

BORDERING ON... DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

October 2019 (29 September - 2 November)



This October as we pray and read the Bible together we are going to think about borders, barriers, edges, horizons — the liminal spaces between one thing and the other.

Our creator God is at the heart of creation, but also at the edges and the places in- between — where things blur and bleed and blend. Those places where we are longing, or waiting, or wondering.

Many of our readings this month reflect on loss and uncertainty. We don't want to shy away from that reality, but as we travel the borderlands we will also take the opportunity to look for signs of hope and encouragement.

Jesus is next to us at home but he also walks alongside us through the wilderness. The Spirit guides us when we are flying high at the top of our game, but also sighs with us, using words from a deep language when we find ourselves falling between *this and that, here and there, now and then*, gazing towards the glimmer of the horizon.

The following discussion questions are designed to accompany the [BORDERING ON... Resource Pack](#) to help adapt the material for small group work. They are divided into 5 parts to correspond with the 5 weeks of the Daily Worship theme.

These questions are just a guideline and there is no need to go through all the given questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose, or adapt to what interests your group.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Part 1: Crossing borders

Conversation Starter

This month our theme is about borders — all kind of borders — the borders between countries, the borders between the sky and the sea, the sea and the land, the past and the present, where we are now and where we want to be.

Think back to a time when you have stood on the border between two things. It could be a real border or a figurative one. It could be:

- the border between two countries
- the border between two neighbourhoods
- the border between now and something you are looking forward to/dreading in the future
- the border or edge of a social group/community
- the border of discovering something new about yourself or God

How did you feel when you were at the 'border'? Not in one space or the other but somewhere in between?

Read Jeremiah 32: 1-15

Thinking about the border between **now** and **then**... The invaders are coming... but never mind all that let's buy and sell land! A siege is a bizarre time to be getting into a real estate deal. Why does Jeremiah do it?

Can we follow Jeremiah's example in the uncertain times of our own life? How do we judge when to act and when to wait?

Read Romans 8: 38-39

Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

As a group you may wish to pray together — listing some of the things that can't separate us from the love of God. If everyone is comfortable doing so — you could go around in a circle taking turns to suggest something that people might worry gets between them and God and then the rest of the group can respond out loud together: 'Nothing can separate you from the love of God'. So **Person A** could say 'Depression' and the group could respond 'Nothing can separate you from the love of God.' And **Person B** could say 'Being selfish' and the group would again respond 'Nothing can separate you from the love of God.' Anyone who doesn't want to speak can just nod (or do something else) to indicate that they would rather not speak out loud and the group can respond 'Nothing can separate you from the love of God.' before moving to the next person. Make sure you decide as a group how you want to pray and make sure everyone feels comfortable to contribute or not, no one should feel under any pressure to contribute.

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Part 2: Wormwood and gall! The borderlands of grief

Read Lamentations 3:19-26

The cry “Wormwood and gall!” (verse 19 in the NRSV translation) vividly express the crawling, uncomfortable feeling of finding yourself in the borderlands of grief. The border between one thing and the next — the loss of today and the dawn of a new day — can be a bitter, frustrating and disturbing place to be.

Does the cry in verses 19-20 resonate with you? Have you ever felt like that?

Is there anything that helps you when you are feeling that way? Share with the group any steps, strategies or techniques that help you to feel better when you are sad or scared or stressed.

Read Psalm 37:1-9

“Do not fret” ...! Well that’s often easier said than done when the wicked and the wrongdoers are having their way! Let’s look at verse 6, which in the NRSV translation says that the Lord will make ‘the justice of your cause like the noonday’.

What are the injustices, wickedness and wrong doing that causes you grief in the world today?

What are our causes, our hopes and dreams for the future, that we trust God will make like the ‘noonday’?

Read 2 Timothy 1:1-14

When we are struggling in an uncomfortable border place, caught between one thing and the next, the Holy Spirit is there to help us ‘guard the good treasure’.

What does this actually feel like in practice? What does it feel like when the Holy Spirit helps you? Often in churches we talk about the Holy Spirit in vague terms and don’t actually dwell on what a relationship with the Holy Spirit actually feels like.

Can you put into words how you feel about the Holy Spirit? Don’t worry if it’s difficult — theologians for generations have struggled to find adequate words to describe the Holy Spirit.

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Part 3: Settling in to the unsettling border places

Borders can be uncomfortable places to be politically, physically and emotionally; but they can also be creative, dynamic and enriching places to be. Sometimes the borders are exactly where God is calling us to be, taking advantage of our unique perspective.

Read Jeremiah 29:1-7

A citizenship that crosses borders. We see here a calling to cross the **mental** borders as well as the national ones, to be hospitable and welcoming, to be invested — to build, plant, and work together with one another.

How can we get better at seeking the welfare and wellbeing of people who are different from ourselves? People who might have different histories, expectations, and frames of reference?

Read Luke 17: 11-19

Of the ten lepers, already social outcasts at the time, it was the outsider Samaritan who grasped the significance of what was going on. Often in the Gospels it is those on the margins, of low status that have the greatest insights while the privileged insiders get things wrong time and again. The Gospels show us that the fringes and borders can be a space of wisdom and clarity.

Where in your life do you occupy a 'fringe' position? Maybe you're new to your neighbourhood and don't know many people? Maybe you've just started a course or class and you're a total novice at something? Maybe you have taken on new responsibilities at work and you're feeling out of your depth?

Is there any way God could be calling you to use your inexperience, or lack of confidence, or unease to discover or do something new? (It might be that others in the group are better at helping you see this than you yourself are.) You could also think back to a time in your past.

Read Luke 8: 1-3

It's historically significant to observe the crucial role of women in Jesus' ministry. In the ancient world public life had quite an ambivalent relationship with women, often tightly prescribing what they could and couldn't do. Jesus took advantage of the border space that women of means such as Joanna and Susanna occupied — people both in and out of the mainstream — to act creatively. Male benefactors more deeply invested in the status quo may have been more cautious in supporting him. Jesus is not constricted to Main Street, mainstream, or the mainline; he can and does use the fringes and the borders, those who find themselves on the edges of society.

Jesus embraced and collaborated with folks that others marginalised. Who are the overlooked/under appreciated/sidelined in our lives and society? How can we listen to them more?

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Part 4: Borders and pain

When we find ourselves hurting, lost or caught-in-between, God is our constant companion — accompanying us as we cross the borders of loss, hurt, bitterness, nightfall, dawn.

Read Jeremiah 31: 27-34

Remembering sin no more...Thinking about the borders of memory.

Sometimes the borders we guard most forcefully are the ones between **now** and **then**. Something we have said or done or something someone else has said or done — that still haunts us and we can't let go. Our God is willing to cross that border for us and say it no longer matters. The Lord — who is vast beyond all sense of time and place that we can grasp — can say "I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more."

As a group spend 5 minutes together in silence. In the quiet of your own mind you are invited to bring before God the memories that are bothering you, that you don't want to let go of. Everyone remains quiet. For a few minutes — let go and let God take care of these memories for you. When the five minutes is finished one person in the group could mark the end of the time of reflection by saying: "Dear God we thank you for the gift of your forgiveness."

Read Genesis 32: 22-32

Wrestling through the night is a fantastically vivid way of thinking about the struggles we sometimes bring to God. When we are in a painful border place — perhaps the border between night and the morning, waiting for the sunrise — minds racing, we bring our anger and frustrations and anxieties to God. Maybe we are looking for answers, explanations, or reassurance.

Have you ever had an encounter with God that left you limping? That left you feeling exhausted? Perhaps you let God really have it — sharing all your bitterness and fear and hurt. As difficult as it can be, God wants us to bring our whole honest selves in prayer. Have you ever felt yourself wrestling with God? How did you feel afterward?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-7

How can we use the consolation we receive from God to help us to console others who find themselves traveling through difficult or painful times?

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Part 5: New horizons...

Much of life is lived looking at the horizon — both the literal horizon and that distant meeting point between two other realities such as happiness and sadness, pain and comfort, longing and belonging.

Our God is God of the horizons — with us in the delight and sorrow and those confusing places in-between where the two seem to blend.

Read Psalm 65

This psalm marvels at the power, creativity and generosity of our God who operates on a mind boggling scale.

Verse 8 talks of God making 'the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy' (NRSV translation). At the end of October in Scotland, in the northern hemisphere, this can be a short dark day. How do we continue to go through the gateway of the morning and join in the shout for joy in the evening when the days grow shorter and bleaker? How do we keep looking to the horizon? As we answer let's think about both the darker days of November, and the darker seasons in our lives more generally.

Read Luke 18: 9-14

The borders between people can be places of jealousy, envy, pride and condescending remarks.

Have you ever prayed like the Pharisee?

How can we guard against feeling smug and superior to others? How can we broaden our minds to see new horizons?

Read Luke 6: 20-31

When we find ourselves in the borderlands of poverty and wealth, hunger and fullness, belonging and exclusion — these words of Jesus known as 'The Beatitudes' point us towards the shining horizon of the Kingdom.

Who are the poor we want to see blessed by the Kingdom?

Who are the hungry we want to see blessed with food?

Who are the weeping we want to see blessed with laughter?

Who are the excluded who we want to see blessed with a sense of belonging?