

A Novel Approach to Bible Study

Personal Issues for Christians for Lent / Easter or whatever the Season

by Rosalie Sugrue

Introduction

Lent is a time Christians use to prepare for the events leading to the traumatic death of Jesus and the triumphal joy of Easter Day. As Christians we ponder these stories every year and know them well. Lenten study groups are a part of this tradition. Our desire is to be Easter People who follow the Jesus Way, this impacts on all we think and do.

Christianity is not a simple matter of ideological belief. Christianity is about relationships and actions. The Church has its Liturgical Seasons but being a Christian is a year round commitment.

Any Season can be a good time for having a series of study groups thinking through the implications of Christianity with others.

Using a novel to direct thoughts offers a fresh way to clarify issues of faith and practise in our time. Relating to a secular story gives us freedom to explore what undergirds our own faith and practise.

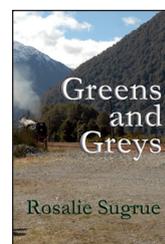
These 6 studies are an invitation to share experiences and feelings concerning sensitive issues and how we live our lives as Christians.

Preparation for the Study Series

Read either of the novels *Greens and Greys* or *Green, Ho!*

They are available in print and eBook editions from the publisher's website here:

- *Greens and Greys* – Print: <http://pgpl.co.nz/print-books/greens-and-greys-print-book/>
- *Greens and Greys* – eBooks: <http://pgpl.co.nz/ebooks/greens-and-greys-ebook/>
- *Green, Ho!* – Print: <http://pgpl.co.nz/print-books/green-ho-print-book/>
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The Six Studies and relevant readings

From the novel *Greens & Greys* by Rosalie Sugrue.
(To find chapters see Contents pages 5-6)

1. **Rules and Promises Learnt in Childhood:** pages 8-34
2. **Faith in Youth:** Salad Days; Religion and Myth; Life after Deac; Over the Hill; The Shamrock
3. **Sexual orientation:** Wear some Flowers in your Hair; There's No Place like Home; Innocence, Harassment and Abuse: December 59; On the Line; Riding down from Bangor
4. **Sex and Situation ethics:** Yield Not to Temptation 112-114; + pages 134-159
5. **Suicide:** Dark Encounters pages 87-93; + pages 160-182
6. **Mature Faith:** pages 187-209

Related issues that could be considered at any session

- **Who are you** – your culture and how you view others
- **Growing in faith**
- **Growing in Biblical understanding**
- **Morals** – honesty, drinking, sex outside marriage etc.
- **Unmentionable topics** – what and why, including sexual trauma
- **Church** – what belonging to a faith community means

Other General Questions and comments

- What experiences enabled Molly to grow in faith and understanding on today's topic?
- What are the differences between Molly's culture and your culture on this issue?
- Comment on Christianity in relation to Molly's marriage and parenting.
- What 4 principles impressed Molly? (The Wesleyan Quadrilateral)
- What ethic does Molly eventually claim as the only Christian standard?
- Do you agree with Molly's final paragraph conclusion?
- Discuss the difficulties of living with health issues (physical and hidden)
- Consider how mental health affects personality and coping ability

Note: Mental and physical health issues are explored in more depth in *Green, Ho!*

These studies are designed to create in-depth fellowship within the parish

To further this aim it is good to meet in a different house for each session with the host providing the concluding drinks and biscuits. Ideal number 6-8 persons; if more break into smaller groups for main discussion. Regardless of group size, it can be helpful to share some considerations in pairs.

Preparation

All participants need to have access to the novel *Greens and Greys* (or the longer version *Green, Ho!*) available in print or eBook from 'Philip Garside Publishing'.

Only the first 34 pages need to be read for the first session.

First Session

Begin with a brief round of introductions (repeat at other sessions if a new person joins)

State: name; who you live with; how long a member of the parish; why you come to this church

Set ground rules: Listen with respect; contribute fairly; take turns to comment; anyone may pass if they have nothing to add or don't want to respond to a question or engage with a particular topic.

Opening statement: Read by leader

It is traditional for churches to have study groups that consider deep questions about our faith and Christian living. Such groups are usually Bible focussed. Each of these studies has supporting Bible texts but today we are going to delve into personal and practical aspects of Christianity by considering the text of a novel. Whatever the topic, it helps to enlarge one's own understanding by feeling into it from another's perspective.

To keep ourselves grounded in Christian tradition each session will begin with an arrow prayer composed by the Quaker, William Penn (1644-1718), followed by a famous prayer composed by an historic saint, and some short Bible passages.

General procedure for all sessions

- **Welcome:** Briefly share any significant happenings since last meeting.
- **Begin study time** with William Penn's arrow prayer, said together.
- **Volunteers then read** the set prayer and Bible verses.
- **Share brief reactions** to the relevant chapters
- **Discuss questions.**
- **Bring discussion to a close** by the agreed time
- **Conclude study by all reading** the Sarum (Salisbury) Primer Prayer written in 1588
- **Confirm time and place** of next meeting.

Discussion I — Values Learnt in Childhood

William Penn's prayer, said together

O Lord, help me not to despise or oppose what I do not understand. Amen

Peace — St. Francis of Assisi, 1181–1226

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
there is injury, pardon
Where there is doubt, faith,
Where there is despair, hope,
Where there is darkness, light,
Where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much
seek to be consoled as to console,
not so much to be understood as to understand,
not so much to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
it is in dying that we awake to eternal life.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶ Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. ⁷ Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. ⁸ Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, ⁹ and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Proverbs 22:6 (NRSV)

Train children in the right way and when old they will not stray.

Proverbs 6:20-22

My child, keep your father's commandment, and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart always; tie them around your neck. When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you.

Values learnt in childhood

Related chapters: December 69; Golden Rule Days; Danny Boy; Behind Locked Doors; Safe on Canaan's Side (pages 8–34)

1. In what ways can you identify with Molly's childhood?
2. What were the family rules of your childhood?
3. Did you belong to any youth group that taught rules or asked for promises?
4. When and how did you learn about sex?
5. When did you first come across the concept of being gay?
6. Did you ever witness adult behaviour that worried or embarrassed you?
7. As a child did you experience guilt for behaviour you were led into by another person?
8. Did you ever feel guilty for something you initiated that could have harmed another child?

Why did Molly do what she did?

What would I have done in her situation?

Conclude with the Sarum Prayer

**God be in my head and in my understanding;
God be in my eyes and in my looking;
God be in my mouth and in my speaking;
God be in my heart and in my thinking;
God be at my end and at my departing. Amen**

Discussion 2 — Faith in Youth

William Penn's prayer, said together

O Lord, help me not to despise or oppose what I do not understand. Amen

Day by Day — Richard of Chichester, 1197–1253

Thanks be to thee, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits which thou hast won for us,
for all the pains and insults which thou hast borne for us.
O most merciful Redeemer, Friend and brother,
may we know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly,
and follow thee more nearly, day by day. Amen

Ecclesiastes 11:9

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

Proverbs 1:8

Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and reject not your mother's teaching.

Proverbs 20:21

Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

Ephesians 5:18

Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit.

Proverbs 23:25

Let your father and mother be glad, let her who bore you rejoice.

Psalms 103:5

Bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord O my soul and do not forget his benefits – who forgives all your iniquity ... who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Faith in Youth

Related chapters: Salad Days; Religion and Myth (pages 35-51); Life after Deac; Over the Hill; The Shamrock (pages 94-111)

1. How old were you when you left home and where did you live?
2. What stood out for you as very different in your new life style?
3. Did you become part of a new church, or a new youth group of any sort?
4. What sort of a social life did you have? What music did you like?
5. When were you introduced to alcohol?
6. Have your attitudes to alcohol altered over the years?
7. Were you excited by deep discussions that took you to new understandings of life?
8. What were the most significant faith revelations of your late teens and 20s?

Why did Molly do what she did?

What would I have done in that situation?

Conclude with the Sarum Prayer

**God be in my head and in my understanding;
God be in my eyes and in my looking;
God be in my mouth and in my speaking;
God be in my heart and in my thinking;
God be at my end and at my departing. Amen**

Discussion 3 — Sexual Orientation: Innocence, Harassment and Abuse

William Penn's prayer, said together

O Lord, help me not to despise or oppose what I do not understand. Amen

God of Goodness — Julian of Norwich, b. 1342)

God, of your goodness, give me yourself;
for you are sufficient for me.
I cannot properly ask anything less, to be worthy of
you.
If I were to ask less, I should always be in want. In you
alone do I have all. Amen

Acts 10: 9-35

About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. ¹² In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ Then he heard a voice saying, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' ¹⁴ But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.' ¹⁵ The voice said to him again, a second time, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven. ¹⁷ Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate ... The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him. ²⁴ The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends ... ³⁴ Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ ... anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Sexual Orientation

Related chapters: Wear some Flowers in your Hair; There's No Place like Home; Innocence, Harassment and Abuse December 59; On the Line; Riding Down from Bangor

1. When did you first get to know an openly gay person?
2. Did knowing this person change any preconceived notions you had about homosexuality?
3. Do you consider yourself as inclusive and accepting of the GLBT community?
4. Would you accept a gay or lesbian as your minister?
5. Have you ever been sexually harassed when too young or too innocent to understand?
6. If you suffered serious sexual assaulted as a young person do you think you would report it?
7. If someone told you they had suffered a serious assault, would you encourage them to report it, even if the assault happened many years ago?
8. What should we do in order to keep ourselves and our children safe?

**Why did Molly do what she did?
What would I have done in her situation?**

Conclude with the Sarum Prayer

**God be in my head and in my understanding;
God be in my eyes and in my looking;
God be in my mouth and in my speaking;
God be in my heart and in my thinking;
God be at my end and at my departing. Amen**

Discussion 4 — Sex and Situation ethics

William Penn's prayer, said together

O Lord, help me not to despise or oppose what I do not understand. Amen

Interdependence (Reinhold Niebuhr, 1892–1971)

O God,
you have bound us together in this bundle of life;
give us grace to understand how our lives
depend on the courage,
the industry, the honesty and integrity
of our fellow beings;
that we may be mindful of their needs,
grateful for their faithfulness,
and faithful in our responsibilities to them;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Proverbs 31:8-9 (NRSV)

Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights
of all the destitute.

Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the
poor and needy.

Amos 5:24

Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness
like an ever-flowing stream.

Micah 6:8

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what
does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to
love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Matthew 11:18-19

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they
say, "He has a demon";¹⁹ the Son of Man came eating
and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a
drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet
wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.

Sex and Situation Ethics

Chapters relating to: Yield Not to Temptation; When Irish
Eyes are smiling; I've Been Everywhere Man; A Bonking
Binge

1. What were you taught about sin?
2. How have your ideas on sin and sex changed since you
were young?
3. Do you consider sex outside marriage a sin when
between single consenting adults?
4. Do you think it is better to marry as a virgin or to live
with a partner before marrying?
5. Did you permit your teenagers and unmarried adult
children to have sex in your house?
6. What do you consider to be important information
and advice for young people?
7. Should the rules for clergy be different than for people
in jobs?
8. Is it best to reveal all your sexual past to your partner
or are some things best kept a secret?

Why did Molly do what she did?

What would I have done in her situation?

Conclude with the Sarum Prayer

**God be in my head and in my understanding;
God be in my eyes and in my looking;
God be in my mouth and in my speaking;
God be in my heart and in my thinking;
God be at my end and at my departing. Amen**

Discussion 5 — Suicide

William Penn's prayer, said together

O Lord, help me not to despise or oppose what I do not understand. Amen

May there be peace within — St Teresa of Avila, 1515-1582

May today there be peace within.
May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.
May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.
May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you.
May you be content knowing you are a child of God.
Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.
It is there for each and every one of us. Amen

Matthew 7:1-2

Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the beam in your own eye.

Galatians 5:13-14

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. ¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

John 3:17

For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

Suicide

Related Chapter: Dark Encounters pages 87-93; and pages 160-182

1. Has someone you were close to suicided or attempted suicide?
2. What was the effect on the family or on the group where you knew this person?
3. Why should we avoid the term "committed suicide"?
4. What causes people to consider suicide?
5. Is it good to talk about suicide or better to avoid mention due to the possibility of talk encouraging vulnerable people?
6. What do you know about New Zealand suicide statistics?
7. How can we help people we suspect may be depressed?
8. What can we do to support the mental health of ourselves and our loved ones?

Why did Molly do what she did?

What would I have done in her situation?

Conclude with the Sarum Prayer

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God be in my eyes and in my looking;
God be in my mouth and in my speaking;
God be in my heart and in my thinking;
God be at my end and at my departing. Amen**

Discussion 6 — Mature Faith

William Penn's prayer, said together

O Lord, help me not to despise or oppose what I do not understand. Amen

From silly devotions – St Teresa of Avila, 1515–1582

From silly devotions and from sour-faced saints,
Good Lord, deliver us.
Let nothing disturb you; let nothing dismay you;
All things pass: God never changes.
Patience attains all it strives for.
Those who have God find they lack nothing:
God suffices.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours;
Yours are the only hands with which he
can do his work,
Yours are the only feet with which he
can go about the world,
Yours are the only eyes through which
his compassion can shine forth upon a troubled world.
Amen

Matthew 22:37-40

And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commands hang all the law and the prophets.

1 John 4:12

No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

Philippians 4:8

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Mature faith

Related Chapters: (pages 187-209) Positively Married; Plain Living; Hokitika; Dunedin; Wellington

1. What do you consider important in a good marriage?
2. What worked well in your parent's marriage?
3. Did your parents behave in ways that you vowed you would not do?
4. Who have most helped you in your quest for faith?
5. Has church played a big part in your life? Was this a good thing?
6. How has your faith matured?
7. What do you consider to be the most important Christian values?
8. How can we achieve healthy intergenerational discussion on sensitive issues?

Why did Molly do what she did?

What would I have done in her situation?

Conclude with the Sarum Prayer

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God be in my eyes and in my looking;
God be in my mouth and in my speaking;
God be in my heart and in my thinking;
God be at my end and at my departing. Amen**

Words to carry in our hearts:

The Love Chapter: 1 Corinthians 13:4-13

1 Corinthians 13:4-13

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; ⁵ it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. ¹³ So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Other Books by Rosalie Sugrue available from Philip Garside Publishing Ltd

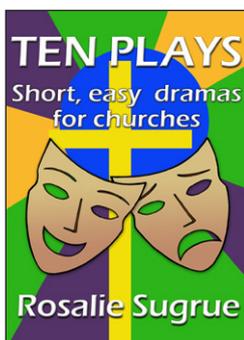


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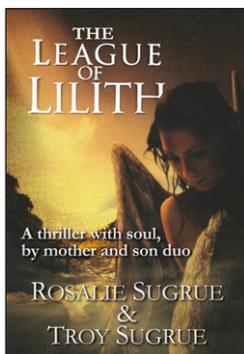


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The League of Lilith: *A thriller with soul*

By mother and son duo Rosalie Sugrue & Troy Sugrue

Sarai, a Biblical Studies lecturer, learns a terrible truth; a core knowledge she must impart to a successor. Will she choose society wife, Jen, or bondage and discipline prostitute Kat? The lives of these two women collide in unexpected ways around Sarai, while in the wings lurk a coven of Wiccan witches, and the dark desires and dealings that threaten Jen's husband, Wilkin. An explosive novel with a dramatic climax.

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