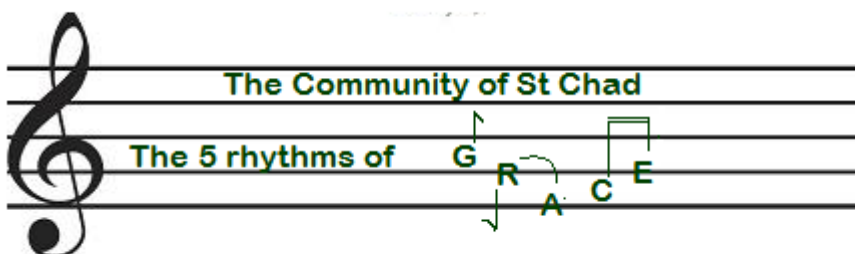
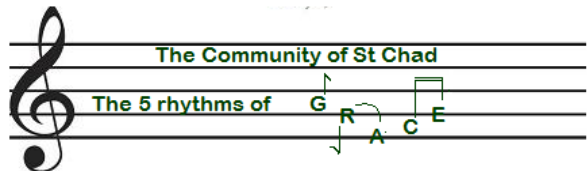


THE COMMUNITY OF ST CHAD

# The Five Rhythms of Grace

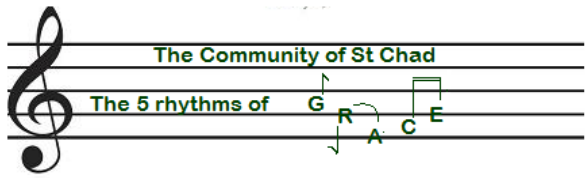
**Becoming Disciples of Christ**





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# Introduction

The Community of Saint Chad is a group of people who try to reflect, pray and live out the Gospel of Jesus in their daily lives. Since Jesus called the first disciples to follow him, men and women have tried to follow Christ, and to become more like Jesus. St Chad, a bishop in Mercia in the seventh century was well known for his humility and his dedication to sharing the Good News of Christianity as widely as he could. To help us in our own discipleship, the Community of Saint Chad recommends a pattern of spiritual formation based upon five 'Rhythms of Grace':

## **Rhythm One:**

By God's grace, I will seek to be transformed into the likeness of Christ.

## **Rhythm Two:**

By God's grace, I will be open to the presence, guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.

## **Rhythm Three:**

By God's grace, I will set aside time for prayer, worship and spiritual reading.

## **Rhythm Four:**

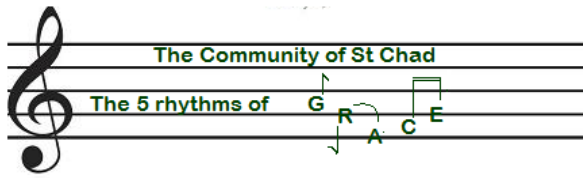
By God's grace, I will endeavour to be a gracious presence in the world, serving others and working for justice in human relationships and social structures.

## **Rhythm Five:**

By God's grace, I will sensitively share my faith with others and support God's mission both locally and globally.

These are not rules that dictate how people behave, but rather a starting point for a process of self-examination that can help us to grow as disciples. The *Community Handbook* includes suggestions about how a commitment to the five Rhythms of Grace might be expressed. It also offers patterns for morning and evening prayer.

This four-session course looks in more detail at each of the rhythms, and encourages participants to reflect on how they might live according to the rhythms of grace. Each session is split into two parts, which will probably take about 45 mins – 1 hour each with a coffee break in between. Each session is interactive and groups should be given chance to talk about the questions raised.



# Session 1

## a) A Life of Discipleship

### The Rhythms of Grace ...

The seasons and patterns of nature have a rhythm, music has – or should have – a rhythm, life can have a certain rhythm to it and the life of a disciple follows a rhythm set by Christ, a rhythm of grace. The phrase comes from Eugene Peterson’s interpretation of Matthew 11:28 – 30. A familiar version of the passage reads:

‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’ (NRSV)

Peterson’s version, *The Message*, translates it:

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly." (The Message)

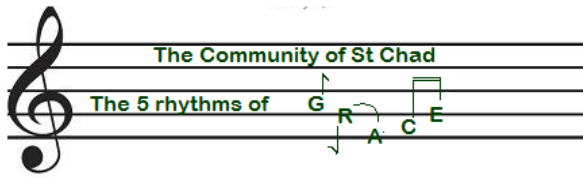
Jesus’s words are not an invitation to *do* more, to take on particular tasks, but rather to live in the presence of Christ, and to follow him. It is not unusual for the focus of discipleship to be on what we do, rather than on being in the presence of Christ. Consider these words from Peter Maiden:

**“Discipleship once  
appeared to me to be  
more about what I did  
than who I was”**

(Peter Maiden).

**Do these words resonate with you?**

**How do the ‘unforced rhythms of grace’ challenge the focus on doing?**



## By God's grace I will ...

Each of the five Rhythms of Grace begins with phrase *By God's grace, I will*. This is because the process of spiritual growth is a powerful combination of our initiative (desiring it) and God's action (achieving it).

The transformation of character and behaviour implicit in the five Rhythms of Grace, is not our work, but God's. We are called to cooperate with him, but not to do it of our own accord. We are to desire the outcome, but it is not ours to achieve it.

St Paul puts it like this:

Continue to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Philippians 2: 12-13)

The phrase 'fear and trembling' does not mean that we should be uncertain about the effectiveness of God's work in us, or fearful that it will be a burden for us. Simply that we should be in awe of a God who cares enough about us and our lives to have his Holy Spirit work in us.

Christians believe that grace is freely and plentifully given to us by God, but even if we know that in our heads, accepting it in our hearts can be a different matter!

**What do you think Rick Warren means here?**

**Can you identify with it?**

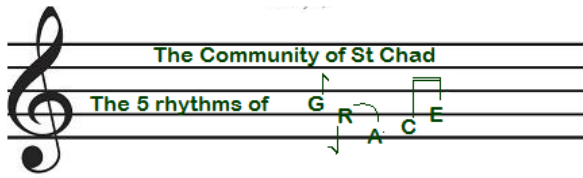
By God's grace we will learn the unforced rhythms of grace that allow us to keep time with God, to walk to God's beat or dance to God's tune.

**Being a disciple ...**

**"A disciple is a person who learns to live the life his teacher lives"**  
(Juan Carlos Ortiz)

Chad was a Christian Saint whose life was focussed on discipleship – living the life that Jesus lived. He lived according to the rhythms of grace, seeking to share the Good News of Jesus with all whom he met, and moulding his life to Christ's.

**What is the biggest challenge about living the way that Jesus lived?**



## b) RHYTHM ONE:

### **By God's grace I will seek to be transformed into the likeness of Christ**

Each of the Rhythms of Grace expresses a personal aspiration. In that way they are not unlike New Year Resolutions. They signal a new start; they embody hope. But this first Rhythm of Grace goes far beyond the usual scope of a New Year Resolution. It feels more like learning to swim by jumping into a pool at the deep end. It is a bold statement, and one we might naturally draw back from, because it sounds grossly presumptuous. How dare we compare ourselves with Christ in this way? Is it right to hope that our lives might become like his?

Surprisingly the answer is yes. St Paul constantly expresses this longing for himself and those to whom he wrote. Here is a typical example.

We are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3: 18)

Paul expects us to become ever more Christ-like, with the consequence that when people meet us, they will encounter Christ. He compares this to an attractive perfume:

Through us [God] spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him [Christ]. (2 Corinthians 2: 14)

And this happens by God's grace. Jesus speaks of us as being like branches of a vine.

If you stay joined to me, and I stay joined to you, then you will produce lots of fruit. But you cannot do anything without me. (John 15: 5, CEV)

We are to become good trees that produce good fruit (Matthew 7: 17-18). And we are to *learn* from Jesus (Matthew 11: 28), to *watch how I do it* (same verse as paraphrased in *The Message*).

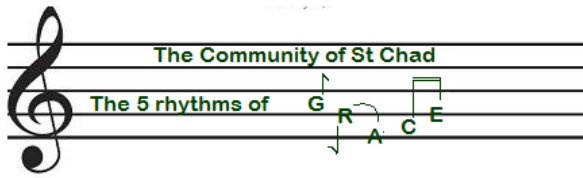
**What have you learnt from the way Jesus lives, according to the Gospels?**

**How far have you been able to reflect that in your own life?**

**Thinking about transformation...**

The first part of the rhythm, 'I will seek' speaks of a new beginning. Paul captures this newness, this freshness:

Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten and everything is new. (2 Corinthians 5: 17, CEV)



This is an incredible claim – that when we make a response to Jesus we can start over. Whatever we have done, and whatever other people think of us, God invites us to start over, to become the person God wants us to be, rather than who we have been in the past.

Jesus in his conversation with Nicodemus says: *You must be born again.* (John 3: 3 and 7) he goes on to explain this to the puzzled Nicodemus as follows:

No-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. (John 3: 5)

This is a clear reference to Jesus' earlier encounter with John the Baptist. John called people to turn from their sins to follow and obey God, and directed attention towards Jesus who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. (Mark 1: 8) John invited people to turn their lives around, to be transformed and with the advent of Jesus, many people experienced extraordinary transformations.

The Bible gives us many examples of how finding Christ is a new beginning. Here are three:

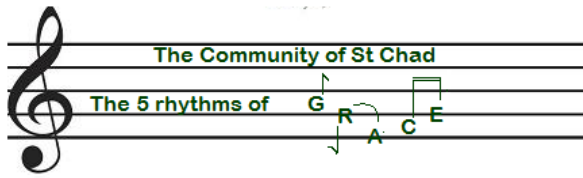
- The Magi, the *Wise Men* who came from the East to see the infant Christ. These were learned men who were seeking answers to the big questions of life. They found no answers in Herod's palace, only politics and paranoia, but in kneeling down before the infant Jesus in a peasant's home in Bethlehem, they discovered that in God meekness and majesty can co-exist. Their response was to worship.
- Thomas the questioner. When he saw the risen Christ, his doubts did not vanish, but they were put aside as he gave himself afresh to his Master: *my Lord and my God.*
- The woman at the well. Jesus knew everything about her and after their encounter, she went and told all of her village about him.

Many of us experience a moment when we realize that God is inviting us to begin a new life with him.

**Can you think of having experienced such a moment?**

**Take a couple of minutes now to think what it means that God does not hold anything against you, but forgives all wrongs of the past and invites you into new life with Christ.**

For some people, life is just one episode after another: today's crisis quickly pushing yesterday's into oblivion. Some people are content with the way things are and try hard to stop life from changing around them. For the disciple of Christ, however, life is about making progress, about learning. Christ is our mentor; we are his disciples. As we become older, we hope to become wiser. As our relationship with God and our experience of his grace deepen, we will find that our lives change from having



occasional moments when God feels real and close to an increasingly steady awareness of him, albeit with occasional lapses.

This is what John described in his first Letter:

No-one who is born of God will continue to sin; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. (1 John 3: 9)

John is not describing a state of sinless perfection. We know this because he also writes that:

...if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us (1 John 1: 8); and:

...if we confess our sins [God] will forgive us. (1 John 1: 9)

John is claiming that God can steadily release us from the power of sins, and remedy our inherent character weaknesses. Even though we still sin, because we fall short of being perfect, we are no longer bound by sin. We know that sin cannot define us, because God has made us new creations, defined instead by life in Christ.

### **What real difference does it make to us to be freed from sin?**

#### **Reflecting on becoming more like Christ ...**

The kind of transformation that happens when we turn away from sin is not just from one state to another, it is a purposeful change in which we seek to be transformed, specifically, into the likeness of Christ. John tells us that:

...when he appears we shall be like him. (1 John 3: 2).

A startling thought! And Paul claimed that, even in the here and now:

...for me to live is Christ (Philippians 1: 21);

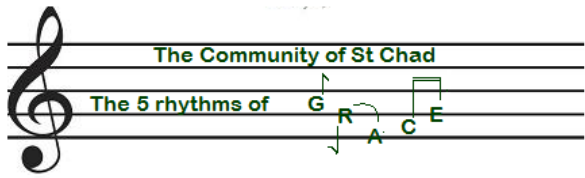
and that Christians:

... should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (2 Corinthians 5: 15).

All of this means that we are no longer the centre of our world. God is. We reflect this in our attitude towards God; we live to serve God. We respond to the grace that God has given us by offering our lives to God. In our prayer we try to learn to listen more than to speak; to seek God's way forward, rather than just asking God to meet our needs and endorse our plans.

The Holy Spirit is God's agent in transforming us into the likeness of Christ. More and more we seek to understand and embrace Jesus' world-view, and make it our own. Our part is to desire and seek this transformation. By making this behaviour – this prayer and seeking Gods will a part of our daily lives, we begin to form ourselves



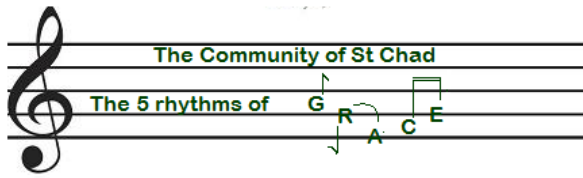


into the pattern of Jesus' life. This process will take a lifetime – and maybe more!  
There is no quick fix, but the journey itself is discipleship.

## Recommended reading

Maiden, Peter (2007) Discipleship. Milton Keynes; Keswick Ministries and Authentic Media.

Willard, Dallas (1990) The Spirit of the Disciplines. Understanding how God Changes Lives. New York, Harper Collins.



## Session 2

### a) RHYTHM TWO:

**By God's grace I will be open to the presence, guidance  
and power of the Holy Spirit**

Christians believe that there is only one God, but God is 'made up' of three persons: Father (or Creator), Son (Jesus) and Holy Spirit (Helper). God's nature is so rich, and frankly so far beyond our full understanding, that this three-fold picture of God (called The Trinity) is the best approximation we humans can hope to get. It may help to think of a musical chord of three notes. The chord has its own rich identity, but this can be heard as three distinct notes. Another parallel is the way we know that white light is made up of three primary colours.

**Do the two illustrations of a musical chord and the colours making up white light help you to understand the Holy Spirit? Or is it still a puzzle?**

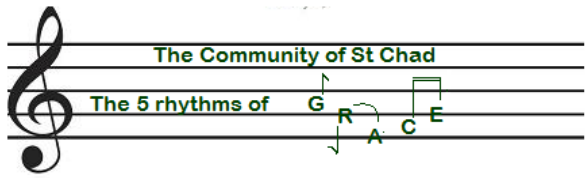
**Open to the presence of the Holy Spirit ...**

It may not be too difficult for us to imagine God as the timeless creator and sustainer of the universe; and as revealed in human form in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. But the idea of the Holy Spirit seems more difficult to grasp. The word Spirit itself conveys the idea of an invisible and intangible influence. Jesus spoke of the Spirit as being like the wind, which we cannot see but whose effects we experience, particularly in people whose lives are touched by the Spirit. (John 3: 8)

Before Jesus was arrested and taken from his disciples, he taught them what life would be like without him (John chapters 14-16). He kept mentioning the Holy Spirit. He told them that the Holy Spirit was already *with them* but in the near future would be *in them* (John 14: 17). So although the Holy Spirit is as free as air, and is at work wherever God pleases, the Holy Spirit is also in us, a resident presence of God in our lives.

The Holy Spirit does not draw attention to the Spirit, but to the Father and to Jesus (John 16: 13-15). He makes God the Father and Jesus the Son real to us. And as Saint Paul says, it is the Holy Spirit in us who assures us that we are loved and accepted by God and enables us to talk with God as children do with a Father they trust. (Romans 8: 15-16)

So the Holy Spirit is nothing less than God within us. Being *open to His presence* is saying "yes please", wanting and asking God to let His influence change us. It is the key factor in experiencing the steady transformation of our lives (Rhythm 1). And it is the link with Rhythm 3, which sees prayer, worship and spiritual reading as ways to keep us focused on God.



### How would you explain the Holy Spirit to somebody else?

#### Open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit ...

Jesus used a word to describe the Holy Spirit that means helper or encourager or close friend. Jesus also said the Holy Spirit would remind his followers of his teaching, and help them to understand it (John 14: 26). The Holy Spirit would also be their guide (John 16: 13).

There are many situations in life when we do not know what direction to take, how to respond to something that has been said or done to us. We can talk to God about these dilemmas, and ask God to guide us. It is the Holy Spirit who will work within our minds and with our emotions to show us the way we should take.

### Can you think of a time when the Holy Spirit has offered you guidance, encouragement, or even comfort?

#### What does this tell us about God, and God's care for us?

#### Open to the power of the Holy Spirit ...

After Jesus had risen from the dead, he promised the disciples the ability and the courage to speak and act for him. He said it would happen when the Holy Spirit came to them (Acts 1: 8).

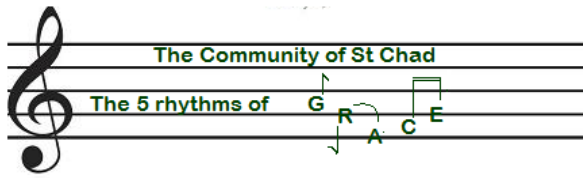
On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came in a dramatic way (read Acts, chapter 2). The disciples were changed from being timid and nervous to being confident and bold. They found they could speak out for Jesus, even if it brought them into conflict with the authorities. They even discovered they could heal people in the power of Jesus. This was all because the Holy Spirit was now in them (Acts 4: 29-31).

One of the results will be the steady growth of personal qualities that Saint Paul calls the *fruit of the Spirit* (Galatians 5: 22-23). He lists nine kinds of fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. God wants each of these beautiful characteristics to develop and grow in each of us.

### Do you recognize these fruits in yourself, or in other Christians you know?

#### Which ones come most easily to you? Which ones do you find difficult?

#### Which of the *fruits of the Spirit* would you like to have? Make it a focus for prayer.



Describing these qualities as fruit reminds us of Jesus' remark that figs only grow on fig trees and not on other plants, and that you can recognize plants by observing their fruit (Matthew 7: 16-20). As the Holy Spirit's influence in us deepens, it will be the life of God in us that produces the fruit of the Spirit. Jesus also said that, just as a (vine) branch cannot produce fruit unless it remains firmly attached to and part of the vine, "neither can you unless you abide in me" (John 15: 4).

Paul also speaks of the *gifts of the Spirit* (1 Corinthians 12: 4-11 and Romans 12: 3-8). Ephesians 4: 11 has another similar list; here the gifts are presented as from the risen Christ. These are specific abilities that can contribute to the health and life of Christian worship, living and service. They are varied in nature, including things as different as administrative ability, teaching, acts of mercy and serving others and the ability to heal or "speak in tongues". In contrast to the fruit of the spirit, we should not expect to have them all (Romans 12: 6). And nor do these necessarily reflect the depth of a person's spiritual life. They have been compared to the decorations placed on a Christmas tree to adorn it. They say nothing about the nature or health of the tree, and owe everything to the grace of the God who chose to put them there.

Paul encourages us to be *filled with the Spirit* (Ephesians 5: 18). We are leaky vessels and need to keep asking to be *filled* again. Expect some surprises! The Spirit is like the wind – unpredictable.

**Do you feel able to ask God to release the power of the Spirit more and more in your life?**

## **Recommended reading..**

Bittlinger, Arnold (1967) *Gifts and Graces*. London, Hodder and Stoughton.

Green, Michael (1975) *I believe in the Holy Spirit*. London, Hodder and Stoughton.

Morgan, Alison (2009) *Doing What Jesus Did: A Fresh Look at the Gifts of the Spirit*. Wells, Resource.

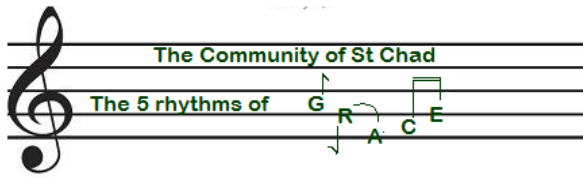
Packer, J. I. (1984) *Keep in Step with the Spirit*. Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press.

Packer, J. I. (1995) *Life in the Spirit: a 30-Day Devotional*. London, Hodder and Stoughton.

Ramsey, Michael (1977) *Holy Spirit*. London, SPCK.

Smail, Thomas A. (1975) *Reflected Glory*. London, Hodder and Stoughton.

Taylor, John V. (1972) *The Go-Between God*. London, SCM Press.



## b) RHYTHM THREE:

### **By God's grace I will set aside time for prayer, worship and spiritual reading**

The third Rhythm of Grace identifies three practices that will strengthen and give balance to our spiritual lives. They are not a menu from which we can choose; each is a necessary component. Together they feed and nourish us, in body, mind and spirit. Prayer, worship and reading the Bible and other spiritual books are an important part of discipleship, and the development of our relationship with God. Because this topic is so big, we are going to split this rhythm in two, and look at spiritual reading in the next session. In this session, we will focus on prayer and worship.

## **Prayer**

The most basic prayer is *Help!* Many of us pray when we are in trouble and urgently need God's intervention and support. And we are right to do so. Jesus indicates that God will not short-change those who ask for his help (Luke 11: 9-13). But when Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them to pray, it was because they had observed his own practice of praying in solitude late at night or before dawn. Prayer in secret was the foundation of Jesus' earthly life. And he encouraged them to:

...go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father. (Matthew 6: 6)

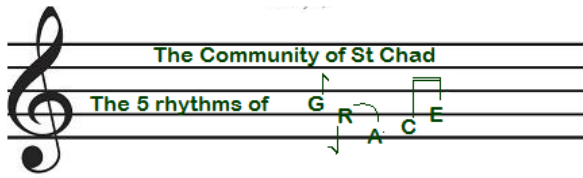
We need to develop this form of prayer, to nourish our relationship with God, to focus on God and discover his will. (Matthew 6: 10)

**Does the idea of spending a period of time alone with God each day attract or frighten you? Explore your feelings and make some plans.**

Prayer can be much more than asking for God's help, or telling God what we would like. Prayer is the way in which we become more connected to God, more 'in sync' with the way that God works in the world and cares for creation. Individual prayer is an important part of our discipleship, and our relationship with God. However there are many different types of prayer, and many different ways of praying.

**How do you pray? Do you have regular patterns of prayer or does it tend to be in response to things that happen?**

When Jesus teaches the disciples to pray, he offers them a prayer – which we now know as the Lord's Prayer – that has several different aspects to it. Firstly, it orientates us to God as Father, as Holy (hallowed) and as Divine (in heaven). It teaches us to ask God for what we need this day and to remember that we are forgiven and therefore forgive others. Perhaps most importantly however, the prayer also reminds us to ask, and make a reality, that God's presence be as real on earth



as it is in heaven. Prayer is not just about our needs, praying for others and giving thanks. It is also about living with a deep awareness of God's presence and seeing the things of earth through the lens of heaven – seeing this world as the place where God reigns and adopting God's priorities for earth as our own.

Corporate prayer is just as important as individual prayer, and in some ways even more important – it is only together as the whole body of Christ – and not as separate individuals that we can, with God, establish God's kingdom on earth. Corporate prayer allows us, as the people of God, to connect with God and to bring our needs, concerns and thanks to God. It also allows us to wait upon God, to listen for God's word and actions and to be transformed into body of Christ.

### **What are the most difficult things about praying together – either in small groups or as a whole church congregation?**

As well as spoken prayer, individually or together, and holding silence before God, there are many other ways of praying. Some people regard the work they do for the kingdom of God as a form of prayer, even when it is an activity rather than a conversation. We might regard our work as an expression of prayer, or the way in which we try to live as part of an ongoing and constant conversation with God.

Prayer is a discipline, and even if we do not find it easy, it is important to create habits of prayer. However, this does not necessarily mean that the only way to pray is in a silent 20 minutes at 6am! There are all kinds of ways, and it is a matter of finding the ones which work best for you. It may be through words, or silence, or action. If it is an intentional time of focussing on God, aligning our will with Gods and giving God room to speak to us, then whatever from your prayer takes, done regularly it will strengthen your relationship with God and help you to be more and more in tune with God's desires for you, and for the world.

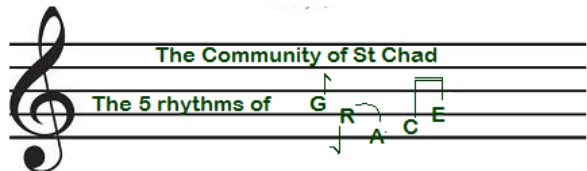
### **Can you think of ways in which you pray, which you might not immediately have classed as prayer? Can you think of ways in which God has worked through these?**

## **Worship**

All worship arises from admiration and appreciation. Our worship of God encompasses thanksgiving and praise and is often expressed in words and song. But why do we need to worship God? Does he need us to tell him how wonderful he is, to sing him hymns and songs? Hardly! C. S. Lewis wrestled with this question until he realized that:

“...all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise; praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed; praise almost seems to be inner health made audible.” (Reflections on the Psalms, 1958)

So worship, whether alone or in church, is a natural and nourishing response to our experience of God's glory, goodness and faithfulness.



**What so you think of C. S. Lewis' description of praise as 'inner health made audible'?**

For many of us, worship is focussed on the time that we gather in church. Different types of services may have different elements, but there will (or should!) always be a time focussed on worshipping through God, through prayer, word and music. The shape of church services, whether they are a Eucharistic service, a service of the Word, or all-age worship, all follow a shape that is intended to facilitate worship.

**Is churchgoing a beneficial experience for you? If not, why not?**

This is an important aspect of our worship, but worshipping God is about more than just that focussed time. In its very broadest sense, worship is an attitude. The English word "worship" is actually a contraction of worth-ship that is to say, worship means to recognise and honour what is honourable. Living as though God is to be honoured above all, is one way in which we make worship part of the rhythm of our life. What we do, the way we live can, in itself, be an offering of worship to God. The times when we focus on praise and worship help to sustain a worshipful life.

**Do you have a sense of your whole life being an act of worship to God? Can you think of an example of a well-known person whose life was lived as an act of worship?**

## **Setting aside time...**

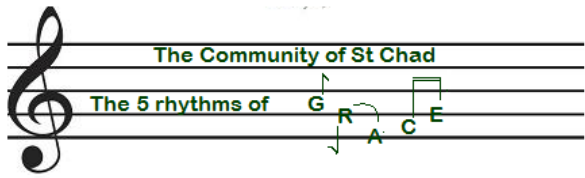
Of the five Rhythms of Grace, this is the one most under our own control. I can choose to set aside time, or choose not to. It is consequently the one most prone to corruption by my innate love for rules. It is so tempting to reduce Christianity to a set of observances, so as to placate a cantankerous God. We would reduce prayer to saying prayers, Bible reading to an arid reading of a chapter a day, and worship to churchgoing.

But to speak and mean this Rhythm of Grace is to accept an invitation to explore a vast new world full of delight and joy. Jesus said that his yoke was easy (Matthew 11: 29). But we must choose to wear it. We must decide and we must persist. We must set aside time for worship and prayer that is life-giving, exciting and challenging. For each of us, that is a matter of finding our own rhythm of sustainable prayer and worship.

**Does the pattern of prayer and worship that you follow work?**

**Are there ways in which you could set time aside that would allow your commitment to prayer and worship to grow and develop?**

**Do you want to commit to trying a new pattern this week, or this month?**



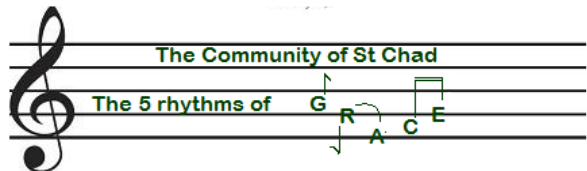
## Recommended reading:

Foster, Richard (1992) Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home. New York, Harper Collins

Wyon, Olive (1943) The School of Prayer. London, SCM Press.

Yancey, Philip (2006) Prayer: Does it Make Any Difference? Grand Rapids, Zondervan





## Session 3

### a) RHYTHM THREE:

**By God's grace I will set aside time for ... spiritual reading**

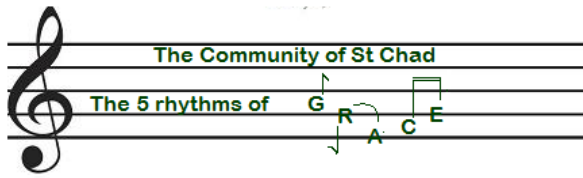
### Spiritual reading

The Bible is core to the Christian faith, it is one of the ways in which we believe God tells us who God is, who we are and what all of that means! The Bible isn't an instruction manual or a book of directions, it is a complex and rich narrative of the way that God has been at work in the world since the beginning. We need to get to know the Bible. It is the source-book of our faith, and is rightly referred to as the living Word of God. But, the Bible is not an easily accessible book. Its 66 component *books* include a number of distinct literary styles. Some are history, some biography, some poetry and song, some letters, and some prophetic and visionary writing. It was written over a span of several centuries, and all of it dates from the distant past. Moreover it was not written in our language, but in Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek. Fortunately this is not a serious problem, as there are many English translations and paraphrases readily available.

To start at page one and work steadily through is probably not the best way for a beginner to become familiar with the Bible. A better approach is to use one of the many excellent reading schemes, in which a short passage of the Bible is chosen for each day, and a comment provided to help the reader understand and apply the text. The major schemes are published by the Scripture Union, the United Christian Broadcasters, the Bible Reading Fellowship, and the International Bible Reading Association. Each of these provides materials suitable for a variety of prior levels of Biblical knowledge.

**Which sections of the Bible are you most familiar with? Why do you think that is?**

The Bible contains much to nourish the soul and stimulate the mind. The different types of texts within the bible each in different ways, invite us to understand who God is and what it means to follow Him. Some of the passages are sustaining, encouraging and inspiring. It is often these passages that stay with us. However, the Bible also contains some writing that we may find offensive and unacceptable. When we encounter such a passage, the best approach is to treat it with respect, but pass on, with an intention to return to it at a later date. Eugene Peterson (2006) notes that the word for meditate (on the word of God) in Biblical Hebrew is reminiscent of a dog growling over a bone to which it constantly returns. Not only will we not completely understand Scripture on the first reading – we will never fully understand it! That is to say, whenever we go back, even to very familiar passages, we may find something fresh and new in what it says. This is why we believe that Scripture is God's living word to us; it is not static and finished but can constantly open our eyes to new ways



of knowing and understanding God. We will never exhaust all the ways that the words of Scripture can take route in us and be at work in our lives!

Knowing and understanding the Bible is important as it provides a firm basis for our Christian belief and practice. It also enables us to defend our faith when we are questioned about it. As Paul tells Timothy, knowing and understanding scripture is a means for us to be:

...thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3: 17)

### **Do you think it is important for Christians to be familiar with the Bible? Why?**

The Bible is the principal focus of a commitment to spiritual reading, but not the only one. There is a wealth of reading matter, both contemporary and from earlier times, that can hugely inform and benefit us. John Martin wrote:

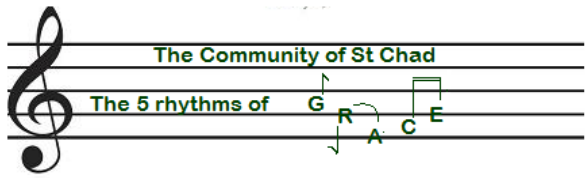
“People’s knowledge of their faith needs to be at the same level as their professional knowledge and practice. Our churches need to be much more serious about being places of learning.” ([www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/?643](http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/?643))

Spiritual reading comes in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. It may be that you find it helpful to read about the lives of those who follow Christ, or the writings of people what have visions or meditate on God. You might find it helpful to read theology and Biblical commentary. It may be that fiction books are most meaningful for you. Many works of fiction can give us glimpses of profound truth. Some of the best known are allegorical books such as John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and C. S. Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia*. If you enjoy reading, but find the thought of ‘spiritual reading’ a bit much, reflect on the spiritual in the things you already read. When have you caught a glimpse of truth, or of the divine in what you read? In what ways has a book lifted your eyes beyond earth to see the things of heaven?

### **Can you think of a book you have read that was spiritually uplifting or inspiring? What was it about it that made it so?**

Just as with prayer, reading the Bible with other Christians is also important. When we read individually, we can come up with all sorts of crazy understandings of the text with nobody to challenge us or to help us puzzle out what it means. When we read together, we are accountable to each other and there are more of us to try and discern whether we are understanding what God is saying to us through the Scriptures.

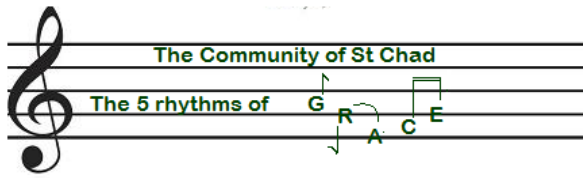
Are you prepared to make one commitment to set time aside for spiritual reading over the next month? Your commitment might be to get to know one book of the Bible better, to read it more regularly, to read other spiritual books, or to reflect on the spiritual in what you are reading. It may be to read the Bible with others once a week or once a month. You might like to think about making a new or further commitment each month.



## Recommended reading

Foster, Richard (2008) *Life with God. A life-transforming new approach to Bible reading.* London, Hodder and Stoughton

Peterson, Eugene (2005) *Eat This Book. The Art of Spiritual Reading.* London, Hodder and Stoughton.



## b) RHYTHM FOUR:

**By God's grace I will endeavour to be a gracious presence  
in the world, serving others and working for justice in  
human relationships and social structures.**

### The teachings of Jesus

Rhythm Four reminds us to follow the example of Jesus, who showed compassion to all. He healed and cared for the sick, forgave the sinful, and shared meals with prostitutes and corrupt officials. Jesus believed that true compassion was motivated by love. When asked which commandment was the greatest, he said:

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments. (Luke 10:27)

To clarify this he told the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 29-37). Jesus also said that when we care for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison, we are serving him (Matthew 25: 31-46).

### **Who are the outcasts today? What would it look like if we cared for them as Jesus did for the outcasts of his day?**

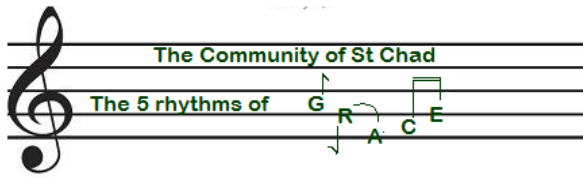
Care for members of the Christian community, as well as for outsiders and outcasts was of great importance to the first Christians. These ideas profoundly affected the early church. In Acts 4: 34-35, we are told:

...there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Similarly, 1 Corinthians 16: 1-4 describes how Christians in Galatia and Corinth gave their money to help believers in the Holy Land who were suffering because of a famine.

### **Would Ignatius describe your church as "leading in love"? Why?**

These practices continued after the New Testament period. Tertullian, a bishop in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (AD 160-225), for example, catalogued a long list of groups that were cared for by believers. The church at that time supported orphans, the house-bound, those who had suffered shipwreck, and those who had been banished because of their faith. They also helped and buried the poor. By AD 250, Christians in Rome were caring for some 1500 needy people and Ignatius described them as *leading in*



love. Bishop Dionysius of Corinth also recorded that they were sending *supplies to many churches in every city*.

The early church also responded to emergencies. When the Christians of Numidia were left homeless in AD 253 by invading nomads, Cyprian collected a spontaneous contribution of 100,000 sesterces from a small group in Carthage. It was not only fellow Christians who benefited from this generosity. Bishop John Chrysostom (AD 347-407) observed that:

“Every day the Church here feeds 3,000 people. Besides this, the Church daily helps provide food and clothes for prisoners, the hospitalised, pilgrims, cripples, churchmen, and others.”

Perhaps the clearest account of what was occurring was provided by the Christian philosopher Aristides in AD 125. He wrote:

“They walk in all humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them, and they love one another. They despise not the widow, and grieve not the orphan. He that has distributes liberally to him that has not. If they see a stranger, they bring him under their roof, and rejoice over him as if he were their own brother: for they call themselves brothers, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit of God; but when one of their poor passes away from the world, and any of them see him, then he provides for his burial according to his ability; and if they hear that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs. And if there is among them a man that is poor and needy, and they have not an abundance of necessaries, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food.”

**Do you think this description applies to Christians, or the church today? Why?**

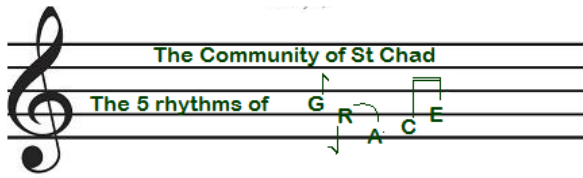
**What specific challenges might this present to us?**

## **The on-going call...**

This emphasis on personal generosity influenced the history of the church, and successive generations of Christian men and women, like St. Francis of Assisi and Catherine Booth, dedicated their lives to caring for the sick and needy. The work of Mother Teresa’s Sisters of Mercy and Christian Aid, are more recent examples of this desire to express love and generosity in the world.

Sometimes the help that is given is short-term. But often true compassion demands more. There is an old proverb that says: *Give a man a fish, and you have fed him for one day; teach him to fish, and you have fed him for a lifetime*. This applies when supporting homeless people in one’s own country or victims of famine abroad.

Care for the poor and marginalised is not only about provision. Christians have to go beyond direct aid and join the struggle for justice. We may be called to oppose the



structures and institutions that deny those in need access to certain occupations, job promotions, essential services, educational opportunities, adequate housing, and more. This requires courage and determination, and can seem like to big a job for us. However if you look back, Christians have made a huge difference to legal structures over issues such as slavery. More recently, you could reflect on the impact of the Jubilee 2000 campaign, which was largely a result of mobilising Christians to campaign for debt relief for the poorest countries of the world.

**Can you think of a structure, either in this country or elsewhere that you think is wrong? What might you be asked to do about it as a Christian?**

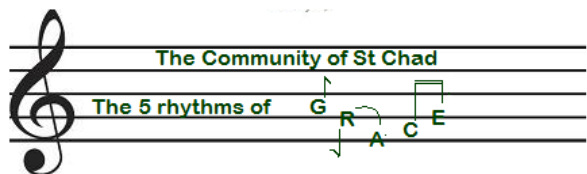
The same teachings that inspired Christian activism in the early church call us to fight those policies that discriminate on the basis of external appearances such as race and gender and social backgrounds such as class and religion, and to stand against those societies and governments that oppress their people by denying them basic human rights. The ministries of Martin Luther King and Desmond Tutu demonstrate the importance and challenge of this call.

**Would you be prepared to fight against those who discriminate on the basis of external appearance?**

## **Recommended reading**

Foster, Richard (1998) Freedom of Simplicity. New York, Harper Collins.

Smith, J.B and Graybeal, L (1993) A Spiritual Formation Workbook. New York, Harper Collins.



# Session 4

## a) RHYTHM FIVE:

**By God's grace I will sensitively share my faith with others and support God's mission both locally and globally.**

The fifth Rhythm of Grace reminds us of the three-fold commission Jesus gave to his followers in Matthew 28:19. First, he asked them to make disciples *from all nations*. Then, he said that they should be baptised *in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*. Finally, Jesus told his followers to teach them *everything I have commanded you* (Matthew 28:20).

### **Making Disciples...**

The three-fold commission was so important to the early church that it was included in each of the Gospels and the book of Acts (Matthew 28: 19; Mark 16: 15; Luke 24: 47; John 20: 21; Acts 1: 8). The New Testament demonstrates that Jesus' first followers shared the *good news* wherever they could. Look at Peter's encounter with the crippled man in Acts 3: 11-26, or Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8: 26-29. The Apostles also taught about Jesus in synagogues, private homes, and public meeting places. Read the account of Paul's sermon in Athens (Acts 17: 16-32).

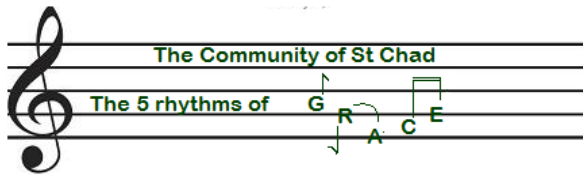
Mostly, however, the first followers of Jesus demonstrated their faith by how they lived. Justin Martyr, an early Christian theologian, explained this in a letter to Emperor Antonius Pius:

"We formerly rejoiced in uncleanness of life, but now love only chastity; before we used the magic arts, but now dedicate ourselves to the true and unbegotten God; before we loved money and possessions more than anything, but now we share what we have and to everyone who is in need; before we hated one another and killed one another and would not eat with those of another race, but now since the manifestation of Christ, we have come to a common life and pray for our enemies and try to win over those who hate us without just cause."

Justin also pointed out that some of those who had been opposed to Christianity had been won over because of the honesty of Christians in their business dealings and their forbearance when cheated.

### **What does your lifestyle communicate about your faith?**

Like these first disciples, we are also called to share the good news by what we say and do. Paul talked about this in Romans 10: 14:



How can people have faith in the Lord and ask him to save them, if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear, unless someone tells them?

Evangelism (the process of sharing faith) may sound like a difficult thing. However, Christians over the centuries have always been willing to give “an account of the hope that is in them” (1 Peter 3:15) and that is how the Good News of Jesus has spread. You could start by praying for your family, friends, neighbours and colleagues. Ask God to give you the opportunity to talk to them about spiritual things. Remember, it is the Holy Spirit who draws people to Christ. Your job is to give them opportunities to respond.

Evangelism is not always about words. Don't forget that the way you live powerfully communicates your faith. Jesus tells us: *you can tell what [people] are by what they do* (Matthew 7: 16). Be open about your relationship with God. Don't be afraid to bring God into your conversations. Never pretend that you know more than you do. If you are not sure about something, say so. Offer to find out what the answer is, if there is one. Life and faith are complex, and not everything has a neat or straightforward answer. If it seems appropriate, invite the person you are praying for to a Christian event that will interest them. But try not to get frustrated by setbacks. Stick with it. It can take weeks, months or even years for some people to come to faith.

**Have you ever invited anyone new to your Church? How did you / would you feel about doing that?**

Looking for opportunities to talk about our faith can be difficult. When Tony Blair was Prime Minister, his communications advisor Alistair Campbell famously stopped Blair from talking about his faith, with his now famous comment “we don't do God”. We may not receive lots of invitations to tell people about our faith, and our experience may be that others don't want to hear about it. The Gospels claim that if the people are silent about the greatness of God, even the stones will shout aloud! The challenge for all Christians is to find ways which are culturally appropriate and authentic to share the joy and the hope that is in them.

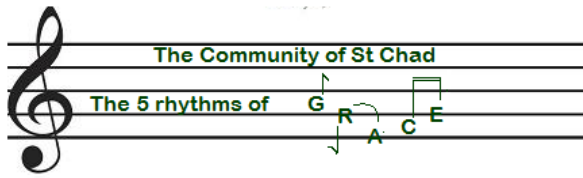
**What opportunities are there for people to acknowledge their faith publicly?**

## **Baptise in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit**

Jesus knew that it was important for converts to acknowledge their faith publicly. That's why he asked his followers to baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the early church, baptism signified:

- death of the old self (Romans 6: 3-11);
- cleansing from guilt and sin (Romans 5: 12-18);
- adoption into the family of God (Galatians 4: 4-5);
- solidarity with Jesus (Colossians 3: 3-4);





Candidates knew that when they undertook to be baptized they were making an irrevocable statement about their belief in Christ and their intent to follow him as his disciple.

Today, however, when many people are baptised as infants, the public acknowledgement of faith that Jesus anticipated often occurs later in life. Baptism of infants is regarded more as a recognition of the grace of God, than as a statement about the life we intend to lead.

**Do you think that baptism is important? Why?**

## **Teach everything I have commanded**

Conversion and baptism are important points in the journey of faith, but there is much more to being a Christian. In the 1700s John Wesley wrote in his diary:

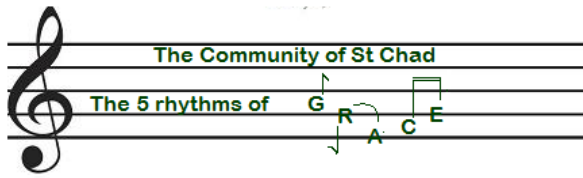
“I [am] more convinced than ever that preaching like an apostle, without joining together those that are awakened and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murderer. How much preaching has there been for these twenty years all over Pembrokehire! But no regular societies, no discipline, no order or connection; and the consequence is that nine out of ten of the once-awakened are now faster asleep than ever.”

**What do you think Wesley meant? Do you agree with his concerns?**

## **Recommended reading**

Graybeal, L and Roller, J.L (2007) *Living the Mission*. New York, Harper Collins.

Singlehurst, Laurence (2001) *Loving the Lost*. Eastbourne, Kingsway.



## b) Following the Rhythms of Grace What next?

The life of discipleship is an ongoing pattern of living out Christian faith, growing closer to God, and learning to be more and more like Christ. The early followers of Jesus knew that it was important to meet together each week: to worship (1 Corinthians 14: 26); to pray (Acts 12: 12); to learn (Acts 20: 9; 1 Corinthians 12: 23-34); to break bread (Acts 20: 7); and to encourage each other (Hebrews 10: 25).

We also need to help people to grow by encouraging them to spend time with other believers in worship, prayer and study. This is the main way in which we become rooted in the teachings of Christ and equipped to live a life of faith that will attract others into God's Kingdom.

### **Is it possible to grow as a Christian if you do not spend time with other believers; in worship, prayer and study?**

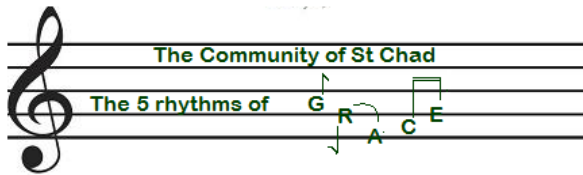
During these sessions you may have made commitments to focus on worship prayer and spiritual reading, work for justice, or even to recognise and acknowledge God's grace. However we all need to constantly commit ourselves to the rhythms of grace. Giving your life to Christ, becoming a Christian is not a one-off decision, but a constant choice, and following the rhythms of grace can help us to keep focussed on this choice.

The Community of St Chad offers material for daily prayer and runs events throughout the year. You can find out more about these on the Diocesan website, or from our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/CommunityOfStChad> . As well as this, the Community of St Chad recommends that members form small groups which meet at least monthly to share together in the journey of faith. These are called spiritual companion groups.

*Spiritual Companion Groups* give structure to the dispersed community. They consist of small groups of people, usually between 2 - 4, who commit themselves, on an annual basis, to meet regularly to encourage and support each other in their desire to become deeply rooted in God and to grow in spiritual maturity. The other members of the group become your companions on your spiritual journey, and together you share the challenges and joys of seeking to live out the rhythms of grace in the world.

### **What do you think would be the best thing about being part of a small spiritual companion group? What would you find difficult about it?**

Confidentiality, care and commitment are crucial elements of the group. Growth, support and transformation are most likely to happen when you trust the other members and are able to share openly. What is said at the Group meeting must remain totally confidential to the members of the Group. Most Groups meet monthly, although some choose to meet more often, particularly in the early days of a Group's existence. Each meeting should be arranged at a time when every member can be



present, unless some emergency occurs to prevent them. Many people prefer to join a group with agreed beginning and ending dates. Having an ending date gives those who need to leave the group a comfortable way of doing so. Usually the Group will want to continue, perhaps with the addition of some new member whose presence is acceptable to the remaining members. At least once a year the Group will review its progress and agree the way forward.

## Forming spiritual companion groups ...

Following on from these sessions, you might want to set up spiritual companion groups. In order to get the most out of these groups, you might like to consider the following points about who should be in each group:

- Am I just sticking to my friends? Is that the best idea?  
Although it may be more daunting, forming a group with people you don't know too well might ultimately be more rewarding. We are more likely to hear fresh perspectives, receive unexpected support and challenges from those we do not already know well. It is also important to remember that the groups are not cliques. Make sure no one who wants to join is left out.
- Who can I practically meet up with regularly?  
There is not much point forming a group with someone whose house you can't get to, or whom is never free at the same times as you are.
- Who will lead the group?  
The simplest way is to share the leadership role equally around the group. During the meeting the leader will ensure that the members stay on task and that everyone has an equal opportunity for sharing.

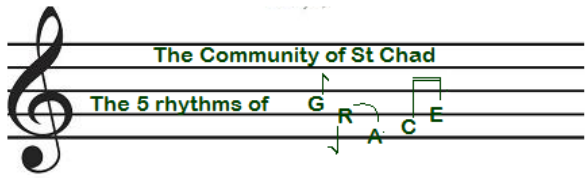
**Do you want to join a spiritual companion group? It may not be for everybody, but if you are hesitant, try and be really honest with yourself about what is putting you off.**

## What happens in the group?

Usually the group will focus on one or more of the *Rhythms of Grace*. Before the meeting members are encouraged to read prayerfully through the Rhythms of Grace and reflect on these questions:

- Which *Rhythm* has particularly brought you life?
- Which *Rhythm* have you struggled with?
- Is there anything you need to change in order to follow the *Rhythms* more faithfully?
- In what ways have the *Rhythms* enabled you to love and be loved by God?

The questions are used as a focus during the meeting, when we suggest each person can spend up to 15 minutes sharing their experience. They should not be



interrupted. When they finish other group members may ask 'open' questions which focus on the one who has shared, not on the experience of the one asking the questions. The keynote here is support and encouragement, but it is possible that this will sometimes include an element of challenge. It is usual at the end of each meeting for each member to choose some specific task to work at in the weeks leading up to the next meeting.

Living according to the 'unforced rhythms of grace' is exciting and it is also challenging. Joining with others who are living by the same rhythms, be it in small groups or as part of the wider Community of St Chad, is a way of supporting one another and sustaining that journey. The community is also a corporate witness to the joy and hope that we have in us because of the good news of Jesus, and the grace that God has given us.