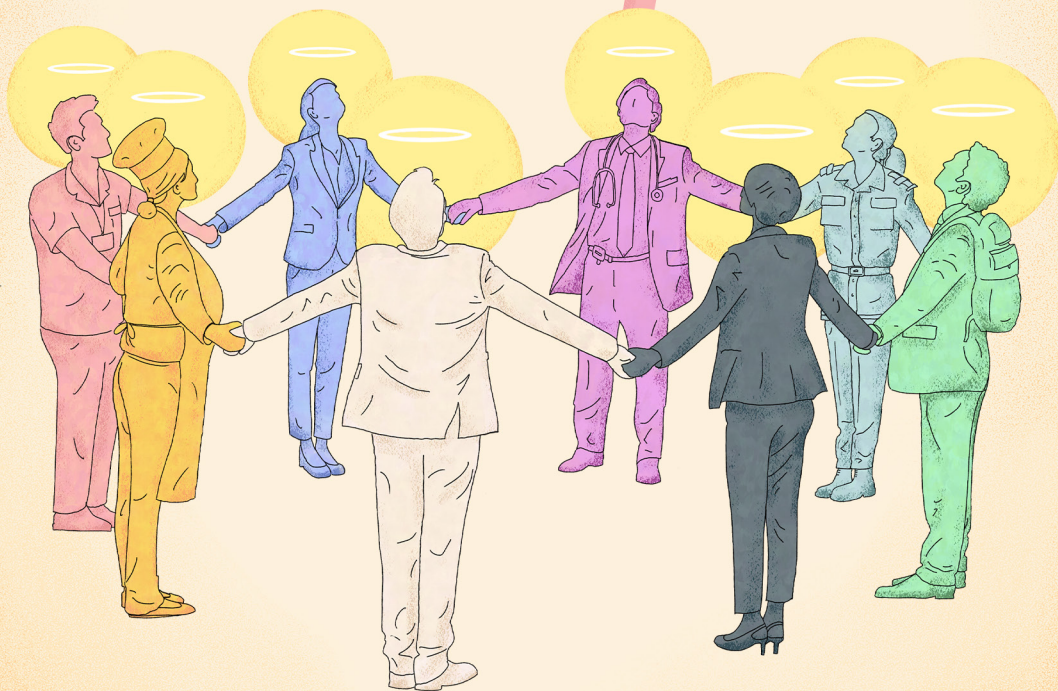


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Singing Redemption

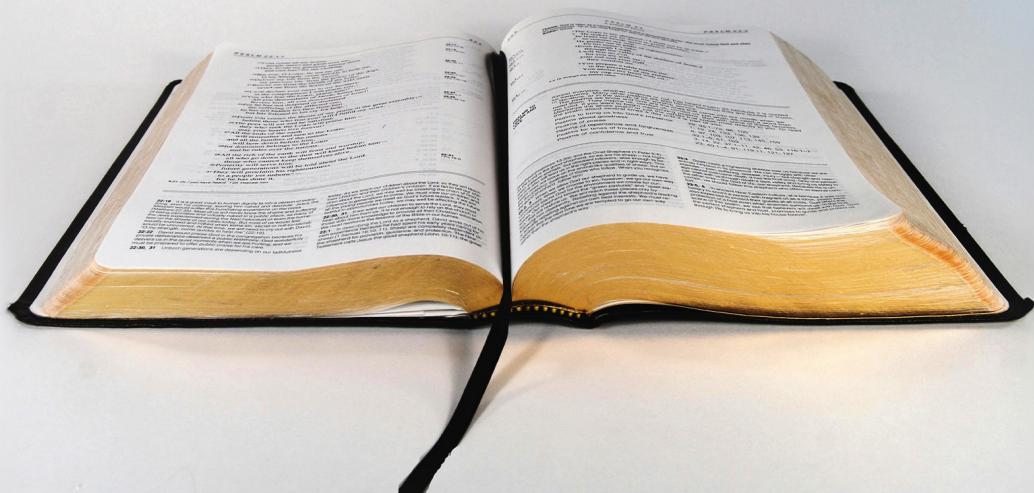
*Connect
Groups*



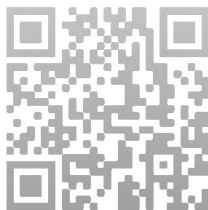
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Ready to start
Your Daily Walk with God?

Let's dive into the Bible!



Download our App



What is a Connect Group?

A Connect Bible Study is a small group who meet regularly to explore faith and life, growing in the things of God together as we go. Anyone can host one using these materials and contact us for support and guidance. Online or in-person, our heart is that they offer a relaxed space for faith, friendship and fun.

We hope the resources and discussion points encourage, inspire, and invigorate you on your walk with God.



It might be the conversation follows the discussion as laid out or heads in a different direction, both are wonderful and we hope the outline we offer here is flexible and supportive to engage with the Bible and our faith in fresh and vibrant ways as we make our way in the world as 21st century disciples exploring the wonders of life with Jesus!

What is involved?

Each week begins with an introduction and 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! (We would love to hear how you get on with this!) We imagine the material for each week would work for 90 minute sessions but feel free to adapt to your group!

Additional Resources

This booklet includes a poem and prayer to reflect upon. You will find a page on how to run a Connect Group, to walk you through the steps if this is your first time.

Each week has an online corresponding page in both our app and on the website where you can get the questions and videos.

Enjoyed this material? Why not dive in further? There are more songs, videos, podcasts and blogs linked to this theme on the Sanctuary First website and app. Have fun exploring it all!



Poem

Take this dance

*Take this dance
take my hand
take my heart
take my plans
take my beat
take my feet
take my toes
take me on
take me close
take me up
take me out
take me in
take me through
take me too
take a step
take my breath
take me and all the rest*

*take my hope
take my fears
take my minutes*

*take my years
take my tapping
take my clapping
take my sighing
take my tears
take my smile
take my voice
take my quiet
take my noise*

*this much I ask...
take me back*

*take me through the steps
I haven't learnt yet
let me look upon your face
Father, Son, and Spirit
so I can take my place*

James Cathcart



Introduction to the Theme:

Singing Redemption

Redemption — that solace we can come home to, that place we can belong, regardless of who we are or what we've done — is not something we can earn or buy. Rather it is something sung to us. A song as old as the universe, a cosmic lullaby that tells us that all will be well and all manner of things will be well. Just as infants begin to recognise songs long before they can grasp the meaning of words — so the work of our redemption was begun long before we could grasp it.

This month we explore the power of song to both teach us about and immerse us in our redemption — the central story of our faith — that we are found, recognised, and named and that we belong with God and one another. Through lyric, rhythm, melody, harmony, percussion, timing, and phrasing songs don't only tell us that we are redeemed, they show us how it feels to be redeemed.

Redemption is an ongoing story we learn to live into that zigzags across the spectrum of human emotion. Songs and poetry are often uniquely able to offer us insights into what it means and what it feels like to live as a person who is being continually redeemed.

Weekly overview

Week One: Live and unplugged! — Songwriting as a way of sharing authentic experience

Week Two: Praise be! — Communal worship as a way of restoring, challenging and shaping

Week Three: Punk prophecy! — Songwriting that give us a glimpse of another world

Week Four: Vagabond Hymns! — A concept album of the hymns of a wandering, wondering people

Running A Connect Group

Follow the Spirit and do what works for your group!

Our Connect material is intended to be flexible and you are encouraged to adapt it to suit your needs and where the Holy Spirit takes you. Below is a completely optional rough outline of how we envision the material could be used in a 90 or 60 minute weekly session. As a leader you are free to shake things up (either as you prepare, or on the fly) responding to the discussion as it unfolds. Our experience of small groups is often the fascinating stuff happens 'off topic' when a group has gone on a tangent and ended up somewhere new. Go as the Spirit leads you and don't feel like you have to cover every reading or topic in each session.

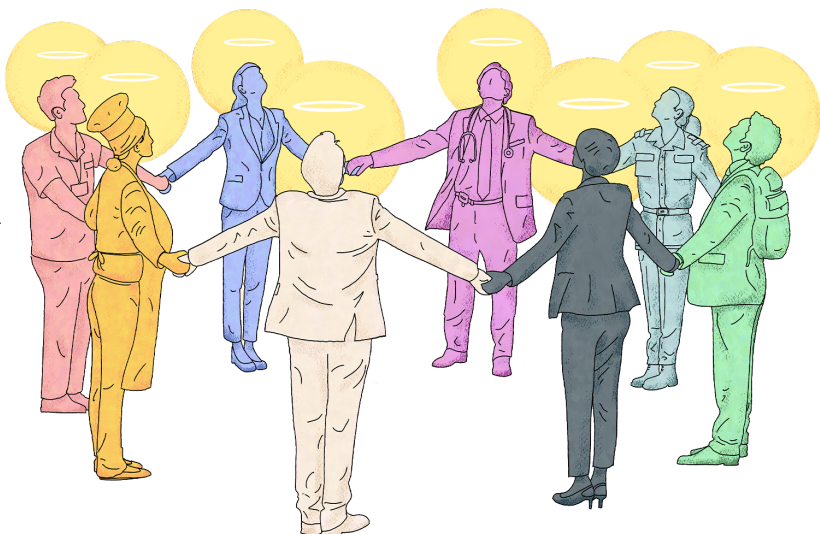
If you are a pre-existing group/community you may have already have a format that works for you. Perhaps you always begin with a song, maybe you read a short liturgy aloud, share a meal together, have an informal catch up before diving into the reading, break for tea and coffee in middle and so on. If so that's great, just weave our material into that.

Optional outline for running a session:

1. Welcome — introducing yourself as the group leader and asking others to do the same, you could share briefly what interests you/draws you to the theme this month/week
2. Brief summary of the overall theme and Sanctuary First/and or specific organisation running individual group
3. An opening prayer, inviting God to travel with us as we explore the Bible
4. Introducing the theme of the week — reading the theme introduction aloud and/or tailoring to your group context, allow space for comments and initial impressions, if any.



5. Point to videos, podcasts, Daily Worship etc on the Sanctuary First site that links in (there is a short video to accompany each week in the Connect section)
6. Share the Seed to Sow for the week and perhaps return to it at the end of the discussion
7. For each section begin by inviting someone to read the Bible text aloud. Then the leader begins the discussion, reading the prompts out to the group and then throws it over to them to respond. (As a leader you may wish to adapt/expand/edit, for instance only focusing on two readings etc or changing the order, or expanding reading ranges etc). The discussion prompts are designed to go in a number of directions. It can be helpful to ask general questions about what stood out for people in the reading, what questions, insights or personal responses do they have to the text? And then you can link those responses to the topics in the material.
8. A closing prayer led by the leader or the group leaving space for intercessory prayer as the group develops and gets to know one another
9. Telling people about the next session's topic and pointing them to Connect resources on the Sanctuary First website.



Week One: Live and unplugged

Songwriting as a way of sharing authentic experience

Introduction:

Authentic songwriting from our heart to God's heart creates a space — a nook — where people can find a resting place, a hiding place, or even a springboard, for the soul. Lyrics and melody create perches where people can not only see but also hear and feel the story of redemption... a story that is both deeply personal and deeply universal. Songs can be lifelines, invaluable points of connection that help to remember ourselves back to ourselves. This week we think about the power of songwriting to create nooks for the soul, where we can draw breath, and catch the breath of heaven.

Seeds to sow:

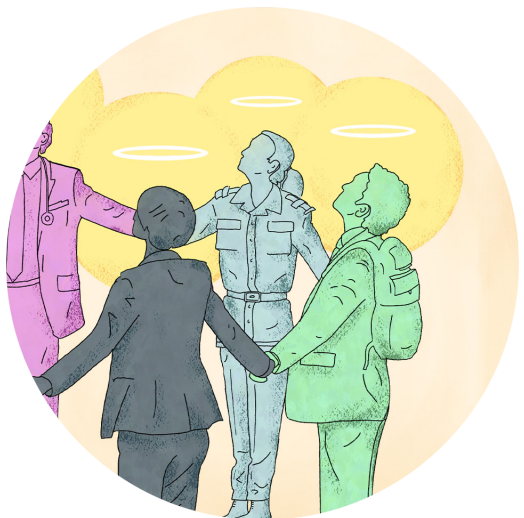
What are some of your favourite memories of hearing live music?

Read Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4

Songwriters stationed all along the watchtower!

In some ways songwriters are like those stationed along the watchtower, eyes to the skies, ready to witness and sing God's works and make the vision plain!

Q: What words and phrases stand out to you in these readings? Would any of them lend themselves to a good song lyric?



Read Isaiah 1: 10-18

Making offerings that mean something!

This is a challenge for all those participating and leading worship!

Q: Is our praise empty, just window dressing for a window shopping worship? Or are we creating real places for people to meet and draw closer to God's heart; a heart that breaks for poor and dispossessed people?

Q: How can our worship foster an environment for real connection with God and one another?

Read Luke 19: 1-10

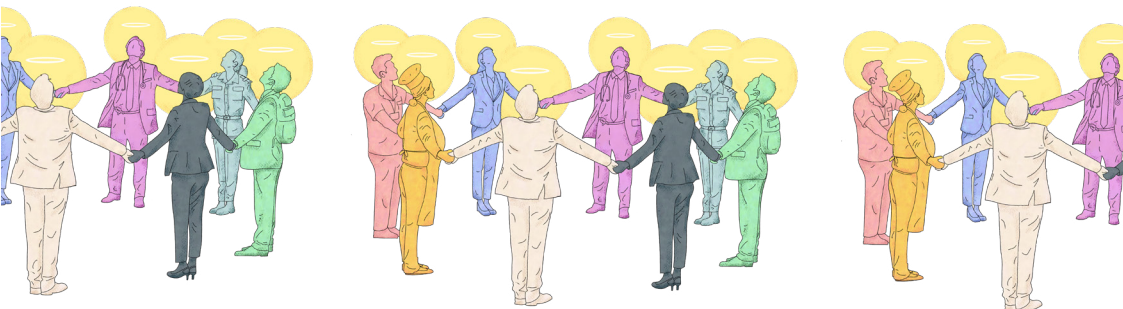
Making trees for Zacchaeus.

This encounter gives us a little parable of how songs can help us connect with Jesus. Without the tree Zacchaeus had no vantage point, no ability to hear or see what Jesus was saying. With the right tree in the right place he was able to see for himself.

Through their songs hymn writers over the years have planted many trees that grow into perches for new Zacchaeuses to climb on up and see for themselves. The right song at the right time can be just the leg-up we need.

Q: Do you think our worship styles make it easy for modern-day Zacchaeuses to feel welcomed into our churches?

Q: How could we vary our worship to grow more 'trees' for more Zacchaeuses to be able to climb and see Christ for themselves?



Week Two: Praise be!

Communal worship as a way of restoring, challenging and shaping

Introduction:

Recounting redemption resoundingly! Exploring how worship restores, challenges and shapes communities as they express themselves authentically to God.

Seeds To Sow:

What songs help restore you? What songs help build you up?

Read Haggai 2: 1-9

Fruitless endeavour...?

Resetting on redemption.

Q: How can our worship help us take courage? What strength do we draw from the songs we sing together in difficult times?

Artists are often prophetic and prophets are often artistic.

Q: What is the role of the artist when it comes to offering public worship to God? Have we excluded a lot of artists and artistry from our churches and in doing so lost our God-given creativity and prophetic edge?

Q: If you could employ an artist for a year to work on worship projects in your church or local community what would you want them to do?

Read Psalm 98

Singing to the Lord a new song!

Worship is not about re-enactment — it is always meant to be a genuine new experience; not a performance of one.

Q: What new songs are we singing? And what old songs are we singing in a new way?

And singing a new song is not always meant literally.

Q: What are we proclaiming in our worship and our teaching about what redemption means today in the 21st century?

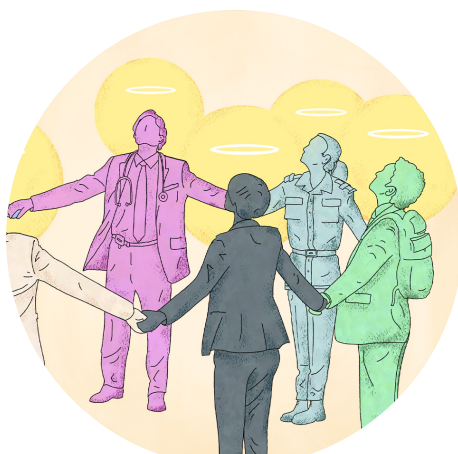
Read Ephesians 5: 15-20

Sharing life-giving music together!

Paul's words here are about harmonising a community together.

Q: How does sharing music together help us to share all of life together?

Q: What is unique about our Christian tradition of sung worship and what can it give to the world?



Week Three: Punk prophecy!

Songwriting that give us a glimpse of another world

Introduction:

Prophets, punks and poets have given us glimpses of another world for thousands of years. Music helps us to see the world around us differently and stirs us; galvanising us to act. The heavenly reality of the Kingdom is sometimes most clearly caught through song.

Seeds To Sow:

What songs challenge you? And what songs have shaped how you see the world?

Read Isaiah 65: 17-25

Visions of redemption.

This prophecy is a striking vision of restoration and transformed relationships.

Q: Take a moment and share with each other songs and hymns that highlight the message of peace and transformation in this reading. You can use the internet or any nearby hymn/song books to help you think of ideas!

Read Psalm 146

Punk psalm.

You could argue this is a punk psalm because it 1) critiques the establishment, 2) is full of passion and 3) is short and bolshy!

The back to basics, counter-cultural ethos of punk has been channeled by the church down the years through plainsong — a stripped back simple form of unaccompanied worship. Now, there might not on the face of it seem to be a lot

in common with a cluster of singers belting out psalms in a cathedral nave and a handful of punks in a basement kicking over amplifiers... but both represent attempts to peel back the layers to get at the truth and in doing so to create moments of transcendence.

Psalm 146 is worship but it's also gutsy, political and hard edged — not qualities we always associate with contemporary worship songs.

God does not make the neat distinctions we do between secular and religious culture — discuss how spiritual truth is often found outside what we tend to call 'worship music'. Sometimes the songs on the radio are more psalm-like than the songs we sing in church.



Q: What supposedly 'secular' songs have given you fresh insights about God, life and faith?

Q: Then discuss how these songs can inspire and shape how we do worship together.

Read Matthew 5: 1-12

Singing the beatitudes.

These words are a radical, counter-cultural, challenge: it's Punk Jesus!

Q: How do we develop and encourage new generations of creative artists to help us articulate the beatitudes in the 21st century? That more might not only learn about redemption but learn to feel it too.

Q: What stories can we share, or insights can we give, to inspire them to pick up a pen, a poster and a plectrum? minimum he needs from his father to survive.

Week Four: Vagabond hymns

A concept album of the hymns of a wandering, wondering people

Introduction:

We close our theme on songwriting and redemption with a kind of concept album. An art form pioneered by the likes of the Beatles and the Beach Boys in the 1960s and carried on to this day where songs are linked not just sonically but thematically and perhaps even narratively. This week we are lacing up our vagabond shoes and singing some vagabond hymns as we follow Christ on the open road.

Seeds To Sow:

What are that catchiest songs that just stay in your head?

Read Luke 1: 68-79

Lazarus and some nameless rich guy...?

A hymn of redemption.

Guest vocals from Zechariah as our album sets out its stall: It's all about redemption!

Q: How can we encourage one another to write our own hymns of praise about our shared knowledge of God that is rooted in our communal experience?

Q: What would it mean for more of our worshipping communities to write their own songs? Think about the local impact of songs that really reflect local experience, struggle and triumph.

Q: Who could write songs in and for your local community?

Singing Redemption

Read Colossians 1: 11-20

A hymn of reconciliation.

The heart of our album, right in the middle, a song that tells us Christ is reconciling all things. Our personal redemption is part of an entire cosmic process of redemption!

Q: What words and phrases leap out to you in this reading?

Q: How can our shared worship connect us to the feeling of cosmic redemption described here? To not just learn about it, but to feel it. Music is a powerful, transcendent force. It's not just about what songs we sing, but also how we sing them.

Q: And how can our shared songs link our personal individual experiences of redemption to a wider picture of redemption for humanity?

Read Matthew 8: 18-20

A hymn to a Vagabond Christ.

Christ is God among us, willing to walk the open roads in search of us, who left the security of heaven to breathe our air and walk our steps! Emmanuel!

Songs are redemption you can carry in your pocket! Regardless of our circumstances songs have a way of sticking with us, suddenly emerging after years when we thought they were long forgotten. A snatch of melody, a short phrase, brings it all flooding back. Even when other memories fade the songs that have been sung to us hold on a long time.

As it says in this reading Christ is not fixed in one place at one time, he is our vagabond saviour, always around, always ready to meet us.

Q: Discuss how songs can faithfully hold the message of redemption over the years even as our faith goes through storms and droughts. A time capsule to eternity!

Let us pray:

***Lord, let the words I use today
be like music to those who hear them,
may they be uplifting,
making hearts sing.***

***May my words encourage and refresh.
May my words bring comfort and peace.
May my words bring needed challenge.
May my words be filled with love.
May my words be your words.***

Amen.

Laura Digan



NOTES

NOTES

We are grateful to the Drummond Trust for helping to sponsor the printing and production of this month's material.

SanctuaryFirst

Your Daily Walk with God

Sanctuary First is a vibrant, online worshipping community. We are passionate about exploring new ways for people to connect with God, the spirit, and one another as a digital community.

In a busy, overwhelming digital world, we want to give you the opportunity to pause and draw breath - to take a moment...

We are excited to explore creative ways of using the internet to wrestle with and grow in our faith — to learn, celebrate, and find solace.

We aim to be a resource for the wider church and a fresh way to engage with Christianity for those who are unfamiliar or unused to church.

Everybody is welcome. Whoever you are, wherever you have come from, we hope you can find a little Sanctuary here.

Find out more:
www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk



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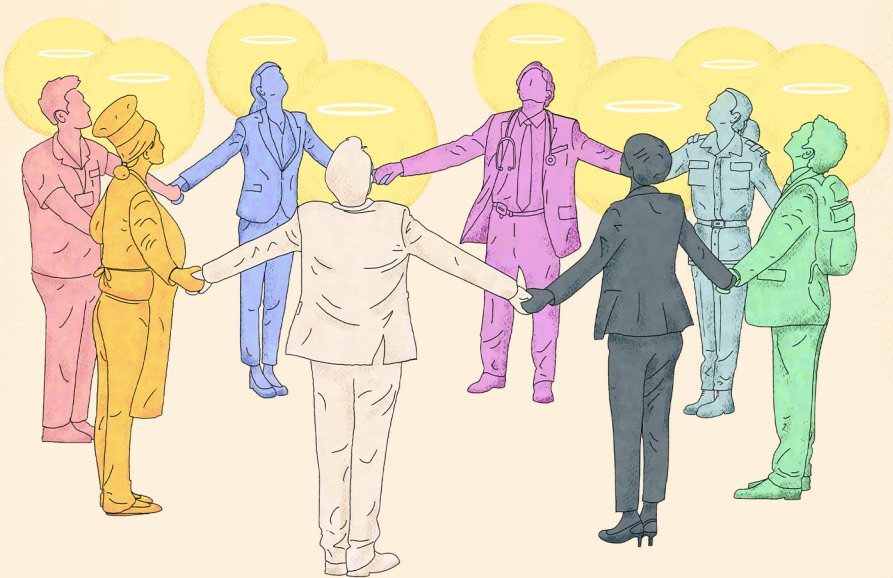
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