

SEVEN | Holy Living



Spend a few moments in quiet reflection on the picture featuring a diver and a labyrinth. When painting this picture Ric Stott was reflecting on his experience of diving into a sinkhole off the Sinai coast of Egypt. He says 'Swimming over the sinkhole I felt fear: an awe and trepidation at encountering something so much bigger than I could conceive. It didn't feel like a safe place to be and yet I could sense the call from the depths that beckoned the divers onward.'



What do the images in the picture say to you about holiness and justice? Share what you see as a group.



Read through the 'Holy Living' material in the booklet.



Share a conversation around the question 'How are you going to make a difference with your life?' If you are doing this as a final session note how your answer to this question varies to the one given in response to the question in the first session 'What difference would you like to make? Have these studies on Holiness and Justice changed your thinking?

**Biblical Study | Psalm 57**

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1 Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me,
for in you my soul takes refuge;
in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge,
until the destroying storms pass by.</p> <p>2 I cry to God Most High,
to God who fulfills his purpose for me.</p> <p>3 He will send from heaven and save me,
he will put to shame those who trample on me.
God will send forth his steadfast love and his
faithfulness.</p> <p>4 I lie down among lions
that greedily devour human prey;
their teeth are spears and arrows,
their tongues sharp swords.</p> <p>5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens.
Let your glory be over all the earth.</p> | <p>6 They set a net for my steps;
my soul was bowed down.
They dug a pit in my path,
but they have fallen into it themselves.</p> <p>7 My heart is steadfast, O God,
my heart is steadfast.
I will sing and make melody.</p> <p>8 Awake, my soul!
Awake, O harp and lyre!
I will awake the dawn.</p> <p>9 I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among
the peoples;
I will sing praises to you among the nations.</p> <p>10 For your steadfast love is as high as the heavens;
your faithfulness extends to the clouds.</p> <p>11 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens.
Let your glory be over all the earth.</p> |
|---|---|

This psalm is often associated with the time in David's life when he found himself in conflict with Saul, Israel's king (see especially 1 Samuel 24). This narrative setting offers a context which helps readers make sense of the psalm in relation to troubled times in their own lives.

The psalm slides between lament and celebration as the psalmist contrasts their own situation with God's greatness. There are many images and words which highlight the overwhelming love of God and the way in which this brings blessing to the psalmist. There are also many ways in which the psalmist pictures their suffering and their fear of their enemies.

The call to 'awake' (v.8) emerges from the psalmist's realisation that 'my heart is steadfast' (v.7) – the enemies cannot overwhelm this determined commitment to God. These two verses pivot the psalm into glowing praise and thanksgiving for God's world-wide, heaven-reaching majesty.

1 Timothy 2:1-6

Instructions concerning Prayer

2 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. ³ This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, ⁴ who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, ⁶ who gave himself a ransom for all—this was attested at the right time.



To think about |

Ric Stott's image of a labyrinth highlights the twists and turns and dead ends that are part of the journey to the centre. The words of this psalm work in the same way, slipping between praise and lament on the way to the final outpouring of love for God. Alongside this, we set the comment of Michael Ramsey, a twentieth-century Archbishop of Canterbury. When asked how long he spent in conversation with God, he said, 'Two minutes – but it takes me twenty-eight minutes to get there'.

How far does this image and these words reflect your own experience of personal prayer?

Are there things that help you reach the 'still centre' – a candle? music? a special place? a particular form of words?

This letter, probably written after Paul's own times, encourages Christians to pray for 'everyone' – including their pagan neighbours – but especially for those in authority, the unpredictable, erratic, despotic leaders of the Roman empire. After all, their well-being depended on the decisions of these men.

The focus of the text shifts at v.3 to stress that God is the creator of all (Gen.1:27). Kings, like everyone else, need to be saved. For them and for everyone, Jesus offers the way to salvation as a mediator or go-between.

This letter, probably written after Paul's own times, encourages Christians to pray for 'everyone' – including their pagan neighbours – but especially for those in authority, the unpredictable, erratic, despotic leaders of the Roman empire. After all, their well-being depended on the decisions of these men.

The focus of the text shifts at v.3 to stress that God is the creator of all (Gen.1:27). Kings, like everyone else, need to be saved. For them and for everyone, Jesus offers the way to salvation as a mediator or go-between.

When we pray for others, we have two complementary aims. We pray that they may do their jobs well (whether they are kings or dustbin-men) so that our lives may be 'quiet, peaceable, godly and dignified'. But at a deeper level, we pray that all people may come to know God through Christ, as we ourselves have done.

What does the diver find in the depths of the ocean? What does the explorer find at the heart of the labyrinth? They come back wanting to speak of their discoveries. Jacques Cousteau made films. The child

who has made it to the centre of the maze tells you excitedly about the fort, or the dragon, in the middle.

When we enter the depths, when we penetrate the secrets of the labyrinth, we bring back news, stories of wonders. In praying for others, we become go-betweens in our own right, finding the words, or the images, or the music to convey the glory of God. Our prayers for others involve that passion to share the vision, so that they too will enter the depths and explore for themselves the 'limitless riches of Christ' (Eph.3:8).



To talk about | What have you discovered about Christ that you would really want to share with other people? What would be the best way of doing this? (Words? Images? Music? Objects?)



Prayer Activities | You might like to spend some time exploring the on-line labyrinth on the Methodist website, <http://www.lostinwonder.org.uk/labyrinth.htm>

As a group, you could write on slips of paper the words which speak most clearly for you of God and what you have discovered about God in your prayers. Then you could exchange these (perhaps putting them in a basket and drawing out different ones) and spend some time thinking about the words used by others to speak of God.

A closing prayer

God of the mountain-top

God of the depths

We seek you with our whole being

Trusting that one day we shall find you

And be found by you.

Open our eyes to see your glory at the heart of all things.

Show us the ways to share with others our sense of your holiness

And as we wander the labyrinth of life, hold us by the hand and bring us home.

Amen.

Suggested Hymn (to sing at the beginning or the end if desired): STF 527 Pray for a world where every child