

Belongingjournal





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Using your Journal

One way that lots of Christians explore their faith is by using a journal. This journal will be a place where you can express some of your thoughts, feelings and experiences. Often by writing things down, we begin to make sense of them, and to see how our thoughts and feelings over a period of time develop and sometimes change.

This journal need not just be a book that you write in. You may like to write poetry, draw or paint. It might be that the things that go into your journal aren't as important as the fact that you are taking the time to think about what Christianity means to your life.

Sometimes expressing thoughts and feelings will be very difficult. It may feel like the right words or images simply won't come. Some people who have been writing journals for a long time say that it can help to write whatever thoughts or images come into your mind. It might feel that nothing you're writing is making sense; however after a while you could discover that you've written some things that are really significant and important.

You will find it best to write in your journal at the end of each unit. Journalling will be your opportunity to think about the things you have discovered and learnt throughout the unit.

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Written by Cheryl Lawrie Designed by Redfish Bluefish Printed by Morning Star Press

Belonging to God

By taking this step in the journey of discovering what it means to belong to God, and to a community of faith, you are in some way saying that Christianity is important to you. Whatever your reason for taking this step, you are walking in the same path as generations of people who have seen a glimpse of something good and holy in the person of Jesus, and who have turned around to begin a new life with the hope, passion, joy, pain and grace that was so much a part of who Jesus was. They have been the foundation of that amazing community of people that we call the Christian Church.



The following statements have been made by various people about faith and Christianity. Spend some time reading and re-reading them. Which relate closest to your experience and understanding of faith?

"...So if we are to be turned inside out,
And upside down,
With even our pockets shaken,
Just to check what is rattling
And left behind,
We pray that you will keep faith with us,
And we with you,
Holding our hands as we weep,
Giving us strength to continue,
And showing us beacons
Along the way
To becoming new . . ."

Anna McKenzie

"What it is to be a Christian:
A condition of complete simplicity, costing not less than everything"
T.S. Eliot

"Belief is a truth held in the mind. Faith is a fire in the heart."

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Hebrews 11:1



Unit 1 Belonging to God

"I was passionate, filled with longing, I searched far and wide. But the day that the Truthful One found me, I was at home."

Lal Ded, 14th Century Kashmir, translated by Colman Barks, in Jane Hirshfield (ed.) Women In Praise of the Sacred, Harper Collins: New York, 1994



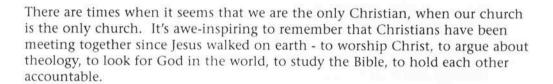
As you begin this part of your journey of faith, think about what it means to you to be a Christian.

What are the difficulties and challenges that face you as you try to follow Christ? What are the best parts of the journey? What are the things that keep you going?

Belonging to God's people

100 Generations of faith

"I had the experience of going to a church in India. It was an old, old church with big velvet drapes in the front that separated the sanctuary, the special place where no-one was able to go except the priests of the church. At the front there were granite stairs leading up to this sanctuary and they looked as if they had been carved out beautifully; someone had spent a long time brushing them back and making them into curved steps. Each step had this lovely bend to it, sort of dipped in the middle. A few of us naively asked about this lovely stone work - how extraordinary it was to make these carved steps. This man translated through the interpreter and said, "I don't think you understand. The stairs were square but over the last fourteen hundred years the Christians who have knelt on them have worn them away into a curve." That's when I remembered and realised that there had been a hundred generations of Christian people who had knelt on those stairs, who had walked those paths . . ."



We are not alone.







In your journal today, think about what it means to you to be a part of God's people.

What experiences in your church have been important for you? Why?

Why is it important for you to belong to the church?

What is your prayer for the church?

Belonging to God's World

'A tree brings glory to God, simply by being a tree.'

Thomas Merton

Christians believe that God's creation shows us things about who God is. We believe that while a tree isn't actually God, it's strength, beauty, fragility and growth are qualities that teach us about God.

Read through these reflections from people around the world who have discovered God in their world.

You are above me, O God you are beneath
You are in air
You are in earth
You are beside me
You are within.
O God of heaven,
you have made your home on earth
in the broken body of Creation.
Kindle within me
a love for you in all things.

Phillip Newell, published by Wild Goose Publications, Scotland. Used with permission

This prayer, which comes from Scotland and is part of the Celtic tradition which believes that all of life is blessed by God - work, play, conversation, rest - and that God can be found in all of these.

Out of the ordinariness of the bare earth, You brought the extraordinariness of human life...

In the ordinariness of the bare earth We plant grain from last year's harvest...

Out of the ordinariness of water Comes the life of the seed...

In human life and in the life of the seed Lies the life of this community...

From the life of God,
Comes creation and recreation...
Out of the heart of God
Comes peace and hope.
Your Spirit lives within us.

Pam Wyley in Phillip Liebelt and Noël Nicholls, Gentle Rain on Parched Earth, JBCE: Melbourne, 1996

This prayer comes from a farming area in Western Victoria. The people in this place depend on the land to give them food, but they also discover some important truths about God from the land around them.





Unit 3 Belonging to God's World



All you big things, bless the Lord Mount Kilimanjaro and Lake Victoria The Rift Valley and the Serengeti Plain Fat baobabs and shady mango trees All eucalyptus and tamarind trees Bless the Lord Praise and extol God for ever and ever.

All you tiny things bless the Lord
Busy black ants and hopping fleas
Wriggling tadpoles
and mosquito larvae
Flying locusts and water drops
Pollen dust and tsetse flies
Millet seeds and dried dagaa
Bless the Lord
Praise and extol God for ever and ever.
"An African Conticle", in Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon
(eds.), Earth Prayers from Around the World, Harper San
Francisco: San Francisco, 1991

This Prayer comes from Africa, where the people have struggled to survive droughts, famines, and abuse of the land.

The Lord is the greatest God, king over all other gods. He holds the deepest part of the earth in his hands, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The ocean is the Lord's because he made it, andwith his own hands he formed the dry land.

Psolm 95:3-5

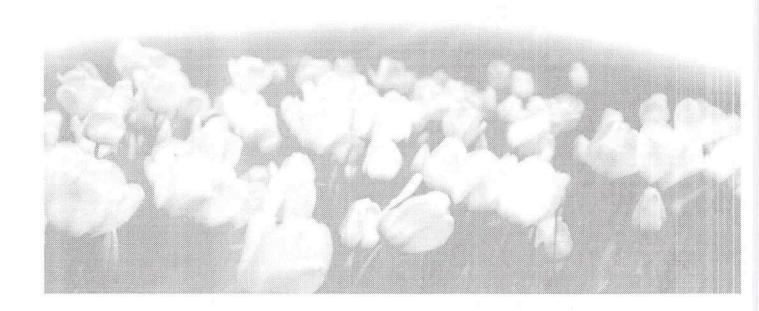
This prayer was written 3000 years ago. It speaks of someone who sees God in all the world.

Unit 3 Belonging to God's World

"Beginning to appreciate being alive and living in creation of God and breathing, feeling, tasting, resting, enjoying all of God's creation, and to appreciate this, one sees the togetherness of all of creation and how it sustains itself and each other... And so with this in mind, I reflect on the life that God has given and in view with how it fits in with other creation of God, it's wonderful to know that ... God has made us for himself, and we need to enjoy the creation of God because we're part of that creation, and he is the creator who made us for himself. I'm glad that life belongs to God."



This statement comes from Wali Fejo, an Aboriginal man from the Northern Territory. His people, for thousands of years, have lived within, and depended on God's creation for their physical and spiritual food.







What does it mean to you to belong to God's world?

What are the things in the place where you live that show you the glory of God?

How do you see God in the rest of the world?

How does that change the way you live?

Finish your reflection by writing or drawing a prayer for yourself, and for God's world.

Believing in God

Have you ever really thought about what you believe? Somebody asked Luci Craig, from Forster in Victoria, this question, and this is how she responded:

"In my naivety as a mere seventeen year old lassie, having only accomplished about one-eighth of what I hope to achieve in life, when asked what it is I believe in, I find **the answer doesn't exactly come to mind** as easily as preconceived knowledge might.

So I had to think about it...

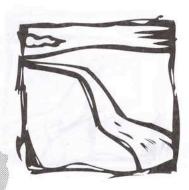
I mean sure, I believe in the sun, the moon and the stars, I believe in love, I believe in this beautiful beautiful planet, I believe most things I'm taught . . . I believe in the human race, but I also believe that **people can change and that beliefs can change...**

So here I am in my teenage years believing passionately in the world and all its charms, knowing that I'm a lucky kid and that **there probably is a God in heaven**. Believing within myself that I am invincible and that no one close to me will ever come to any harm, believing that only a happy future lies ahead, full of success . . . yet knowing full well that there will be failures, that **some days the sun won't shine and the car won't start...**

Maybe 'belief' is too strong a word for the questioning, the sceptical and mildly radical mind of a young adult. There are just these gut reactions that I have and think about a lot, base my values and morals on and live my 17 year old, Coca-Cola, rock and roll, pizza shop, Mickey Mouse, glow-in-the-dark, Year 12 in a coastal town life by. I like to think that **one day I'll believe in things** by questioning/straying thoughts. Maybe when I'm all grown up and worldly, hopefully happy and successful, I won't even have to think about what I believe in, I'll just know - it'll be a part of me. That would be nice."

Luci Craig in John Marsden (ed.), This I believe, Random House Australia: Sydney, © 1996

If you have a copy of the *Big Things, Little Things CD*, listen to track 4 on the stories CD. These statements are from a group of Christians who were asked 'What do you believe about God?'.







If somebody asked you this question, how would you respond?

What things about God are most important to you?

How does what you believe in God change your every day life?

How would you describe your relationship with God?

What things can make that better?

Reflect and write in the space below.

Believing in Jesus Christ

To believe in Jesus means we must make choices. We must think, intentionally, about the things that we do, think and say. No longer can we think about what will be best for me; rather we must think about what will be best for God's world.



'Jesus stood up to read,... "The Spirit of God is upon me, because God has appointed me to bring good news to the poor, and God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of God's favour." And Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Jesus, who began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Luke 4:16,18-21

Christ has no body on Earth but ours, no hands but ours, no feet but ours.

Ours are eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. Ours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good.

Ours are the hands with which he is to bless his people.

St Thérèse of Lisieux

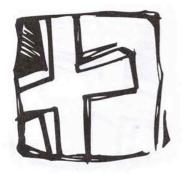


Write or draw the images of Jesus you have discovered in this unit. Which make you uncomfortable? To which do you relate? Which do want to follow?

Think about the ways you have been challenged in this unit, in particular how you understand and relate to Jesus.

What will you do with your life because you believe in Jesus?

Use this space to pray, write, reflect, dream, or draw about Jesus, and the relationship that you have with him.



Unit 5 Believing in Jesus Christ

Finish by reading this statement of belief.

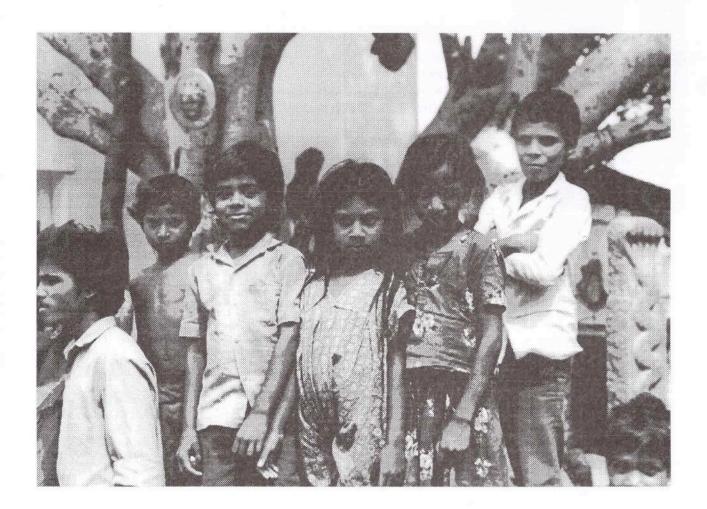
If I believe that Jesus was a real human being, with flesh and blood, with sweat and pimples, with parents and teachers, I know that he knows what I'm going through. If he could get it together, I can believe that I can too. If he was really real, then his example is real, and he can show me what's worth doing and worth forgetting, what's worth hoping for and worth giving up, and who I can be. Craig Mitchell © 1997

Unit 6 Believing the Good News

"Jesus saves", the graffiti said. It was scrawled, over and over again around the wall that separated the slum - home for 70 000 Indian people - from the beautiful, ornate cathedral next door. "Jesus saves". I smelt the stench of people dying, of rotting food, of stagnant water. I watched the people around me who had no work and no food. I felt the pain of those who dreamt of a new life for their children, but knew it wouldn't happen. And I wondered how Jesus would save them.

Suddenly, almost like a dream, I saw a cross, rising out of the middle of the slum, and on this cross was Jesus, face contorted with pain, body screaming with agony, and I knew. This is how Jesus saves. Not by taking these poor, desperate people out of the slum, but by living and dying in there with them.







Unit 6 Believing in the Good News



The words 'salvation' and 'grace' are often used by Christians. They are concepts that don't mean much unless we take them on as a part of our own Christian faith.

What do they mean to you?

How have you experienced salvation?

How has grace changed who you are, what you know about yourself and your faith?



Use this space to respond to these questions.

Growing in Worship

This is a story that comes from the Jewish tradition. It talks about what's really important in prayer and worship.

When the great Rabbi Israel Baal Shem-Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted.

Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Magid of Mezeritch, had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say, "Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer," and again the miracle would be accomplished.

Still later, Rabbi Moseh-Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say: "I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient." It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished.

Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his arm-chair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: "I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is to tell the story, and this must be sufficient."

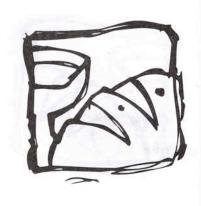
And it was sufficient.

Elie Wiesel

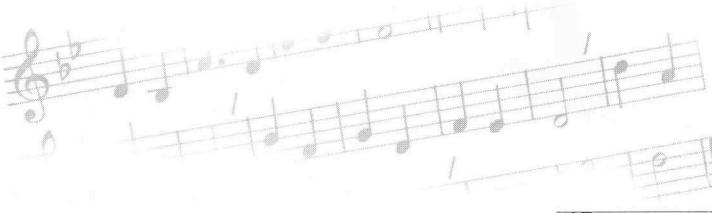
The important thing about worship isn't saying all the right words, doing the right actions, or even whether there are important people up the front making it happen. The important thing is that when we worship God we are taking the focus off ourselves, and placing it onto God. We do it in different ways, with our friends in church, on our own, when we see God in the world around us, in nature, in the flickering light of a candle, in the darkness and silence of a room late at night, in the brightness and energy of a dance or loud singing.

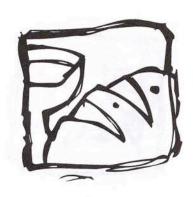
But it isn't simply putting aside time each week to consciously worship God. Our lives should be worship all the time. All that we do, all that we are, all that we think should be focused on God, an act of love for God.

Ella Simpson











Light a candle while you write in your journal today. Focus on the candle and think about the stories and quotes written here.

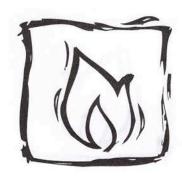
What do they challenge about the way that you pray and worship? How do you see the Holy Spirit working in your life?

In what ways do you need to become more open to the Holy Spirit? How can your worship reflect this?

Growing in the Spirit

When the disciples admitted that they wanted some help in their prayer life, Jesus didn't laugh at them, or move into a theological treatise about what prayer is. He simply taught them a prayer which they could use.

In your journalling time today, read through this prayer, and make it yours by writing or drawing your response to each part of the prayer. Do this slowly, and allow some space to think about what this prayer means to you, and how it can change you.



Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name

We have heard about you,

God of all power.

You made the world out of kindness,

creating order out of confusion;

you made each one of us in your own image;

your fingerprint is on every soul.

So we praise you.

Iona Community, "We have heard about you," in A Wee Worship Book, Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, © 1989.

your kingdom come

Blessed be the works of your hands,

O Holy One.

Blessed be these hands that have touched life.

Blessed be these hands that have nurtured creativity.

Blessed be these hands that have held pain.

Blessed be these hands that have embraced with passion.

Blessed be these hands that have tended gardens.

Blessed be these hands that have closed in anger.

Blessed be these hands that have planted new seeds.

Blessed be these hands that have harvested ripe fields.

Blessed be these hands that have cleaned, washed, mopped, scrubbed.

Blessed be these hands that have become knotty with age.

Blessed be these hands that are wrinkled and scarred from doing justice.

Blessed be these hands that have reached out and been received.

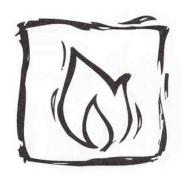
Blessed be these hands that hold the promise of the future.

Blessed be the works of your hands.

O Holy One.

Diann Neu, "In Praise of Hands: A Hand Blessing," WATERwheel 2, no. 1 (Winter 1989),

Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual: Silver Spring, USA



Unit 8 Growing in the Spirit

your will be done, on earth, as in heaven

Pray that the Lord may soften the hardness of your soul. Pray that the Lord may forgive the sins you confess to him. Don't pray that what you want may come to pass. It does not necessarily coincide with the will of God. Pray rather as you have been taught, saying: 'Your will be done in me!'

Pray that the will of God may be done in everything. He, in fact, wants what is good and useful for your soul, while you are not always seeking that and only that.'

Evagrius, 'Sentences on Prayer' in Thomas Spidlik, Drinking from the Patristic Fountain, New City Press: London, ©1992

Give us today our daily bread

If you have two loaves of bread, sell one and buy a hyacinth. Hungarian Proverb

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us

Only one petition in the Lord's Prayer has any condition attached to it: it is the petition for forgiveness.

William Temple

Unit 8 Growing in the Spirit

Save us from the time of trial

'We raise our eyes in prayer through the bars, darkly.

Together with a thousand prisoners in their cells and with many more thousands in the larger prison of our country.

We pray for freedom and even more urgently, for life.

As nameless executioners salvage those whom they used to merely torture and detain and both children and parents slowly but surely die of sickness that has many names and only one name.

We ask for faith to see that death and prison are not forever that life and freedom will prevail.

We ask for faith to celebrate even while we mourn knowing that death and prison are already signs of a people's struggle for freedom and life.

We raise our voices in prayer through the bars, boldly believing there will be an answer as our people awaken.

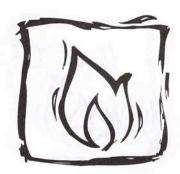
Amen.

Edicio de la Torre, the Philippines, in Masao Takenaka and Ron O'Grady (eds.),
The Bible Through Asian Eyes, Pace Publishing in association with the Asian Christian Art Association Auckland, ©1991

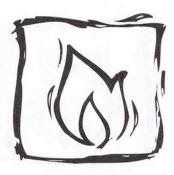
and deliver us from evil

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand, I am tired, I am weak, I am worn; through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light' Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

Thomas A. Dorsey, "Precious Lord", in United Methodist Hymnal, Unichappell Music: Milwaukee







For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours You are a fire, ever burning and never consumed

You are a fire, ever burning and never consumed
You are a light, ever shining and never fading.....
You are goodness beyond all goodness, beauty beyond all beauty,
wisdom beyond all wisdom

Catherine of Siena, "Sea, Light, Fire," from The Dialogue, in Robert Van de Weyer (ed.)
The HarperCollins Book of Prayers, Harper San Francisco: San Francisco, ©1993

now and forever. Amen.

So be it.

Growing with Scripture

Choose one of the Bible passages listed below. Read the passage a few times over, and begin to imagine that you are there in the passage. Imagine that you are listening to this story being told for the first time, or that you are actually in the event which is happening. Say the words out loud. Become so familiar with the story that you can close your eyes and see and hear what is happening.



Luke 7:36-50

The woman pours perfume on Jesus' feet

Mark 15:22-41

Jesus' death

John 21:1-19

Jesus appears to the disciples after his resurrection

Matthew 6:25-34

Don't be anxious about tomorrow



Unit 9 Growing in Scripture



Now imagine that you are one of the characters in the passage. Imagine that you are actually present while the events are happening. What are your feelings? What do you want to say or do as a response to what you are hearing and seeing?

Now be silent, and let God speak to you through the passage. There may be something new which you suddenly understand in the story. You may hear a message that you haven't heard before. You may hear a message which challenges your faith where you are at the moment.

Use the space below to respond to this.

Unit 10 Sharing our Gifts

"Our life is God's gift to us. Our gift to God is what we do with our life." Anonymous



Choose, choose, choose

to fight or run

to sleep or read

to study or play

to be faithful or promiscuous

to obey or rebel

to yield or resist

to create or destroy

to repent or deny

to forgive or resent

to save or spend

to take risks or be cautious

to dream

to trust

Who will I trust? Who will I serve? Who will I please?

The crowd, the fashion, the neighbours?

For what will I sacrifice ...?

Choose this day

Paulo Solari, 'Choose, Choose, Choose' in Journal for Current Social Issues. (Imaging the Word, vol 3)

If we choose to live so we are focused on God, that changes the way we use our time, our gifts, our money.



Unit 10 Sharing our Gifts



Think seriously about your life, and your priorities. What are the things that you believe God would want you to challenge and work on?

What are the areas of your life which are too complicated? What things detract from your faith, from your relationship with God and the other important people in your life?

How can you use the life and gifts you are given to be more faithful to God?

Reflect on these things in the space below.

Unit 11Sharing our Faith

But I can't tell people about my faith, God.

My actions tell people what I believe - well mostly, anyway -

My friends know what I believe

I can't put it into words

I'll pray for those who do That's what I'm good at

God can use other ways of reaching people

I'm not called to evangelism

Our church doesn't do that

I'm too vulnerable

I want to respect their beliefs

It's too personal

People don't want to hear this

And you can't ask me to do more than that. Thanks God

Nobody would understand

The story goes, as Jesus went to heaven, he was greeted at the gates by the angels, who expressed surprise at his returning to heaven. "But who will continue your work on earth, who will tell people about God, who will share your message?" And Jesus replied "Well, I've left Peter, James and John, Mary and Martha, and the rest of my disciples".

The angels were a little scornful at this. "Peter denied you three times at your worst moment. James and John spent their time arguing about who was the greatest. How can your message be left in their hands? What's your back up plan?"

Jesus said, "They are all I have. There is no back up plan."







Throughout this program you have discussed, explored, thought and learnt about Christianity. You have probably clarified much of what you believe about faith and life.

Spend some time thinking and writing about the things which are central to your faith, the beliefs you have, and the words that you would use to describe them to people around you.



What are the opportunities you have in your life to share your faith? Are there things within you which stop you from doing this? How can you overcome these difficulties?

Unit 12Sharing our World

Will you come and follow me
If I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
And never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
Will you let my name be known,
Will you let my life be grown
In you and you in me?



You have, over the last 12 units, explored what it means to belong to God, to God's people, and to God's world. This is something which will be an ongoing journey, just as our commitment to God has to be made every day.



Think about your commitment to God.

What does it mean to you to follow Jesus?

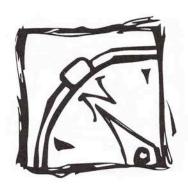
How far are you prepared to let that commitment affect your life?

Will you leave yourself behind
If I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
And never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
Should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
In you and you in me?

We are changed when we discover God's presence and love in our lives and the world. God's challenge to us is to make that love real by living dangerously, but living with integrity. Reflect on how that happens in your life.



Think about what it means to you for God to answer prayer in you.



Unit 12 Sharing our World

Will you let the blinded see
If I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
And never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
And do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean
In you and you in me?



The Gospels tell us of Jesus who liberated, healed, challenged and loved. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to walk the way of Jesus, changing the world, turning the values of the world into justice, peace and integrity. Think about how these values can be real in your life.

Will you love the 'you' you hide

If I but call your name?

Will you quell the fear inside

And never be the same?

Will you use the faith you've found

To reshape the world around,

Through my sight and touch and sound

In you and you in me?



Knowing that we are loved by God gives us the freedom to love ourselves, to take new risks, to be people who change the world. We do not do what we do out of fear or guilt, rather we respond out of the richness we have been given by God.

What are the fears that you need to overcome to follow God?

What are the barriers that hold you back from responding to the presence of God in your life?

Unit 12 Sharing our World

Lord, your summons echoes true
When you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
And never be the same.
In your company I'll go
Where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow

In you and you in me.

'The Summons', written by John L Bell, Published by Wild Goose Publications, Scotland. Used with permission.



We are not alone. We live in the company of God.

What is your response of faith to the God who calls you, loves you, and now challenges you to respond with your whole life?



Think of the journey you have taken through Belonging.

Are there things you would like to say in response to what you have experienced?

How will you continue to grow in your journey of faith?

