

80 Creative Prayer Ideas

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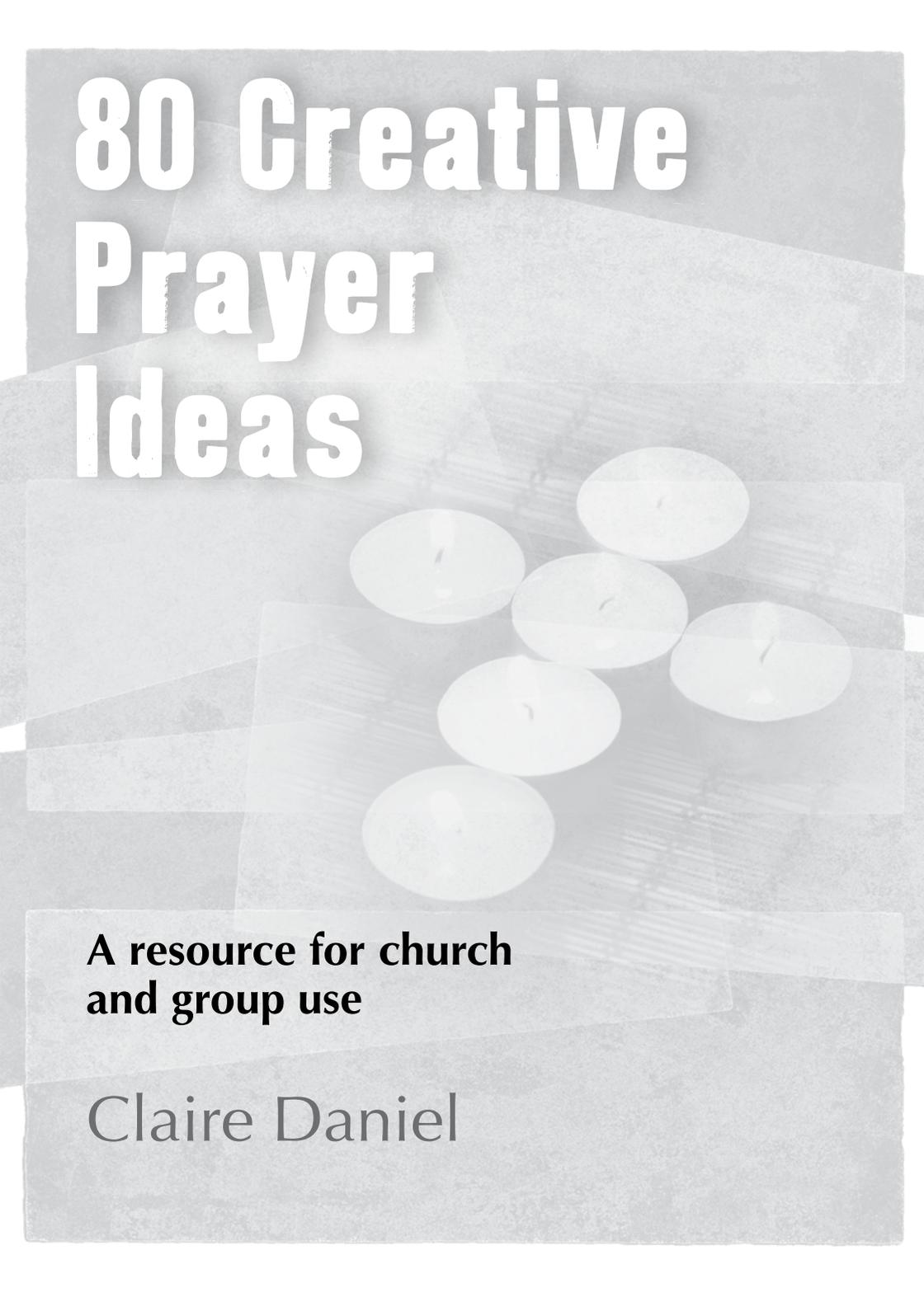
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80 Creative Prayer Ideas



**A resource for church
and group use**

Claire Daniel

*For my Grandpa, Walter Hooley. You are wise beyond your 94 years.
Your stories and strength inspire me simply to trust God,
whom you have served so faithfully.*

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Preface

Creative prayer has long been a feature of my journey with God—an integral part of some of the most significant and memorable moments in the development of my faith so far. There have been numerous times, at intervals, when I have personally spent time in prayer, alone or as part of a group or congregational worship, using simple, active prayer responses. These have been experiences of important reflection, sometimes painful or cathartic but mainly joyful, reassuring and uplifting.

Moments spent in creative reflection give precious time over to listening to God in prayer, as well as offering worship or requests to him. Creative prayer activities also help at those times when our prayers are difficult to form into words or when we feel we lack eloquence. As a form of worship, response and communication, creative prayer enables many Christians to discover a level of closeness and connection with God quite different from the other types of prayer that form their ‘usual’ worship experience.

The written prayers, doodles, objects and Bible verses that I have kept from times spent in creative prayer remain some of the most treasured memories and keepsakes of my faith. They serve as a reminder both of the things I shared with God and the things he communicated to me, a wonderful sign of all that God has done for me and the journey that I have walked with him so far. They also act as visual reminders to continue to pray for certain things, and to keep on persevering, growing and developing in my faith.

In writing this book, my aim is to make creative methods of prayer accessible to everyone and anyone who wants to engage with God in an imaginative, alternative way. The book has been put together in a user-friendly format, designed to be used or

adapted to suit a variety of group, church or individual needs and settings. Some of these ideas may be familiar, as they are, to a degree, adaptations of widely known ways of bringing prayers creatively to God. However, the majority have occurred to me during my own moments of reflection, when I have not been consciously trying to devise a specific idea.

I pray that this book may be a helpful resource to you, whenever and wherever you choose to use it. May you, and all those with whom you share these ideas, find great joy, rest and renewal as you explore the ways to meet with God that best suit you.

Prayer is everywhere. Prayer is language used to respond to the most that has been said to us, with the potential for saying all that is in us.

EUGENE PETERSON, *HOPE: A POCKET INSPIRATIONS BOOK*
(SUMMERSIDE PRESS), P. 58

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Foreword

This is a book that is so needed in our word-filled world! It is wonderfully creative, helping us to engage with all of our being in the whole business of listening to, walking with, waiting for and talking with God. It provides biblically based ideas to make prayer accessible to an individual, small group or church congregation in ways that are engaging, stimulating and fun.

So many of us find it hard getting down to prayer, whether we try on our own or with others in a small group or in a church setting. Often this is because we rely solely on using verbal tools to 'pray'. Although that does work for some of us, others need to engage more actively in the 'doing' and so become able to connect with the Bible passage, themes or issues in more interactive ways which enable prayer to flow for themselves and for others.

I hope this book will spur on leaders who want to include creative praying in church services and home groups as well as individuals who want to explore new ways of encountering God in the place of prayer. Jesus clearly showed us our responsibilities as his followers: to pray for his kingdom to come and for his will to be done in and for our families and our neighbours, in our communities, our nation and our world. Let's use these creative methods of prayer and see where God leads us as we sense our own prayer journey developing, reaching up to God and out to those he puts on our heart to pray for and about.

Jane Holloway, World Prayer Centre, Birmingham

Introduction

The term ‘creative prayer’ often evokes very mixed and strong reactions. For some Christians, it generates an enthusiasm to pray in new or inventive ways and be guided into a physical, active response to God. A desire to worship God in this way almost literally ‘bubbles up’ in certain personality types, who are naturally eager to use a variety of props or reflective methods in order to communicate with God. In other Christians, however fervent their desire to bring their prayers to God, the term produces a sinking sense of dread or even abject fear. The mere mention of it is swiftly met with cries of ‘I’m not creative!’

If you have used creative prayer methods countless times already, you may wish to skip to the chapters containing themed prayer ideas and use them to start your own ideas flowing straight away. However, you may still find it helpful to take time to read the rest of this introduction, designed as a guide to using creative prayer, as it contains some general ideas for prayer and reflection that can be adapted to fit various settings, themes and occasions.

Many Christians also find that the style of creative prayer is a great leap from the more traditional, liturgical approach with which they are familiar. There are also a great many Christians, actively involved in ministry and familiar with creative prayer, whose desire to use it with their groups or congregations is overwhelmed by the regular demands of their everyday family or work circumstances. Involvement in existing church commitments and paid or voluntary service to God, as well as the pace of life in general, can make the practicalities of organising a creative prayer event an unbearable added pressure for even the most energetic of us. This book sets out to be equally relevant and user-friendly for those to whom creative prayer is a new prospect as for those who are entirely familiar and even ‘expert’ at it. I pray that, whatever your

current need or viewpoint may be, you might keep the book handy for those times when you need a ready-to-use idea or collection of ideas for a particular theme. It may even inspire you to begin your own journey of using creative methods and discovering new ways to pray.

Setting up creative prayer stations, preparing resources and sourcing ideas can be very time-consuming, whether or not you feel you have a flair for it and despite (or perhaps due to) the enormous number of online resources available. The prayer ideas in this book are deliberately designed to provide a complete tool-kit, with guidance on everything you need, to take the stress out of organising creative prayer.

The rest of this introduction provides support with the practical side of planning and implementing creative prayer, as well as some ‘general’ creative prayer ideas that can be used as individual activities or added to the ones included in the subsequent themed chapters. For example, if you wanted to set up a prayer event with five, six or more stations rather than four, the ‘general ideas’ section will enable you to mix and match, add your own ideas and adapt them to your requirements.

Setting up

There are various practical aspects involved in organising a creative prayer activity. The practicalities will vary enormously, depending on whether you are preparing a single activity for a group or congregation, using the prayer ideas at home with your family or holding a creative prayer event or workshop with a number of stations available. You will need to take into consideration the venue you are using and the space available. If you are going to set up a series of stations, you will need, of course, to think more carefully about setting up the space than if you are using a single prayer idea in a small group or church setting.

If you are preparing a complete creative prayer event with four to six or even more stations for people to circulate around in their own time, you will need to put in some groundwork. Ensuring that all is ready in the room itself, in addition to preparing each station and its content, is important. This may be relatively easy in some churches, halls, homes or school settings but may require a little more adjustment and assistance in others. You should think about the changes you may need to make to the overall room and its appearance, which might include some of the following considerations.

Furniture

Make sure you have enough chairs, tables, cushions or beanbags and that carpets and flooring are clean and suitable for use. Set up tables with chairs ready, if needed. Consider whether you will need tablecloths or other decorations to fit with the overall theme, and anything else that will help to provide a calm, relaxed atmosphere in which to focus on prayer.

Lighting and sound

The right kind of lighting is crucial to create the appropriate atmosphere, but your choices will depend on what type of stations you choose to set up. Some may work best if dimly lit, using small lights or candles, but any involving writing, reading or drawing may need some extra lighting. Be creative! Use the lighting options available and bring along extra lamps as required, such as small desk lamps or decorative table lamps.

If some of the stations include the use of music, think about what would work best—a CD player or some kind of MP3 device and appropriate headphones. You may want to engage musicians in your church or group, or use a recording, to have quiet music playing for the duration of the activity. This is not always necessary, of course, but it can aid reflection and help people focus; there

are also times when silence during a time of prayer is more appropriate. Playing recorded worship music as part of a creative prayer event or service does not require a specific licence, as it is classed as part of an ‘act of worship’. However, if you wish to clarify anything regarding the use of music in your chosen venue, information can be found on the Christian Copyright Licensing International website at www.ccli.co.uk.

Power sources

Do ensure that you have adequate power sockets near any stations that require them (for example, if you are using a small lamp or fan). Checking these before you set up will prevent you from having to move stations around at the last minute.

Health and safety

There will inevitably be some basic health and safety considerations in arranging even the simplest creative prayer stations. Most of them will be common-sense issues regarding safe use of power sockets, managing water spillages and furniture lifting. Make sure that you and all those attending are aware of the location of fire exits, extinguishers, toilets and any other amenities specific to the venue, particularly if it is not normally used as a multipurpose space. You may need to return chairs and other furniture to their previous layouts, for other sessions or services. Also, do check that the whole space used is generally clean and tidy.

Make sure you have sufficient fire safety equipment and knowledge specific to your chosen venue, before as well as during your prayer event, and check that you meet fire regulations regarding access if you are changing the furniture layout. You may also need to check the situation regarding the use of naked flames or cooking, if you plan to make these part of any of the stations, to avoid any hazards and to ensure that you don’t accidentally set off smoke alarms.

Handwashing facilities

Many creative prayer ideas, by their very nature, will involve a certain degree of mess, and any stations that involve paint, water or sand may need to be supplied with items such as paper towels or hand wipes. You might even set up the stations near a sink or toilet to facilitate handwashing. It may be necessary to keep a watch on the messier stations during an event and ‘reset’ them periodically or clear up spills. You will also need to provide handwashing facilities if you are using sticky materials, such as bread dough, modelling clay or glue sticks, or if people need to prepare for any food-based creative prayers.

Kitchen requirements

If you are planning to provide a station involving food (including baking or pre-prepared salt dough or biscuits, for example), you should check that there are kitchen facilities available and equipped for your needs. If you choose to bake bread or biscuits as part of the prayer activity, food hygiene and kitchen safety should also be factored in, particularly if younger children are involved.

Replenishing stations

Most of the prayer ideas will require the replenishment of resources, or a large quantity of them to begin with, especially if you are using a single activity as a group or congregation or if you are anticipating a large number of people. As the event proceeds, it is probably a good idea to have someone assigned to keeping the stations tidy and ‘reset’ at intervals. It is important (though probably quite obvious) that the stations are presented in a user-friendly way and kept tidy, in order to be experienced fully by each person.

Some of the prayer ideas include the use of bowls or trays of water, or the use of ice cubes. In addition to handwashing facilities, you may also need to consider how you will fill, refill or manage

water use. You will probably want to use plastic tablecloths or sheets to protect tables and carpets from the inevitable spills.

Props and useful kit

Each prayer idea in this book includes a guide to the items that will be needed. The two templates on pages 188 and 189, for the spinner and pinwheel, may be photocopied from this book or downloaded from www.brfonline.org.uk/9781841016887/.

There are also some generally useful props or 'kit' that you may want to use, in addition to those detailed for each individual prayer idea. If you are not already well stocked with these ministry 'essentials', you will probably start to stockpile supplies, which in turn can generate new prayer ideas. Here is a list, which is far from exhaustive.

- Plastic sheets or tablecloths (either 'standard' ones or camping-style groundsheets).
- Tables and chairs. Size and quantity required will depend on your venue, expected attendance and the prayer stations you are planning.
- Soft furnishings, such as cushions, beanbags, small sofas or blankets. Also think of items that will be useful for enhancing stations, such as small desk or table lamps or even some decorative mats or covers in appropriate colours, to match a theme.
- Craft resources. The possibilities are endless, but a basic craft kit would include glue sticks, scissors, paper, coloured card, sparkly wrapping paper, ribbons, pipe cleaners, felt-tip pens, sticky tape, sticky notes, adhesive tack, paint, paint pots, brushes, sponges, balloons, tissue paper, sequins, buttons, rolls of paper and large sheets of card or fabric (for example, voile or bed sheets).
- Bowls, trays and food equipment. If your prayer activity involves anything food-based, you will need to provide suitable serving bowls, trays or plates. If you are using paint, modelling dough

or other messy craft items, you should find a suitable receptacle for the activity, enabling several hands or feet to dip into them, one or more at a time. If you are using dough (either modelling dough or bread or biscuit dough), you will need to make some simple tools available, such as plastic cutlery, rolling pins or wooden cocktail sticks, to shape, manipulate and decorate items.

Internet

The internet can be an excellent source of images, photos, music and outlined shapes or templates for prayer activities. Although this book is intended to reduce the time taken in searching online for prayer ideas, some of the activities require you to draw or print shapes or templates to use, which can be found online or in a computer wordprocessing package. There are, of course, many prayer ideas available online that you can access to supplement those included here, should you wish to.

Bibles and books

Some of the prayer ideas include a Bible or printed scripture in the ‘What I need’ list, although I have also assumed that some stories will be familiar to users. Depending on your audience, you may feel it necessary or helpful to include a Bible or printed version of a certain story—for example, the story of Zacchaeus.

A selection of Bible versions, plus other inspirational books, leaflets or tracts, can provide a great resource for prayer activities related to a specific verse of scripture. They are also useful if you want to set up a station that is a less structured space, browsing and reading from a selection of material and reflecting or praying unguided. These materials could include Bible verse cards, inspiring quotes, stories and poems.

Getting started

Each prayer idea is set out to give you all the information and instruction needed to resource and plan each activity. You may wish just to use the idea and create your own prayer card or instruction sheet for your station. Alternatively, you can write or type out the wording for the prayers as suggested in the book for each station. You may want to use the 'Reflect' and 'Pray' parts, and possibly the 'Prayer focus:' and 'Bible reflection', as appropriate for your specific audience.

General prayer ideas

The following ideas are useful for creating additional stations if you want to provide a larger creative prayer event. They can be used as a single activity for a group or even congregation to use, and can be adapted to fit with various themes.

- Sticky note prayers: sticky notes are readily available in various shops and can be found in a variety of colours, sizes and shapes (for example, heart- or star-shaped).
- Graffiti prayer wall: use a large roll or piece of paper or card as a space for people to add individual prayers, drawings or Bible verses on a theme, creating a collective wall of prayer graffiti. You can make the wall more structured by preparing uniform shapes for each person to write in, or it can be done 'freestyle'.
- Whiteboard or chalk prayers: this is ideal for any prayers to which people will respond by 'wiping away'. This approach is good for forgiveness or 'fresh start' prayers. Regular or jumbo chinks can be used on either boards or pavements and wiped away with a damp cloth.

- Bubble prayers: individual bubble pots, a shared bubble mixture tray or a bubble machine can be used in a variety of prayer activities or illustrations.
- Shredder prayers: using a paper shredder is a rather noisy but very powerful method of 'letting go' or giving things to God, in response to prayers for forgiveness and moving forward with God.
- Flash paper: this special paper appears to burn when lit, then vanishes without a trace. You can write a word or prayer on it—for example, 'sin'—making an excellent gospel illustration or prayer activity. Adult supervision is required if using flash paper with a younger age group.
- 'Pick a promise' box: a traditional prayer tool, this is available to buy ready-made or you can create your own mini prayer box. It contains tiny rolled-up scrolls, printed with biblical promises. The scrolls usually stand upright in a 'honeycomb' formation but can be stacked inside or tied with pieces of ribbon. The box could be a gift to take away and treasure or a prayer station focus, with scrolls to be read and replaced after each use.
- Tactile prayer objects: examples might be small wooden prayer crosses or hearts, or pebbles from a beach or riverbed. Holding a tactile object during prayer helps to focus the mind and can also inspire prayers.
- Prayer pebbles: casting pebbles into water is a powerful and well-known method of creative response to God. It can be used in a variety of situations and represents a physical act of giving something up to God or symbolising God's cleansing power.
- Modelling clay prayers: modelling clay or dough can be bought or made in a variety of colours and is adaptable to suit a variety of themed prayer activities, including those related to 'moulding' and 'transformation'.

Section 1

Walking with the Bible



Chapter 1

Men of faith

Daniel: courage in the face of adversity

Prayer focus: Using the story of Daniel's courage, to bring before God the 'lions' in our lives, asking for his help to face difficulty and giving thanks for the times when he has provided the strength needed to overcome adversity.



Bible reflection: *When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, 'Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?' Daniel answered, 'May the king live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight.'*

DANIEL 6:20–22

What I need

- Large picture or photo of a lion, open-mouthed (hand-drawn, if you feel very competent, or printed at A4 or larger)
- Paper or card 'mouth' to fit over the mouth in the picture, able to open and close
- Triangular paper or cardboard 'teeth' (pre-cut shapes or triangular sticky notes)
- Adhesive tack (if not using sticky notes)
- Pens or pencils

- Sticky tape or glue
- Copies of Bible, storybook or printed version of the story of Daniel in the lions' den

Set up the image of the lion on a large flipchart, pinboard or table, as required. Make sure the 'mouth' is stuck on, hinged with glue or sticky tape, and that it opens and closes easily.

Reflect: Reflect on the Bible story of Daniel and his trust in God, even in extreme adversity. Consider your own need for strength to face those circumstances or emotions that seem like sharp-toothed lions in your life. These may include seemingly insurmountable worries, difficult relationships or personal struggles in your own experience or that of people known to you.

Pray: Bring these 'lions' before God, trusting that he is a powerful God who gives us the strength to overcome. Take a paper or cardboard tooth and write on it a word or prayer about your worries. Have faith that God can help you overcome your 'lions'.

Take some time, holding the tooth, to pray about these circumstances, fears and impossible situations, giving them into God's care. Give thanks, also, for times when he has helped you overcome the 'impossible' in the past.

When you are ready, lift the mouth of the lion open and stick your 'tooth' of fears or worries on to the space inside. Pray as you do this, remembering that God's strength helps us overcome our 'lions' too.

In a final response, firmly shut the lion's mouth over the sharp, worrisome 'teeth'. Leave these things with God, and rejoice as you look at the lion's mouth, now tightly shut.

David: repentance and renewal

Prayer focus: Using Psalm 32, to reflect on God's power to transform our hearts and offer forgiveness and renewal when we seek his grace.



Bible reflection: *Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!*

PSALM 32:11

What I need

- Bible or printed copies of Psalm 32
- Smaller cards printed with verse 1, 5, 7 or 11 (several copies of each)

Reflect: Read the whole of Psalm 32, or the selected verses below, reflecting on the words before you begin to pray.

Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. (Verse 1)

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.' And you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Verse 5)

You are my hiding-place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. (Verse 7)

Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart! (Verse 11)

Pray: Thank God for the sins he has forgiven and use the verses above to help you confess the wrongs you need to bring before God. Know that he holds out the offer of forgiveness, even before we repent. Know that you are blessed.

Pray your own 'song of deliverance', giving thanks to God for his protection in times of trouble and the grace that sets us free. Pray a prayer of rejoicing, knowing that God hears your prayers and offers forgiveness.

Take a small verse card away with you, as a reminder that God forgives those who truly repent and that he wants you to live in freedom.

Zacchaeus: prayer of restoration

Prayer focus: To bring to God those areas of our life where our faith or ability feels ‘small’, asking God to use our ‘little’ to do ‘big’ things for his kingdom. To pray for restoration and a chance to serve him as Zacchaeus did.



Bible reflection: *Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.’*

LUKE 19:9–10

What I need

- Small blank people shapes (pre-cut from plain card or paper)
- Large tree drawn or printed on to paper or card (large enough to hold a number of the cut-out people shapes)
- Sticky tack
- Scissors
- Felt-tip pens or crayons

Stick a quantity of blank people shapes on to the tree. Replenish later, as required.

Reflect: Consider those areas of your life, ministry, work or spiritual growth where you feel small, inadequate or not up to the job. Reflect on them honestly as you look at the tree and think about the story of Zacchaeus.

Pray: When you feel ready, respond by removing one of the people shapes from the tree, as a sign that you want God to help you to come down from your 'tree' and serve him, however small you feel.

Decorate the figure as yourself, praying as you do so. When your 'Zacchaeus' is finished, take it away with you as a reminder that God can and does do big things when we give our lives to him.

Place your Zacchaeus somewhere where you will see it regularly, to remind you to continue to ask God to help you as you seek to serve him.

Saul/Paul: trust in a transforming God

Prayer focus: To reflect on the story of Paul's conversion after encountering Jesus, and to bring our own prayers for restoration and renewal to a God who can transform lives.



Bible reflection: *All those who heard him were astonished and asked, 'Isn't he the man who caused havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? ... Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.*

ACTS 9:21–22

What I need

- Blindfold or opaque scarf (sleeping masks are ideal)
- Desk lamp or candles
- Matches (if using candles)
- Small tealight candles, unlit

Reflect: Sit for a moment and reflect on areas of your life where you feel a particular need for God to shine the light of his love and grace afresh. Consider where you need God to bring transformation in your life or the lives of people known to you. This might include transformation in relationships, habits, personality traits or struggles with forgiveness.

Pray: Put on a blindfold and sit in darkness as you consider the things you would like God to illuminate or transform. Use these moments of 'blindness' to inspire your prayers.

When you are ready, commit your prayers to God, trusting his transforming power, and remove the blindfold. Appreciate the light and vision you now have and turn on the lamp or light a candle, as a sign that you are asking God to shine into the areas of life that you have considered.

Take a small tealight away with you, unlit, as a reminder of your prayer. You may wish to light it at home, as a reminder of God's light in dark times and his transforming grace.

Chapter 2

Women of faith

Hannah: patient faith

Prayer focus: To reflect on the story of Hannah and to pray for patience and an understanding of God's timing in your life. To help develop patient faith or give thanks for prayers answered after a time of waiting.



Bible reflection: *So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, 'Because I asked the Lord for him.'*

1 SAMUEL 1:20

What I need

- Pencils or pens
- Cut-out clock faces with the words of 1 Samuel 1:20 printed on the reverse, plus space to write a prayer or word of hope or faith.

Lay out the clock faces on a table or board, with pens or pencils ready for use.

Reflect: Reflect on situations in your life that require patience, such as difficult circumstances, ongoing illness or a long-held prayer that has not yet been answered.

Pray: Use the verse printed on the clock face to inspire your prayers, thinking especially of those things that you need to trust in God to fulfil or deal with in due time. Pray for patience as you wait for an answer. Pray that God may bring clarity and peace as you continue to seek his assistance.

Take up a clock face as a reminder that God does things in due time—and trust the timing into his care.