

2 Crossing Divides

God invites us to see where difference or prejudice divide us from others and offers us opportunities to see them as he does.

Three key points:

- 1** Sometimes the brokenness around us is the result of discomfort or prejudice inside us: beliefs and attitudes that we develop through our upbringing or inherit through the society and culture around us. These attitudes create 'walls' that divide us from others.
- 2** Jesus' example challenges us to find out where assumptions and prejudice stop us engaging with others and to realise that others too might have barriers that stop them engaging with us.
- 3** Jesus also shows us that we can begin to overcome these barriers by making time and space for those on the 'other side' and being curious about their story.



Reflection



Read this ahead of the session to prepare yourself to host the group.

We live in a world of divides: categories and labels that not only distinguish but which separate us from one another. Healthy boundaries are essential in our relationships, but walls we put up due to prejudice or assumptions can prevent us from asking those on the other side about their story. This only increases distrust and distance, and we stop questioning our own assumptions.

Differences can then become a cause of suspicion, rather than curiosity.

Some of these divides are of our own making, some we inherit. Consciously and unconsciously we often surround ourselves with people who think like us, dividing the world into the categories of 'us' and 'them'.

Jesus lived in a world of divides and power imbalances. Roman citizens had rights not afforded to anyone else. Within his own religious community there were strict guidelines about who to meet and what to eat. Sharing a meal with non-Jews was not permitted. Jesus was continually engaging in encounters with those on the other side of all sorts of divides. He spent time with the most unlikely people – those whom society had already made up its mind about – as we see in the story of the Samaritan woman at the well.

The first step for us will be to identify the walls we create and the people on the other side.

Session starts here

Welcome

 10 mins

 00:00

Feedback

 5 mins

Ask participants to share briefly an experience they've had over the past week relating to the previous session. Have your own example to share.

Introduction

 5 mins

Tell participants:

In this session, we will explore where assumptions and prejudice divide us from others and how we can learn to cross those divides.

Pray

Open the session with prayer, inviting participants to bring to mind divides they are aware of and asking God to be at work in the group as they explore what it might mean to cross these divides.

 Slide 1





Signpost

It is easy to distrust and feel wary of those who are different from us. We often find ourselves in echo chambers, drawn to voices that reinforce our own perspective or experience. It is increasingly easy to avoid or shut out those who make us uncomfortable or fearful, creating a dividing wall between us. But we are called to respond differently and to be curious about others, as people made in the image of God just like we are. This session is about responding to God's invitation to know ourselves better by seeing our walls and the people on the other side.

Pastoral note

Tell your group:

This session is designed to help us think about the people we hold at arm's length for the wrong reasons, where prejudice or assumptions lead to walls being created, sometimes without us realising it. This session is not about situations where abuse has occurred, which is never permissible and in which distance is needed for safety and security.

Story

 35 mins

 00:00

Tell participants:


In this part of the session, we are going to **Be Curious** as we engage with two stories. We choose to wonder about the other person and about how God might expand our perspective.


Introduce the stories:

- First, we're going to hear the story of Sami – a Christian living in Bethlehem – and how he crossed divides.

difference.

- After this, we will look at the biblical account of how Jesus crossed divides when he met a Samaritan woman.
- We will then have 15 minutes to discuss the stories in small groups.
- Listen out for moments in both where people practise the habits of:
 - **Being curious** Listening to others' stories and seeing the world through their eyes.
 - **Being present** Encountering others with authenticity and confidence.
 - **Reimagining** Finding hope and opportunity in the places where we long to see change.



 **10 mins**

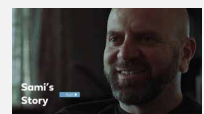
Film

Sami's story

- 1) Watch the film
- 2) As a group, discuss:


 What does Sami's story say to you about crossing divides?


 Slide 2



 Slide 3





 **10 mins**

Bible passage

The Woman at the Well

(John 4:1–30)

Background

- 3) Share the background
 - This is the longest recorded conversation that Jesus had.
 - The Jews and Samaritans distrusted one another, because of historical hostility and continuing differences in belief and religious practice.

 Slide 4



- This was a very unusual encounter between Jesus and the woman. Most Jews would not travel through Samaria, but Jesus and his companions did. They were effectively in enemy territory and would have been out of their comfort zone. Although the woman was at her own familiar well, she was speaking to an unknown man in a culture that did not allow men and women to socialise outside the family.
- The fact that the woman was alone and collecting water at the hottest time of day suggests that she was socially marginalised and avoiding meeting others.
- The conversation takes place in a culture where a woman could not pursue a divorce herself. To have been married more than once for a woman likely meant being on the receiving end of divorce or being widowed.

4) Invite a volunteer to read the passage



Small groups

🕒 15 mins

5) Discuss in small groups:



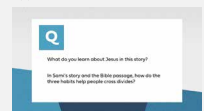
What do you learn about Jesus in this story?



In Sami's story and the Bible passage, how do the three habits help people cross divides?

If time allows, two or three people feedback a highlight to the whole group.

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Signpost

Jesus, the Samaritan woman and Sami all show courage in crossing divides that many others wouldn't dare to question. By allowing themselves to be curious about who was on the other side, they opened up new possibilities. To do the same in our own lives, we first need to recognise the walls we put up and what keeps those walls in place.

Space

 30 mins

 00:00

i **Note:** *The following activity is designed to help participants discover divides or barriers in their own lives and where these come from. Encourage people to be really honest with themselves. Later in the session, there will be an opportunity to explore how we can begin to overcome these.*

■ Tell participants:

In this part of the session, we are going to **Be Present** as we engage with an activity. We become aware of ourselves, our surroundings, the people we share this space with and of God's presence with us.

■ Remind the group:

This is not about situations where abuse has occurred, in which distance is needed for safety. The purpose of the following activity is to help us acknowledge where prejudice or difference lead us to create walls to avoid others or keep them at arm's length. If this activity raises anything you would like to talk about further then please speak to us or seek support at the end of the session.



Activity

Discover our walls

i **Note:** For this activity, you will need 'bricks' and pens to enable participants to build the wall.

1 ■ Ask participants to do the following:

- Think of a group of people or person whom you avoid or distance yourself from. This could be a person or groups of people you avoid, don't engage with, distrust or feel uncomfortable with because they're different.
- **Reflect:**
 - Why do you find it hard to engage with them?
 - How do you feel when you think of this person/these people? (e.g. *'I feel excluded / threatened / suspicious'*).
- Share with the person next to you why you find it hard to engage with them. There is no need to say who you are thinking of.
- Call out words that describe how you feel when you think of the person/people you are thinking of (e.g. *'threatened'*).
- Take one of the 'bricks' and write on it a behaviour which you might engage in in response to the person/people you are thinking of (e.g. *'I walk away / I ignore them / I keep the conversation at a surface level'*).
- Place the bricks next to each other, **creating a wall**.

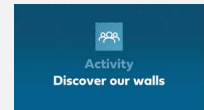
2 Gather everyone around the wall.

3 Ask a volunteer to read the words aloud. Take a moment to reflect.

4 ■ Tell the group:

- Our reactions can build a wall between us and the other person, which eventually becomes so high that we can no longer see the face of the person on the other side.
- In our minds, the other person becomes the image we have created of them.

Slide 6



5 Invite everyone to sit back down and to reflect on the person or people on the other side of their wall whom they identified earlier.

6 ■ Ask participants:

Imagine you are that other person/people. What do you think might make it difficult for them to engage with you? Step into their shoes and be curious about their view of you.



Signpost

Our inner lives and human relationships are complex. We all have walls that are hard to cross and there are walls that we find ourselves behind. Sometimes we inherit walls without realising it from attitudes ingrained in our culture or unquestioned by our family and community. But when we take time to notice these walls, we can start to liberate ourselves to feel curious about the story of the other, and to realise that we are 'the other' to someone else.

7 Gather participants in front of the wall again.

8 ■ Ask participants to:

- Think of one step you could take this week to encounter someone on the other side of your wall.

Invite them to call out their ideas.

9 As the participants call out words, take down each brick one by one. Offer these to God in prayer.

10 ■ Tell participants:

- These behaviours can remove bricks in the walls we build or inherit.



Signpost

As we go about our lives, we have opportunities to recognise unexpected others as people made in God's image and to be curious about their story. When we do this, we can challenge the walls of our echo chambers and comfort zones, and maybe even inspire others to do the same.

Sanctuary

 10 mins

 00:00

i **Note:** *Reading each of the reflections that follow, guide this time of prayer in whatever way works best for your group. For silent prayer, we suggest leaving one minute of silence between each paragraph to allow people to pray.*

■ **Tell participants:**

In this part of the session, we are going to **Reimagine**, noticing where we are most in need of renewed hope.

As we pray, we invite the Holy Spirit to expand our imaginations of what is possible, as individuals and as a community.

i **Pastoral note**

Acknowledge that some walls may still be too big for us to walk towards after this session. Encourage participants to talk to God about these too and to share with someone if they need further support.

 Slide 7





Prayer

Offering our story to God

Divides and prejudice are part of the story of all of our lives. But we have an opportunity to be part of a new story.

Think back to Sami's story and the dividing wall in Bethlehem. Ask God to help you see where divides have dehumanised others and how you might **Be Curious** about their story.

Think back to the woman at the well. Ask God where he might be calling you to **Be Present** somewhere you wouldn't normally place yourself.

Think back to your own walls. Bring them before God and ask God to help you **Reimagine** your response, perhaps enabling you to remove some of the bricks in that wall this week.

Loving God, fill us with your Spirit now,

Help us to **Be Curious** about others' stories – listening as often as we speak.

Give us the courage to **Be Present** – engaging our whole and unique selves.

Inspire us to **Reimagine** what's possible – finding hope by glimpsing you at work.

In Jesus' name. Amen.



Top Takeaway

Invite one or two people to share a one-line takeaway from the session or something they feel inspired to do between now and the next session.

Application

🕒 5 mins

🖋️ 00:00

Suggested actions for your group:

1 Be Curious

The least impacted by a division, injustice or hurt are often the least aware it exists. Which division could you try understanding more about?

2 Be Present

Visit somewhere you wouldn't normally choose to go e.g. a church with a different tradition of worship, or a cafe in a different part of town.

3 Reimagine

Consider the possibility that someone unlikely could become a friend.

i **Remind participants** to make notes in their *Guide* following the session, perhaps writing or drawing something they want to take away from this session and what they want to do in their daily lives as a result.

Heads up

Navigating Disagreement

Before the next session, ask participants to think about a disagreement they have with someone which they would be prepared to explore further in Session Three – Navigating Disagreement.

🖥️ Slide 8



End

Write any notes you may have here...