

Rivergate Resources
Sunday worship and sermon resources
for
(date of talk placed here)

Theme: **You were made to last forever**

Welcome

Welcome people warmly and invite them to begin worship by reading:

Lamentations 3:22-23:

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Worship

If you have your own musicians

Worship with your own live music

If you want to worship in song but don't have your own musicians:

Worship using a DVD of Christian music, e.g. using "Integrity's *i WORSHIP*".

If you want to worship without singing:

Ask everyone to open their Bible to Ephesians 2:11 and read until the end of the chapter (v.23). Invite everyone to worship God by finding a phrase in this reading they can thank God for out aloud, e.g. "Lord, I thank you that you have 'brought us near through the blood of Christ'" (v.13).

Prayer of confession

Lord of creation, we thank you for our rich and beautiful land,
wild, vast and beautiful.

We confess that we have damaged this fragile gift to us
and damaged ourselves by turning from your ways.

We have increased our possessions but reduced our values;
We have more busyness and less joy;
more regulations and less consideration;
more spiritualities but fewer convictions of truth;
more cynicism and less hope;
more money but less equality;
more houses and less stable families.

Our banks have been accused of exploitation;
Our churches have been guilty of abuse;
Our legal system has been accused of greed.
Our history accuses us of mistreating indigenous people
Moral leadership has given way to legal expediency
And our politician's credibility is scorned.

We are deeply sorry for what we have allowed.
We, your church, pray for your mercy on Australia.
Teach us your ways and lead us by your truth
that we might be a holy people,
a people of hope and integrity who honour you. Amen

Assurance of forgiveness

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry for ever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.
(Micah 7:18-19)

Prayer of thanksgiving

Loving Father,
You overturn our thinking
to draw us beyond ourselves into your hope.
We do not fully understand your ways,
but we delight in them.
We thank you
for death which gives life;
for hunger that makes full;
for servants who become great;
for grief that becomes joy;
for silence that is eloquent;
for faith that brings certainty;
for weakness that makes strong;
for the last who become first;
for the poor who become rich;
for the seeking who find
and for the cross which is your glory. AMEN.

Notices

Share those notices that are essential to effective mission of your community.

This is often a good point to invite the children to leave for their "Kid's Church (Sunday School).
The Kid's Church lesson is appended below as APPENDIX 1.

Testimony

Invite people to share their experience of God acting in their lives in the last week.

(Note: If Holy Communion is not shared every week, then people can be invited to share their testimony of how God has blessed them in the weeks Holy Communion is not celebrated.)

Offering

Intercession

Pray the prayers that will build God's mission and purposes in your community.

Holy Communion

If you are sharing Holy Communion, it can be introduced with the following:

"Jesus asked us to remember him in the simple act of sharing in bread and wine. As such, Holy Communion looks back with gratitude for the sacrifice Jesus made in taking the blame for all the bad things we think and do that would otherwise make us ineligible for life with God.

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he took bread, broke it, (pick up the bread, hold it aloft and break it in two. Hold out the two pieces.) and said, 'This is my body broken for you'.

Likewise, after supper, Jesus took the cup of wine and said, (Pick up the wine goblet and hold it aloft) 'This cup of wine is my blood which is poured out for you to take away your sins. Drink this,' said Jesus, 'all of you.'

It was also at this supper that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, so Holy Communion not only looks back, but it commissions us to serve one another today. The act of Communion binds us together as the body of Christ, a people committed to Christ's mission of service and sacrificial love.

Finally, Holy Communion is also a foretaste of the Heavenly banquet Christians look forward to when God restores us fully to himself and makes all things new. Christians are a people of hope.

As such, this meal celebrates the past, the present and the future."

(Say a prayer of thanks for the bread and the wine which represent the body and blood of Jesus sacrificed in order to rescue us back to God. Then share the bread and wine together.)

The Message (sermon)

(Appended at the end as APPENDIX 2)

Dismissal

(From Jude 24-25)

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy - to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore! Amen.

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APPENDIX 1) Kid's Church
(Sunday School)

Don't rush into teaching the children. The main priority is that they encounter God and do business with God. As such, it is recommended that the following sequence (or something similar) precede the teaching time:

A suggested lesson plan

1) Energy burn off (Optional, and if time permits. Boys appreciate this.)

A brief time of physical exercise, e.g. a relay race or basketball.

2) Worship (5-10 minutes)

Spend some time in prayer telling God how much you love him and why you love him. If you have the facilities, music and singing can be great tools to help children express their love for God. However, do allow plenty of time for prayer. Do whatever is necessary to provide a worship experience and to build a culture where uninhibited, wholehearted worship comes naturally.

3) Junking the bad stuff (10 minutes)

1) Asking forgiveness

Repentance means saying sorry to God for the wrong things we have done and not doing them again. It is getting rid of the bad stuff in our lives so that it doesn't spoil our ability to be close to God. Let's get really quiet before God and ask ourselves these questions:

- *have I disobeyed my parents?*
- *have I lied?*
- *have I stolen?*
- *have I hurt anyone?*
- *have I spoken unkindly to anyone?*

(Pause – allow time)

Is there anyone here I need to say sorry to right now? If so, do it now.

2) Giving forgiveness

Forgiving is important because unless we forgive, we can't receive God's forgiveness. Now let's spend some time thinking of anyone we need to forgive.

Has anyone hurt me? If so, tell God you want to forgive them and not hold a grudge.

3) Checking our friendship with God

God wants to be your best friend. Let's ask ourselves:

Have I been spending time with God chatting and listening in prayer?

Have I been reading the Bible enough?

4) Pray for each other (5 minutes)

God chooses to use our prayers to change things. Praying aloud changes your thoughts into action.

Let's pray for each other about the things they want to fix up.

5) Listening to God (5 minutes)

Be quiet and listen for God to feed you his ideas in your mind.

(Share any ideas on what God may have said to you.)

6) Learning time

Teach the following:

Teach the following:

BE A WARRIOR
(Ephesians 6:10-18)

Teach the significance of Eph 6:10-18 by asking the children to dress one child up in armour. (You might introduce the theme by showing them a poster from the *Narnia* film.)

1) Belt of truth

Use any wide belt.

Teach: Always speak truth and always seek out the true things to believe in.

2) Breastplate of righteousness

Use two 2 litre plastic ice-cream containers with one side cut away as shoulder armour. Make two holes along two of the edges to allow you to tie a square of cardboard (breastplate) in place. Tie the bottom of the cardboard in place with string as you would an apron string.

Alternatively, you could borrow some motorbike, "off road body armour" from someone who has it.

Teach: Always be righteous in all you do. Explain what being "righteous" is. It is doing the "right" thing.

3) Shoes of "readiness".

Use a pair of sandals.

Teach: Make sure you are equipped with the gospel and are ready to share it with your friends. Do you know how to tell people about Jesus? (Make sure children have access to the instructive tools to do this.)

4) The shield of faith.

This can be a dustbin lid, a shield-shaped piece of cardboard, or a large saucepan lid. Another idea is to put a handle on the back of a "Velcro dart" dart board. This allows people to throw the Velcro darts (darts of doubt) gently at the person dressed in armour. Please ensure that the Velcro darts are safe and that the person in armour is wearing a helmet with a visor in place (see next).

Teach: Build your shield of faith by reading the Bible and talking with God in prayer. This will shield you from the darts of doubt.

5) The helmet of salvation

Find a motorbike helmet with a visor.

Teach: Know that Jesus has saved you from being excluded from God's presence by paying the price for all the wrong things you have ever done on a cross.

6) The sword of the spirit.

Make this out of rolled up newspaper (so it can't hurt people).

Teach: God invites us to ask for his Holy Spirit power and to use his Holy Spirit power we do things for God. This power is available to everyone who accepts Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

At the end, label all the pieces of armour with card and 'Blue-tak'. Go through all the pieces again and test the children so that they remember each piece.

Finally, ask each child to kneel in front of you to be “knighted” (tapping a sword lightly on each shoulder) as you say:

(Name)... *I knight you as a warrior for Jesus. You have been called by Jesus as someone who is very important to him. You have been called to battle evil and to do great things for Jesus.*

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APPENDIX 2) The Message
(the sermon)

Note: The sermon notes presented here can be used as presented for a brief sermon, or form an excellent basis for an extended sermon (allowing you to develop any of the themes further yourself).

A model that works well is to present the subject for 10 minutes; allow 10 minutes for small groups to discuss questions relevant to the issue, and then spend 5 minutes summarising the key points before presenting the challenge, typically by saying, "Will you....?"

YOU WERE MADE TO LAST FOREVER

You were made to last forever.

The seventeenth century playwright, Molière, once quipped, "We die once, and for such a long time!"

For Christians, however, this is not a problem because we know that this life is not all there is. Life is simply an imperfect prelude for what is to come, a prelude in which God offers those who accept his loving friendship the right to enjoy the main act - eternity with God. "The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever" (1 Jn 2:17).

The book of Genesis teaches us that death would ensure that none of us would be trapped in this imperfect world forever (Gen 3:17-23). Yet, that is not the end of the story. The Old Testament also gives some intriguing hints about the existence of life after death in a more perfect state (Psalm 16:9-11; 73:24). For example, Job was one who expected to come face to face with God eventually after death to be vindicated by him (Job 19:25-27).

However, it is the New Testament that really trumpets the joy and certainty of life after death. The teaching of Jesus particularly gives us confidence in the existence of eternity with God, for example, in the parable he tells about the rich man and a beggar called Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31).

Jesus not only taught about heaven but also described himself as being the gate into heaven (Jn 10:7-9). This was because Jesus came to suffer judgement in our place, making us worthy of life with a holy God.

Now here's something fairly amazing: Christians can already experience some aspects of heaven before death because they already have a relationship with God now. That's why Jesus taught that the kingdom of God was within us. Let me read from Luke 17:20-21: Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

However, whilst the Kingdom of God is a present reality, it can only be partially enjoyed whilst we are here on earth. That is why Jesus also spoke of it being a future reality, something we can only fully enjoy once we have gone to be with God.

A helpful concept taught by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:37-44 is that our physical body is like a seed which, unless it dies, cannot grow into its eternal, spiritual potential. We can therefore look forward to the future with hope.

It follows that we should live knowing that the shadow of eternity falls over us. Fortunately, eternity is something we can invest in right now (Mt 6:19-24).

What kingdom have you invested most in, earthly or heavenly?

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Home Group Study
(for young adults and adults)

Hints on running a Home Group well

PREPARE WELL

This resource contains all the information you will need to teach this subject well. However, you will need to adapt it for your particular situation. It is recommended that you read through the resource and mark with different coloured highlighters:

- those sections you want to teach to the whole group
- those sections you will invite people to discuss and share in pairs
- those Bible references you will read out in full to the whole group
- those Bible references you will ask other members of the group to look up and read out.
- those sections which can be framed as a question for people to discuss in pairs or as a whole group. This is important, as it encourages ownership, relevance and learning.

THE GROUP LEADER

The leader should be a facilitator. This means that he/she should make it possible for things to be organised and happen. The leader should not necessarily do everything but should delegate responsibility. It is particularly a good idea for the leader not to be personally responsible for the domestic arrangements of the venue but to give this responsibility to an assistant.

PROMOTE DISCUSSION

The leader's main job in the group discussion time is to get people talking. It is not simply to provide the answers. A leader's skill is in making people feel at ease, appreciated and in gently drawing people into discussion. Leaders need to treat all questions seriously and with respect so that people will be encouraged to share because no question or opinion is considered too stupid or antagonistic to be appreciated.

PREPARING THE VENUE

A venue should be comfortable, non-threatening and look good. Consider using soft indirect lighting and having background music as people arrive. Chairs should usually be placed in a circle for discussion. Avoid having chairs behind each other if possible as it encourages those sitting in them to be less involved. Take the phone off the hook or switch it off to avoid distractions.

BREAKING THE ICE

“Warm up” activities at the start of a home group meeting can be anything that will help people relax, smile and get to know each other. It can be as basic as a chat over a cup of coffee.

WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE BRING?

Ask people to bring their Bibles.

TIMELINESS

There is no spiritual merit in meetings being long drawn out marathons. People will tire of them if they are. Be disciplined with time and let people go home at a civilised hour.

Before people go home, the meeting should have a definite ending e.g. a concluding prayer.

PRAYER

All prayers prayed by leaders before or after a meeting should be simple, sincere, relevant and short. Such prayers will not intimidate people and will encourage them to believe that they too might soon be able to pray in such a way.

GUIDANCE

*Show me your ways O Lord, teach me your paths,
guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God
my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long
(Psalm 25:4-5)*

THE FIVE FINGER CHECK LIST FOR GUIDANCE

When seeking God's guidance on an issue, do the five finger check by addressing the following five factors:

1) IS IT BIBLICAL?

The Bible provides a solid basis for guidance (Ps 119:105; 2 Tim 3:15-17).
If our guidance does not agree with clear biblical principles, it will not be correct.

We don't need to pray for guidance about something God has already given us clear direction on in the Bible. Our job is to go ahead and do what it says!

It is important, however that we interpret the Bible properly (2 Tim 2:15).
Read it in its context and understand the cultural setting that the writings come from.

2) DO WISE AND SPIRITUALLY MATURE PEOPLE ENCOURAGE ME?

Seek advice from the wise and mature (Prov 2:15).
Note that Rehoboam foolishly ignored the advice of his older counsellors (1 Kings 12:8).
This resulted in the Jewish nation splitting apart into Israel and Judah (1 Kings 12:13,16,18-19).

It is important, however that wisdom be God centred.
This is the type of wisdom found in Proverbs.
This is important, as the wisdom of God is not always the same as the wisdom of a godless world (1 Cor 1:20).
Godly wisdom means aligning ourselves with Christ and involves living a life that is in accordance with God's best plan for us (1 Cor 1:21-30; Jas 3:17).

3) DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVE YOU AN INNER PEACE?

The Holy Spirit, promised to all Christians (John 7:38-39), is involved in teaching and leading us (Jn 14:16-17,26).

Learn to recognise and be sensitive to the inspiration and insights that the Holy Spirit gives you. Remember to check out these insights first before you accept them as God's ord to you, as you can sometimes muddle up your own ideas and wishes with God's.

The 16th century spiritual writer Teresa of Avila says:
"The first sign that a locution (a style of speech) comes from God is the sense of power and authority the locution bears with it, and the sense of confidence and peace that follows it."

God's words and inspiration don't usually come in dramatic ways. Sometimes it is only heard in the quietness (1 Kings 19:11-13).

4) DO CIRCUMSTANCES SUGGEST IT IS A WISE COURSE OF ACTION?

Don't avoid the responsibility for making your own decisions by seeking to interpret signs which you look to tell you what to do. God answered Gideon's request for a sign as a concession to his lack of understanding or ability to discern God's will (Jdg 6:36-40; Is 7:10-13; Lk 4:12).

Signs may help or be deceptive. Therefore, they are not enough to base decisions on by themselves.

Nonetheless, we are to make the most of the opportunities God presents us with. The Apostle Paul certainly did (2 Cor 2:12).

I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me... (1 Corinthians 16:8-9)

One of the ways God guides us is therefore through circumstances.

5) ARE YOU HAPPY TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN DECISION?

It is important that your decision be your own and not someone else's (1 Kings 13:15-22).

If you feel you lack wisdom, the Bible invites you to ask God for it (Jas 1:5-6).

Hunger for wisdom. Seek it out (Prov 2:1-6; 4:5-9).

IN SUMMARY:

When deciding on a course of action, do the five finger check by asking the following:

- Does it match biblical principles?
- Do wise and spiritually mature friends encourage you?
- Does the Holy Spirit give you a deep inner peace about your decision?
- Are circumstances offering you a good opportunity?
- Does it seem wise and good to you? Is it your decision? Will you happily take responsibility for it?