

PRAYER RESOURCES FOR TIMES OF CHALLENGE AND UNCERTAINTY

This is a set of studies based on stories from the New Testament when Jesus and the Disciples find themselves in challenging circumstances, and their reactions to the situation. They can be used for individual or group reflections, a retreat session, Bible studies, as part of a worship service, or as part of your church planning programme.

Each study offers a brief reflection on the story, suggestions for actions and discussion points arising from the passage that encourage you to prayerfully respond.

At the start of each study you might like to do the following:

Read the story together

- We would suggest reading the story aloud two or three times, using different translations and different readers/voices each time.
- Reading 1
- Pause – in a moment of stillness – what are you noticing?
- Reading 2
- Pause – in a moment of stillness – what are you becoming curious about?
- Reading 3
- Pause – in a moment of stillness – what questions do you have/what seems important?

Reflect on the story

Take some time to reflect on the story and if you are in a group, take a few minutes to chat about what stood out for each of you.

1. On the Road to Emmaus	3
2. In the Garden of Gethsemane	5
3. Jesus Calms the Storm	6
4. Jesus Appears to the Disciples on the Shore.....	7
5. Day of Pentecost	8

1. On the Road to Emmaus

[Luke 24:13-35](#)

The two disciples are walking away from Jerusalem thinking that things had not gone to plan. They are disillusioned and unsure as to exactly what has happened. A curious stranger appears in their midst and asks them: “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” Jesus is keen to know what the two discouraged disciples are thinking. He wants to hear their concerns and understanding of what has just happened from their perspective. It is important that we take time to share our stories as we journey along the way.

As the disciples sit down for a meal with Jesus, He breaks bread and then disappears right before their eyes. The disciples say: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us? When they think back to what has just happened, they realise that subconsciously something special was happening, but they had not stopped to identify what it was.

Are there things happening around us where we are unable to recognise Jesus’ presence with us? Are we, like these disciples and Thomas, too wrapped up in the immediate circumstances to see the bigger picture? Once the disciples understood what had just happened, they raced back to Jerusalem to share their story of hope with their closest companions.

Pray

We would have a real sense of Jesus’ presence with us as we journey together.

We do not forget to look up and outwards at what is happening around us.

Give thanks that we have the promise of Christ with us and His encouragement when we start to lose heart.

Act

Think about other people or groups you know of who are facing similar circumstances to you at the moment. Find out how they are affected and ways that they might be supporting and working with each other.

Ask others about their experiences and try to see things from their perspective, so that we might have a greater understanding of where Jesus is at work in the community, walking beside us in our daily activities – pray together about it.

Share with your group about a time that your 'heart was burning within you' – when you had a feeling that you were witnessing something special... how did you react? What did you notice around you and within you? Where do you get that same sense in the places you are involved now?

2. In the Garden of Gethsemane

[Luke 22:39-46](#)

The Disciples think that everything they have been doing for the past three years has just come crashing down. What challenges are you experiencing within your church and community where it feels as though plans have shifted or gone in very unexpected ways? Is there a risk of your focus being in the wrong place and falling asleep, like the Disciples? In the story there is a mix of different responses to the unfolding events, with people lashing out and losing ears and so on. Where are you witnessing responses that are compassionate in the midst of tensions and unsettling circumstances?

The word Gethsemane means 'oil press', and to extract the goodness from the olives in the garden, it would literally need to be squeezed out of them. In the midst of pressure from lots of different places, where are you seeing goodness? Where are there blessings to be found in the midst of all that is going on?

Pray

For the strength to accept what has to come next.

For a vision of how the growth of mission can come from a place of loss or upheaval.

For a real sense of Jesus with you in the midst of pressure.

That blessing and anointing would emerge from the oil press.

Act

Make a list of the things that are worrying you today – share them with Jesus. There is strength in showing our vulnerability that can lead to the opportunity to be compassionate and receive comfort.

Take time to pray and discuss what Jesus might be asking of you in the midst of upheaval and pressure.

In what ways can you work together with others on common concerns?

3. Jesus Calms the Storm

[Mark 4:35-41](#) or [Matthew 8:23-27](#)

This event comes after Jesus has told a number of parables about growth and fruitfulness (in Mark 4) or (in Matthew 8) after performing a number of miracles of healing. It is of note that Jesus sets aside time to move to a quiet place to pray before the major events in His life of ministry.

In their panic in the face of danger, the Disciples forget that Jesus is beside them and present with them even when He is sleeping. It is understandable that we can become disheartened, or lose sight of God's promise to be with us, even in times of challenge and uncertainty. But it is important to remember that we can turn to Jesus for help, whatever the circumstances.

Pray

Give thanks that God is always watching over us, even if sometimes it does not seem like it, or when you feel overwhelmed by events.

That you would recognise Jesus speaking decisively into the midst of our fears.

For others you know of who might be feeling tossed by the stormy seas.

Act

Make a conscious effort to create regular time and space to pray about important decisions and to remember that Christ is with us throughout difficult and confusing times.

Pray for people in your community or others you know of who are feeling abandoned or frightened by the force of circumstances beyond their control.

What are the ways can you offer support or encouragement to them?

Actively make time to seek out quiet spaces and listen for God in the midst of all that is going on. While in the midst of storms be attentive to where God/Jesus might be.

4. Jesus Appears to the Disciples on the Shore

[John 21:1-17](#)

The Disciples have no idea what to do now. They go back to what they knew and were comfortable with – fishing. They needed a really obvious clue to recognise that Jesus was in their midst – a replay of their first calling. Do we need to remind ourselves of our own sense of calling and mission? How are we feeding and tending the sheep in meaningful ways?

Jesus forgives Peter for his three-times denial; what do we need to let go of or turn around to allow us to continue to be faithful? We all fall short, but God is patient, and this friendship is never withdrawn from us. Even the people we might think are the most unlikely candidates are given some of the greatest tasks.

Jesus' instructions to Peter remind us of our shared responsibility to carry out the work of the kingdom.

Pray

That we keep our eyes open to see Jesus in situations around us and to recognise that it is up to us to continue Jesus' mission to bring peace in every generation.

That we can forgive and encourage people when they get frightened or fall away, and to draw on the strength of the community of God to encourage and support each other as we follow in Jesus' footsteps.

Give thanks for the people and organisations that support and encourage us when we are feeling downhearted or lost.

Act

Think about who you turn to in times of difficulty. How have they encouraged you in the past?

Do you know of anyone or any groups that are feeling lost or confused? How might you be able to offer them support?

Identify the ways in which your community is feeding the flock or tending God's sheep. Are there needs that you can help to meet?

5. Day of Pentecost

[Acts 2:1-28](#)

After Jesus' death and ascension, the followers of Jesus find themselves in a completely new place, with no plan of how to move forward, but still with a sense of purpose. The chaos and rowdiness that heralds the coming of the Holy Spirit throws everything open and overturns everyone's expectations of how to behave. There could be no more hiding in an upper room after this very public display! In the midst of the noise and confusion it was clear that the Holy Spirit was moving. People from a diverse set of backgrounds were integral to the story. How are we making space to listen to and take on board the voices of different generations or cultural backgrounds, New Scots and those who are marginalised to be influential in our communities?

Pray

That we can embrace radical change and listen for God's voice speaking to us through all the noise.

Sometimes chaos and confusion are required to shake us out of a place of fear or complacency. Pray that we are prepared to be surprised, remembering that the Holy Spirit works through every one of us.

To be thankful for contributions from voices that we might not expect to hear.

Act

At this time of mission and strategy planning, whose voices are we listening to? Whose are the surprising voices that are making themselves heard in your community?

Consider verses 14-28 and how this vision of old people/young people prophesying is being played out in your church. Whose voice is dominant? Whose voice is missing or being drowned out, or needs to be brought into the conversation?

Where do you think you notice God's voice in your plans/situation?

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