



## **All you ever wanted to know about doing a Lent course ... but were afraid to ask!**

### **Why do a course at all?**

1. Because it's good to discuss issues of faith, doubt, morality, conflict, and so on with other people – especially if they take a different view from you. It's just good to talk and it's good to share!
2. Because discussion of important issues helps you grow, both as a person and in faith.
3. Because it is useful to take refresher courses and to keep up with new ways of thinking – there are always new things to learn, however long you've been a Christian (or, for that matter, however long you've been considering becoming a Christian).
4. Because discussing current issues with fellow Christians is often helpful in sorting out what sort of line you want to take – swapping ideas can be very creative.
5. Because it is a good opportunity to get together with members of other congregations and denominations and talk with a real purpose – learning the faith together. Joint ecumenical study is worth any number of ecumenical meetings going over the same old ground again and again.
6. Because, if you're doing it right, it's FUN!

### **Why do it in Lent?**

1. Because Lent, traditionally a period of fasting and prayer in preparation for Easter, is also an ideal opportunity to put aside time for regular meetings for joint study. You can get five or six in between Ash Wednesday and Easter. It's not easy to forget if it becomes a regular annual event.
2. But, of course, you don't have to wait until Lent. You can do a study course any time you like, as many times as you like in the year. You could even do a course on a study weekend away, or after worship on a Sunday - or whenever you like. It's for this very reason that York Courses are never 'Lent specific'. It's always good to join together to study the faith. Sometimes groups like to disband after doing a set course while others like to keep going and will start a new course as soon as the last is finished. Either way is fine. There is no right and wrong in this – use the resources as suits you best. The important thing is – do something!

## How do we go about running a course?

### 1. Preparation, preparation, preparation! Easy but essential. So decide:

#### **a. Who?**

*Who will organise it?* Probably you (!) but it's a really good idea to try and recruit at least one 'buddy' who will share the load (and the praise).

*Who will lead it?* It doesn't need to be the minister. There is some preparation a leader will have to do, so it needs to be someone who has time to do that. Whoever the leader is, they would always be well advised to consult as widely as possible, especially with the leadership.

*Who do you need to check with to make sure everyone's on board?* If it's going to be ecumenical then all the participating churches need to be in on the planning from the start – or, at the very least, kept informed.

*Who do you want to come?* We normally think of the age range for York Courses' material as being from 14 upwards. York Courses are not specifically an evangelistic tool – they are intended for personal and corporate growth. Non-church members should never be turned away, but it's fair to say that our courses are designed for those actively involved in church life, at whatever level. We always produce courses which have an eye to ecumenical use, though they are entirely suitable to single-church groups (in fact, we also know quite a few people use them for individual study). In short, the wider the mix of group members in terms of age, gender and experience, the better the course is likely to be.

If anyone has hearing difficulties they will benefit from having a personal copy of the course transcript to help them follow the audio material. If you have anyone with special requirements, please contact us and we will do our best to help.

*How big should the group be?* It's generally agreed that a group works best with between 5 and 12 members. Any less means a limited set of opinions, any more makes the group unwieldy and not everyone gets the chance to speak, or has the confidence to do so. If you get more than a dozen, put them into two groups – with an eye to creating a good mix, if you can.

*How will you let them know it's on?* The publicity is important: posters, leaflets, invitations (often the most effective way of getting people to join in), church notices and pew sheets, church noticeboards, lists at the back of church for people to sign up. And there is also the number one best way – approach people in the congregation and invite them! [www.yorkcourses.co.uk](http://www.yorkcourses.co.uk) has an A4 poster which you can download and print off, personalising the blanks with your own course details. There's also an invitation template on the website for you to print off, fill in and distribute.

#### **b. Where?**

*Where will it take place?* In church, church hall, individual home or homes - anywhere else?

*Will it always be in the same place or will it go round?* This can always be decided week by week, but it's probably best for people to know the

arrangements from the start. Wherever it is, make sure it's warm, comfy and accessible. Is parking or access an issue? Some sort of hospitality helps things to go well – coffee for example, or even a party to start the series off (or half-way through, or to end with). Decide on the format of your meeting and try to stick to it – it makes people feel more secure, especially if they may be new to this sort of thing. But, on the whole, keep it fairly simple.

### **c. When?**

Give plenty of notice of the date when the group(s) is going to start, and what the subject is.

Decide on the day of the week and what time of day to meet – that may well be determined by the mix of the group. Retired people may prefer to attend a daytime group and avoid the dark evenings, for instance. It's as well to do a bit of research by asking a few people what they would prefer. Set the day, and the start and finish times, and try to stick to them.

*How long should each session last?* It depends on what people want, but a rough guide would be that less than an hour is probably insufficient time to do justice to the subject and anything over 90 minutes means that people start to get fidgety.

### **d. What?**

*What sort of course should we do?* There are quite a few on the market - but obviously we would heartily recommend one of the 15 now available from York Courses! (You can download a pdf of our current courses list from [www.yorkcourses.co.uk](http://www.yorkcourses.co.uk) - or ask our office to post you out a printed copy.) But most of what follows would also be applicable to other courses.

*What makes a good group leader?* You need to be someone with patience, not worried by silences but ideally able to encourage others to talk, rather than wanting to dominate the conversation. You don't need a comprehensive knowledge of the Bible – our material gives plenty of background information and suggests relevant Bible passages. It is essential that you should have read each session in the course booklet before the meeting and have listened to the CD. The transcripts were introduced in the first place to help group leaders with their preparation and some people find it a good idea to mark the transcript up beforehand. You should also look at the questions before the session and decide which you think will stimulate lively debate with your particular group. Decide which question to start on and here's a really important point: YOU DON'T NEED TO ANSWER EVERY QUESTION. We provide a large number of questions so that you have a choice of which way you want to tackle the material. Different groups have different needs so we try to put something in for everyone.

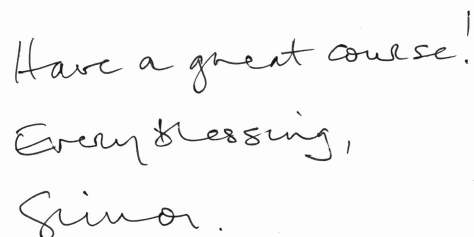
*What will I need at each meeting?* A CD player (or tape recorder), the course CD, the course booklet (preferably one for each member) - and a bible is always useful.

*What form will the session take?* It's important to stress again that you can use our material in any way that suits you – it is a resource for study and not a rigid pack that can only be done in one way. But perhaps the most common way is that each member will be encouraged to read the material in the booklet for each session before they arrive at the meeting. This may be difficult to arrange

for the first session, so the leader may want to give people a few minutes to look through it.

The group will start by listening to the set session on the CD or audiotape. It can be listened to right through (about 15 minutes) and then the group will discuss the issues by either reacting to what they have heard, or attempting some of the questions in the booklet, which sometimes refer directly to things said on the recorded session. Alternatively, just one question can be listened to by itself, then the CD/audiotape paused and some discussion had on that. Either way, the CD has tracks for each new question or topic, so it's very easy to stop, start and find anything you need – especially if you have a Transcript, which is a booklet containing the full text of the CD and listing all the track numbers. (Tracking is only possible on CDs, not on audiotapes.)

If there's anything else you think we might be able to help you with, feel free to get in touch.



Have a great course!  
Every blessing,  
Simon.

Simon Stanley

PS The front of each course booklet contains some tips for group leaders. You may find them helpful.

PPS There are also a couple of checklists on the website, together with the poster and invitation templates, to help you with planning and organising a course. They're in Excel format, so that you can personalise them any way you like.