

PRAISE

Instructions:

Our God is so worthy of our praise! The Psalmists celebrate this wonderfully, praying and singing such things as:

“My mouth is filled with your praise, declaring your splendour all day long” (Psalm 71:8)

“I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever... Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise, his greatness no one can fathom” (Psalm 145:1, 3)

On the tables you'll find pieces of paper and some pens. Use these to write down praise to God for who He is and for what He has done in your life. Then peg your written praise to the string, joining with others to make a tapestry of praise.

Response:

Psalm 92 declares simply yet profoundly “it is **good** to praise the Lord”!

- Reflect: what impact does recognising and declaring the praise-worthy things about our God have on you?
- Reflect: How could you incorporate praise into a daily rhythm in your life?
- Pray: pray a prayer of praise and adoration to God with one or two others nearby.

SEE

Instructions:

In 1 Samuel 16 the prophet Samuel when anointing the next King over God's people said: "The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Arrayed around you are a series of portrait photos. Examine a few - one at a time. Don't rush but spend time looking at each one beyond what you normally would.

As you do, wonder to yourself: What are they experiencing in that moment? What might be their backstory? What might be their present joys and challenges? What do they need most?

Response:

Every week our service fills with faces; individuals. Each has their own back story complete with present joys and struggles we may know very little about.

Take a moment to look around at who is in the room and (remembering also those who aren't here today) consider:

- Who is God putting on your heart to connect more with?
- How much do you let others see behind the masks we all wear to what is really going on in your life?
- Who have you overlooked, ignored, been too quick to judge or "put in a box"? How could you start to shift that?

BURDENS

Instructions:

Most of us know what it is to carry a burden – something that weighs heavy on our mind, heart and soul. Sometimes we can carry them for so long we almost forget what it is like to not be burdened by that thing. Sometimes the longer we carry them the heavier they seem to become.

Pick up a bag or two. Feel the weight. Be aware of your body's response – tensing and compensating for the additional weight. Walk around for a bit carrying the extra weight.

As you do, consider what are some of the things that are burdening you at the moment. What is weighing heavy on you in this season of life?

Response:

The invitation of Jesus has always been “come to me you who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Place the bag down. Hear Jesus' words and look to the cross (on stage).

When ready go and kneel (or stand) at the foot of the cross. There release your burdens to Jesus. Trust them to Him. Welcome his strength and comfort. Experience his peace.

- Reflect: how can you continue trusting Jesus with this going forward?
- Pray: if comfortable share what burden you are laying down for with someone close to you and ask them to pray for you.

COUNTING BLESSINGS

Instructions:

Sometimes we find ourselves not feeling all that blessed, spending our energy focusing on what we do not have. Yet 1 Thessalonians 5:18 reminds us to “*give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*”

This is the will of God for you?! Wow. Think on that for a moment and then stop to ‘count your blessings’. Recognise all the wonderful things that you have in your life right now that are a gift from God!! List them; either in your head, on paper or share them out loud with someone.

Response:

Take a strip of coloured fabric as a symbol and reminder of the blessings in your life, and then place them on the branches nearby. Notice the contributions of others and how our gratitude together brings colour, life and vibrancy to an otherwise empty “tree”.

- Reflect: what have you been focusing on which undermines your perspective on the blessings already in your life?
- Reflect: what would happen in your relationship with God and in your experience of life if you made counting your blessings a natural part of your daily life?
- Pray: a prayer of thankfulness to God for all He has given you

COMMUNION

Instructions:

Communion is a powerful time of remembering, of celebrating, of recommitting. Jesus has left us this 'meal' and these symbols as a means of constantly returning to the great saving act performed on the cross.

Jesus has paid it all. Forgiveness is freely given as a gift to all who would believe.

Partake in communion by eating the bread and drinking the juice. You can do so by either reclining by one of the tables or by taking the bread and juice to a seat.

Response:

- **Reflect:** Spend time thinking on what Jesus has done for you. Receive his forgiveness afresh.

- **Pray:** commit yourself anew to following Jesus wholeheartedly with the empowering help of the Holy Spirit.

LISTENING

Chances are you have had the experience of wanting to move to a quieter location in order to better hear the person you are with. In noisy situations it can be hard to hear and listen. The same can be true in our lives when it comes to hearing God's voice.

Find a comfortable place to listen. Feel free to stand, sit or lie down.

Think about how much easier it is to hear a specific sound when we are focused on listening for it. Then shut your eyes and listen to the sounds around you.

Listen to the sounds coming from below; the shuffle of feet as people move around; the quiet whispers as people interact with each other. See if you can hear your own breathing or the breathing of a person nearby.

Response:

In John 10 Jesus likened himself to a good shepherd, teaching that *"my sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."*

Beyond all the noises and sounds we hear with our ears, still your inner self to tune in and listen to God's voice speaking.

- First try and hear: What is God speaking personally to me?

- Then: Does God have a word for you to pass on to someone else?

- Then: What is God speaking over our church community?