



# **ALL SAINTS WELLINGTON**

WITH ST CATHERINE'S EYTON



## **Saying Yes to Life**

**A Small Group Leaders Guide**

## Introduction

This guide is intended to assist small group leaders who are using Ruth Valerio's, "Saying Yes to Life" to run a small group Lent course. It is particularly designed for those groups where only the session leader has a copy of the book. It will, however, be necessary for at least one copy of the book to be available.

The basic framework for each session is the same. Within the framework there is a variety of suggestions and resources, which you may want to select from, or use as thought starters for your own material. If, for instance, you feel that there are too many Bible passages for your group to flick between, then do feel free to focus on fewer, or to divide the readings between members of the group so that not everyone has to look them all up.

These notes draw in places on the accompanying Youth pack, developed by Dot Tyler of the "We are Tearfund community" and the Diocese of Bristol's course notes, developed by Rev'd Dr Mark Siddell. Both of these resources are available, along with other useful resources:

<https://spckpublishing.co.uk/saying-yes-resources>

# Session 1 - Let there be Light.

## Welcome

“Where does light feature in your life? Can you share any particular experiences that have given you a new appreciation of light?” p23

## Worship

Watch, listen, or sing together:

Hail Gladdening Light - David Crowder Band,  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFjbkcW1\\_pQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFjbkcW1_pQ)

Christ be our Light - Bernadette Farell,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJq3bhdgQoc>

Light of the World, You Stepped Down into Darkness – Tim Hughes

## Word

1. Read these passages: Genesis 1:1-5, Psalm 33:6-9, Job 38:1,4-7

- What do these passages tell us about who God is?
- What do these passages tell us about who we are?

2. Read Colossians 1:15-20

- What is Jesus' relationship with Creation?
- Who or what did Jesus come to reconcile?
- What are the implications of this for our relationship with the rest of creation?

3. Read these passages: Psalm 27:1, James 1:17, Ephesians 5:8-9, 2 Corinthians 4:6, John 1:5-9

- What do these images of light applied to God tell us about God?
- What is the relationship between light and darkness?
- Are there other Biblical uses of light language that resonate particularly with people?

## **Witness**

Ruth Valerio argues that the availability of light, beyond daylight, is a key element in bringing prosperity and development to those living in poverty, and illustrates this with stories of changed lives. She also describes the increasingly negative impact on the planet, of providing the energy for this light from non-renewable energy sources.

As practical suggestions, she advocates:

- Reducing consumption of meat and dairy
- Choosing less polluting modes of travel
- Choosing a renewable domestic energy supplier
- Reducing our own electricity consumption by using energy-efficient light fittings and appliances, and switching them off when not in use.

Which of these might we adopt as part of our Lenten discipline, and perhaps continue into the rest of our lives?

End with the prayer on p.24.

# Session 2 – Let the waters be separated.

## Welcome

What is your favourite body of water? What makes it special to you?

## Worship

Print or display a selection of images of “Streams of Living Water”. Ask people to select one and share what it is that has drawn them to that picture. Use these reflections to share brief prayers of worship.

Suggested images:

<https://danielgaryhill.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/streams-of-living-water-5.jpg>

<https://www.propheticartists.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Streams-of-Living-Water-1300pixels.jpg>

<https://images.fineartamerica.com/images/artworkimages/mediumlarge/1/streams-of-living-water-debra-markewicz.jpg>

## Word

1. Read these passages: Genesis 1:6-8, Exodus 14:15-22, Joshua 3:9-17

- What strikes you about the similarities between these accounts?
- What do you make of the differences between these accounts?

2. Read these passages: Kings 18:22-45, Mark 4:35-41

- What do these passages tell us about who God is?
- What do these passages tell us about God's relationship with creation?

3. Read Ezekiel 36:25-27, Matthew 3:13-17

- What do we need cleansing of?
- What does the account of Jesus' baptism reveal to us about the relationships between Father, Son, Holy Spirit?

## **Witness**

Ruth Valerio argues that many people in the world (60% of the world's population) live in areas of water stress. Their lives are blighted by too much water, too little water, or polluted water. "Water is extremely precious and the Kikuyu in Kenya say *Mai ni Mwayo*, 'water is life', a phrase we would all do well to adopt." p.39

If possible, watch:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOe\\_M3GutdY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOe_M3GutdY)

Discuss which of these actions you could take:

- Install rainwater butts, clean your car less, use green cleaning products.
- Reducing our consumption, mending and reusing our purchases is a 'hidden way' to use less water.
- When you turn on a tap, flush the toilet, have a shower, put on the washing machine or dishwasher - pray for those who do not have easy access to clean water.
- Support organisations like Toilet Twinning ([toilettwinning.org](http://toilettwinning.org)) and Well Boring ([wellboring.org](http://wellboring.org)) that improve hygiene and access to clean water.

End with the prayer on p.50.

# Session 3 – Let the land produce vegetation.

## Welcome

“ How aware are you of your connectedness to the land? What helps you appreciate that more deeply?” p.78

## Worship

Reflect on Psalm 1 together.

You may want to prepare copies of different translations in advance, perhaps using an online tool such as:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/>

You may want to use the translation on p.67

Read it to each other, with each other.

## Word

1. Read this passage: Genesis 1:9-13

- Repeatedly God says that what is created is good. What implications does this have for how we treat creation?

2. Read these passages: Luke 23:44-45, Romans 8:19-22, Psalm 148

- What do these passages tell us about who God is?

- What do these passages tell us about how the land responds to God?

### 3. Read John 15:1-17

- How do we remain connected to Jesus?
- What does it mean to be fruitful?
- In what wider sense is the Father the gardener?

## **Witness**

Ruth Valerio identifies two significant global issues in this chapter. The first is to do with connectedness to the land, and the associated just distribution and ownership of land. The second is to do with the disastrous impact of deforestation on the planet.

Discuss which of these actions you could take, as individuals or as a group.

- Plant a tree
- How could you follow Rowan Williams suggestion, "Receive the world that God has given. Go for a walk. Get wet. Dig the earth." p.62
- "Consider how your actions impact on forests, whether through meat that comes from deforested land or wood and paper products you may buy. What steps could you and your church take in response?" p.78
- Calculate your carbon emissions for a year:

<https://www.climatestewards.org/>

and then consider how you can reduce them, or offset them.

End with the prayer on p.79.



# Session 4 – Let there be lights in the sky.

## Welcome

What is your favourite season, and why?

## Worship

Watch, listen, or sing together:

The Servant King – Graham Kendrick,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rh4xEvMVQQ>

So Will I – Hillsong United

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2U7ffUM5Ec>

Jesus shall reign, where'er the Sun – Isaac Watts

## Word

1. Read these passages: Genesis 1:14-19, 2 Kings 21:1-6

- What do these passages tell us about the right relationships between God, people, and the stars of heaven?

2. Read these passages: Genesis 22:15-18, Psalm 147:1-5, Philippians 2:12-18

- What do these passages tell us about who God is?

- What do these passages tell us about how God thinks about us?

3. Read these passages: Isaiah 65:17-25, 2 Peter 3:1-13, Revelation 21:1-4, 22:1-5

- The Biblical use of the word “new” has a sense of both continuity and discontinuity – see examples on p.102ff. From these passages, what continues into the new creation, and what is completely different?
- How might this idea of continuity affect our attitudes to creation?

## **Witness**

Ruth Valerio suggests that in our modern western culture we have become disconnected from the seasons. Light and warmth are available at the flick of a switch, fruit and vegetables are in our supermarkets whatever the time of the year. These mechanisms of disconnection also have a cost to the planet – from turtles confused by bright lights at the seashore to the carbon footprint of growing and transporting fruit beyond its natural season.

Discuss which of these actions you could take, as individuals or as a group.

- “Do a litter pick as a church, (or a group), taking time together to pray for the people whose rubbish you have collected and asking God to speak to you about their problems and struggles.” p.89
- How could you reduce the light pollution in your area?
- Look back over previous weeks and discuss what has been easy and difficult about doing the things people committed to.

End with the prayer on p.105.

# Session 5 – Let the waters teem with living things and let birds fly.

## Welcome

“Do you have a favourite ocean/sea place to be, or favourite memory” p.135

Do you have a favourite bird, or bird watching memory?

## Worship

Reflect on Psalm 8 together (see Session 3 for suggestions)

Or watch, listen, or sing together:

Oceans – Hillsong United

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2PNTq\\_-mZs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2PNTq_-mZs)

Lead us heavenly Father, lead us – James Edmeston

## Word

1. Read these passages: Genesis 1:20-23, Nehemiah 9:5b-8, Psalm 104:24-26

- What do these passages tell us about who God is?
- What do these passages tell us about how important the oceans and its denizens are to God?

2. Read these passages: Exodus 19:1-6, Deuteronomy 32:10-12  
Isaiah 40:28-31

- What aspects of God’s nature are expressed in these passages?
- What feelings do they evoke in us?

3. Read these passages: Matthew 6:26, Matthew 10:29-30, Matthew 23:37

- What do these passages suggest about God's relationship with birds?
- What do these passages imply about God's relationship with us?
- And what about our relationship to birds?

## **Witness**

Ruth Valerio describes the massive reduction in bird population numbers over recent decades due to habitat loss and climate change. She also highlights ways in which the pollution of the oceans is having a negative effect on marine wildlife.

If possible watch this video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLx4fVsYdTI>

Discuss these suggestions for practical action:

- Look around you or around your house and notice your plastic use. What can you reduce or stop using altogether?
- Increase the amount of organic or LEAF accredited food that we buy.
- Sign the rubbish revolution petition: Let's get Coca-Cola, Unilever, Pepsico and Nestlé to take responsibility for their plastic waste. Fill in the form online and add your voice to the petition:  
<https://weare.tearfund.org/revolution/>

End with the prayer on p.135.

# **Session 6 – Let the land produce living creatures and let us make humankind in our image.**

## **Welcome**

What is the thing that you are proudest of creating? Who in your family do you resemble, physically or otherwise?

## **Worship**

Print or project a selection of images of animals from:

<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/projects/photo-ark/>

Share characteristics of God that are evident in these images, and use them to form short prayers of worship.

## **Word**

1. Read these passages: Genesis 1:24-25, Genesis 9:8-17

- What does the passage tell you about who God is?
- What do we learn about God's heart for animals?

2. Read these passages: Genesis 1:26-27, Psalm 139:13-16,

- What does it mean for humanity to have been created in the image of God?
- What does it mean for each individual human being to have been created by God?

3. Read these passages: Genesis 1:28-31, Mark 10:42-45, Matthew 25:14-30

- What does Jesus' teaching in Mark imply about what it means to exercise rule over the creatures?
- What does Jesus' teaching in Matthew say to us about God's expectations of our stewardship of God's creation?

## **Witness**

In the opening illustration of the chapter Ruth Valerio describes the hedgehogs that visit her garden. From a population of about 30 million in the UK in 1950, it is thought that there are currently fewer than 1 million, and that hedgehogs are in danger of extinction in the UK. This story is one that could be repeated for countless other animal species around the world. The environmental factors that are driving these extinctions are also those that are having the greatest negative impact on the most vulnerable human communities.

"As we have seen throughout *Saying Yes to Life*, people and planet have to be held together." p.145

Discuss these suggestions for practical action:

- In what ways can we buy and use less?
- How can we learn to see God's image in those whom we struggle to recognise it?
- What can we do to encourage biodiversity in the places that we live?
- Will we eat more plant based foods and less meat and dairy?

End with the prayer on p.163.