



Shine Like Stars

**Connect Bible Study Questions
New Year/January 2024
(31 Dec - 3 Feb)**

Introduction

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. The following discussion questions adapt our theme for small Connect Bible study groups or for individual discipleship and we have additional resources in our monthly resource packs for daily and deeper reflection (check out this month's: [here](#)).

Each weekly session has questions and thoughts which correspond with our Daily Worship and Sunday Live topics. Our hope is you can use these Connect sessions as best fits your situation and discussions, so as presented or as your conversations lead with all the freedom to pick and adapt as you need. We love to hear how or indeed if, these materials are helping you grow in your faith and walk with Jesus, so please let us know!

Theme

As 2024 rolls around it's time to take to the skies and shine like stars! This month we ask: what does it mean to reflect the light of God in the lives around about us? We begin by taking time to sit in the transforming quiet with God. What do we see when we find a place to sit in wonder and lift our eyes to the Lord?

In that divine space we consider how we are tuning in to what God is telling us at the start of this new year. We think about what it means to be the eager questioning children that Jesus welcomes to come to him. Then, after looking up to God and down into our hearts we look out and reflect on our role as stars in the glittering constellations of God's love shining for the world to see.

Seeds to sow

Each week begins with 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! They are short and sweet, simply a starting off place for you and your imagination. Expand, tailor and develop as suits you.

Format

Each week is split into three question sections. We imagine the material could be the basis for a 90 minute session but feel free to adapt to your group and rearrange the order or adapt the content to suit you.

Week 1: Sitting Down

Introduction:

We launch in to this new year and our first action is... to sit down! Let's take time to pause, to breathe, to take stock, to find ourselves again. Let's make a space to create a 'tent of meeting' where we can spend some intentional time with God (you can find a tent of meeting in Exodus 33: 7-11). We could even set aside a literal physical place where we can come before our wondrous creator, star-maker God. With awe and humility, gratitude and wonder — and all the other emotions that make us the humans we were born to be. This week we will use Psalm 27 to contemplate what it means to really take the time to sit with God, to enter that place of transforming quiet.

Seeds to sow: Does *where* you pray affect *how* you pray?

Video: Coming to www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/connect soon!

1) Psalm 27: 1-3

The psalm begins with taking shelter in God and taking comfort from an inner peace even when external factors are overwhelming.

As you shelter with God at the start of this year what are you sitting with? And how is God able to be your light in the midwinter dark?

3) Psalm 27: 13-14

Sitting, waiting, wondering. Like the psalmist here (and like the wisemen all those years ago who went on their epic journey from the east to Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem) we come before God in hope and expectation, longing and wonder.

In the week ahead, in our daily lives, where are we going to look for God with expectant wonder?

2) Psalm 27: 11-12

Before going on a long journey we often sit, like the psalmist, and make preparations; consulting routes, finding a way, and seeking good paths.

As we hope to set off into this new year on a level path of our own what can we gain from exploring this metaphor of route planning.

If 2024 was not a year, but an epic pilgrimage, what would we need to be preparing? Where would be looking for help? How would we map out the months?



Week 2: Looking Up

Introduction:

Last week we focused on finding a place of contemplation with God. Now that we are sitting comfortably... it's time to look up! In this theme we are reflecting on Paul's timeless invitation to 'shine like stars in our generation' (see Philippians 2: 14-18), so let's take a moment to look up to the star maker — our Father God — the source of our light! The sparks we carry in our daily interactions in the world are a reflection of God's divine love that shines everlasting through the universe. This week we will think about how looking *up* helps us to shine *out*!

Seeds to sow: How do you feel when you look up at the vast night sky?

Video: Coming to www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/connect soon!

1) Isaiah 40: 26

All those stars numbered and named! It's just mindboggling.

We begin our looking up by marvelling at the incredible detail of our universe. The cosmos is not some CGI special effect that only works if you look at it from one particular angle. It's a phenomenally detailed place that we get to learn more and more about the closer we look.

What does this tell us about God?

3) Philippians 2: 14-18

Shining as stars! We shine out because we look up to the one who has shone down. Next week we begin thinking about tuning in to God, but today let's bask in the light of God that illuminates us today — for all the world to see!

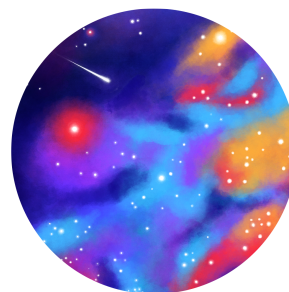
What are three things you can do this week to 'let your light shine' for others to see?

2) Job 38: 31-33

This reading is part of a metaphysical 'reality check' for Job as he gets a glimpse from God of just how much he doesn't know, can't possibly fathom, of the incredible difference of scale between our star making God and us. And yet we know that the star-maker cares for each of us individually and has a role for us to play.

In the context of our call to shine like stars from Paul, this reading is a reminder that we are not the source of the light we carry — that pressure's not on us. Instead we reflect that light to one another.

How would these words have made Job feel? How do they make you feel? Does this perspective change how we see God, the source of our light?



Week 3: Tuning In

Introduction:

Having focused on light and vision last week, we now turn our attention to different ways we can tune in and listen to God. How are we tuning in to what God is telling us at the start of this new year? In day to day life what is involved in actively listening to God? Does 'comfortable silence' fit into our relationship with God? As we are called to shine like stars, you could say we are also called to broadcast like them, sending out electromagnetic signals of grace!

Seeds to sow: What does the phrase 'listening to God' mean to you?

Video: Coming to www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/connect soon!

1) John 9: 1-12

We start by tuning in to God in the squelch of mud! We spent last week stargazing but we begin this week crashing back down to earth, literally to the grassroots. Mud is very much a multi-sensory phenomenon — one of the thrills of childhood is squelching about in wellies through the mud.

But why does Jesus choose to use mud here? What sensory information is Jesus picking up on? How is he tuning in to the situation and the environment around him? And today when Jesus listens to us what is he hearing?

3) 1 Samuel 3: 1-20

We conclude by thinking about tuning into God in the middle of the night. In this reading Samuel is learning to recognise God's voice.

What can we learn from Samuel about recognising God speaking in our lives?

2) James 1: 19-27

Now we turn to thinking about how we can tune into God through active listening. In this reading, listening to God is not something passive, it requires our participation, to put what we hear into practice. Active listening requires us to pay close attention, engage with the person speaking, and ask follow up questions.

Listening to God is an ongoing process of being open, humble and sensitive — sensitive to tune into both God and the needs of others.

If we are listening without responding are we really listening? How can we be active listeners of God this week?



Week 4: Being Ourselves

Introduction:

So far we have taken time to sit, to look up, to tune in, and before we 'look out' next week we take a moment to *be*. To simply *be* ourselves. To be the eager questioning children that Jesus welcomes to come to him. We are not staff recruited by God to carry out agendas and goals. We are beloved children who are invited to come sit at his feet, to tune into the voice that sung us into being. We are called to be ourselves — beloved of God.

Seeds to sow: Imagine Jesus playing games with the children who came rushing towards him. Imagine what that would have been like.

Video: Coming to www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/connect soon!

1) Luke 18: 15-17

We are the children that Jesus doesn't want stopped!

Are you rushing to Jesus in the same way as these children? Is there anything stopping you?

2) Zephaniah 3: 17

We are delightful to God! We are each worth God singing over! Isn't that amazing?

What kinds of songs does God sing over us? What would God sing over you do you think?

3) Romans 12: 9-13

Young children tend to do things very sincerely — acting wholeheartedly, not holding themselves back the way adults often do.

Paul here urges us not to be cynical and jaded but to keep working towards goodness and love. What can we learn from the earnest sincerity of children to help us with Paul's instructions here? 'How are we getting on with approaching Jesus in a childlike, authentic way, are we ourselves in God's presence?'

Have you read 'The Father's Love Letter'? It's rich in letting us know how God sees us. You can find it [here](#).



Week 5: Looking Out

Introduction:

Focused, intentional time spent with God — like we have been reflecting on this month — is precious. Reflecting on our 'vertical' relationship with God enriches our 'horizontal' relationships with one another. Engaging with others, being present in the lives of our fellow disciples, in turn enriches our time spent tuning in to God. *Vertical* and *horizontal* are of course shorthand terms, and there are in fact so many diagonals as our relationship with God interacts directly with our relationships with others.

A 'tent of meeting' (that we referred to back in week 1) is a temporary structure but the lived-experience of the meeting remains. In the same way a specific time of focused reflection with God can be a temporary thing that has an ongoing impact on us for the rest of our life. And when we leave that 'tent' our relationship with whom we met continues. We are always of course welcome to come to that quiet place with God and we are also able to turn our gaze outward, ready to shine like stars in our generation...

Seeds to sow: What is Jesus inviting us to look out at this week?

Video: Coming to www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/connect soon!

1) 1 Corinthians 8: 1-13

In this reading Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to go above and beyond in their behaviour, to not just think of how it impacts them but the ripple effect of their actions.

As stars glinting in the world how are we going above and beyond to look out for others? The example in the text is to do with food so perhaps we could think of examples that relate to the purchasing and preparing of food too. As a Connect group is there one action that you can all commit to that would benefit others this week?

2) Ephesians 2: 10

Looking out at the work to be done we read this timeless calling to serve, working for goodness and light!

How does this verse make you feel? How does it inspire you? Challenge you? Puzzle you? Enthuse you?

3) Hebrews 10: 24-25

As great constellations of stars — depicting God's love in action for others to see — we are called to encourage one another star to star!

Let's stop right now and encourage each other! What can you say to encourage one another right now?

