

Shining Like Stars

A course which helps Christians understand
how God intends us to live in this world

Leader's Manual

by Roger Morgan

Shining Like Stars is Book 3 of *The God Who Is There*,
a discipleship course for small groups

The Mathetes Trust

www.mathetestrust.org

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The Mathetes Trust seeks to advance Christian discipleship through training, support and provision of resource materials to churches, church leaders and church members in the UK, Africa and elsewhere in the world. Support and training is available for those using our materials. Please do get in touch with us if you think we may be able to help you.

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Preface

Welcome to the three-part series on discipleship, *The God Who Is There*. The series consists of three books, each providing a course of ten sessions suitable for small groups. The first book, *Beyond Ourselves*, begins with the question ‘Is there anything beyond ourselves?’ or in other words ‘Is God there?’. By the end of the course group members should be able to say ‘Yes – I am sure God is there, because I have experienced him for myself.’ The second book, *The New Community*, is about finding God to be there whenever a group of Christians come together. By the end of this book, group members should be able to say ‘Yes – we are sure that God is there because again and again we have experienced him in our meetings.’ This third book, *Shining Like Stars*, is about finding God to be there in ordinary day to day life. It aims to teach Christians to respond to the God who is there through a life of wholehearted discipleship.

The God Who is There takes its inspiration from *Rooted in Jesus*, a discipleship course written some years ago for rural Africa. *Rooted in Jesus* has been highly successful, having been translated so far into 45 African languages and adopted in 16 countries. It has been used to transform many lives as well as whole churches and communities. Because of its success in Africa many people have asked us to release *Rooted in Jesus* for use in the West, believing, as we do, that discipleship is needed here too.

Taken together the three books in this series are our attempt to explain the fundamentals of Christian discipleship. In the first book we learned that discipleship is entering into a relationship with God, a relationship based on promises and therefore on faithfulness and trust. In the second book we discovered that discipleship is not just an individual thing; discipleship is intended as a group activity, a shared journey in which we find a new identity as part of a community centred on Jesus. Finally, in this third book we learn that discipleship is about how we conduct our lives in the daily reality of our families and communities. In all the ups and downs of everyday life we find that

God is there setting us standards, leading us on, and helping us at every turn.

For each of the three courses in the series there is a leader's manual and also a parallel coursebook for the group members. The series is suitable for groups of any size. It will work well with just three people or it could be used by a large church with many groups meeting together at the same time.

The Mathetes Trust is able to offer advice or training to churches or group leaders who wish to use this material. If you would like to find out how we can support you, please do get in touch with us by emailing admin@mathetestrust.org.

How the course works – notes for the leader

Shining Like Stars envisages a group of between three and twenty people who will meet together for a series of ten sessions, each lasting an hour and a half. Each session can be preceded by a shared meal or a simpler form of refreshment.

This Leader's Manual is for the leader only, and it gives minute by minute suggestions for how to spend the time. Some leaders will prefer to follow the book in every detail. Others may wish to adapt the course to suit their own style or to suit the composition of the group. You will need to prepare carefully and come up with your own detailed plan for each session.

In each session the sections are carefully timed; you will need to keep your eye on the clock and stick more or less to these times. If you get behind on one section you must make it up on the next. With some groups this will be quite easy but with others, where people are more talkative, keeping to the timings will be quite difficult. If this happens you may wish to over-run a little, or you may prefer to complete one session in two meetings or even two sessions in three meetings. If you start the sessions late you are bound to run into problems.

Shining Like Stars involves music and there is an accompanying CD (also available separately). The CD has been made by Phil and Saskia Lawson Johnston and Pete Gunstone; it provides 21 songs for use both with this book and with book two, *The New Community*. Detailed instructions are given about which songs to use, often with alternatives. The course will not work well without the songs, and choosing them will be an important part of the leader's preparation. You can substitute other songs if you know ones that you think will work better, but do not leave the songs out.

Each session contains a key verse from the Bible for group members to write out on cards and keep with them. In the African version of the course, where it is normal for the groups to memorise the key verses, our experience is that those who take the memorisation most seriously make the most progress. The same will be true for those who work through *The God Who Is There* series. So suggest to the group that it would be a good plan for them to memorise these key verses. If they do decide to memorise they will greatly benefit from the experience, but if the group is opposed to the idea then do go along with their wishes.

There is a separate member's coursebook which you should give to each of the group members during the first session. This coursebook contains exercises, four for each session, which are designed to help group members work out the practical implications of what they are learning. Three of the exercises follow on from the session, and one is there to help them prepare for the next session. There are various ways of introducing the exercises for groups of different kinds (see below), but do bear in mind that if the exercises are omitted, the impact of the course will be greatly reduced.

Here are three ways in which you could use the exercises:

- Agree with the group that each of them will choose one exercise and try to complete it before the next session starts. Those who are keen can do more than one. With most groups it would be best to work in this way. Make sure that time is allowed in the sessions to report back on the exercises.

- If your group lacks much formal education then it may work better if you choose one of the exercises for each session and suggest to the group that you all tackle the same one. If reading skills are a problem it may be better to describe the chosen exercise orally and not use the coursebooks at all. Another idea which sometimes works well is for the group to divide themselves into pairs and then for each pair to meet up to do the chosen exercise together.
- As a third alternative you could choose to build the exercises into the group sessions themselves, and devote two meetings to each session. This will work extremely well if the group is happy to do the course over twenty sessions rather than ten.

There is more to leading a small group than just running meetings; a good leader will also care for the group members individually. So put time into developing a relationship with each group member. Do this in any way that seems appropriate, for example by meeting up for coffee, going shopping together, playing squash, doing something with your children, going to a film. If you show them that you love them, you will find that what you are teaching in the sessions will get across much more effectively.

Shining like Stars

Session 1: Work and worship

Please note that this session is divided into 7 sections. Timings are given for each section with 90 minutes in all. You may decide to leave some sections out, but if you want to include them all you will have to stick carefully to the timings. If time runs out for a particular section then it's normally best to cut the section short and move on straight away to the next one.

Things you will need for this session:

- A coursebook for each member of the group
- The course CD and a CD player
- Spare copies of the course CD
- Bibles and spare pens for any who do not bring them
- A whiteboard or flipchart, and pens
- A large sheet of paper with Colossians 3.23 written out clearly, displayed in a prominent place in the room
- Small cards (small blank name cards are available in stationers) for the key verses – you will need a fresh supply every week
- Cleaning materials, sufficient for the whole group to spend 10 minutes cleaning the house in which you are meeting

Introducing the course

(10 mins)

Welcome the group, allow time for any new members to be introduced, and open in prayer.

Introduce *The God Who Is There* series. Book 1 is called *Beyond Ourselves*, book 2 *The New Community*, and today you are beginning on book 3, *Shining like Stars*. Give each member a copy of the coursebook and allow them a brief time to browse through it.

Draw the attention of the group to the homework exercises and explain that there are four exercises for each session. The first three

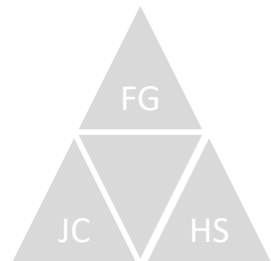
relate to the session you have just done, and the fourth is a preparation exercise for the next session. Explain that the exercises are a big part of the course. Suggest that each person choose one exercise for each session and that they aim to complete it before the next session. If they wish they can do more.

Introduce the course CD. The songs have been arranged by Philip Lawson Johnston and the words can be found on pp 69-76 of the coursebooks. Some of the group may want to have their own copies of the CD for use at home so make sure that you have some spares, or encourage them to order their own copies from the website. To introduce the CD play the song 'Jesus, all for Jesus' (track 18), and ask the group to listen.

The new community

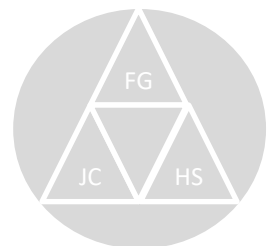
(10 mins)

On your board or flipchart draw a triangle. At the corners write the initials FG for Father God, JC for Jesus, and HS for the Holy Spirit. Explain that this is a triangle of love. The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Spirit, and the Spirit loves the Father. This love existed before the universe was created.



Then explain that God's great plan is and always has been to draw people into this triangle of love – that is, into a relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. More than that, God's plan is that those who have this relationship with him should be formed into a community. In Book 2 we called this *The New Community*.

On your flipchart draw a large circle which has the triangle representing God contained within it. Explain that the circle represents this new community with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit at the heart of it. Then say that because everyone here is a Christian, we all belong to this community. We belong inside this circle. This



community exists outside time; it is an eternal community involving people from all times and places. Within time the new community is a huge, worldwide community. Our little group forms part of this huge community – as do millions of others all over the world.

Show this truth on your board by writing the words OUR GROUP above the circle and the words THE NEW COMMUNITY below the circle. Then suggest that everyone signs in. Ask each person to put their initials somewhere within the circle. And add the initials of anyone who is a member of the group but is unable to be with you on this occasion.

Say that you are using this diagram to emphasise the fact that God is here with you now. Our group, and others like it, are the dwelling place of God on earth.

Acknowledging the presence of God

A good way to acknowledge the presence of God in the group is to sing a song of praise. For this you will need your CD. It is best to start with a well known song – for example ‘How great thou art’ (track 4). Good alternatives would be track 12 ‘Be still’ or track 17 ‘When I survey’. Choose the song which best fits the group.



It is essential for the success of the course that the group quickly becomes familiar with the idea of singing together and joins in with enjoyment and enthusiasm. To achieve this it will be important to get off to a good start, so begin by playing a verse or two of your chosen song and asking the group to listen.

Then stop the CD, ask them to stand and join in, and play the song again from the beginning. Explain that it may feel a bit strange at first but once they get used to it it will be just as good as singing in a bigger setting. Ask them to join in right from the start and, because there are only a few of you, to sing confidently. Make sure you yourself give a good lead.

Probably the song will go very well, but if you find that people are not joining in stop the CD and start again. Try not to bully them but just say that you would like everyone to try and forget about themselves, concentrate on God, and sing with all their hearts. Ask if they feel okay about this and, if they do, try again. If it goes well, be sure to congratulate them on their singing.

Then say that for some Christians it is a normal practice to express unity and commitment to one another by sharing what is called 'The Peace'. Each member of the group greets each of the other members with a handshake or a kiss or a hug, as appropriate, and the words 'The peace of the Lord be with you'. So say to the group 'The peace of the Lord be always with you' and ask them to reply 'And also with you'. Then allow time for everyone to share 'The Peace' with the others.



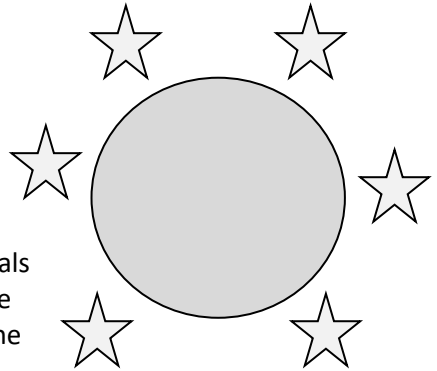
Shining like stars – life in the world (10 mins)

Tell the group that the New Testament word for the new community is 'church'. A church is any group of people, small or large, who meet in the name of Jesus. So your group is a small church. Everything the New Testament teaches about the church also applies to the group. *The New Community*, Book 2 of the series, explains this teaching.

Then explain that *Shining Like Stars* aims to take us on from Book 2. In this book, although you will continue to learn more about your life together as a community, the primary emphasis will be on your lives as individuals in the world outside the community.

Turn together to **Philippians 2.15** and ask someone to read it. Explain that this is where the title for *Shining Like Stars* comes from. It is God's plan that when each group member returns to his or her home, family, place of work, or neighbourhood, he or she will shine like a star in a world which is sometimes very dark.

On your board draw another circle, this time an empty one. Outside it draw a number of small stars, one for each person in the group. Explain that when the group disperses, this is what it is supposed to look like, no longer together but shining as individuals in a world which is often dark. Write the initials of the group members next to the stars.



Alternate the two pictures. Sometimes the group will look like the first picture, together in community, and sometimes like the second, stars shining in the world. God's plan is that these two pictures alternate throughout our lives.

Daily work

(20 mins)

Say that in today's session you will think about the different kinds of work that you do. Ask the group:

- How can Christians shine like stars through the way they do their daily work?

Let them answer and then say that in the Bible the subject of work is introduced in the very earliest chapters of Genesis. Turn to **Genesis 1.26-29** and ask someone to read it. Ask:

- What does the passage teach us about the life that God has designed for all human beings?

Again let them answer and then summarise as follows:

- **God is a worker.** The opening chapter of the Bible reveals that God himself works. God's work is to create things – even today God is creating new things, people, animals, plants, planets, galaxies. God is pictured as looking at his work with great satisfaction and declaring it to be good.

- **We are workers.** God has designed human life in such a way that we too work. This is part of what it means to be made in the image of God. Our work is very varied. Some are preoccupied with raising children. Others are farmers, engineers, teachers. Making meals, cleaning our homes, digging our gardens are all part of our work. We have no choice but to work – if we do not work, our lives will fall apart.
- **Gospel work is work.** Turn together to **John 5.17**, which tells us that the things Jesus was doing (preaching the gospel and ministering to the sick) were also work and not leisure. For some people a lot of their work falls into this category, but for most Christians gospel or church work has to be fitted around other work.
- **Caring for those who can't work.** Some, because they are sick, or very young or old, are unable to work at all. Caring for them is part of the work which the rest of us must do.

The purpose of work

Ask the group what they think the purpose of work is.

Let them discuss, and then say that work has many purposes: we work to eat, to support our families, to care for the world in which we live. But the chief purpose of our work is to give God pleasure. Explain what you mean:

- Perhaps God has created someone in the group to be a mother. She is a good mother, caring lovingly and effectively for her children. As she mothers them, God looks lovingly at her and is very pleased. This is what he created her for.
- Perhaps another group member is a musician. He plays his music with all his heart and to the best of his ability. God listens and enjoys what he hears.
- Another person is an accountant, made very differently from the mother or the musician, but equally able to please God as she uses the skills which God has given.

Tell the group about the parts of your own work which you find satisfying and creative. Say to them: 'If I do my work (as a teacher, gardener, salesman) not to impress others or to make my fortune but entirely for God, and if I continually offer it up to him, not only do I give pleasure to God, but my life shines. It shines because in this small way I myself am like God. He is a completely satisfied worker and so am I.'

Ask each member of the group to briefly mention one aspect of their work that they find satisfying. You are wanting each person to say 'I am really satisfied when I am cooking, when I am teaching a class, when I am building a wall,' and so on.



Say that work should, and often does, make us very happy. Then turn to **Genesis 3.17-19**. Again ask someone to read it out. These verses show how, because of the fall, some aspects of work are neither pleasant nor satisfying. Give examples from your own experience of times when your work has not been easy or rewarding. Then say that this leads to a further question. Is there a way to make daily work shine even when it is tiring, irksome, or boring? Explain to the group what this means for you.

Put them into threes to share with each other what work they do, whether or not they enjoy it, and **if** they think they do it well. Remind them that we are not just talking about paid work but about everything we do that makes the world go round. Probably most of the group find part of their work very satisfying and part painful or frustrating.

Introducing the key verse

(10 mins)

Before the session begins arrange for the key verse, **Colossians 3.23**, to be written up in large letters in a prominent place. Draw the attention of the group to this key verse. It has been chosen because it encapsulates the essence of this session.



Explain that this verse was written to first-century slaves who had recently become Christians. These slaves were mostly well treated but they had no choice other than to work very long hours in the service of their owners. Paul, who wrote these words, wanted them to show by the way that they did their work that God had changed their lives. He wanted them to shine like stars in the households where they served. From now on, Paul says, regard your work, even the aspects of work which are tedious or backbreaking, as being given to you by God. Do it for him, for his glory and his pleasure.

Explain that there will be a key verse for each session of the course and that you would like the group to write out the key verses on cards and keep these cards with them in their wallets or bags. Give each member of the group a blank card on which they should write the key verse and the reference:



Colossians 3.23: 'Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters.'

Then say to the group that although it will be good for you all to have the key verses stored in your wallets or bags, it will be even better if they are stored in your memories. There is a well known proverb 'No gain without pain.' Memorising verses will involve the group in a little pain, but in the long run everyone will gain because the lessons learned are likely to stay with you long after the course is finished.

Propose that you make a group decision to memorise the key verses. How do they feel about doing this? If they decide they would rather not attempt to memorise the key verses then accept the decision with a good grace.

Assuming that the group opts to memorise, make a start now. Recite the verse out aloud, with the reference, and do this nine times. Then ask everyone to say it a tenth time but without looking. Don't compromise by reciting the verse fewer times – if it is to have lasting

value it must be learned thoroughly. Reciting ten times creates a groove in the mind where the verse can reside.

If they opt not to memorise ask them to instead spend a few minutes quietly meditating on the verse. They could probably do this best by thinking about their own daily work and offering it to God.

Working with all our hearts

(20 mins)

Give an example from the ministry of C H Spurgeon. He asked a young girl who served as a domestic to one of his church families ‘What is the evidence that you have now become a Christian?’, and the girl replied ‘I now sweep under the mats.’ Do people think this was a good reply, and if so why?



Help the group to see that God is perfect, and that he never gives half measures. God looked at the world he created and declared it to be ‘very good.’ Our work gives us the opportunity to be like God, to make things and do things to the best of our ability, and then offer them to God so that he can declare what we do to be also ‘very good.’ This applies to work that is immediately satisfying but also to work that is hard.

Suggest to the group that you now put this into practice by doing some work together. Give each person some cleaning materials and ask them to set about cleaning the house or the building in which you are meeting – if possible divide the territory up between them. Ask them to clean with all their hearts, and as they clean to offer their work to God.

Give them long enough to actually make a visible difference, and bring them back together. Then ask how they felt about doing the cleaning.

- Was the cleaning they did a creative activity?
- Was the cleaning a tedious activity?

- If so, did it matter? Were they able to clean with joy in their hearts?
- Do they feel that God was pleased by the way they did their cleaning?
- How did the work of cleaning compare with the work they each do every day?

Worship

(10 mins)

Go back to the two pictures with which you began the session and explain that when we meet together (first picture) we worship, often by singing songs to God. When we are in the world (second picture) then we work by cleaning or whatever it is that we do. The two activities, worship and work, are intended to be carried out in the same spirit and with the same inner attitude. We do both to the glory of God. We do both with all our hearts. We do both with the same energy and enthusiasm. In the Bible some of the Greek and Hebrew words for work could be translated as either work or worship.

So end today by worshipping God with all your hearts just as you cleaned with all your hearts.

First ask the group to sit in silence, to close their eyes, and have their hands held palms upwards. Ask them to listen to God and to expect God to speak.



Leave the group sitting like this for a little while and then say 'Now let's stand in God's presence as a sign of our readiness to serve him. As we stand, let's think about the work we will do in the days ahead. Let's resolve to make this work into a series of acts of worship.'

- Then invite them to lift both hands, and as they do so to turn their thoughts to heaven where Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father.
- Ask them to make him once again the Lord of their lives, and to tell him that they will live to please him and no other.

- Ask them to stretch both hands upwards to their full limit and adore and praise Jesus, asking him to pour down his Spirit on their lives.
- Finally, ask them to kneel, as a sign of their submission to God, to bow their heads low, and to seek his forgiveness and blessing.

While people are still kneeling begin to play the song 'Jesus, all for Jesus' (track 18, words in the coursebooks). As the introduction plays, ask them to sit and join in the song. Suggest that as they sing they should keep their eyes closed and raise their hands in front of them.

Finally turn in the coursebooks to page 5 where you will find a prayer by the 19th century theologian John Henry Newman. End the session by saying this prayer together:

Dear Jesus,

Help me to spread your fragrance wherever I go.
 Flood my soul with your spirit and life.
 Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly
 that my life may only be a radiance of yours.
 Shine through me and be so in me that every soul I
 come in contact with may feel your presence in my soul.
 Let them look up and see no longer me, but only Jesus!
 Stay with me and then I will begin to shine as you shine,
 so to shine as to be a light to others.
 The light, O Jesus, will be all from you; none of it will
 be mine.

It will be you, shining on others through me.
 Let me thus praise you in the way which you love best,
 by shining on those around me.
 Let me preach you without preaching, not by words but by example,
 by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what I do,
 the evident fullness of the love my heart bears for you. Amen.



John Henry Newman
(1801-1890)