



CELL

PSALMS

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OVERVIEW

This month we start our series exploring the Psalms. This theme will take us through to Christmas so there will be plenty of time to dig deep into the poetry of the Old Testament.

SESSION ONE: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PSALMS

In Session One we will begin our journey into the book of Psalms. We'll consider who they were written by, what was their purpose and how we can use them in worship today. After reflecting on the modern-day psalms (worship songs) that we sing today, there will also be an opportunity for the group to write a psalm together.

SESSION TWO: PSALM GENRES

Are you a fan of pop or rock music? How about hip hop? Is country music your thing? Within the music world there are many different genres and subgenres that present different styles of music. There are cover versions, samples taken from golden oldies and reworkings of familiar classics. In today's session we'll consider the words of praise, grief and celebration contained within the psalms and discover how not all poetry fits neatly into the categories we create.

SESSION THREE: LET'S START AT THE VERY BEGINNING...

In today's session we'll dive into the very first psalm in the collection. Psalm 1 sets the scene for the rest of the book and provides an opportunity for us to explore how we can live a life of righteousness, planted by God's living stream. It also helps us to recognise times when we have walked away from God's path.

SESSION FOUR: REFLECTIONS ON NATURE – BIG GREEN WEEK

This week's session coincides with the Big Green Week. At the time of writing there were limited resources available on the Big Green Week website. Please take the time before the session to visit the website and see what is happening in your local area and how your group could join in. This could link in with the 'Witness' section of the session. Alongside Big Green Week we will be exploring psalms that reflect the wonder of God's creation and consider our role in caring for our planet.

For this session you may also want to ask the group to bring along any old magazines that they have at home, particularly those that contain pictures of landscapes and nature.

Any text in italics represents notes for the leader. It gives more context around the Scripture/activity. You may choose to share verbatim, summarise or not share at all.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PSALMS

In Session One we will begin our journey into the book of Psalms. We'll consider who they were written by, what was their purpose and how we can use them in worship today. After reflecting on the modern-day psalms (worship songs) that we sing today, there will also be an opportunity for the group to write a psalm together.

WELCOME

In the run-up to Christmas we will be exploring the Psalms found in the Old Testament. Just like the songs and poetry we listen to today, they express many different emotions. Jews and Christians across the centuries have turned to these songs when they couldn't find the words to say how they felt. We still do this today!

What song do you listen to when you are feeling...

- * sad?
- * happy?
- * had your heart broken?
- * need a bit of motivation?
- * want to just chill out?
- * in need of a spiritual boost?

Have you ever created a playlist for a specific situation or circumstance, eg preparing for exams, for the run-up to a stressful situation, to help you sleep?


What is it about these songs that resonates with you? Is it the music or the lyrics?

What's your favourite song lyric? Why is it so special to you?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

In the starter you discussed songs that you turn to when you need a spiritual boost. As a group, create a playlist of your spiritually uplifting songs that you can share together.

WORD

 What is your favourite psalm?

Many people are able to share a favourite psalm, even those who do not profess to believe, since this extensive book of Old Testament poetry communicates the whole range of human emotion. For centuries Jews and Christians alike have used the book of Psalms as an integral part of their prayer life and worship. Over the coming months we will explore psalms of heartbreak and desolation, along with psalms filled with joy and praise.

Give each member of the group a Psalms Fact Sheet.

Review the key information about the Psalms and discuss the facts as you go through the sheet. There are additional questions and verses to explore on the sheet, but the main aim is to gain an overall understanding of the Psalms.

What have you discovered about the Psalms that you didn't know before?

PSALMS FACT SHEET

Many people are able to share a favourite psalm, even those who do not profess to believe, as this extensive book of Old Testament poetry communicates the whole range of human emotion. For centuries Jews and Christians alike have used the Psalms as an integral part of their prayer life and worship. Over the coming months we will explore psalms of heartbreak and desolation along with psalms filled with joy and praise.

TITLE

The Hebrew title – Tehillim (praises)

The Greek title – Psalmoi (songs usually sung to instrumental accompaniment)

The English title – Psalms (or the Psalter)

All these titles suggest that this book is full of songs, both accompanied and unaccompanied, that came to play an important part in the life and worship of the early Church. The book of Psalms is basically a songbook!

AUTHORS

Although David is the most well-known author of the Psalms, he is not the only one!

The book of Psalms was written over a time period of 1,200 years.

The oldest psalm was possibly written by Moses (Psalm 90), but other authors include David, Solomon, Asaph, Ethan, Hemon and quite a few whose identity we will never know.

INSPIRATION

Although the psalmists used their own words, the way they expressed their praises and prayers (and complaints) to God was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Through their words they passed on God's wisdom, reflected on the challenges of life and shared the thoughts and feelings of their community with God. The book of Psalms that we read today was collated and gathered together over a period of many years.

STRUCTURE

The Psalms are divided into five smaller books.

Look up the verses listed underneath each title. What theme do they have in common?

Book 1: Psalms 1 to 41
Psalm 41:13

Book 2: Psalms 42 to 72
Psalm 72:18-20

Book 3: Psalms 73 to 89
Psalm 89:52

Book 4: Psalms 90 to 106
Psalm 106:48

Book 5: Psalms 107 to 150
Psalm 150

As you look at the verses in bold, what do you think the overall theme of the book of Psalms is?

At the end of each book there is a Doxology. A Doxology is a statement and declaration of praise to God and they can be found throughout the Old and New Testaments.

What is your response to Matt Redman's thoughts about the Psalms?

“I love the intensity of the Psalms. No one ever sounds bored about God or about life in the Psalms.”

— MATT REDMAN

What do you hope to discover as we spend the next few months exploring the book of Psalms?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

This clip is quite long but provides an overview of the purpose of the Psalms. Although it is listed as an additional activity, it complements the more factual information presented in the previous activity.

 **The Bible Explained: Psalms (11:22)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6NSw20AkJQ>

After watching the clip, discuss together what you have discovered about the Psalms.

WORSHIP

Earlier in the session we discovered that the overarching theme of the book of Psalms is praise and thanksgiving. Many of the songs in this book give us an opportunity to worship God. Psalm 118 is a song of thanksgiving to God.

Read through the psalm together. The group could read a couple of verses each. As they read, ask the group to identify the different emotions communicated in the psalm.

Psalm 118

¹ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures for ever.

² Let Israel say:
'His love endures for ever.'

³ Let the house of Aaron say:
'His love endures for ever.'

⁴ Let those who fear the Lord say:
'His love endures for ever.'

⁵ When hard pressed, I cried to the Lord;
he brought me into a spacious place.

⁶ The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?

⁷ The Lord is with me; he is my helper.
I look in triumph on my enemies.

⁸ It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to trust in humans.

⁹ It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to trust in princes.

¹⁰ All the nations surrounded me,
but in the name of the Lord I cut them down.

¹¹ They surrounded me on every side,
but in the name of the Lord I cut them down.

¹² They swarmed around me like bees,
but they were consumed as quickly as
burning thorns;

in the name of the Lord I cut them down.

¹³ I was pushed back and about to fall,
but the Lord helped me.

¹⁴ The Lord is my strength and my defence;
he has become my salvation.

¹⁵ Shouts of joy and victory
resound in the tents of the righteous:

'The Lord's right hand has done mighty things!'

¹⁶ The Lord's right hand is lifted high;
the Lord's right hand has done mighty
things!'

¹⁷ I will not die but live,
and will proclaim what the Lord has done.

¹⁸ The Lord has chastened me severely,
but he has not given me over to death.

¹⁹ Open for me the gates of the righteous;
I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.

²⁰ This is the gate of the Lord
through which the righteous may enter.

²¹ I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.

²² The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;

²³ the Lord has done this,
and it is marvellous in our eyes.

²⁴ The Lord has done it this very day;
let us rejoice today and be glad.

²⁵ Lord, save us!
Lord, grant us success!

²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the
Lord.

From the house of the Lord we bless you.

²⁷ The Lord is God,
and he has made his light shine on us.






With boughs in hand, join in the festal
procession

up to the horns of the altar.

²⁸ You are my God, and I will praise you;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.

²⁹ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his
love endures for ever.

DISCUSS

-  What range of emotions are found in this psalm of thanksgiving?
-  Does it bring to mind any worship songs that we sing today?
-  Are there any songs that we sing today that convey a similar range of emotions?
-  What kind of relationship do you think the author of this psalm has with God?
-  What can we learn from the psalmist? How can we use what we have discovered in our own prayer and worship?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Revisit verses 1-2; 16-17; 22-23.

What is the main message they are trying to convey?

Listen to Francesca LaRosa's interpretation of these verses as you reflect on their message.

-  **Psalm 118 - This Is The Day - Francesca LaRosa (Official Lyric Video) 3:22**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XdjHEHYcF2M>

WITNESS

The Psalms follow patterns, rhythms and a form of poetry that was familiar to worshippers of the time.

Does that sound similar to the worship songs that we sing today? If so how?

Watch this tongue-in-cheek clip about how to write a worship song and discuss your thoughts about the points it makes.

-  **Messy Mondays: How to Write a Worship Song (In 5 Minutes or Less)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhYuA0Cz8ls>

This isn't a criticism of modern worship songs, just a tongue-in-cheek look at how many of them may be constructed.

What is the key difference that you notice between the popular worship songs we sing today and the content of Psalm 118?

Using Psalm 100 as a basis, we're going to write our own psalm of praise and thanksgiving.

Read Psalm 100 together.

A psalm. For giving grateful praise.

¹ **Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.**

² **Worship the Lord with gladness;
 come before him with joyful songs.**

³ **Know that the Lord is God.
 It is he who made us, and we are his;
 we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.**

⁴ **Enter his gates with thanksgiving
 and his courts with praise;
 give thanks to him and praise his name.**

⁵ **For the Lord is good and his love endures for ever;
 his faithfulness continues through all generations.**

Using an enlarged version of the Psalm 100 handout or a flip chart, share ideas together of how you can fill in the blanks reflecting the heart of worship of a modern-day believer. Encourage the group to share genuine emotions, like the psalmists, and avoid formulaic words and phrases. Their version doesn't need to follow the rhythm of the psalm exactly, it will simply provide a framework.

An example is provided below:

Shout your praises, and let everyone know who you follow.

Worship the God who created every part of his world;

come before him with a heart that recognises his greatness.

Know that the Lord is who he says he is;

It is he who knows our heart, and we are forever connected to him;

we are part of his creation, part of the 'it is good' description he gave the world,

Enter his church with a heart focused purely on him and his goodness;

give thanks to him and remember you are part of something special.

For the Lord is faithful and his love will see us through every situation we face;

his care for us continues from cradle to grave.

Once you have completed your group psalm, read through it together.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

If you have enough time, record a version of the psalm you have created as a group. If not, then one of the group members may want to take it away and turn it into a song or record it to share on your corps social media site.

PSALM 100 (OUR OWN CREATION)

A PSALM. FOR GIVING GRATEFUL PRAISE.

1 Shout _____.

2 Worship the Lord _____;

come before him _____.

3 Know that the Lord is _____.

It is he who _____, and we are _____;

we are _____, the _____.

4 Enter his church _____

and his _____;

give thanks to him and _____.

5 For the Lord is _____ and his love _____;

his _____ continues through _____.

PSALM GENRES

Are you a fan of pop or rock music? How about hip hop? Is country music your thing? Within the music world there are many different genres and subgenres that present different styles of music. There are cover versions, samples taken from golden oldies and reworkings of familiar classics. In today's session we'll consider the words of praise, grief and celebration contained within the psalms and discover how not all poetry fits neatly into the categories we create.

WELCOME

Music comes in many different forms known as genres. As you watch the clip, jot down all the musical genres that are mentioned.


 **Trolls World Tour Trailer Official Trailer (2:59)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yP86-TR6IME>

Discuss the musical genres in the clip and see if you can find a song that fits with each genre.

How did you choose your song for each genre? What characteristics make it fit into that genre?

Examples are listed below, and if you have time you can click the link and listen to each genre:

 **Pop – 'Hold my hand' – Jess Glynne**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLyUcAUMmMY>

 **Funk – 'Superstition' – Stevie Wonder**


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97hwNY3ni10>

 **Classical - Elgar's Cello Concerto**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWUDu1FpSIU>

 **Techno – 'Switch Play' – D72**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdtFDGQqDmc>

 **Country – '9 to 5' – Dolly Parton**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbxUSsFXyo4>

 **Rock – 'We will rock you' – Queen**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tJYN-eG1zk>

 **Hip Hop – 'Big for your boots' – Stormzy**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FOYlqttMhw>

Finding a 'clean' hip hop song proved to be a bit of a challenge. The link is a live version of the song at Radio 1 road show. If you chose a different song, please check for profanity.

Where would you place this song in our genre list?

 **Play 'Running up that hill' – Kate Bush**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wp43OdtAAkM>

This song has experienced a huge revival during 2022, but when it first came out it was like nothing people had heard before. It didn't fit neatly into any particular musical genre.

What other songs can you think of that have either broken boundaries or don't fit neatly into a specific genre?

Today, as we continue our journey through the music and poetry of the psalms, we'll discover the different 'genres' within the writing and how not all psalms fit neatly into the categories we have created.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

This additional activity links with the additional activity in the WORD section.

Often artists remake songs that have been released in the past. They take the original lyrics and music but create a new version.

Listen to a selection of original songs and their covers. How does the artist change the original version of the song? Which do you prefer? Why?

Examples are listed below with links for each version but the group will be able to think of their own:

'Everybody wants to rule the world'	Tears for Fears	Lorde
'I will always love you'	Dolly Parton	Whitney Houston
'Hit me baby one more time'	Britney Spears	Ed Sheeran

What current song do you think will become a popular cover version in the future?

Is there a song that you feel should be left alone and never covered? What is it and why should it be protected?

WORD

If you put the words 'types of psalms' into a search engine, then you would get many different results. There could be four, five or as many as nine different categories of psalms listed, including themes of repentance, royalty and wisdom. The categories provide us with a framework to collate the Psalms into themes but, just like the musical genres we looked at earlier, not all psalms play by the rules. We will hold the categories loosely as we explore the Psalms but they will help us to discover the different emotions and themes found within this book.

There are many ways of categorising the Psalms, but today we will focus on the following five:

- * Hymns of praise
- * Laments
- * Thanksgiving
- * Wisdom
- * Trust

Give out the **Psalms Genres** handout or use a larger version if you would like to complete the activity as a group.

The aim of the activity is for the group to explore the psalms listed at the bottom of the handout, either individually or as a group, and decide which genre they fall into. The psalms and their themes are listed below for reference:

Hymns of praise 🎵	113	135	146
Lament 😞	3	12	17
Thanksgiving 🙏	9	92	138
Wisdom 🧠	1	49	112
Trust 🤝	11	16	121

They can jot down words, phrases or Scripture references to support the decisions they have made. As a group, discuss the choices that have been made and see if there are any disagreements.

- 🗨️ Which psalms maybe fit into more than one genre?
- 🗨️ Which words or phrases have particularly resonated with you today? Explain why.

Just like music, the Psalms convey a wealth of emotion and experience that we can all relate to. Whatever human emotion you are experiencing today, you will always find it hidden within the Psalms.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

This activity follows on from the 'Additional' starter.

In today's starter we looked at different versions of the same song. Each artist provided a fresh outlook on a well-known song.

There are many translations of the Bible and the different versions can bring to light the poetry of the Psalms.


Choose a psalm that we have looked at today – for example Psalm 121.


Look at different translations of the psalm.

How do the translations differ?

Which translation do you prefer? Why?

WITNESS

 What is one thing that you've learned about God through your reading of the Psalms?

 What is one thing you've learned about yourself through the reading of the Psalms?


It may be too early in our exploration of the Psalms for you to answer these questions fully, but keep them in mind as we move through the sessions.

Watch the clip together as the U2 singer Bono discusses his journey through the Psalms with the theologian David Taylor. Encourage the group to explore how the message of the Psalms encourages them to be authentic in their Christian witness to others. Questions are provided to prompt discussion, but the aim of the conversation is to explore the honest expression of faith contained within the Psalms.


 **'Be Brutally Honest' | Bono & David Taylor: Beyond the Psalms 3:09**


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8V0QiX8zJmQ>


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS


 What is your response to Bono's answers to the same questions you considered earlier?


God listens, I don't listen enough.


 Bono was asked, 'What is the one difficult or troubling thing the Psalms have required of you?' What was his reply?

 Why do you think he answered this way, and in what way do you relate to his response?


 Do you think our modern-day worship songs convey the same range of emotions contained within the Psalms? If so, how?

 Bono calls artists to express their honest emotions in their music. Many do, but why is it a challenging thing to do?

 Do you find it difficult to be honest about where you are in your faith journey?


 If you were to write one line in a psalm that could convey honestly your relationship with God right now, what would that be?

 How would you share those feelings with someone else?

 How do you think it may encourage them to start a relationship with Jesus or move forward in their faith if you did?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Share any Christian song or spoken word where you feel the artist is honest about their faith journey.

 What is appealing about their honesty?

WORSHIP

Today we have looked at the different genres of the Psalms, explored different translations and discovered more of the way honest feelings are communicated through their poetry. To bring this session to a close we are going to reflect on the words of Psalm 42. They are words you will have heard before but maybe in a different translation and musical form.

Read 'The Message' paraphrase of Psalm 42 and then play Steffany Gretzinger's version of 'As the deer'. When the music finishes bring the session to a close in prayer.

Psalm 42

¹⁻³ A white-tailed deer drinks
from the creek;
I want to drink God,
deep drafts of God.
I'm thirsty for God-alive.
I wonder, 'Will I ever make it –
arrive and drink in God's presence?'
I'm on a diet of tears –
tears for breakfast, tears for supper.
All day long
people knock at my door,
Pestering,
'Where is this God of yours?'
⁴ These are the things I go over and over,
emptying out the pockets of my life.
I was always at the head of the worshipping
crowd,
right out in front,
Leading them all,
eager to arrive and worship,
Shouting praises, singing thanksgiving –
celebrating, all of us, God's feast!
⁵ Why are you down in the dumps, dear soul?
Why are you crying the blues?
Fix my eyes on God –
soon I'll be praising again.
He puts a smile on my face.

He's my God.
⁶⁻⁸ When my soul is in the dumps, I rehearse
everything I know of you,
From Jordan depths to Hermon heights,
including Mount Mizar.
Chaos calls to chaos,
to the tune of whitewater rapids.
Your breaking surf, your thundering
breakers
crash and crush me.
Then God promises to love me all day,
sing songs all through the night!
My life is God's prayer.
⁹⁻¹⁰ Sometimes I ask God, my rock-solid God,
'Why did you let me down?'
Why am I walking around in tears,
harassed by enemies?'
They're out for the kill, these
tormentors with their obscenities,
Taunting day after day,
'Where is this God of yours?'
¹¹ Why are you down in the dumps, dear soul?
Why are you crying the blues?
Fix my eyes on God –
soon I'll be praising again.
He puts a smile on my face.
He's my God.

 Steffany Gretzinger – 'As the deer' (Official Lyric Video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LthkibTzuj8>

Explore the psalms listed at the bottom of the handout, either individually or as a group, and decide which genre they fall into

HYMNS OF PRAISE



LAMENT



PSALM GENRES

THANKSGIVING



WISDOM



TRUST



1, 3, 9, 11, 12, 16, 17, 49, 92, 112, 113, 121, 135, 138, 146

LET'S START AT THE VERY BEGINNING...

In today's session we'll dive into the very first psalm in the collection. Psalm 1 sets the scene for the rest of the book and provides an opportunity for us to explore how we can live a life of righteousness, planted by God's living stream. It also helps us to recognise times when we have walked away from God's path.

WELCOME

Last week we spent time looking at the different genres of the psalms and how they conveyed different emotions.

Can you remember the different genres we looked at? What are they?

Hymns of praise 🎵

Lament 😞

Thanksgiving 🙏

Wisdom 🧠

Trust 🤝

We discussed last week that there are even more genres available but we focused on these five.

See if you can find modern-day worship songs, or even song book songs, that would fit with each genre. You may need to have a look on a music streaming service.

Why do you think these themes continue to surface in the worship songs we sing today?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

In Session One you were given the option to set up a group playlist of songs to give you a spiritual boost. Are there any from today's starter that could be added to the playlist?

WORD

Our deep dive into the Psalms starts at the most obvious point, the beginning!

Psalm 1 consists of only six short verses and is seen by some scholars as an introduction to the whole book.

As a group read the psalm from a few different translations.

💬 What do you think is the main message of this psalm?

In the last session we looked at the different genres of the psalms including hymns of praise, lament, thanksgiving, wisdom and trust.

💬 Which genre would you place this psalm in? Explain why.

In Psalm 1 we hear wise words about the choices we need to make if we wish to lead a blessed life.

Watch the clip together and then discuss the questions below.

📺 **A TREE PLANTED BY STREAMS OF WATER | Bible Study | Psalm 1 (3:58)**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVv-_SDsC3g

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

💬 What do you think it means to be blessed?

- 🗨️ The clip described being blessed as 'being in a happy and right relationship with God'. Is that how you see being blessed and is that something you want to experience / do experience? Explain your responses.
- 🗨️ In what ways do we misunderstand the meaning of blessing?
- 🗨️ The psalm divides people into two categories – the righteous and the wicked. Do you think this oversimplifies things or goes straight for the truth? Explain your thoughts.
- 🗨️ Where does God's forgiveness and grace fit in with the idea of the righteous and the wicked?
- 🗨️ In his Sermon on the Mount how does Jesus' teaching align with the message of Psalm 1?

Turn to Matthew 5-7.

Skim-read through these chapters and share examples of ways people wander away from God's pathway and how we can be planted beside God's living stream.

The choices we make in life were important to believers in the Old Testament and remain important today. The key to living a blessed life is to remain planted by the stream of God's word, wisdom and love. This living stream is the only source that brings true blessing to our lives.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

“ ‘Concentrate on counting your blessings and you'll have little time to count anything else.’
— WOODROW KROLL

- 🗨️ In what ways are you blessed by God?

WITNESS

There used to be a popular interview question that went something like this:

- 🗨️ Where do you see yourself in five years?

It was always very difficult to answer, particularly if you were fresh out of university and sat in your first job interview. Invariably you would give an answer that you thought the employer wanted to hear, rather than the truth that you really didn't have a clue!

- 🗨️ What answer would you give to this question?
- 🗨️ Do you find it challenging to answer? If so, why?
- 🗨️ How about this question: what kind of person do you want to be in five years?
- 🗨️ Are the current choices you are making leading you down that pathway?

Psalm 1 encourages us to think about the path that we are taking as we live our lives as followers of God.

The first two verses show a progression of how we gradually move away from God's path.

¹ Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,

² but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.

— (PSALM 1:1-2)

“ ‘Notice the verbs used to describe what a righteous person does not do. The suggestion seems to be one of progression: first you try it out by walking it, then you get used to it and stand in it and finally you sit down in it and it becomes a habit.’

— (JOURNALLING THE PSALMS, PAULA GOODER)

- * Share some examples of some behaviours that follow the pattern: walk, stand, sit.
- * Where are you starting to walk in the wrong direction, stand somewhere that isn't for you, or sit in a habit that leads you away from God's path?

As we think about our witness to others, the path we are choosing every day needs to look different from the world around us.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

How we represent Jesus to others is important.

The book *UnChristian* (David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons) is based around a survey carried out with young people in the United States. Those involved in the survey had either left the church or had never attended church. Although it was carried out a while ago, it still gives us a starting point to discuss attitudes to Christians today. Eighty-five per cent of respondents believed that Christians are hypocritical.

 What is your response to that statistic?

The aim of this discussion is not for us to feel bad, but instead to reflect on how the pathways we choose influence those who do not know Jesus yet.

As Kinnaman says:


“The problem is not fundamentally hypocrisy. We're all hypocrites at some level. The problem is the air of moral superiority many others carry around. We stop acknowledging imperfections in our lives. We forget where we came from and all God has done in our lives. I don't see in Jesus' teaching a call to fake moral superiority. I'm a sinner following him. I don't have it all together, and that admission is precisely what tweets the perception of hypocrisy.”


— (UNCHRISTIAN, DAVID KINNAMAN AND GABE LYONS)

 Why is it important to be authentic as Christians when we are sharing what we believe?

WORSHIP

We've spent some time reflecting on the way we can wander down the wrong path, so now let's move in a different direction, toward the source of strength and growth. In verse 3 the metaphor changes from a pathway to a tree planted by streams of living water.

 Where are you planted?

 What advice can you take from the psalm to ensure that you are drawing from God's supply of living water?

Try and encourage the young people to be specific about the steps they can take to spend more time meditating on God's word or in prayer rather than giving generic answers. Encourage them to explore what following the advice of Psalm 1 would practically look like in their lives.

Drawing on the discussions from today's session, create either a group or individual picture of a tree. Incorporate the actions we can take to keep drawing on God's strength within the roots of the picture and fill the leaves with the many blessings the group discussed earlier. This is an opportunity for the group to be creative, and you can adapt this activity, and the art materials you supply, depending on your group.

Once the picture is completed, read *The VOICE* translation of Psalm 1 to bring the session to a close:

**God's blessings follow you and await you at every turn:
when you don't follow the advice of those who delight in wicked schemes,
When you avoid sin's highway,
when judgement and sarcasm beckon you, but you refuse.
For you, the Eternal's Word is your happiness.**

It is your focus – from dusk to dawn.
You are like a tree,
planted by flowing, cool streams of water that never run dry.
Your fruit ripens in its time;
your leaves never fade or curl in the summer sun.
No matter what you do, you prosper.
For those who focus on sin, the story is different.
They are like the fallen husk of wheat, tossed by an open wind, left deserted and alone.
In the end, the wicked will fall in judgement;
the guilty will be separated from the innocent.
Their road suddenly will end in death,
yet the journey of the righteous has been charted by the Eternal.
— PSALM 1 (VOICE)

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Share this song together based around the words of Psalm 1.

I believe, I'm rooted by the river,
Drinking deep from life-giving streams.
In your truth I stand unshaken,
I'm alive I'm alive!
I believe, I'm rooted by the river,
Drinking deep from life-giving streams.
In your truth I stand unshaken,
Your word is my delight

— SONGWRITERS: APC MUSIC

 'Come Alive (Psalm 1)' – APC Music | Untiring Love (4:25)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AeQNK_p9MPs

REFLECTIONS ON NATURE – BIG GREEN WEEK

This week's session coincides with the Big Green Week. At the time of writing there were limited resources available on the Big Green Week website. Please take the time before the session to visit the website and see what is happening in your local area and how your group could join in. This could link in with the 'Witness' section of the session. Alongside Big Green Week we will be exploring psalms that reflect the wonder of God's creation and consider our role in caring for our planet.




For this session you may also want to ask the group to bring along any old magazines that they have at home containing pictures of landscapes and nature.

WELCOME

There is lots to cover in our session today, so our starter is short and sweet. Watch the following video to help you to marvel at God's creation and make you smile.

 **Funny Talking Animals | Walk On The Wild Side – BBC (2:19)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQ1HKCYJM5U>

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

-  If you could have a conversation with any animal, which one would you choose?
-  How do you imagine they would talk?
-  What would they want to talk about?

WORD

Today's activity enables the group to explore psalms about God's creation while expressing their own creativity. How you carry out this activity will depend on the space you have available, but ideally you will need a large table for the group to sit around.

The aim of the activity is to create a collage that shows the splendour of God's creation as represented in the psalms.

Provide the group with an enlarged copy of a selection of nature psalms handout and the PowerPoint images included in this session. The images are the same ones used in the 'Care for Creation' sessions in May. You can also ask the group to bring in any old magazines from home that contain pictures of animals and nature. If you are unable to print out multiple copies of the colour images, then the group can use them as a basis to draw their own representations of nature on the collage. This activity can go in whichever direction the group would like. The entire collage could form the shape of the Earth, or a tree, or they could create the word 'nature' using extracts from the psalms and the images of creation.

As the group creates their collage, you could play the music playlist you have created over the past few weeks.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Take time to look at the collage the group has created. Ask each member to write one line that they would use in a psalm that represents the wonder of God's creation. If you have time, you could form these together and display them with the collage at your church.

WITNESS

As mentioned in the session introduction, at the time of writing the Big Green Week website has limited resources available. There may be suggestions for local activities for your group to join in with. Alternatively, you can review the resources below and discuss practical ways that the group can care for creation.

Revisit the clip we watched in May's 'Care for Creation' session.

▶ Why should Christians care for creation? (2:17)

<https://www.creationjustice.org/blog/52-ways-to-care-for-creation>

The clip answers the question in three ways. Focus on each answer and discuss how it should impact the everyday life of Christians today and some of the issues raised in the clip.

1. We should care for creation because of our love for others.
2. We should care for creation because of our love of God.
3. We should care for creation because we have hope for the future.

It can sometimes be difficult to know what practical steps we can take to make a Christian witness in the area of caring for creation.

It is important that rather than just discussing the issue we take action and show those around us that caring for creation is a key part of our Christian faith.

Spend time reading through the '52 ways to care for creation' suggestions on the Creation Justice Ministries Website. Many of them link to American environmental days, but there are still plenty of suggestions that we can take on board.

<https://www.creationjustice.org/blog/52-ways-to-care-for-creation>

List at least five that you will commit to doing over the coming weeks.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Why do you think some Christians are resistant to the idea that caring for our creation is part of God's plan for us?

Spend time praying for Christians who feel they have no desire to make the necessary changes to care for our planet.

WORSHIP

Caring for creation is an act of worship. It's the way that we show our love for the Creator, by caring for his creation.

Read the lyrics of 'So Will I (100 Billion X)':

Which words and phrases stand out to you and inspire you to take steps to care for God's creation?

**God of creation there at the start
 Before the beginning of time
 With no point of reference you spoke to the dark
 And fleshed out the wonder of light**

**And as you speak a hundred billion galaxies are born
 In the vapour of your breath the planets form
 If the stars were made to worship, so will I
 I can see your heart in everything you've made
 Every burning star a signal fire of grace
 If creation sings your praises, so will I**

God of your promise, you don't speak in vain
No syllable empty or void
For once you have spoken all nature and science
Follow the sound of your voice

And as you speak a hundred billion creatures catch your breath
Evolving in pursuit of what you said
If it all reveals your nature, so will I
I can see your heart in everything you say
Every painted sky a canvas of your grace
If creation still obeys you, so will I

If the stars were made to worship, so will I
If the mountains bow in reverence, so will I
If the oceans roar your greatness, so will I
For if everything exists to lift you high, so will I
If the wind goes where you send it, so will I
If the rocks cry out in silence, so will I
If the sum of all our praises still falls shy
Then we'll sing again a hundred billion times

God of salvation, you chased down my heart
Through all of my failure and pride
On a hill you created the Light of the world
Abandoned in darkness to die

And as you speak a hundred billion failures disappear
Where you lost your life so I could find it here
If you left the grave behind you, so will I
I can see your heart in everything you've done
Every part designed in a work of art called love
If you gladly chose surrender, so will I
I can see your heart eight billion different ways
Every precious one a child you died to save
And if you gave your life to love them, so will I

Like you would again a hundred billion times
But what measure could amount to your desire?
You're the One who never leaves the one behind

— JOEL HOUSTON / MICHAEL FATKIN / BENJAMIN HASTINGS

Share your thoughts together and then listen to the song as you reflect on the lyrics.

 'So Will I (100 Billion X)' Lyric Video – Hillsong Worship (7:04)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyYn21RdBBQ>

or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfVd5x9W1Xc> (live version)

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Spend some time looking at the collage that you created.

What prayers of thanksgiving does it bring to mind?

As you look at the pictures and think about the state of the environment, what prayer requests do you need to bring to God?

Spend some time in prayer as a group.

PSALMS ABOUT NATURE

THE MESSAGE PARAPHRASE

Psalm 8

¹ God, brilliant Lord,
yours is a household name.
² Nursing infants gurgle choruses about you;
toddlers shout the songs
That drown out enemy talk,
and silence atheist babble.
³⁻⁴ I look up at your macro-skies, dark and
enormous,
your handmade sky-jewellery,
Moon and stars mounted in their settings.
Then I look at my micro-self and wonder,
Why do you bother with us?
Why take a second look our way?
⁵⁻⁸ Yet we've so narrowly missed being gods,
bright with Eden's dawn light.
You put us in charge of your handcrafted
world,
repeated to us your Genesis-charge,
Made us stewards of sheep and cattle,
even animals out in the wild,
Birds flying and fish swimming,
whales singing in the ocean deeps.
⁹ God, brilliant Lord,
your name echoes around the world.

Psalm 19:1-6

¹⁻² God's glory is on tour in the skies,
God-craft on exhibit across the horizon.
Madame Day holds classes every morning,
Professor Night lectures each evening.
³⁻⁴ Their words aren't heard,
their voices aren't recorded,
But their silence fills the earth:
unspoken truth is spoken everywhere.
⁴⁻⁵ God makes a huge dome
for the sun – a superdome!
The morning sun's a new husband
leaping from his honeymoon bed,
The daybreaking sun an athlete
racing to the tape.
⁶ That's how God's Word vaults across the
skies
from sunrise to sunset,
Melting ice, scorching deserts,
warming hearts to faith.

Psalm 24:1-2

¹⁻² God claims Earth and everything in it,
God claims World and all who live on it.
He built it on Ocean foundations,
laid it out on River girders.

Psalm 33:6-9

⁶⁻⁷ The skies were made by God's command;
he breathed the word and the stars popped
out.
He scooped Sea into his jug,
put Ocean in his keg.
⁸⁻⁹ Earth-creatures, bow before God;
world-dwellers – down on your knees!
Here's why: he spoke and there it was,
in place the moment he said so.

Psalm 65: 5-13

⁵⁻⁸ Earth-Tamer, Ocean-Pourer,
Mountain-Maker, Hill-Dresser,
Muzzler of sea storm and wave crash,
of mobs in noisy riot –
Far and wide they'll come to a stop,
they'll stare in awe, in wonder.
Dawn and dusk take turns
calling, 'Come and worship.'
⁹⁻¹³ Oh, visit the earth,
ask her to join the dance!
Deck her out in spring showers,
fill the God-River with living water.
Paint the wheat fields golden.
Creation was made for this!
Drench the ploughed fields,
soak the dirt clods
With rainfall as harrow and rake
bring her to blossom and fruit.
Snow-crown the peaks with splendour,
scatter rose petals down your paths,
All through the wild meadows, rose petals.
Set the hills to dancing,
Dress the canyon walls with live sheep,
a drape of flax across the valleys.
Let them shout, and shout, and shout!
Oh, oh, let them sing!

Psalm 71:1-8

Give the gift of wise rule to the king, O God,
 the gift of just rule to the crown prince.
 May he judge your people rightly,
 be honourable to your meek and lowly.
 Let the mountains give exuberant witness;
 shape the hills with the contours of right
 living.
 Please stand up for the poor,
 help the children of the needy,
 come down hard on the cruel tyrants.
 Outlast the sun, outlive the moon –
 age after age after age.
 Be rainfall on cut grass,
 earth-refreshing rain showers.
 Let righteousness burst into blossom
 and peace abound until the moon fades to
 nothing.
 Rule from sea to sea,
 from the River to the Rim.

Psalm 89: 5-13

God! Let the cosmos praise your wonderful
 ways,
 the choir of holy angels sing anthems to
 your faithful ways!
 Search high and low, scan skies and land,
 you'll find nothing and no one quite like
 God.
 The holy angels are in awe before him;
 he looms immense and august over
 everyone around him.
 God-of-the-Angel-Armies, who is like you,
 powerful and faithful from every angle?
 You put the arrogant ocean in its place
 and calm its waves when they turn unruly.
 You gave that old hag Egypt the back of your
 hand,
 you brushed off your enemies with a flick
 of your wrist.
 You own the cosmos – you made everything
 in it,
 everything from atom to archangel.
 You positioned the North and South Poles;
 the mountains Tabor and Hermon sing
 duets to you.
 With your well-muscled arm and your grip
 of steel –
 nobody messes with you!
 The Right and Justice are the roots of your
 rule;
 Love and Truth are its fruits.

Blessed are the people who know the
 passwords of praise,
 who shout on parade in the bright presence
 of God.
 Delighted, they dance all day long; they
 know
 who you are, what you do – they can't keep
 it quiet!
 Your vibrant beauty has gotten inside us –
 you've been so good to us! We're walking
 on air!
 All we are and have we owe to God,
 Holy God of Israel, our King!

Psalm 95:1-7

¹⁻² Come, let's shout praises to God,
 raise the roof for the Rock who saved us!
 Let's march into his presence singing praises,
 lifting the rafters with our hymns!
³⁻⁵ And why? Because God is the best,
 High King over all the gods.
 In one hand he holds deep caves and caverns,
 in the other hand grasps the high
 mountains.
 He made Ocean – he owns it!
 His hands sculpted Earth!
⁶⁻⁷ So come, let us worship: bow before him,
 on your knees before God, who made us!
 Oh yes, he's our God,
 and we're the people he pastures, the flock
 he feeds.