



Taster Unit

SECTION ONE **Where this Taster Unit fits**

This Unit gives an idea of what TLS study material is like for one-year and two-year courses and is for everyone who enquires about joining the main TLS programme for the first time.

After you have applied to join your first TLS course you are asked to work through a simple Introductory Module to equip you with the tools you will need. People coming from one TLS course to another will already have much of this preliminary knowledge and will not need to do a Taster Unit or Introductory Module again.

SECTION TWO **About Study Units in general**

2a) Format

TLS study units contain four kinds of material:

- The main text, for you to read carefully, looking up any Bible references which are given.
- 'Doing-It-Yourself' exercises. These are pieces of work for you to do on your own, designed to reinforce what you have read in the main text. You may well want to make notes, but generally these exercises are not discussed in the Local Study Group or equivalent (e.g., Study Day).
- 'Doing-It-Together' tasks. These tasks are the main discussion topic for the Local Study Group. You should make notes of your investigations/conclusions to help you take part in the Local Study Group meeting – but you will not be asked to hand them in.

- Sometimes exercises of this kind are designed to be done with members of your Support Network. We give you advance notice of these so that you can share with the Network before the relevant meeting of the Local Study Group. Working with the Support Network in this way happens more frequently on TLS one-year courses.
- ‘Extracts’ are just that – portions of published material to help you see what others think about a particular topic. Where Extracts are included you are expected to read them. They are included so that problems getting access to books etc. do not prevent people from doing some further reading. They are reproduced under strict copyright permissions and **must on no account be copied from the units except as needed for Support Network exercises.**

Those doing essays or short answers will need to do more reading than just the Extracts.

2b) Content

TLS Modules contain both Biblical work and material relating to contemporary topics.

The Biblical work is embodied in the Study Unit. In the particular case of the Gateways into Worship course there is also Biblical work required in the lectionary-based sermon preparation task to be done for each Local Study Group meeting.

You will need access to Biblical commentaries – advice on these is given in the Course materials.

TLS does not specify any particular version or translation of the Bible – indeed, comparing the different versions used by course members is often very enlightening during Local Study Group discussions. However, if you want to buy a Bible for TLS purposes and are looking for guidance, we would suggest the New Revised Standard Version. TLS does not use the books of the Apocrypha.

2c) How much effort must I put in?

About five or six hours of private study is usually needed in preparation for each Local Study Group meeting – but this will vary from individual to individual.

SECTION THREE About this Study Unit

This Taster Unit is similar in format to the study units for one-year and two-year TLS courses. WE STRONGLY ADVISE THAT YOU WORK THROUGH IT. It should take you about one or two hours, and will give you a fair idea of what you are in for if you apply for a TLS course. If you decide not to apply, it won't have done you any harm!

The one area which cannot really be tried out before your course starts is the Local Study Group meeting. However, we have included one or two exercises of this kind. If you have the opportunity of gathering with one or two church friends or other potential TLS course members for a 'trial', please do so! You may copy relevant pages of this Unit for this purpose.

The Taster Unit explores the meaning of 'training', 'learning' and 'serving'. For each we look at definitions, Biblical examples, implications, and how TLS works it out. So working through this unit will not only give you a flavour of 'doing' TLS but also expand some of what you have read in your Course Prospectus.

SECTION FOUR Training

4a) Definitions

The Oxford Compact English Dictionary defines 'training' as the '*act or process of teaching or learning a skill, discipline etc.*', and '*to train*' as to '*teach a specified skill, especially by practice*'.

4b) Biblical Examples

There are many Biblical examples of the mantle of prophecy or discipleship passing from one man to a successor. Elisha followed Elijah (see 1 Kings 19: 15-21 and 2 Kings 2: 1-16); the young Samuel served his apprenticeship, as it were, with Eli (see 1 Samuel 1: 10-23, 2: 11,18-21 and 3: 1-19). But there is little Old Testament evidence of training as such. We can infer that it happened – but we do not know for sure.

Much the same could be said about the New Testament. Even the references to Paul and Barnabas, that powerful early mission partnership, do not describe how Barnabas was 'trained'. Yet in Luke's gospel we have a very clear picture of Jesus training people for discipleship.

Doing-It-Yourself 1



Carefully read Luke 10: 1-12.

Although Jesus may not have thought in these terms, he was clearly 'teaching a specific skill'. And, he said, this skill was to be gained by the practice of "going ahead of him to every town and place where he himself was to go".

So Jesus wasn't just teaching a skill – he was also talking about discipline.

Doing-It-Yourself 2



Read Luke 14: 16-23.

For the seventy-two, the advance men of the Gospel, the practice was in how the skills were to be learnt through working in a disciplined way.

4c) Discussion

A moment's thought shows that all of us need to be trained. This is true of all 'higher' animals, not just humans. A few of the skills we need are instinctive, like suckling at the mother's breast, but mostly they have to be acquired.

Most important are the skills needed for survival – the skills of obtaining food and of remaining safe from predators. For animals and early humans, these are skills of hunting and finding good pasture or the equivalent – all combined with skills of observation and concealment. For animals, and until comparatively recently humans, these skills come through practice and following example.

Nowadays in the so-called developed world few of us use these basic skills directly. For most, hunting skills are restricted to tracking down favourite foods on the shelves of the supermarket, and safety from predators is achieved more through the Highway Code and burglar alarms than through camouflage or agility.

Yet we still need skills to survive. In an increasingly complicated world they are the skills which enable us to buy our food and security, and to maintain relationships in an ever more complex society. It's a bit scary to realise that the training we have to undergo is still about being able to compete to survive.

So in the United Kingdom in the 21st century, more and more the 'unskilled worker' cannot compete economically and will tend to lose out socially. The in-phrase is that we all need 'vocational qualifications'. Being able to read, write and add up, to sew or use a spanner, are on their own not enough.

Today's training programmes, in whatever field they happen, are about adding layers of new skills on top of existing ones.

Doing-It-Together Task A



With a motoring friend, make a list of the skills needed before you can start to learn to drive. Then add to the list the additional skills you have to acquire before you can drive without L-plates.

Extract One below introduces the idea of training for skills in studying.

4d) How Training works out in TLS

TLS isn't like the driving test. We are not aiming to provide a 'vocational qualification', not progressing you through an instruction manual so that you can claim to have obtained some defined set of mechanical competences. TLS is more about exploration, experience and education than training – a distinction which is increasingly ignored, perhaps especially by politicians!

However, along the way you will pick up new skills and/or disciplines, or enhance existing ones. At first sight, it seems obvious that this is more likely to happen with the one-year courses, focused as they tend to be on the means of conveying and living out the Gospel.

But everybody will be developing their study and analytical skills. All the courses help with the skills of reflection and being able to express better what is in your head. The experience of TLS course members is that this development leads to an increased sense of confidence.

Whatever the skills and/or disciplines you are looking to TLS to enhance, they will be developed 'especially by practice'. Practical context is crucial – whether it be the Foundation 'Area of Service' or the project work for one-year courses. Insofar as TLS is training, this is our preferred method.

SECTION FIVE

Learning

5a) Definitions

The Oxford Compact English Dictionary definition of 'learning' is 'Knowledge acquired by study'.

5b) Biblical Examples

Doing-It-Yourself 3



- i) Read Luke's account of Jesus speaking in the synagogue (Luke 4: 14-22) and its aftermath (Luke 4: 31,32).
- ii) Read in Matthew 13: 10-16 how Jesus explained his use of parables.

For each, make notes on how knowledge is being imparted and how learning is happening.

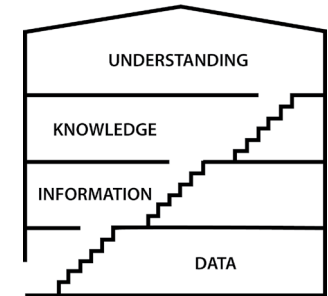
Two things might have come from your thinking about these passages:

- Study does not only mean reading – it's often about listening and asking.
- Authority, whether of the teacher or the text, is an important factor in learning.

5c) Discussion

In looking at the definition of 'learning', as so often happens it depends on knowing what other words mean. Rather than look up 'knowledge' and risk the circular journeys that often occur with over-zealous use of dictionaries, let's set knowledge in a context.

Imagine a four-storey building, with floors named as shown.



Starting from the ground floor, 'data' are facts.

- Fact 1 – I take size 11 shoes.
- Fact 2 – I like lettuce.

These two facts tell you hardly anything about me. You have no picture of me other than that I might be tall and could be a vegetarian.

But obtain more facts (i.e., more data) on me and you're beginning to have **information**. Add the data that I read the 'Daily Telegraph', have a professional qualification and enjoy classical music, and information begins to emerge which contributes to a mental image of me.

Yet imagining what I look like, the kind of area I might live in, what sort of age I am – this doesn't tell you anything about how I tick. For that you need **knowledge**. Information about my career, my background, my politics will begin to enable you to know some aspects of my character. And to really know me in the round, you would need to know how I react in certain situations, why I find it easy to get on with some people and not others, the things that I do or say that are 'out of character'. If some of this knowledge about me comes from others, your view of me is likely to be more balanced.

If your knowledge of me has been gained over a long period in a variety of circumstances, it will grow into an **understanding** of the way I am and why I behave as I do.

So knowledge comes not just from facts but from accumulated reflection and observation – and through learning it hopefully leads to understanding.

5d) How Learning works out in TLS

Again TLS goes along with the Oxford Dictionary definition – 'knowledge acquired by study'.

- We provide some facts, and advice through references on where to find out more.
- We string our facts together, and encourage you to do the same, so that information can be gathered.
- We bring into play the knowledge gained by others so that your knowledge about a topic is enriched.

Much of this learning by acquiring knowledge happens in a group setting. The thinking and life experience of your fellow course members in the Local Study Group or Study Day meetings and the weekend group work, together with input from weekend leaders and the information from study units, combines to offer the chance of synergy happening in your head.

The opportunities for reflective thinking in all TLS courses will lead to a higher degree of self-awareness. Hence the TLS emphasis on self-appraisal (as distinct from imposed assessment) and our belief that it's important for TLS to allow space for your own and the Holy Spirit's discernment.

And what of understanding? In the TLS context, this is theology. We hope the way TLS goes about helping your learning about the Christian faith and the world in which we are charged to speak and act it out will enable you to do theology. If through TLS you can deepen your relationship with God and God's world, you (and incidentally we) will achieve something, which is very worthwhile.

SECTION SIX

Serving

6a) Definitions

Our Oxford Dictionary offers us several definitions for serving:

- *'To do a service for (a person, community etc.)'*
- *'To be a servant to'*
- *'To meet the needs of'*
- *'To do what is required for'*
- *'To render obedience to'.*

6b) Biblical Example

Look in any concordance of the Bible and you will find a large number of references to serving or service. We focus on just one – the only New Testament account of the Last Supper which does not describe the Passover meal itself.

Doing-It-Yourself 4

Read John 13: 1-18 carefully, thinking about:

- Why Simon Peter reacted the way he did.
- What Judas Iscariot might have been thinking.
- How in subsequent months Thomas, the doubting disciple, might have reflected on Jesus' actions.

Doing-It-Together Task B



With one or two other people, read John's account again and work out which of the 'service' definitions above were involved.

6c) Discussion

For the Christian, as you may have found in the exercise above, serving is a multi-faceted thing. We are charged by the Gospel with meeting the needs of others, be they individuals or in community; we must do so in the role of servants; we do, in obedience, what is required for the fulfilment of God's will.

6d) How Serving works out in TLS

We have already mentioned the importance of practical context in the educational design of the TLS Programme. This notion of context is not just an academic technique – TLS takes it to be a theological statement.

Through our Christian service we are being obedient to God's will and recognising, as did Jesus, that we are God's servants in this world. We are using the potential which God has given each of us to serve the needs of others.

We want TLS to help you to do these things better, more assuredly. It is for you to pray about what your service is and to discern the work God has for you. That is why we do not instruct you on your choice of Area of Service or one-year project work. We offer suggestions and possibilities – but your TLS-related serving is first and foremost for God, not only for the Church or TLS.

SECTION SEVEN

A final word

Sometimes TLS is thought of as a leadership programme for Church and/or community. A look at the Oxford definitions below for 'to lead', and comparison with what we have discussed in this unit, shows that this idea of leadership in conventional terms is not the primary aim for TLS.

- *'to cause to go with one, especially by guiding or showing the way or by going in front'*
- *'to direct the actions of opinions of'*
- *'to pass or go through (a life etc. of a specified kind)'*
- *'to be in charge of'*
- *'to be pre-eminent in some field'*

Your TLS experience will offer some skills helpful in leadership, and if your discernment during or after your course places or confirms you in a leadership role, that's fine. We would just want to remind you of what we have said about the nature of serving.

EXTRACT ONE

In the early part (pp22,23) of her very useful book 'The Study Skills Handbook' (Macmillan, London 1999 ISBN 0-333-75189-2), Stella Cottrell introduces the notion of skills in the context of preparing to study in further education....

“1 Self-awareness and self-evaluation

To develop a skill you need first to know where you are starting from. What are your current strengths and weaknesses? What do you want to achieve? Where do you need to improve? How are you going to improve? What are your resources? What could obstruct your goals?

Ways of developing this awareness include self-evaluation questionnaires; reflective journals, group discussion, and using tutor feedback on your work.

2 Awareness of what is required

To score a goal you need to know where the goalposts are. In an academic context, you need to know what is expected of you and what your lecturers are looking for.

Essential information on this is usually provided in the Course administrative files. For each subject, find out about:

- The curriculum – the course content.
- The outcomes or objectives – what you must know or be able to do by end of the course.
- How marks are allocated – what gets good marks? what loses marks?
- The special preferences of each lecturer – if in doubt, ask!

3 Methods, organisation, strategies

It is easier to study and saves you time if you have a method for working and are well organised. A skilled student uses strategies – and with practice these strategies become nearly automatic.

4 Confidence and permission

To succeed well and without undue stress, you need to feel that you are entitled to learn and achieve. Many students, however, feel that academic success is for other people. This may be because of their experiences at school, or because nobody from their family has a degree. Often, it is because they hold particular ideas about intelligence – and especially their own intelligence.

If you are to succeed as a student, it is very important that you believe that success is possible.

5 Familiarity: practice and habit

All skills improve through practice, feedback and monitoring. The more you study, the more you are:

- adept at finding shortcuts
- aware of sub-skills you need to improve
- able to see patterns in what you do
- able to focus on study for longer
- able to perform sub-skills automatically.

The way to study well and easily becomes a habit. It is important to develop regular study habits in the first year, especially if you have been away from study or are not used to managing so much unscheduled time.



Identifying your current skills

Think about something you do well, a difficulty you overcame, or a personal achievement, no matter how small. It might be success in your A-levels, skill in a particular sport, making a good cake, or being accepted at college.

What did you do to create the conditions that led to success? Which skills, attitudes and qualities did you exhibit? Did you practice? Did you urge yourself on in a particular way? Did you find people to help? Or did you just believe you could do it? Look at the example below for some ideas.

Example: The beautiful garden

Supposing one year your garden or a window box was absolutely beautiful. How did that happen?

Many small things may have brought about a perfect outcome. For example, maybe you watered the plants very carefully, depending on the weather. If so, you used powers of *observation* and *deduction*. You may have weeded and pruned in the rain, when you wanted to stay indoors. Here you *kept in mind your long-term goal* for the garden, showing *dedication* and *perseverance*.

You may have selected some new plants from a wide range of options, to match your garden conditions. You *followed specific instructions* on how to grow them. You probably did *research* by reading gardeners' books and seed packets, talking to other gardeners or watching television programmes. You may have purchased special fertiliser and pots, or prepared the ground in a certain way or pruned at particular times: such care requires *attention to detail*, *time management* and *task management*.

All these skills are relevant to study. Whether your experience is in cooking, riding a bicycle, sport or bringing up children, you are likely to have developed a range of strengths such as those described in the example above. The important thing is to recognise which qualities and abilities you already have so that you can draw on them when you need them.”.

