



Shine Like Stars

**Theme Resource Pack
New Year/January 2024
(31 Dec - 3 Feb)**

Introduction

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 as 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.

Overview

Starting on Hogmanay, week one has us doing a deep dive on Psalm 27, an ancient poem of longing, faith and hope. In the second week we turn to Paul's timeless invitation to shine like stars in Philippians 2: 14-18, and look up to the source of our light. In week three we move from *looking* to *listening*, as we reflect on tuning in to what God is telling us at the start of this year. In the fourth week we take some time simply to *be*, to rediscover a childlike wonder in our relationship with God and in the final week our gaze is turned outwards as we emerge, renewed to shine in our generation.

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.

Format

Each week of this five week theme runs Sunday - Saturday and has its own subtheme title. It contains a series of daily Bible readings and prompts for thought that our Daily Worship writers use to write prayers and reflections.

Sitting Down (Week 1, 31 December)

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. We could 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. What does it mean to really take the time to sit with God, to enter that place of transforming quiet?

Setting the scene: A comfortable seat in a quiet corner.

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

- 1. Psalm 27: 1-3 [Hogmanay] What are we sitting with at the end of this year?** As we take time to sit and enter the transforming quiet with God we take comfort in the shelter of The Lord.
- 2. Psalm 27: 4-5 [New Year's Day] Sitting with God.** What words to start a year! What does living with God and sheltering with God look like in 2024?
- 3. Psalm 27: 6 A singing seat.** Celebrating the power of music and worship to uplift us.
- 4. Psalm 27: 7-9 Seeking God's face.** The cry comes from within us, yearning to know our maker.
- 5. Psalm 27: 10 Always a place to sit.** After the Christmas holiday season which can sometimes put pressure and strains on families and friendships it is good to know that with God we always have a place at the table.
- 6. Psalm 27: 11-12 Sitting route planning.** As we hope to set off into this new year on a level path what can we gain from exploring a metaphor of route planning? What does it mean to look up the map coordinates with God, to check the forecast, to tick the checklists?
- 7. Psalm 27: 13-14 [Epiphany] Sitting, waiting, wondering.** Like the Magi all those years ago, we come before God in hope and expectation, longing and wonder.

Looking Up (Week 2, 7 Jan)

Introduction: Now that we are sitting comfortably... it's time to look up! As we reflect on Paul's timeless invitation to 'shine like stars in our generation' (see Day 7, Philippians 2: 14-18), we 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.

Setting the scene: A starry sky.

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

- 1. Genesis 1: 1-5 Looking up at moments of time suspended in light.** When we look up to God we are looking at *the* light-maker... Wow!
- 2. Psalm 136: 1-9 Looking up at great wonders.** Taking time to take in the majesty of God's steadfast enduring love.
- 3. Isaiah 40: 26 Looking up at the detail.** The cosmos is not some CGI special effect that only works if you look at it from one angle. It's a phenomenally detailed and rich wonder that we get to learn more and more about. What does this tell us about God?
- 4. Job 38: 31-33 Looking up at the enormity of God.** Appreciating the incredible vastness of God. We are ourselves are not the source of the light we carry — that pressure's not on us — we instead can reflect that light to one another.
- 5. Psalm 119: 105-112 A lamp for our feet.** From the vastness of space to the immediacy of a handheld lamp... God's light is not only enduring and everlasting, it is portable! Through divine grace we are able to carry this light before us to illuminate us the way.
- 6. Matthew 5: 14-16 Let your light shine!** From lightyears in space to the flickering candle that show us the path ahead, we are illuminated by God's love. Let's think now about how we can be part of reflecting that light on and on!
- 7. 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!

Tuning In (Week 3, 14 Jan)

Introduction: Having focused on light and vision last week we turn now to focus on sound and listening to God. How are we tuning in to what God is telling us at the start of this new year? How does 'comfortable silence' fit into our relationship with God? In day to day life what is involved in actively listening to 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!

Setting the scene: Sitting by a window, listening to the world outside.

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

- 1. John 9: 1-12 Tuning into God in the mud.** We begin by listening to God in the squelch of mud! We spent last week stargazing but we begin this week crashing back down to earth, literally at grassroots. Why does Jesus choose to use mud here? And how can mud be transformative in our lives too?
- 2. Psalm 139: 13-18 Tuning into God through our movement.** We can tune into God through listening to our bodies. We are fearfully and wonderfully made and God can use our bodies to help us tune in, whether that be walking, running, gentle breathing, light stretches, dancing.
- 3. John 1: 43-51 Tuning into God with others.** Tuning into the Philips who connect people to Jesus!
- 4. James 1: 19-27 Tuning into God through active listening.** Listening to God is an ongoing process of being open, humble and sensitive — sensitive both to tune into God and to tune into the needs of others.
- 5. Psalm 46: 10 Tuning into God in silence.** Being still, knowing God, finding the signal through all the background noise.
- 6. 1 Samuel 3: 1-20 Tuning into God in the middle of the night.** Learning to recognise God's voice.
- 7. Psalm 62 Tuning in to God with expectation.** God alone can bear the weight of all our longings and expectation. When we come to God with everything we find someone we can lean on and somewhere to take shelter.

Being Ourselves (Week 4, 21 Jan)

Introduction: We are the children that Jesus doesn't want stopped! (See Day 1 Luke 18: 15-17!)

So far we have taken time to sit, to look *up*, to tune *in* and before we look *out* we take a moment to *be*, to 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.

Setting the scene: Jesus sitting, smiling at us.

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

- 1. Luke 18: 15-17 Being children.** What does it mean to receive the kingdom like a child?
- 2. 1 Thessalonians 5: 12-22 Being openhearted.** Engaging a childlike energy and reverence, eagerly seeking out and holding on to the good!
- 3. Hosea 11: 1-4 Being beloved.** The bittersweet love of God who loves us all, even when we turn away.
- 4. Romans 12: 9-13 Being sincere.** Children often do things wholeheartedly, not holding themselves back the way adults do. What can we learn from their sincerity to help us with Paul's instructions here.
- 5. Acts 17: 16-28 Being curious.** The curiosity of Paul to engage in his surroundings and the curiosity of the Athenians drawn to question him.
- 6. Zephaniah 3: 17 Being delightful.** We are delightful to God! We are worth singing over? Isn't that amazing?
- 7. 1 John 3: 1-3 Being children of God.** A chance to celebrate that we get to be God's children!

Looking Out (Week 5, 28 Jan)

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...

Setting the scene: Getting up and opening the door.

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

- 1. Matthew 3: 13-17 Looking out at the scene of baptism.** Baptism is not just a personal, private thing between you and God — it's a visible encounter that portrays your relationship with God for the world to see.
- 2. 1 Corinthians 8: 1-13 Looking out for one another.** As stars glinting in the world how are we going above and beyond to look out for others in our actions?
- 3. Ephesians 2: 10 Looking out at the work to be done.** The calling to serve, working for goodness and light!
- 4. Psalm 95: 1-5 Looking out to sea.** We stand in awe as we gaze at the open ocean and are reminded of the vastness and vibrance of God's creation
- 5. John 20: 19-23 Looking out further afield.** As Jesus was sent, so are we sent, out into the world.
- 6. Isaiah 2: 4-5 Looking out the tools we need.** What are the tools we need to recover, reforge and reuse as disciples of Jesus working today?
- 7. Hebrews 10: 24-25 Looking out at the stars by our side.** 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!