



ON A MISSION!

Exploring the peat bog psalms.

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**SANCTUARY FIRST
CONNECT BIBLE STUDY**

OCTOBER 2024

WELCOME TO CONNECT!

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.

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!

There are more songs, videos, podcasts and blogs linked to this theme on our **website** and **App**, have fun exploring it all!

ON A MISSION...

We are a people on a mission. A mission from God. Join us this month as we reflect on this mission and peat bogs... *Peat bogs? Really?* Read on to find out why!

In the New Testament Jesus and the Holy Spirit urged the apostles to go out and share the Gospel, the life transforming message of hope — God's Kingdom — where everyone can belong and be treated with dignity and respect as beloved children of God. To the ends of the earth!

For two thousand years faithful followers of Christ have carried their witness around the world pointing people to God's grace through openhearted hospitality, tenderness, and acts of compassion. They have expressed this mission through music, story, artistry, and poetry and innovated in a multimedia explosion of creativity! In fact a lot of the technology we use across our lives today were developed and pioneered by Christians looking for new ways of sharing the Gospel.

But those early innovators weren't starting from nothing. Before those first Christian missionaries set out, God was already at work in the world guiding and inspiring humanity. One way God did this was through the Psalms — the stunning collection of songs and poem in the middle of the Old Testament — a tremendous soul-rich resource that has given solace, vision and motive force to humans for thousands of years!

The musicality and rhythm of the Psalms, both in the original Hebrew and in translation, have made them incredibly memorable and 'portable' as we as God's people have carried them with us. For most of human history most people have been unable to read and write but for all of human history people have been able to sing and recite things word perfect from memory.

So what about those peat bogs? Where do they come into this?

Well bogs — those mossy wetlands — are brilliant for ecology, archaeology *and* theology! Firstly, they are a carbon sink which means they helpfully store greenhouse gasses

keeping them out of the atmosphere. As we think about our mission, sharing the Gospel today, how we care for the planet has to be a core part of caring for one another. Preserving peat bogs are a brilliant natural example of how we can care for the earth. Secondly, they provide a unique chemical environment that can preserve ancient artefacts remarkably well giving us fascinating insights into the past and into our faith.

The 'Peat Bog Psalter', a book of Psalms, was uncovered in Ireland just 18 years ago after spending over *ONE THOUSAND* years in a bog! The absence of oxygen and the presence of certain acids do a great job of preserving organic matter. The manuscript was preserved by sphagnum moss as it sat upright in under the ground for all that time. In fact, if the farmers who accidentally found it while cutting the turf hadn't wisely covered it back up in moss immediately the exposure to the air and sunlight would have quickly destroyed it. As it is, it's an invaluable find for archaeology and it is so well conserved that parts of it are even visible to view and read (in Latin!) online. The Peat Bog Psalter has made it from parchment to the touchscreen!

And so what does this Peat Bog Psalter have to do with our mission as God's people today? Well this one object tells a fascinating story. Archaeologists were surprised to discover fragments of papyrus in the binding of the book suggesting a direct link to the Coptic church in Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean! In the late eighth century missionaries perched in the boggy North Atlantic carried with them not only the psalms but a direct material link to the origins of their faith and vibrant communities of faith hundreds and hundreds of miles away!

How does papyrus make its way to a boggy field in Ireland in the middle of the Middle Ages? The same way that Hebrew words become Greek and Latin and Gaelic and English. The same way that words spoken in

Aramaic centuries before become beautiful images painted on parchment. Through missionaries — through us.

For we are a people on a mission. A mission from God. Christ has already won, having defeated darkness and death for all time, but our mission to share the gospel is still ongoing, still unfolding as we reach out to point more people to God's eternal love. More people need to hear about the Kingdom. More people need to hear the universal wisdom and beauty of the Psalms to discover the solace, inspiration and motivation they offer.

The Peat Bog Psalter tells a story that binds together papyrus and parchment and touchscreens and ploughs. An ongoing multi-lingual, multi-media, multi-cultural, harvest where unexpected discoveries show us the unexpected links that bind God's people together through time and space! Constantly innovating and experimenting. This is our mission! We are called to join in this harvest, setting out with our ploughs, ready to uncover treasure, through testimony, ministry and song — in our lives and in our worship. We are on a mission!

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

- **Papyrus** — *Moving out, a Gospel always on the move...*
- **Parchment** — *Moving out, a Gospel we continually illustrate...*
- **Touchscreen** — *Moving out, a Gospel moving from page to screen...*
- **Harvest** — *Moving out, a Gospel of scattering wide and gathering close...*

POEM

PEAT

Papyrus at the breath of the Nile
Papyrus pressed, dried — still wild —
spreading like fire
to vellum stretched into recognition
a skinned, bright vision
submerged in earth
before plough
rips it back
into the present
to be digitised
as time flies.

A feat of peat
a steady current
running
underneath.

James Cathcart

PRAYER

LET US PRAY

Caring God,

Sometimes it seems too hard to care:
Too difficult to imagine the numbers
Too overwhelming to see how we can make a
difference.
Help us believe
that how we live and act to others
shows our attitude to evil.
May we cling to good,
and work, so far as we can
to make life taste better,
preserving the good
casting light into shadowy corners
being salt and light
in our patch of your vineyard.
So that we may live at peace and oneness
with each other.

Amen.

Dave Slater

WEEK 1: PAPYRUS

INTRODUCTION:

Just like papyrus made its way from the eastern Mediterranean to the middle of Ireland — so did the Gospel! Christianity is a *movement* and it has always *moved*. And it hasn't stopped moving. That's the nature of the mission! As we set off on our month exploring mission we ask: what is our responsibility to God, to one another, and to the earth itself as missionaries of this movement? To this world we have crisscrossed with story, witness and song. Our faith is a moving, living thing that moves people — our mission is to share that.

SEEDS TO SOW:

Like papyrus in an old psalter, what hidden gems from the past are you finding in your life of faith today that you can share with others?

READ ACTS 1: 8

To the end of the earth...

So this is the mission! To be witnesses — to the ends of the earth — of all we have seen, all that we know to be true!

What inspires you, excites you, or challenges you about this verse?

READ PSALM 72: 1-14

A different kind of kingdom.

In the ancient words of this psalm we have a vision of a just, fair and flourishing kingdom where the needs of the poor are paramount and oppressors are crushed! We are on a good news mission where the needs of the vulnerable, the abandoned, the oppressed and the victim, are prioritised over that of

competing warlords and bigwigs (verses 9-11)! In our modern societies — which often reward the rich, the connected and the powerful — our mission can be a subversive, countercultural one.

We also see that ecological and social harmony are linked. Our mission is for all the world — not just the people on it! Millennia before climate science and modern ecology, God was inspiring people to see the link between a flourishing ecosystem and a flourishing society! So this is not just good news for people — it's good news for the Planet!

Are people listening to our countercultural mission? If not why not? When they are, what is catching their attention?

READ PSALM 72: 15-20

Filling the whole earth.

A blessing for all nations! God's Kingdom is bigger than any one culture. Like papyrus found in binding of our Peat Bog Psalter — our movement is a cross-cultural, multi-lingual, transnational one!

God's glory fills the whole earth, because God's glory is not static. Like the beautiful words and images that travelled from papyrus to parchment, then to iPads — our mission won't stay still either.

Do you think people in our neighbourhoods today know that they are intended to blossom (verse 16)? That they *can* blossom? That it goes with the grain of the Kingdom, the grain of the universe? How can we help the people we live with in our neighbourhoods to blossom?

WEEK 2: PARCHMENT

INTRODUCTION:

In the middle ages artists rendered beautiful texts painstakingly on expensive vellum parchment (stretched and dried animal hides) to help not just to *repeat* the Gospel but to *express* it in accessible ways, to convey it in a way that was both beautiful and relatable.

How are we doing that now in our day and age? The peat bog persevered that vellum psalter — what are we preserving and conserving? And where are we innovating and experimenting to make the Gospel message accessible for all? The medieval illuminators were using cutting edge technology to bring the Gospel to life in an eye-catching way. We tend to think about 'illuminated manuscripts' as something from the past but we continue to *illuminate* the Gospel as the Holy Spirit inspires us — illustrating it through our artistry and through our everyday lives.

SEEDS TO SOW:

What do we want to preserve from our time for future generations?

READ MATTHEW 28: 16-20

To the end of the age...

If last week we were thinking about how we *describe* the Good News of the Kingdom this week we want to think about how we *picture* it.

How do you picture the incredible scene in this reading? If you were a director or a painter how would you approach turning it into a film or a painting?

In what ways is imagery and visual art important for expressing our mission?

READ PSALM 67: 1-3

That your way may be known upon earth.

As we continue to think about mission, the psalm we are carrying with us this week is the vibrant, sparkling Psalm 67.

What is our mission? Well Psalm 67: 1-3 is a pretty good mission statement!

These verses closely link praise and mission. Sharing our openhearted worship and making it accessible for others can be a crucial way of carrying out our mission.

How can we use our worship as a tool for mission to help people know God's ways upon the earth?

As a group you could take your ideas to God in prayer.

READ PSALM 67: 4-7

Revered to the ends of the earth.

Nations, plural! God's Kingdom transcends all our borders and divisions — it's a multi-cultural, multi-lingual picture.

As communities of God's people how can we ensure that we are accessible to all people regardless of background?

And how can we live our everyday lives in such a way that they invite others to ask us about our faith, our story, our mission? Share practical suggestions with one another.

WEEK 3: TOUCHSCREEN

INTRODUCTION:

We have a Gospel that just won't sit still! Our digital age shows us what has in fact always been true — that we are *always* linked and connected across time and space! As the Gospel has sprung from page to screen we have been given new insights into our faith. The Holy Spirit has always connected us wirelessly! We are all linked in the cloud!

Our faith, like our tech, is a seamless part of our everyday lives — not something somehow separate and distinct. In the same way that digital technology joins up different parts of our lives (family, shopping, hobbies, work, weather, music... there's an app for everything) our mission from God is woven in to every aspect of our life. Are we releasing the full potential of that...

SEEDS TO SOW:

Where could God be calling you to mission in your life?

READ COLOSSIANS 4: 16

Once you have read it — pass it on!

This wee verse offers us a fascinating insight into the early mission of the church. Read it and pass it on! Swap! Share! Innovate! Collaborate! Don't just be silos doing your own thing and not communicating with one another...

Do we recognise this collaborative spirit in our experience of church communities? Mission achieved? If not... why not?

What stops us pooling and sharing resources and insights?

READ PSALM 96: 1-6

Declaring the marvel!

The Gospel is catchy, it's infectious, it inspires us to sing new songs, it gets the whole earth singing.

But sometimes we lose the tune, or make it too complicated, or too diluted.

What are some new and catchy ways (still drawing from these ancient roots) that we can share the marvel of God in a society populated with idols that compete for our attention?

Take these ideas to God in prayer.

READ PSALM 96: 7-13

Let the earth rejoice!

Have we lost the art of trembling? (See verse 9.) Can part of our mission to an often cynical, jaded societies be one of rediscovering the tremble — the awe of being alive!

When is trembling a good thing?

How can we help the world to tremble in awe?

WEEK 4: HARVEST

INTRODUCTION:

There will be tears of sorrow and tears of laughter as we go out into the world, bearing the seed for sowing, looking to harvest, to share what we ourselves have tasted, sharing the mission. Our Gospel has always been one of scattering wide and gathering close... This final week we carry two final psalms with us, Psalm 34 and 126.

SEEDS TO SOW:

What are we harvesting this year?

READ LUKE 10: 1-2

The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few...

The mission is ongoing! Christ may already have defeated death and darkness but our mission is still unfolding. Sometimes it can really feel like the labourers are too few. But pray — earnestly pray!

Let's stop now and earnestly pray for labourers to come out to the field. Let's pray for unexpected voices to come from unexpected places — to draw others to the Kingdom.

READ PSALM 34: 1-14

Pursuing peace!

Harvests are cyclical and seasonal — there are times of scattering wide and times of gathering close.

Our Lord listens to poor souls! We are never too small or insignificant for God. Mission Control always has our back!

Our mission is not only to tell people about the Gospel, but to live it out! To do good and actively pursue peace!

How can we be exemplars of peace today? In the supermarket? At work or at study? In the hospital? On street corners? On the global stage?

READ PSALM 126

Scattered far, brought close.

Even when everything has been scattered far and wide, our God who loves us remembers us, his missionaries on this earth, and he brings us in, holding us close. And in our arms we shall reap the harvest in those we love.

The story of the Peat Bog Psalter we have looked at this month — of a book of psalms preserved for over a thousand years underground — is a story with a long gap between the sowing and the harvesting. Archaeologists think the book might have been hastily buried to save it from raiders, where it then lay undisturbed for centuries. It took a long time to come to fruit.

This precious object, with its papyrus and vellum is now digitised and visible online and accessible all over the world. It is a testament to humanity's faith in God and God's faith in us.

How can this story inspire us to take the long view when it comes to mission? That seeds long buried can suddenly blossom into life, breaking the surface, as they come to the light.

What can keep us going as we sow in tears and long dearly to reap with joy?