



The New Year is often a time of reassessment. After the feasting of Christmas and Hogmanay we can find ourselves wanting to get fitter and healthier. The temptation of a crisp new calendar seems to promise a fresh start in other ways: a chance to reboot, restart, relaunch a 'new' you. These attempts are often comically doomed to failure. We write long colour coded lists and set unrealistic expectations and are surprised when we crash and burn, when our resolutions become... less resolved... But sometimes the new initiatives stick, January 1st may be an arbitrary time to start something but it's better than 'maybe tomorrow' or 'probably next week' and far better than 'some day' or 'one day'.

At this time of year, when many of us are wanting to work on our fitness and our habits, perhaps starting new routines, we thought it would be stimulating to read our Bible mindful of our bodies and our senses. As we re-tune physically we can re-tune spiritually, open to new ways ancient texts might speak to us. There are many, many valid ways of reading scripture — that's why it is such a dense, rich collection — but often we come to it in pretty similar ways, noticing the same kind of things. This month we invite you to start your year by reading the Bible awake to your senses. As you read together think: what could these people see, taste, smell? Think about how what you read affects how you feel, and what you sense. We also want to think about more than the big five senses — we have many more than five — our bodies pick up on time, temperature, balance, music!

*The following discussion questions are designed to accompany the [Making sense of it... 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.***

# Making sense of it...

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Part 1: Getting in touch

#### Conversation Starter

We are going to start this New Year reading the Bible alert to all our different senses. We often think about how situations in the Bible looked, or sounded, but not as often how they **felt**.

God has given us imaginations so that we can conceive of things that have been, could have been, might be, or might have been. Imagining ourselves in the story can help us to discover new things. We may never know exactly what a particular robe, or tree, or net felt like — but we can imagine what it felt like and then relate that to our own experiences.

As a group, take 3 minutes to brainstorm as many different textures and materials that you can think of that you find in the Bible. Here's a few to start you off: *Abraham's beard, the feel of the dusty road to Emmaus, Judas' hard silver pieces...* After the 3 minutes, have a look at your list and chat about it — what textures do you like, what do you not? What do they remind you of? Do any surprise you?

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#### Read Hebrews 2: 10-18

"Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested." (verse 18 in the NRSVA translation). What physical sensations (good and bad) did Jesus feel in his human life? As a child, as a young man, and in his later ministry?

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#### Read Job 1: 1, 2: 1-10

The detail of Job using the piece of broken pottery to scratch himself is striking and help us to 'feel' his discomfort. The Bible features many times of triumph and celebration, but also times of suffering and unease.

As a group you may want to say a short prayer together for all those in the world who are suffering with longterm pain. You could do this as a group or ask one person to say a prayer on everybody's behalf. You may wish to start with a few minutes of silent reflection before sharing your prayers.

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#### Read Luke 4: 40

Jesus has a personal moment with each one. Imagine you were there as one of those 'ones'.

What would that have been like? What would you have felt?

# Making sense of it...

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Part 2: Setting your sights

#### Conversation Starter

We are going to start this New Year reading the Bible alert to all our different senses. This week we focus on vision.

What are your favourite sights? The things you love to look at. What is it about those things that catches your eye?

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#### Read Ephesians 1: 3-14

What could it mean in real everyday terms to be “marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit”? (From verse 13 in the NRSVA translation.)

Is it something that others can ‘see’ and notice in some way?

Imagine you were designing a seal of the Holy Spirit — what would you make it look like?

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#### Read Psalm 72: 10-14

Is blood precious in our sight? Do we live in such a way that we value the gift of life? Or would we rather look the other way when we see vulnerable people suffer?

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#### Read Matthew 2:1-12

The point of following the bright shining star is to find what’s underneath it...

This New Year what are you looking for? Where are you looking for it? And as you look for it: What are you missing? What are you finding?

# Making sense of it...

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Part 3: I've heard it said

#### Conversation Starter

We are going to start this New Year reading the Bible alert to all our different senses. For many of us, reading is our main way of accessing the Bible, whether that's in a book or on our phone. For the original audience their most common way of experiencing it would have been hearing the words spoken aloud (either by a reader, or from the speaker's memory).

As a group discuss the differences between reading and listening. **Here are some prompts:** What are the advantages to hearing a piece of information rather than simply reading about it? What are the disadvantages? What's hard to communicate with just words on a page? Do you prefer to listen to a book or read one? Do you prefer to listen to the news (on the radio or in a podcast say), or read it on your phone/newspaper?

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#### Read Acts 10: 34-43

The message spread and is continuing to spread. As a group think of some different situations in which people are likely to hear the Gospel being spoken today. What does it sound like to them? How do different people hear it in different contexts? Does it sound inviting? Confusing? Intriguing? Annoying?

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#### Read James 1: 19-27

Turning sound into action. When runners race they use a starter's pistol rather than a flag or a flashing light to tell them to start running. Even though sound travels more slowly than light, our bodies start moving faster when we hear something rather than see something. With sound there seems to be less processing for our brains to do.

Think about your life... what are the starting pistols that might be firing for you at the moment? Little signals or prompts from God telling you to go somewhere or do something? It could be a Bible verse, or a song lyric, or something somebody's said to you, or something else you have heard recently that is running through your mind. Have a think and discuss with the group.

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#### Read John 10: 22-30

*Rather than immediately answering the following questions aloud, one person could read them out and then the group could spend 5 minutes in quiet contemplation before discussing as a group what you were thinking about. You may wish to read the passage above again after reading out the questions and before the time of silence.*

Put yourself in the scene. Imagine you are there listening to Jesus speak. What else can you hear? What are the sounds going on around you? Re-tune into Jesus. How do you recognise his voice? What does he sound like? What do you pick up of his tone, mood, personality?

# Making sense of it...

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Part 4: Taste and see

#### Conversation Starter

We are going to start this New Year reading the Bible alert to all our different senses. This week we are thinking about taste and smell. These two senses are closely related and can make for striking metaphors that go straight to the gut... Think of the 'smell of money' or the 'taste of success'. Smells and tastes are strongly linked to our emotions and memory; a bite or sniff can bring it all back: delight or disgust, fear or fascination...

Are there any tastes or smells that immediately 'take you back' to a particular time or place? Or that remind you of a particular person? Are there any tastes that you absolutely love? How about smells that you absolutely hate?

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#### Read Ephesians 5: 1-2

What's your idea of a 'fragrant' smell? What would a fragrant offering smell like do you think?

What does it mean to be a 'fragrant' offering in our day to day life?

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#### Read Daniel 3

"...there was no smell of fire on them." As we are tuning into sensory observations this month let's focus on this odd detail in verse 27. Not only are they not burnt to a crisp, they don't even smell smoky!

Why is this detail included in the story?

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#### Read Exodus 16: 31-36

What is our 'omer of manna' (see verse 33, an *omer* is an ancient Israelite unit of measurement) for generations to come? In other words, what are the tastes that we are preserving for future generations? This is both in the sense of food tastes (things like beloved family recipes, specially tended heirloom plants, or scientifically stored seed banks) but also other things that we enjoy and that sustain us day to day. Taste as a metaphor for the personal choices and preferences we develop in our lives. What do we want to keep secured for future generations?

(Also as a side note: what do you make of 'manna' — does it appeal to you? How would you eat it? How would you cook with it?)

# Making sense of it...

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Part 5: Having a sense of...

#### Conversation Starter

We are going to start this New Year reading the Bible alert to all our different senses. There's the big five senses: touch, smell, taste, hearing and sight — but we also have a number of other senses.

As a group brainstorm as many other kind of senses that you can think of. There's other physical senses like our sense of balance but there's also more abstract senses like our 'sense of humour'. You might want to give yourself 3 minutes to do this. Afterwards discuss what you might be able to learn about God by tuning in to these different senses.

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#### Read Isaiah 9: 1-4

Having a sense of humour... The light at the end of the darkness and the release of tension that comes from a sense of overwhelming relief can lead to laughter and whoops of delight.

Do we tend to associate our faith with laughter and rejoicing and glee? If so — why? If not — why not?

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#### Psalm 27: 1-9

Having a sense of tune....

Why did God create in us the capacity to make and appreciate music? The ability to sing and "make a melody to the Lord"? (See verse 6.)

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#### Read 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27

Having a sense of where and what we are... **Kinaesthesia** — is a word that describes the sense of where your body is in space. So, with my eyes closed and my ears blocked (and without anything touching my foot) I still know where my foot is in relation to the rest of my body. The different parts of my body know where the other parts are without any external stimuli.

Thinking of the metaphor of the Body of Christ — we might need to tune into a kind of 'spiritual kinaesthesia' so we can work out where we fit in with others!

As different parts of the same body, how can we continually get better at supporting one another? Is there anything we can learn from how the different parts of the human body work together that we can apply to making our church body work together?