

In the Fathers Hands



Introduction

Welcome to our Connect Bible Study for In the Father's Hands!

A Connect Bible Study is a small group who meet regularly to explore faith and Godly responses to life issues, growing in the things of God together as we go. Anyone can host one using these materials and contact us for support and guidance. Online or in-person, our heart is that they offer a relaxed space for faith, friendship and fun.

We hope the resources and discussion points encourage, inspire, and invigorate you on your walk with God. We have short accompanying introductory videos for each week on the Sanctuary First website:

sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/connect

It might be the conversation follows the discussion as laid out or heads in a different direction, both are wonderful and we hope the outline we offer here is flexible and supportive to engage with the Bible and our faith in fresh and vibrant ways as we make our way in the world as 21st century disciples exploring the wonders of life with Jesus!

What is involved?

Each week begins with an introduction and a 'seed to sow' conversation starter. These are open-ended prompts to inspire creative responses to the themes. Perhaps they will inspire you to write a song or a poem, or to paint, draw, move or explore! We imagine the material for each week would work for 90 minute sessions but feel free to adapt to your group!

Additional Resources

This booklet includes a poem and prayer that explore what it means to be loved by God.

We have a [Resource Pack PDF](#) for this month's theme with daily Bible readings and prompts.

There are more songs, videos, podcasts and blogs linked to this theme on our [website](#) and [App](#), have fun exploring it all!

In the Father's Hands

In the Father's hands! Sometimes people say flippantly or fatalistically 'well it's in God's hands now' — as in 'there's nothing more we can do'. But when we reflect on the fact that we live and breathe in the shelter of God's the Father's hands — there's so much we can do!

This month we conclude our three month series looking at the Trinity by reflecting on our Father God. Wild Jesus regularly talks about and prays to His Father knowing that His Father loves Him and shows Him all He does (John 5: 20). One of the sparks the Spirit gives us is that we cry out 'Abba, dear father' (Romans 8: 15). We keep in mind that God the Father is one of heavenly understanding and not an earthly understanding.

We are reflecting on the care, creativity and generosity of our heavenly Father, who loves us dearly who empowers, encourages and energises us, side by side with Wild Jesus.

So, what are Father God's hands like? What does it mean to be in His hands? Hands that are safe. That are open. That are skilled. That are creative. That are ever resourceful. Hands that know how to sensitively sculpt, weave, cultivate, and nurture. Hands that are both powerful and gentle, unimaginably big and yet able to hold us close.

To help us picture the Father's hands we are going to be looking at a series of metaphors for the skilled craftsmanship of our loving Father God. In a world that knows only too well the pain of absent fathers we are comforted by the presence of our God — who has all the presence of the gifted artist lovingly crafting his art. We are beautiful dishes, a rich tapestry, a vibrant garden, and an endless canvass of God's grace.

- Week 1 The Potter's Hands — *The Father's Goodness*
- Week 2 The Weaver's Hands — *The Father's Vision*
- Week 3 The Gardener's Hands — *The Father's Nurturing*
- Week 4 The Artist's Hands — *The Father's Presence*
- Week 5 The Hands of the Trinity: Artistry in Motion — *The Trinity Together*

Poem

In This Wild World

In this wild world
let us make an arbour
A pocket in the fabric of time
Where we can treasure lost things
Where we can be together

In this broken moment
Let us make a shelter
and take shelter
under a canopy of all we can be
Where we can be together.

At our feet, sacred quiet,
where the miraculous goes unsaid
where promises grow and tears are shed
— seeds fly and trees fall into the sky
And we can be together.

In this commitment
this fledgling frescoed framework
a little alcove in the uncertainty of what could be
we take a seat and take heart
And we can be together.

In this bond between us
we catch our breath and our courage
discovering who we can be in the dappled light of nurture
sheltered, cherished, loved, a simple place
Where we can be together.

James Cathcart, Sanctuary First

Prayer

God you are my protector, Elohim Shomri, this is your Name.

I remember that you call me your child and I was made in your image.

I remember that I am not a mistake for all my days are written in your book.

I remember I am fearfully and wonderfully made and you rejoice over me
with singing.

Here in this secret place with you, away from all others, I remember how you
love me.

And here in your love, there is no fear.

As you were with David, so you are with me, Spirit, help me worship you
with the freedom and trust that David had, for you are higher, mightier,
more loving and holy than anything or anyone. You are the highest rock.

Father, these prayers are in Jesus' name,

Amen.

**Rev Ruth Kennedy, Minister Sanctuary First, Digital Ministries Advisor,
Church of Scotland**

Elohim Shomri — 'God is my protector' in Hebrew

Week 1: The Potter's Hands

Introduction

We begin our theme by picturing our Father God as a potter! This is an ancient metaphor inspired by an ancient art form that occurs multiple times in the Bible.

This week we are thinking especially about the goodness of God. We will be reflecting on the thoroughness and sensitivity of God's hands on care.

Seeds to Sow

As well as their hands, potters use a number of tools to shape and decorate their pots as they work the clay. One thing they use is a 'sprig mould' kind of like a stamp which can be pressed into the clay to create textures and designs. If God had a 'sprig mould' in your community, what designs and patterns would he be pressing into the clay?

Read Isaiah 64 (especially focusing on verse 8)

Wedging the clay

We need God and God kneads us! 'Wedging' is when potters work the clay to make it workable, consistent, and pliable. A potter doesn't simply grab a lump of clay and immediately start sculpting — in the same way God doesn't just grab us and bend us out of shape — God knows us and kneads us, supporting and strengthening us. Let's use this imagery to think about the sensitivity and goodness of God the Father.

The flash of insight in verse 8 — that we are all the works of God's hands, bearing the maker's mark — comes in the midst of this heartfelt plea to God to intervene, to be present! What can we do when we are desperate for our Father God to act or intervene in a situation but he is instead wedging the clay — working in unseen ways to prepare and nurture us?

Read Jeremiah 18: 1-11

Moulding the clay.

Let's use this pottery analogy to think about the power behind God's goodness.

The words at the end of this reading seem somewhat drastic at first reading, "Thus says the Lord: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings."

But are we missing a comic undertone here? God is not a literal potter, and God does not shape evil against us. And while a potter might get frustrated with their clay that doesn't mean they're going to take it out on the clay itself, instead they'll go back to square one and begin moulding the rebellious clay again (see verse 4). Where do you see God working and reworking our potential, as communities, societies and nations?

Read 2 Corinthians 4: 1-15

First firing

When pottery goes into the kiln the questions come — will it hold? Will cracks appear? Clay makes a great metaphor for humanity — delicate and earthy, everyday and beautiful. God the Father loves us, has a purpose for us and can use all the broken pieces of our lives! Cracks are how the light gets in as Leonard Cohen said! Our imperfect clay forms can be beautiful vessels of grace, not in spite of being humble clay jars, but because of it! Kintsugi is the Japanese practice of mending cracks in broken pottery with gold — not erasing the break but healing it and making it beautiful.

Where are we asking for our Father God to work gold Kintsugi in our lives?

Week 2: The Weaver's Hands

Introduction

Our Father God is handy on the loom as well as the pottery wheel! This week we think about God's vision, about the loving Father who knits us together, both individually and as communities — and across time and space!

Seeds to Sow

Imagine if being clothed in Christ (see Galatians 3: 23-29) was literal clothes — what would that outfit look like? What would it include? Use your imagination and have fun with it!

Read Psalm 139: 1-18

Knitted together.

God the Father knows the warp and weft of all of us individually and it is with this knowledge that God can weave us together as whole communities, tapestries made of the bright threads of humanity, that our Father God has taken the time to know.

We are each unimaginably smaller than God and yet unfathomably precious to him! Like each stitch and every fibre in a vast tapestry — we are all treasured and all part of realising the bigger picture.

How does it feel to know that God knows each of us so well? How do we get our heads around it?

Read Ephesians 4: 14-16

Ligaments!

The human body, just like a tapestry requires supporting stitches that anchor and hold together the fabric that God the Father makes out of us.

Think of the people, relationships, resources and dynamics that God weaves into our lives — who or what are the supporting elements that our Father has weaved together to build us up in love?

Read Galatians 3: 23-29

All one, clothed in Christ.

A tapestry of distinct but complementary threads — together in the glory of our diversity we reflect the image of God the Father back to him.

Being clothed with Christ, suggests a daily activity, a daily decision to join Christ, to embody Jesus in the world.

What can we do to help us 'dress' with God each day? To start each day with the Father?

Week 3: The Gardener's Hands

Introduction

Now we join our Father God out in the garden, we stroll through the orchards, the vineyards, seeing the care and attention he gives to cultivating the ground, nurturing seedlings. The generous cultivation of the gardener turns water and sunshine and hope into wonderful fruit!

Seeds to Sow

Pruning is an important part of gardening, but how do we ensure that when we prune we do so in the same generous spirit as our Father God?

Read Psalm 104

Beginning in awe.

We begin this week in the place of awe, amazed at the works of the Master Gardener!

What can we learn about our Father God through the natural world?

Read John 15: 1-17

My Father the gardener

Jesus gives us this striking picture of God as a skilled gardener coaxing growth and fruit from a vine, pruning and tending the branches.

Picture a devoted gardener so attuned to the whole environment, knowing the acidity and moisture content of the soil, keeping an eye on the temperature and wind direction, rainfall levels, and seasonal changes. Gardeners have time to watch branches slowly grow over years and in the same way God knows the whole context, where you have come from,

where you are growing, the soil you grew in, the winds and pests you've endured.

Nobody knows you like God knows you, no one else has that perspective.

A loving gardener cannot and will not keep a garden in a laboratory — a true garden can't live in a sterile antiseptic environment — it has to be outside in the real world to grow, just like us. And yet gardens can be places of peace, continuity and abundant fruit.

What does it mean to abide in that knowledge? To abide in that care?

Read Isaiah 58: 1-12

A beautiful thriving garden!

God's timeless cry against injustice "Is not this the fast that I choose..." offers us a way of claiming our heritage of a vibrant well watered garden.

It's a beautiful vision of how equality and fairness and dignity feel like the peace and shelter and beauty of a garden, tended by the Master Gardener himself - our Father God.

Individually describe what your own perfect garden would look like. What would it look like, sound like, smell like? And most importantly what would it *feel* like?

Then as a group take the elements you like best from all your gardens and think about how those things could inspire you to serve your local community?

For instance if you have a nice nook to sit and read in your imaginary garden, think about how you could provide places for rest and learning in your community.

Week 4: The Artist's Hands

Introduction

The artistry of our Father God! An artist entirely absorbed, absolutely present. In a world that knows only too well the pain of absent fathers we are comforted by the presence of our caring, nurturing father God. Present in our lives.

These readings might not immediately make us think of an artist, but the aspect of artistry we are focusing on is this sense of deeply and truly knowing the artwork, being entirely present and connected to it — the way God knows each of us and cares so much about us.

Seeds to Sow

If you were to close your eyes and imagine God painting a picture — what would you see on the canvass?

Read Matthew 6: 5-8

God notices you

We are not below God's notice — in our petty grandstanding or in our quiet humility — God sees us. God cares enough to register us with an artist's eye for composition, to see how the picture is coming together!

Like an artist who has studied the colours and the canvas and the subject — God knows us each so well, our grain, our texture. God does not paint us from a photograph, God has us sit for our portrait — over our whole lifetimes!

Given that God already knows what's on our hearts, what are the benefits of still speaking our prayers aloud?

Read Matthew 6: 24-34

Be in the moment.

As a painter catches a moment in time, slowing us down to notice it — God invites us to take it in — to take it all in! To not rush off to the next picture, the next exhibit, the next anxiety — but to see this precious moment.

How has God used beauty and wonder to teach you about value and worth over your life?

Read Matthew 10: 26-31

Every hair on our head!

For God we are all foreground, we are all in focus, we are all rendered beautifully — we all fall under the loving care of our Father. We are in God's hands.

Our Father God has an artist's hands but also an artist's eye — missing nothing.

Who can we share this message with — of their essential value? Who in our society needs to hear that they matter, that they are precious, that they belong and that they don't need to be afraid?

Week 5: The Hands of the Trinity: Artistry in Motion

Introduction

We draw our theme to a close with a week on the hands of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit coming together! At the heart of our faith, at the heart of Christianity is the Trinity — God-as-community, God as relationship!

Seeds to Sow

How could we use pottery, sewing, gardening, painting or any other hands on craft or skill to learn more about the Trinity this year?

Read Genesis 1: 1-2

In the beginning...

Father and Spirit in motion together. What strikes you about these two verses? What captures your imagination? What questions do you have?

Read John 5: 19-27

Inseparable.

The Father and Son are inseparable, step by step! Just as all three persons of the Trinity are inseparable and love one another. What can we learn about God as our Heavenly Father by considering his relationship with Jesus?

Read Matthew 28: 19-20

Together in Baptism.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit in and through Baptism! In Baptism we see the artistry of the Trinity vividly — how all three come together in this beautiful moment of belonging and beginning of new life.

What can we do to share and explain the wonder of baptism to people who have little or no frame of reference for it?

How can the loving relationship of the Trinity inspire us to inspire others to the heavenly community they can openly join?

And, if you're not familiar with Baptism, what questions do you have? How can those in the group who know about Baptism give some context for you?



Sanctuary First is a vibrant, online worshipping community of the Church of Scotland. We are passionate about exploring new creative ways to connect and grow with God and one another, through all forms of digital ministry.

Our minister is Rev Ruth Kennedy, Digital Ministries Advisor, Church of Scotland.

Find out more about Sanctuary First...

sanctuaryfirst.org.uk