



Habitats of Hope

Habitats of Hope

Join us as this month as we look to cultivate hope!

A five week theme about nature, ecology and how we can enthuse and empower one another to tackle the myriad challenges we face as a planet.

We will be using nests, harvests, homes, ecosystems and habitats to reflect on nurturing an attitude of hope in our world as disciples of the hope bringer: Jesus Christ.

This August, as we look around about us we are taking hope! We're going to seek it, nurture it, carefully cultivate it, and celebrate its blossoming as we discover what the natural world can help us learn about our faith... and what our faith can teach us about the natural world.

As our Habitats of Hope theme begins we want to explore what we can learn from the metaphor of nest building. Nests are not fixed, birds often remake them season by season perhaps returning to the same location but rebuilding anew. A nest while offering a sense of security, is not so much a way for a bird to hide away from the world — but rather for

Habitats of Hope

STUDY QUESTIONS

them to find a place in it. How could building a nest with God each year be helpful way of thinking about our relationship with God?

When we think about habitats we also think about harvests and how our harvests can harm them. When we work the land we can make choices that work with it or against it. In the last hundred years we have made phenomenal leaps in productivity, producing enormous amounts of food to feed millions of people. But sometimes this has been done at the cost of the land itself causing degradation, habitat loss and pollution.

How can we ensure homes for all of humanity and nature? The vision we are given in Psalm 85 of righteousness and peace kissing is a tender image of restoration and togetherness. When righteousness and peace are kept apart — conflict and inequality rise. Peace isn't simply the absence of war, it's the presence of something: a habitat where the qualities of peacefulness can blossom, where homes can be made.

As people who cherish and value the world we have been entrusted with for our flourishing — what on earth can we learn from the habitats we are in danger of erasing completely before it's too late? What do we learn from the desert, the fields, the forests, the ocean? How can we rediscover humility and awe, and in that space — hope also.

So, having sought hope as nest builders, tended to it as harvesters, lived it as dwellers, and cultivated ecosystems to nurture it... we will conclude our theme by asking how do we hold on to habitats of hope?

Over May to July our trio of themes **Rock, Paper, Scissors, Pegs; Who are we?;** and **A-Z** delved into some of the fundamentals of our faith. We looked at figures who shaped the early church, the key principles of the Gospel, and several of the everyday concepts that make up our day-to-day faith.

So as we begin a new sequence of themes running August - October we want to take what we have learned about the fundamentals and see how they relate to the world around about us. Nothing exists in a vacuum, our faith is not something that takes place *in* the natural world — it is *part* of the natural world.

We begin by *looking around* with this first month's theme focusing on nature and ecology, then with our second theme we will *look back* over the **80 Generations** between us and the time of Christ's earthly ministry. And then in October, as skies begin to darken and temperatures cool, we will *look up* as we consider **Stormy Weather, Peaceful Shore** — exploring poetry, language weather and metaphor as we express our response to the love that sustains us through all.

So you could say this new trilogy is one of Hope, Faith and Love as we consider: what happens when our belief takes root in a rich and vibrant world, finds itself tossed to and

Habitats of Hope

STUDY QUESTIONS

from on the waves of history trying to stay true to the faith, and then the love that sustains us amid the storms and to the peaceful shores.

In the meantime, harvests, homes, eco-systems and habitats await us.

Look around — it's time to take hope!

SEEDS TO SOW: Open-ended prompts to inspire creative responses to the themes. Perhaps a song, some drawing, or creative writing! They are short and sweet, simply a starting off place for you and your imagination. Expand, tailor and develop as suits you. Often they take the form of a question, to encourage reflection.

These discussion questions adapt our monthly themes for small Connect Groups or personal Bible study (look up [Habitats of Hope Resource Pack](#) for more information on this month's theme). The questions are divided into 5 parts to correspond with the 5 weeks of the Daily Worship theme. They are offered as a guideline and there is no need to go through all the given questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose, or adapt to what interests you or your group.

Habitats of Hope

STUDY QUESTIONS

Part 1: Nests of Hope

When a bird starts gathering twigs and moss they are acting in hope, working towards an uncertain but willed for future. When summer holidays begin to draw to a close and a new season approaches we start putting together a new bundle of ideas about the months ahead: names we'll be remembering, gifts we'll be nurturing, cares we'll be carrying. Perhaps there will be: particular song lyrics, Bible verses, quotes from books, and conversation with friends we'll be weaving into this year's nest.

SEEDS TO SOW: ARE WE MAKING IT EASY FOR WILDLIFE TO NEST AND FIND A HOME IN OUR LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOODS?

Read Psalm 84: 3 (we suggest you read the whole psalm and then return to focus on verse 3)

Nest making anew.

Why do you think the psalmist includes this reference to birds nesting? What do you think it tell us about our relationship with God?

Read 1 Kings 3: 5-12

Triangulating.

Let's reflect on the keen-eyed owl perception of Solomon who wisely asks for wisdom. During this 'bird' week we can think of him as a canny owl looking around, aware of the dangers and opportunities that surround him. Did you know that some species of owls have ears at two different heights!? The asymmetric position helps them to discern where a given sound is coming from. Combined with their night vision it contributes to their uncanny ability to find things in the darkness and has doubtless contributed to their reputation for piercing insight.

The process of discerning between good and evil, of choosing the right path, can be a bit like that... one of working out where the sound is coming from! A place of good, or a place of evil? Like an owl flying through the forest — or a young leader thrown into the deep end in our reading — what are the things that can help us find our way and discern a wise path?

Read Matthew 13: 31-32

A vast nest network!

What would it mean to consciously 'nest' each year with God? Taking our place amongst the branches and intentionally working on a place to shelter? Like a bird gathering bits and pieces for their nest, what could we be weaving into our nests for the year ahead? It could be things like particular Bible verses, a meaningful phrase, a verse from a hymn, a particular piece of art, a journey you plan to take... What is going to help you focus on God this year?

Habitats of Hope

STUDY QUESTIONS

Part 2: Harvests of Hope

When we work the land we can make choices that work with it or against it. In the last hundred years we have made phenomenal leaps in productivity, producing enormous amounts of food to feed millions of people. But sometimes this has been done at the cost of the land itself causing degradation, habitat loss and pollution. Our response to issues of sustainability is not a lifestyle choice that's tacked on to the end of our faith, like choosing a nice hessian tote instead of a plastic bag, but a beating question at the heart of it. If we believe we have been entrusted with a beautiful world and that we owe it to others to feed and care for them — that we have a responsibility for one another beyond borders and continents — then sustainability is crucial.

As grim as the ecological picture can look sometimes we want to sow in hope as a people of hope who wish not to reap in bitterness, but reap in joy.

SEEDS TO SOW: WHERE CAN WE DIRECTLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN CARING FOR OUR PLANET THIS WEEK?

Read Genesis 32: 22-31

Wrestling for answers.

When we face the mounting challenges of extreme weather events, conflict and growing inequality it can be an instinctive action to turn away — from the news, from the problem, from God. But like Jacob, we may learn more by coming to God face to face and refusing to let go...

How of you think Jacob felt as he limped away? What was his mental state like?

Read Micah 6: 9-16

Considering the consequences of an uncaring, and acquisitive culture.

This reading about injustice and dishonesty and a sowing without reaping echo uncomfortably for us today.

How do these ancient words connect to contemporary events?

Read Matthew 14: 13-21

Two solutions.

The disciples suggest that the crowd disperse, spread out, forage. Jesus instead invites them to stay, to get closer together, to share.

What can we learn from this contrast and is there any way we can apply that to how we produce enough food for our world?

Habitats of Hope

STUDY QUESTIONS

Part 3: Homes of Hope

The vision we are given in Psalm 85 of righteousness and peace kissing is a tender image of restoration and togetherness. When righteousness and peace are kept apart: conflict and inequality rise. Peace isn't simply the absence of war, it's the presence of something: a habitat where the qualities of peacefulness can blossom. Peace requires righteousness — people acting with goodness, virtue and integrity. The unrighteousness of millions of people displaced from their homes through war, catastrophe and crop failure; of homelessness and inadequate housing; of unfair systems that punish the poor for being poor; make it incredibly hard to foster peace.

Rather than just wallowing in the doom and gloom, how can we recognise the pain of our world but also do something positive about it? How can we make a world with homes of hope for all?

SEEDS TO SOW: WHEN DID YOU LAST FEEL 'UPROOTED'? WHEN DID YOU LAST GO THROUGH AN 'UPHEAVAL'? AND WHEN DID YOU LAST FEEL 'UPLIFTED'?

Read Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 & Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b

Uprooting, upheaval, uplifting. What does the concept of 'home' mean over the course of Joseph's story?

Read 1 Kings 19: 9-15

On the run, in the quiet.

What interests you, confuses you or challenges you about this passage?

And who today in our world is on the move and needs to hear God in the stillness?

Read Jeremiah 12: 1-4 & Psalm 85: 8-13

The land mourns.

In the psalm righteousness and peace kiss, a vision of security and justice and mercy for all. For peace without righteousness isn't really peace and righteousness without peace isn't really righteousness. Which takes us to our Jeremiah reading where prosperity for some does not mean peace for all.

Jeremiah's complaint contains a very human plea to God: "Why do good things happen to bad people?" And why does the land have to mourn while people exploit it? The poetic point is underlined by biological reality, our actions do have consequences for the soil under our feet. Why does God give us the freewill to mess up ecosystems, why doesn't God reverse climate change? Why do people live comfortable lives in exchange for making the lives of others miserable?

These questions don't have easy answers, but through asking them we look to learn more about how to recapture hope and work towards restoring habitats of hope.

Habitats of Hope

STUDY QUESTIONS

Part 4: Eco-systems of hope

Habitats are complex systems. Flick one lever, change one part and you'll influence the rest. Scientists sometimes talk about the 'Anthropocene', the idea that we humans have made such an impact on the world around us that we are entering a new epoch where human action on the planet is defining this current age, whether it be in wildlife, or meteorology, or geology. Animal, vegetable or mineral — we humans have bulldozed through with our building, farming and processing. As people who cherish and value the world we have been entrusted with for our flourishing — what on earth can we learn from the habitats we are in danger of erasing completely before it's too late? What do we learn from the desert, the fields, the forests, the ocean? How can we rediscover humility and awe, and in that space — hope also.

SEEDS TO SOW: WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HOW WE TREAT THE LAND AND HOW WE TREAT OTHER PEOPLE?

Read Psalm 133

The pleasantness of unity.

What do you make of the two analogies in this psalm, to the oil on the beard and the mountain dew? What do they tell us about unity?

Read Isaiah 56: 1-8

Drawn into an ecosystem of grace.

God's ecosystem of grace is about gathering and participation, not conquest and oppression. God does not conquer people to draw them into the fold, they are invited to take part and find a home there.

To the people first hearing this, how must it have sounded it? How would it have affected how they thought about identity, loyalty and belonging?

Read Exodus 23: 9-13

Do not oppress others, do not oppress the land, do not oppress yourself.

Give others a break, give the land a break, give yourself a break! What are the things that tie these three concept together? How does not exploiting others relate to how I work the land? And how does my attitude to the land affect my attitude to myself?

Habitats of Hope

STUDY QUESTIONS

Part 5: Holding on to Habitats of Hope

So, having sought hope as nest builders, tended it as harvesters, lived it as dwellers, and cultivated ecosystems to nurture it... how do we hold on to habitats of hope? As this theme draws to a close we take inspiration from different habitats to think about the breadth and depth of the hope that God calls us to.

SEEDS TO SOW: IN ISAIAH 55 THE TREES CLAP. WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD MAKE TREES CLAP AND CHEER?

Read Exodus 1: 8-22

The hope of women, labouring in the desert.

Shiphrah and Puah — given an impossibly cruel task in an impossibly cruel time — somehow foster a habitat of hope through their ingenuity. Habitats of hope can and do sometimes blossom in the midst of dire circumstances.

What do you think sustained Shiphrah and Puah and sparked their hope?

Read Exodus 2: 1-10

Rivers and survival.

Rivers have always been crucial to human survival — offering a means of sustenance, travel and for information to flow.

What did the river represent to Moses's mother? To Moses's sister? To the Pharaoh's daughter. Think about both before and after the incident described in this reading.

Read Romans 12: 1-8

Our bodies — our biomes — a living sacrifice.

Thinking outside the box here, the human body is a habitat both literally and metaphorically for the microbes and thoughts, hopes and dreams that inhabit us.

How can we ourselves be habitats of grace? Places where God's kingdom flourishes?

What traits do healthy ecosystems need to flourish and how can we apply some of those ideas to ourselves? For instance to sustain life habitats need water and light...