



REFLECTION GUIDE

Welcome to the May Camp Reflection Guide. We hope you find this little guide useful as you think about the sessions from May Camp this year.

Our suggestion is that you read one of these reflections each week over the next four weeks.

Each session includes the bible reading, the reflection, some reflection questions to think about, and a prayer.

Why not do this with some friends online? Or your whole youth group?

We hope that you have enjoyed May Camp this year, and we look forward to seeing you again next year!

The May Camp Team

Focusing on our helper, not our hills

READING: Psalm 121

A song of ascents.

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
- 2 My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
- 3 He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not slumber;
- 4 indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
- 5 The Lord watches over you—
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;
- 6 the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.
- 7 The Lord will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over your life;
- 8 the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.

REFLECTION

Where is the first place you look when you're in trouble? Do you have a friend that you call? Your family? Your youth leader?.

This Psalm is full of amazing promises, that God will always protect you, that God won't let you fall, that He will keep you from harm. It was often sung by the Israelites when they set out on journeys. Now any journey they took would have been pretty hazardous, these journeys were long and often on foot, all kinds of things can happen. Robbers, natural disasters, running out of food / water etc. So these promises would have been an amazing strength and comfort to these people whenever they set out on a dangerous journey.

But what does that mean when you feel like actually, the whole world is falling apart underneath your feet? What does it mean when the worst thing imaginable happens?

For many years, David was chased by a crazy King who really had it out for him. David had to run for his life, he literally ran for the hills, he hid in caves so that this King, who had once been a friend and mentor, would not be able to kill him. For some of us when we look at hills and mountains, we're reminded of how big and good God is, or we're reminded of trips we've taken to mountains etc. For some people mountains and hills represent difficulties and struggles, but when David looked to those hills he once hid in, he would have remembered God's faithfulness even when everything fell apart. For him, those hills would have been a reminder to not lose sight of God, that it was God who had kept him from harm, and that it is God who continues to guide him.

The focus wasn't the hills. His focus was God, not the pain, not the problems of past, present and future or even the things he hid behind or used for protection, but God. Sure, the past difficulties served as a great reminder of how God helped him but David didn't just rely on the hills or on the past problems to remind him. He speaks of ancient truths about who God is, our problems become even harder when we shrink suffering and pain down to being all about us, until all we see is our own struggle. David spoke of truths that had been told for generations. Truths show us that when we need help, it's God who needs to be our focus. David was preaching a bigger picture to himself to remind himself to not lose sight and focus of God.

When God the Father sent his Son to die for us, He also gave us a bigger picture of what God's protection is, of what all these ancient promises really mean. That even though trouble and difficulty will come, we are forever safe from ultimate harm as we get to be with God, enjoying Him forever.

There was a young woman from North Korea, she was a Christian in the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian. Her husband was killed, her baby died and her health continued to get worse and worse as she almost starved to death because of the famine. After all the trauma she had been through, she was asked by someone who worked for organisation called Open Doors why after all these things she was still a

Christian. Her reply? “Because my God died young, naked and alone in excruciating pain without knowing why either. I see Him in Gethsemane, sweating drops of blood, I see Him on the cross, writhing in agony, most of all I hear Him on the cross: ‘Why? Why have you forsaken me?’ – an anguished, strangled cry dragged up from the deep pit of abandonment.” With tears she said “it means so much that He suffered just like me, that He shared it. Even Jesus on the cross asked ‘why.’ God for all His immense power, knows how to share our suffering too, He sent us His son to die, to show us that we can never again believe the lie that He does not love us. We can be assured of His love because He came to us. God’s care is everywhere in the world if I can see past my own suffering. Suffering is hard to take, but it becomes harder when we shrink it down to just be about our own pain, our own sickness, our own struggles, our own loss. God is the lifter up of our heads, ‘look at the whole world’” he whispers, ‘look around you’, see all these gifts and wonders, see what I am doing and see me, look at me.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Think back to a time in your life when it felt like things were falling apart, where you felt like your life was over at the time, but it didn’t end up being the end of everything. Maybe you got some bad exam results, maybe there was a family crisis that you got through. Did you ask God for help? Did you look to other things?
2. What are your hills and mountains? What represents difficulty in your life right now?
3. What does this passage say about God?
4. What does it say about you?
5. What are the things in your life that remind you that God is where our help comes from?

PRAYER

Lord, thank you that you are where our help comes from. Thank you that you protect us, that you guide us and keep us from ultimate harm. That nothing can separate us from your love.

Please help me to remember that you are with me, help me to look to you and be reminded of your promises when life is difficult. Help me to see what you are doing even when it feels like everything is falling apart.

Amen

Filtered Out

READING: Acts 9:1-19

Saul's Conversion

1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. 14 And he

has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptised, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.

REFLECTION

Saul was an interesting man. Before he met Jesus, Saul didn’t really like Jesus, in fact, he went out of his way to knock Jesus down. Then all of a sudden, the Lord spoke to Saul, and after a natter, and three days of blindness, Saul was converted. Instead of shouting out against Jesus and his disciples, he shouted for them, and then he became Paul. You know the one, the famous one. The one, that did all the travelling!

Paul was a changed man, but before he was changed, he was chasing after the wrong things in life. We even as Christians can be chasing after the wrong things.

What are some of the things you’re chasing after? Is it Boys? Girls? Those extra likes on the insta? All the extra views on your latest tik tok?

In this current season of lockdown, life can be tough. That comment from the person you fancy, trying to hit 100 likes, or your latest tik tok going viral can be everything to you.

But do you know there's a God that loves you? That's for you? That's with you? When the world around us is tough, it can be easy to forget about Jesus. Over this season, give yourself a challenge, take a daily 5-minute retreat. Find a verse or two and read it for 3 minutes. Don't just read it the once but repeatedly, what do you notice? What jumps out at you? Underline your favourite words. Then after the three minutes, pray about the verse for 1 minute, how does it connect to you. Then for the final minute listen. See what God Says to you.

Knowing and spending time with Jesus can change your life as it did with Paul. Think higher than this world and look up to God, see what changes for you when you shift your focus from the likes of people to the love of God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What's the main focus of your social media? (Connection? Popularity? Growth?)
2. If you've got a phone that tells you your screen time, what's your screen time for social media? If it is high, what could you do to bring it down?
3. What do you do to spend time with God?
4. What do you think about the 5-minute retreat? If you don't like it what could you do to spend time with God?
5. Do you think there's something in the way of God changing you? If so, Why? What is it? Why not have a chat with your youth leader about it?

PRAYER

Dear Lord,

Thank you that you're for us, with us and love us. We that pray that as we go forward on this journey that we take time to sit and stop and reflect. May we know even though my youth group are apart we're together as one family with you, may we let your love and light change us.

Amen

Author: Sam Mead (*Youth Team Leader, Rising Brook Community Church*)

Surely he was the Son of God

READING: Matthew 27:45-56

The Death of Jesus

45 From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. 46 About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.”

48 Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. 49 The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split 52 and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”

55 Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. 56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.

REFLECTION

When Jesus died, there were some extraordinary things that occurred, and in Matthew's Gospel we get this account:

“at that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people”

These are not things that occur normally, so we can attribute them to happening due to the death of Jesus. This means that Jesus was someone so powerful, a person whose very death causes extraordinary things to happen. It must have been a worrying time for those who were gathered around and saw these things happening; especially for those who had contributed to His death.

This is the moment when the centurion who was guarding Jesus, and those with him exclaimed: ‘surely he is the son of God!’

If they can change their beliefs that quickly after witnessing His death I wonder what it would take for people today to change their beliefs and put their faith in Jesus.

Of course at the time of his death the onlookers didn't know that Jesus was going to rise from the dead two days later, they thought this was the end; what a strange sense of emotion that would be.

We can't really read the Easter account for the first time without already knowing the ending, it gets told to us time and time again from the moment we are young enough to understand doesn't it? But, I wonder if we were reading this account for the very first time with no idea what happened, would we have picked up on the fact that Jesus was going to return? I think many of us would have missed it, and I think many of us would have been completely shocked when it happened.

Of course, Jesus did rise from the dead and that is truly the greatest moment in history. For Jesus died on the cross, a perfect person, someone

without sin, he did nothing wrong in the eyes of God; and by that action he took with upon himself all of the wrong things that we have ever done, our sin, and he sacrificed himself for us. He spent the three days he was gone in place away from the love of God, a place we now refer to as hell. Jesus by his perfection went to hell so you don't have to. Then on the third day he rose from the dead, proving for all people that death is not final, there is life after death and Jesus has provided the answer for that, he has provided the option for us.

If we put our faith in Jesus, if we believe he is the Son of God, then we too can experience life after death, our sins will have been carried to hell for us, and we are forgiven and given the opportunity to live a life free from wrong doing and a life with Christ, a life with the Lord our God by our side.

We are all invited to be free, we are all invited to be a part of the Kingdom of God. It's a gift, for everyone. To receive it, all you need to do is put your faith in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you think the people standing by while Jesus was crucified felt when he died?
2. What does it mean to have your sins forgiven?
3. What does a life with God look like to you?
4. What does it mean for you that Jesus invited you to share in the gift of eternal life with him?

PRAYER

Lord, I thank you for your tremendous gift to us, that we can be free from our sin because of your amazing actions all those years ago. I pray that you would help me to put my faith in you, to know that you are my Lord and Saviour. I ask that you would forgive me, and help me to live my life to the best of my ability following your instructions and your guide.

Jesus fill me with your holy spirit I pray, and keep me safe in your Kingdom.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Where is He?

READING: John 20:11-18

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

11 Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

15 He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

REFLECTION

Mary Magdalene has been the first person to discover that Jesus is missing from the tomb, so she runs to tell Peter & John who then race over to the tomb to see for themselves (v1-10). After Peter and John leave, Mary is left weeping at the tomb but she encounters two angels and someone who she thinks is the gardener.

Caught up in the whirlwind of events, at first Mary fails to recognise Jesus has risen from the dead and is standing in front of her. It's not until Jesus calls Mary by name that she recognises Him.

In recognising Jesus, Mary gives Jesus a gigantic hug but Jesus tells her that she cannot keep the Good News to herself - she must pass it on!

I wonder what stands out for you from this first bit of the passage?

Something I've found super interesting is: As Mary approaches the tomb, she doesn't **expect** to find Jesus alive (He died, right?). I wonder if the same is true in your life, if you go about your day not expecting Jesus to show up? I'd really challenge you to pray before meeting with your friends or walking through the school gates (when we can again), or in your conversations online. What might it look like for Jesus to be a part of your everyday interactions? There's been numerous occasions where I've simply asked Jesus to come with me in different situations and He's never missed an appointment!

You may have heard the Christian writer, Pete Grieg? If not, google him! He gives 3 simple steps which I've found super helpful in trying to practice this.

1. Keep it simple
2. Keep it real
3. Keep it up

For example - "Lord, Thank you that you are alive and at work through me. I pray that as I meet with my friends tonight I will be able to know you are present and shine brightly for you. Amen"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Where is it easy/challenging to see Jesus alive & working in my life?
2. Do I live my life without expectation that Jesus is alive and can work through me?
3. What opportunities do I have to pray before seeing friends/going to school etc?
4. How can I use Pete Grieg's prayer tips to go deeper in my faith?

PRAYER

Lord, I pray that you would help me to expect you to be at work in all that I do in my life. I pray that you would help me to be constantly looking out for what your plans are and what you are doing in those around me. Let me not keep the Good News to myself, but let me tell those that I meet, the Good News of your love.

Amen.