendships. Take a moment to think through which characteristic you would like God's help to grow more in.

Play a song about Jesus being our friend and ask people to find a quiet space in the room to reflect on the passage as you listen. You could use *Befriended* by Matt Redman or *I am a Friend of God* by Israel Houghton for example.



Bible
20 mins

Words of wisdom

The book of Proverbs offers a lot of wisdom on what it means to be a good friend, and who to be friends with. Divide the group into four and give each group one of the following verses:

- Proverbs 17:9
- Proverbs 17:17
- Proverbs 18:24
- Proverbs 27:6

Ask each group to reflect on their verse and to discuss what it means. Then ask them if they can come up with an example of where they've seen this in their own friendships.

Alternatively if your group enjoys a bit of drama, ask them to create a short role play illustrating their verse.

'Friend - a person known well to another and regarded with liking, affection and loyalty.'
Collins English Dictionary

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session 1: friends

Or, if you'd prefer, give a straight talk drawing from 1 Samuel 20:1-42 about David's friendship with Jonathan.

This relationship is held up as one of the great friendships in the Bible, but it wasn't the easiest of relationships owing to the difficulties between David and Jonathan's dad, King Saul. At one time David and Saul had been very close, but Saul had become incredibly jealous of David and was now set on killing him. David found out about this so asked Jonathan to find out what was going on. Jonathan had difficult decisions to make about his relationship with his dad and his friendship with David.

They came up with a plan for Jonathan to carry out at the New Moon Festival. He would see how Saul reacted to David not being there, and they would be clearer about what Saul was planning. David would stay in hiding until Jonathan could give him the answer.

Before the festival they promised to be faithful to each other.

You might like to include the following points:

- Jonathan was torn between being loyal to his friend and loyal to his father, but for him truth was most important.
- True friendship for them was about doing whatever it takes to support and help your friend, even risking his father's anger (v4).
- Their friendship was unconditional (v15).
- Their friendship had God at the centre and that made it really strong (v42).

Jonathan was a great friend. He risked everything for David including his life. He eventually helped David escape even though it meant he would never see him again.

The Bible teaches that God designed friendship to be selfless, always considering our friends ahead of ourselves. The Bible also says that the best friend we could ever have is someone who always wants the best for us and gives up everything for us – and that is what Jesus has done for us.

'I get by with a little help from my friends.'
The Beatles



Reflection
10 mins

Working it out

Choose one of the following:

- In groups of two or three think about a friendship that isn't always great. What have you learnt tonight that could help in that situation? Invite the young people to offer help to each other about how they could make the situation better. Then pray for each other.

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session 1: friends

- In groups of two or three think about how you can be a better friend to people. Invite each person to write on a slip of paper a characteristic they want to grow in in their friendships this week. Pray together for God's help in this.
- Look back at the list of what makes a good friend from the earlier activity (if you did it). Has this list changed at all in the light of what you have read? What would Jesus want you to do in your friendships to be more like him? Pray.

Finish by reading Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.



And finally
5 mins

Thank everyone for coming. Invite the group to start thinking about the next session's theme which is family.

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session 2: families



Aim

Introduction

This session looks at our families and the role we play in them. For some people, the idea of the traditional family of two parents and children living together can be far from their reality, and so leaders must be sensitive to this. The session aims to help us accept the family we are in and to look at how we can be more like Jesus within our family set-up.



Way in

10-15 mins

Happy families

Before the session starts, think of famous families and their members e.g. The Simpsons, the Royal family, etc. Choose four members of each family and write each member's name on a separate piece of paper. There needs to be enough names for each person who will be at the session. Get some balloons and, before you inflate each one, put a name inside. Then inflate and tie the balloons. You will have one balloon for each person.

Explain how the activity runs as follows:

- Each person must grab a balloon, burst it and discover which family character they are.
- Then find the rest of your family.
- In your family, come up with a slogan for your new family or sing a tune connected with that family (e.g. *The Simpsons* theme tune, the national anthem etc.).

If you make it competitive, it can be the first family to shout/sing their slogan/tune. Or you could get each family in turn to introduce themselves and perform their ideas.

To make this activity more difficult, you could insist that it is played in silence and that they have to communicate who they are by actions, not showing each other the names on their papers obviously!

Who am I?

As a variation on 'Happy families' – instead of putting the names inside balloons, put them on sticky notes and stick them on people's backs. Each person then has to work out who they are by asking each other questions to which they can only answer yes or no. Once they've worked out who they are, they have to sit in families as above.

Materials

- Bibles.
- Paper.
- Pens.
- Green and red stickers.
- Balloons.
- Post-its.
- Lining paper.
- The Lord's prayer.
- Postcards.
- Refreshments.

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session 2: families



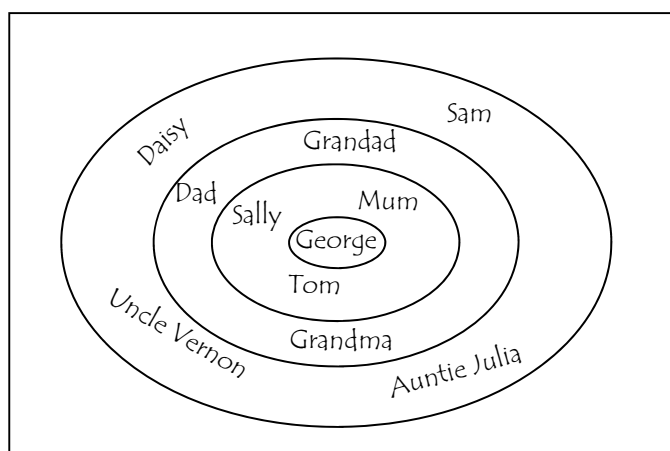
Activity
10-15 mins

Families are complicated!

Give each person a piece of paper and a pen. Ask them to do the following:

- Write their name at the centre of the paper and put a circle around it.
- Next ask them to draw a slightly larger circle around this first circle. In this area write the names of the people who they live with.
- Draw another slightly larger circle around this and write the names of anyone they would consider close family but people they don't live with. This could be a parent they don't live with, a brother or sister living away, perhaps at university, or a grandparent.
- Draw a final circle and ask them to write down the names of other relatives: aunts, uncles, cousins etc.

It should look something like this...



Once everyone has drawn their family, give each person some stickers. Red and green dot stickers would be great. Tell them to put a green sticker next to everyone on their piece of paper who they get on well with, and a red sticker next to anyone who they don't always find it that easy to connect with.

Ask them to reflect on their family:-

- Do they have more dots of one colour than the other?
- Do the colours depend on the nearer they are to me at the centre?
- What is the best thing about their family?

End this activity by explaining that the picture they have produced may appear quite complicated. That is because families are complicated!

'You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them.'

Desmond Tutu

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session 2: families



Worship

10-15 mins

Choose one of the following ideas for helping your group meet with God:

Our Father

Jesus taught us to refer to God as 'our Father'. The actual word, 'abba', is better translated as 'daddy' today. It gives us that sense of closeness, of intimacy, of being held in his arms.

Ask each person to find some space in the room where they can sit quietly on their own, with paper if it helps. Tell them to take this time to talk to God about how they feel about having him as their heavenly dad.

It might be good to point out that regardless of whether your experience of an earthly father is good or not, God is the perfect father and wants to meet our every need. Play some appropriate music in the background as they sit.

Child of God

Jesus says that if we believe in him, we become children of God. Therefore, we are brothers and sisters in Christ.

- Put a large piece of paper on a wall (a roll of lining paper from a DIY store is ideal for this). Have some marker pens or felt tips available.
- Explain that you are going to give some space for them to write or draw anything that comes to mind about what it means to be a child of God.
- Put some music on while they do this.
- Encourage them to be listening and talking to God as they do this.

The Lord's prayer

Jesus taught us how to pray to our heavenly father – the Lord's Prayer. Give out copies of this prayer and say it together. Ask people to reflect on the different sections to it and to consider how they might pray a similar prayer in their own words.

Our Father, in heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
Now and forever.
Amen

'The love of a family is life's greatest blessing.'
Anonymous



session 2: families



Bible
20 mins

Choose one of the following ideas which best suits your group's learning style and depth of understanding:

Honour our parents

Ask someone to read Exodus 20:12, one of the ten commandments. Ask what 'honour' means. You could provide someone with a dictionary or, if you have access to the internet, get someone to look up the meaning on a dictionary website such as www.dictionary.com.

Spend some time discussing what it looks like to honour your parents, especially when you might disagree with them. Some useful questions might be:

- What do you think honouring our parents might look like?
- In what ways might this be hard to do?
- Why do you think God made this one of the ten commandments? How does it compare in importance to the other commandments?
- What do parents do which makes it hard to keep this commandment?
- What stops us from honouring our parents and what can we do to restore honour in our relationships with our parents?

Part of the family

Divide into three groups and give each group one of the following verses:

- Ephesians 6:1-4 (honour your parents)
- Galatians 5:22-26 (fruit of the Spirit)
- Genesis 25:19-34 (teenage rivalry)

Ask each group to read their passage and to consider what the implications are for us in our own families.

Have everyone feedback their thoughts and then ask them:

- How can we be good family members?
- What are the dangers or traps we can easily fall into?

Then get them back into their groups and ask them to come up with two scenarios in a typical family life today where they have a choice of whether to do the right thing or the wrong thing. After a given time, bring the groups back together and get them to share their scenarios without saying what the right or wrong thing to do is. The actors could freeze-frame the scene just before the right/wrong action takes place. Ask the other groups to comment on what they think the right or

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session 2: families

wrong thing would be to do in that situation. Encourage them also to think about how easy or difficult it would be to do the right thing. Let the scenario play out to show what the group came up with.

Love one another

Read Matthew 22:34-40. Jesus said that the second most important command, second only to loving God, is to love your neighbour as yourself. If we lived by these two commandments in our families, what would be the implications? What would it look like?

Often we can read this as love your neighbour but, of course, thump your brother, after all he is very irritating! But what could our families really look like if we always loved one another?

In small groups, discuss these questions and ask them to list specific things that happen in their family which could be different if they took these commandments seriously.



Reflection
10-15 mins

Choose one of the following ideas to help your group respond to this session and pray for each other.

Share an issue

In pairs, ask each person to share an issue in their family life which needs God to help make a difference. Tell them to pray for each other in their pairs.

Postcard commitment

How can you show Jesus' love for your family to your family? Ask them what one thing they could do this week which might make a difference.

Give each person a postcard and a pen and ask them to write this challenge on the postcard. They might like to take this home and put it somewhere where it can act as a prompt for them during the week.

Get into small groups and encourage them to share with their group what their challenge is. In their groups, ask them to pray for each other that God will help them to do what they intend.

'Family is the most important thing in the world.'
Princess Diana

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session 2: families

Family house

Give each person a piece of paper. Ask them to draw a house on the page (the classic square for the shell, triangle for the roof etc., not a work of art!). Get them to write down in one window something they have done this week which hasn't helped their family (e.g. disobeyed a parent), in another window something they can do to help someone in their family (e.g. do the dishes), and in another window something that they would love God to do (e.g. help my brother to know God). Then, in pairs, ask them to share whatever they would like to, and then pray for each other.



And finally
2 mins

Thank everyone for coming and encourage them to keep thinking about how they can be more like Jesus in their families. Tell them that next week we look at relationships with the opposite sex!

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session 3: the opposite sex



Aim

Introduction

This session looks at our relationships with people of the opposite sex.



Way in

10-15 mins

Choose one of the following activities as a way of introducing the subject:

Read all about it

Grab a few 'celebrity' magazines and ask people to cut out headlines and photos which communicate about relationships. If you have some large paper and glue sticks you could get them to build a collage. When finished, ask them to comment on what messages the media portrays about relationships (e.g. singleness = unhappiness, marriages don't last etc.).

Celebrity couples

Put up some faces of famous people around the room. Ask people to go round and write down the names of the people and who they are in a relationship with. When people have finished either exercise invite them to feedback what messages they feel the media gives about relationships.



Activity

15-20 mins

The following ideas are all based around Psalm 139 which tells us of how God made us on purpose and knows us inside out. Both these things are essential if we are to be in healthy relationships with someone of the opposite sex.

Side on silhouette

Get everyone to sit in a circle. Give each person a piece of paper and ask them to draw the silhouette outline of the person sitting on their left (their face profile from the side they are looking at). Get each person to cut it out, write the name of the person on the back (making sure beforehand that it doesn't show through!) and give it to the leader. When you have collected all of them, display them one at a time at random and ask people to guess who it is. Continue until they have all been guessed.



Worship

10 mins

Unpacking Psalm 139

Then do one of the following:

- Ask people to find some space where they won't be distracted by others. Play some suitable background music and read out Psalm 139:1-18. You may like to read it in chunks giving space between each section for people to reflect.

Materials

- Bibles.
- Paper.
- Pens.
- Magazines.
- Music.
- Bin.
- Matches.
- Refreshments.

making connections



session 3: the opposite sex

- Read Psalm 139 once, encouraging each person to let God guide them to one specific verse for them to reflect on. Get them to write their verse out and then to either draw their thoughts and prayers around it or to write down words and phrases that inspire them from this verse. They may like to offer these up as prayers.

Make the point that God created each one of us with great care and love and he cares deeply about us. This includes how we are treated by others and how we in turn treat other people. God's intention for us is that we are in relationships that are healthy and reflect something of the selfless, unconditional love that he has for us.

Taking this a bit further, in groups of two or three with pens and paper, ask them to draw a line down the centre of the page and then turn the page 90 degrees and draw another line across the centre, creating 4 boxes. Explain that the Psalm has two halves, the first focuses on how God knows and sees everything in our lives, the second focuses on how God thinks we are amazing and wonderfully made. Both these things have great things about them but also difficult things about them, for instance knowing that God sees my sins. In the left column get the group to write down thoughts that come from the 'God sees everything' verses. Put good things in the top left box and challenges/difficult implications of the verses in the bottom left box. Repeat the exercise in the right column with the verses on how wonderful we are. Encourage the groups to pray about what they have written.

'You cannot be lonely if you like the person you're alone with'
Wayne W Dyer



Activity
5-10 mins

Worldly Wisdom

In small groups give each group a pen and a piece of paper and ask them to compile a top ten guide to dating according to your mates. Then ask them to circle any which they think God would recommend.



Bible
15 mins

God's Design

Share out the following passages and ask the group to consider what they would say about how Christians should behave in relationships:

- Genesis 2:18-24
- Song of Songs 2:10-17
- 1 Corinthians 13:4-13
- Proverbs 31:10-31
- Matthew 22:34-40

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session 3: the opposite sex

You may like to give a bit of clear teaching. If so here are some points to include:

- God loves sex, he invented it! The first thing he says to Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28) is 'go and be fruitful and fill the earth'. Now there's a challenge!
- Sexual attraction and emotions are very strong and can't be ignored but they can be controlled. We are in charge of our bodies not the other way around.
- Love is about putting the other person first, not what I can get out of the relationship but what I can put in. If we put the other person first, seek to honour them and to help them in their relationship with God, then we should be in relationships where we both can grow as people and in our relationship. It should be a place where we can be ourselves, knowing that that is who the person loves.
- We can't conduct our relationships like our non-Christian friends do and just draw the line at sleeping together. This is setting up for a fall and then loads of guilt afterwards. We need to think about why we are in a relationship in the first place (or wanting to get into one) and then make sure we put God first in all things. It is probably better to work hard at having deep, quality friendships than pursuing someone to go out with when you are not in a place to get married.

Provide some space for the group to ask any questions they may have about the things you've talked about so far. You might want to think of a way that they can do this anonymously.



Reflection
10 mins

As you come to the end of the session choose one of the following:

- Play a suitable song and give people space to talk to God about how they feel recognising that some people will probably have slipped up in this area of life. Pray a prayer of repentance at the end and ask God to remind them of his love for them.
- Give each person a piece of paper and ask them to write down anything about dating relationships that they feel they need to say sorry to God for. This may be for being too eager in their desire for a partner, for sexual mistakes etc. Tell them that no one will see what is written. Then ask them to put them all into a metal bin and then take them all outside and set fire to the papers. As they burn pray for God's forgiveness and explain how God wants us to feel the freedom of forgiveness and be free from guilt.

'Love is a
friendship set
to music.'
E Joseph
Cossman



session 3: the opposite sex



And finally
5 mins

Finally, In pairs discuss what is the single most significant thing that they want to take away from the meeting. Pray for each other that God will be with them and they will always know that they are significant and his child.

'Do not awaken
love until it so
desires.'
Song of Songs

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session 4: God



Aim

Introduction

This is the final session on relationships so you might want to recap on what's been covered so far. This final session looks at our relationship with God, exploring how we can grow in knowing him.



Way in 10 mins

Back to back

Get the group into pairs and give one person (person 1) in each pair a pen and a piece of paper. Give the second person (person 2) in the pair the shape picture. Person 2 must then describe the picture to the person 1 without letting them see the picture. Person 1 cannot ask any questions or ask for clarification. They have 3 minutes to describe and draw. Award prizes for the closely matching pictures.

Ask the group to feedback how they felt about the activity, particularly person 1, who was unable to ask any questions. Once done, suggest that sometimes people view a relationship with God as a one-way thing - God tells them what to do and they simply have to do it, with no opportunity for conversation or discussion. Or sometimes it's the other way around - we simply talk to God and never let him speak to us.



Activity 10 mins

On track

Look together at the picture of the railway station. Ask everyone to think: If beginning with God is like setting out on a train journey, where would you say you are on this picture? People can choose one of the characters on the picture or put themselves somewhere else. Chat in pairs, inviting each person to say where they would put themselves and why. If you think your group would be ok with this, ask them then to share with the whole group.



Worship 15 mins

Creator God

Use pictures of space exploration, maps of the solar system etc. to explore the concept of insignificance. (How big is it? How far away is it? Where is the nearest star?)

Read Psalm 8 together as a group. A good way of helping people get into a passage is using the Swedish Bible study method. If this is new to you, please don't panic, it's not some dodgy Abba theology! In small groups, participants read the passage together and using handout 1, reflect on it in four different ways as described on the handout.

Materials

- Bibles.
- Paper.
- Pens.
- See appendix for:
 - Station picture.
 - Back to back picture.
 - Swedish Bible study.
- Refreshments.

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session 4: God

Once the groups have had time to read the passage in this way, give them a few minutes to talk with each other about their responses. Next, invite them to choose one thing from each category to feed back to the rest of the group. Be ready to answer any questions that come up either yourself or by opening it up for group discussion.

'God loves each of us as if there was only one of us.'

St Augustine



Bible
10 mins

Make sure that people can still see the passage. Pick up on some of the points made in the previous activity. You might also want to make the following points if they haven't been covered:

- God is awesome and the creator of the whole universe yet he knows us by name and wants us to know him personally.
- It's a huge privilege that we can be in relationship with God.
- Link back to opening game—our relationship with God is a two way conversation, not just God telling us what to do, or just us presenting our requests to God.
- Our relationship with God grows in the same way as other relationships - it takes time, intention, conversation and commitment.
- God went to incredible lengths so that we could know him.
- God invites us to respond to him and to grow in relationship with him, making his priorities our priorities.



Reflection
10 mins

As a follow up do one of the following things:

- Show the youtube video 'God's love letter'.
- Read together 1 John 4:7-18.

Give some space for the group to respond individually to what they have just seen or heard. You might want to invite the group to respond in one of three ways:

- Invite them to enter into relationship with God.
- Invite them to reaffirm their relationships with God, possibly with a time of asking for forgiveness for the times when they've grown distant from God.
- Provide pens and papers for the group to write a prayer of thanks and praise to God.

making connections



session 4: God

Go back to the train station picture used at the beginning of the session. Ask the group to look back at where they put themselves at the beginning, and to reflect on whether they feel they have moved at all, or whether they can identify where they would like to be.



And finally
10 mins

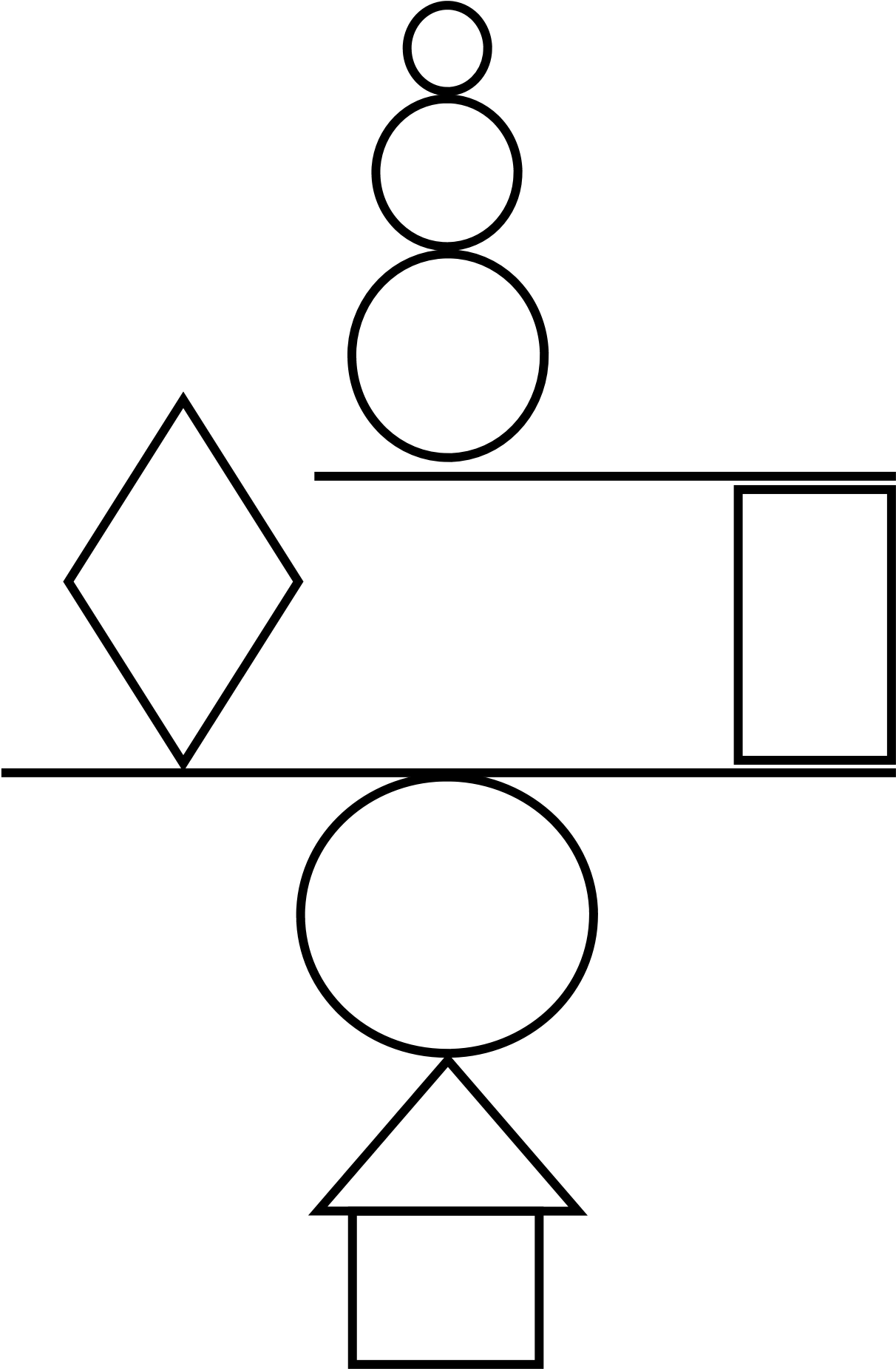
As the session comes to a close offer some suggestions as to how the group (leaders included) could grow in their relationship with God during the coming week:

- Write 10 things to thank God for each day
- Pray - commit to chatting to God for 5 minutes each day
- Journal - record your prayers
- Bible reading - choose a passage each day and ask God to speak to you through it (if your group don't have Bible reading notes, you might like to suggest some they could use, or something like *Soul Survivor's Bible in a Year.*)
- Spend some time each day simply listening to God.
- Go on a creation walk.

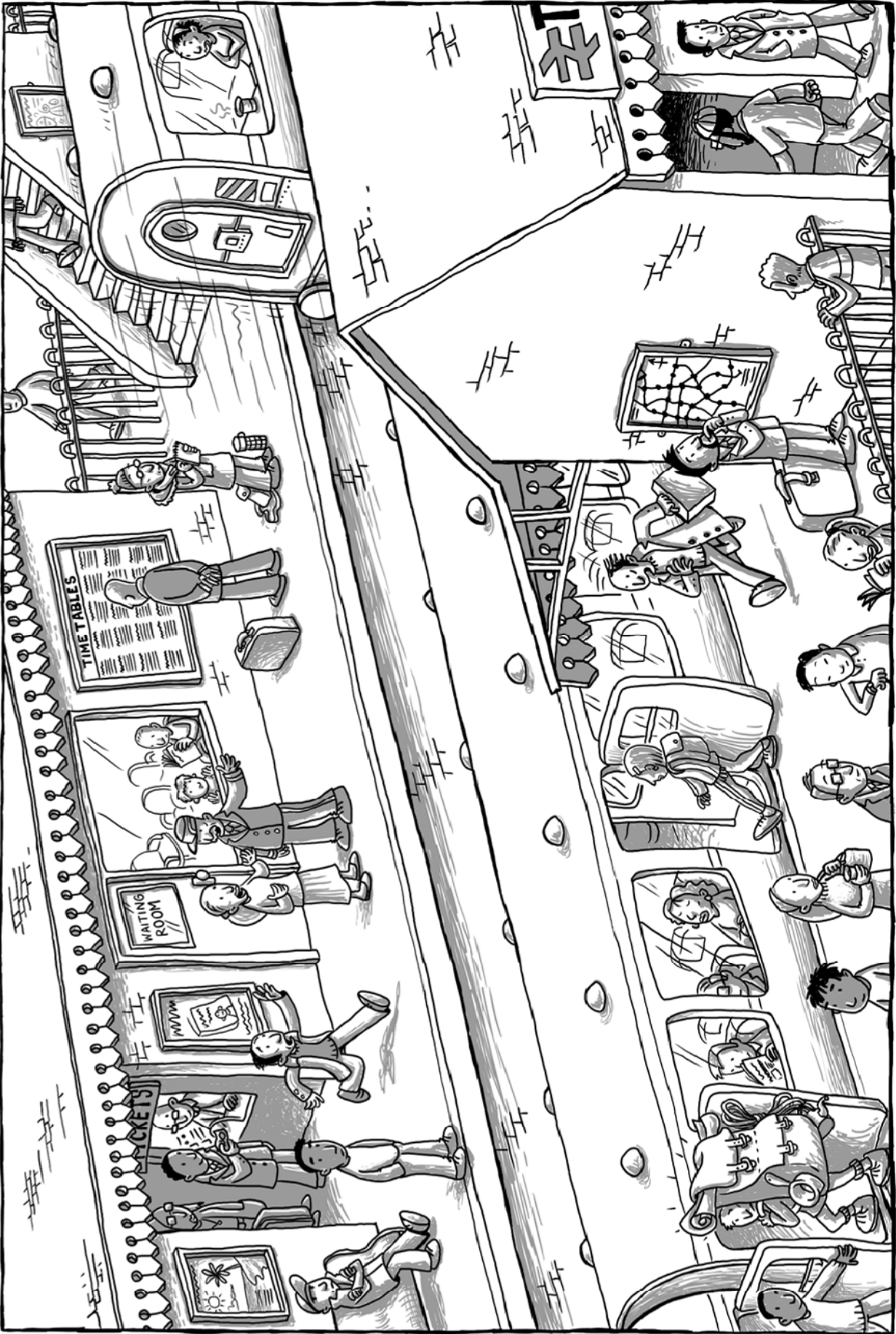
Close by praying for the group.

'You can tell the size of your god by looking at the size of your worry list – the longer your list the smaller your god.'
Unknown

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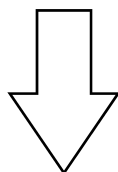
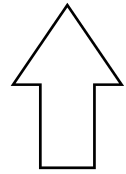


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'Swedish' Bible study




The basic idea is as follows:

- Candle: list new things you learn from the passage.
- 'Up' arrow: note anything that the passage tells you about God.
- 'Down' arrow: note anything that the passage tells you about people.
- Question mark: jot down any questions the passage has raised for you.



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