

Slithers of Gold



Creative Activities and reflections on the themes of Guilt, Mending and Grace; connecting issues in day to day life with Bible stories



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*** Group leaders are advised to review this section before they begin.**



This pack includes a selection of linked creative activities discussion questions, and reflections on the themes of Guilt, Mending and Grace; connecting issues in day to day life with Bible stories.

These are adapted from approaches initially used in informal worship in an Anglican church in Derbyshire and are suitable for use in various informal contexts including small groups.

As with all Unlock resources leaders need to use the material flexibly, creatively and selectively, adapting it to the needs of their own local context and groups.

It is not designed as a series of distinct sessions, but as a succession of linked topics and activities that can be run over as many or as few sessions as seems appropriate. You can go fast or slow!



Regrets

I really wish I hadn't . . .

- What are the things you have done that you have gone on regretting *for a very long time*?
- What are the regrets that you can't let go of?



Judged?

- Do you ever feel guilty *in your heart* even when *in your head* you know you don't need to?
- Do you ever feel guilty for things that are outside your control?
- Does the church (or church people) ever *make* you feel guilty?
- Why do you suppose that is?



Reflection Material for Leaders . . .

How do we get it so wrong?

Somehow the church has done a far better job, historically, of selling us *guilt* than it has of selling us *grace*. It has convicted us of sin and made us *feel it in our hearts* whereas somehow the way the church has communicated grace has only reached our heads. So we *feel* guilt, while we only *understand* grace, we rarely *feel* it.

You don't have to look at much church history to see how it works. The church would set up impossible rules, rules that were not all biblical and rules that anyone who is human is bound to break sooner or later. And the church would tell people (in days when most could not read the bible for themselves in order to question this) that if they broke those rules they would spend eternity in hell, that they had separated themselves from God for ever. But there was a solution, and for that they needed a priest. If they confessed their sins and followed their priest's instructions for an act of penance, then the priest had the power to reconnect people to God – until they sinned again. For the wealthy there was even the option of paying the church to have their sins obliterated, and if your loved one died and you weren't quite sure how much they had sinned, you could pay the church to say masses for them to improve their chances of going to heaven and not hell.

So you can see what the church and the priest get out of this system?

Slowly, slowly these attitudes have been broken down since the invention of printing and universal education but they have left deep marks on how we think about the Christian Faith.

The fact that the church has used guilt as a way to control people, sadly in much the same way that manipulative and narcissistic individuals use guilt, has done great harm over the centuries, to people, to the church and to the Christian faith.



Reflection Material for Leaders . . .

Good Guilt/ Bad Guilt

Although it's often an unwelcome feeling guilt is not necessarily a bad thing; it has it's uses. If we really have done something that is destructive to ourselves or to others guilt serves to make us question that behaviour and reflect on how to avoid causing such harm again.

But, for guilt to work in the way that it's meant to, it should be temporary. It is useful for only as long as it takes for us to recognise our fault, make what amends are possible and learn from our error; but if it continues beyond that point it serves only to oppress us. It is appropriate for guilt to motivate us to avoid such destructive behaviour in the future but if it cripples us with the fear of putting a foot wrong, so that we do nothing rather than things that we need to do, then it is not helpful.



Matthew 26:69-end Peter's Denial of Jesus



Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, 'You also were with Jesus the Galilean.' But he denied it before all of them, saying, 'I do not know what you are talking about.' When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, 'This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.' Again he denied it with an oath, 'I do not know the man.' After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, 'Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.' Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, 'I do not know the man!' At that moment the cock crowed. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: 'Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly.



- How would you have felt if you were Peter: -
 - a) when he was being recognised and questioned?
 - b) when Jesus looked at him and the cock crowed?
- Do you feel sorry for Peter?
- What do you think Peter deserved after this?
- What happened to Peter?



- How did his guilt about this change him?



- What is the point of guilt?
- What use is it?
- When is it not useful, or no longer useful?
- How can it trap us, or harm us?

To see what happens to Peter later have a look at: -

John 21:15-17

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord;



you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.



Meditation

Take a blanket and wrap it around your shoulders.

It represents the guilt you carry with you always. It has weight, it has density. It impedes your actions to some extent and it means that you never really feel light and free. When it is warm it is somewhat suffocating and it saps your energy. Very occasionally you may be able to put it down for a few minutes and feel some relief but you very quickly pick it back up again because you feel a little bit exposed without it.



But you know, it's also kind of comforting. You are used to it; it has always been there and it has become a part of you. You have adjusted your way of walking through the world to accommodate it. Sometimes you are barely aware that it is there.

But God notices, even when we don't. God notices and God feels such love and sorrow for us that God cannot leave us sweating under a burden of guilt that restricts our joy and weighs us down. God is so distressed by what we have accepted into our lives that something must be done. That oppression must be lifted from us and God comes to us in Jesus and says, 'you don't need to carry that any more, you never did need to keep it with you'. And how do we respond? We go 'Nah, you're alright, it's not heavy, I can manage it. I can't leave it behind; it might get lost and I deserve it anyway. That person over there needs your help more than I do' And Jesus says, 'but I can take it, give it to me, I can carry all of that and everyone else's as well. I love you and I can't bear to see you struggling, please let me take it from you If you will let it go then I can put my arms around you properly and give you a great big hug and make all that pain go away.

Now you can choose whether you shed your blanket, or keep wearing it until the end of the session.



Patchwork Guilt

It is as if each of us makes ourselves a '*patchwork guilt*' which we hold and keep and carry. It says, 'Yes, I know I'm a sinner; you don't have to keep telling me that'.

You are invited to make your own 'patchwork guilt' and to use the activity as the basis for a reflection

Instructions are on the following page.

As you work; think about the guilt that will not let you go such as: -

- The time when you had to choose between something bad and something much worse
- The guilt you feel about not living up to someone else's unrealistic expectations
- The guilt you feel about the way you are made – about things about yourself that you cannot change
- The guilt you feel about the white lie that was told to save someone from pain
- The guilt you feel at being manipulated or abused
- The guilt you feel about lapses & failures that are just because you are human and not always perfect
- The guilt you feel about the things you struggle with
- The time you were too tired, fragile, or ill to do what you felt you really should.



Everyone needs: -

- A piece of backing paper, ideally A3 but A4 will do if space or resources are short, reasonably strong but doesn't have to be pretty.
- Scissors
- Paper glue - the stick type is the least messy option
- An assortment of hexagon sheets from the following pages
- Coloured pens
- Some plain coloured paper

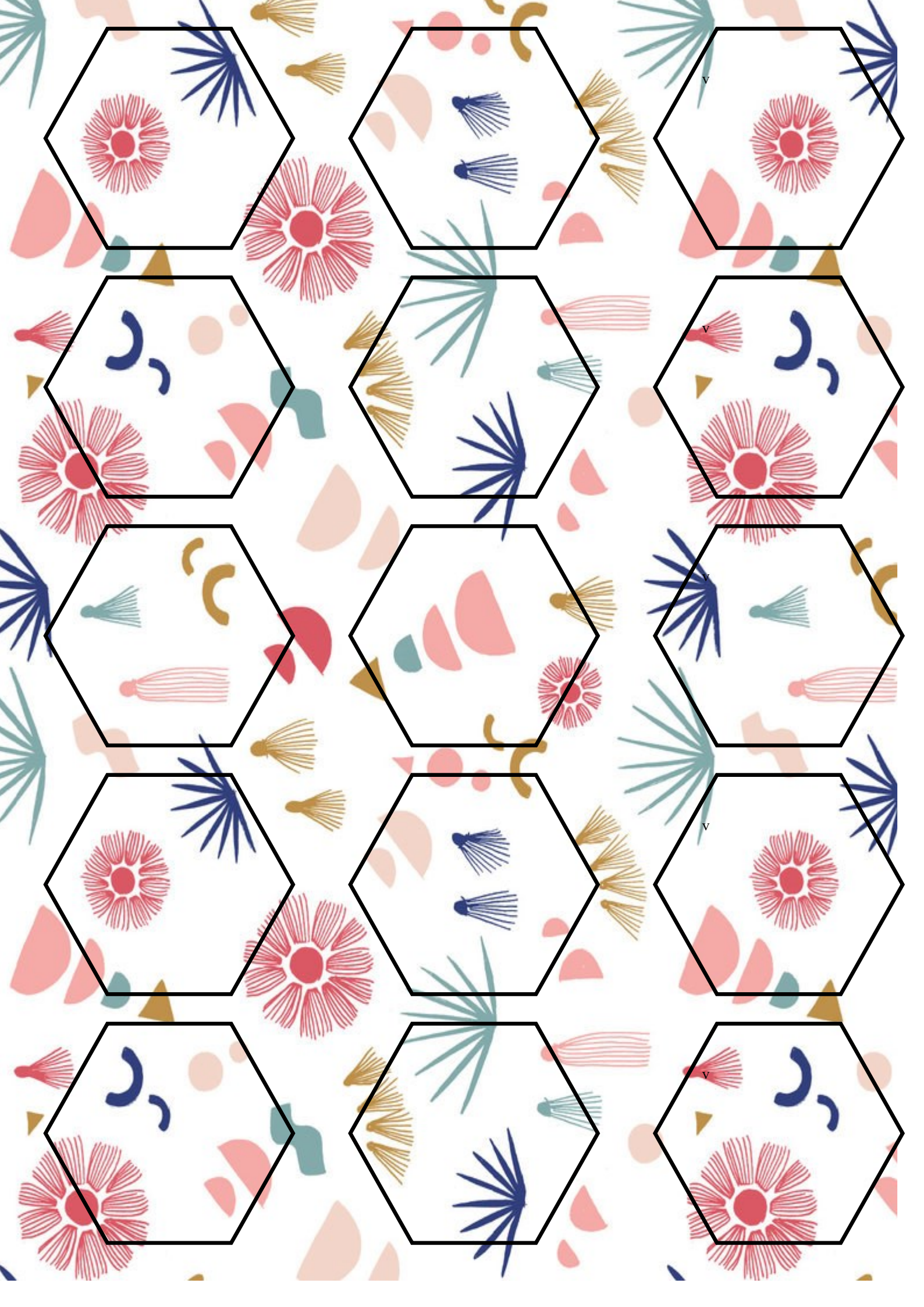
Instructions: -

- Cut out hexagons in the colours and patterns of your choice
- Arrange them and stick them into a patchwork pattern on your backing paper
- Using the questions on page 17 you can embellish your 'Patchwork Guilt' with words or pictures using the coloured pens, and some of the plain coloured paper if you like.

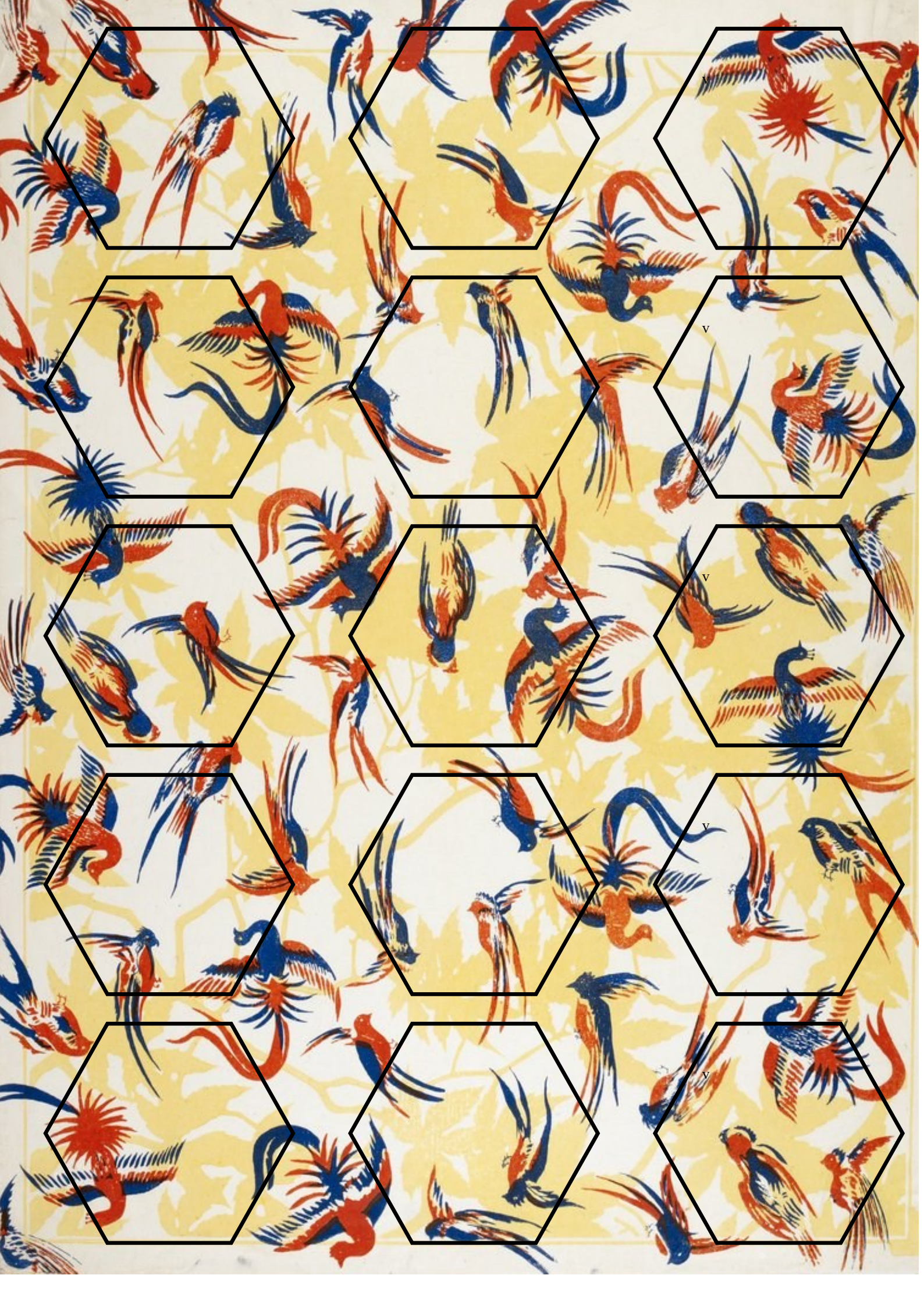
As you work you can listen to

[https://
littleroommusic.bandcamp.com/
album/road-to-the-city](https://littleroommusic.bandcamp.com/album/road-to-the-city)

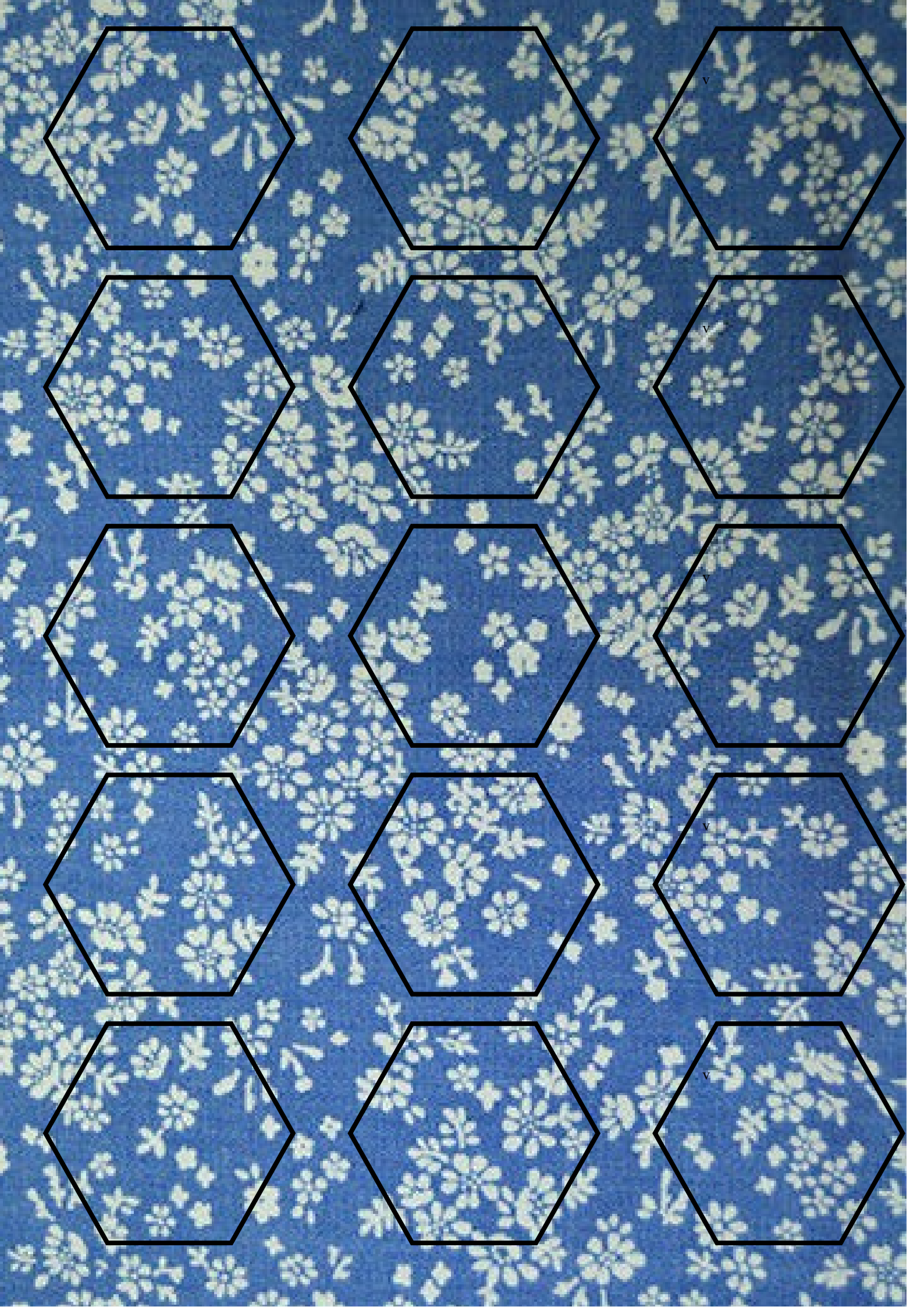




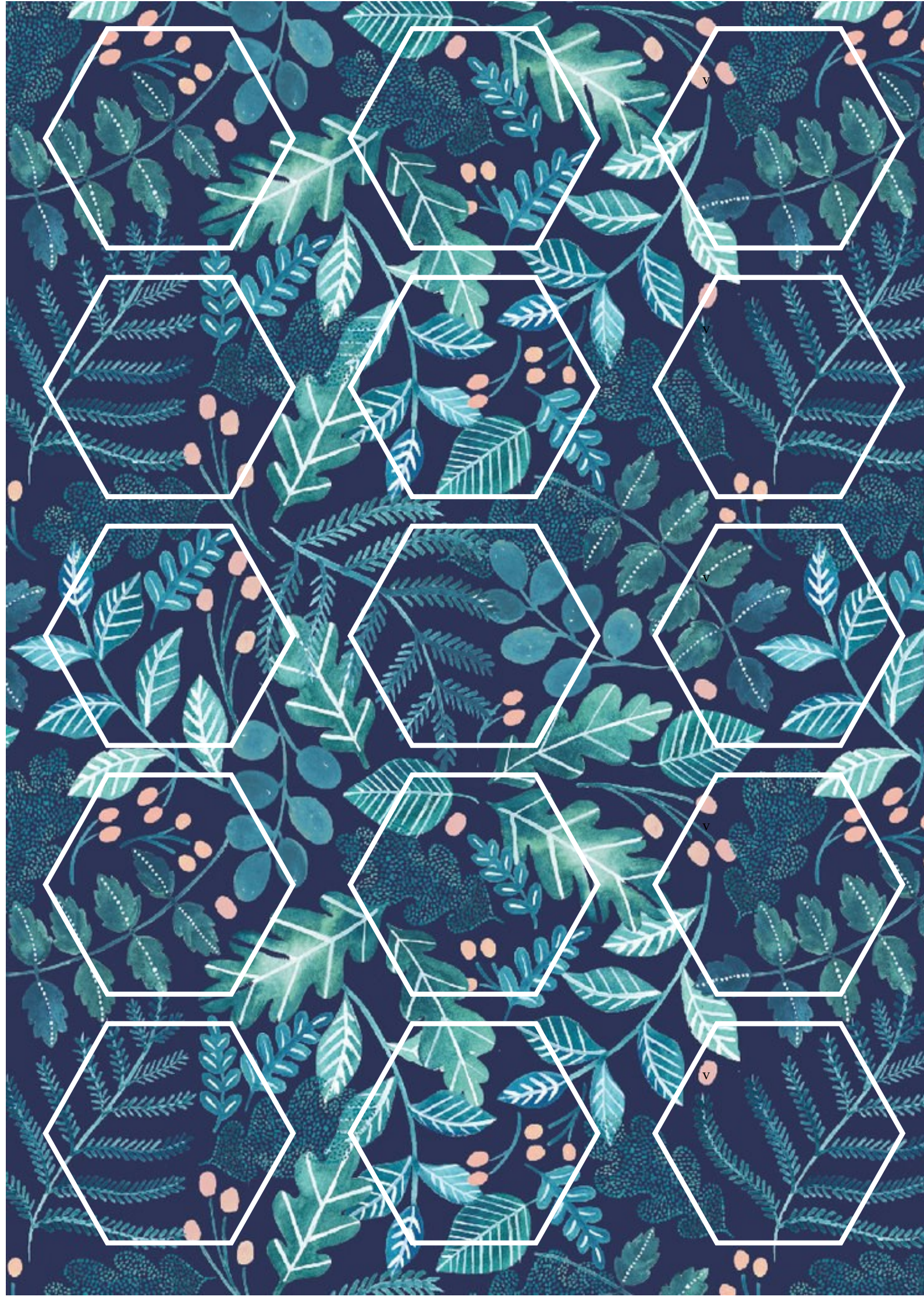


























You can take your 'Patchwork guilt' home with you and use it to think (or pray) more about what you have been discussing today.

You might want keep it for a bit and your group might decide to bring them all back together again in a week or so and destroy them together.

Or, one day, when you feel you are ready, you might want to destroy it yourself, or with a friend, as you choose to let go of any guilt that you no longer need to carry.



Optional alternative: -

Groups that are really up for a challenge, or already accustomed to using textiles, could replace this paper activity with making small fabric patchworks if they like; but it's more work, the materials are more costly and you will be much more reluctant to destroy them afterwards!

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



Uncomfortable blessing

“May the Spirit bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships so that you will live deep in your heart.

May the Spirit bless you with anger at injustice and oppression, and exploitation of people and the earth so that you will work for justice, equity and peace.

May the Spirit bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer so that you will reach out your hand to comfort them.

May the Spirit bless you with foolishness to think that you can make a difference in the world, so that you will do the things which others say cannot be done.”

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Brokenness



We're all a little bit broken

Hands up anyone who feels that they are perfect!

I remember when our first child was born. Like all new babies (even the ones who are not born whole and healthy) he was an amazing little miracle; tiny but perfect. Ten tiny toes and ten tiny fingers, eye lashes and a little round bottom! Nothing mattered in the world right then except that new human.

And yet in my heart I knew, even in the midst of all that wonder, that it was only a matter of time before that perfection would be damaged in some small way. I treasured the days of his unblemished perfection because I knew they had a shelf life. I knew that he could not stay forever unscathed. If he was to live, then he would be hurt, both physically and emotionally. It is an inevitable consequence of life. I can't actually remember the first of his childhood injuries, perhaps, a tiny



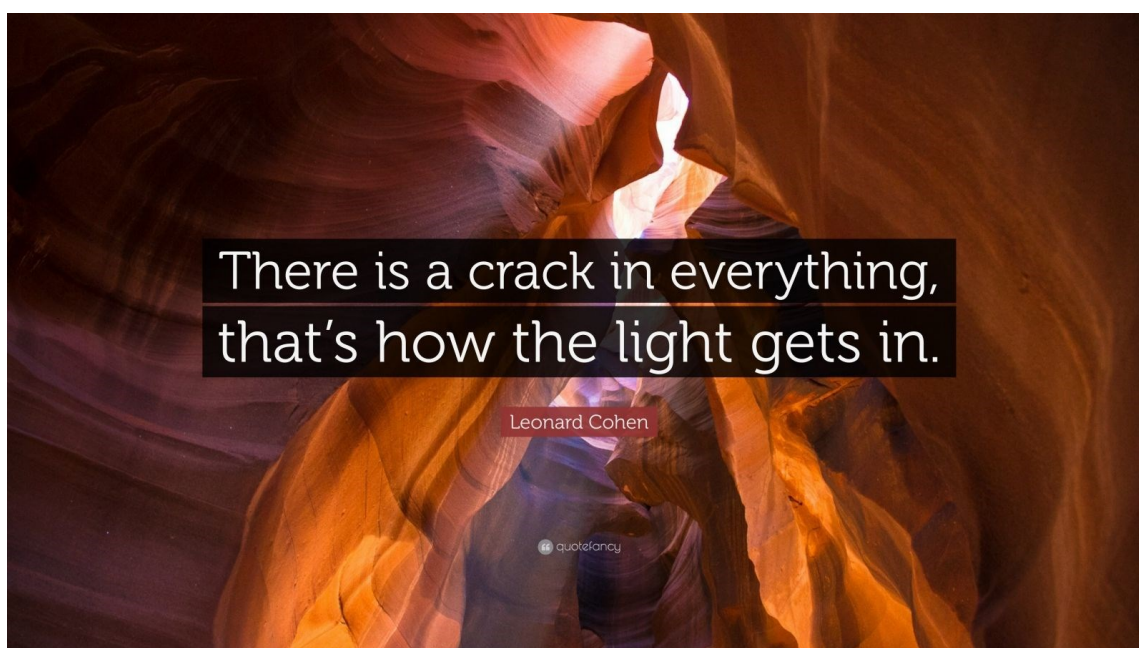
scratch from his own fingernails or a bump, or a rash on his little round bottom. But I know that at some point he became slightly less pristine. Now at 34, he's waiting for surgery on a wrist that he fractured while quad biking at his cousin's stag do!

All of us carry some physical marks that show we have lived, that our bodies have been lived in, and made use of; that we've had adventures and mishaps. The older we get, the more wear and tear we carry. Our hearts too carry the emotional bruises that result from living in a world where we constantly bump up against other people's hurts and sorrows.

We're all a little bit broken, but that's okay, because it's the same for everyone, and we don't have to be ashamed of it or hide it, and God loves us just the way we are, scrapes and scars and tender spots and all.

Being able to acknowledge and accommodate our own and one another's little bits of brokenness is what makes us human, and it's what makes us lovable, by each other and by God.

You might like to read out Janet Morley's Poem '[Bodies of Grown-ups](#)'



Job 30—16-19

Now I am about to die;
there is no relief for my suffering.
At night my bones all ache;
the pain that gnaws me never stops.
God seizes me by my collar
and twists my clothes out of shape.
He throws me down in the mud;
I am no better than dirt.



Psalm 102:4-8

I am beaten down like dry
grass;
I have lost my desire for
food.
I groan aloud;
I am nothing but skin and
bones.
I am like a wild bird in the
desert,
like an owl in abandoned ruins.
I lie awake;
I am like a lonely bird on a housetop.
All day long my enemies insult me;
those who mock me use my name in cursing.



- How do you feel hearing of the brokenness of the people in the two Bible readings?
- What does it make you think?
- When have you felt ‘broken’?
- Is there anything that made you feel ‘mended’?
- Are you good as new, or,

never quite the same again?





Bring along something that is broken and see if you can work together to help each other mend

things?

If you don't have the materials or skills to do this yourselves; discuss where might you find them?

Is anyone going to try and find a way to mend what they have brought?

While you work together you can tell each other about your injuries or scars. What is the story behind them?

Are there ways that you can support one another with mending?

As you work you can listen to
[https://
littleroommusic.bandcamp.com/
album/city-of-gold](https://littleroommusic.bandcamp.com/album/city-of-gold)



Now What?



- Is there anything you'd like to do as a result of thinking about brokenness together?
- Do you need any support with that and where can you find it?



Mending

- Look at some pictures of 'visible mending' on the following pages.
- Choose the one you like best and say why
- Choose the one you like least and say why
- Share the story of one thing you own that you would like to be able to mend or have mended
- Why would you want to mend it rather than replace it?
- What are the benefits of mending things rather than throwing them away and replacing them?
- What are the draw backs?



Mending - Images



Pictures from Claire Cullingworth @ragbagmending on Instagram, twitter and facebook



Mending

Reflection Material for Leaders . . .

Attitudes to mended clothes have varied a lot over the last century. During World War Two, clothing was rationed just like food. “Make do and Mend” was an official government campaign to encourage people to save resources by making their existing clothes last longer. There was a cheery (somewhat terrifying) mascot called Mrs Sew and Sew and all sorts of educational booklets to tell you how. *(There are no license free pictures but you can Goggle her if you are curious. Other search engines are available.)*

As time went on, fabric became readily available again and attitudes changed. Mended clothes became a sign of being poor. You could get bullied at school, if you were wearing something obviously mended rather than new.

In the past 20 years clothes have become cheaper and cheaper as Fast Fashion has taken hold. Now, it's easier, quicker and cheaper to throw out something old and replace it, rather than to pay someone to mend it, or to learn the skills to do it yourself. You can see the same changes with other things too. It's often easier and cheaper to buy a new washing machine, or phone or tv, rather than try to get a broken one mended.

If we start to think of more and more things as disposable, to be thrown out when broken, maybe we can start to think in the same way about people too.

Do we start to value the young, fit and healthy rather than the old and worn? Do we feel that someone who has been damaged by life is less valuable than someone with a simpler story? Do we prefer the unscarred and unwrinkled rather than those who look more “lived in”. Are we hard on ourselves when we feel that our mental health challenges, or the general pressures and stresses in our lives mean we need to slow down or take things more gently than we used to?



In recent years, mending clothes, and especially visible, creative mending has started to become more popular. It's a craft that celebrates the old and worn and damaged. It says that much loved, old clothes are precious. They can be restored and used and enjoyed far beyond the point at which they first start to need mending. Sometimes they are even more lovely after they have been repaired than they were before, not just "second best". If you've ever seen The Repair Shop on the BBC, you'll know that old, damaged items can be immensely precious and full of stories.

How does God see us when we are damaged and in need of repair? Is God only interested in the new and pristine? Or is he prepared to spend time and care on helping us to heal? Can we appreciate each other in that way too?

The image that speaks to me most of God's mending is that Jesus, after the resurrection, brought back to life by God, still bears all the scars of the crucifixion on his body. He shows them to his followers and invites "Doubting" Thomas to see them up close. God could have restored Jesus to an unblemished human body, but those scars were somehow important. They were part of the story of what Jesus had been through, so they mattered. What if our scars and damaged parts could be beautiful too, because they are part of our story?





Pictures from Claire Cullingworth @ragbagmending on Instagram, twitter and facebook



Mending - Images

John 20:24-29 Jesus and Thomas

One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

Thomas said to them, “Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

A week later the disciples were together again indoors, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe!”

Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”



Jesus said to him, “Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!”



- What strikes you about the fact that the resurrected Jesus still had his wounds or scars?
- Do you think that the damage to Jesus' body became an important part of who he was?
- Why do you suppose that it wasn't just vanished away?
- What do you think it might mean for us that Jesus takes his scars up to heaven with him, as part of him?
- Do you think there's a difference between mending and healing?
- Can mended items be used again? or are they now just keepsakes?
- Has anything or anyone ever made you feel mended?

Optional Extra: -

If you want to look at further Bible materials relating to people who are damaged/ mended you might like to explore some of the activities and resources here [http://
unlock-urban.org.uk/documents/
unlockingtheprodigalHeanorpopversion.pdf](http://unlock-urban.org.uk/documents/unlockingtheprodigalHeanorpopversion.pdf)

In the Bible story known as 'The Prodigal Son' both sons were damaged in different ways, by their life experiences. Both were offered different types of mending and responded to it in different ways.



What you need.

Pieces of sturdy fabric, about 6-8 inches square.

Cutting up a worn out pair of jeans would work well. If no-one has an old pair they haven't thrown out yet, a charity shop is a good place to try.

You need at least one piece per person. If you have more, people can try making damage in different ways. Something to damage the fabric with. Scissors and rough sandpaper both work well.

What to do.

Take a few moments to examine the fabric you have. Then set about making a hole in it.

You can make the holes by rubbing with rough sandpaper, or by cutting a small hole with scissors, then using your fingers, or something sharp, to fray around the edges of the hole to make it larger and more ragged.

Examine your handiwork!

Discussion questions:

- Have you ever damaged something on purpose? If so, tell us how and why?
- Have you ever had a piece of clothing that you cared about get damaged? What happened?
- What sort of things can damage us as people?



What you need

Sturdy fabric with holes in. See above.

Offcuts of fabric for mending with. Ideally a few different colours and patterns so people can choose. Ask around your group for someone who has a sewing related hobby (dress making or patchwork, for example). They'll almost certainly have plenty of leftover scraps. Anything bigger than a few inches across could be used.

Embroidery thread – a selection of colours. Again, ask if anyone in your group does cross stitch or tapestry as a hobby.

- Needles (with eyes big enough to match the thread)
- Pins.
- A needle threader is helpful, if you have one.
- A couple of pairs of scissors.

Encourage the group to have a go at using thread and patches of fabric to mend the holes they made in the denim. You can put the patch over the top of the hole or behind it. Use pins to hold it still while you sew. You can use a simple up and down stitch (often known as running stitch) to attach the two together, or you can do something more decorative if you know how, or if someone else in the group can show you.

Do you want to leave the edges of the hole and the patch raw? Or do you want to fold under the edges to make a neater edge. Both are fine, it's up to you! Do you want to trim the patch or the hole to an interesting shape? What colours look good together? Could you add extra stitches or fabric to make the mend more decorative?

As you work you can listen to

Oh Lord your tenderness

We cannot measure how you heal



- Can something mended be better than something new? Or is it always less good?
- When have you tried to mend something that was broken? How did it go?



- Look at the hole you've just mended. How did you get on? What

would you need to do or learn to be better at mending?

- What or who has helped you to mend as a person, after you've been damaged?
- Have you ever felt like God has helped you to mend? Can you tell us about it?



Bagpuss Church

- To what extent do you think your group (or church) is like the 'Bagpuss church' described in the meme on the next page?
- Which aspect of that idea do you like best?
- Is there some aspect of it that you are less comfortable with?
- Would you like your group (or church) to be more like that, or less like that?

Optional Extra: -

If anyone in your group is unfamiliar with Bagpuss you might enjoy watching an episode together. All are available on YouTube and each one lasts around 15 minutes. [Bagpuss Episode one.](#)



Bagpuss

Church where
battered, broken, random
items are taken in and
restored to loveliness,
by a really bizarre mix
of cantankerous, kindly,
bossy, weirdos.

With songs, and plenty
of time for naps

~Claire Cullingworth~



Grace

On the following pages there are some pictures of the Japanese art of Kintsugi. Kintsugi means *golden joinery*; it is repairing broken pottery by mending the areas of breakage with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. It is based on a philosophy, which treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise.

Something that has been damaged and beautifully repaired is seen an even more precious than when it was new because it carries history. We are sharing this because it speaks to us of how God responds to our brokenness. We are not so much healed (made new) as mended (made whole) by God, whose mending is visible and makes us yet more lovely and more beloved.



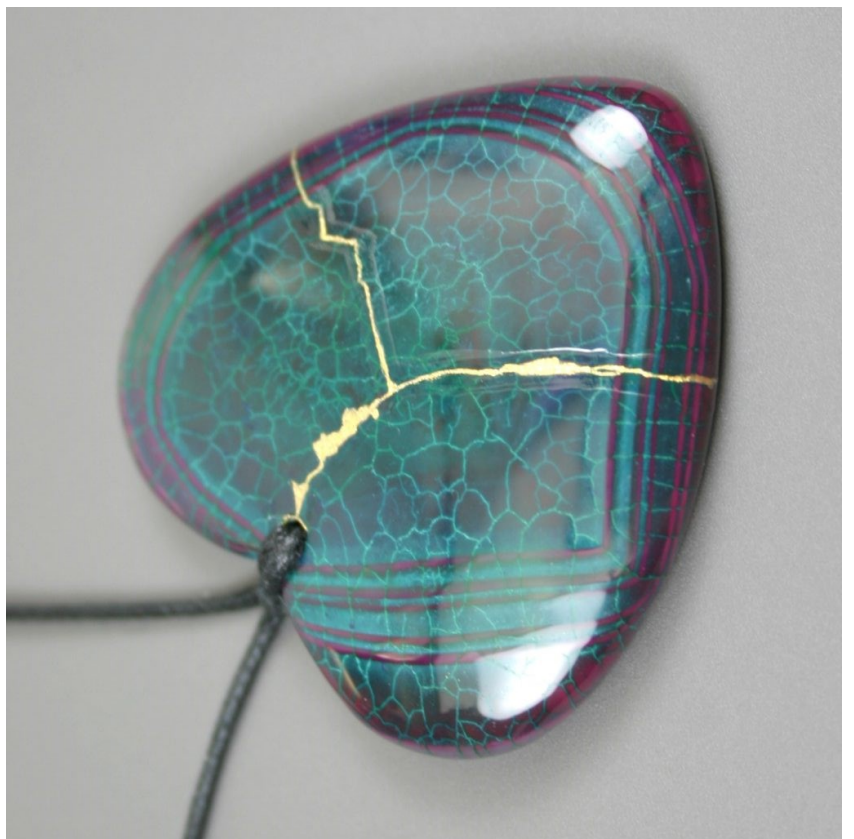
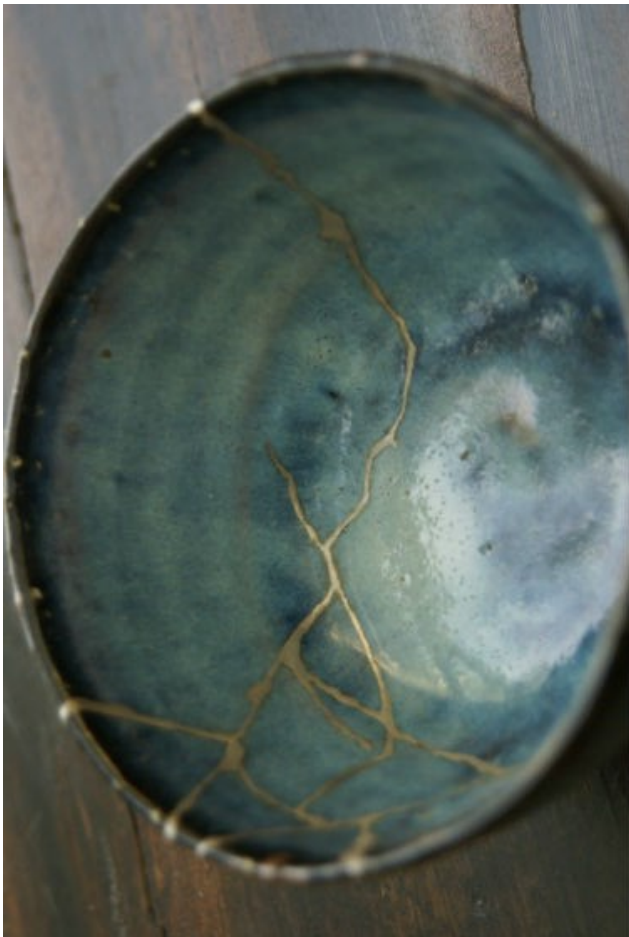




Image by [Gugger](#)





Image by [Stenaire](#)

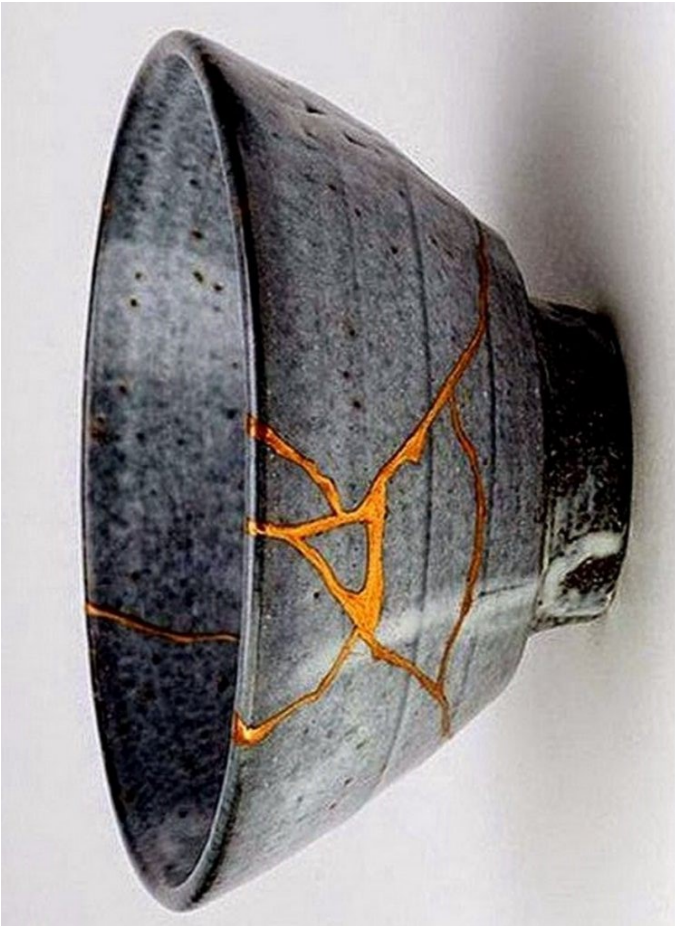
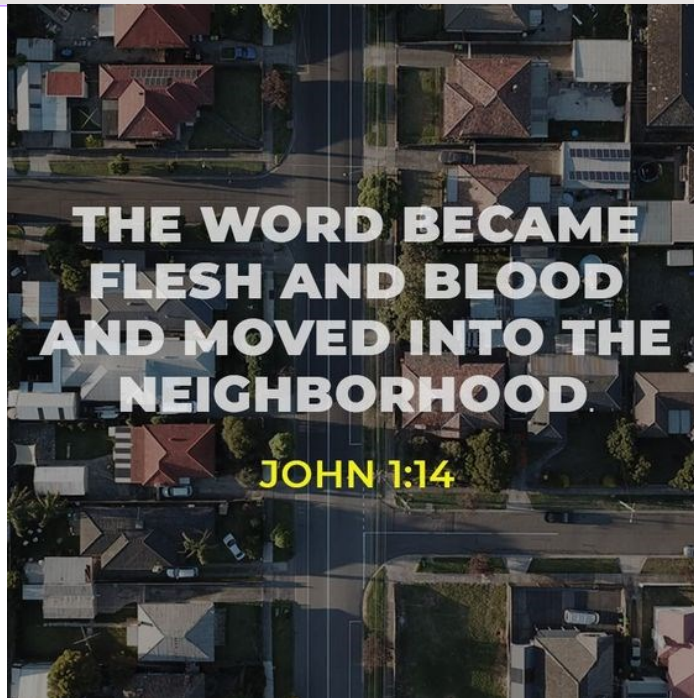


Image by [Haragayato](#)

John 1:14-17

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the



glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me."") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.



Reflection Material for Leaders

Golden Grace

In our earlier sessions we reflected on the guilt that we cannot let go, that we continue to carry even though we know in theory that we are forgiven. And we touched on the idea of Grace which we are going to think a bit more about now; not because we have all the answers but because by working together we might be able to get a bit more of a hold on what it means. There's an awful lot of it in the Bible, once you know how to spot it, endless books have been written about it, sermons delivered, and it is the underlying theme of much literature and film. We tend to think that the antidote to guilt is forgiveness; and yes, that might be a part of it but maybe the fullest antidote to guilt is grace.

Many people have tried to construct an analysis or imagery that does Grace justice but somehow their success is only ever partial. Perhaps it is, in some way beyond description, too overwhelming and unfathomable to tidily pack up in a box. We get moments of insight, glimpses; but they are transient; gone before we can really catch hold of them, and hard to recall except in terms of the way they made us feel.



Maybe the key to understanding it may be to come to terms with the way God feels about us; about each one of us – and the truth of that is ever so hard to accept - because we find it pretty hard to love ourselves; we are almost *taught* not to. But the truth is that God loves us beyond all measure. Think of the person in the whole of your life that you have loved the most – the way you feel about that person is just a tiny shadow of the way God feels about each individual one of us. We are so loved, and to God we are infinitely lovable. To God, each of us is a precious, glorious delight, no matter who we are, no matter what we've done, no matter whether we are short or tall, fat or thin, male or female (or anything in between) healthy or sick, strong or weak, black, white, green or purple, young or old, clever or dim. None of that matters to God. God delights in each one of us, longs for of each one of us, treasures each one of us. We



cannot begin to form a notion of what Grace means until we begin to grasp how God feels about us.



- What does God's Grace mean to you?
- When/how have you known it?
- Where in your life do you need it most?



Make a 'Mood Board' on the theme of **Grace**. You can work as a group, in twos or threes or individually -

- but most of these activities are more fruitful when done in groups!

An arrangement of images, material, words, etc intended to reflect a particular idea.

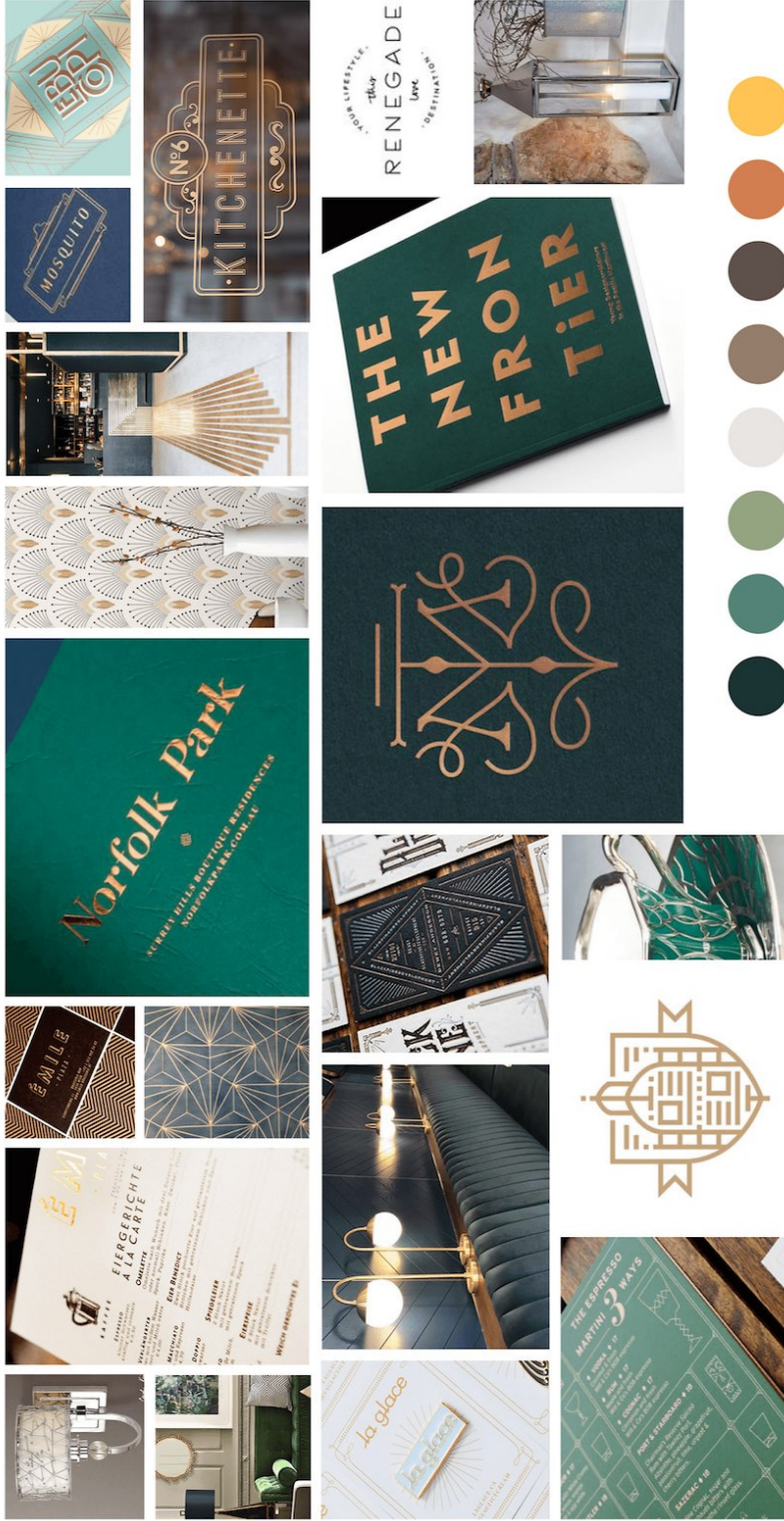


There are some ideas and resources on the following pages but the group(s) can also have fun finding their own.

You could introduce this at one session and ask everyone to bring materials to use along to the next session.



As you work you can listen to Tracks 4,7 & 9 from Shipwrecks and islands: - <https://littleroommusic.bandcamp.com/album/shipwrecks-islands>



The group can add interest by including other materials, textures, natural items, your own drawings and so on.



W

W

C

C

A

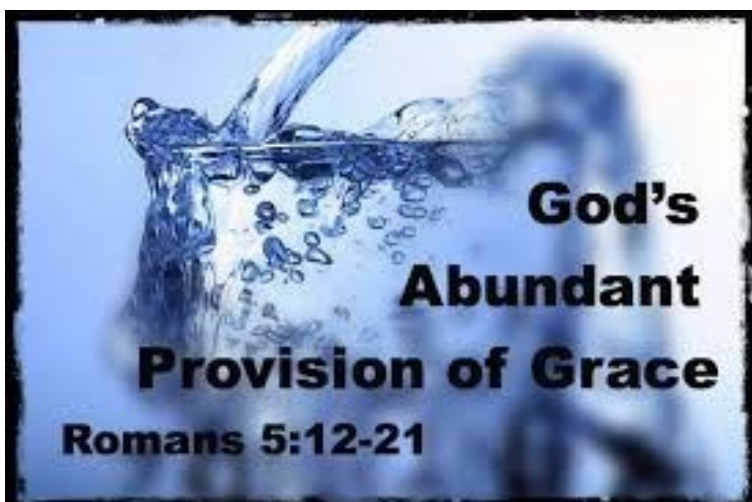
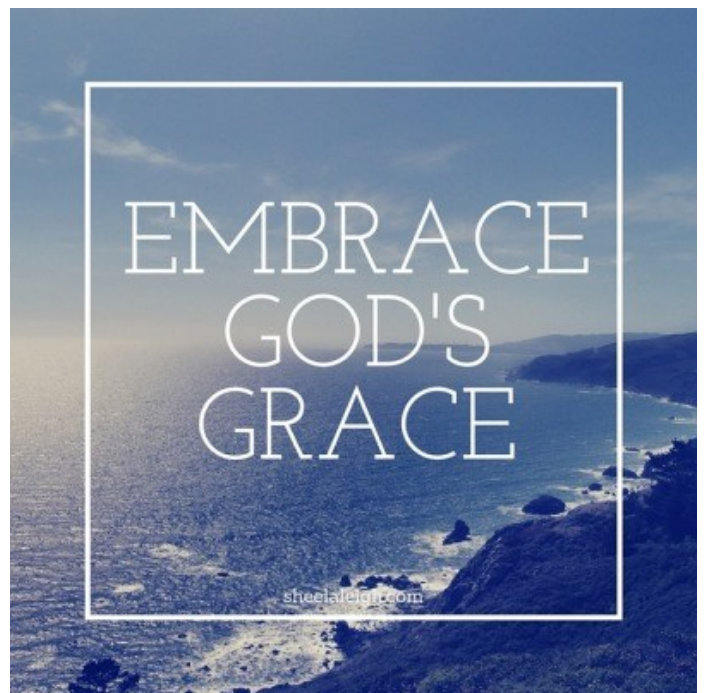
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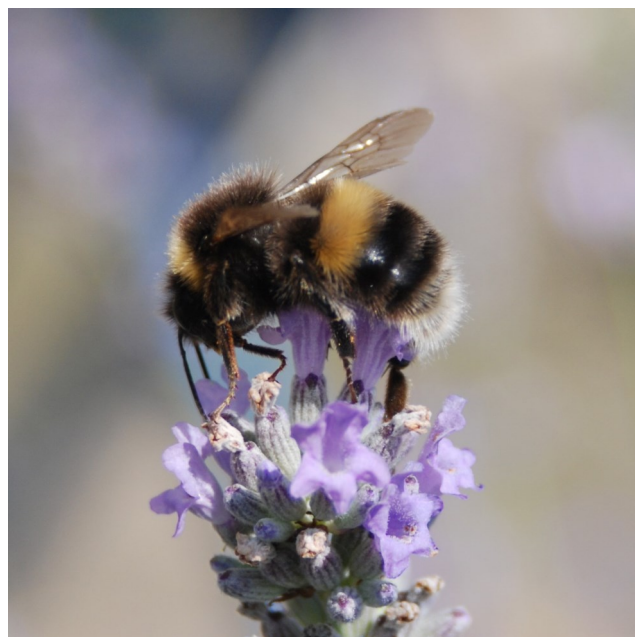
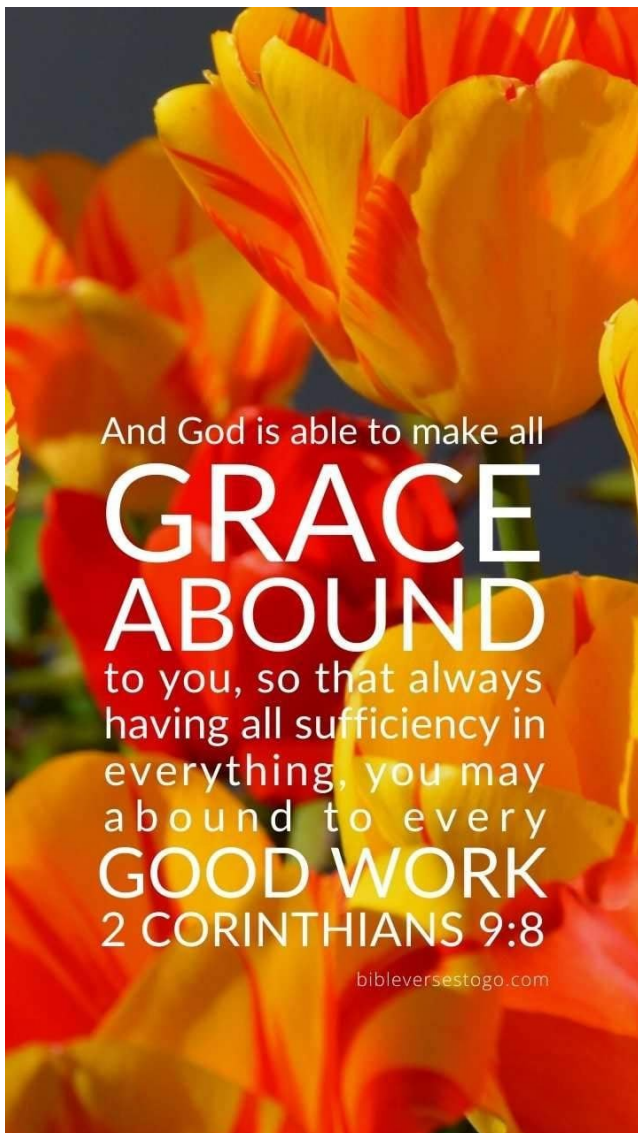
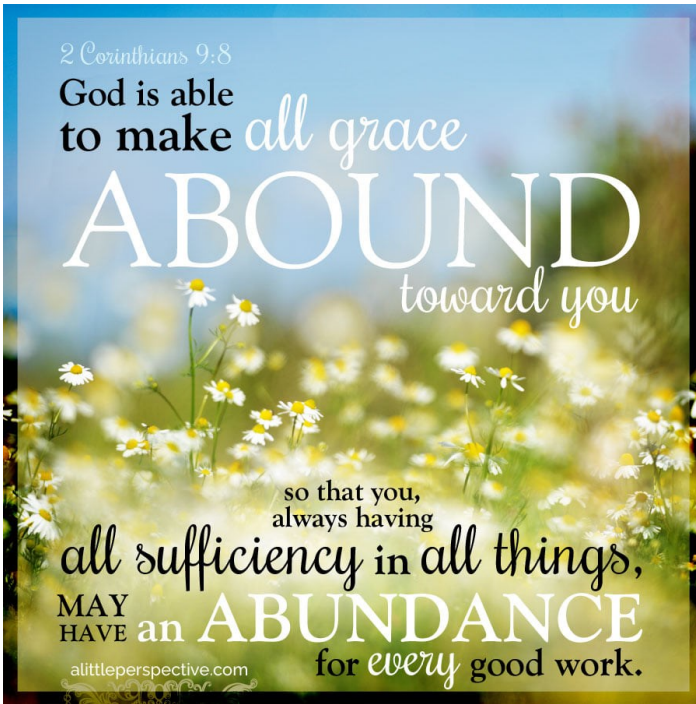
GRACE

Changes

EVERYTHING

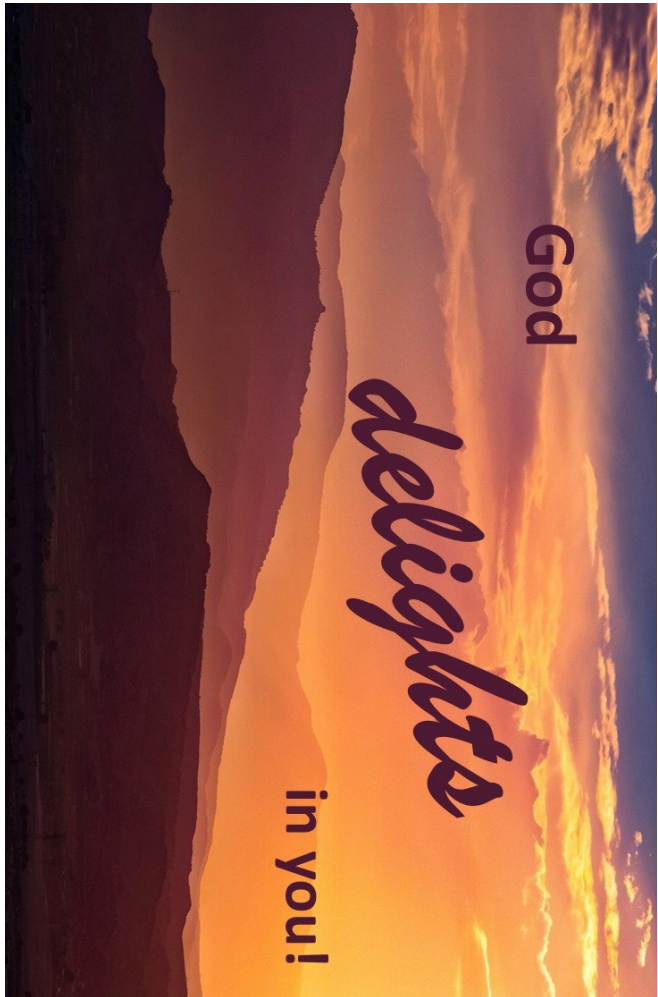
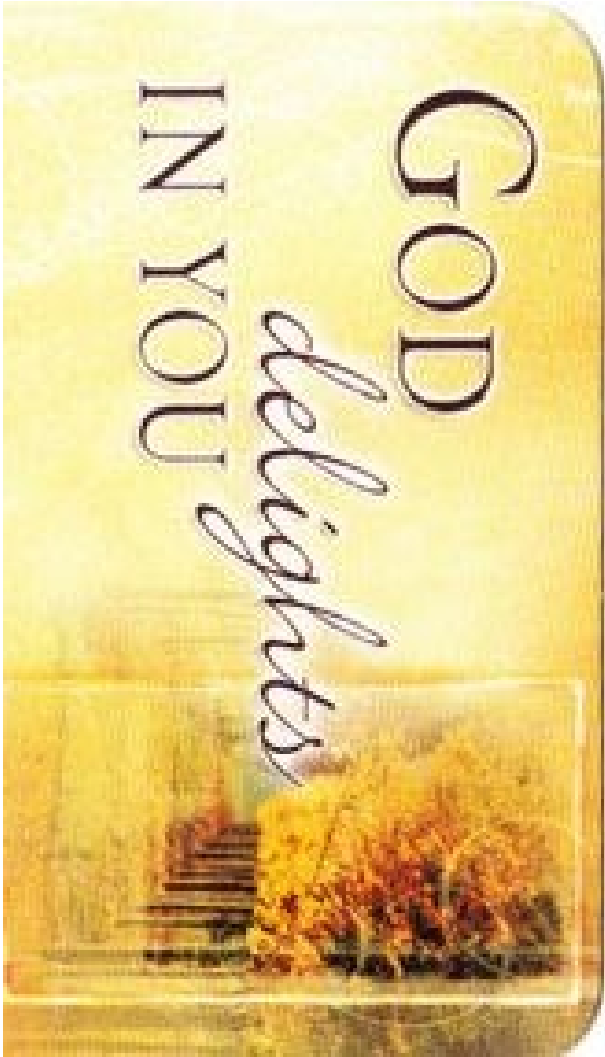


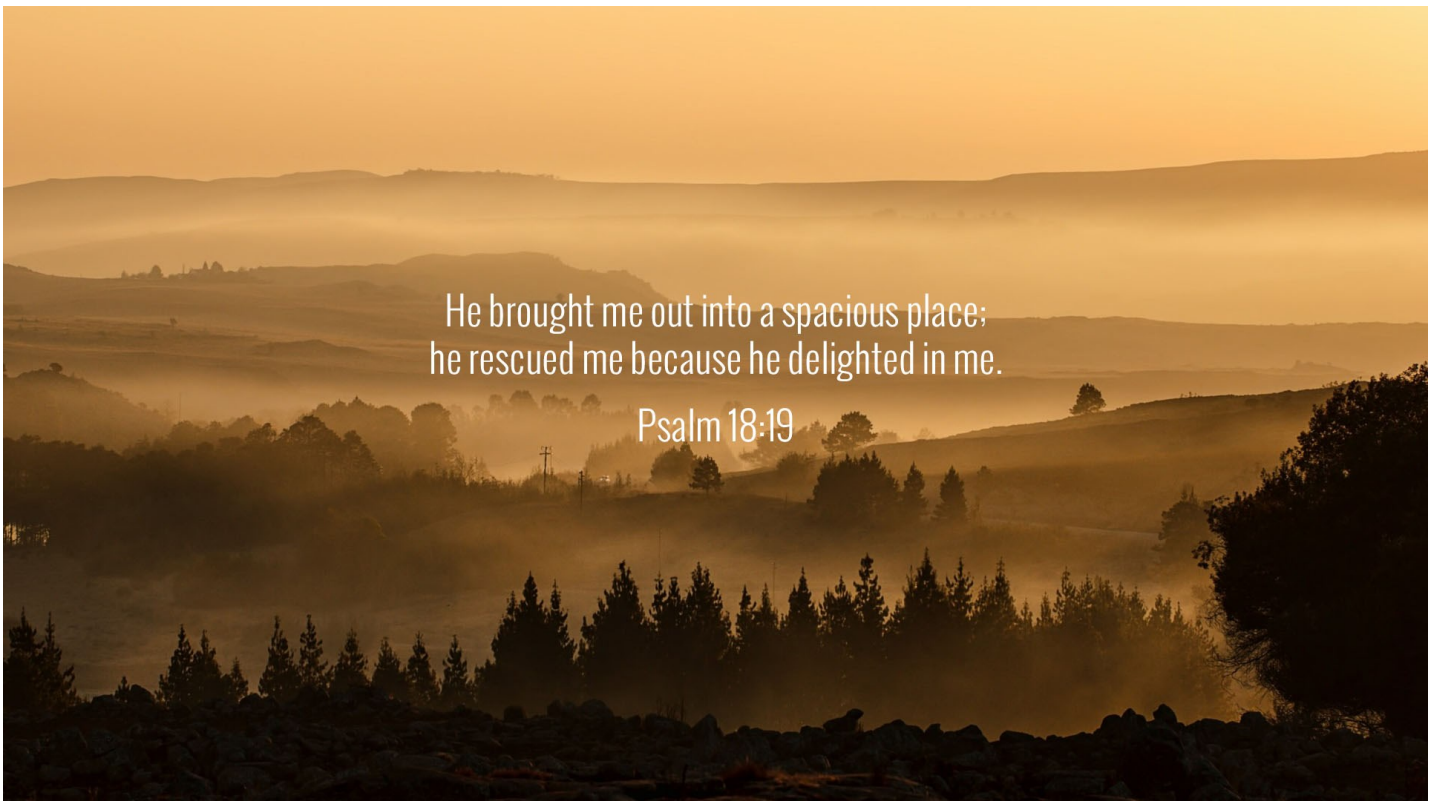
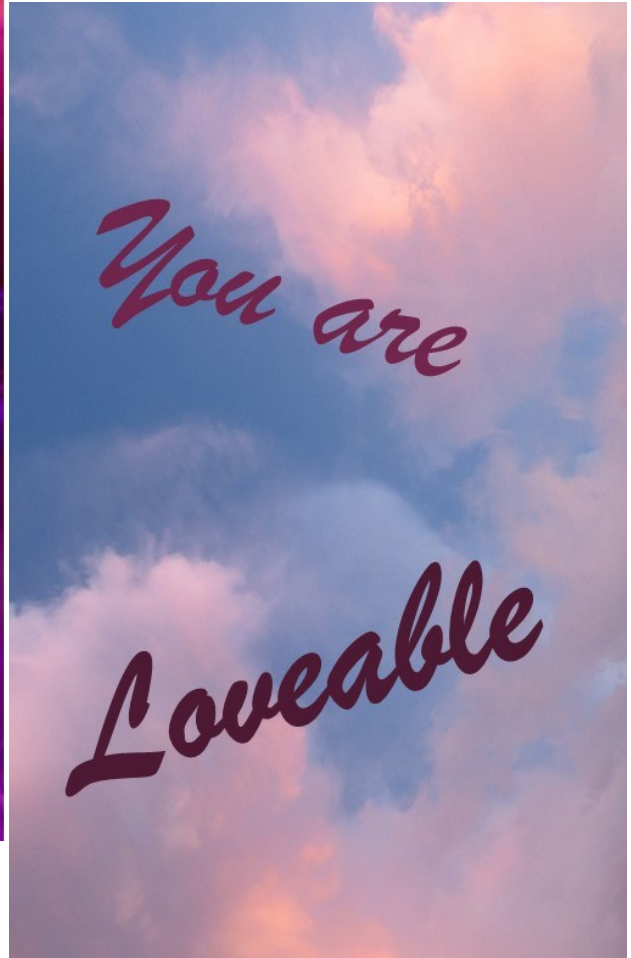






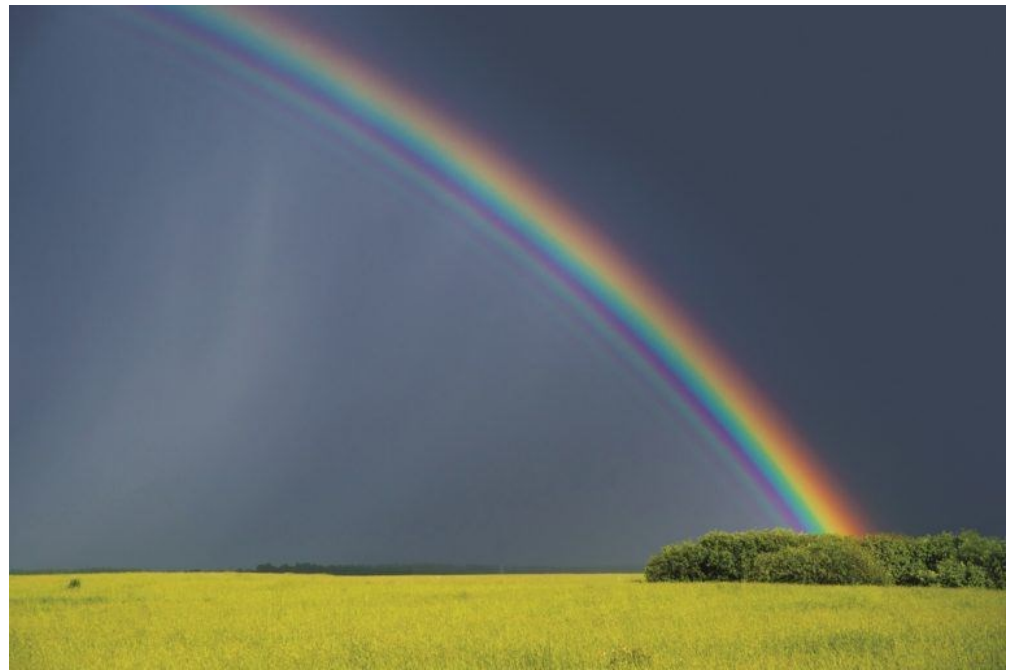


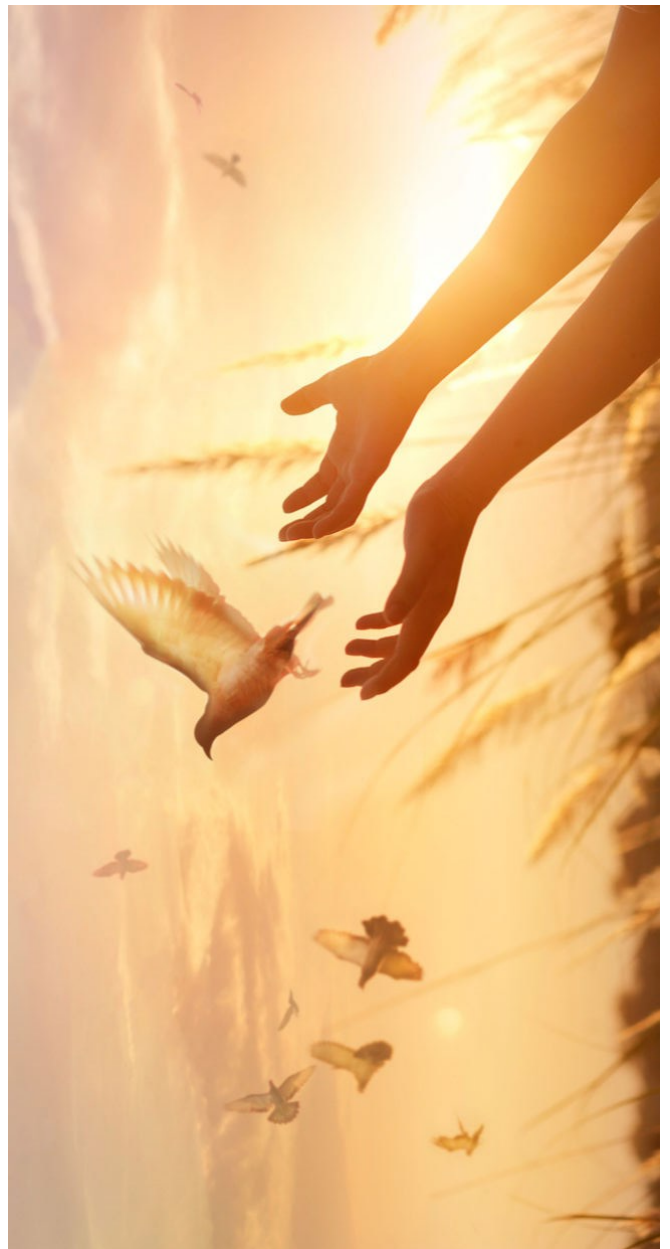












Provide Gold body paint and paint brushes. Invite people to use the gold paint on each other, or themselves as a reminder of how precious each of them is to God, i.e. worth mending, and precious even once damaged.

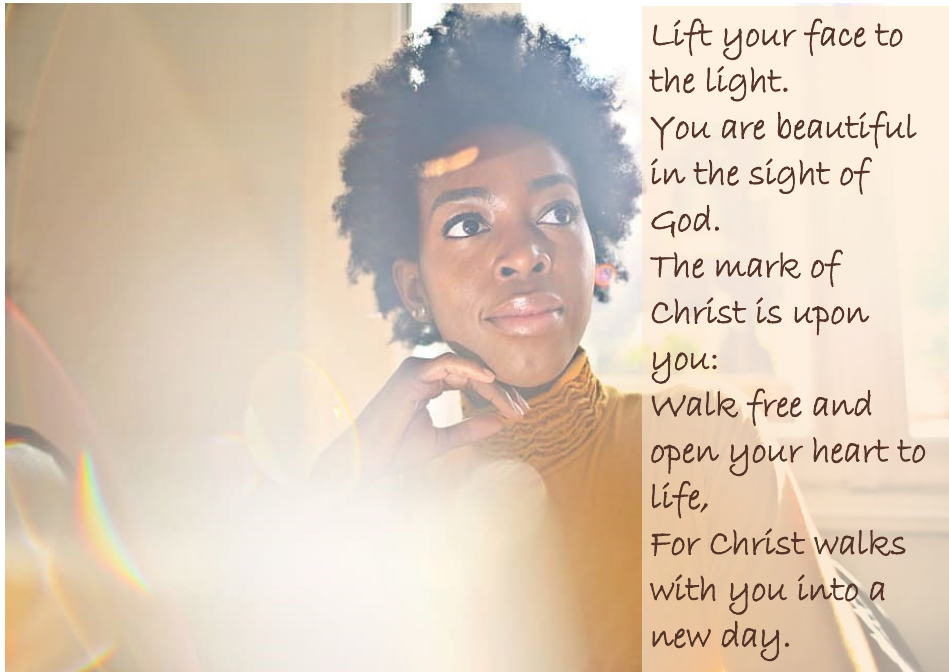


As you work you can listen to 'Amazing Grace' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDOJkfxnjJs>

If people have been asked to bring back their 'Patchwork Guilts' they can be destroyed by being burnt (outside in a small brazier, or inside with a candle and a safe metal bucket for the burning paper to go into) or ripped up. You need to ensure that the arrangements you make for this comply with the health and safety regulations for the premises you are using! Please check with those in charge.

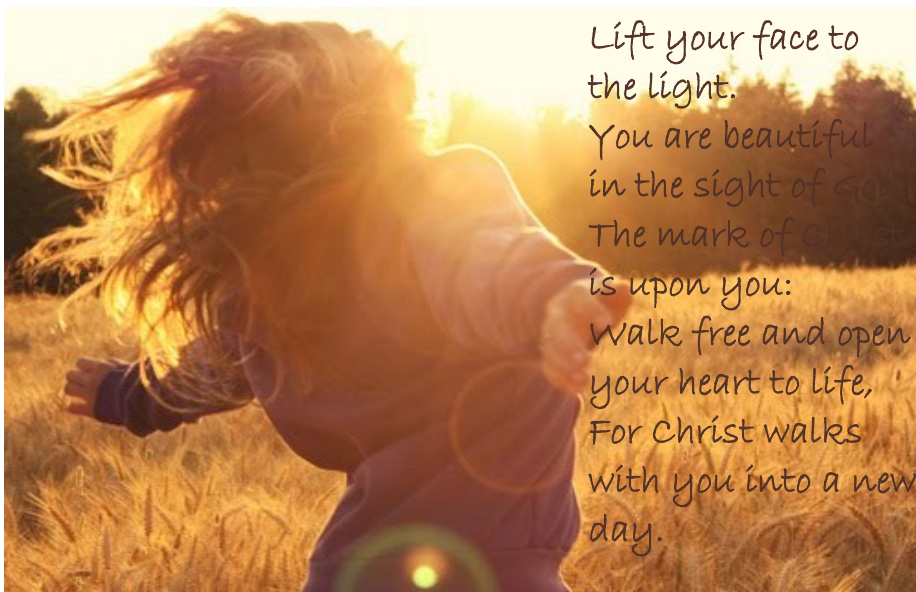


I love this prayer. I have carried it on a home made card in my purse or pocket for many years and shared it with others on numerous occasions. I cannot remember where it came from. If you know please tell us so that we can seek permission for use and give appropriate credit.



Lift your face to the light.
You are beautiful in the sight of God.
The mark of Christ is upon you:
Walk free and open your heart to life,
For Christ walks with you into a new day.

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Appendix - Psalms of repentance

The intention of this pack is *not* to make people feel guilty; but rather to free people to explore new ways of thinking about sin (a word which you may notice occurs very *infrequently* in the text of this pack), guilt, love, forgiveness and Grace. Nevertheless, discussions of past mistakes and a sense of repentance is fairly likely to come up as part of these sessions.

Should it come up, it may be helpful for your group to know that they are neither the first, nor the only people ever to wrestle with such matters! You may therefore choose to explore the issue using *some* of the Psalms of repentance on the following pages.

We suggest that you choose just one or two Psalms (or even just short sections), that you think will resonate for your group, and read them aloud, quite slowly, and possibly more than once. You may well be able to find video or audio versions of them online if that's a more accessible format for your groups.

Allow your group freedom to respond to the Psalm(s) in their own way; to discuss what struck them, what they think about them, how they connect with them and how they want to respond, both emotionally and practically.

If you want to provide your group with a creative activity linked to this they could choose the Psalm they like best, cut out the text (from a print off) and stick it onto a coloured background sheet which they can then decorate with pictures cut from magazines or printed from the internet, words, drawings, collage materials or whatever they like. This can be done individually, but you are likely to release better conversations if it is done as a group.





PSALMS OF REPENTANCE



PSALM 2

- 1 Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?
 - 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying,
 - 3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.
 - 4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.
 - 5 Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.
 - 6 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.
 - 7 I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me,
 - 8 Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.
 - 9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.
 - 10 Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth.
 - 11 Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.
 - 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.
- Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

PSALM 6

A Psalm of David.

For the leader, with stringed instruments, "upon the eighth."

- 1 O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath.
- 2 Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am faint;
- 3 O LORD, heal me, for my bones are in agony.
- 3 My soul is in anguish.
- How long, O LORD, how long?
- 4 Turn, O LORD, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love.
- 5 No one remembers you when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave?
- 6 I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears.
- 7 My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of all my foes.
- 8 Away from me, all you who do evil, for the LORD has heard my weeping.
- 9 The LORD has heard my cry for mercy; the LORD accepts my prayer.
- 10 All my enemies will be ashamed and dismayed; they will turn back in sudden disgrace.

PSALM 22

For the director of music. A Psalm of David.

- 1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?
- 2 My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.
- 3 Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises.
- 4 In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them.
- 5 To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.
- 6 But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people.
- 7 All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.
- 8 "He trusts in the Lord," they say, "let the Lord rescue him." Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.
- 9 Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast.
- 10 From birth I was cast on you; from my mother's womb you have been my God.
- 11 Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

12 Many bulls surround me;
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.
13 Roaring lions that tear their prey
open their mouths wide against me.

14 I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.
15 My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.

16 Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce my hands and my feet.
17 All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.
18 They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.

19 But you, Lord, do not be far from me.
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.
20 Deliver me from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dogs.
21 Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;
save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

22 I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.
23 You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!

24 For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.
25 From you comes the theme of my praise in
the great assembly;
before those who fear you I will fulfill my
vows.
26 The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the Lord will praise him —
may your hearts live forever!

27 All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,
28 for dominion belongs to the Lord
and he rules over the nations.

29 All the rich of the earth will feast and
worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before
him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.
30 Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.
31 They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!



PSALM 23

79

A Psalm of David.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul:
he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his
name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow
of death,

I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of
mine enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil;
my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the
days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

PSALM 31

To the chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

1 In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be
ashamed:
deliver me in thy righteousness.

2 Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily:
be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to

save me.

3 For thou art my rock and my fortress;
therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide
me.

4 Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for
me:
for thou art my strength.

5 Into thine hand I commit my spirit:
thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.

6 I have hated them that regard lying vanities:
but I trust in the Lord.

7 I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy:
for thou hast considered my trouble;

thou hast known my soul in adversities;
8 and hast not shut me up into the hand of the
enemy:

thou hast set my feet in a large room.

9 Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble:
mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and



80 my belly.
10 For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing:
my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed.
11 I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance:
they that did see me without fled from me.
12 I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind: I am like a broken vessel.
13 For I have heard the slander of many: fear was on every side:
while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life.
14 But I trusted in thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my God.
15 My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me.
16 Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies' sake.
17 Let me not be ashamed, O Lord; for I have called upon thee:
let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave.
18 Let the lying lips be put to silence; which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous.
19 Oh how great is thy goodness,

which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!
20 Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.
21 Blessed be the Lord: for he hath shewed me his marvellous kindness in a strong city.
22 For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes:
nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee.
23 O love the Lord, all ye his saints: for the Lord preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer.
24 Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart,
all ye that hope in the Lord.



PSALM 32

*A Psalm of David.
A Maskil*

1 Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.
2 Blessed is the man
whose sin the LORD does not count against him
and in whose spirit is no deceit.
3 When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
4 For day and night
your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer.
Selah

5 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."
Selah

6 Therefore let everyone who is
godly pray to you
while you may be found;
surely when the mighty waters

rise,
they will not reach him.

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

8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you

should go;
I will counsel you and watch over you.
9 Do not be like the horse or the mule,
which have no understanding
but must be controlled by bit and bridle
or they will not come to you.
10 Many are the woes of the wicked,
but the LORD's unfailing love
surrounds the man who trusts in him.

11 Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you
righteous;
sing, all you who are upright in heart!

PSALM 38

*A Psalm of David.
For remembrance*

1 O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your wrath.

2 For your arrows have pierced me,
and your hand has come down upon me.

3 Because of your wrath there is no health in my
body;

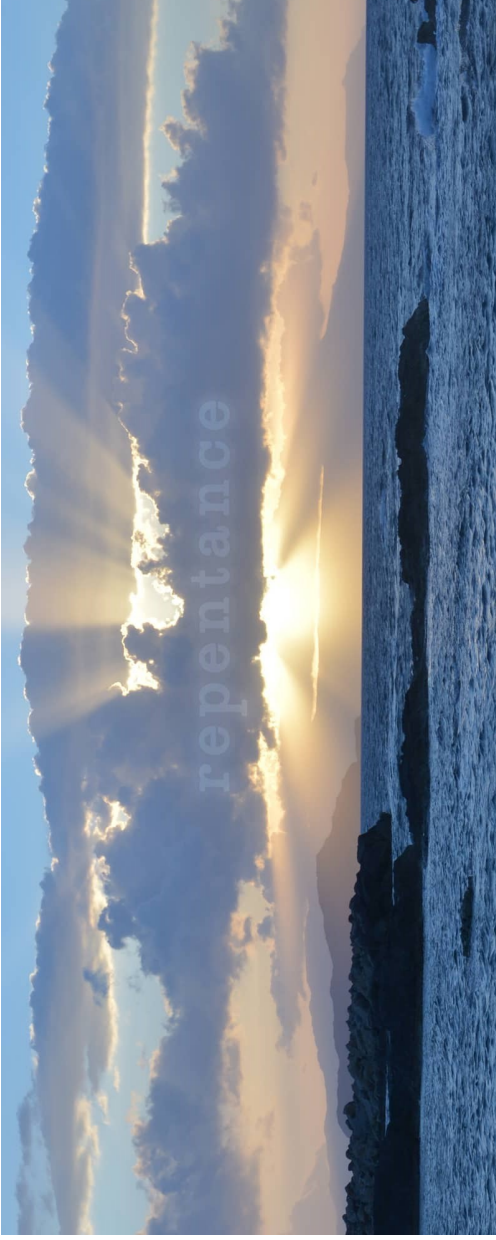
my bones have no soundness because of my sin.
4 My guilt has overwhelmed me
like a burden too heavy to bear.



5 My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly.
 I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning.
 My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body.
 8 I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart.

9 All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you.
 10 My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes.
 11 My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds;
 my neighbours stay far away.
 12 Those who seek my life set their traps, those who would harm me talk of my ruin; all day long they plot deception.
 13 I am like a deaf man, who cannot hear, like a mute, who cannot open his mouth;
 14 I have become like a man who does not hear, whose mouth can offer no reply.

15 I wait for you, O LORD; you will answer, O Lord my God.
 16 For I said, "Do not let them gloat or exalt themselves over me when my foot slips."
 17 For I am about to fall, and my pain is ever with me.
 18 I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin.



19 Many are those who are my vigorous enemies; those who hate me without reason are numerous.
 20 Those who repay my good with evil slander me when I pursue what is good.

21 O LORD, do not forsake me; be not far from me, O my God.
 22 Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Saviour.

according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.
 2 Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.
 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.
 5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
 6 Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.
 7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

PSALM 51

A Psalm of David, when Nathan the Prophet came to him after his affair with Bathsheba. For the leader. Miserere.

1 Have mercy on me, O God,

8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
9 Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
11 Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will turn back to you.
14 Save me from bloodguilt, O God,
the God who saves me,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

15 O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring
it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise.

18 In your good pleasure make Zion prosper;
build up the walls of Jerusalem.
19 Then there will be righteous sacrifices,
whole burnt offerings to delight you;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

PSALM 102

*The prayer of one afflicted and wasting away
whose anguish is poured out before the Lord.*

1 Hear my prayer, O LORD;
let my cry for help come to you.
2 Do not hide your face from me
when I am in distress.
Turn your ear to me;
when I call, answer me quickly.

3 For my days vanish like smoke;
my bones bum like glowing embers.
4 My heart is blighted and withered like grass;
I forget to eat my food.
5 Because of my loud groaning
I am reduced to skin and bones.
6 I am like a desert owl,
like an owl among the ruins.
7 I lie awake; I have become
like a bird alone on a roof.
8 All day long my enemies taunt me;
those who rail against me use my name as a
curse.

9 For I eat ashes as my food
and mingle my drink with tears
10 because of your great wrath,
for you have taken me up and thrown me aside.
11 My days are like the evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.

12 But you, O LORD, sit enthroned forever;
your renown endures through all generations.



13 You will arise and have compassion on Zion,
for it is time to show favour to her;
the appointed time has come.
14 For her stones are dear to your servants;
her very dust moves them to pity.
15 The nations will fear the name of the LORD,
all the kings of the earth will revere your glory.
16 For the LORD will rebuild Zion
and appear in his glory.
17 He will respond to the prayer of the destitute;
he will not despise their plea.

18 Let this be written for a future generation,
that a people not yet created may praise the
LORD:
19 "The LORD looked down from his sanctuary on
high,
from heaven he viewed the earth,
20 to hear the groans of the prisoners
and release those condemned to death."
21 So the name of the LORD will be declared in
Zion
and his praise in Jerusalem
22 when the peoples and the kingdoms
assemble to worship the LORD.
23 In the course of my life he broke my strength;
he cut short my days.
24 So I said:
"Do not take me away, O my God, in the midst of
my days;
your years go on through all generations.

25 In the beginning you laid the foundations of the
earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
26 They will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.
Like clothing you will change them
and they will be discarded.
27 But you remain the same,
and your years will never end.
28 The children of your servants will live in your
presence;
their descendants will be established before you."

PSALM 110

A Song of David

1 The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right
hand,
until I make thine enemies thy footstool.
2 The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of
Zion:
rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.
3 Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy
power,
in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the
morning:
thou hast the dew of thy youth.
4 The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent,

Thou art a priest for ever after the order of
Melchizedek.

5 The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through
kings in the day of his wrath.
6 He shall judge among the heathen,
he shall fill the places with the dead bodies;
he shall wound the heads over many countries.
7 He shall drink of the brook in the way:



8 therefore shall he lift up the head.

PSALM 130

A Song of Ascents

- 1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD;
- 2 O Lord, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.
- 3 If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins,
O Lord, who could stand?
- 4 But with you there is forgiveness;
therefore you are feared.
- 5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I put my hope.
- 6 My soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
Yes, more than watchmen wait for the morning.
- 7 O Israel, put your hope in the LORD,
for with the LORD is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.
- 8 He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins.

PSALM 143

*A Prayer of David, when he was in the cave.
A Maskil.*

- 1 O LORD, hear my prayer,

listen to my cry for mercy;
in your faithfulness and righteousness
come to my relief.

- 2 Do not bring your servant into judgment,
for no one living is righteous before you.

- 3 The enemy pursues me,
he crushes me to the ground;
he makes me dwell in darkness
like those long dead.

- 4 So my spirit grows faint within me;
my heart within me is dismayed.
- 5 I remember the days of long ago;
I meditate on all your works

and consider what your hands have done.
6 I spread out my hands to you;
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.
Selah

- 7 Answer me quickly, O LORD;
my spirit fails.

Do not hide your face from me
or I will be like those who go down to the pit.

- 8 Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing
love,

for I have put my trust in you.

Show me the way I should go,
for to you I lift up my soul.

- 9 Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD,
for I hide myself in you.

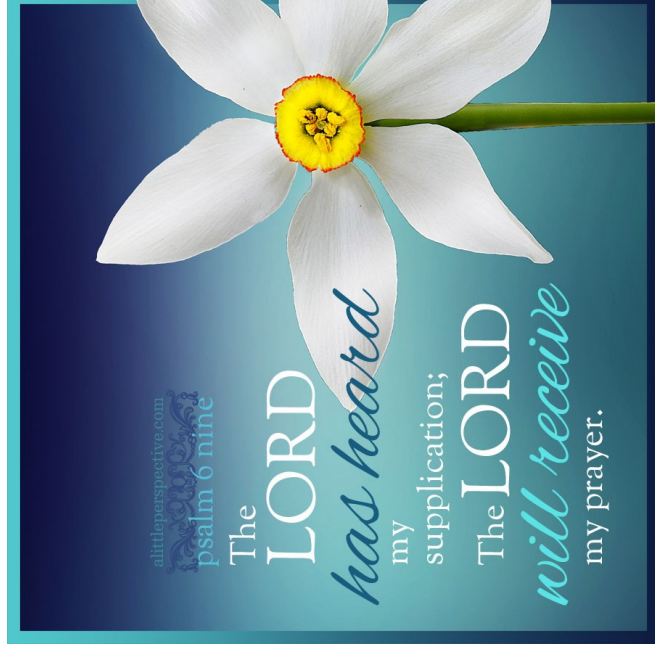
- 10 Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God;

may your good Spirit
lead me on level ground.

- 11 For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my
life;

in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble.

- 12 In your unfailing love, silence my enemies;
destroy all my foes,
for I am your servant.



For Group Leaders

Resource name: *Slithers of Gold*

Authors / Facilitator: Dawn Lonsdale (Unlock Chief Officer) with contributions from Claire Cullingworth (Ragbagmending and Unlock National Council)

Aims: To enable participants to engage with their own stories in relation to guilt, brokenness, mending and Grace. To create opportunities to explore how their own story connects with the bigger story within scripture. To be able to reflect on the impacts, both positive and negative, of our attitudes and actions. To enable participants to reflect theologically on situations in their own lives and in society, and to make reflective and informed choices about how they respond to challenging experiences and circumstances.

Outcomes: The group will be more able to engage with each other, using a reflective theological cycle, starting from their own story or the stories of others in the group, or things that have affected them on a daily basis, without necessarily having to understand at an academic level. The group will be more able to refer to the connections made with Scripture, and intended changed approaches in similar situations in the future. The group will be able to reflect on their own experiences, and personal issues which affect them, and to do this in relation to scripture. The group will be better able to manage the points of crisis and tension in their lives with reference to scripture.

Session Content

Unlocking Real Life Experience

Media: the sharing of participants' own stories is facilitated starting from various images, videos, stories and questions.

Own story: Within our own narratives and situations are threads that can be woven into scripture and understood, helping us recognise our connections with God's story. The contents of this resource were designed for a specific group of people with particular needs. Other groups will have different needs.



For Group Leaders

Group leaders are encouraged to take some time to work with their group to agree some **ground rules** as part of their first session together. This should include participants taking responsibility for their own level of sharing.

Ice Breakers and opening questions: See individual sessions for suggestions or insert your own.

Revealing the Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

Bible: Passages used (examples):

Matthew 26:69-end

Job 30—16-19

Psalms 102:4-8

John 20:24-29

John 1:14-17

Psalms 23

Psalms of penitence

The Bible passages suggested are a selection from which facilitators can choose; if the group's discussions go in a different direction you may need to choose others that are more appropriate.

Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

By connecting God's story with our own, participants begin to encounter alternative responses to the issues and pressures they encounter in their day to day lives.

Reflective Activities

Creative activities to enable further reflection are offered as part of each session. Leaders are advised to review them in plenty of time to allow for the gathering of any necessary resources.



Unlock, by various names, has been around since 1972, trying to help (mainly) urban Christians to understand and share their faith appropriately. Our life experience matters; our stories; our joys and sorrows. The Bible has plenty to say, more than we'll ever know, about our lives, if we know how to read it and apply it - if we know how to **UNLOCK** it!

The work outlined in this pack applies the learning cycle on page 90, **starting by using a 'prompt'** or ice breaker to draw out group member's stories. Allow plenty of time for people to respond to the prompts and share their own experiences and listen carefully as they do. What are the themes and issues arising in the stories? Try to remember so that you can remind people later if necessary.

The next stage is to **find part of the Bible** that comes to mind having listened to the stories. If you are using these sessions with a non-church group you will need to be ready to provide some Bible links, but only if they are unable to do so. It is always worth giving them a chance to come up with a Bible link for themselves first; they may surprise you! Then ask the group to explore **connections**, similarities or differences.

Finally there is a **reflective activity**, giving people an opportunity to reflect on the session and any action they might want to take as a result. The reflective activity creates space in which discussion and reflection can continue in an unforced way.

How well the group know and trust one another will affect the type of story that they share, often the newer the group, the more light hearted the stories are likely to be.



Unlock uses an approach to engaging with the Bible that is different to traditional Bible studies (see page 90). Unlock's approach starts from the stories and experiences of group members, whereas a more traditional approach starts from the Biblical text. Unlock's approach has been found to work well with small groups of urban, oral learners from outside of the church. There are many free resources on the Unlock [website unlock-urban.org.uk/](http://unlock-urban.org.uk/) designed for use with such groups. However, because each of these resources was designed for a particular group in a particular time and place they are unlikely be a perfect fit for your group as they stand. They are offered more as inspiration to you to design your own materials along the same lines, rather than as ready to use packages.

Unlock usually works with people outside of church who may be interested in finding out a bit more about faith but perhaps are not attracted to the formal methods of learning often associated with church. Our work is based on a reflective learning cycle and is a tried and tested way of introducing people to the Bible in a non-threatening way. Many churches have activities that draw in members of their surrounding community but then struggle with how to move on from those relationships into exploring faith, especially in urban environments where anything formal might be treated with suspicion.

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The Unlock Learning Cycle

Unlocking real life stories of urban people

Start with the group telling stories from their real life experience.

Leading to more experience

What we learn now is learnt for life and changes us. We also learn to keep reflecting!

Releasing life changing skills and confidence

Change happens as a result of linking real life experience with the Bible. This change often leads to action among others.

Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

The real life stories are connected to and compared with similar situations in the Bible.



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Pack title inspired by a line from John Bell's song, 'Today I Awake'. Iona Community's Wild Goose Resource Group. You can listen to it here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Prs9ZoACHeY>

