

Resource Manual 2018



God of
Wonders



Salvos
Women

Resource Manual 2018

God of **Wonders**



Salvos
Women

Copyright and permissions.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NCV are taken from the New Century Version®. Copyright © 2005 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked ICB are taken from the International Children’s Bible®. Copyright © 1986, 1988, 1999 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked The Voice are taken from The Voice™. Copyright © 2008 by Ecclesia Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NASB) are taken from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB), Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.Lockman.org

Scripture quotations marked REB are taken from the *Revised English Bible*, copyright © Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press 1969. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked GNT are taken from the *Good News Translation*® (Today’s English Version, Second Edition) Copyright © 1992 American Bible Society. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, *New Living Translation*, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (TLB) are taken from *The Living Bible* copyright © 1971. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

We are grateful to The Salvation Army Caribbean Territory Women’s Ministries Department for permission to reprint the following articles from *Journey of a Lifetime: Signposts on the Way*, 2014: *Wonderful Peace at Christmas* (originally *Peace at Christmas*), by Venene Jonas. *Wonderful Gift of Mothers* (Originally *A Tribute to Mothers*) by Deborah Lorde. *Wonderful Light of God* (Originally *Turn on your Headlights: The Light of God*) By Marie-Chantal Gaspard.

Foreword

I love music!

Those that know me well know that my devotional times oscillate between using scripture and music, and more often than not, both. I will often associate themes from scripture with the words of songs, so it's not surprising that when I first heard the theme for 2018, the songs that came instantly to my mind were those with the word 'wonder' in them.

While there are numerous songs that proclaim the wonder of God, there are two that over the years have 'stuck' in my head ... *The wonder of His grace* by Salvation Army Officer Major Howard Davies, and *More than wonderful* by Lanny Wolfe. Both of these focus on the wonder of God's creation and God's love for me!

Why do these songs resonate so much with me? Apart from the fact that they have beautiful melodies that go deep to my soul, the words express my love and amazement for all that God has done for me. The miracle of creation, the beauty of this world in which I live, the way in which He holds me in the midst of pain, but delights also in my praises; these are just a few of the things that fill me with awe and wonder.

But even more wonderful than all of these things is that this all knowing, everywhere present, all powerful God put in place a plan of salvation so that I could have a relationship with Him! I am totally overwhelmed when I think of His grace and love, and that the God of the Universe is interested in me!

As I look at the themes that are included in this resource manual I am reminded over and over of the magnitude of God's power and presence in every aspect of my life.

Thank you to all who have contributed, especially the Territorial Salvos Women Co-ordinator, Fay Foster, for the enormous amount of work that she has put into producing this widely used resource. It is my prayer that as you use this material, you and those you share these with will also be amazed by the wonder of God's love for you!

A God of Wonders -WONDERFUL!!!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cheralynne". The script is fluid and cursive, with a prominent flourish at the end of the name.

Cheralynne Pethybridge (Lt Colonel)
Territorial Secretary for Women's Ministries
Australia Eastern Territory

Wonderful God

God of wonders MIRIAM GLUYAS.....	2
Surprise! The God of unexpected wonders LOUISE MATHIESON.....	4
Oh, the wonder of His grace BRENDA STAGE.....	9
Jesus knows all about us JENNY HALL.....	13
Holy Spirit wonders: don't miss out! BELINDA SPICER.....	15

Wonderful word

The shepherd's psalm: a message from sheep! MAJOR ELVA BANKS.....	18
Psalms of wonder JOANNE SMITH.....	21
The wonder of His word! JO-ANNE BROWN.....	23
Wonderful promises from a God of wonder CHRISTINE DICKSON.....	27
Wonderful promises of God ROBYN BLACK.....	30

Wonderful plan

A wonderful future, now and forever more BEATRICE KAY.....	34
God's wonderful plan JAN CAIRNS.....	36
The wonder of a transformed life CHRISTINE TAMSETT.....	39
Wonderful light of God MARIE-CHANTAL GASPARD.....	42
The wonder of brokenness JULIA METCHER.....	45
Limitless God PENNY WILLIAMS.....	48

Wonderful creation

Butterflies HAZEL FORD	52
The wonder of creation JAN LAWS	56
God's marvellous creation – Us! SUSANNE COX	59
Fearfully and wonderfully made BINDY LUPIS	61
Wonder woman JOANNE SMITH	63
My place in the universe CHERALYNNE PETHYBRIDGE	65
The eye of God LEISA HUMBLEY	67
Wonderful creation colouring pages MISSION SUPPORT TEAM	73

Wonders of the world

China HAZEL FORD	76
Seven wonders JOANNE SMITH	82
Wonders of the world PAMELA HODGE	84

Wonders of everyday life

Recapturing the wonder JOANNE SMITH	87
I wonder! GLENYS DOMROW	89
Wonder in small things FAY FOSTER	92

Five wonderful senses

Eye Wonder JOANNE SMITH	96
Hearing and listening ROD YULE	97
Taste and see CLAIRE HILL	99
We smell! FAY FOSTER	102
Unless I touch... JO-ANNE BROWN	105

Special occasions

Wonderful gift of mothers DEBORAH LORDE.....	109
Easter: The wonder of His grace JAN CONDON.....	111
Wonderful peace at Christmas VEVENE JONAS.....	115

Resources

Wonderful worship MAVIS SALT.....	119
Wonderful websites SALVOS WOMEN TEAM.....	122
USB: Contents list	125

IHQ Bible Studies

Introduction: Transformed into God's image	128
Transformed into God's image COMM. SILVIA COX.....	129
Transformed in our heart COMM. ROSALIE PEDDLE.....	131
Transformed in our minds COMM. DORITA WAINWRIGHT.....	133
Transformed in our speaking MS IRINI PANTELIDOU.....	135
Transformed in our lifestyle MAJOR AGRIPINA GOCHEZ.....	138
Transformed in our love CAPTAIN SUMMRA NEMAT.....	140
Transformed in our service MAJOR TRACEY KASOSO.....	142
Transformed in our suffering MAJOR HEIDRUN EDWARDS.....	144
Transformed in our acts of social justice CAPTAIN SANDRA PAWAR.....	147
Transformed in our spiritual journey LT-COLONEL EVA DANSO.....	149

Wonderful God



God of wonders

MIRIAM GLUYAS

Three Clips

Throughout this time play three clips of miracles, stories of the great God of wonders coming through. This can be Bible clips from the Old or New Testament, or modern day miracles.

READ: **2 Kings 7:1-16**

Discussion

What stands out to you in this story?

Spend 15 minutes on each of these segments:

1. Don't lose hope ...

This was the time of the great prophets, the days of Elijah and Elisha.

The Israelites were going through tough times. They had had bad king after bad king, with just a few good ones rising up.

In this story, they were in a foreign land, hungry and struggling.

'The officer on whose arm the king was leaning said to the man of God, *"Look, even if the Lord should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?"*

Share in groups of 2-3.

Has there ever been a time in your life when you have lost hope? How did it feel? What was it like? Who did it affect?

2. God often chooses the most unlikely people to bring great hope.

Four lepers were sitting at the gate, wondering what they should do. Because they were lepers, they had to ring bells and call out 'unclean' so that people knew not to come close to them. They were definitely disadvantaged. If they went into the city they were likely to be killed.

If they went into the camp of the Arameans, they were likely to be killed. Great choice!

So they make the choice to go down to the camp of the Arameans, and God does a miracle as they go. He makes it sound like a mighty Army is coming at them. The Arameans flee. The lepers walk into the camp, feast on the food of the Arameans, gather the spoils, and then realize that they should probably invite the other Israelites down too. God does His miracle, and uses the most unlikely people.

When you lacked hope, who did God use as your 'most unlikely person'?

How did that happen? What happened?

What did you enjoy as part of that?

Was there unexpected good waiting for you? What was it?

3. We have a big God ... a God of wonders.

A miracle happens. The Israelites see God come through (once again!)

What have been the times that your 'big' God, your 'God of wonders' has come through?

What was the miracle that He had for you?

Are you praying for a miracle right now?

-
- Remind yourself of the story you love most of God coming through for someone.
 - It's the same God in the Old Testament and the New Testament who is with you today.
 - Ask God for your miracle. What do you want Him to do for you?
 - Pray together and commit to praying for each other's miracle.

Surprise! The God of unexpected wonders

LOUISE MATHIESON

Sometimes the most wonderful things God does are the ones we're not looking for...

Setting up the scene

There are a number of approaches and activities with key elements of surprise. The following list is just an example for establishing the theme. It may also be worth evaluating how much 'shock preparation' your group may require for some of these – you may wish to warn them ahead that they should be prepared for a special surprise, but not give away too many details.

Decor

Theme possibilities

1. A 'surprise party' – e.g. hold the gathering in a different area of the corps facility or outside (weather permitting); or at a local venue or park, if transport is available and group size permits.
2. Have an extra birthday surprise by celebrating this week/month's group member birthdays in a different fashion (this may include party poppers and whistles if you are brave!)
3. Feature a special guest performer or artist.
4. Give out a small surprise gift. These could be presented in Oprah style, 'You get a flower, and you get a flower, and everybody gets a flower!'

Introduction

Surprises are an interesting phenomenon. They can be nice or nasty, rewarding or challenging, delightful or disastrous. Even those that are pleasant can be confronting to some of us who are not at home with being surprised. For some people, fitting something into our day that we didn't expect is relatively easy; for others, it can cause us to feel off balance, unsettled and out of sync.

Opening discussion questions

How do **you** feel about surprises?

How do you usually handle an UNpleasant surprise?

What has been your least welcome surprise?

Your 'best ever' surprise?

Possible Activities

Table Discussion

What is your favourite movie 'plot twist' moment? (e.g. the famous Darth Vader reveal in The Empire Strikes Back; the duo's clever plan revealed at the end of The Sting etc.) Note that these may range from funny to shocking to quite emotional.

Consequences

Picture consequences or Mad Libs type of game

Each person writes or draws, folds over their contribution and passes on. The end result can be quite hilarious.

Sample template on **USB**, also refer to

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consequences_\(game\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consequences_(game))

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mad_Libs - explanation and examples

<http://www.madtakes.com/index.php> (Hilarious auto-generating site where you add the words and it creates your story or poem).

Videos

YouTube has many very funny videos with 'unexpected' situations - pranks, candid camera, funny home videos, etc. (Preview carefully to make sure they are appropriate for your group.)

First time reaction to automatic doors - this child is very surprised!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CiFHzOjVal8>

Anti Boredom Campaign (car prank)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-lgd-85PDg>

God gives me strength

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rn-sTOolhyo>

A longer, powerful, serious clip: Beth Moore's story of what happened when God asked her to do something very unexpected <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U088JkiQeDQ>

Devotional Outlines

Your devotional time might focus on one of these topics, or you may wish to incorporate the key points of all three of these 'surprise!' topics.

Note: Full outlines of each of the three **Devotional Outlines** below are provided on **USB**. Prayer/Reflection ideas and other resources are also on **USB** and can be mixed and matched from the lists provided.

Surprise #1: Who, me?

Key Idea

Throughout Scripture, God has been in the business of surprising His people. In fact, He seems to specialize in dealing with the least likely, the most far-fetched and even the rather ridiculous!

Key Scripture

Acts 9:1-22 (The Voice translation) - The story of Saul and Ananias and what happens when God does something very unexpected.

Key Challenge

Why are we so often surprised when God chooses us?

Surprise #2: Didn't see that coming...

Key Idea

As well as being surprised by God, we are often blindsided by life. But one of the most wonderful things about our God is His faithfulness and trustworthiness, regardless of what we face. We can learn to trust God and act confidently upon our trust in Him.

Key Scriptures

Romans 8:28; Genesis 37; 39-45 (story of Joseph)

Key Challenge

How do I need to trust God when I have been blindsided?

Surprise #3: Ready for anything!

Key Idea

Part of life with God is learning to adapt to the new things He brings into our life. There are Scriptural principles that can help us become ready for the unexpected.

Key Scriptures

‘See, I’m doing a new thing- won’t you pay attention? It’s kicking off right now - haven’t you noticed?’ (**Isaiah 43:19**, my paraphrase); **Ephesians 3:20-21**

Key Challenge

How can I become more alert and responsive to God’s presence?

Reflection Resources

Poem/meditation

While You Were Sleeping (USB).

Songs

- *Great Expectations* (Steven Curtis Chapman) – from album *Speechless*.
- *You Are Love* (Rend Collective Experiment) – from album *Organic Family Hymnal*
- *I’m In His Hands* SASB 848 (arr. Phil Laeger). YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dihH62UX42Y> Recording available on iTunes (on album *Return*)

Faith colouring cards or similar

<https://www.amazon.com/Colorful-Blessings-Cards-Color-Share/dp/B01B76KBR2> - also at Koorong and similar stores.

Note: The sample picture included on **USB** is one I recently coloured while meditating on **Hebrews 11:1** during a prayer retreat. The monochrome lettering represents the times that we can’t see the surprising, colourful things God is creating below the surface of our lives.

Sample Images

See **USB** for a selection of images for song backgrounds, reflection or prayer focus or incorporated into flyers or handouts. All images have been collated from www.freelyphoto.com or www.unsplash.com and can be used without restriction under Creative Commons License.

Continue *Surprise! The God of unexpected wonders* onto the next page >>

Suggested Songs

- *And Can It Be*, SASB 241; (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFC2dCQGD6M> (Phatfish) for different arrangement).
- *God's Love Is Wonderful*, SASB 25 (see **USB** for a different arrangement)
- *I Have Not Much To Give Thee*, SASB 570
- *Great is Thy Faithfulness*, SASB 26
- *I Serve A Risen Saviour, (He Lives)* SA
- *The Wonder Of It All*, SASB 65
- *Desert Song*, (Brooke Ligertwood; Hillsong Music Publishing) (available on Song Select).
- *Blessed Be Your Name*, (Matt & Beth Redman; Thankyou Music) (available on Song Select).
- *God I Look To You*, (Jenn Johnson/Ian McIntosh; Bethel Music Publishing) (available on Song Select).
- *Hallelujah*, (Brenton Brown/Brian Doerksen; Vineyard Songs) (available on Song Select).

Oh, the wonder of His grace

BRENDA STACE

DECOR: Display some resources about grace on a table

- *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (Philip Yancey)
- *Grace* (Max Lucado)
- *Amazing Grace* (DVD)

Welcome and introduction of theme

To introduce the theme, read one of the Apostle Paul's welcomes found either at the beginning or end of any of his epistles.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we are so amazed by Your grace towards us. Our minds are so small when it comes to understanding what Your grace is all about. However, it's abundantly clear that Your grace is the thing that enables us to live every day in Your presence, with Your Holy Spirit to guide us, and Your Son, Jesus – the one who made Your grace towards us possible – to be our Friend. Help us to understand a bit more about your amazing grace, and to say with the songwriter: '*Oh, the wonder of His grace!*' Amen.
Home League Prayer, p.5 in the Home League Song Book.

Continue *Oh, the wonder of His grace* onto the next page >>

Song Choices

- *The Wonder of His Grace* (New SASB 876 –Tune: 873)
- *Amazing Love* (New SASB 185 – Tune: 555)
- *Amazing Grace/My Chains Are Gone* (Chris Tomlin)
- *No More! He Remembers Sin No More!* (New SASB 460 – Tune: 723)
- *Amazing Grace* (New SASB 453 - Tune: 57)

Note: Check out the index in the new SA Song Book under the headings *Grace* and *Justification* for many more song options.

ANNOUNCEMENTS ► ROLL CALL ► WEEKLY FEATURES

Scripture

Choose from the verses on this page. You might like to have several of these typed out for the ladies and ask them to read their verse aloud to the group. Full verses are on **USB**.

John 1:14

Romans 5:15 and 17

Ephesians 1:7

John 1:17

Romans 5:20 and 21

Ephesians 2:8-9

Acts 11:23

Romans 6:14

Ephesians 4:7

Acts 15:11

1 Corinthians 15:10

2 Timothy 1:9-10

Romans 3:24.

2 Corinthians 4:15

Hebrews 4:16

2 Corinthians 12:9

1 Peter 4:10

SONG: Choose from the songs above, or from the new SASB index.

Sharing

Invite several ladies to share how their lives have been affected by God's grace. This could even be pre-arranged as a personal testimony from them.

READ: Choose an illustration from the resources listed on the previous page – see 'Décor'.

Competition

Something simple like these suggestions.

How many words can you make in two minutes from the words:
wonderful grace or amazing grace?

OR

Finish these lines from songs about Grace:

1. *Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that...* (saved a wretch like me)
2. *Oh, the wonder of it all, just to think that God...* (loves me)
3. *How marvellous, how wonderful, is my...* (Saviour's love for me)
4. *Everything was done so you...* (would come)
5. *Grace that blows all fear away...* (Jesus, what a beautiful name)
6. *Mercy there was great, and grace was...* (free)
7. *Giving me grace, giving me power, yes, my Lord...* (is able)
8. *Flow, river, flow, flood the nations with...* (grace and mercy)
9. *'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace...* (will lead me home)
10. *Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour? Are you washed...* (in the blood of the Lamb)

Devotional thought

You may decide to choose a different Scripture from the list on the previous page and write your own devotional thought rather than the one provided (see **USB**). The Devotional Thought provided is taken from the book, *He Loves Me*, by Wayne Jacobsen. Although the book is under copyright, no authority is needed (we want to get this book into the hands of every person possible). Please pass it along electronically or in printouts as long as you do so without charge and without changing its content. (lifestream.org)

Response time

SONG: *So You Would Come*, Darleen Zschech (Hillsong)

Closing prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the grace You have shown us in Jesus Christ. Help us not to add anything to this grace. Rather, help us to fall on Your grace, knowing that Your grace is all we need in order to be in a right relationship with You. Teach us how to show this grace to others so that we will never stand in judgement of them, but will learn to love them as You love them – warts and all. We ask this in the precious and powerful name of Jesus. Amen. *Home League Benediction* (Home League Song Book, page 6).

Scripture Readings

Quotes are from *New International Version (NIV) Holy Bible*, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®

Quotes in Devotional thought

He Loves Me – The Relationship God Has Always Wanted With You, by Wayne Jacobsen, chapter 18 – ‘*So, Sin Isn’t Important To God?*’ Published by ‘LifeStream’ - www.lifestream.org
P.O. Box 50240 • Oxnard, CA 93031

Jesus knows all about us

JENNY HALL

“Wonder. A feeling of amazement and admiration, caused by something beautiful, remarkable, or unfamiliar.”¹

Introduction

We read in the New Testament that Jesus performed many miracles while here on earth.

They brought to him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and he healed them. The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them **Matthew 4:24**.

Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them **Matthew 15:30**.

A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill **Matthew 12:15**.

But the Bible also says, Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written (**John 21:25**). Jesus performed not only miracles but wondrous (‘inspiring a feeling of wonder or delight; marvellous’²) acts.

This brings us to ‘the woman at the well’.

We have heard, I am sure, many sermons about this woman and participated in many Bible studies about her, but I wanted to point out what I believe to be one of the ‘wonders’ that is sometimes overlooked because of all the other lessons we can learn from this passage of scripture.

Have you ever been in awe of the fact that Jesus could tell this woman everything she had ever done? Jesus told her about some of the most intimate parts of her life, parts of her life that she would rather forget, parts that she would prefer no one to ever know.

Yes, it was a wonder that Jesus even spoke to this woman, a Samaritan; yes, it was a wonder that Jesus offered her the gift of living water; yes, it is a wonder that Jesus wanted to have anything to do with her considering her sordid past.

But I think it is just as wonderful that Jesus actually knew what this woman had done without her telling Him anything about her life. Of course, Jesus knowing these things about this woman clearly tells us that He is divine. That He is God.

Have you ever allowed Jesus to tell you everything there is to know about you?

And if you have, have you ever wondered how He could still love you, knowing everything that you have ever done that was wrong?

You see, the beauty of this ‘wonder’ is that Jesus knows us completely yet He still wants to spend eternity with us; He still loves us, and that will never, ever change.

But the real ‘wonder’ is that Jesus knows.

Reflection time

1. Break off individually and read **Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24** (The Message) - **USB**
2. Particularly taking notice of **verses 23-24**, ask God to tell you everything there is to know about you, the good and the bad.
3. Write down what God has revealed to you.
4. Spend some time waiting to hear from God what He wants you to do with these areas of your life.
5. Come back together as a group and sing *At The Cross* (Hillsong).
6. Spend time ministering to each other, praying for each other and brainstorming ideas about how you can work on the areas of your life that God has pointed out to you.
7. Spend time in corporate prayer and song, praising and worshipping God, our God of Wonders.

¹<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/wonder>, accessed 1.43pm, 17th March 2017.

²<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/wonder>, accessed 1.50pm, 17th March 2017.

Holy Spirit wonders: don't miss out!

BELINDA SPICER

In July 1973 the very popular Gowans and Larssons musical *Spirit* was performed for the very first time. The fourth musical written by the pair was a sequel to *Jesus Folk*. Through music and song, the narration reveals the Spirit of Christ transforming the people of Jesus. Thousands gathered all over the world to experience *Spirit*.

Forty years later, etched in our hearts are songs like:

- *Ask, Seek, Knock*
- *Burning, Burning*
- *For the Mighty Moving of the Spirit*
- *To be like Jesus*
- *What does the Spirit say to the churches?*

But Hang on! The experience of The Spirit doesn't stop there with the musical genius of Gowans and Larsson. The wonders of The Holy Spirit born at Pentecost are still available to us today, even when the music fades.

LET ME ASK YOU THIS QUESTION: It seems that we know how to sing of the Holy Spirit but as Women of God, do we know what it means to experience the Holy Spirit?

I believe the answer is found in **Acts 16:6-15** with the conversion of Lydia. The beauty of this story is that it's all simply about **gathering together**. The story goes like this...

When Paul reaches Philippi, he hears of 'the women who gather by the river to pray', and he decides to join them and preach the Word of God. Lydia, a wealthy woman who sells beautiful purple linens, listens with her heart ready and open to receive the truth. At that moment something wonderful occurs; Lydia and her entire household have *an experience with the Holy Spirit!* As a result, the first Church in Europe is birthed, influencing the entire region for Christ ... and all because a few women gathered in the name of Jesus.

There is something powerful about women gathering together. Sharing life, praying together, studying the Word and encouraging one another. It's not hard to do.

Truth be told ladies - we are experts at creating a reason to come together. Bridal and baby showers, mothers groups, girls' night out, coffee and dessert nights. The list goes on... But when women 'gather' to grow and deepen in their relationship with God - something really special happens:

1. **Hearts connect**
2. **Friendships are formed**
3. **Bonds are strengthened**
4. **Lives are changed**

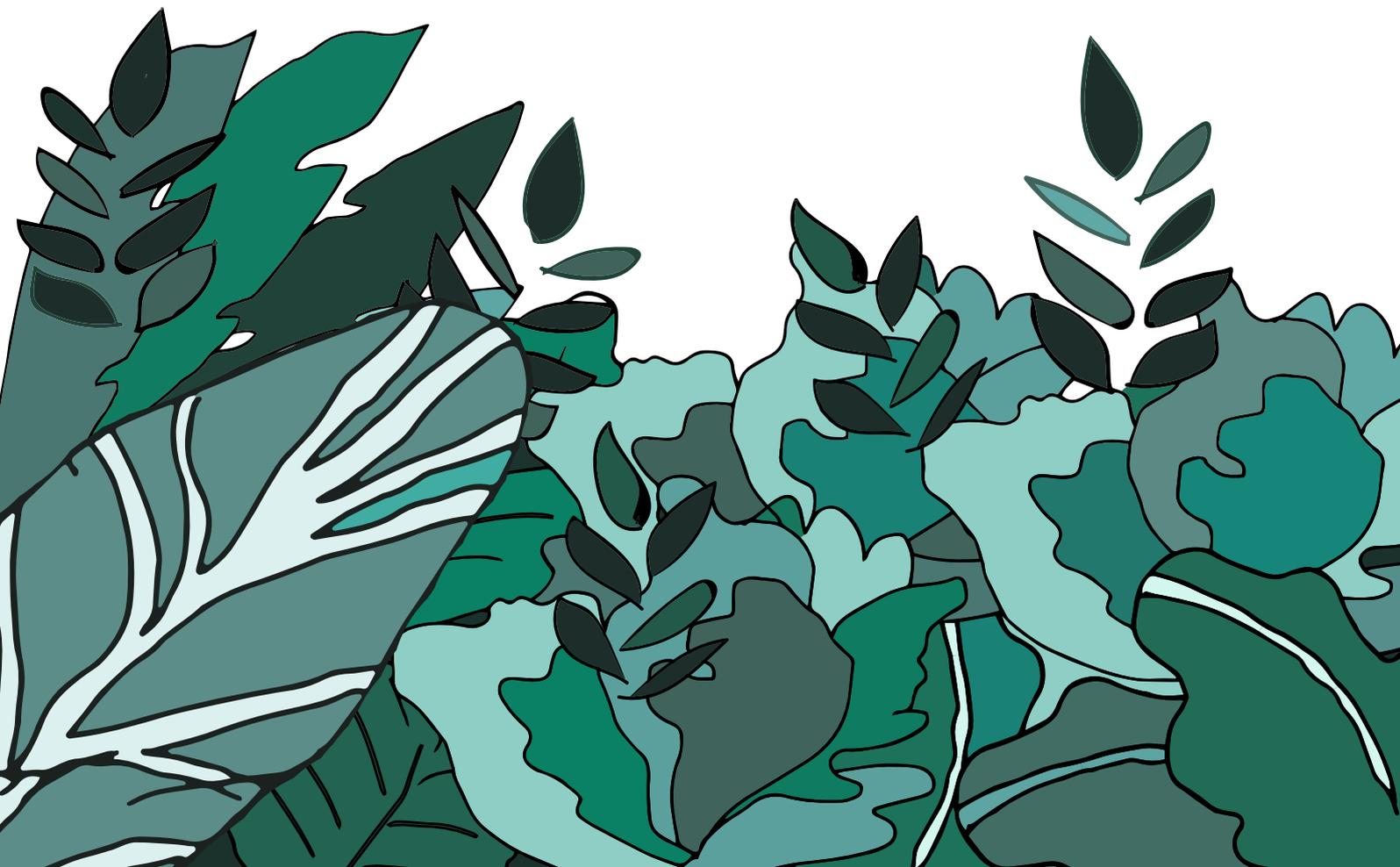
Just imagine and dream of the impact you and your friends could have in the communities and cities God has called you to serve... and it's all about the gathering. The music may have faded; however, let's continue to say,

*“That’s the Spirit, Holy Spirit,
that’s the Spirit of the Lord in me...”*

For discussion:

1. When have you been aware of God's Spirit speaking to you or acting in your life?
2. What have been the results of this experience?
3. Have a look at the words of one or more of the songs from the Spirit musical listed above. What do they tell you about the work of the Spirit in and around you?
4. How could you intentionally come together with other women to experience, and be strengthened and inspired by, the Holy Spirit?

Wonderful word



The shepherd's psalm: a message from sheep!

MAJOR ELVA BANKS

DÉCOR: Decorate with pictures, photos and/or sayings on the theme of 'sheep' and/or 'shepherd'.

I was privileged to live with a beautiful man who was a shepherd of sheep before he became an Officer. I learned lessons about sheep, and witnessed the care that Karl transferred to his spiritual 'flock', and more lessons followed:

1. Sheep are valued for what they give.
2. They only bleat when they are calling for help, from either their mum or the shepherd.
3. Sheep are intelligent. An example: I was visiting Karl's parent's farm, and was helping Mum put the sheet on the clothesline when a pet ewe, who had a new lamb, came and started nudging Mum. She tried to brush the sheep away, but it insisted, and kept on nudging until Mum stopped what she was doing and followed the sheep. Then we both saw a tiny lamb in a hole, unable to get out, and too deep for its mother to help it. Mum lifted the little thing out. Problem solved! The sheep and the lamb went off together.
4. Sheep follow a leader, and stick together.

If we transfer these traits to people, what amazing lessons we can learn.

1. Are we more interested in what we get rather than what we give, in time, talent, attention and in other ways?
2. Do we tend to whine and complain rather than call for help when things go wrong?
3. Are we willing to become sensitive to others, so that we can go along with them and help them out of a 'hole'?
4. Are we prepared to follow our leaders, or do we always want to lead? Do we stick together in a crisis – in our home, church, social group or community?

The **23rd Psalm** is the most recognized and best loved of the Psalms. It covers every area of our lives:

The Lord is my Shepherd	that's Relationship!
I shall not want	that's Supply!
He makes me lie down in green pastures	that's Rest!
He leads me beside still waters	that's Refreshment!
He restores my soul	that's Healing!
He leads me in paths of righteousness	that's Guidance!
For His Name's sake	that's Purpose!
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death	that's Testing!
I will fear no evil	that's Protection!
For You are with me	that's Faithfulness!
Your rod and your staff comfort me	that's Discipline!
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies	that's Hope!
You anoint my head with oil	that's Consecration!
My cup overflows	that's Abundance!
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life	that's Blessing!
And I will dwell in the House of the Lord	that's Security!
FOREVER	that's Eternity!
(Author unknown)	

Suggested songs from the Home League Song Book

105	<i>The Lord's my Shepherd</i>	93	<i>Simply trusting every day</i>
106	<i>The Saviour sought and found me</i>	12	<i>He found me with a burden</i>
119	<i>To God be the glory</i>		(Choruses)
123	<i>What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought</i>	13	<i>He is mine</i> (Choruses)

Continue *The shepherd's psalm: a message from sheep!* onto the next page >>

Closing thought

Nothing distracts sheep; they concentrate on what they are doing. Just watch them ... eating, following each other, attending to their young.

How easy it is for us to become distracted! The world offers many glittering opportunities and things for us to 'enjoy', and it is easy to follow the wrong group, even as we grow older. The Good Shepherd is still the same; He is there leading us, and we know His name – but better news than that is that He knows our name.

May our prayer be,

'Let all who come behind us find us faithful.' *Faithful* (Steve Green).

Possible readings

You might like to have some ladies read out alternate versions of **Psalm 23**.

The Lord is my Teacher

<http://www.biblecharts.org/teachersandteaching/23rd%20Psalm%20for%20Teachers.pdf>

Psalm 23: The Message

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+23&version=MSG>

The Lord is my pacemaker

<http://soslee.info/asos/pacemaker.html>

An American-Indian interpretation of the 23rd Psalm

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/a-native-american-interpretation-of-the-23rd-psalm>

Another version, source unknown, is as follows:

The Lord is my close Companion;
I shall never be lonely or friendless.
He gives rest to my weary soul
In the quiet sanctuary of communion.
He reaches out to me in the still watches of the night.
He gives rich meaning to life;
He guides my mind in the upper paths of truth that I may know Him better.
Yes, even though my way be in the midst of confusion of those whose lives scoff at faith,
I am not afraid.
My Companion is with me.
His hand upholds me and gives me poise.
When fear, discouragement and worry make inroads upon my life,
His Spirit touches my spirit, and my heart
Overflows with an upsurge of joy.

The following website contains the poem, *Twas a sheep, not a lamb*, which discusses the role of adults in modelling God's love to children:

http://www.skywriting.net/inspirational/poems/twas_a_sheep_not_a_lamb.html

Psalms of wonder

JOANNE SMITH

Wonder can stir strong emotions and responses within us that can be difficult to put into words. Today we are going to reflect on how some of the Psalmists expressed their wonder and attempt to write our own Psalms of Wonder.

Wonder is a feeling of amazement and admiration, caused by something beautiful, remarkable, or unfamiliar. ¹

Share

Take a moment to think of a time when you were filled with wonder. How would you describe what happened? How would you describe the emotions that you experienced?

Create a word cloud with the responses (see **USB** for an example of a word cloud. Instructions for generating a word cloud can be found at <http://www.wordclouds.com/>).

Continue *Psalms of wonder* onto the next page >>

Brainstorm

Brainstorm some synonyms:

'Wonder', 'amazement', 'admiration', 'beautiful', 'remarkable' and 'unfamiliar'.
Add the responses to your word cloud.

Some examples ... Reverence, delight, adoration, remarkable, awe, wonderment, fascination, surprise, astonishment, amazement, marvel, miracle, phenomenon, sensation, spectacle, beauty, curiosity, rarity, extraordinary, unusual, curious, exceptional, important, impressive, miraculous, momentous, noteworthy, outstanding, phenomenal, rare, significant, singular, solid, strange, striking, surprising, uncommon, unique, conspicuous, distinguished, greatest, marked, peculiar, pre-eminent, prominent, salient, smashing, super, uncustomary, weighty

Read

Many of the Psalms were written to express wonder.

Ask a number of people to read the following verses aloud.

- **Psalms 95:1-7a**
- **Psalms 104:1-30**
- **Psalms 9:1-2**
- **Psalms 19:1-4**
- **Psalms 5:7-8**

Write

Think again about a time when you experienced wonder.

Write a psalm to express what happened and how you responded.

¹ <https://www.google.com.au/search?q=define+wonder&oq=define+&aqs=chrome.0.69i59j69i57j69i59j0l3.4023j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

The wonder of His word!

JO-ANNE BROWN

MEDITATING ON GOD'S WORD: "Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives" **Colossians 3:16 MSG**

Introduction

Discuss favourite Bible verses – lead into meditation.

Talk about meditation, experiences of meditation. Many people shy away from meditation, thinking it means something very different to what we are talking about when we talk about Biblical meditation.

What is Biblical Meditation?

Simply meditating on God's Word! It is a taking a verse, or a phrase, perhaps just a word or two and giving our focussed attention to it – pondering it, thinking about it, repeating it to ourselves so it sinks in.

From the Bible

There are a number of words in the Bible that are translated as "meditation" and they all give us a slightly different insight:

Hagah **Psalm 1:2**

To murmur (in pleasure), to ponder. Meditation is a pleasant murmuring of Scripture to oneself.

Sichah **Psalm 119:99**

To reflect with deep devotion, to contemplate. Meditation is a quiet contemplation of and reflection on Scripture.

Higgayon **Psalm 19:14**

A musical notation, a murmuring sound. Meditation is a musical repetition of God's Word.

Melateo **1 Timothy 4:15**

To ponder carefully with the mind; to muse upon. Meditation is a careful and prayerful reviewing of Scripture.

Meditation reminds us of a cow chewing its cud. Taking her time to keep chewing over what she has taken in and working on digesting it completely.

So meditation is... : (Participants come up with their own definition)

Compared to other forms of meditation

Biblical meditation is different to other forms of meditation, where frequently the aim is to empty the mind. In Christian meditation we fill the mind with Christ—we focus on him. Other forms of meditation aim for detachment, but Christian meditation is about engaging more deeply with God.

Anyone can meditate. Most of us allow the thoughts that cause us worry or stress to go round and round in our heads constantly. If we can focus that way on the things that worry us, we can focus in the same way on God's Word – which transforms us!

READ: **Luke 2:19** and discuss.

Some easy ways to begin meditating on God's word

Some of these can be done together in a group, with the group members sharing what it was like for them to meditate in Scripture in that way. Other forms can be tried out individually by sending the group members off on their own to try a new way of meditating on Scripture then coming back to share their experience. I have found that the first 3 or 4 work well in a group setting.

1. Emphasise each word

Choose a verse that you know well and is reasonably short, for example **Psalm 46:10**.

Each time you read it through, emphasis a different word. Think about how it sounds, how that particular word makes sense of the verse and what it might mean specifically for you.

'Be still and know that I am God.'

'Be still and know that I am God. '

'Be still and know that I am God ...' etc.

2. Memorization

Many of us may have done this as kids – and we may even think we can't memorise anything any more.

1. Start with a short verse, 'The Lord is my Shepherd'; 'I am the light of the world', etc.
2. Each time you say it through, think about what it means and let the words speak to you.
3. Once you have memorised a verse, you can meditate on it any time, anywhere – you might be surprised at how much fun it is!

3. Put actions to it

Dance or sing to it. (**Psalm 18:1**) Each person takes a turn choosing a favourite verse and putting actions to it. This can be fun.

4. Visualisation

As far as you are able to, visualise the significance of each and every key word. Think back to the verse you used to emphasise each word, or the one you memorised.

Picture each individual word. What comes to your mind? What do you see when you think of that word?

Note: Some verses ('The Lord is my Shepherd'; 'I am the light of the world', etc.) are easy to picture.

5. Pray the verse.

Turn the verse into a prayer and offer it back to God.
For example:

Thank you, Lord that you are my Shepherd, that you lead and guide me and show me where to go. Please help me to see the right pathway for me at this time ... etc.

6. Paraphrase a passage or verse

Put the verse or passage into your own words. This can help us to see it in a different way or to discover something new in it. Try writing it out in your own words, and speaking it out.

Continue *The wonder of His word!* onto the next page >>

7. Meditate using imagination

One powerful way of meditating on scripture is to use all your senses and put yourself into the scene of the passage you want to meditate on. Become one of the characters, or a bystander. Imagine what you see, hear, smell and taste, what you feel with your hands or your skin. Imagine yourself speaking or hearing the words of the text and think about what that would be like for you. Let the message of the passage speak to you. This can be a helpful way to read Scripture passages that we are very familiar with.

Some good ones to try are: the miracle of the loaves and fish; being in the boat with Jesus on a stormy sea; the shepherds when the angels announced the birth of Jesus; the crucifixion; the road to Emmaus, etc.

So, take a story. Read it slowly, and then try to enter the scene in your prayerful imagination. See the people, the surroundings; hear the voices, feel the breeze. Think about what is going on. Mull over it. What does it mean?

Note: You can become one of the characters in the story. Try to feel how they would have felt. See Jesus as they saw him. Hear Jesus speak to you the words he said to that person.

8. Draw it, paint it or collage it

Psalm 23:1 **Joshua 1:8.**

Let's do it ...

MEDITATE: Try out some of these ways of meditating on your own.

SHARE: Come back to the group and share your experiences.

SOME SUGGESTIONS:

Psalm 1 **Psalm 62:1-2** **Psalm 18:1-2** **Psalm 23:1** **Joshua 1:8.**

Wonderful promises from a God of wonder

CHRISTINE DICKSON

Note: This could be used and adapted for most groups or meetings. It could even form a discussion group.

Activities

1. Promise box (optional)
2. What promises from God have been your rock?

Song Suggestions

Standing on the promises, TSA Song book

Christ is enough (I have decided to follow Jesus), Hillsong Live

Desert Song, Hillsong United

His Strength is Perfect, Steven Curtis Chapman

Note: These can be sung, or you can download the clips and show them.

READ: **Philippians 4:10-19**

FOCUS VERSE: 'And my God will supply all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus,' **Philippians 4:19 (NIV)**.

Message

We make promises all the time and sometimes we break them. Others make promises to us, and sometimes they break them. It's not a good feeling to be in either of those groups. Breaking promises generally comes with feeling bad. The sense of letting someone down or being let down is uncomfortable. We tell ourselves we aren't perfect but we often expect perfection in others. We are a complex bunch.

The author Stephen Richards wrote,

'Promises are only as strong as the person who gives them...'

If that quote is true, then let's take some time to consider the one who makes the strongest promises and always follows through. How's this for an amazing promise?

And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus **Philippians 4:19** (NLT)

How does this promise apply to our lives?

A significant area in which many of us seem to think this doesn't apply - or we would prefer that it didn't - is in the area of our finances. We read in the Bible and sing songs of God's provision. We have faith that we follow and serve a mighty God. We believe that we will go to be with Him when we die. We believe that He sent His Son to die and then raised Him from the dead. We believe God's Spirit dwells with us. We believe so many things - yet when it comes to believing God will provide all our needs, we seem to think He didn't really mean that.

God's promises are so firm that we can stand on them. We can build our lives on them and around them. The promise to provide was not an off the cuff comment; it was and is a promise.

Here are some interesting statistics: There are **31,102** verses in the Bible, and within those we find **2,350** that give advice and instruction on how we should handle our money, wealth and possessions. Jesus tells **38** stories in the New Testament to illustrate something He wished to teach; the Bible refers to these stories as 'parables'. Of these, **16** relate to how we handle our money, wealth and possessions. In fact, **15%** of Jesus' recorded words are on this subject. Indeed the Bible says more about money and possessions than about any other subject except God Himself. The Bible offers **500** verses on prayer, while fewer than **500** discuss faith. There are **700** verses that speak directly about the handling of money and **300** about our responsibility to the poor.

Why did Jesus speak so much about these topics? Because He knows that how we approach that aspect of our lives makes all the difference in our lives and the lives of others. Jesus wants us to have His perspective, not the world's. The world would tell us to trust ourselves, get what we want when we want it no matter how much debt we need to accumulate to get it. But Jesus wants us to be free. Not bound in the chains of debt. We cannot be generous and giving if we do not have the freedom to do so.

So what does the verse say to you? The Message version of [Philippians 4:19](#) says, ‘You can be sure that God will take care of everything you need, his generosity exceeding even yours in the glory that pours from Jesus’. Read through the whole passage from [verse 10](#).

We read of giving, generosity, caring for others, being aware of others, our role in the lives of others, our reliance on God. Have you considered that you may be the answer to someone who believes in that scripture? You may have the opportunity to bless others because you have been blessed. Think about the times this has happened for you, either as the giver or receiver. God provides; we have the blessing to be His way to help spread that provision.

You may never know the value of your blessings and gifts for others but they will make an impact nonetheless. The way God provides may not be as we expect or even envision. Here is a story about a little girl and her 57 pennies (Taken from *7 Keys to Open Handed Living in a Tight Fisted World* by Pastor Brian Kluth):

Hattie May Wiatt was a young girl who lived near a growing church in Philadelphia in the 1880’s. One day Hattie was found crying because there was not enough room in the Sunday School for her to attend. Pastor Conwell placed her on his shoulders and carried her through the waiting crowds into the church. She began saving her pennies to help build a larger Sunday School. She had saved 57 cents (which was a lot back then) when she became sick and died. Hattie May’s parents gave the little purse with the 57 pennies in it to Pastor Conwell. They told him Hattie had been saving the money to help buy a bigger Sunday School building. The 57 pennies were auctioned off and grew to \$250. This money was used as the down payment to help buy a building next door to the church. Hattie May Wiatt’s picture is still hanging in this building. The first college class of what is now Temple University was also started in this building (and Temple has educated more than 80,000 students over the years). The church also started the Wiatt Mite Society to continue expanding her 57 cents to support the Lord’s work. This all happened because of the generosity and sacrifice of one little girl who saved and gave 57 pennies.¹

God provides. He promises that He will. Maybe not how we expect, but in His way.

All the promises of God are sure. Christ is enough for me and for you. His strength and provision are perfect. May God bless you as you bless others, as you rest on the [wonderful promises of God, our God of wonder](#).

¹There are many versions of this story on the Internet. The quoted version is from the website <https://library.temple.edu/collections/scrc/hattie>

Wonderful promises of God

ROBYN BLACK

Introduction

Promises are funny things, aren't they? When you're a child, promises are everything, and promises are taken very seriously. I remember when I was a child, when I made a promise I would say after it, 'Cross my heart and hope to die'. Now that's pretty serious isn't it! Saying 'cross my heart and hope to die' meant that I was going to do everything in my power to fulfil the promise I had made. And I remember as I got older, the saying changed to 'cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye'. Now that's just gruesome!

But the principle is there; even as children we take promises seriously. We take making promises seriously, and we take other people making promises seriously. And how often do kids say, 'but you promised'? I think as adults we'd probably say more often to people 'but you promised', if we were honest. Our society largely runs smoothly only when promises are made and kept. People expect their partner to keep their marriage promises; when we promise to pay a debt, others rely on this. Making and keeping promises is something we usually feel strongly about. You know, the Bible says that we are made in God's image, so it stands to reason that God may also have strong principles around making and keeping promises.

Promises in the Bible

The whole Bible is really a promise from God to us – a promise to love us, a promise to never leave us, a promise to save us. The Bible has something like 7,000 promises from God – I heard that on the Christian Broadcasting radio station – about 6,000 promises in the Old Testament and over 1,000 in the New Testament. God makes a lot of promises to us, and the Bible shows that he keeps his word.

It's interesting because the Old Testament is written in Hebrew, and the word that we translate as **promise** in the Old Testament, is actually the Hebrew word, for **spoke**. So for example, instead of saying 'God promised Abraham', the original Hebrew text says,

‘God spoke to Abraham’. And this says to me that God’s promises and God’s word are the same thing. Every time God speaks he will come through on what he has said, because he has made a promise. It’s assumed in the Bible that **God speaks, it will happen**. God is literally ‘**as good as his word**’.

This is exciting stuff because knowing God’s promises, and knowing that God is faithful to fulfil his promises, can change our life.

SONG: *Standing on the Promises of Christ my King* (SASB 522)

Prayer

‘*Who am I*’ promises (Excel spreadsheet on **USB**)

1. Hand out one page for each person with their name in it.
2. Choose one or two verses of scripture and look them up.
3. Read the verses out loud.

A few promises from scripture

These are discussed simply and usefully on the given websites.

PROMISE: ‘Not one of My promises will ever fail you’

Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. **Joshua 23:14 (NIV)**

<http://www.365promises.com/daily-promises/2017/1/31/promise-31-tuesday-january-31-2017.html>

PROMISE: I look after foreigners and I help the fatherless and the widow

The LORD watches over the foreigner
and sustains the fatherless and the widow,
but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. **Psalms 146:9 (NIV)**

<http://www.365promises.com/daily-promises/2017/1/26/promise-26-thursday-january-26-2017.html>

God’s Promises Find-a-word

<http://thewordsearch.com/puzzle/3557/gods-promises/downloadable/> (See **USB**)

Discussion

What stories do you remember from the Bible of people holding on to the promises of God? Or, what promise in the Bible has been important to you?

POEM: *Loving Promises*, by Helen Steiner Rice

<http://juliesdailyinspirational.blogspot.com.au/2009/06/promises-of-man-may-fail-but-gods.html>

SONG: *All the Promises of God are sure* (SASB 893)

A few more Promises from scripture

PROMISE: Cast all your worries on Me, for I really care about you.

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you, **1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)**

<http://www.365promises.com/daily-promises/2017/1/22/promise-22-sunday-january-22-2017.html>

PROMISE: My love will persevere through every situation.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**

<http://www.365promises.com/daily-promises/2016/1/24/promise-24-sunday-january-24-2016.html>

PROMISE: I will not let you be tested beyond what you can endure.

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. **1 Corinthians 10:13**

<http://www.365promises.com/daily-promises/2017/1/23/promise-23-monday-january-23-2017.html>

SONG: *Simply Trusting* (SASB 892).

Wonderful plan



A wonderful future, now and forever more

BEATRICE KAY

DECOR: A cross, picture of heaven, photos of future, a retirement bucket list.
Two diagnostic questions, see <http://evangelismexplosion.org/the-two-question/>.

Welcome

SONG

Through it all, Andre Crouch

My Tribute, Andre Crouch

HL SONG BOOK

107 *The word is the way*

Tune: *To God be the Glory*

108 *There are many hearts*

41 *I must have the Saviour with me*

Question time

Ask the ladies if they have any questions about the future and hereafter. Make this funny but memorable.

Let them know that we are assured of eternity with Jesus if we have accepted His lordship in our lives.

THOUGHT: *If Jesus comes to your House*, Lois Blanchard (Printable)
<http://www.godswork.org/enpoem4.htm>

Message: A wonderful future

In November 2016 I had a beautiful retirement service.

My boys sang the song by Andre' Crouch, *Through it All*, which says that although we go through many situations in our lives, through it all we can trust God.

In all situations we can lean upon Him and His word and depend on Him whole-heartedly

This service gave glory to God for 35 years' service and for sustaining me through these years - especially the last ten years as a solo officer - and giving honour to my husband who had been promoted to Glory in 2007 after 25 years of service.

How good is God! Yes, He is good all the time.

We all have things in our lives that we can look forward to.

Talk about the birth of a child, grandchild, niece or nephew; a wedding or engagement of a friend; children and grandchildren going to school; changing houses; meeting our first love; a blind date, etc. It all happens and is happening. So many things have happened and are still happening.

We have a guarantee for a home in heaven one day. The Bible says that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Heaven is a free gift, not earned or deserved.

Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 6:23

1. **John 3; 16, John 14:1-7, 1 John 5:13**

These verses speak about our future with Jesus in heaven; expand on these.

Note: Most people say, 'I hope I get there'. Let's reassure them, as God promises this.

2. There are movies about this now: two of them are *Miracles from Heaven* and *Heaven is for Real: The Boy that Went to Heaven*.

3. A teacher said to some students in class, '*Who would like to go to heaven?*' Everyone put their hand up except Jonny. The teacher asked Jonny, '*Don't you want to go to heaven?*' Jonny replied, '*I can't teacher, my mum said I must go straight home*'.

We can laugh at this little story, but it is absolutely vital that we prepare ourselves for where we will be ultimately spending eternity. The person who expects to go to heaven should take the trouble to learn what route will get him there.

In God's word we have promises from God that tell us what we should do to assure us of our place in heaven.

The best is yet to be!

POEM: *Christmas in Heaven*, Wanda Bencke, <http://rileyhitt.com/christmasinheaven/>.

God's wonderful plan

JAN CAIRNS

Song

The Wonder of his Grace (SATB 873)

Do you remember singing the chorus 'My God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there's nothing my God cannot do?' These simple words tried to help children understand something of the wonder of God in terms that they understood.

When you think of God, what words would you use to describe him?

Words are often inadequate; but the Macquarie Dictionary defines 'wonderful' as someone who is 'excellent, delightful, extremely good or fine'. These definitions describe to some degree our wonderful God.

Wonderful name

One of the names given to Jesus in the Bible is *Wonderful*. **Isaiah 9:6** says, 'He will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace'. When we get to know and love Jesus and when we stop and think of what he has done for us, then we can understand why he is called 'Wonderful'. Think about your name for a moment – does it carry a special meaning? Perhaps it's a specific family name which your parents wanted you to carry into the next generation. Maybe they chose it because of its beautiful meaning – my newest granddaughter is called Eden which means delight – and she is already living up to her name, a delight to her family and friends. When Jesus was given his name he was given it for a reason – it was a prediction of his future task on earth (i.e. to be the Saviour of humankind) – a wonderful name for a wonderful person.

SONGS: *Jesus, name above all names, beautiful Saviour, glorious Lord, Emmanuel, God is with us, Blessed Redeemer, living Word* (SATB 714).

QUIZ: Prepare PowerPoint pictures of people who have accomplished something special with their lives and ask people to name them.

Wonderful plan

Not only did Jesus have this wonderful name but his birth was all part of a wonderful plan which God instigated because he loved us so much. This wonderful plan was made known to some Old Testament prophets such as Isaiah and Micah. Centuries ago God told them that a Saviour would be born – he told them the circumstances of his birth and even his name.

Unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. **Isaiah 9:6**

You Bethlehem ... though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come ... one who will be ruler over Israel. **Micah 5:2**

God's wonderful plan of salvation began centuries ago when he announced to these prophets the upcoming birth of Jesus.

Wonderful birth

It certainly was a wonderful plan to provide humankind with a Saviour as we are incapable of saving ourselves, but it needed a wonderful birth for this to happen. Just think about the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth – his mother Mary was a virgin, a teenager who was willing to be part of God's wonderful plan in conceiving, carrying and delivering the son of God. I would have thought this was a pretty scary thing for a teenage girl to be part of, but Mary was obedient, and in due time Jesus was born. It could well seem an 'unwonderful' (if there is such a word!) birth – no sterile room with doctors or midwives supporting the mother to be, no comfy bed or shower available, no creature comforts except the four-legged ones who would be stomping around the stable, chewing and making noises. And yet God deemed this a wonderful birth.

SHOW DVD: **Matthew 1: 18 – 24**, *The Visual Bible* or some other DVD.

Wonderful life

This wonderful birth is what we celebrate at Christmas but the story doesn't finish there – that's just the beginning, because we know Jesus went on to live a wonderful life. When he was 30 years of age he began his public ministry performing miracles, teaching about God and how he wanted us to live, and choosing his disciples so they could carry on the work. When on earth he lived a wonderful life – he was always thinking of others: healing them, teaching them, enjoying hospitality with them, being a friend to them. Everything Jesus did while living on earth was designed to show people his wonderful heavenly father. Jesus' ministry was not about himself but about others - no wonder we call him 'wonderful'.

Wonderful death

How can we say anyone's death is wonderful? Death is cruel and causes much pain and loss. Death on a cross is unimaginable to us - the physical aspects of the incredible pain when being nailed to a cross, the difficulty breathing the longer one hung there, the insatiable thirst followed by difficulty swallowing – it's hard for us to imagine how traumatic such an experience would be. For God to watch his only son go through such an experience must have caused him great pain as he watched his only son's life ebb away. But Jesus' death IS wonderful if we keep it in the context of God's plan. It was his amazing love that made such a plan truly wonderful.

SONG: *Amazing Love*, SATB 555

The soldiers who placed him on the cross thought that was the end of the Jesus story but God's wonderful plan wasn't quite completed – there was more to come, and so after three days we have a wonderful resurrection.

Wonderful resurrection

SHOW DVD: *Matthew 28: 1- 10*, *Visual Bible* or some other DVD depicting the resurrection.

God proved to the world that he and he alone had power over death. During the next 40 days Jesus appeared to hundreds of people confirming that he was alive. Some believed it was Jesus, others struggled to comprehend that such a return was possible.

Then another wonderful thing happened!

Wonderful ascension

Mark tells us that when Jesus had finished talking with his disciples 'he was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God'. **Mark 16: 19.**

This was the fulfilment of many discussions Jesus had with his disciples, telling them that he would return to his heavenly father when his work on earth was done. But the wonderful ending included a gift for God's people – the daily presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the believers, and that includes you and me. What a wonderful gift.

READ: *Acts 1:6-11*

SONG: *The Wonder of it All*, SATB 874

Prayer

The wonder of a transformed life

CHRISTINE TAMSETT

Meeting Lead

VIDEO CLIP: *Touch of the Master's Hand* by Wayne Watson (YouTube).

POEM: *Touch of the Master's Hand* (USB)

PAINTING: Rembrandt's painting, *The Prodigal* (USB)

SHARING / GUEST:

- Someone who is a survivor from drugs and / or alcohol
- Someone who is a survivor from domestic violence
- Someone who is a survivor from bereavement
- Someone who is a survivor from suicide
- Someone who has returned from the 'brink' of a life experience

READ: **Luke 15** *The Lost Sheep, Coin and Son*

MESSAGE: What happened after the lost was found - Transformation!

Continue *The wonder of a transformed life* onto the next page >>

Introduction

Have you ever lost anything? How did you feel?

Car keys, glasses, key to house, gift cards, odd socks, wallets.

Some responses might be?

Angry, frustrated, ask yourself why, why did it have to happen now, why me.

How do you feel when the lost article is found?

Elated, overjoyed, relieved, really happy.

Give a personal illustration.

Point 1

Lost sheep

- a. The shepherd goes to any length to find one sheep
- b. Shepherd feels his flock is incomplete
- c. When he finds the sheep, he calls his friends and neighbours to rejoice with him
- d. Transformation from sad to glad

Point 2

Lost Coin

- a. The woman hunts diligently for one single coin of the ten-coin headband
- b. The lost coin made the woman's wedding band incomplete
- c. Calls her friends and neighbours to rejoice at finding the coin
- d. Transformation from sad to glad

Point 3

Lost Son

- a. The father looks for the return of his wayward son
- b. Father felt his life was incomplete with only one son and not two
- c. On the son's return, the father calls friends and neighbours to come and celebrate
- d. Transformed from sad to glad

Point 4

The old violin

- a. The auctioneer tried to auction an old violin but no one wanted to buy
- b. His sale was not complete but then a transformation happened with a touch of the master's hand
- c. He was elated when the violin was sold. It had been transformed
- d. The true value of the violin was revealed, and sadness turned to joy

Conclusion

Transformation happens when we find something of value. We feel sad, then glad when it has been found.

It doesn't have to be of great monetary value; it can be our life. Just look at the illustration of the story in the painting *The Prodigal Son* by Rembrandt.

There is great joy in our lives when God finds the true value in each one of us. Our lives are transformed: the old has gone and the new has come.

BIBLE STUDY: Discuss **Luke 15** together in the group.

Wonderful light of God

MARIE-CHANTAL GASPARD

Living in the Light

SCRIPTURE: **Psalm 119:105**

In olden days when electricity was a novelty, the moon and stars at night were a main source of light. Lamps provided light indoors and life was not really a bother. Electricity is much more accessible nowadays, but darkness has not been eradicated. Imagine a sudden power outage. You are in total darkness, but you have no flashlight or lamp to give some light. Oh ... What joy when the light flashes on again! You celebrate the light; you thank the electric company, forgetting in that moment the hefty bills that will come in the next few days. There appears to be life, happiness, joy in the light.

The Bible says that Jesus came into the world to bring light – Jesus was life ‘and the life was the light of men,’ (**John 1:4**). God gave His only Son Jesus to you, me, our children, our neighbours, to everyone who will believe in Him so that we can live in the light that He alone brings. Unfortunately, there are many who have not accepted the light of Jesus. **John 1:5** describes that they remain in darkness, and the more they choose darkness over light is the more the darkness invades them. Some results of darkness include: murder, rape, paedophilia, prostitution, theft, violence against one another. It is only Jesus who can illuminate the darkness and change the heart of man. He helps us in these ways:

1. His Word becomes our lamp. **Psalm 119:105** says it clearly. God’s Word gives light in every dark place of our life. Of ourselves we are but darkness and cannot see unless we are enlightened by God’s word. **Proverbs 3:5-6** reminds us to ‘lean not unto [our] own understanding ... and he shall direct [our] paths’.
2. When we trust God to shed His light in our lives, we find instructions in His word for how we must live, not only in our homes, but also at work and abroad, and in our everyday life – for how we follow the right path and avoid taking the wrong way. This means that we must depend upon God’s word every day. We must read it, study it, love it, and apply it if we are to avoid remaining in darkness.

3. His Holy Spirit fuels our lamp. Not only does the Word of God inform us of His will, but it teaches us that His Holy Spirit will help us to understand it. The Holy Spirit opens our spiritual eyes and minds and interprets the Word to our hearts so we will truly know God's will (**John 14:26**). The Holy Spirit is not like the sun which could blind us in our fallen state. He gives the light we need that will guide us until the Sun of Righteousness shall come, and we shall be made capable of seeing Him. Praise the Lord!
4. Are you living in darkness? Accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour of your life and live forever in His Light! Receive the light that only He can give.

Note: Invite seekers to pray the Prayer of Consecration (next page).

Preparation

The week before, ask the ladies to research as many Bible women as they can in preparation for a quiz (next page).

Suggested choruses

- *I want to live right*
- *God is still on the throne*
- *Let the beauty of Jesus*

Prayer Time

Sentence prayers for:

- Families going through divorce
- Families struggling with their children
- Home League families
- Corps families

Continue *Wonderful light of God* onto the next page >>

Bible Quiz

Women of the Bible

1. Business woman of Thyatira ([Lydia](#))
2. Spiritual leader who was ordered to leave Rome with her husband ([Priscilla](#))
3. Wife of Boaz ([Ruth](#))
4. Honoured wife who became a mother in old age ([Sarah](#))
5. Pure, young woman ([Mary](#))
6. Lived in the valley of Sorek ([Delilah](#))
7. Name at least three queens ([Vashti](#), [Esther](#), [Jezebel](#))
8. Lived with her mother-in law; Ruth was her sister-in-law ([Orpah](#))

Prayer of Consecration

Jesus, I give you my life. I recognize that there is darkness in my heart at times. I am sorry, Lord, and ask for your forgiveness. I need your light on my path and your presence in my heart, in my home and in my family. Lord Jesus, you are the Way, the Truth and the Life. You are the Light of the world. There is none like You.

The wonder of brokenness

JULIA METCHER

The prayer box set up

The prayer box will contain **7 personal prayer activities** for individual use (next page).

Note: Instruction cards and other resources can be found on the **USB** attached to this manual.

Before you start

The activities will take an hour.

- You will need to prepare a prayer box for each lady. (You can use noodle boxes or paper gift bags).
- Decorate as you choose or just use the label supplied. (A 'Title' label is included on the **USB** or there are six other pictures you can use.)
- Each activity might have several parts – put all parts for each activity in a small zip-lock plastic bag or an envelope to keep each activity separate.
- Each lady will need a pen and enough space to find a spot by themselves.

The prayer box needs to be done in silence to allow a sacred space for all.

Continue *The wonder of brokenness* onto the next page >>

The 7 Prayer Activities:

1. The Broken Shell:

You will need

- » Beautiful Broken Shell Instruction card
- » My Beautiful Broken Shell Poem (scroll & tie with ribbon)
- » A journal shell, cut out
- » A real broken shell

2. Ashes:

You will need

- » Ashes Instruction sheet
- » A small sealed plastic bag of fire ashes

3. The Broken Christ:

You will need

- » The Broken Christ Instruction card
- » The Broken Christ sheet (scroll & tie with wool)
- » Twig crosses picture
- » 2 small twigs
- » A piece of black or red wool to tie twigs together in a cross

Note: let the ladies make their own crosses

4. The Broken Cup:

You will need

- » The Broken Cup Instruction card
- » The Broken Cup Sheet (scroll and tie with string)
- » A split cardboard/polyphane disposable cup
- » 3 pieces of string to tie around cup (let the ladies do this)

5. The Broken Alabaster Jar:

You will need

- » The Broken Alabaster Jar Sheet (scroll & tie with ribbon)
- » Spray a little perfume on the paper before you scroll it

6. Thorns:

You will need

- » Thorns Instruction card
- » The Blessing of Thorns story (scroll & tie with ribbon)
- » Thorns prayer
- » A small thorn stem (florists will often give you these free)

7. The Broken Spirit:

You will need

- » The Broken Spirit Bible verse (**Psalm 51:17** Living Bible)
- » A paper tear drop, cut out
- » ¼ sheet of tissue paper (folded)

Limitless God

PENNY WILLIAMS

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen

Ephesians 3:16-21 (NIV)

I ask him to strengthen you by his Spirit – not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength – that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God. God can do anything, you know – far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.

Ephesians 3:16-21 (The Message)

SUGGESTED SONGS

- *10,000 Reasons*, Matt Redman
- *He is Able*, Greg Ferguson (YouTube)
- *How Great is our God*, Don Moen
- *How great Thou Art*, New SASB no.49
- *Amazing Grace (My chains are gone)*, Chris Tomlin, Louis Giglio

Introduction

Have you ever had an expectation that God is going to do something? You have a bit of an idea of what might happen ... you know or feel that God is going to bless what you are doing. When it comes to fruition, it goes beyond what you expected. That is God at work; God blows our mind. Sometimes we are surprised by this; but we should really expect it because, as **Ephesians 3:20** tells us:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us ...

By His Spirit that is at work in us, He can do more than we ask Him or think or imagine ... He is beyond our finite thinking.

The Message version says it this way:

God can do anything, you know – far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams!

Ask: How have you experienced God in this way?

Some ideas to include

- A life story – someone who against all odds came through because of God
- Verses on PowerPoint – some of the ones below can be used throughout the presentation.
- Pictures of the amazing ways God has shown us His creativity - these could be included on your PowerPoint.
- Life verses sharing – sharing the verses we consider to be our life verses, and saying why we think of them that way.
- Bible readings from **Ephesians 3:16-21** - both NIV and MESSAGE versions
- Competition – Fill in the missing words from some well-known Bible Verses (**USB**)
- Poem

Message

Why are we surprised when God goes beyond our expectations, beyond what our finite minds can think or dream? We are told time and time again in God's word about our amazing God, yet when we experience something like this it surprises us.

I think it is OK to be surprised, because this brings a certain amount of awe and praise when we have experienced God's amazing showers of blessing.

We have sung and heard stories which express how God is amazing, how great is our God, how He is a God of provision and wants to bless us so much. The testimony and life verses have shown us that God does work in our lives in an unlimited way.

1 Peter 1:3 speaks to this:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

And the answer is found in **Ephesians 3:16-21**:

He blesses us so that we may be strengthened in Christ.

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being ... **V16 NIV**

He blesses us so that we can be a blessing to others.

And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God. **V17-19 Message**

An echo of a call to love as we have been loved...

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. **John 13:34 NIV**

God shows Himself in this act of limitless provision. He shows this great love that He has loved us with; He shows us that He delights in us as He shares this great love and provision.

Finish with poem, '*What God Can Do*' (**USB**)

**Wonderful
creation**



Butterflies

HAZEL FORD

In spring, we see nature come alive. The flowers are blooming and so attract the bees and the butterflies.

I guess the part we look at on a butterfly is its wings. We see all those shapes and colours and we can be fascinated that just a few days before, this butterfly was emerging from a cocoon where it had been undergoing metamorphosis, changing from a hungry little grub into this beautiful butterfly.

We watch it flit from flower to flower, with no worries or cares. After all, the average life for a butterfly is less than two week. And what does it eat? Well, it only really sips liquids from flower nectar, tree sap, rotting fruit, bird and animal droppings and from wet sand or mud. BUT 'where does the butterfly go when it rains?' Do you know?

Read book

Where does the butterfly go when it rains?, May Garelick, Leonard Weisgard (Illustrator), Scholastic Book Services, 1970 (first published 1961)

Actually, butterflies do hide when it rains. They usually go to the same place as they do for the night. They do not sleep, they just become inactive because when it is cloudy or at night they cannot keep their temperatures at activity levels. So some hide under large leaves, some crawl down into dense leaves or under rocks, and some sit head down on grass stems or bushes, with wings held tightly. If the rains are exceptional or of long duration, many of the butterflies become tattered and die.

SONG: *A Wonderful Saviour is Jesus, my Lord*, HLSB 2 Tune 537

Message

Let's imagine today that we are a butterfly. Life is great; we have fought our way out of that tight cocoon and now we are just flitting around a beautiful garden in the warm sunshine.

However, that shower of rain comes.

You know the sort of things that fall on you ... health problems, financial worries, mental anguish, bad habits, physical needs such as food, shelter or clothing, family situation and lots of others. Where do you go when these things happen?

Some people turn to alcohol or drugs, take a holiday or go on a shopping spree.

The Bible is full of promises that at all times we can go to God for shelter and take refuge in Him. In the book of **Psalms (KJV)** it shows many times that God is a shelter for us.

Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of your wings. **17:8**

For in time of trouble he shall hide me. **27:5**

Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence. **31:20**

Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble. **32:7**

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. **91:1**

Thou art my hiding place. **119:114**

I flee unto Thee to hide me. **143:9**

We all need such shelter, refuge and protection. We look for safety, security and survival.

Continue *Butterflies* onto the next page >>

Again from the Psalms, let us look at **Psalm 61**, which has some powerful verses for us butterflies when the rains come down upon us. The song writer Isaac Watts expressed this Psalm in verse:

When, overwhelm'd with grief,
My heart within me dies,
Helpless, and far from all relief,
To heav'n I lift mine eyes.

O lead me to the rock
That's high above my head,
And make the cover of thy wings
My shelter and my shade.

Within thy presence, lord,
For ever I'll abide;
Thou art the tower of my defence,
The refuge where I hide.

Thou givest me the lot
Of those that fear thy name;
If endless life be their reward,
I shall possess the same.

This God who provides us with shelter from the rain also offers us continuing care. The eternal God is our refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

Whose arms? God's arms. He is a personal God and no matter what our situation, God is always available. No matter what our experience, whether it's a spring shower or a category 5 storm, His arms are underneath us. How comforting to know that we can be that safe!

As we continue to look at the butterfly, continue to be aware that God is your hiding place. Life brings with it sunshine and rain, triumphs and troubles. God is the hiding place ... He's safe and He's sure.

SONG

Read verse 1 of this song (SASB 341)

In the love of Jesus I have found a refuge,
Thought the winds may blow, this one thing I know;
He who never fails is my shield and shelter;
And he leads me where still waters flow;
He leads me where still waters flow.

CHORUS: O What A Hiding Place (HLSB 29)

SHARING TIME: Butterflies

SONG: *I dwell within the secret place* (SASB 728, Tune Mozart 496)

Scripture

Refuge and Safety (NIV)

Blessed are all who take refuge in Him. **Psalm 2:12**

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms **Deuteronomy 33:27**

You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance **Psalm 32:7**

Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. **Psalm 5:11**

He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge. **Psalm 91:4**

It is good to be near God. **Psalm 73:28**

Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge. **Psalm 16:1**

It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in humans. **Psalm 118:8**

Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. **Psalm 34:8**

Hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who are out to destroy me, from my mortal enemies who surround me. **Psalm 17:8-9**

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. **2 Timothy 4:18**

COMPETITION (USB): The answers to all of these clues use letters from the word **butterfly**.

SONG: *The cross that he gave may be heavy* SASB 758 Tune: 814

ANNOUNCEMENTS

BENEDICTION, SASB 9 VERSE 2 TUNE 228

The Lord our refuge is
And ever will remain;
Since he has made us his
He will our cause maintain.
In vain our enemies oppose,
For God is stronger than his foes.

The wonder of creation

JAN LAWS

DÉCOR: Display posters of nature scenes or show a scenic DVD.

Introduction of theme

Share

What do you remember as being breathtaking or awesome? Think of the times that your breath has been taken away by the sheer beauty of nature.

Share: Practical ways that we can care for nature where we are.

SONG SUGGESTIONS:

SASB 3 *All things bright and beautiful*

SASB 14 *For the beauty of the earth*

SASB 39 *Joyful, joyful we adore Thee*

SASB 49 *How great Thou art*

United Scripture Reading of Praise **Psalm 95:1-7a (USB)**

Activity

Unscramble the names of some of the 'natural wonders' of Australia (USB)

Show YouTube: God's creation according to Genesis'

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ean_aMNkAgM (approx. 5 mins)

You will require sets of Scrabble tiles. After watching the above YouTube or reading the Creation scripture passage arrange the ladies in groups and use the scrabble blocks to make words of what 'God created in the beginning.'

Devotions

Earlier in the meeting we shared times that our breath was taken away by creation. It might have been by the formation, colour or aroma of a rose. It might have been a magnificent sunset or a snow capped mountain or a rainbow spreading across the sky. Oh that we could sometimes recapture the simple wonder that we had as a child when our attention was so easily drawn to a simple flower or a chirping bird or a puddle to splash in, causing us such excitement.

It is so easy to become familiar and complacent with our surroundings that we can find ourselves taking little notice of the amazing sunset or just quickly pass by the beauty of a rose in full bloom. How easy it is to lose our sense of awe and wonder.

I once stayed in a holiday house that overlooked the wide beautiful rolling ocean which for the first few days I constantly gazed at it in awe and wonder. Sadly however, after a while, as the view became more familiar to me, some of the wonder and 'wow' faded away and I was no longer as captured by its beauty. The extraordinary had become ordinary and mundane.

Give the following verses to ladies to read out loud (USB)

The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make Him known. **Psalm 19:1-2 NLT**

For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen. **Romans 11:36 NLT**

He holds in his hands the depths of the earth and the mightiest mountains.
Psalm 95:4 NLT

O Lord, what a variety of things you have made! In wisdom you have made them all. The earth is full of your creatures. **Psalm 104:24 NLT**

When visiting the Louvre in Paris I remember standing in front of one of history's most famous pieces of art, the Mona Lisa. As I stood in amazement and awe before this masterpiece, I gave little thought to its creator, Leonardo da Vinci.

Each day declares anew the glory of our God. In all the rushing of life take time 'to stop and smell the roses' and to acknowledge God as the Creator, to thank Him for all He does for us and means to us. Creation is a daily reminder of the One who created it. It is a daily reminder of the greatness and power and beauty of our God who brought everything into being. It is a daily reminder of His existence, His power and His love and provision for us, who are the most wonderful of creations. Creation has the amazing ability to bring us into the presence of our Heavenly Father.

Let us praise Him, saying,

Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honour
and power and strength belong to our God
forever and ever! Amen. **Revelation 7:12 NLT**

SONG: Show a YouTube clip or sing the song, *How Great Thou Art* HLSB 80

Read together Psalm 148:1-6 NLT as a Benediction (USB)

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens! Praise him from the skies! Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all the armies of heaven! Praise him, sun and moon! Praise him, all you twinkling stars! Praise him, skies above! Praise him vapours high above the clouds! Let every created thing give praise to the Lord, for he issued his command, and they came into being. He set them in place for ever and ever.

God's marvellous creation – Us!

SUSANNE COX

SONG SUGGESTIONS:

- *What a wonderful change in my life*
- *In my life Lord, be glorified*
- *He's got the whole world in His hands*
- *I'm in His hands* (chorus)

DÉCOR:

- Skeleton (some \$2 shops have cardboard cutouts)
- Pictures of ordinary people / family groups that show a likeness

Ideas for meeting

- **Game:** Ladies to bring in childhood/baby photos for I.D. game (guess who the baby is).
- Show slides/pictures of Anne Geddes photography of babies
- **Small group activity:** Play the game 'Operation'
- **Competition**
Identify the different parts of the body, OR name A-Z parts of the body (**USB**)
- **YouTube:** The skeleton dance
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e54m6XOpRgU>
- **Discussion points**
 - » Athletes and how they achieve the almost impossible, their training, and how they treat their bodies
 - » The growth process between a baby and an adult. E.g. babies are not born with kneecaps - this is a development that happens at around two years
 - » Interesting facts about the body. E.g. your nose continues to grow until you are around 70 years old
 - » Search the Internet for other interesting facts

Message

If we were to stand in front of the mirror and really look at ourselves—at our eyes, nose, and ears—we would find them fascinating. It is truly the wonderful design of the Creator that we human beings are such. Someone went so far as to say, “Throughout history and over the whole earth, there is not one great designer who can improve the human appearance.” Whilst you might not entirely agree with this statement, it is undeniable that the human body is a thing of wonder. For example, our blood circulates throughout our bodies but clots when we are cut. If the system of blood clotting within our bodies was not perfectly balanced we would bleed to death when cut, or clots would form causing a stroke or heart attack.

Our bodies are designed with eight major load joints: ankles, knees, hips and shoulders. If these joints were not aligned vertically and horizontally we would not be capable of walking, running, jumping and navigating the world.

If our bodies did not create a new stomach lining every 3-4 days the stomach would soon dissolve due to our strong stomach acids.

These illustrate that the creation of man is truly a wonder.

To illustrate further, the hairs on our body all grow downward, and only the hairs in the trachea grow upward. In this way the phlegm in the throat can be kept from flowing downward. A medical doctor told me that the earwax in our ears is very useful medically; it instantly kills intruding bacteria, preventing them from doing any harm to us.

The intricacy of design in the human body certainly suggests that we did not develop through mindless evolution. We were created by the sovereign Lord of the universe. Before creation he had a design; we were created according to the design of the wisdom of God. God’s design is mysterious, complex and exquisite. We little human beings are amazing expressions of God’s great design.

Scripture **Psalm 139: 1-18**

Marvellous Creations of God.

- **Verses 1-6.** God knows all about us.
- **Verses 7-12.** We cannot hide from God.
- **Verses 13-18.** God created (made) us.

We are marvellous creations ... Fearfully and wonderfully made

If possible, give everyone a small bar of “Marvellous Creations” chocolate ... or even just a taste!

Prayer

Pray for those we know who are in hospital.

Fearfully and wonderfully made

BINDY LUPIS

Call to Worship

VIDEO: a beautiful clip of people with disabilities saying **Psalm 139**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXN_VJnWrHo

SONGS:

He knows my name, Paul Baloche

God of Wonders, Chris Tomlin

Never Once, Matt Redman

Psalm 139, Rebecca St James

How Great is our God, Chris Tomlin

Scripture Activity

Psalm 139 (focusing on verses 13-16). Have different people read out different translations.

Ask people to call out words that are used to describe us in each translation (unique, wonderfully complex, marvellous, wonderful, etc.). Write these up on a whiteboard or butcher's paper for everyone to be able to see.

Discussion

How does it feel to have those words used to describe you?

Turn to the person next to you and say, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (this will be awkward for many people but encourage them to try).

Activity

Give every person a small handful of play dough.

The task is to make a person, complete with eyes, nose, mouth, ears, fingers, toes, etc. BUT the person can only be 5cm tall.

Link: There will no doubt be some 'interesting' people being created. Hopefully there will be cries of how impossible it is to make a complete person that small. And yet, it's what God does!

Talk/Message

Note: See **USB** for talk and PowerPoint.

Reflection & Prayer

Song

Psalm 139 or *How Great is our God*

Depending on the group, the reflection could be a time of celebration and praise prayers OR it could be a time for those who struggle to accept that God loves them to come and kneel and be prayed for and with.

Note: Be aware of women in the group who may have had a miscarriage or termination. Hearing how developed a baby is in those early stages of pregnancy could be very painful.

Wonder woman

JOANNE SMITH

Preparation

- Invite the women in your group to come dressed in their best Wonder Woman costumes.
OR Provide craft materials for them to make Wonder Woman costumes when they arrive. You might like to award prizes for the best costume, most budget friendly, etc.
- Bake cupcakes and prepare materials for decorating
- Supply the sharing questions in advance to allow individuals to consider their responses

Cupcakes

Decorate cupcakes in Wonder Woman themes. There are several different ideas online. Here is one to try

<http://www.myrecipes.com/recipe/wonder-woman-cupcakes>

Share

Give some advance warning for these questions so that people have a chance to consider their responses. You could even provide them with the questions a week in advance.

- What is your best secret super power?
- What is your best secret weapon? *E.g. Sense of humour, Magic eraser scrubbing pad, Dyson vacuum cleaner, pen, dancing shoes, slow cooker, green thumb, oil pastels, positive attitude.*
- If you could choose any super power what would it be?

Game

Have a Wonder Woman competition...

Choose 3 volunteers. Ask them to race to complete the following tasks

- Apply eye shadow, lipstick and rouge without a mirror
- Do the shopping – collect items from a shopping list from around your space
- Send an email – type an email explaining why you should win the ‘Wonder Woman’ competition and send it to the leader

Reflect

Women in our culture often take on many roles. What roles do you have? Which of these roles have you chosen? Which of these roles have been imposed on you?

It may seem like the world wants us to be Wonder Woman. The pressure can be real for us to juggle many different roles, to perform these roles flawlessly and to ensure that we are perfectly presented while we are doing it. The reality is that none of us are ‘Wonder Woman’, no matter how hard we try to live up to the expectations. We make mistakes. We grow tired. We get grumpy. We comfort eat. We procrastinate. We lose our temper. We forget. We are imperfect.

We were not created to be Wonder Woman but we were created to do wonderful things. Our ability to do them is not dependent on us being perfect but on us being perfected by God’s grace.

READ: [Ephesians 2:8-10 \(NIV\)](#)

My place in the universe

CHERALYNNE PETHYBRIDGE

SCRIPTURE:

Psalm 8

Psalm 19

Psalm 139

DÉCOR: Anything to do with space.

SONGS:

How great is our God

How great thou art

Many are the things

There are hundreds and thousands

All heaven declares

Indescribable

VIDEO: *Indescribable*, Louis Giglio, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNgJhulCrVA> (43 mins 52 seconds)

CLIPS: There are numerous clips relating to space, such as the journey of the Hubble Space Telescope, which are available on YouTube. Chris Tomlin's song *Indescribable*, with lyrics and illustrations from nature, is also on YouTube.

ACTIVITIES:

- Name the planets. In order of distance from the sun (closest first) they are:
Mercury - Venus - Earth - Mars - Jupiter - Saturn - Uranus - Neptune - Pluto
- Space Quiz (**USB**)

Devotional thought

I have always been fascinated and awed by the night sky. As a teenager I would often lie in the driveway of the place where I lived and try to work out the locations of the various constellations. This interest has not waned. Opportunities to visit observatories, and live in and visit isolated communities, have only added to this fascination.

There is nothing more amazing than being in a location where there are no city lights – the night sky seems to come alive, and the longer one looks at the stars and planets, the more intense and complex it becomes. The Psalmist also had a fascination with the night sky and there are numerous references within that book to the majesty of the heavens and mankind's place in it.

In **Psalm 8** the Psalmist declares the majesty and glory of God, recognising the Creator's power and sovereignty over the entire universe. Here David is reflecting on creation and the place of man within it. It is very evident that David is totally in awe as he looks into the sky and considers His place in creation. I, along with David, am constantly amazed by God's creative 'genius'.

In **verse 4** David asks the question, 'what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?'

It is easy to feel lost in the presence of the night sky. David would have looked at the sky in a purer form than we do today. There would have been very little light to detract from its magnificence. There would have been no space junk infiltrating its reaches, no satellites needing to be discerned from the stars and planets.

Today's city dwellers never see the night sky in all its complexity. The lights of the buildings and the traffic blur and diminish the brilliance of the stars. The vastness of space

can overwhelm and it is understandable that we would feel insignificant within it. It is easy to feel increasingly 'small' when looking into space. It is easy to ask questions such as, 'where do I fit?' and 'what is my place in God's creation?'

David's question in **Psalm 8:4** is answered time and time again through the provision of God for His most wonderful creation – **US!**

In **Psalm 139 verse 14**, David praises God as he recognises that the Creator of the Universe made him as well! God created you and me! That fact alone seals how important we are to God.

The fact that the God who created the heavens (and the earth) took the time to create you and me is simply amazing! We are not insignificant – our place in the world was considered and planned!

The Psalmist goes on to declare where God has placed us in His creation, You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honour, You made them rulers over the work of your hands: you put everything under their feet.

Psalm 8:5-8

God has given us an honoured place in His creation, a place of authority and responsibility. Even more than this is the fact that God created us, not just to look spectacular - He made us to have a relationship with Him! A relationship where everything that we think, do, or say is known to Him. A relationship where He is Lord and where His presence is with us in every situation.

What an incredible peace we have in the knowledge that the all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere present God who created the world is intimately interested in us and wants nothing more than to be involved in every aspect of our life!

The eye of God

LEISA HUMBLEY

DÉCOR

Space theme: planets, fairy lights, world globe, stars.

- Stars template – see printable template (**USB**). Print on silver, gold or yellow card
- Drape fairy lights across the ceiling with hanging stars (see printable template of stars)
- Decorate tables with tea light candles in different sized mason jars
- Star table scatters (available from party supply stores)
- Make star shaped cookies for morning tea
- Use fun-size Milky Way or Mars chocolate bars for prizes
- Star shaped Christmas ornaments may be used for décor or prizes

Search for Stars Themed Décor ideas on [Pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com)

YOU WILL NEED:

- Space Quiz Sheet for each person if using that option
Download link: <http://sciencekids.co.nz/quizzes/space.html>
- Helix nebula picture (**USB**). Print as Poster, or show on screen.
- Solar System Bingo Game – free download available online from [ArtsyCraftsyMom.com](https://www.artsycraftsymom.com)
Download link: <https://gumroad.com/l/eCpII#>

Welcome and introduction to theme

Ever wondered just how great and how magnificent God, our Creator really is?

1. Use the Youtube Video of Louie Giglio's Worship with Stars and Whales.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=helxFeG-0n0> (9 mins)

2. Or, describe the above video:

Recently an American pastor and science lover, Louie Giglio, discovered the amazing sounds from space. The sounds were a repetitive rumble, sort of like a drum beat. These sound waves are caused by an exploded star that is oscillating and emitting radio frequent pulsar sounds 11 times per second. Along with this pulsar, there are millions of other stars oscillating at different speeds and omitting different sounds ... much like the string section of an incredibly big orchestra.

Inspired by **Psalm 148**, Louie combines the sound waves from space with the wails of the whales in the deep of the ocean. The whales/wails give a melodic balance to the rhythmic beating of the stars. Using an App on an iPad/Tablet, Louie mixes the sounds together and adds a popular Christian worship song, How Great Is Our God ... then he invites the congregation to sing with the stars and the whales in unified worship together. It truly is an amazing sound to listen to.

What an incredible thought ... that we can sing and worship together with all of God's creation, for God to hear our voices accompanying the magnificent creatures of the deep vast sea and space.

Today we are invited to marvel at the amazing wonder of God and find our significant place in God's creation, being a part of the incredible symphony of God's Orchestra.

Worship

Song suggestions

God of Wonders, Kutless: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LiEO-HvdDYY> (3 mins)

How Great Is Our God, Don Moen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coPD8amHKO4> (5 mins)

This is my Father's world HLSB 117

Scripture

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. (NRSV)

Genesis 1:1-3

The unfathomable cosmos came into being at the word of the Eternal's imagination, a solitary voice in endless darkness. The breath of His mouth whispered the sea of stars into existence. (VOICE)

Psalm 33:6

Every considered how small and insignificant we are in comparison to all that God has created?

Prayer

Space Quiz

Can you finish this line: "Twinkle, twinkle little star" [how I wonder what you are]

How often have you actually 'wondered' about that twinkling little star?

Did you know that stars don't actually twinkle at all? They shine, and as we heard earlier... they also sing.

Space Quiz

Space is a mysterious place but there are plenty of things we are sure about when it comes to that vast space that surrounds us here on earth. And there is still so much more to learn and discover.

Here's a little quiz to see just how much we know, or don't know about our very own galaxy. (Space Quiz, <http://sciencekids.co.nz/quizzes/space.html>)

Note: You may like to reduce the Quiz to 10 Questions, depending on time available.

You may also like to have prizes, such as a Fun-sized Milky May or Mars chocolate or star cookie, star shaped ornament etc.

Options for Quiz

- Option 1** Print the quiz for each of the participants and have them complete it, perhaps with some background music.
- Option 2** Ask each question to the whole group.
- Option 3** Invite three contestants to the front. Using their name, or the name of a planet as their 'buzzer', ask them the quiz questions.

Sharing

Does anyone remember watching or listening to the broadcast of Aldrin and Armstrong's walk on the moon in 1969?

What impact did that event have on you?

Encourage the group to share their memories and inspire discussion around these events that expand our perception of the world in which we live. Maybe discuss how we feel about alien life on other planets, moving to Mars or other related topics.

Fun Facts

From: <http://sciencekids.co.nz/sciencefacts/space.html>

A star is a massive, bright sphere of very hot gas called plasma which is held together by its own gravity.

As a star is near the end of its life, it begins to change its helium into heavier chemical elements, such as carbon and oxygen, and the star will begin to change colour, density, mass and size.

After the Sun in our Solar System, the nearest star to Earth is Proxima Centauri. It is about 39.9 trillion km away or 4.2 light years. This means it takes light from this star 4.2 years to reach Earth. Using the newest, fastest space probe propulsion systems, it would still take a craft about 75,000 years to get there.

There are approximately 200-400 billion stars in our Milky Way Galaxy alone.

Each galaxy contains hundreds of billions of stars and there is estimated to be over 100 billion galaxies in the universe.

Show Picture of Helix Nebula ... Eye of God.

Explanation from: https://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/imagegallery/image_feature_2368.html

This is an image taken by a satellite telescope. It is a dead star called the Helix nebula and is sometimes referred to as the Eye of God ... because it remarkably looks like a human eye.

“In death, the star's dusty outer layers are unraveling into space, glowing from the intense ultraviolet radiation being pumped out by the hot stellar core. This object ... lies 650 light-years away. It is a typical example of a class of objects called planetary nebulae. Planetary nebulae are actually the remains of stars that once looked a lot like our sun. These stars spend most of their lives turning hydrogen into helium in massive runaway nuclear fusion reactions in their cores. In fact, this process of fusion provides all the light and heat that we get from our sun. Our sun will blossom into a planetary nebula when it dies in about five billion years. Before the helix nebula star died, its comets, and possibly planets, would have orbited the star in an orderly fashion. When

the star ran out of hydrogen to burn, and blew off its outer layers, the icy bodies and outer planets would have been tossed about and into each other, kicking up an ongoing cosmic dust storm. Any inner planets in the system would have burned up or been swallowed as their dying star expanded.”

Are you feeling rather small? Well, we should be! Compared to the vast universe that our Father in Heaven has created, we are small! In the words of Louie Giglio:

“God breathes out stars a million times the size of the earth. Sin has a way of shrinking God down and puffing us up.” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRiIWL04po8>, accessed 28th April, 2017)

We need to keep things in perspective. Our Great Big God, who created the stars with just a word, looks upon us each with intimate care and concern. We are small, but we are significant.

GAME: Solar System Bingo – free download available from [ArtsyCraftsyMom.com](https://www.ArtsyCraftsyMom.com)
Download Link: <https://gumroad.com/l/eCpll#>

Scripture

You are the Eternal, the only One.
The skies are Your work alone —
You made the heavens above those skies
and the stars that fill them.
You made the earth and everything upon it,
the seas and all that lives within their depths.
Your creation lives and is sustained by You,
and those who dwell in the heavens
Fall down before You and worship. (VOICE)
Nehemiah 9:6

So, how can we find our significance in such a vast Creation?

God said: “Now let Us conceive a new creation—humanity—made in Our image, fashioned according to Our likeness. And let Us grant them authority over all the earth—the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, the domesticated animals and the small creeping creatures on the Earth.” (VOICE)
Genesis 1:26

Our significance is found in our likeness to God himself. We are created in his image. We are given authority to care for the rest of God’s creation that is within our reach; the earth, the moon, the planets and stars that are a part of our world and our existence. We are invited by God to participate and unite with the rest of creation to worship and praise him. God is looking on us, and God is listening to us to hear our praises of Him.

Even more significant is the fact that God himself came down from heaven to dwell among us.

Paul's letter to the Colossians describes the significance of Jesus, the man who lived, died and rose again to give our lives significance and purpose. He wrote:

He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (NRSV)

Colossians 1:15-20

We too become shining starry lights in the world by being like Jesus and inviting God's fullness, his Holy Spirit to dwell in us.

Do everything readily and cheerfully—no bickering, no second-guessing allowed! Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message into the night. (MSG)

Philippians 2:14-15

Final song suggestions:

Oh, what a wonderful, wonderful day HLSB 78

God's love to me is wonderful HLSB 24

His eye is on the sparrow, Whitney Houston: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCfFi8SDz6I> (3:30 mins)

I will run to you (your eye is on the sparrow), Hillsong; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Asqyfls8sPs> (5 mins) or instrumental: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKjloo-f3r8> (4 mins)

Prayer

Benediction

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
10 so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. (NRSV)

Philippians 2:9-11

Wonderful creation colouring pages

MISSION SUPPORT TEAM

Colouring for adults has become a popular way to relax and to enjoy beautifying a page. It is a simple task for people of any ability level, so can be enjoyed by just about anyone.

The five colouring pages attached (see **USB**) feature:

- A sunflower design with wording, *God of Wonders*
- A floral pattern reminiscent of a peacock's feathers
- A doe, with wording, *Sharing the love of Jesus*
- An intricately patterned toucan perched on a branch
- A kangaroo with joey, with the word, *HOPE*

Suggestions for including colouring pages in your women's meeting

1. Invite women to colour their page while thinking about the ways God's love, power, creativity and/or wonder is shown in His creation.
2. Play a song and invite women to colour the picture while they listen.
3. Invite women to choose a picture that symbolizes an aspect of God's character – share with the group why they chose that picture, then spend time colouring it.
4. Give women a choice of activities in which they can share in the creative process that God has initiated. E.g. colouring a picture; making something from craft materials; writing a poem, story or prayer; drawing or painting a picture.
5. As above, but invite the women to engage in this activity as a prayer, or to represent the thing they love most about God, etc.
6. Invite the women to ask God to speak to them, perhaps about a particular issue in their lives, in their community or in the world, while they colour. Then share about what they heard from God during this time.

7. If you have a craft session and some of the women find the craft too challenging, invite them to colour a picture instead.
8. Provide clipboards and pencils. Visit a place of natural beauty and colour whilst enjoying the beautiful surroundings.
9. Ask the women to identify a verse that speaks about the wonder of God. They can write the words of the verse into spaces within the picture, then colour.
10. Arrange for the women to join a children's group within your corps for a session. They can sit and colour alongside the children while they discuss the wonders of nature.
11. Choose an audio version of the Bible. Allow Psalms to play in the background while the women colour and reflect.

Wonders of the world



China

HAZEL FORD

China is the world's fourth largest country, after Russia, Canada and the USA, and is bordered by 14 other countries. The population is over 1.3 billion, with a city like Shanghai having more people living there than all the population of Australia.

All the land is owned by the government, which is a Communist Republic. If you want to build a house or business you lease the land from the government. Because of its size, the climate varies over the country and there are deserts, fertile river valleys, forests, plains and mountain areas.

It is a fascinating country and the people are really lovely and friendly.

Song

In Christ there is no east or west (SA Song Book 826, NTB 129).

Choose any of the following aspects of Chinese culture that the ladies might be interested in.

Note: If you have a lady who is from China, or has been to China, ask them beforehand to help lead this session.

Silk

China is the birthplace of silk. Sericulture (the raising of silkworms for silk production) has a history of over 6,000 years. Legend has it that Lady Hsi-Lin-Shih (wife of the Yellow Emperor Huangdi) was having tea under a mulberry tree when a cocoon fell into her cup. As she watched, the cocoon spun a strong white thread. She unwound the strand onto her finger, realizing that it could be used as weaving thread. Thus an industry was born. She taught her people how to raise silkworms, and later invented the loom.

Silk was originally only worn by wealthy people, but has become a popular choice for clothing and furnishings around the world.

<http://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/culture/chinese-silk.htm>

Rugs

Originally, Chinese carpets were woven by hand and were just for use in China. It was not until the first half of the 19th century that the Chinese began to export their rugs.

Calligraphy

Calligraphy, literally "beautiful writing," has been appreciated as an art form in many different cultures throughout the world, but in Chinese culture is highly valued. In China, from a very early period, calligraphy was considered not just a form of decorative art, but as the supreme visual art form. It was more valued than painting and sculpture, and ranked alongside poetry as a means of self-expression and cultivation. How a person wrote was just as important as what they wrote.

Chinese calendar

See Chinese years handout **(USB)**

The traditional Chinese calendar is complicated, and based on the movements of the sun, moon and earth. The years are named on a 12 year cycle, with each year represented by an animal which, according to tradition, affects the life and character of people born in that year. Legend tells us that Buddha called all animals together on New Year, but only 12 came. As a reward a year was named after each animal. Let us discover our animal sign and personality characteristics.

Give out Chinese Years handout **(USB)**

Which animal are you?

Do you think the description of that animal type reflects your personality?

SONG: *This is my Father's world*, SASB 42, NTB 186

Tea

Tea (cha) has been drunk in China for thousands of years, and it is one of China's best known products. For centuries China was the only exporter of tea in the world.

Food

The foods most commonly consumed in China are rice, noodles, tofu (bean curd), meats (mainly beef, chicken, pork and duck), eggs, and lots of vegetables. The food is often spiced with ginger, garlic, chillies, spring onions or coriander. Food is also a big factor in traditional medical treatments.

Dumplings are a famous traditional northern Chinese food. They are half-moon-shaped, soft, stuffed pasta — like ravioli. Dumplings are named according to their various fillings and cooking methods (fried, heated in boiling water, or steamed).

Eating dumplings at the Spring Festival is said to bring good fortune financially, as dumplings look like ingots, the currency used in old times.

Jade

Jade is a metamorphic rock that is naturally coloured green, red, yellow, or white. When it is polished and treated, the vibrant colours of jade can be extraordinary. The most popular kind of jade in Chinese culture is green jade, which has an emerald hue.

Called 玉 (yù) in Chinese, jade is very important in Chinese culture because of its beauty, practical use, and social value.

Cloisonné

Cloisonné is an art technique that is mainly used to decorate metal objects or ceramics. Chinese cloisonné enamelware is made by embedding small pieces of material such as flecks of gold or powdered mineral in enamel. Enamel is a layer of glass melted onto a surface. Craftsmen may apply many thin layers of enamel with embedded material, firing (heating) each layer to coat an object. If the process is done well, the result can be a **strikingly colourful and even sparkling** hard surface with translucent depth that looks unusual compared to simple painted ceramics or lacquer ware.

CHORUS 1: *Beautiful Christ* (SASB 175 NTB 526 - Chorus only)

PRAYER

Great Wall

Like a writhing dragon's tail, the **Great Wall of China** snakes its way across China's northern border. The Wall is often considered one of the greatest man-made wonders of the world.

The Great Wall of China's history stretches back more than 2,000 years, to a time before China was even a unified country.

Despite its name, the Great Wall is not actually a single wall. It is a collection of walls and fortifications, some of which run parallel to one another, while others are circular or side walls. There are even portions of the Great Wall that are natural barriers, like rivers or high mountains.

Hundreds of years before any official construction on the Great Wall began, individual Chinese states built fortifications against one another, using mostly earth, wood, and stones. Construction during the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644) made use of bricks rather than cut stone, which appears largely in the foundation and gateways.

According to [History.com](https://www.history.com), Qin Shi Huang had a **labour force of nearly 300,000 soldiers**, commoners, and prisoners. Hundreds of thousands of men died while working on the wall, which required them to carry heavy materials on their backs up to the top of the ridgelines.

Much of the work on the oldest sections of the Great Wall was done by hand, though primitive technology — wheel barrows, ropes, basket-and-pulley-systems, and horse or oxen-drawn carts — was also used.

Despite its cultural and historic importance, it wasn't until 1987 that the Great Wall of China was listed as a World Heritage site by UNESCO.

Every year, more than 10 million people visit the Great Wall of China, making it one of the world's most popular tourist attractions.

Message

Good Morning China – The Chronicle of The Salvation Army in China 1916-2000, a book by Lieut-Colonel Check-Hung Yee, OF, a story of dedication and heroism in this vast country. It is a compelling story of struggle, courage and enduring faith.

The Bible is now the number one best-seller in China and the country has one of the world's fastest growing bodies of Christian believers.

The last request of William Booth, on his deathbed in 1912, to his son Bramwell:
I have been thinking very much during the last few nights about China. I greatly regret the Lord has not permitted me to raise our flag amongst that wonderful people. Promise me that you will begin the work in China.

The story in China is inspiring. Salvation Army missionaries held their first services in Shantung in 1916, and the work spread over northern China. By 1932 the Army had ninety centres in five northern provinces, in Shanghai, and in Hong Kong. In Peiping, the Boys' Home had its own famous brass band. The Army's work, however, was almost destroyed by the Second World War and the civil war in China. In 1948 expatriate missionaries were expelled from China. At the same time most Chinese officers, unpaid, cut off from outside support or guidance, their buildings wrecked or confiscated, their soldiers scattered, were driven out of the movement.

A few, led by Major Yin Hungshun, remained loyal throughout the long years of adversity; these were triumphantly reunited with The Salvation Army in 1987 when retired General Arnold Brown, accompanied by the Dulwich Brass Band from Britain, visited Yin in China.

From Captain Jeremy Lam:

Since 1988, The Salvation Army has begun its involvement in emergency relief work in China. After each serious disaster, such as floods in Eastern China and Yangzi River, earthquakes in Yunnan and Hebei, and blizzards in inner Mongolia, you can find that The Salvation Army is fighting the disaster and going through the difficult time together with the victims.

As soon as The Salvation Army receives news of the disaster, an emergency relief team is organized to acquire the update information from local civil affairs or other departments concerned. At the same time, project personnel are dispatched to the site to collect first-hand information from which overall relief plan and strategies are worked out.

Apart from applying for emergency relief funds from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government, The Salvation Army is active at organizing all kinds of public donation activities to mobilize more resources for disaster areas to relieve victims' hardship and meet their urgent needs.

With support from various overseas groups of The Salvation Army as well as other overseas organizations and individuals, we started disaster rehabilitation projects in China. The Salvation Army has been working on community reconstruction, education, health and other development work in various provinces, such as Hebei, Anhui, Guangxi, Jiangxi, Hunan, Yunnan and Inner Mongolia. Till now, a total of over RMB 80 million (about 50 million Australian dollars) has been put into the relief and rehabilitation work in China through The Salvation Army.

Poverty Alleviation and Development Projects

To date, over 100 poverty alleviation and development projects have been implemented by The Salvation Army in deprived areas of China. The total number of beneficiaries has exceeded one million. In addition to resolving urgent needs of the locals, we are also working on bringing long-term benefits and effects to them. In doing so, we adhere to our tenet, hope that by providing the people with the necessary guidance and support we will empower them to develop by themselves and hence lead to an improvement in the quality of their lives.

Our projects cover the following five areas:

- **Basic Construction:** Water & electricity supply, construction of sanitary toilets, etc.
- **Education and Training:** School (re)construction, teaching materials and equipment, girls' classes, basic literacy training, teacher training, etc.
- **Agriculture and Production:** Agricultural and vocational training, micro-credit, agricultural and husbandry production, material support, etc.
- **Health Care and Sanitation:** (Re)construction of clinics and hospitals, providing medical equipment and medicine, training for medical personnel, community health education, etc.
- **Community Integrated Development:** A concept of poverty alleviation in rural areas. It advocated the local community's direct participation in needs assessment, programming and distribution of relief funds.

In 1996, the Army established an office in Kunming (Yunnan) to oversee its growing portfolio of projects in southwest China. Several rural development projects are under way in Yunnan, together with work in basic education and in AIDS prevention. In 2001, a second office was established in Beijing to cover north China. This oversees ongoing community development programmes in Inner Mongolia and forestry projects in Hebei, Hubei and Anhui.

And just for interest, from the beginning of the work in 1916, women's meetings were held. They were not called Home League until 1933, when those who had become Christians were 'promoted' to Home League while the usual meeting for ladies was still run. Before the First World War, as a result of a talk on Dorcas, the Chinese Home Leaguers undertook to make clothes for Christmas for the needy and 100 garments were made. To help finance the effort, these ladies went without biscuits with their tea and often without milk and sugar. At Christmas there was a wonderful meeting when the people came to get their parcels, plus a packet of sweets and nuts, donated by the Headquarters Officers.

Let us pray for the work of all Christians as they minister among the 1.3 billion souls in China.

BIBLE READING: The Great Commission,
Matthew 28:16-20 (in fortune cookies?)

SONG: *They shall come from the east*, SASB
170, Tune NTB 831

BENEDICTION

In every land where man is found,
Let us make known the story
Of love divine; its praises sound
And give to Jesus glory.

Seven wonders

JOANNE SMITH

Preparation

- Ask each member to choose a ‘wonder’ from their own home, something that they marvel at, and bring it with them. E.g. an item from nature, an artwork, a photograph or a decorative item.
- Prepare a set of trivia questions relating to the Seven Wonders of the World lists
You can find questions at these trivia websites:
 - » <http://www.sevenwondersbooks.com/quiz>
 - » <http://www.proprofs.com/quiz-school/story.php?title=seven-wonders--world>
 - » <http://www.proprofs.com/quiz-school/story.php?title=seven-ancient-wonders-of-the-world-quiz>
 - » http://www.funtrivia.com/quizzes/world/world_sites/seven_ancient_wonders.html
 - » http://www.softschools.com/quizzes/social_studies/seven_wonders_of_the_ancient_world/quiz2962.html
 - » <http://www.triviaplaza.com/seven-wonders-ancient-world-quiz/>
 - » <http://www.braingle.com/trivia/30837/the-seven-wonders-of-the-modern-world.html>
 - » http://www.softschools.com/quizzes/geography/the_new_seven_wonders_of_the_world/quiz4210.html
- Set up AV equipment and download the YouTube clip, Seven wonders of the world through a child’s eyes <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjZq1tVcqZY>.
- You might like to decorate using images from some of these lists
 - » <http://kellyellamaz.com/2013/03/25/the-new-seven-wonders-of-the-world/>
 - » https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New7Wonders_of_the_World

Introduction

There are wonders all around us, both in the natural and the man-made world. Over the centuries, lists have been created to help us categorise and rank the most amazing of these marvels. Sometimes the lists vary as it can be difficult to narrow down all the wonders of our world to a list of just seven.

Explore

Take some time to explore some of the various '*Seven Wonders*' lists.

- Divide into groups. Name a list and ask each to come up with as many items as they can think of. For example, 'Name the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World'.
- Trivia Quiz: there are plenty of quizzes available on the internet, based on the various '*Seven Wonders*' lists. Choose a set of questions and test the knowledge of your group.

Share

Invite each participant to share about the item they have chosen to bring with them

- What is special about this item?
- Why is it precious to you?
- Was it difficult to choose just one item?

Reflect

WATCH YOUTUBE: seven wonders of the world through a child's eyes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjZq1tVcqZY>

There are many things that cause us to stop and wonder. This is true in the natural world, the man made world and the spiritual world.

READ: **Psalms 5:7**

Brainstorm

What are the things of the spiritual world that fill you with wonder?

Brainstorm and create some lists :

- Seven Wonders of the Christian world
- Seven Wonders of God's Kingdom
- Seven Wonders of the Church

Wonders of the world

PAMELA HODGE

Introduction

Louis Armstrong sang a lovely song, *What a Wonderful World*.

Watch the clip of this at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21LGv8Cf0us>.

At school we learnt about the 7 wonders of the ancient world. Can you remember them?
(Competition or discussion)

1. Pyramids (or Great Pyramid) of Giza
2. Hanging Gardens of Babylon
3. Statue of Zeus at Olympia
4. Temple of Artemis at Ephesus
5. Mausoleum at Halicarnassus
6. Colossus of Rhodes
7. Lighthouse of Alexandria

7 wonders of the modern world:

1. Christ the Redeemer statue in Brazil
2. Great Wall of China
3. Machu Picchu
4. Petra Jordan
5. Pyramids in Mexico
6. Colosseum in Rome
7. Taj Mahal

Discussion

What are the 'wonders' in your world?

People? Places? Events?

Message

'And I think to myself what a wonderful world' and what a wonderful God who created it.

His wonders are boundless but let's look at seven of them:

1	Wonderful grace	2 Corinthians 12:9	'But He said to me " <i>My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness</i> ".'
2	Wonderful love	John 3:16	'For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish.'
3	Wonderful power	Luke 1:37	'For nothing is impossible with God'
4	Wonderful plans	Jeremiah 29:11	'" <i>For I know the plans I have for you</i> ", declares the Lord, " <i>plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.</i> "'
5	Wonderful presence	Matthew 28:20	'And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.'
6	Wonderful promises	2 Corinthians 1:20	'For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'yes' in Christ.'
7	Wonderful ability	Ephesians 3:20	'Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power at work within us.'

Which of these do you find the most wonderful in your own life? Share with another person (or with the group) which it is and why.

SUGGESTED SONGS:

Wonderful grace that gives what I don't deserve

Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful love, coming to me from heaven above

**Wonders of
everyday life**



Recapturing the wonder

JOANNE SMITH

Wonder is the beginning of wisdom - Socrates

Reflection of a firework

When our children were young we braved the crowds and joined millions around the steps of the Opera House for the New Year's Eve fireworks. By half past eight my legs were aching, I was irritated by the constant encroachment of strangers into my personal space, and the smell of the 'porta-loos', brought in especially for the occasion, was beginning to overpower the scent of sea water, fumes and fast food.

As the first fireworks began to explode over the harbor my attention was firmly invested in making plans for a hasty getaway before the final lights faded from the sky. Pausing in my mental list making, I glanced down at our youngest child and saw the sparkle of a cracker reflected in her eyes. She didn't notice me observing her. She paid no heed to the push and shove of the crowd. The aroma of the toilets did nothing to distract her.

As each new 'boom' shook the ground below us, her mouth silently formed into fresh expressions of wonder and appreciation. The exploding flashes of light and colour captured her attention and filled her with awe. She marveled at the magic of sudden bursts of beauty in the blackness.

For an instant, I was transported back to the years of my life when the world seemed fresh and new and wonder-filled. As I watched the reflected light of the fireworks in her eyes I too shared in a moment of appreciation for the phenomenon playing out before me. I have experienced this at other times too. The quiet footsteps at crazy-o'clock on a Christmas morning, when the excitement of the Season apparently negates the need for sleep; the giggles and chatter that come with a train ride into the city, followed by the wide-eyed craning of necks to take in the topmost point of ridiculously tall buildings; the insistence on stopping to investigate every twig, every flower and every insect when the destination is all I have in mind.

Perhaps you can relate. Perhaps you too can think of a time when the natural excitement of a child permitted you to recapture the wonder of youth.

While studying aspects of early childhood development I learnt not to answer every question that a child asks. I can think of two good reasons for this. Firstly, answering every one of the endless questions leaves me dazed and exhausted. Secondly, wonder is an integral element of childhood development. When I answer every question I deny them the opportunity to imagine and hypothesise and discover. These processes permit them to learn far more successfully than if I gave them a narrow, succinct response. Eventually, I realized that the best answer I could give was often, 'I wonder?' But the truth is, I rarely do actually wonder. Somehow I seem to feel that my worth as an intelligent, sophisticated adult is threatened by any admission of awe.

What about you? As a child, what did you wonder or marvel at? What captured and held your attention?

What about as an adult? What do you wonder about now?

The sad reality is that this same pattern is often true of our spiritual lives. Think back to when you first recall encountering God.

- Describe your sense of wonder at this experience.
- How has it changed over time?

What impact does it make when our sense of wonder in God begins to wane? We start to feel like we don't need him; we suspect that we may be good enough without him; we forfeit some of our closeness and intimacy with him; we miss his daily miracles; and we lose a sense of fullness and depth in our lives.

What can we do to revive our sense of wonder at who God is; at how he operates; at the way he relates to us as a community and as individuals?

- **Slow down** – just as a child meanders along a pathway, we too can slow down a little and value the journey as much as the destination.
- **Notice** – as a child strolls along they notice every insect, flower and pebble. We cannot appreciate and wonder at God's goodness unless we first notice it.
- **Share it** – children are rarely content to just notice the small miracles of life. They want to share them. They want others to join them in wonder. When we join together in wonder, our own sense of appreciation increases

I wonder!

GLENYS DOMROW

DÉCOR: Random half-finished set up? I wonder ... ? (Like you can't make up your mind)

SCRIPTURE: **Isaiah 29:14 (NIV)**

¹⁴ Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.

Or any other verses appropriate to the Wonder of God

Preparation

Print out enough *A Wonder Walk* sheets (**USB**) for each person. Have Bibles available.

Introduction

How many times have you said "I wonder"?

I wonder what kind of day it will be ...
I wonder what she thinks of me ...
I wonder if he will be happy with ...
I wonder if God hears my prayers ...
I wonder... I wonder... I wonder?

Let's wonder as we wander together today through the majesty and glory of our God. Let's not ever lose our wonder.

SONG SUGGESTIONS:

The wonder of it all ...

Love Divine all love excelling ... (Lost in wonder love and praise)

Have you been to Jesus (wonder working power)

Wonder Walk

Give each person a **Wonder Walk sheet** and make time and space for them to work through the sheet and spend time with God.

Bibles would be helpful for this time.

PRAYER: Make this time a culmination of the Wonder Walk.

Challenge: I Wonder!

We started today by asking if you have ever said the following:

I wonder what kind of day it will be ...

I wonder what she thinks of me ...

I wonder if he will be happy with ...

I wonder if God hears my prayers ...

In a day and age when we have become very conditioned to having, seeing and doing the best, it's pretty difficult to impress anyone any longer. We have so many questions and are constantly challenged by things around us. We expect a show; we thrive on activity and excitement, and it takes more and more to get our attention. Take the word wonderful; it means full of wonder. As we look at children, we see how easily they are impressed and are often filled with wonder at things and people. Their eyes light up, big grins break out on their faces and their mouths drop open as they are filled with wonder at new and exciting experiences. And as grownups, parents and grandparents, we so enjoy watching them enjoy the wonders around them.

I sometimes think it's that childlike wonder that we so often and so easily lose in our walk with the Lord. Yes, we've got the doctrine straight; yes, we're faithful to our church and yes, we read the Bible and pray occasionally. But we lose the wonder, the joy, the excitement, the curiosity that is ours to enjoy. We lose it and walking with Jesus becomes a chore. We get hung up wondering or worrying about the wrong things, instead of concentrating on Jesus.

The church at Ephesus had lost the wonder. In **Revelation 2** we read about all the good things they had done and were doing, but it was written about them that they had forsaken their first love. That's another way of saying they lost the wonder.

I wonder if you have lost the wonder? Maybe today we could do a check-up on ourselves as we look at some of the wonders we need to recover.

Let's ask ourselves today the following questions ...

Have we lost the wonder of our salvation?

Nothing could be more wonderful than our salvation. To wonder that God sent his Son to die as a sacrifice for our sins, that he has enabled us to believe in him and that because we

have believed, we are now his children and destined for heaven. That is wonderful!
Have you lost the wonder of it?

Have we lost the wonder of God's creation?

Do we take all the beauty and extravagance of the world for granted? When was the last time you enjoyed a beautiful flower or sunset?

Many of us have little balance in our life when it comes to enjoying God's creation, and we miss a great deal when we ignore the wonder of creation. You know, David was a man after God's own heart, and one reason was that he never lost the wonder of God. He wrote,

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him? **Psalm 8:3-4**

Have you lost the creation? Take some time to sit and look around you at the beauty of the world.

Have we lost the wonder of our uniqueness?

So often we forget who we are in Christ and the wonder of how God has created us. Again David wrote, 'For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made'. **Psalm 139:13-14**.

You are made full of wonder ... have you ever really appreciated the wonder of who you are? You know it is totally biblical to be amazed at the wonder of God's creativity in you.

Have we lost the wonder of what God has called us to do?

Sometimes we just get caught up in the hard work, the busy schedule, the long days, and we lose the wonder that God calls us to serve him and uses us in the lives of other people. Has your ministry, your work for God, simply become another thing on your to-do list? Have you lost the wonder that God would, could, and does use you as part of his kingdom work? Ask God to restore the wonder of what you have been called to do. It makes it so much easier to get up each day when you feel a sense of wonder at God's working in your life.

Have we lost the wonder of prayer?

If you find that prayer is difficult or dry or uninteresting, it may be because you've lost the wonder of what it means to be able to pray to the living God. As Christians we are privileged to go right to God's throne, at any time, for as long as we wish, and spend intimate time alone with the God of all creation. Wow, that is wonderful, isn't it? And to add to this, the Bible teaches us that if we ask anything in the name of Jesus, God will hear us and answer. Prayer is so incredible. Have you ever really appreciated the wonder of prayer?

I do hope you were able to be honest with yourself as we have worked through the check-up. If today, you are still saying, *I wonder...* about any of these areas please allow God to minister to you, and take him at his word.

Wonder in small things

FAY FOSTER

When you hear the word 'wonders', what do you think of?

Amazing sights or sounds?

The seven wonders of the world?

The miracles of Jesus?

All of these things are wonders. But if we think of wonders only as the big things in life, we can miss out on the little wonders that make our life wonderful.

I have always loved small things. Baby animals, miniature houses, tiny flowers ... for some reason I've always felt happy with little things.

As I grow older I love knowing that there will always be little things in my day, things that bring me happiness and wonder. The light shining on a bottle cap on the ground; a bird that suddenly appears outside my window; a flower that grows where I didn't expect it to; the laugh of a baby. Life is full of small wonders.

Activity

Have a set of cards with one of the following words on each card: **(USB)**

Baby	Kitten	Ring	Card	Letter
Toy	Hug	Child	Sunshine	Rain
Book	Phone call	Word	Encouragement	Insect
Flower	Rainbow	Cloud	Bird	Meal
Gift	Smile	Touch	Colour	Puppy
Picture	Drawing	Sound	Conversation	Saying

These set of cards are all small or simple things that we might see every day. But for some reason, some of them have become amazing or wonderful to us.

Choose one of the cards that reminds you of a time when you felt wonder, or experienced a wonderful change in your feelings or situation. Share your memories of this time with the group.

Let's look at some of the Bible passages that talk about small things.

How many are your works, LORD!
In wisdom you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

There is the sea, vast and spacious,
teeming with creatures beyond number—
living things both large and small.

Psalm 104:24-25

Four things on earth are small,
yet they are extremely wise:

Ants are creatures of little strength,
yet they store up their food in the summer;

hyraxes* are creatures of little power,
yet they make their home in the crags;

locusts have no king,
yet they advance together in ranks;

a lizard can be caught with the hand,
yet it is found in kings' palaces.

*A hyrax is a small furry animal

Proverbs 30:24-28

Who dares despise the day of small things, since the seven eyes of the Lord that range throughout the earth will rejoice when they see the chosen capstone in the hand of Zerubbabel? **Zechariah 4:10**

Here we see three meanings of **small things**.

The **Psalm** speaks of living things in the sea. **Proverbs** talks about little creatures that have a place on earth, even though they are small and seem insignificant.

Zechariah tells us to not look down on the small things that happen in God's service. Building a wall starts with one brick. Building a life of service to God may start with one small act of kindness, or one small decision that we will do things His way.

Compared with the ocean or the stars, we are very small things. But God doesn't despise us.

He loves us, cherishes us and gives us important roles in bringing His Kingdom on earth.

1. What is one small way in which you can help to bring God's Kingdom to earth this week? Allow a few minutes for the ladies to think what they might do, then time to share this if they'd like to.

E.g. It may be an act of kindness, a note written to encourage someone, a gift or meal prepared for someone who needs a friend.

2. What small thing can we do together over the next month to make a difference for those around us?

PRAYER: Let's ask for God's help and wisdom as we make our plans.

Discussion

How can our group bless those around us in some small way?

Five wonderful senses



Eye Wonder

JOANNE SMITH

Option 1

Take an excursion to a place of natural beauty.

- Enjoy the space.
- What do you notice?
- Take the time to wonder at God's creation.
- Share about:
 - » What the wonder of God's creation teaches you about who God is
 - » How the beauty and wonder of God's creation helps you grow closer to God

Option 2:

- Decorate your space
- Use iWorship clips
- Images of natural beauty
- Provide materials for each participant to:
 - » Create an artwork
 - » Make a collage from nature
 - » Make a floral arrangement
- We were made in the image of God – and that includes sharing his creativity. Share about this experience of creation: Did you enjoy it? Did you find that it motivated you to do more creating? What is your favourite kind of creativity? Why?

Hearing and listening

ROD YULE

Introduction

1. Ask the participants to share with a partner what sounds they like to listen to. What sounds in life do you enjoy? After a few minutes, ask the partner to share with the group the sounds that the other person likes.
2. Play *Guess the Sounds* (Guess the 22 sounds presented over five minutes – answers given at the end) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZsssS_I_2Y. There are quite a few similar games you can google.

Note: As an alternative to *Guess the Sounds*, make a collection of 10-20 short sounds or music excerpts and ask the participants to guess the sound or song.

3. Play Chinese Whispers. Ask the participants to sit in a circle and whisper one of the following sentences to the person next to you, and ask them to whisper it to the person next to them until the message comes back to the beginning of the circle.

Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. **James 1:9**

Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not disregard it.
Blessed are those who listen to me. **Proverbs 8:33-34**

4. If time permits, do this activity again with the other sentence.

General discussion

Listening is one of the easiest things you'll ever do, and one of the hardest.

In what sense is it easy and in what sense is it hard?

What makes it hard to listen well?

Bible discussion

In groups of four, read the following Bible passages and discuss what each says about the sense of 'hearing' and the art of 'listening'.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, *Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!* **Luke 10:38-40**

Listen to my instruction and be wise;
do not disregard it.
Blessed are those who listen to me,
watching daily at my doors,
waiting at my doorway.
For those who find me find life
and receive favour from the Lord. **Proverbs 8:33-35**

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. **James 1:19**

Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions ... To answer before listening - that is folly and shame. **(Proverbs 18:2,13)**

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. **Philippians 4:9**

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. **Romans 10:17**

After discussing the verses, ask the participants to think of a person who they regard as a 'good listener'. Ask them to share what makes that person a good listener – and how a good listener makes them feel.

Watch and 'listen' to the video clip: Being a good listener (4 min 57 seconds)

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

After watching and listening, ask, 'What are the four qualities of all good listeners?'

PRAYER: Spend time praying about the things discussed during the meeting.

Taste and see

CLAIRE HILL

YOU WILL NEED:

- Pens (one for every two participants)
- Printed handouts (one for every two participants)
- A batch of freshly made treats (e.g. fresh scones, cakes or a special slice)
- Small prize x 2

Optional – for ‘testimony’ section:

- A participant or guest who is willing to share for about 3 minutes about a recent time when they have personally experienced God’s goodness

Welcome

Welcome! In **Psalm 34:8** David implores us to, ‘Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.’

Today we are going to explore what this means.

First, we are going to play a game.

Game

Ask group members to get into pairs. Give each pair a copy of the handout and a pen.

Handout:

For each of the following 10 statements, indicate whether you think it is 'True' or 'False'.

1. True or false - We have taste buds in our cheeks
2. True or false - There are more than 7000 kinds of apple
3. True or false - The average tongue is about 5 inches long
4. True or false - You can see taste buds with the naked eye

5. True or false - Different 'zones' on the tongue pick up on different tastes (e.g. sweet, sour)
6. True or false - Your tongue print is as unique as your finger print
7. True or false - Women usually have longer tongues than men
8. True or false - 80% of what we experience as taste is actually smell
9. True or false - Flies and butterflies have taste organs in their feet
10. True or false - Humans lose almost half of their taste receptors by 20 years of age

Once participants have finished completing the handout, read out the correct answers so that members can score their sheets.

1. Answer: True
2. Answer: True
3. Answer: False
4. Answer: False
5. Answer: False
6. Answer: True
7. Answer: False
8. Answer: True
9. Answer: True
10. Answer: True

Give a prize of your choice to the winning pair.

Object Lesson

You will notice that I have brought some especially delicious treats to our meeting today. I am now going to have one.

Pick up one of the treats and, as you eat it describe the taste using great enthusiasm. E.g. If you have chosen to make scones you might say: "Goodness me, this is the best scone I have ever tasted! I don't know how to explain it to you. I feel like I'm eating a heavenly cloud! This scone is just perfect. It is moist and soft ... oh! You would love it!"

Ask the group:

1. Who would prefer to taste the treat for themselves? Why?
(Allow time for participants to answer)
2. If you had never ever tasted a treat similar to this one before, do you think you could properly understand what it is like from my description? Why not?
(Allow time for participants to answer)

The same is true when it comes to experiencing God. Hearing others talk about their relationship with him is good but, as David said in the Psalm, if we are to truly experience his goodness we need to taste and see for ourselves.

Testimony

Invite your guest or group member to share about a time when they have experienced God's goodness first hand. (If you do not have anyone willing to share you could share a story from your own life).

SONG

We are going to listen to a song that talks about us tasting and experiencing God. Listen to the lyrics. You are welcome to sing along if you wish.

Listen to '*Taste and See*' (James E Moore),

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qhPFt8XWWc> (Your group might like to sing along).

PRAYER:

Lord, we pray that you would help us to 'taste' this week – through Scripture and through prayer. We thank you that we can experience your goodness for ourselves! Amen.

We smell!

FAY FOSTER

Can someone tell us what our five senses are? (Sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell). Today we'll be talking about our sense of smell.

According to scientists, a normal adult can smell over a trillion different scents.¹

Discussion: Part 1

What is your very favourite smell?

Which smells do you really NOT like?

Here are some facts about our sense of smell:

1. All around us, things like coffee, bread or petrol give off tiny molecules that can enter our olfactory system in two ways: either through our nostrils or at the back of the throat (e.g. food). Once inside your nostrils, these air molecules land on the tissue that lines the nasal cavity, the space above and behind the nose. This tissue contains millions of smell receptor nerves that bind with specific odour molecules. The nerves send information to the brain, which identifies that particular smell.²
2. A blow to the head or face can cause loss of our sense of smell, due to damage to the olfactory nerves or nose. The olfactory nerves will often regenerate so that the sense of smell is restored.³ This regeneration can also happen when the nerves reach a particular age. The nerves often continue to regenerate well into a person's old age.⁴
3. Scientists believe that the sense of smell is our oldest sense. They say that even organisms made up of only one cell can detect the chemical composition of their environment.¹
4. Women usually have a better sense of smell than men. Studies have found that women have on average 43% more cells than men in the olfactory bulbs in their brain.⁵
5. Our ability to smell declines faster with age than does our ability to taste. During a

person's 50s, the decline is pretty rapid. In the average 80 year old, the sense of smell is half as sharp as it was during his or her youth.⁶

6. Dogs possess up to 300 million olfactory receptors in their noses, compared to about six million in us. And the part of a dog's brain that is devoted to analyzing smells is 40 times greater than ours.⁷
7. Just as everyone has their own individual and unique fingerprint, so does every individual when it comes to body odour.⁸

Discussion: Part 2

We sometimes associate smells with things that have happened in our lives. Can you think of some smells like that? What are they, and what do you associate them with?

When you smell these things, do the feelings from that time also come back?

Smell game

1. Have some small containers and place something with a distinctive smell in each one. Some of these substances might be:
 - A chopped onion
 - Vinegar
 - Sugar
 - Paint
 - Mint
 - Chocolate
 - A moth ball
 - Coffee
 - Soap
 - Vanilla essence
 - Rose petals
2. Cover each container with a lid (e.g. a sheet of aluminium foil or baking paper) with a hole punched in it.
3. Pass the containers around and ask the ladies to identify the contents of each container purely by smell.
4. Each lady writes their answer on a sheet of paper. It could be worthwhile numbering the containers and numbering the lines on the answer paper. That way someone could say, '*Can I have another smell of number 6?*', etc., and will know which line to put their answer on.
5. Have a prize or prizes for those who can identify the most smells.

Scripture

SCRIPTURE READING: **2 Corinthians 2:14-16**

But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task?

MESSAGE: The aroma of Christ

We don't usually think of the knowledge of Jesus as having an aroma. But like a physical smell, the quality of knowing Jesus can attract or repel someone.

How do we get to have the same aroma as someone else? I think it would have to be by spending time around that person.

If we are to carry the aroma of Jesus, we need to spend time with Him. Then when we are with other people, that aroma of Jesus, of the knowledge of Him, comes from us.

We don't do this aroma-spreading on our own; the scripture tells us that it is God who uses us to spread the aroma of knowledge of Him everywhere.

Let's ask Jesus to help us get so close to Him that His aroma rubs off on us.

PRAYER: 'Dear Jesus, we are humbled when we think that people will judge what it's like to know you by the way we speak and act. We want to be close to you so that your aroma becomes ours as well. Help us Lord to be people that you can use to spread your aroma to others, so that they can see how beautiful it is to know you. Amen.'

¹ <http://www.everydayhealth.com/news/incredible-facts-about-your-sense-smell/>

² <http://www.medicaldaily.com/how-does-nose-smell-inner-workings-our-sense-smell-324566>

³ <http://www.fifthsense.org.uk/post-traumatic-olfactory-loss/>

⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/175216>

⁵ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2822672/Women-really-better-sense-smell-men-Study-finds-female-brain-50-olfactory-cells.html>

⁶ <https://amac.us/how-the-five-senses-change-with-age/>

⁷ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/nature/dogs-sense-of-smell.html>

⁸ <http://www.scienceworldreport.com/articles/11587/20131213/every-person-has-their-own-unique-scent.htm>

Unless I touch...

JO-ANNE BROWN

Scripture

Luke 8:43-48 (Healing of the woman who was bleeding)

John 20:24-28 (Jesus appears to Thomas)

Both the unknown woman with the bleeding and Thomas the disciple had a strong need to touch Jesus. For both, this was an act of faith, hope and affirmation – and perhaps something even deeper.

Jesus seemed to specialise in touch: he touched the blind, the lepers, and the children. His hands held healing power.

He seemed to invite touch, as we see in the woman who anointed his feet with her tears.

There is great power in touch. In the Old Testament there are strong warnings about touching both what is holy and what is unclean; for example Uzzah, seemingly struck down for touching the Ark of the Covenant (**2 Samuel 6:7**. See also Leviticus and Deuteronomy).

Yet in Jesus we see the healing and wholesome power of Divine touch.

- What can we discover for ourselves when we explore these encounters of people reaching out to touch Jesus?
- What longing do we discover in ourselves to reach out and touch Jesus?
- And how can we be the touch of Jesus to the hurting world around us?

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. ⁵⁴ As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. ⁵⁵ They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed. **Mark 6:53-56**

... the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all. **Luke 6:17-19**

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, *'Peace be with you.'*

They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.

He said to them, *'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see...'* **Luke 24: 36-39a**

Reflection

Jesus was the living incarnation of God.

God's Word tells us, "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son ... has made him known" (**John 1:18**). Until Jesus was born in a stable, no one had ever truly seen, held, embraced or touched God. Or looked upon him face-to-face in human form.

Jesus changed all that. Jesus was held as a baby, and likely embraced as a child. As an adult, he held children in his arms and reached out and touched those who were sick, unclean, and unwanted.

He wasn't afraid to touch, and he recognised the healing power of his touch. And people longed to touch Jesus, or even just the edge of his cloak.

Some were driven by the desire for healing. Perhaps some, like the woman with the bleeding who had been so long deprived of human touch, also longed for some physical sign that they were – that they existed and that they had worth.

Thomas longed for absolute proof that his beloved Lord was truly alive. He is often condemned for his lack of faith, but perhaps his love for Christ was so great he dared not hope until he could prove for himself that Jesus was truly alive!

After his resurrection, Jesus invited his disciples to reach out and touch him. This was the affirmation that they needed that he was alive.

How does the longing to touch Jesus resonate in our hearts? We cannot touch him as the disciples did, or feel the touch of his hands on our bodies as the sick and dying did. Yet we also long for that real connection with God. We long to see him, hear from him, experience his nearness and his presence.

Discussion

What does the invitation to “Reach out and touch me” mean for you today?

How do we embody the healing power of Jesus to those around us?

How can you be the hands of Jesus to those who most need the touch of God?

SONG SUGGESTIONS:

Forever – Chris Tomlin

Take my life and let it be, Frances R. Havergal, 1874.

Open our eyes Lord, Robert Cull (1976)

Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King, Chris Tomlin

Sacred hands of Jesus, Albert Orsborn (1886-1967) - SASB 129

Make me a channel of your peace, Anonymous – lyrics attributed to St Francis of Assisi

Take my life and let it be, Frances Havergal (1874) - SASB 525

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, touch our eyes,
as you did those of the blind;
then we shall see
in things that are visible
those things which are invisible.
Lord Jesus, open our ears,
heal our wounds and purify our lives,
as you did those who came to you;
then we shall hear and perceive what is true
amidst the sounds of the world,
and find wholeness in ourselves.
Origen (185-254)

BENEDICTION:

May you feel the loving arms of God the Father surround you,
May you know the healing touch of the hands of Jesus the Son upon you,
May you feel the renewing breath of the Holy Spirit move within you,
And in all you do, may the touch of the Living Creator God awaken, refresh and empower you.
May you then be the touch of God, Father, Son and Spirit, to all those you encounter.
In his name, Amen.
Jo-Anne Brown

Special occasions



Wonderful gift of mothers

DEBORAH LORDE

Programme

Song #323 *I am so glad*

PRAYER TIME:

- Chorus #105 *Teach me how to love Thee*
- Prayers:
 - » Thanks for mothers of the Home League and the corps
 - » Single mothers

CHORUSES:

- *Able to save, able to keep*
- *What a mighty God we serve*

Meditation

A Mother's Example (Ruth 1:8-18)

In the story of Naomi, we recognize that even though Orpah and Ruth were not her offspring, Naomi nurtured them like her very own. She taught them her faith and gave them an insight of what it meant to have faith in God.

When Ruth declared that she would not leave Naomi she was in fact saying that she was not willing to go back to what she knew before. She was not going to turn her back on her mother-in-law but, more importantly, she was not going to turn her back on the God that Naomi had introduced her to.

Mothers have a responsibility to set an example and especially one that is based on Godly living. This is the best gift that mothers can give their children. It is said that 'the hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world'. Mothers have this tremendous opportunity to make a difference for God's Kingdom.

Naomi thought that she did not have anything more to offer: no sons for these girls to marry; no money or any means of providing for herself, let alone her in-laws. What she failed to recognize was the impact that her service to and dependence on God had made on Ruth.

The Word says to us: 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me' (**John 12:32**). What Naomi had actually done was to constantly lift up the name of her God before these girls. She trusted God in difficult times and because of this, even now at her lowest point when she wanted to give up on life, Ruth could remind her of her faithful God. In verse 16 Ruth testified to Naomi when she declared, 'Your God shall be my God'. The witness was that, because of the faith that had been nurtured in her by Naomi, she too would now be able to trust God.

As a mother, how have you helped your own children or others with whom you have come in contact? Have you helped them come to a saving knowledge of God? Do you show the example that your God is faithful?

You are encouraged to walk out your faith so that others may see His good works and come to know Him as their personal Friend and Saviour (**Matthew 5:16**). Walk out your faith in your homes, at your workplace, in your community and see your faithful God respond (**Ephesians 3:20**).

Activities

1. Memoir to Mother

Mothers have a special opportunity to impart knowledge to their children and also to impact the world. As we celebrate mothers today, let us take some time to reflect on a 'pearl' of wisdom that your mother shared with you. Have the women share.

2. Mother's Faith Design a card which reflects your mother's faith.

Material:

- » Card stock;
- » Coloured pens;
- » Glitter or paint;
- » Any colourful items that would enhance the look of the card

Options:

- » Write her favourite Bible verse
- » Write a prayer
- » Compose a poem
- » Write her a special message
- » Tell her the characteristics she has that have helped you most
- » Write a verse of her favourite song

Note: The card may be presented to your mother or to your daughter / sister in remembrance of your deceased mother.

CLOSING SONG: *Give thanks with a grateful heart*

Easter: The wonder of His grace

JAN CONDON

DÉCOR: A large cross at the front of the room with red cloth draped over it.

A banner could be placed across the cross with the words, “O the wonder of His grace” – or the words Amazing, Redeeming, Justifying, Sustaining and Enabling, Transforming – could be written on cards and placed on the vertical beam of the cross

This may be a suitable meeting outline for Easter. Scripture verses are taken from the NIV.

SONG: *Amazing grace* Or *Amazing grace (My chains are gone)*.

Amazing grace

From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses, but God’s unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ (**John 1:16 - 17**).

His grace is amazing - amazing because it is an individual grace and love for us.

Geoff Bullock said, ‘As Jesus is the name above all names, grace is the word above all words’. Grace is God’s choice of us, our sinfulness, our brokenness, our willfulness, our pain, our rebellion, our judgment. Grace is his life bursting free from our chains, from our shame, from our condemnation and ultimately from our nails. Grace is his life freely given to us, free of charge, free of debts, free to receive, free to give.

Grace is Jesus and it is AMAZING

Redeeming grace

Grace is Christianity's best gift to the world.

Grace comes free of charge to people who do not deserve it.

Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more, and grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us less.

SONG: *O the wonder of His grace*

Ephesians 2:4 – "...God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much..."

The song entitled *Who am I?* sung by the American all-female group Point of Grace, says,

Who am I that you would love me so gently?
Who am I that you would recognise my name?
It is grace, grace, God's grace that will pardon and cleanse
and grace that is greater than all my sin.

SONG: *Only by grace can we enter*

Justifying grace

Jesus paid the price so we could be justified. Just as if I had never sinned. Wow - is that possible? We are justified through grace

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. **Romans 3: 23 - 24**

Song: *O the mercy of God*

1. Play this song and have a copy of the words for the women to look at as it plays.
2. Invite people to come and stand or kneel before the Cross
3. Just think about His blood poured out for you
4. Give thanks for your salvation as we listen to the words of the song *O the Mercy of God*

Sustaining and enabling grace

God's grace sustains and enables us.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God unless we allow it.

Song: *He giveth more grace*

The song writer, Annie Johnson Flint, knew what it was to rely on the grace of God. From her childhood she wanted to be a poet but developed arthritis and thought that her writing days were over because of her twisted fingers, but she learned to type using her knuckles and she wrote such words.

He giveth more grace as our burdens grow greater.

God's grace sustains us through difficult times:

- A challenging assignment
- A difficult person
- A physical problem.

Remember He giveth, and giveth and giveth again. That's the wonder of His grace.

Note: If there is time, there could be someone who could share their story of God's enabling and sustaining grace.

Note: The following verses can be printed on card and three people asked to read them.

"My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness," (**2 Corinthians 12:9**). So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.

So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most (**Hebrews 4:16**).

Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many (**Hebrews 12:15**).

Song

In **Matthew 11 verse 28** is an invitation from Jesus to come to Him.

Note: Colonel Keith Banks has put this verse to music, *Learn the unforced rhythms of grace (USB)*

Transforming grace

In music, grace notes are unessential notes that add beauty to a piece of music. How much more can God's grace transform our lives with His beauty?

I'm not what I was. I'm not what I'm going to be, and by God's grace He is transforming us daily to be like Him. And by God's grace - one day we will be like Him. It's God's work - not ours

SONG: *The power of your love*

The power of God's love in our lives gives us the grace to be like Jesus and show that grace and love to others.

SONG: *By Grace alone*, 1BelovedSon (YouTube - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6lhlhgWXIE>)

Play this and allow the group to reflect on the Grace of God

Prayer

Benediction

The amazing **grace** of the Master, Jesus Christ,

The extravagant **love** of God,

The intimate **friendship** of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you on your Journey

Note: another possible YouTube song is *Grace* by Laura story
- Angelique Katalbas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51LGsPMKeAE>

Wonderful peace at Christmas

VEVENE JONAS

Worship Centre

Decorate the room for the festive occasion. Display a manger scene with shepherds and wise men worshipping the baby Jesus. Place a Bible in front of the manger. If possible, also display a picture of Bethlehem. Play quiet music while members enter the meeting room.

SUGGESTED CAROLS:

- *O little town of Bethlehem*
- *While shepherds watched*
- *Hark! The herald angels sing*

Suggested games

- **Ice Breaker**
As each person enters, pin on them or just give them a piece of paper with a few lines of a carol written on it. Encourage everyone to mingle and find the person with the continuation of their carol. People with lines that go together could sit together for the rest of the programme.
- **Christmas Word Search**
Have individuals sing as many choruses or songs with the word 'peace' as they can without repeating. If you repeat, you're out.
- **'Santa Says': Memory Game**
Have individuals or groups recall the items on the manger display without looking again. You may have to use blindfolds.
- **Musical Chairs**
In advance, ask members to bring a wrapped gift for this game. To be fair, you may want to suggest a price for the gift. Only those who bring a gift should play (see **USB** for how to play).

Suggested Outline

Carol

O little town of Bethlehem

Prayer time

- Chorus: *He is Lord*
- Prayers for peace in our homes and communities

Meditation

'Jesus the Prince of Peace'

Poem

Carol Sing

Christmas Activities

Message: Jesus the Prince of Peace

Isaiah 9:6-7

Peace of mind is something that we all want. Ask any of us today; we would say we want to be able to rest, enjoy ourselves, and not be burdened with worries that rob us of vigour, life and purpose. The reality is we don't always have peace of mind. So much so that we sometimes get angry and lash out at God or others, especially those we love.

Christmas means peace – quietness and repose of the soul – because it is about the character and purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the gift of God's love, and in Him is peace. In a manger in Bethlehem, peace came when Jesus was born (**Luke 2:14**). The peace He brings is SHALOM (Hebrew term), meaning inner peace that is not dependent on external circumstances but upon the condition of the heart.

In today's text, we read Isaiah's prophecy of the birth of the coming Messiah who would be called the Prince of Peace and whose peace would have no end. **Isaiah 53:5** also talks about the purpose of the Prince of Peace, that 'the chastisement of our peace [was] upon him' – Jesus is for our sake. Because of Him we have peace with God. The Apostle Paul also documents the purpose for Jesus in several Scripture. For example, in **Colossians 1:20** he says that Jesus made peace through the blood of His cross. And, praise God, the peace Jesus brings cannot be understood by the world. As the song says, 'The world didn't give it, and the world can't take it away'.

In **John 14:27**, Jesus Himself says that the world cannot give the soul's repose. He also speaks of His divine purpose that 'in [Him] ye might have peace' **John 1:33**. Well, there it is! We can have Jesus. We can have peace. And, if we want it, it is ours!

People today often ask, 'Can there ever be peace?' Only a few years in recorded history have been free from war. We certainly don't have peace between nations, neighbours, families. So, is the Bible wrong about peace? Were the angels just singing because they wanted to sing? The answer is a resounding 'No!'

Jesus promises peace to His people, those who receive and know Him **Psalm 85:8**, and those who have experienced new birth can readily tell you that they know the peace of God that the angels sang about.

The real question for each of us is, 'Do I have the peace that only the Prince of Peace can bring?'

Resources



Wonderful worship

MAVIS SALT

Resources for worship and other meeting contexts

As a Chaplain within Aged Care Plus, I have found and used a great variety of resources to enhance the worship experience. These are not restricted to use in aged care facilities, but could be helpful in any Christian worship or meeting context.

Within the care of the frail aged in care, I have encouraged the Chaplains to use the colours of the church year (which we are not so familiar with in TSA) and other visuals such as a small standing cross.

1. Liturgical colours

Did you know that in many churches, different colours are associated with different seasons or events in the calendar of the wider church? The colours are associated with the emotions and ideas aroused by these events or seasons.

Some of these times and colours are:

Advent – the lead-up to Christmas	Purple and blue
Christmas and Christmas season	White or gold
Season after Epiphany (beginning on 6th January)	Green
Lent	Violet
Holy Week (the week leading up to Good Friday)	Red; white or gold
Good Friday	Red or black
The season after Pentecost	Green

Using these colours to mark each season can help people to focus on the meaning and importance of that time. For a great explanation of the purpose of these colours, and what each colour represents, see the United Church of Christ website:

http://www.ucc.org/worship_liturgies_liturgical-colors

2. Books

- a. *The Revised Common Lectionary* is a lectionary (a book or listing) of readings or extracts from the Bible for use in Protestant Christian worship, taking into account the liturgical year with its pattern of observances of festivals and seasons. It runs in three-year cycles; the gospel readings in the first year (Year A) are taken from the Gospel of Matthew, those in the second year (Year B) from the Gospel of Mark, and those in the third year (or Year C) come from the Gospel of Luke. Portions of the Gospel of John are read throughout the Easter season, and are also used for other liturgical seasons including Advent, Christmas and Lent.
 - » Year A begins on the first Sunday of Advent in 2013, 2016, 2019, etc.
 - » Year B begins on the first Sunday of Advent in 2014, 2017, 2020, etc.
 - » Year C begins on the first Sunday of Advent in 2015, 2018, 2021, etc.

The idea behind the lectionary is that on a Sunday members of congregations should be able to hear the voice of each writer week by week, rather than readings being selected according to a theme. So in any given year, the writer of one of the first three gospels will be heard from beginning to end. The other New Testament books are also heard; some are read as complete books, and extracts from the others are read.

Extracts from the Gospel of John are included in all three years. In particular seasons, such as Christmas and Easter, the regular readings may be interrupted to focus on readings relevant to that season

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revised_Common_Lectionary.

- b. Another helpful resource is *Living Stones Complete Resource Book* by Susan Sayers, for Years A, B & C of the Lectionary. This series contains ideas, outlines, intercessions, photocopiable worksheets, mini-dramas and more. These books explore the texts of Common Worship, give thoughts about these themes, and also suggest music and different ideas for different age groups
- c. Another series called *Waters of Life – Complete Resource Book* by David Adam. This is a three-year, all-age teaching and worship programme.
- d. Scripture Union Resources such as *Celebrations Sorted*, *Easter Cracked* and *Christmas Wrapped Up*. These books are full of ideas for churches to use at times of celebration in the church calendar, including Lent, Mother's Day, Harvest, Valentine's Day and even sports events. Subjects contain service outlines, craft, drama, assemblies, creative prayer and more. I find all age worship ideas helpful in any setting
- e. Also, *Scripture Union Resources: Words of Faith, Peace and Hope* – good outlines plus music CDs - very helpful for Chapel services that are no longer than half an hour.
- f. A book entitled *Christmas Services* by Donald McKenzie Hood (Australian) gives complete outlines for nine services.
- g. The other helpful resource is a series of books of *Spirited Skits for Sundays and other days*. The one I have is *Let's Make Another Scene* by Verena Johnson – I have found drama very helpful in different settings. Skits can also be found online.

I also have books of illustrations and written prayers. As I have the originals I don't put the reference points when using them in a worship context.

All my sermons have also utilised commentaries I have at home. Although I do not usually mention the references when I deliver the sermon, I do give these whenever I produce something in writing.

3. The Bible on DVD

I have the gospels of John and Matthew, and the book of Acts. Using these visuals as well as the spoken work makes a good contrast.

Wonderful websites

SALVOS WOMEN TEAM

On this page are some websites we've discovered that contain great resources for ministry with women and/or wonderful information. Some of these sites also allow you to sign up to a free newsletter.

Ministry websites

1. **The Salvation Army New Zealand and Fiji Territory Women's Ministry website**
<http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/our-community/church-life/womens-ministries/resources> Ideas for celebrations, activities, crafts and more.
2. **Womensministry.net:**
Equipping women to effectively lead in ministry
<https://womensministry.net/> Leadership development articles and videos, tools and resources for leaders, and an online community of women leaders.
3. **Propel Women:**
<http://www.propelwomen.org/>
Resources to buy as well as download. Articles, videos and a book club.
4. **RightNow Media:**
<https://www.rightnowmedia.org/> An amazing collection of Bible study videos, kids' shows and training content for all ages. As an officer or corps congregation member in the AUE Territory, you have FREE access to this!
For access, or for more information, please contact the Mission Support Team at missionteam@aue.salvationarmy.org
5. **Calvary Chapel Women2Women website:**
For great testimonies from women who have converted from Islam to Christianity, see <http://ccwomen2women.com/muslimwomen>
6. **Pinterest.com**
has a gazillion ideas – just search 'women's ministry' and you'll be amazed!

7. **The Salvation Army USA Eastern Territory website:**
Women leaders share their lesson plans and other resources from their own ministry, as well as news from around the Territory.
<http://saconnects.org/category/ministries/womens-ministries/>
8. **Group for women:**
For stories and articles shared by other leaders of women's ministries, devotionals and group resources: <http://womensministryleader.com/>
9. **Christianity Today:**
With current articles, the capacity to search archives and links to many other sites, this is a great launching pad for your search! www.christianitytoday.com/women-leaders
10. **The Salvation Army Canada Territory website:**
Tips and resources for ministry with women, families, children and more, all searchable by keyword: <http://ministryhelps.ca/>
11. **Retreat in a bag:**
For downloadable skits, graphics, studies etc. – some free and some at cost – go to: <http://www.retreatinabag.net/>
12. **Encouraging Creative Prayer:**
An article on how to encourage creative prayer, plus suggestions for creative prayer stations: <https://engageworship.org/ideas>
13. **Creative Ladies Ministry:**
Women's Ministry planning with Julia Bettencourt: Looking for ideas for event themes, devotionals or free printables? Try this (very American) website: <http://www.juliabettencourt.com/>
14. **Women's ministry tools:**
Free Bible studies and ideas for studies, plus the opportunity to purchase ministry resources: <https://www.preaching.com/women/>
15. **Ideas for worship:**
Sketches, poems, prayers, interactive readings – search by media type, theme, special occasion, etc: <https://engageworship.org/ideas>
16. **Purchase media resources:**
Want backgrounds for your PowerPoint? Small group videos? Worship track videos? Church software? This is your site. Note: payment is required for all of these.
<https://engageworship.org/ideas>
17. **Heartlight.org:**
Articles, devotionals and scripture/inspirational quotes with illustrated backgrounds: www.heartlight.org
18. **Word to Worship website:**
Looking for songs to fit your message? Search this site by keyword, theme or scripture reference: <http://wordtoworship.com/search/node>

Wonderful information

1. **Natural wonders of Australia:** Access this list, with photos and descriptions, at <http://travel.cnn.com/sydney/visit/10-natural-wonders-australia-834214/>
2. **New natural wonders of the world:** <https://nature.new7wonders.com/wonders/>
From 2000 to 2007, a team set out to discover the new natural wonders of the world, as voted by people from around the world. They came up with three sets of ‘winners’, seven in each of three categories: Wonders of the World, Wonders of Nature and Wonders Cities. This site contains a short video on each of these 21 wonders.
3. **Wonders of the Bible:**
<http://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/7-wonders-of-the-bible> lists seven wonders of the Bible, from the way it was formed to the way it has persisted despite intense opposition. The website <http://www.biblecharts.org/thebible/sevenwondersofthebible.pdf> shows this same information in chart form. The John Mark Ministries site <http://www.jmm.org.au/articles/17049.htm> extends this list to ten wonders of the Bible.
4. **Wonderful facts:** If you google ‘wonderful facts’ you will find lots of informative websites. Some of the more comprehensive ones are:
<http://all-that-is-interesting.com/interesting-facts-about-the-world#8>,
<http://zarius.com/archives/2006/04/20/100-interesting-science-facts/> and
<https://www.factretriever.com/world-facts>.
Did you know that 10 percent of all human beings ever born are alive at this very moment? That there are no black flowers on earth, though some are very dark shades of purple or red? Or that in the evening, you are one per cent shorter than in the morning? These are just some of the wonderful facts to be found on these sites.
5. **God of Wonders:** A set of 18 short DVDs (85 minutes all up) demonstrating some of the wonders of creation. Titles include Thunderstorms, Universe, Flowering plants, Snow crystals, DNA, Sea creatures, Butterflies, Mankind and more! Public performance rights are granted by the producer, provided there is no fee charged and the contact website is given: <http://www.eternal-productions.org/>.
Videos are at <http://www.godofwondersvideo.org/>

USB: Contents list

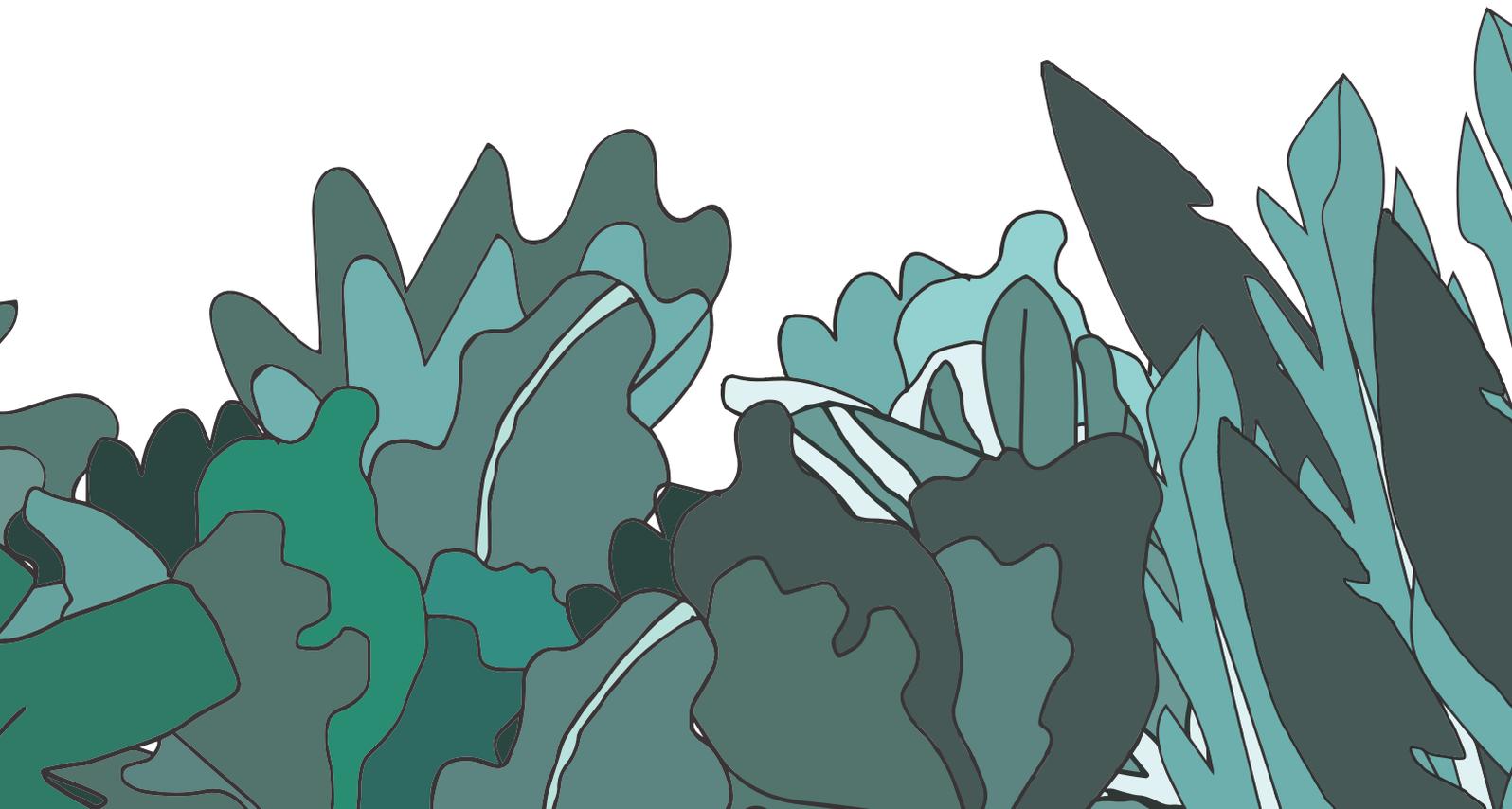
N.B. The number in the first column below refers to the page number of the article for which this document is a resource.

	God of Wonders Resource Manual	God of Wonders Resource Manual (entire manual as printed)
4	Surprise! The God of unexpected wonders	Consequences Desert island Faith sample colouring God's Love is Wonderful lead sheet Surprise! Devotional outlines
9	Oh the wonder of His grace	Oh the wonder of His grace message Wonder of His grace scripture verses
13	Jesus knows all about us	Psalm 139 reading for individual reflection
30	Wonderful promises of God	God's promises find-a-word Who am I promises
39	The wonder of a transformed life	Painting: Return of the Prodigal Son The Touch of the Master's Hand
45	The wonder of brokenness	The Broken Shell: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful broken shell instructions • Journal shell • My beautiful broken shell poem Ashes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ashes instruction sheet The broken Christ: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The broken Christ instructions • The broken Christ • Twig crosses The broken cup: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broken cup instructions • The broken cup The broken alabaster jar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The broken alabaster jar Thorns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The blessing of thorns • Thorns instructions • Thorns prayer The broken spirit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broken spirit Bible verse • Broken spirit teardrop Prayer box labels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Box labels 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 • Prayer box title label

48	Limitless God	Limitless God fill-in-the-world Poem: What can God do?
52	Butterflies	Butterflies competition Butterflies competition with answers
56	The wonder of creation	Benediction Psalm 95:1-7a Selected scripture verses Unscramble the words Unscramble the words – with answers
59	God’s marvellous creation – Us!	Parts of the body competition: possible answers
61	Fearfully and wonderfully made	Fearfully and wonderfully made PowerPoint Fearfully and wonderfully made talk
65	My place in the universe	Space quiz Space quiz with answers
67	The Eye of God	Eye of God nebula Stars printable template
73	Wonderful creation colouring pages	Colouring page 1: Sunflower Colouring page 2: Floral Colouring page 3: Deer Colouring page 4: Toucan Colouring page 5: Kangaroo
76	China	Chinese years handout
82	Seven wonders	Seven wonders of the world chart
89	I wonder	A wonder walk
92	Wonder in small things	Word cards
111	Easter The wonder of His grace	Song: Rhythms of Grace
115	Wonderful peace at Christmas	Musical chairs game

IHQ Bible Studies

Transformed into God's image
Women's Ministries 2017



Introduction: Transformed into God's image

The shared theme of Women's Ministries throughout the world in 2017 is 'Transformed into God's Image'.

In **Psalm 139** the psalmist writes:

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways ... For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well ... Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (**vv 1-3, 13-14, 23-24**).

This year's Bible studies will encourage you to reflect on how the Lord transforms your life, other people's lives and how, through the Spirit working in you, others may be transformed. These studies are designed to be flexible and allow for the addition of material that is relevant to your culture and context.

Each study includes four sections which can be explored with your group, as follows:

1. **What the Bible says** – where you explore '*What does the text actually say?*' It is important that you read the Bible carefully and allow it to speak to you and guide the content of your study.
2. **Our lives today** – considers:
 - What does the Bible reading tell you about your lives?
 - Does it highlight any problems in society?
 - What challenges are there for the way you live your life?
3. **Discussion questions** – depending upon where you are using the studies, you may choose to select one or two that seem most suitable for you, or ask different groups to discuss other aspects and possibly, if you have time, share what they have been speaking about.
4. **Living as transformed people** – this is designed to give you something to take away and do before you next meet.

*Unless stated otherwise, Scripture references are taken from the New International Version® Anglicised, NIV® Copyright © 2011 by <https://www.biblica.com/>, Inc. ® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide

Transformed into God's image

COMM. SILVIA COX

BIBLE READING: **2 Corinthians 3:7-18**

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory... **(v 18)**

What the Bible says

In order to understand our key verse we need to read **verses 7-18**, which explain the fading glory of the old covenant and the surpassing glory of the new covenant.

Paul reminds us that Moses wore a veil when he descended from his Ten Commandments encounter with God, '... so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was ...' **(v 7)**. Paul goes on to explain that 'in Christ' such a veil is no longer required. A veil which hides the face of those who turn to the Lord; one which dulls the mind and covers the heart, preventing us from understanding the mystery of the gospel (the new covenant), is removed **(v 14)**. This is made possible through Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jesus delivers a new freedom through the Spirit **(v 17)** which he promised in **John 8:36**, '... if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.' He removes the limitations of the 'old covenant' enabling 'the whosoever' to have access to God. As we gaze on the Lord 'with unveiled faces' **(v 18)** his glory shines on us, transforming us into his likeness. Such a transformation begins when we initially turn to the Lord **(v 16)** and continues as we commit ourselves to spend time with our heavenly Father, allowing his glory to encompass us and his Spirit to enable us to become more and more like Jesus.

Continue *Transformed into God's image* onto the next page >>

Our lives today

Be inspired and encouraged by the fact that through Jesus you can have a personal relationship with the Creator of the universe. No longer is such a relationship restricted to specific individuals like Moses, but it is now available to all who 'turn to the Lord' (v 16).

As disciples of Jesus we follow his teaching and example. We aspire to be like him. Our key verse assures us that this aspiration can become a reality as we spend time in God's presence and meditate on his Word, exposing ourselves to his light and glory.

We reflect the light of God as through a mirror. In biblical times mirrors were made of metal rather than glass and therefore required constant polishing to enable them to reflect a better image. The same applies to us today. As we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives – cleaning and polishing – the image we reflect becomes more Christ-like.

There are no perfect Christians! Each of us is 'a work in progress'. Sometimes we fail to reflect the light of God as we should. Only when we are in Heaven will our transformation be made perfect. But, for now, we must fix our eyes on Jesus '... the pioneer and perfecter of faith' (Hebrews 12:2), allowing his glory to transform us and reflect out into the world in which we live. People should be able to see that we belong to God and that his light shines on and through us, not unlike Moses, whose face was radiant after spending time in the presence of God!

Reading the Bible will help us to consider how God desires to transform our mind, our thoughts, our whole being so that we can become more like Jesus. Our task is to be in his presence, allowing his glory to shine on us. We believe, as outlined in our international vision statement, that the transforming message of Jesus brings freedom, hope and life. It truly does!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What practical steps do you need to take in order to contemplate the Lord's glory in your daily life?
2. How can you share and discuss your experience of being in the presence of God?
3. How can the glory of God transform you?

Living as transformed people

During the next week, commit yourself to spend time in God's presence. Start and finish the day at his feet and next time you meet as a group, share what you have learned. Let the light of God shine through you into this troubled world.

Commissioner Silvia Cox – IHQ, from Switzerland, Austria and Hungary Territory (having served in Zimbabwe, Finland, Southern Africa and the United Kingdom with the Republic of Ireland)

As World President of Women's Ministries my aim is to be increasingly transformed into God's image and, during my travels around the world, to share this message of transformation with everyone I meet.

Transformed in our heart

COMM. ROSALIE PEDDLE

BIBLE READING: **Ezekiel 36:26; Proverbs 4:23**

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you;
I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

Ezekiel 36:26

What the Bible says

The word ‘heart’ occurs more than one thousand times in the Bible, which indicates its importance to Christian living. It is used not just to refer to the large, muscular pumping ‘thing’ in our chest that keeps blood flowing, but has a much wider and deeper meaning.

The Bible tells us that the heart is the seat of our personality, emotional state, intellectual actions and will. Your heart is who you are. It is the part of your being where passions, actions, desires and decisions come from. The heart is the very soul or core of a person. It is the only place where God desires to live and make his home. Just as bodily health depends on a healthy physical heart, so moral health depends on a healthy spiritual heart.

The Bible refers to all kinds of spiritual heart problems. There are hard hearts and troubled hearts. There are selfish, divided, boastful, unrepentant, lying, callous, doubting, lustful and slow-to-believe hearts. **Mark 7:21** clearly reminds us, ‘For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come ...’

1 Samuel 16:7 tells us that God does not look at our appearance, but at our heart. When David confessed his sin (**Psalms 51**), he realised his greatest need – a transformed heart. Ezekiel refers to a spiritual heart transplant (**Ezekiel 36:26**). We cannot do this for ourselves. But God can and will. Our heart of stone must be changed into a heart of flesh that beat with new life and a love for God and others. The key to living a life of holiness and purity is found in embracing spiritual heart transformation. Jesus says, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul ...’ (**Matthew 22:37**).

Our lives today

Everything depends on the focus of our heart. Just as the state of a person's natural life depends upon the soundness and vigour of the heart, so the state of their spiritual life depends on the good or evil condition of their heart. King Solomon summed it up in words of wisdom that we need to embrace (**Proverbs 4:23**). We need to cultivate a heart of wisdom, living with Christ at the centre of every breath we breathe, every decision we make and every step we take on this journey of life. The heart must be made new by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

We need to 'guard our heart' because it is our greatest treasure. It is the core of our being, where our dreams, desires and passions live. It is the part of us that connects to God and other people. God has graciously given us a new heart and it is our responsibility to keep it clean and in proper condition.

We need to 'guard our heart' because it is our life source. Our heart overflows into thoughts, words and actions. If it is unhealthy this has an impact on everything else, including our work, family, marriage and legacy.

We need to 'guard our heart' because it is under constant attack from the evil one. We have an enemy who is focused on our destruction. He opposes not only God but also everything aligned with him – including us. The enemy uses all kinds of weapons to attack our heart. These often take the form of circumstances that lead to disappointment, hurt, discouragement, despair or disillusionment. The flow of the wellspring of life in our heart can be stopped by lack of faith, unwillingness to forgive, materialism, pride and evil acts of any kind. Guarding our heart involves the energising of our life with the transforming truth of God's love and his Word. He has chosen us to know his heart, have his heart and share it with others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think God is interested in the condition of your heart? What feelings does that provoke? What do you think you need to do differently?
2. When was the last time your heart was attacked by the evil one? How did you respond?
3. What are some of the ways you can embrace the 'guarding' of your heart?

Our lives today

During this month, make an intentional effort to 'guard your heart' by practising the presence of God in your daily life, meditating deeply on God's Word, praying specific prayers, embracing acts of kindness and cultivating the art of forgiveness and grace.

Commissioner Rosalie Peddle – IHQ, from Canada and Bermuda Territory (having served in New Zealand, and the United Kingdom Territory with the Republic of Ireland)

As World Secretary for Women's Ministries, I take the spiritual condition of my heart seriously as I have the opportunity to impact and influence the world for Jesus – the transformer of hearts and lives.

Transformed in our minds

COMM. DORITA WAINWRIGHT

BIBLE READING: **Philippians 2:1-18**

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus. **(v 5)**

What the Bible says

The mind is very powerful. Controlling our thinking, speaking and actions, it can be a powerful force for good, giving inspiration, encouragement, strength and healing to other people. On the other hand, we all know what can happen if we speak or act without thinking. The consequences can be far-reaching, causing hurt and harm.

Paul was very much aware of this when he wrote to the Romans describing how he found himself doing the exact opposite to what he knew God wanted (**Romans chapter 7**). He concludes this by saying, ‘... I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin’ **(v 25)**. He acknowledges the struggle involved, even when his mind was trying to obey God’s law!

Paul’s letters also help us to see why, in our key verse, he urges the Philippians to have the same mindset as Jesus. He writes in **2 Corinthians 4:4**, ‘The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.’

Those who have accepted Jesus as Saviour have a new mindset or attitude. This is clear in **Romans chapter 8** where Paul makes a distinction between those who live according to the flesh and those who live according to the Spirit, ‘... those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires’ **(v 5)**, and ‘... the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace’ **(v 6)**. This is the mind that all Christians should desire – the mind of Jesus that produces life and peace! God grants us his peace when we focus our minds on him, ‘You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you’ (**Isaiah 26:3**).

Jesus himself told one of the Pharisees, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind' (**Matthew 22:37**). The Pharisees had closed minds. They were not open to considering the true identity of Jesus. We are called to have open minds, ready to accept Jesus, to think like him and to act like him.

Our lives today

How can we even begin to have the same mind or attitude as Jesus? The Holy Spirit is our guide. He will help us as we pray, read God's Word and reflect upon the thoughts, words and actions of Jesus.

Have you ever gone to sleep with a tune going through your head and then woken in the morning singing the same tune to yourself? Perhaps the first picture or thought that comes to your mind in the morning relates to a television programme you watched the night before. This illustrates the power of the mind. The information and images fed into our minds remain there. They might not surface straight away but they are there, and they influence us for good or bad.

We are faced every day with the challenge of keeping our minds pure. How do we do this? How do we help our children and grandchildren enjoy and benefit from the wonders of modern technology whilst at the same time avoiding its evils? The Holy Spirit will help us to feed our minds with all that is good. 'Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things' (**Philippians 4:8**).

Our new mindset is brought about by transformation. 'Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will' (**Romans 12:2**).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think it is possible to have the same mindset or attitude as Jesus?
2. How do you seek to reflect the mind of Jesus in your daily living?
3. What needs to happen so that you and the members of your Bible study group, corps or centre, better reflect the mind of Christ?

Living as transformed people

During this month, consider how your mind is affected by what you choose to listen to, watch and read. Do you need to make changes to your reading material, television viewing, use of social media, or even the friendships you keep?

Commissioner Dorita Wainwright – from the United Kingdom Territory with the Republic of Ireland (having served in Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zambia and as Zonal Secretary for Women's Ministries, Europe Zone.)
All through my ministry I have seen the lives of men, women and children transformed by God's power. In all I think, say and do, I am constantly seeking to reflect the mind of Jesus. This is a work in progress with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Transformed in our speaking

MS IRINI PANTELIDOU

BIBLE READING: **Ephesians 4:29-31; James 3:1-12**

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen ... Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. (**Ephesians 4:29, 31**)

What the Bible says

We have all experienced the power of words – times when someone’s words have helped us and times when words have hurt us. We can also recall times when God has spoken to us, whether as a still, small voice or an unmistakably powerful force.

The Bible contains beautiful dialogues between God and people – between Heaven and earth. He speaks to Job out of a storm; he converses face to face with Moses and calls Samuel in the night receiving the faithful response, ‘Speak, for your servant is listening’ (**1 Samuel 3:10**).

In the New Testament we see Jesus speaking words to individuals that reveal how intimately he knows them and us. He speaks words of instruction to the woman at the well (**John chapter 4**), words of forgiveness to the woman caught in adultery (**John 8**) and words of revelation to Mary Magdalene (**Mark 16**).

Like these individuals we can recognise his voice because we belong to him. He is our Good Shepherd who says: ‘My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me’ (**John 10:27**). As children of God and followers of this Good Shepherd, let us respond, live and speak as people worthy of these identities. Our mouths hold potential for good and for evil and the challenge of taming the tongue is a daily one.

While our words have the power to proclaim that ‘Jesus is Lord’ (**Romans 10:9**), they can also deny him repeatedly as Peter did. We can worship God and encourage others or we

can bring destruction, cause pain, and diminish and depress others. James highlights this paradox when he says, ‘Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing’, asking ‘Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?’ (**James 3:10-11**).

The word ‘unwholesome’ in today’s reading is more literally translated as ‘rotten’. Just as eating something rotten corrupts and contaminates our physical body, depriving it of health, so rotten words cause our spiritual health to deteriorate.

If the words that flow from our lips are rotten, it is an indication that the source – the heart – is impure. What we speak is a reflection of the state of our heart: ‘For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of’ (**Luke 6:45**). This is why the Psalmist writes: ‘May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight’ (**Psalm 19:14**).

Our lives today

Speaking with God – What an awesome reality that God speaks to us personally, and that in turn we can speak to him! Job’s desire to ‘speak to the Almighty’ (**Job 13:3**) is a privilege we enjoy today through prayer. Let us not take this opportunity for granted but engage in conversation daily with the Lord. Just as to the woman at the well, Jesus also says to us that ‘he is the one speaking with you’ (**John 9:37**).

Speaking with others – **James 3:9** states, ‘With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness.’ Words of encouragement, love, forgiveness and guidance can be life-changing, offering hope and breathing new life into situations. In contrast, complaining, gossip, lies and words spoken in anger can echo in people’s hearts and minds long after they are said. It is not difficult to accept that ‘The tongue has the power of life and death’ (**Proverbs 18:21**). Let us therefore speak as people who have been saved, according to the needs of others and exercising the same compassion and patience that Jesus shows to us.

Speaking with ourselves – I love the idea from the Bible that we can speak to ourselves – to our very souls – words of encouragement and faith. **Psalm 43:5** asks: ‘Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.’ In the same way that we can encourage others, we can encourage ourselves. Instead of speaking judgement, inadequacy and failure to our hearts and souls let us meditate on how much we are loved for ‘The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit’ (**Proverbs 15:4**).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When did someone’s words have a positive impact on your life?
2. How do we take up the challenge to bless those who curse us (Luke 6:28)?
3. Are there situations in which it is wiser to listen than to speak?

Living as transformed people

This month let us make a conscious decision to be transformed in our speaking and ask God to set a guard over our lips. Let us strive towards the characteristic of the wife of noble character, of whom **Proverbs 31:26** states: ‘She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.’

Ms Irini Pantelidou – from Italy and Greece Command (having worked as Administrative Secretary for the America and Caribbean Zone - IHQ.)

Realising the impact of speaking encouraging words to others has been a wonderful transformation for me; it is a gift of great value and no cost.

Transformed in our lifestyle

MAJOR AGRIPINA GOCHEZ

BIBLE READING: **Romans 12:1-2, Colossians 3:9-14, Ephesians 4:22-24, 1 Peter 1:14-15**

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. (**Romans 12:2**)

What the Bible says

When Paul wrote to the Romans in **chapter 12** he urged them to have a change of lifestyle. In Roman culture it was normal to seek pleasure so as to feel good about themselves. But Paul talks of being transformed by the help of God. Not settling for who they were without Christ, he encouraged them to change their lifestyle – to be transformed in their thinking, speaking, attitudes and behaviour. He urged them to be transformed to a new lifestyle in Christ.

Paul spoke not only to the Romans about transforming their lifestyle, but also to the **Colossians (3:9-14)**. He taught them how they should behave as they now lived in Christ. They should not lie to each other and should not practice things that were not according to God's will. No matter what nationality they were, now they belonged to Christ they should behave with the virtue that God himself had placed in them.

He also spoke to the **Ephesians (4:22-24)** and told them they should not take on the lifestyle where they lived. They should no longer be as their former corrupt selves, but they should change their minds, becoming the new creatures they were meant to be, created for righteousness and holiness.

Through Paul, God exhorts us to change our lifestyle and be completely transformed by the grace of God.

In his first letter (**1:14-15**), the apostle Peter reminds us that as obedient children we must no longer conform to the evil desires of our flesh, but we should live according to the holy calling of God.

Our lives today

Change for the better is not always easy, but when we make a decision to transform our lives, we change our habits according to the holy example of our Saviour. Our God calls us to change our old way of life. Even if we have been believers since childhood, our natural human tendencies still lead us to ungodly character, thoughts and attitudes.

God calls us to live a different life, a lifestyle that differentiates us from a world that does not know him and has no interest in him. As obedient children, we must transform our lifestyle so we become a reflection of Jesus Christ. That is, if we say that we walk with him and we are his, then we must be like him.

The Holy Spirit will help us to transform our minds, speech, actions and behaviour. Our lifestyle must give glory and honour to the Father.

English novelist Charles Reade wrote, 'Sow a thought and you reap an act. Sow an act and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character. Sow a character and you reap a destiny.'

As obedient children filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, we can change our lifestyle, thoughts, actions, habits, character and destiny. Change for the better is possible with the help of our Saviour and friend Jesus.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. According to the Bible verses in this study, why is it necessary that God transforms our lifestyle?
2. According to the illustration of the potter in **Jeremiah 18:3-6** and **Isaiah 64:8**, what will our Father do to transform us?
3. What does **Psalms 32:8** teach us when we decide to be obedient and allow the Lord to transform our lifestyle?

Living as transformed people

During this next month reread these verses and ask:

- God, what do you want me to change in my lifestyle?
- With your help, Lord, what should I change regarding my thoughts, actions and habits?
- Do I need to change my lifestyle and my character?
- Be assured that with God's help you can change your destiny by transforming your lifestyle.

Major Agripina Gochez – IHQ, from Latin America North Territory (having served in Guatemala, Panama, Colombia, Dominican Republic and Costa Rica)

As an officer and as Under Secretary for the Americas and Caribbean Zone, my Lord Jesus has been a constant friend. Even though I am not always constant in my desire to obey God, the Holy Spirit is my guide and speaks to my heart, transforming my thoughts, actions, habits, character and destiny.

Transformed in our love

CAPTAIN SUMMRA NEMAT

BIBLE READING: **John 13**

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (v 35)

What the Bible says

To understand our key verse more clearly we need to reflect on the whole chapter. It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to his Father. There was no time to lose, so Jesus took the opportunity to foretell his death and communicate important truths. He washed the feet of the disciples and, when Judas departed, Jesus declared: 'Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once' (vv 31-32). Jesus explains that he glorified his Father by finishing the work the Father gave him to do (John 17:4).

He addressed his disciples as children because they were part of his family, had experienced his grace and were in a relationship with him. Jesus' new command was a way to give glory to the Father by loving one another. Jesus declared: 'A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another' (v 34). Jesus issued a command for you and me to love one another. Why does Jesus call it 'a new commandment', when love was an old commandment (Deuteronomy 6:5)?

Love is more than a characteristic of God – it is his character. In 1 John chapter 4 we read, 'Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God' (v 7). When you love others you allow God to love through you. 'No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us' (v 12).

Jesus said: 'As I have loved you, so you must love one another' (John 13:34). Jesus has shown us the standard of love to follow. He loved everyone and showed his love even to those who mocked, disbelieved and betrayed him – and he wants us to do the same. The words of Jesus found in our key verse confirm that love is the real sign of Christianity.

Our lives today

In the busyness of this world we forget to follow this command and we have limited this love to those who love us. However, this command indicates that we need to love everyone, not just those who love us because, as Christians, we belong to the family of God – we have been given his name. We know that it is not easy to force ourselves to do something, but have you ever tried to force yourself to feel love toward someone? It is almost impossible, but when we belong to God we abide in him and his love automatically flows through us, reaching out to others.

Love is defined as a strong affection, desire or devotion. Love is not only about feelings – it is about action. As disciples of Jesus we put him first in our lives and follow his teaching. This inspires us to be like him and it is then that his Holy Spirit works in us and makes us able to love one another unconditionally. This love shows others that we are a follower of Jesus. We prove our faith in Christ by showing love to one another.

We love because we are his disciples, but in order to show love we must be connected to Jesus and follow him, always longing to be like him. It is God who enables us to share his love with others and glorify his name. These words of General John Gowans encourage us,

To be like Jesus! This hope possesses me,
In every thought and deed, This is my aim, my creed;
To be like Jesus! This hope possesses me,
His Spirit helping me, Like him I'll be. (SASB 328)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How can we develop this kind of love in us?
2. Do you have anything hindering you from following Jesus' command to love each other?
3. What steps will you take to follow this command?

Living as transformed people

God lives within us. He wants us to respond to him earnestly. We need to reflect and daily spend time in prayer, asking God to help us reflect his love to others. We must desire to be like Jesus and ask the Holy Spirit to enable us to love one another and then encourage others to obey this command.

Captain Summra Nemat – IHQ, from Pakistan Territory

It is my privilege to work as Assistant Under Secretary in the South Asia Zone. Being transformed into his image is an ongoing work and I find this command to love one another is what Jesus requires from me. The Holy Spirit enables God's love to flow through me to others in my daily life.

Transformed in our service

MAJOR TRACEY KASOSO

BIBLE READING: **James 2:17**

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (v 17)

What the Bible says

The New Testament is rich with biblical texts that highlight the subject of faith. There exist several texts that explicitly outline about having faith and living by faith, to the extent that one can easily think, 'All I need is faith'. However, in his writing James expresses that faith goes hand in glove with works and the two are intertwined. He writes that faith is inadequate, if not accompanied by action.

In his letters to the **Galatians (2:16)** and **Romans (3:28)**, Paul gives the impression that faith by itself is enough and yet from James's perspective it appears to be different. Do Paul and James differ in their understanding of faith? The context of Paul's understanding rests within the Jewish setting in which being circumcised and obeying the law was considered as good enough for being saved. When you compare the readings, you will notice that the life setting of the people to whom Paul and James were presenting their teachings are totally different.

Paul then tries to teach the Romans that circumcision or keeping the law was not adequate for them to be called 'saved people' but they needed to have salvation by faith. James, on the other hand, was writing to correct the misconception that faith alone without works was adequate and that they could still live in ways that displeased God. He also addresses the misconception surrounding the understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith, from which others thought that works were no longer important. James speaks to them about how the two should be combined to bring about transformation. James gives examples from the Old Testament about the actions of Abraham and that of Rahab, whose faith was expressed in action.

Our lives today

Society today is looking for transformed Christians to serve the world. We cannot claim to have faith if it is not accompanied by action. Faith comes first and it causes a change in what we do – our deeds. Deeds, according to James, are love and obedience. Our acceptance of Jesus Christ should effect our whole being. Christians have an opportunity to demonstrate God’s love to people in need, and I count it a privilege to be able to witness to others by living out what is inside me. The Jews thought circumcision, keeping the Jewish law and having faith were all that a Christian needed to do. If we take opportunity to put our faith into action, we will have not only threatened the devil but also become a living witness to Jesus’ continued work and love. It does not have to be something big – perhaps a hospital visit – but unless faith is demonstrated by works, it is irrelevant.

Galatians 5:6 states, ‘For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.’ This therefore means that there is nothing like true faith without works. Faith enables good works to happen. In other words, your actions reflect the kind of faith within you.

In **Ephesians 2:10** we read, ‘For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.’ We do ‘works’ as a sign of how much we love God.

They demonstrate that we are saved. It leaves us challenged as to how best we can display his love to others.

ILLUSTRATION: If salt remains in the salt cellar it will not cause any change to the taste of our food. Instead it needs to be sprinkled to cause some change. We should act so that we make a difference in the world. Unless we have love as a reflection of our faith, then our faith alone will not save us. Our deeds should speak about what we are within. We should strive to serve as a way to show our faith.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can we tell if our faith is true?
2. Using your own words, how would you translate the phrase ‘faith unaccompanied by actions is dead’?
3. Is it possible to be a Christian of faith but no works?

Living as transformed people

Pause for a while and think how best you can help someone who claims to be a Christian but seems to show no evidence of it in their lives.

Major Tracey Kasuso – Zimbabwe Territory (having served in Southern Africa and at IHQ)
As chaplain at IHQ I had the opportunity to speak about and share my transformed life with people who came into the building. Now as Territorial Secretary for Women’s Ministries in Zimbabwe I have the privilege of seeing lives transformed by Jesus.

Transformed in our suffering

MAJOR HEIDRUN EDWARDS

BIBLE READING: **Romans 8:17-28**

Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. **(v 17)**

What the Bible says

In **Isaiah 53:2-4** Jesus is portrayed as suffering personified. He gives suffering a face. For this reason, for centuries a crucifix could be found in hospital wards to indicate to the patients that they were not alone in their suffering.

Throughout his earthly life Jesus experienced suffering for various reasons, including:

- Rejection from his own people – the believers of his time **(Matthew 13:53-58)**
- Lack of understanding from his family **(Mark 3:21)**
- Suffering because of compassion **(John 11:33)**
- Persecution **(John 5:16)**
- Illness and injury (although the Bible does not explicitly mention these, Jesus must have experienced illness and, as a carpenter, we may assume that sometimes he was injured. The gospels report the unusual occurrences in Jesus' life, not the common ones).

Jesus understands all the various suffering which mankind encounters. There is nothing he did not experience himself in one way or another. Jesus not only understands, but he also sets an example **(Isaiah 53:7)** and gives advice **(Matthew 5:39-42)**.

We live in a fallen world – a world marked by sin **(Romans 3:11-18)**. We live in a world that has an expiry date stamped on it – we just do not know the exact date **(Revelation 21:1)**. As Christians we are not taken out of this world **(John 17:15)** but, like Jesus who came from Heaven to earth and lived among the people, we are called to continue to live among the people of this world.

Our lives today

Ever since Adam and Eve left paradise there has been suffering on the earth. **Ecclesiastes 1:9** says: ‘... There is nothing new under the sun.’ Jesus willingly accepted suffering as part of his humanity. As his followers, we should not expect to walk through life without experiencing suffering at different times. There are many types of suffering relating to all parts of our lives – body, mind, soul, emotions and spirit – and there is no such thing as a scale that measures suffering from not so bad to worst. We should be careful not to judge our suffering against that of other people or devalue their suffering.

The world we live in requires instant solutions. The expectation of immediately resolved suffering is very much present and can influence our thinking. Sometimes I am not sure why people want suffering to end. Is it because of the person (a family member?) going through a time of suffering? Or is it because they themselves cannot cope with the situation? To identify the nature of our suffering is important, as it influences our praying. An immediate resolution is rare and at times not possible. Perhaps we have to learn anew how to have ‘staying power’.

The theme of suffering is not alien to me. Much of my officership has been spent in social institutions where injured people were cared for. I experienced a dark time in my soul, but I can testify that our Lord is greater! He wins the battle (**Isaiah 31:4-5**).

In times of suffering one Bible verse has encouraged me over and over again. **Romans 8:28** states: ‘And we know in all things God works for good of those who love him.’ This verse does not mean that as Christians we will only encounter good things, but that God can transform the bad things in our life (suffering) into something good for me and for others if we allow him to do so – not always as easy as it might at first seem. Giving God ‘permission’ means that he has the say in everything related to suffering. But, it does not mean that suffering will definitely be taken away, nor does it mean that suffering should be used for our own purposes, for example to attract attention.

Although we cannot avoid suffering, we should not actively seek it for the sake of it. Suffering reminds us that our life on earth is not for eternity. Something much better, more fantastic is yet to come.

I am convinced that the way Christians handle suffering is a much-needed testimony to our society where immaculate appearance (including mental as well as physical health) is applauded.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How do you react to suffering?
2. Can you give examples of how suffering has been or can be transformed into something good?
3. Do I allow Jesus to transform my suffering into something good?

Living as transformed people

During dark times of your life hold up to God whatever you are facing and allow him to transform it into something good. Let him be the wings beneath your feet and the assurance for victory to come.

Major Heidrun Edwards – IHQ, from Germany, Lithuania and Poland Territory)

Working as Assistant Under Secretary in the Europe Zone, I not only get a glimpse of the amount of suffering worldwide (refugees, natural disasters, persecution) but I also get to know what can happen when Christ's transforming power is claimed and absorbed.

Transformed in our acts of social justice

CAPTAIN SANDRA PAWAR

BIBLE READING: **Proverbs 31:8-9**

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (**Micah 6:8**)

What the Bible says

Our key verse of Scripture is often considered one of the most comprehensive statements on what God asks of us in the Bible. In this statement Micah asks the simple question: What does God require of us?

At the beginning of chapter 6, we see that the people of Israel had not yet come to understand that the authentic and true way to come before the Lord is personal conversion and not through blood sacrifices. In verses 6 and 7 of this chapter we read that the Israelites believed that they needed to make material sacrifices in order to enjoy God's delight and a personal relationship with him. They are struggling with the question of what will please God and they believe the answer is found in their material sacrifices. Yet Micah points out that even though they may have made the most extravagant sacrifices over and over again, they were not living the rest of their lives the way God wanted and therefore their sacrifices became pointless. They had come to a place where outward shows of religion had become more important than their actual relationship with God.

Although Micah poses the question: 'What does God require of us?', he is aware that they already know what is expected of them – it is written in the Word and has been pointed out many times before. In verse 8 Micah reminds them that what God really desires of them is a change of heart, a change in attitude and a heart toward both God and their neighbours. Micah desperately wants them to understand that a relationship with God is personal and involves a heart transformation, not material sacrifices or extravagant shows.

Our lives today

What does it mean to act justly? It means to demonstrate fairness, honesty and integrity in all our dealings. It means we do what is right and fair and we fight for what is right on behalf of others. We must bravely face the various injustices facing people around the world and be prepared to act justly on their behalf. As we read in **Proverbs 31:8-9**: ‘Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.’

What does it mean to love mercy? One definition of mercy is: ‘Compassion or forgiveness shown towards someone whom it is within one’s power to punish or harm’ (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*).

In the world we daily see men, women and children who are being harmed by others. It is not just important that we speak up for them but that we also pray for mercy for those who cause harm. How often do we pray for the perpetrators? For those that sell or buy women and children, for those that abuse or inflict harm upon people? It is hard to show mercy to those people, but if we want to see God’s justice come about in this world we need to pray both for those being harmed and those doing the harm. When we stand ‘in the gap’ (**Ezekiel 22:30**) and show mercy and pray for mercy, victory after victory is won.

What does it mean to walk humbly with our God? To walk implies movement; it means your relationship with God is not stagnant but growing and developing. To walk humbly with God means to be in submission to God and to be willing to walk where he wants you to walk. When it comes to issues of justice it means walking with God amidst opposition and injustice yet continuing to move forward towards justice because you know he is walking alongside you. **Isaiah 41:10** says: ‘So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.’

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Can you name one form of injustice being faced by people around the world today? When you have done so, write down how you will act justly on their behalf.
2. Thinking of that same form of injustice, how will you show mercy to the perpetrators?
3. How do you think acting justly and showing mercy can transform your walk with God?

Living as transformed people

Read **Proverbs 31:8-9** each day this month and then ask God to give you opportunities to act upon it.

Captain Sandra Pawar – Southwark Corps, UK, from USA Southern Territory
Issues of social justice are close to my heart. I have seen how showing justice and mercy to people has brought about incredible transformation in my own walk with Jesus and has changed the way I minister.

Transformed in our spiritual journey

LT-COLONEL EVA DANSO

BIBLE READING: **I John 1:7**

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. **(v 7)**

What the Bible says

Whether we are aware of it or not, we are on a journey. It is not a journey by car, but if it were, everything we need to know about operating and maintaining the vehicle would be found in the owner's manual. The manual for our spiritual journey is the Bible.

The Bible describes two kinds of lives and two ways to live. You are either in the flesh or in the Spirit (**Romans 8:9**) and walk according to the flesh or according to the Spirit (**Galatians 5:25**). The unbeliever lives in the flesh and walks according to the flesh. The Christian walks in the Spirit and ideally walks according to the Spirit. Walking after the old ways of the flesh is abnormal for a believer. It is like a butterfly which thinks and acts as though he was still a caterpillar.

We are a new creation from the day we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). The Spirit of God creates something new – he takes out of us the heart of stone that rebels against God and puts into us a new heart which trusts God and follows his ways. **Ezekiel 36:26-27** affirms: 'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; ... I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.'

Our spiritual lives mature as we walk the journey of life. We seek to follow the example of Jesus and form our character to be more and more like him in thought, word and deed. Spiritually, Jesus grew strong and in the favour of God. Jesus looked to God in perfect obedience, and God nurtured him in his perfect favour. Socially, Jesus grew in favour with men. He was friendly, loving, caring, helpful, unselfish, pure, honest and humble. Other families within his community welcomed him.

Our lives today

Just as physical food becomes part of our physical body, what we feed on for our spiritual journey becomes part of who we are (**1Corinthians 3:2**).

To walk in darkness is to live and act against God. We should remember that Jesus put on flesh and blood and died to cleanse us from our sins. He bought us with the price of his own blood.

Once I was living in sin – not knowing where life’s journey would end – but when I received Christ he gave me true sight and a sense of what sin is. I am now a child of God. His Spirit leads me on life’s journey.

Today, we see how few children of God follow the example of Jesus, and therefore how few really grow spiritually. Too many follow the crowd, ignoring the challenge of Jesus to stand up for him. But as children of light, we are to progress by faith and increase in spiritual light and knowledge. We are to walk in faith in Christ, the Light. We are to walk in the light and truth of the gospel.

We are to have fellowship with one another and with God. Without having fellowship with God there can be no true Christian fellowship with one another. ‘But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin’ (**1 John 1:7**).

How do we walk in the light? Walking in the light is what we do when the desires produced by the Spirit are stronger than the desires produced by the flesh. Therefore, walking in the light is something the Holy Spirit enables us to do by producing in us strong desires that align with God’s will.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What does it mean to walk after the Spirit?
2. Are there any examples of this in the Bible?
3. How do we walk in the light?

Living as transformed people

The fruit of the Spirit is seen in our life when we walk in the light. We learn from Luke 2:52 that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in divine and human favour. As disciples of Jesus, we need to imitate Christ and grow in the grace and knowledge of him on our spiritual journey.

May we take the time to realise for ourselves how the Spirit is leading us by producing godly desires. The commands of God become a joy, not a burden.

Lieut-Colonel Eva Danso – IHQ (having served in Ghana)

In all my appointments, and currently as the International Literature Programme Coordinator, I want to be as one transformed in my spiritual journey with Jesus.

