

## **Jane's story of being in a 7 Sacred Spaces *meet-up***

When I had the chance to join the 7 Sacred Spaces [7SS] meet-up, I jumped at it! I was already quite familiar with George Lings' explorations. I'd had chances to chew the fat with him in person as he was writing, and I'd bought a lovely shiny copy of the book as soon as it was out. The idea of relating my life with God and the church to different physical spaces was one which appealed. I like to think in pictures, and I could picture myself in the different spaces. I was intrigued that meals together in the refectory could be equally important as prayer in my room - not to mention the other 5 spaces. I had an inkling that if I were to have a proper poke round in each space, there would be something important and life-giving for a jaded older Christian!

At this point I need to make a confession: I'm really rubbish at reading non-fiction books. I find it hard to stick at it, and then what I've read doesn't fix in my memory. Give me a rattling good novel any day and you'll lose me for hours. Give me non-fiction and pretty soon I'll be wandering the house, tidying cupboards and polishing the sink. Don't get me wrong, I'm very much in favour of non-fiction. I just have to work really hard at it.

So, along came the invitation to the 7SS meet-up. Just my cup of tea: people, conversation, support and encouragement. A bit-by-bit approach. With a manageable chunk to read, a deadline and a group of friends to look forward to; my house wandering days were over and motivation was riding high.

### **So what's a meet –up?**

Five of us met, over a period of months. First, we got to grips with the way we would work together, so we all knew what to expect: before each meet-up, to read about one space, to choose the questions which most helped us to ponder, and to come ready to share. No pressure to share in a particular way, just be yourself. We each took a turn. In our turn, we shared without interruption, and then the others gently fed back what they'd noticed. Each then had the chance to pick out what had been important in what others said (if we wanted to), before the next person's turn.

For me, the process was what helped me dig deep into the book - and more importantly, into myself! The process felt safe – I knew I was going to be listened to and that I was in control of what I shared, no pressure. I knew how long my turn would last. I knew no one would tell me what I ought to do, but would help me think deeper by saying what they noticed. I knew they also trusted me to listen well to them. Because we built trust, we were open and sometimes – often - helpfully vulnerable.

### **So what did I get out of it?**

On one level, it was a way of exploring a book which really worked for someone rubbish at reading non-fiction. I got into it, it came alive and it stuck in my brain. The process of a chapter at a time, pondering the questions, talking aloud, being listened to and listening to others really worked for me. My cupboards stayed untidy, and my sink was under-polished.

On another level, it was one heck of a journey with others. Relationships went deep. We discovered the power of listening and being listened to. We had a safe place to be honest, to be held and encouraged. We've finished the monthly walk through the book, but friendships are still running. We plan to meet up soon, to look back and see how we're all doing with the spaces, a few months on.



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On a third level, it gave some of that hoped-for new life to a jaded old Christian. Pondering and listening to what the group said has been helping me shape up. Why was each space important? Where was I happy to lurk, where did I never linger – and why? A surprising and big encouragement was when people commented that God and I seem to have a really friendly relationship. That helped me relax, and turn a deaf ear to those ‘not good enough’ whispers that creep in. A challenge was realising I need to stop my work from taking more than its right share of space, squeezing other spaces out. Both these things are continuing to help me shape a healthy life with God. These and more: there’s lots, lots more – very precious, but far too personal to share in a blog!



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