



Leaping Together!

reshaping order:

Theme Resource Pack
Lent 2/March 2024
(3-30 March)

Introduction

Welcome to our theme resource pack for March 2024! It takes us through the second part of Lent and runs from Sunday 3 March to Saturday 30 March.

Our word for Lent this leap year is: 'Leap'! So far we have been reflecting on what it means to leap with God — to leap into prayer, to leap into the Bible, and to leap into action. The phrase a 'leap of faith' is often seen as desperate dash, a last ditch attempt, "It will take a leap of faith..." But the leaps of faith we take in our discipleship are often more like the practiced leaps of an athlete, or an enthusiastic child playfully pushing themselves. Learning to trust and grow as we leap further, not out of desperation but out of love for God and God's world, living lives of compassion.

Like sportspeople competing in a competition or children playing a game we don't leap alone, we rely on the support of others. An individual gold medalist doesn't get over the line on their own — there are whole teams getting them there.

The work we do helping build God's kingdom through kindness, generosity and love takes leaps of faith as we learn to 'back ourselves' and back others, to grow ever more into the wonderful people God created us all to be. But, however rewarding, this can be hard work! As with all leaps, there will be falls, there will be crashes but as Christians we are not asked to leap alone. We are intended for community, to support one another as we leap through the air!

So this month we are going to take inspiration from four leapers in the Bible, who knew that they did not leap alone, who drew strength from others to make the leap:

- *The Esther Plan*: the importance of **community**
- *The Nehemiah Method*: the importance of **belonging**
- *The Mary Mission*: the importance of **collaborating**
- *The Nicodemus Trajectory*: the importance of **involvement**

This year, we continue to leap into Lent!

Overview

We begin by exploring *The Esther Plan* — reflecting on what community means when you're out on a limb, and how flourishing often comes through helping others to flourish. Loving God, amongst people who don't know God is a difficult but invaluable thing. Then in the second week we consider *The Nehemiah Method* and how powerful a real sense of belonging is at the heart of our efforts. It is transformative when everyone has a role and a place, leaping together, working fast and *not* breaking things. In the third week we reflect on *The Mary Mission* and ask

what it meant to work together as a community to provide for Jesus in the 1st century and then what it means to provide for Jesus as a 21st century community. How are we collaborating to become more than the sum of our parts? Finally, in the last week of the theme, we contemplate *The Nicodemus Trajectory*, and what it means to go on a journey from feeling on the periphery of something to becoming more involved and realising it has become central to your life as you learn to leap together with others — moving from being at the edge of something to the heart of the action.

Format

Every month we have a God-given theme delving into different aspects and areas of faith. Over the course of 2024 these themes connect and take us on a faith journey out into the wonders of life with Jesus. Our themes shape our Daily Worship, Sunday Live streams and all sorts of other creative things we get up to! It is broken into four sections that focus on a different topic each week. The weeks run Sunday - Saturday and each has a series of daily Bible readings and prompts for reflection.

Setting the scene

Each week we offer a visual motif. This is an optional additional focus point for preparing worship services or multimedia inspired by the material.

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.

The Esther Plan (Week 1, 3 March)

Introduction: The importance of community. What can we learn about community and leaping together from the story of Esther? A courageous woman in a perilous position forges a way forward, drawing strength from her community. She is isolated from her people but she remains connected to them. It's a mutual relationship where the community helps sustain her (not least through her uncle Mordecai) and she acts to preserve them. What inspiration does Esther offer us for mission in the 21st century?

Setting the scene: Esther setting the table for a feast.

Seeds to sow: Feasts are a big factor in the story of Esther, how could we use meals this week to show our love for God and others?

- 1. Esther 4: 10-17 The Esther Plan** Esther's community turns to her for help and likewise she turns to them for support too.
- 2. Esther 7: 1-6 The story unfolds...** Esther risks retribution and spends what precious social capital she has to reverse the fortune of her people and unmask Haman's plot. Esther is a nuanced person in a nuanced book, thinking on her feet and trying to navigate a way forward in the midst of a hostile oppressive world.
- 3. Jeremiah 29: 4-7 Wherever you find yourself — be part of the flourishing!** It takes a leap of faith to move past 'us' and 'them', to weave your life into the lives of others, binding your welfare into theirs for the good of all.
- 4. James 5: 7-12 The early and late rains.** 'Mission' as a way of life, not a specific time limited project. The importance of keeping an eye on what God is doing, serving and honouring others as we do so, not undermining them.
- 5. Romans 16: 1-16 Remaining connected to a sustaining community of faith.** The importance of a network of relationships as we live out mission in different locations.
- 6. Proverbs 27: 17 Christian communities — where iron sharpens iron.** Places where we can gather together to be encouraged and sustained by one another before we go out and live out mission in our daily lives, newly sharpened!
- 7. Esther 8: 1-8 The Esther Plan...** Esther is triumphant, she has reversed the plight of her people but she hasn't short-circuited the violence as the blood shed in chapter 9 shows. The book of Esther does not offer a perfect roadmap for Christians today — rather it is a fascinating story of what it means to be dealt a bad hand and yet turn the tables and how to draw strength from others in difficult times.

The Nehemiah Method (Week 2, 10 March)

Introduction: The importance of belonging. In the book of Nehemiah we see an incredible feat unfold. The community are able to work together so rapidly and effectively because of their sense of belonging and investment, you could say their 'buy in'. They face taunts and opposition, hunger and threats, but they shoulder in together.

Setting the scene: A building site, laying bricks.

Seeds to sow: What could we physically build together this week to help grow community?

- 1. Nehemiah 2: 11-20 DIO, Do-It-Ourselves.** "It's broken, can't fix it on my own!" need for community.
- 2. Nehemiah 3: 9-14 A shared endeavour.** The names here are not beside the point, they show us how the community got invested in this massive project. Builders in their place — even at the dung gate.
- 3. Nehemiah 4: 15-20 Facing opposition.** There are various ways we can respond in faith in situations, one of the interesting things we see in Nehemiah is that there is a call to go and help others when they are vulnerable, and it brought success.
- 4. Nehemiah 5: 1-13 'The thing that you are doing is not good', speaking out for justice.** Restoring welfare, dignity and agency.
- 5. Nehemiah 6: 10-19 Staying united, rejoicing together.** Despite plots to undermine them they finish the project!
- 6. Nehemiah 8: 8-12 The joy of the Lord is your strength!** Although as a community they may be physically and emotionally exhausted from the mammoth building project they gather together to listen and learn and in so doing are replenished in God's delight in them. They are then spurred to communal action.
- 7. Nehemiah 13: 30-31 A coda.** The community have worked together and achieved something incredible but the work of continuing to build the community was not all smooth sailing, there would continue to be disruption and discontent. Nehemiah teaches us about the importance of individual responsibility and how our individual actions affect the whole community.

The Mary Mission (Week 3, 17 March)

Introduction: The importance of collaborating. Jesus didn't come as a warlord or a rich businessman. He was a poor wandering teacher, preacher and storyteller. One who needed fed and sheltered by others. One of the people who provided for him was Mary Magdalene, a woman who is prominently mentioned several times across all four gospels, looking out for Jesus. This week we are taking inspiration from her practical, unstinting ministry. What's fascinating is that Mary is almost always mentioned as part of a group. The story of her individual liberation (Luke 8: 2) quickly becomes a story about deepening relationship, friendship and community. Mary, Joanna (and many other unnamed women) stayed with Jesus throughout his ministry. Mary and others supported him when the going got tough, unwilling to abandon him even at the cross. As women whose lives had been transformed by Jesus they were a crucial part of forming a new community where all could contribute and collaborate together.

Setting the scene: Mary sitting at a spreadsheet, looking at the logistics!

Seeds to sow: What support and encouragement can we provide as a community for the Kingdom this week?

- 1. Luke 8: 1-3 Providing for Jesus.** Mary Magdalene is always shown to us as looking out for Jesus. She was not just a passive recipient of Jesus's ministry, but an active and engaged member of the community. What would it have been like to be Mary, life transformed, creating a new network of supportive women (like Joanna and Susannah mentioned in the passage) to help transform the lives of others? What was involved in providing for Jesus then and how are we collaborating with others to use our resources, ingenuity and leadership to provide for Jesus today?
- 2. Mark 12: 30-31 The Golden Rule.** In the so called 'Golden rule' are the seeds of community building. The willingness to see the dignity and value of others worthy of the same respect and nourishment as ourselves. Doing for others what we would appreciate them doing for us is the start of a reciprocal process of collaboration. Imagine Mary hearing Jesus teaching on this.
- 3. Leviticus 19: 18 Collaboration... leaping with our neighbours.** But who really is our neighbour? Let's make the leap and think big beyond our walls and get out of our digital echo chambers!
- 4. Mark 15: 40-41 Standing by Jesus.** Mary, along with several other women, didn't abandon Jesus at his lowest ebb. When the disciples are in disarray, these women stand by united together, drawing strength from one another. We can contrast this image with Peter alone in the crowd by the fireside as the cockerel crowed.

5. **Matthew 27: 57-61 The last to leave him.** Two Marys sitting opposite the tomb of their Lord, united and present.
6. **John 20: 11-18 The first eyes on Jesus.** Mary crying out *Rabbouni* before being sent on her mission!
7. **Luke 24: 1-12 The first evangelists.** In the face of the disciples' scepticism Mary makes the leap, apostle to the apostles! Let's reflect on the incredible legacy of Mary Magdalene. At a time when a woman's testimony had little legal or social weight — it is her and her community of women who are entrusted with this news. But then, who better than these women who knew the true value of collaboration, relationships and standing by one another?

The Nicodemus Trajectory (Week 4, 24 March)

Introduction: The importance of involvement. From being on the fringes of a movement to it reaching to his very own heart — Nicodemus is learning to leap with others! His trajectory from the fringe to the heart is one we go on many times in our lives and through our faith. As well as following the trajectory of Nicodemus we are following the trajectory from darkness to light over Holy Week, and the static in-between as the passion unfolds.

Setting the scene: Myrrh and other spices.

Seeds to sow: Over Holy Week we are thinking about a movement from darkness to light. Our week is bookended by Nicodemus under the cover of darkness, but how do we think he might have felt come the bright light of Sunday morning?

- 1. John 3: 1-21 Questions from the edge.** We start the week with Nicodemus, who comes to Jesus with this questions under the cover of darkness.
- 2. Leviticus 19: 9-10, 33-34 Making room for all.** In the midst of these ancient law codes from thousands of years ago come two radical instructions to have no double standards based on who you are or where you've come from and to make room for the land and for people who need food. As well as being aware of the Nicodemuses on the edges of our communities with their hunger to know more we must remember those on the fringes of our society suffering from literal hunger. Our Gospel message has to resonate with the curious and the hungry or it is not the Gospel.
- 3. 1 Kings 17: 7-16 Finding each other in our need.** Both the widow at Zarephath and Elijah find sustenance in coming together as God blesses the food to be more than the sum of its parts. When we come together hungry souls can leap together and find unexpected belonging.
- 4. John 7: 45-52 De-compartmentalising Jesus!** Perhaps for Nicodemus, Jesus was compartmentalised, just part of one aspect of his life. Here we see him starting to reconcile his nighttime questions with the day job. Faith is not just something between us and God, it weaves through all of our lives.
- 5. John 13 Fractures form as Judas stumbles.** We take a moment to reflect on Judas's very different trajectory. Someone who was was at the heart of things but drifted away.
- 6. Psalm 22 Jesus was willing to go to the very edge of existence for our sake.** There is no edge or fringe or hinterland or wilderness that Jesus cannot reach, this ancient poetry that Jesus quoted on the cross speaks of heartbreaking abandonment. But in the devastation of the Cross is the hope of Resurrection, Jesus knows that God won't hide his face from him.

Whenever we are feeling flung out, on a limb, out on our own - we know that Jesus leaps with us.

7. **John 19: 38-42 Murmurs and Myrrh: Leaping together.** Concluding the week with Nicodemus on Holy Saturday, the hushed mourning at the heart of the Jesus movement. Nicodemus is all in.