

Taking time to think about our
ending of life on earth and
Journeying Home

INTRODUCTION

Journeying Home

Many years ago when visiting a beautiful couple called Molly and Filmore, I heard the phrase 'journeying home'. This couple had a real-life love story of their very own, but acknowledged as years were going by that they would not live for ever on this earth. So Molly had started to give away some of their belongings in preparation for 'journeying home'. This phrase has stayed with me ever since, and is a reminder that when we have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ we have the assurance of eternal life in Heaven and will one day journey home to be with him. Molly's preparation is a reminder to us all that we need to prepare for our end of life on this earth, and doing this in a positive manner gives our loved ones left behind the gift of knowing they are doing exactly what we would wish.

Let's journey home together. After all, if you think this earth is a beautiful place, wait until you see Heaven!

Ali Thornton-Dean

OLDER PEOPLE'S MINISTRIES TEAM

GETTING STARTED

The format of this session can be used in its entirety, or you may wish to pick and choose from the different activities provided in this resource. Please ensure that you allow those in the session adequate time to consider their personal views on end of life and the opportunity to plan for their own funeral. This may be something that is followed up after the session on a one-to-one basis with the corps officer / church leader. On a practical level, once people have planned their own funerals you may decide to keep these plans in a safe place where you can find them when needed, or where another person can find them in your absence. We would suggest a safe or a locked cabinet may be a good idea.

The aim of this session is to combat the stigma and fear which surrounds speaking about end of life issues. In The Salvation Army we use the beautiful phrase 'promoted to Glory' when someone dies. If we truly believe that our end of life on this earth is a promotion into the presence of God, then we must not shy away from this but be prepared to consider it in the knowledge that death is inevitable for each one of us.

May we also ask you to consider that whilst, on the whole, the term 'promoted to Glory' brings about a triumphant feel as we 'journey home', we must also allow time for people to journey through their own grief when death comes to family and friends. Grief is a natural part of living, and we must be careful in allowing time, understanding, love and patience, not only with those who are in our care but also ourselves.

Resources and Help

In advance of the session, the corps officers / church leaders need to resource details of local funeral directors and solicitors with names and telephone numbers to give people on the day, should they ask for them to help planning a funeral and making a will.

Should you require further help and assistance with regard to end of life, whether that is pastoral care, general ministry context or practical issues, please contact the Older People's Ministries Team by emailing olderpeoplesministries@salvationarmy.org.uk.

May God bless you as you lead your people from this life into the promise of eternal life with Christ. Whilst we acknowledge this can be sometimes a difficult journey to start, planning not only helps each one of us face the reality of death but also helps those whom we love who will be left behind. Whilst it is a difficult subject, we are assured an adventure awaits us!

He will swallow up death forever.
The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces.
ISAIAH 25:8

W E L C O M E

Journeying Home

Today we are going to look at the end of life on earth and what we will from now on call 'journeying home'. The phrase 'journeying home' is a reminder that this short time we spend on earth is not the 'be all and end all' of life. As Christians we cannot separate death and Heaven. The death of our physical body means that our souls are united with God in Heaven. Therefore we will spend some time considering Heaven and all that means to those who follow Jesus Christ. There will also be a time of fun, time to consider the practicalities of planning for our end of life on this earth, time to look at what Scripture says and also time to think. We sometimes are so busy we forget to take time to think, so there will be time to do just that.

There will be some activities that we can share at the end which will allow us time to reflect. However, if you would prefer to take these activities home with you at the end of the session, then please feel free to do that. What we plan ourselves saves time and energy for those we love when we die. This might be one of the biggest gifts you can give to your family: the knowledge that you decided what you wanted for your end of life, so that they didn't have to. We recognise that this is not always an easy subject and our hearts can hurt for those who have journeyed home before us. If you feel you need to take some time out at any part of the session please feel free to do so. Likewise, should you wish to discuss this further with your corps officer / church leader and they would be happy to talk through this subject more, please contact them.

John Dunlop, a Christian doctor and writer, says that 'dying well is nothing more than living well right up till the end'. So just one last thing – talking about the end of life does not mean that it will happen tomorrow! So don't panic – you've still got time to laugh, to think, to plan and to be thankful for all life brings in the here and now. So let's get started and have some fun!

TIME OF WORSHIP

Songs

If it would work in your setting, acknowledging everywhere is different, you might want to encourage people to sing a song about Heaven or listen to a recording.

Here are some suggestions:

- ‘Heaven is a wonderful place’ by Ernie Rettino and Debby Kerner Rettino
- ‘When the roll is called up yonder’ by James Milton Black (SASB 559)
- ‘I can only imagine’ by MercyMe
- ‘Living Hope’ by Phil Wickham
- ‘I stand amazed in the presence’ by Charles Gabriel

Prayer

Father God,

We thank you for this day and for the joy of spending it with each other.

We thank you for giving us the gift of eternal life and the assurance that you have prepared a place for us in Heaven.

In these moments, allow us laughter, insight, wisdom and peace as we consider journeying home and all that means to us as individuals. We thank you for those who have journeyed before us and the impact they had on our lives. We ask that as we walk our journey on earth, others will see you in everything we do and everything we are.

In the name of Jesus we pray.

Amen.

QUIZ

Heaven!

A fun way to do this is to split the group into teams!

1. Who sang 'Stairway to Heaven' (There are two right answers!)

-  A Neil Sedaka
-  B Elvis Presley
-  C Led Zeppelin
-  D Cher

2. Which Heaven was Paul caught up to in his vision?

-  A Second
-  B Third
-  C Fourth
-  D Seventh

3. Who had a dream and saw a ladder reaching from Heaven down to earth?

-  A Jacob
-  B John
-  C Ezekiel
-  D Jeremiah





4. Who starred in the 2005 film *The Kingdom of Heaven*?

-  A Tom Cruise
-  B Liam Neeson
-  C Jack Black
-  D Bill Nighy

5. Where was Jesus when he rose into Heaven?

-  A Jerusalem
-  B Mount of Olives
-  C Galilee
-  D Nazareth

6. Who said 'Heaven doesn't make this life less important, it makes it more important'.

-  A William Booth, Founder of The Salvation Army
-  B Martin Luther King
-  C Billy Graham
-  D Queen Elizabeth II

7. In the book of Revelation, how many elders are seated round the throne of Heaven?

 A 4

 B 12

 C 24

 D 40

8. When the Lamb has opened the seventh seal in the book of Revelation, how long was there silence in Heaven?

 A Quarter of an hour

 B Half an hour


 C One day

 D Three days

9. What happened on the day that God opened the windows of Heaven?

 A He heard Noah's prayer

 B It rained and Noah and his family entered the ark

 C It rained and the sun and the moon were darkened and did not give their light to the earth

 D Noah sent a dove to Heaven with an olive leaf in its beak

10. Which chart-topping singer sang 'Heaven' in 1984?

 A Brian May

 B Tom Jones

 C Bryan Adams

 D Tom Selleck



Answers on page 12



Now it is time for us to look at some of the practical issues we need to consider. Whilst we have the opportunity let us be brave enough to ask ourselves some questions.

If we don't take the time to consider this thoughtfully and meaningfully whilst we are still able to, then these things will be left to those who are the closest to us, and we are aware that in the raw moments of grief these decisions can be hard to make on behalf of another.

We acknowledge that some of these issues are difficult to talk about, but we need to be assured that talking about end of life does not mean that we will die in the next 24 hours! We will look at planning our funerals in more detail later on. We plan birthday parties, christenings/ dedications, engagements and weddings because we want them to be good and a time of celebration. The same applies to funerals!

By taking time to make a Will and arrange your own funeral, you are giving a gift to your loved ones that will be far more valuable than you could possibly imagine.

Encourage people to think of things that need to be thought about when planning for the end of our lives. Below are some ideas which might help you to get started.

- Who will care for me?
- Where will I die (if I had the choice)?
- Would I want to be resuscitated?
- Care of any dependents - do I need to have some conversations?
- Making a Will
- Power of Attorney
- Organ donor
- Funeral planning
- Outstanding issues - bridges to be built with friends/loved ones

Talk simply around the issues that are brought out in the discussion and write each point on a flip chart.

At the end of the discussion, ask the group if there is anything on the list that they hadn't thought about before.

Death and the hope of Heaven

‘A man who lives fully is prepared to die at any time,’ said Mark Twain, because ‘death can be life’s one and only certainty.’

There are many Scripture passages which speak about death and the hope of Heaven. A particular one is in Luke 23 where we hear the conversation between Jesus and one of the criminals hung next to him on the cross. Death was a certainty for this man who now finds himself crucified next to Jesus. The criminal makes a statement which is really a question: ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into you kingdom’ (v42). The man is about to die and wants some reassurance that he will be safe, despite the life he has lived. Jesus simply replies, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.’

Wow! ‘Today’ – at that moment – the criminal is assured that today, he will be with Jesus in Heaven.

John 14:1-3 also gives assurance, again from the lips of Jesus telling his disciples not to be troubled when they think of death. Jesus tells them that his Father’s house has many rooms and he is going to prepare a place for them. Again, wow! This time there’s an assurance that Jesus has prepared a place just for you and me! That’s amazing love, isn’t it? What amazing grace Jesus shows in these few words to his friends – and we too are friends of Christ.

Death can be viewed as a terrible thing – the end of life as we know it! However, today I hope and pray as we start to consider, or continue to consider, death and what that means to us as individuals, that we will do this with a joyful heart knowing that death is simply the continuance of the Christian’s life with Christ. Our body may no longer be needed, but our soul lives for ever with our amazing God. Surely that is something that we can plan for with joy and celebration.

Of course, when we lose someone we love dearly, our hearts break and life is never the same again. But Jesus wants us to know that it most certainly isn’t the end, and if we choose to believe in a Saviour who died and rose again so that we may have eternal life, we may even choose to say as Peter Pan said ‘To die, that would be an awfully big adventure.’

Fanny Crosby wrote a beautiful hymn which speaks of this assurance:

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine; O what a foretaste of Glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.
This is my story, this is my song, praising my Saviour all the day long.
(SASB 455)

Let’s be assured that God has got Heaven and our eternal lives safely in his hands, and all we have to do is the planning for those who are left behind, to make their lives a little easier while we will be meeting Jesus face to face.

ACTIVITY

Bucket List



Flipchart required

Some people make a 'bucket list'. Has anyone heard of that before?

A bucket list is simply a list of things you would wish to do before you die.

This may not be 'your thing'; it's not for everyone. However, if there was one thing you would like to do before you die, what would that be?

Hopefully this will bring about a lively and happy discussion on things people would like to do. Write down people's answers on a flipchart and then ask this question:

- What's stopping you?

Planning our Funerals



Planning sheet on page 13

Make copies of the Later Life Planning Sheet and give one out to each person in the group. This is a very simple starting point and does not cover every question someone may wish to consider with regard to planning a funeral.

Put on some background music and ask people to start to consider the questions on the sheet. Some may feel more comfortable taking this home to do at a later date. Talk about why you have planned your own funeral and try to keep this section light-hearted.

To break any tension as people are thinking, you may ask the following questions to be shared with the group:

- How would you like to be remembered?
- What's your favourite hymn or piece of music and why?
- Describe the worst funeral you've attended and why.
- Describe the best funeral you've attended and why.

TIME TO THINK

Reflective Time / Crafts / Response

Continue to play some background music and offer people a few minutes to spend in the craft areas. (Copies of colouring sheets and templates are attached at the end of this resource.) The Thanksgiving Tree may be placed somewhere in your hall on display.

Tree of Thanksgiving

 Pages
14 & 15

You will need:

- Tree of Thanksgiving picture
- Cut-out leaves
- Pens

Enlarge and photocopy the Tree of Thanksgiving and leaves to A3 size. Cut out leaves for people to write prayers of thanksgiving on. (Coloured paper works well for the leaves to create a colourful tree.)

Dragonfly Colouring Sheet

 Page 16

You will need:

- Copies of the colouring sheets
- Coloured pencils

If people prefer to take a copy home with them you may want to suggest this.

Tealight Holders

You will need:

- Glass tealight holders / glass jam jars
- Tealight candles
- Glass pens

Ask people to decorate a glass tealight holder to take home. They may wish to draw on this, or write a word such as hope, Heaven or home. Suggest that people take the tealight home with them to light later and give thanks for someone who has already journeyed home.

T I M E T O P R A Y

Quiet Prayer

Earlier we thought of a word that we would like to be remembered by. Think of that word again, and as we take some quiet moments to pray ask God to make this possible in your life with his help.

Prayer Chorus

'Prayer Gently Lifts Me'
(Hal Beckett, SASB 783, Tune book 800).

Closing Prayer

God of Heaven and earth, we come to you with thankful hearts knowing that you have prepared a place for us in Heaven. Help us to live our lives well on this earth in the way you would desire. May our lives not only tell of our story on earth but also your story of love and light. Soothe our hearts by your gracious Spirit, and may we step forward in hope as we set our faces towards Heaven, keeping our eyes fixed upon Jesus.

Amen.

Quiz Answers

1	A & C	Neil Sedaka and Led Zeppelin
2	B	Third (see 2 Corinthians 12:2)
3	A	Jacob (see Genesis 28:10-12)
4	B	Liam Neeson
5	B	Mount of Olives (see Acts 1:9-12)
6	C	Billy Graham
7	C	24 (see Revelation 4:4)
8	B	Half an hour (see Revelation 8:1)
9	C	It rained and Noah and his family entered the ark (see Genesis 7:11-13)
10	C	Bryan Adams

Later Life Planning Sheet

Make a start by asking the following questions:

If I don't plan for my later life, who will? Do I want to leave all the responsibility to a family member or friend when they will be coming to terms with my death?

.....
Who would I like to take my funeral service if possible?

.....
Would I like flowers? If so, what kind?

.....
Would I like any donations to be given to a specific charity, and if so, which?

.....
Do I want to be buried or cremated, and where would I like this to take place?

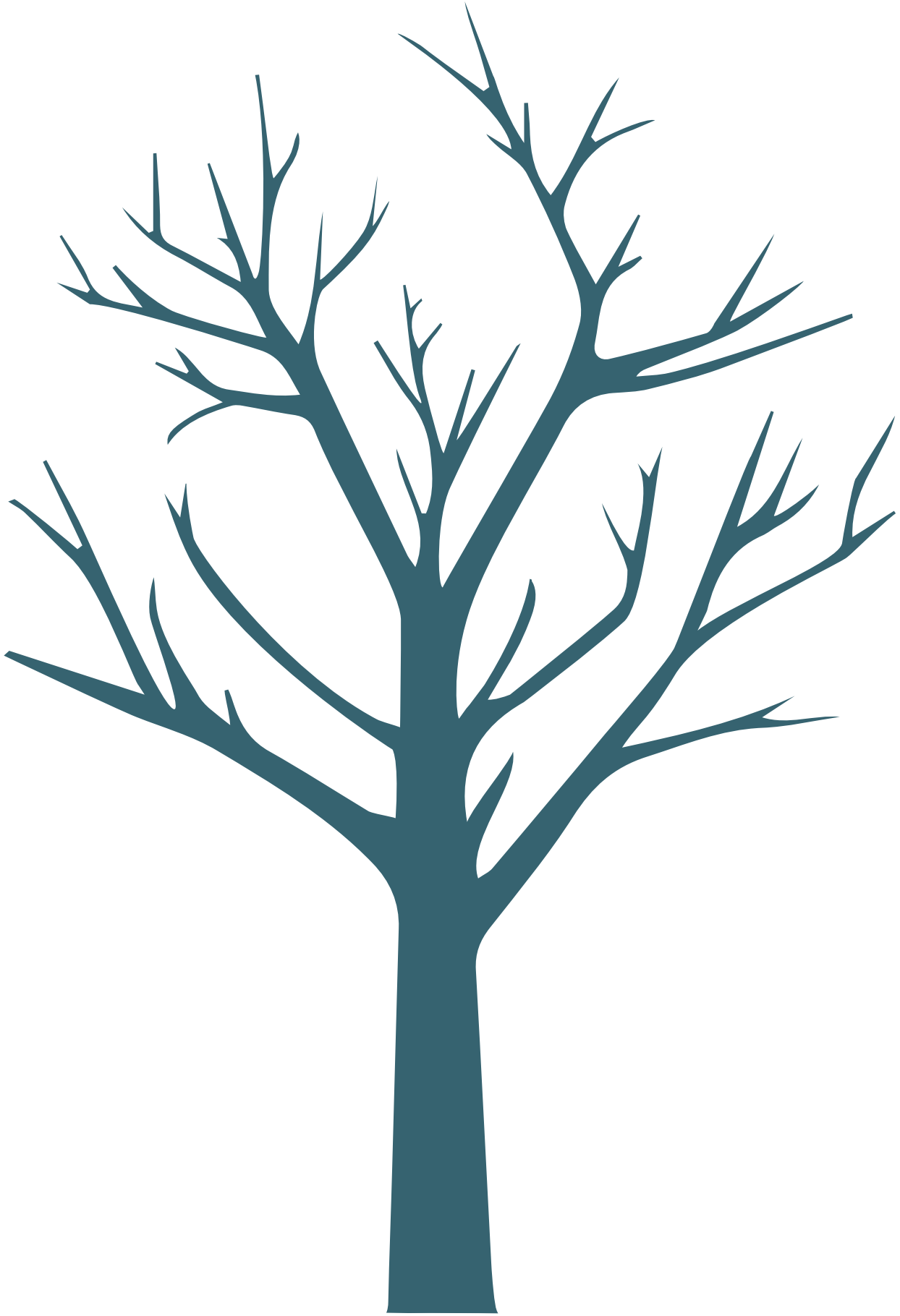
.....
Do I want a service at the crematorium or a service in the church, or both?

.....
Which hymns/songs would I like?

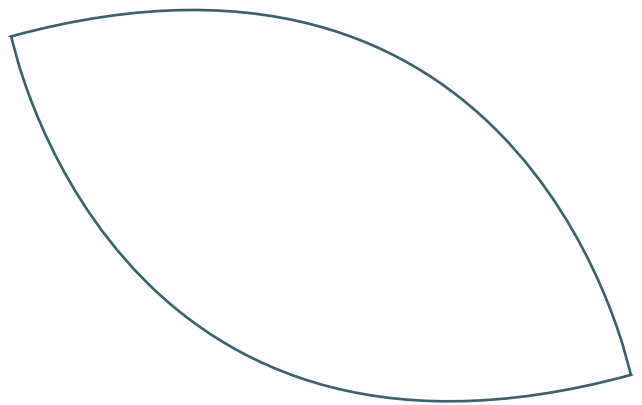
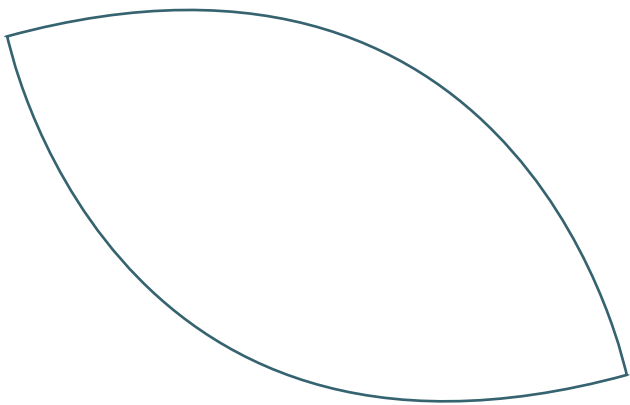
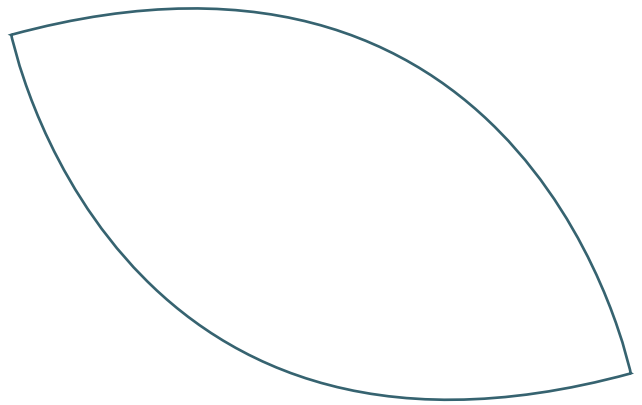
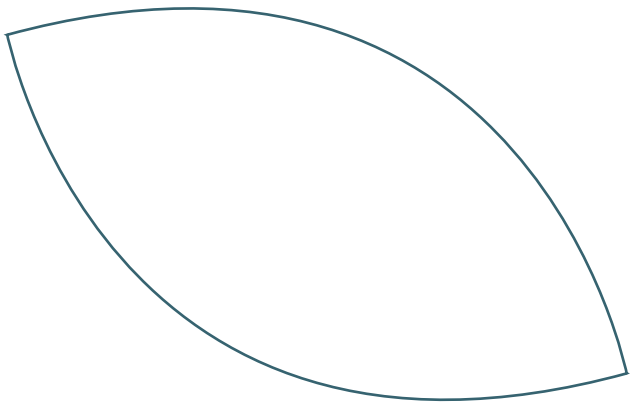
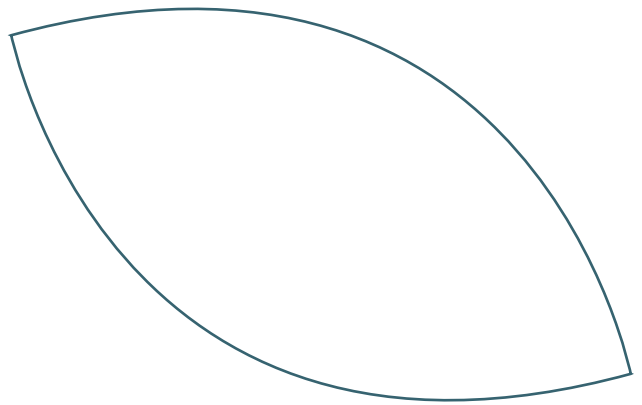
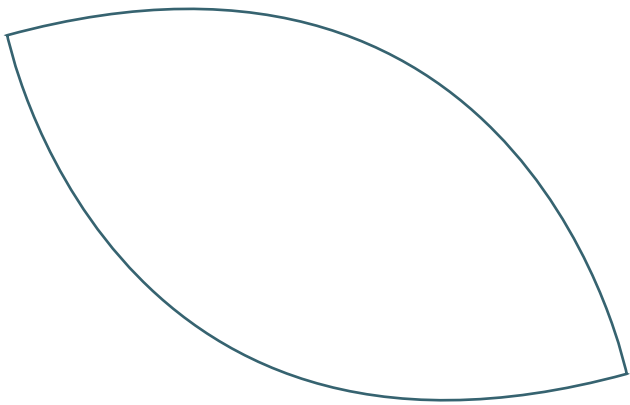
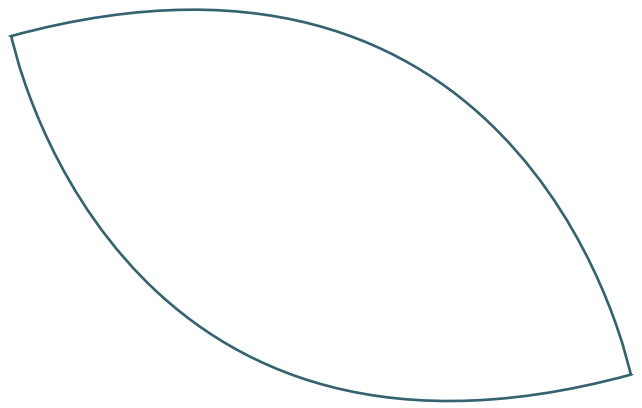
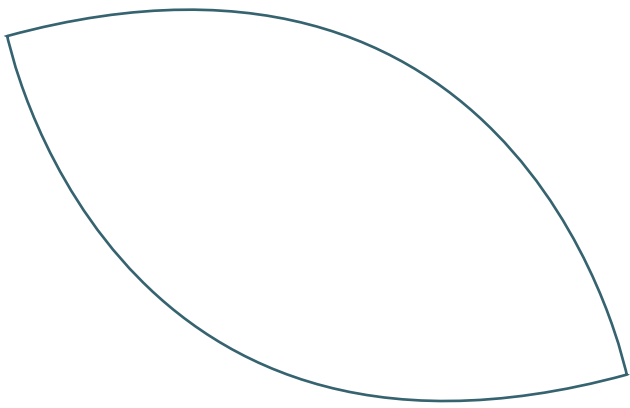
.....
Who am I happy to speak at my funeral about me, either a eulogy or tribute?

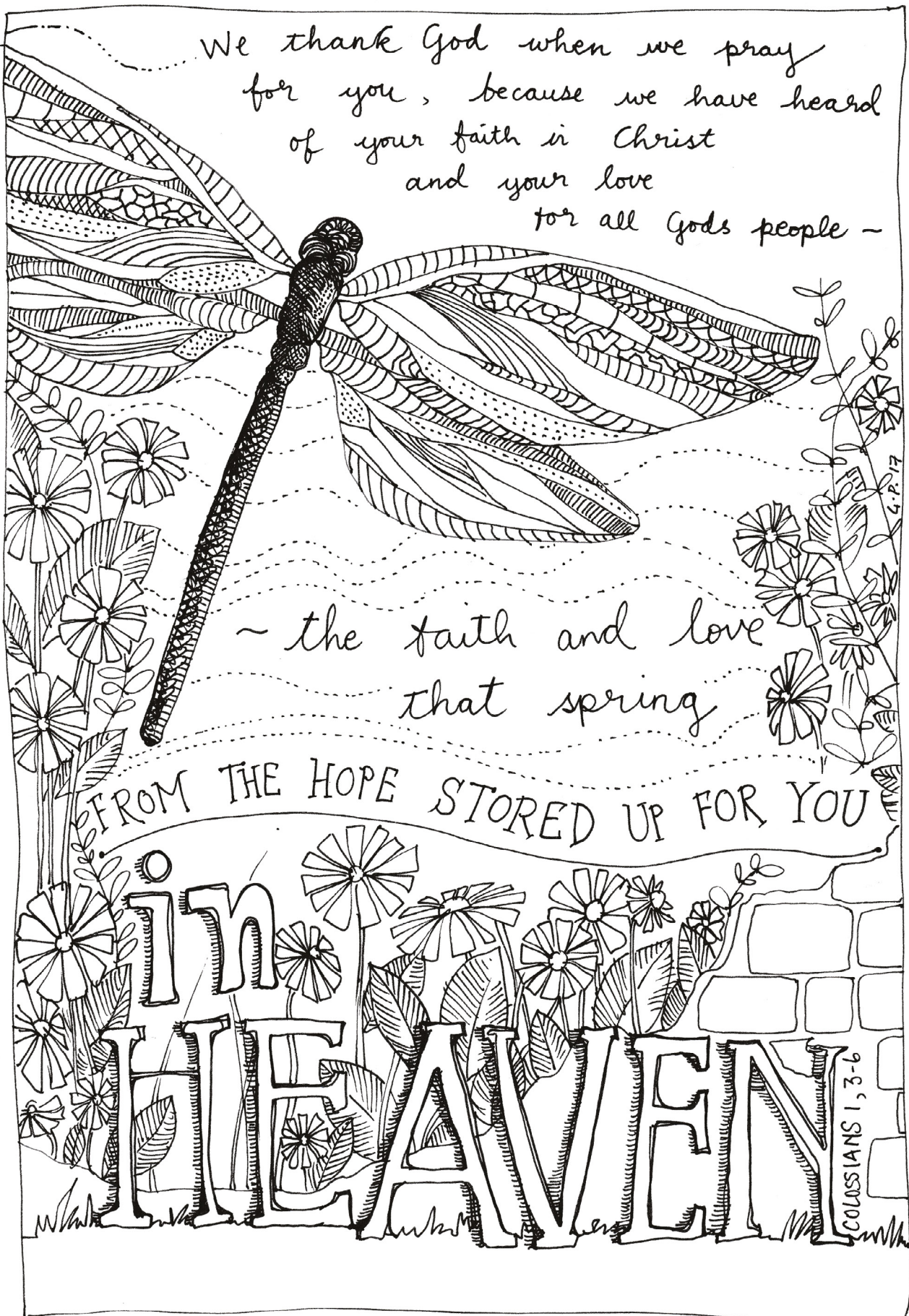
Things I may want to do:

- Contact a funeral director and arrange a payment plan for funeral costs.
- Make a Will and think about asking a trusted friend / family member to act as Power of Attorney.
- Ask my corps officer / church leader to discuss making a funeral service plan which can then be kept at the church and locked away for hopefully many years to come!



Tree of Thanksgiving





Example plan for a Funeral / Thanksgiving Service

Entrance Music

Song *'O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder'*

Scriptures Psalm 23 and Psalm 91

Song *'The splendour of the King'*

Poem or Tribute (Family photos on screen while favourite song plays)

Sermon

Song

Prayer

Exit Music

Personal request to be cremated at a private service before the service.

FOLLOW UP SESSIONS

Heavenly Music

Music stirs and soothes the soul, and in The Salvation Army music generally plays a large part in thanksgiving/funeral services.

Arrange a sharing session when people bring food to share and their favourite piece of music. (This may be one they will be choosing to use at their own funeral.)

Allow the group members time to listen to each piece of music whilst sharing food. It would be great if people could share why they like the piece of music and how it either soothes or stirs their soul.

Finish the session with a time of prayer blessings. You could revisit the Thanksgiving Tree made in the 'Journeying Home' session and add more blessings to this. (More leaves can be printed from the resource.)

Memories of Life

'A picture paints a thousand words'

Invite people to bring along photos of family and friends. Some of these loved ones will still be journeying with us on earth and some will have journeyed home.

Celebrate life and the memories it has held by allowing members to share a moment in time that the picture speaks of and why this was such a beautiful moment for them.

As you share in tea and cake together, place all the pictures either on a wall or on a table for the group to look at without rushing.

Practical Points

Have a fun afternoon talking about what practical notes you would leave to your loved one(s) about things you may know that they don't. For example, how the boiler works, how to make Grandma's apple pie, a list of family birthdays, how to grow the best tomatoes, etc.

Then give the group a blank card on which to write their own practical point, along with a 'love message' to a loved one simply saying how much they love and care for them.

TAKING IT FURTHER

Resources

Books

- *Waterbugs and Dragonfiles: Explaining Death to Young Children* by Doris Stickney
- *Finishing Well* by Ian Knox
- *With the End in Mind* by Kathryn Mannix
- *Dying Well* by John Wyatt
- *Matters of Life and Death* by John Wyatt

Online

www.dyingmatters.org

Dying Matters is a coalition of individual and organisational members across England and Wales, which aims to help people talk more openly about dying, death and bereavement, and to make plans for the end of life.

The Salvation Army Older People's Ministries team has been established to support corps and the communities they serve in understanding, reaching and meeting the needs of older people. This recognises the changing demographic of the UK and that people are now living longer than ever before.



Older
People's
Ministries

Contact the team to talk to us
about other resources and services:

Email: olderpeoplesministries@salvationarmy.org.uk

salvationist.org.uk/older-peoples-ministries