

Using the Bible in pastoral care



(click to go straight to the passage you wish to use)

Psalm 23 – God’s presence

(For Christians needing assurance and guidance or to hold out the promise of God’s presence for people who have not come to faith)

Psalm 121 – God watches over us

(For Christians facing difficulties or wanting to pray for loved ones facing difficulties)

Philippians 4:4-7 – God’s peace

(For Christians with anxieties wanting to know God’s peace)

Mark 2:1-12 – Forgiveness of sins

(For people who have not yet put their faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins)

Romans 8:31-32 – Generous God

(For Christians to respond to God's generous grace by being generous to others)

Matthew 11:28-29 – An Invitation to Rest

(For people who not yet put their faith in Jesus – and for Christians to bring their burdens to him)

Hebrews 12:1-3 – Running the Race

(For Christians to encourage them to have their lives transformed by 'Emmanuel' God with us in Christ)

Revelation 21:1-5 – The Ultimate Healing

(For Christians to assure them of their future hope of a new heaven and new earth)

Ephesians 4:26-27, 31-32 – Dealing with Anger

(For Christians who struggle with anger)

Matthew 1:18-25 – Christmas: God with us

(For Christians to encourage them that God is with them to transform them to be like Jesus)

Luke 24:1-8 – Easter: Mission Accomplished

(For Christians to know they have a living hope because of the resurrection of Jesus)

God's presence: Psalm 23

¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow
me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.

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Some first words of explanation:

The first half of this Psalm is a picture of God as our shepherd.



The second half is a picture of God as a host who invites us into his house and makes us part of his family.



This Psalm points us to Jesus, the good shepherd, who makes it possible for us to be part of God's family.



A question to ask:

“What picture of the journey speaks to you at this point in your life – the green pasture, the quiet waters, the right path or the dark valley?”

- Green pastures are food for spiritual hunger



- Quiet waters are God's peace and rest for our souls



- Right paths are not so much specific guidance about big decisions but honouring God 'for his name's sake' in all we do



- Dark valleys are any time of difficulty



A possible response:

Assure them of the promise to Christians of:

- **God's provision,**
- **God's peace**
- **God's help in doing what is right**
- **God's presence** – even when a dark valley means he seems far away.

Another question to ask if appropriate:

(related to verses 5 to 6)

“What are your ‘enemies’ right now – not necessarily people although there can be people who oppose us – but the things that get you down?”



Two possible responses:

1. Assure them of the **security** found in knowing that, as a Christian, they are seated at God's table together with the promise of being in his house forever.

2. If they have not come to faith, tell them that this great **promise** of God's love and life with him forever, awaits those who put their trust in Jesus for forgiveness and a restored relationship with God.



Suggested prayer

Lord, as our shepherd, please guide [*person's name*] through life in the good times and in the dark seasons. Help him/her to trust you at all times and in all circumstances. Help him/her know the comfort of your presence especially in the difficult times.

Thank you for Jesus the good shepherd who laid down his life to pay for our sins. Help [*person's name*] to recognise his voice and follow him into eternal life. Amen.

[Back to menu](#)

God watches over us: Psalm 121

- 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.

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Some first words of explanation:

Journeying in the mountains in the time this was written could be dangerous. A slip could result in a fatal fall. There could be thieves and bandits.



The sun and the moon poetically represent all the elements from which we need protection like rain and wind as well as the heat of day and the cold of night.



The Psalm refers to the dangers of a journey in the mountains – but it could equally apply to the many other dangers we face in all of life, spiritual as well as physical. The knowledge that God watches over us is a great comfort.

A question to ask:

“What dangers or difficulties do you, or your loved ones, face now for which you need God to watch over you?”

A possible response:

This Psalm promises us God is always alert and active in his commitment to his people.

Being kept from ‘all harm’ doesn’t mean that bad things won’t ever happen to us or that we will never stumble along the way.

As Christians, we know our end destination to be with Jesus is certain – that’s what is promised in the last words of the Psalm: ‘both now and evermore’. (For someone who is not a Christian this can be offered as a promise for those who trust in Jesus).

We can use Psalm 121 as a prayer for ourselves or for someone we are concerned about, for example:

- Someone going through a painful part of the journey of life – that they would know God's care for them now and always.



- Someone facing spiritual danger in a place that could tempt them away from a close walk with God – that their foot would not slip.



- Someone far from God – that they would come to know that he is close and shows loving care towards them.



Suggested prayer

Thank you Lord for the promises of this Psalm. Help [*person's name*] to understand

that you are with him/her even at times when he/she doesn't have a strong sense of your presence.

Thank you for the wonderful truth that you are constantly alert and that [*person's name*] can rely on your guiding and protecting hand upon his/her life day by day. Amen.

[Back to menu](#)

God's peace: Philippians 4:4-7

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all

understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

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Some first words of explanation:

When Paul wrote these words he was in prison for his faith. But he knew God was near and hadn't abandoned him.



Like Paul, we can praise God and rejoice in his presence in good times and difficult times.

As well as our worship and praise, God wants to hear our prayers about the things that concern us – this Bible passage isn't telling us to “just to put a brave face on it” or to “keep smiling”. God knows we need his help.

A question to ask:

“Is there anything you are anxious about that you would like to bring to God in prayer?”

You can use the suggested prayer below and also mention specific requests.

A possible response:

Speak about the reality of God’s peace which is a blessing even if we don’t understand it, and even if the situation causing the concern doesn’t change much.

(For someone who is not a Christian you could share your own testimony of this experience of God.)



Suggested prayer

Lord, thank you for your willingness to be near us and to hear us when we humbly call out to you. We bring [*person’s name*] concerns to you now in prayer and in faith.

We pray for..... and place this situation into your hands.

We trust you to answer according to your will and [*person's name*] needs. We also pray that he/she may experience your peace, even beyond his/her understanding.

We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

(For someone who is not a Christian you could adapt this prayer to ask that the person would come to know Jesus, forgiveness for their sins and a real sense of the peace of God).

[Back to menu](#)

Forgiveness of sins: Mark 2:1-12

¹ A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. ² They gathered in

such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. ³ Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴ Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

⁶ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷ “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

⁸ Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? ⁹ Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are

forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? ¹⁰ But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, ¹¹ “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” ¹² He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

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Some first words of explanation:

Imagine yourself as one of the paralysed man’s friends. You are desperate to get him to Jesus because you have heard of his healing miracles. You throw caution to the wind and dig



through the mud and straw of the roof of someone's house. Imagine the shock when Jesus doesn't just heal him. Instead he says "your sins are forgiven".

Even worse, it seems like there's going to be an argument because the religious teachers are up in arms – only God can forgive sins – and they are right. Who does this man think he is? Then the relief when your friend is healed – but more than that, the amazement that Jesus is not just an ordinary man – he is the Son of God who can forgive sins.

A question to ask:

"What is the greatest need you feel in your life just now?"

A possible response:

People give many different answers to that question. The Bible tells us that our greatest need is forgiveness of our sins. God, by

sending his son to the cross meets that need. We can in no way earn forgiveness. It has to come from God to us through Jesus' death on the cross. This is a gift which we either accept or reject.



Suggested prayer

(This is a prayer you can encourage someone to pray if they are ready and happy to do so)

Lord, I have many needs but help me to realise that my greatest need is forgiveness for all my sin.

Help me to understand that Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world to save sinners like me.

So I now receive Jesus as my Saviour and Lord and give thanks to you for the great blessing of forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus Christ. Amen.

[Back to menu](#)

Generous God: Romans 8:31-32

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

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Some first words of explanation:

In these verses, Paul tells the believers in Rome of God's generous grace. This is not just the act of a kind person, God's generosity is centred on the giving up of his Son, Jesus, born into the world as a baby in Bethlehem and dying on a Roman cross outside Jerusalem.



In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed that he would not have to "drink the cup of suffering". However, submitting to his heavenly Father's will, he did go to the cross to die for the sin of the world, your sin and mine.

These Roman believers had now received so much from this generous God. They have the gift of eternal salvation and the many other blessings that come from experiencing God's love.

Two possible questions to ask:

“Have you responded to God's generous grace, trusting that Jesus by his death on the cross has paid for your sins?”

“What are the things in your life just now for which you are especially thankful to God?”

A possible response:

As Christians we must surely respond by displaying kindness towards others, both inside and outside the church. We must extend forgiveness to those who have wronged us, just as we have been forgiven. We must give of our time, resources and money to bless others.

The more we take to heart what God has generously given us, the more our hearts will flow with generosity to others.



Suggested prayer

Lord, we thank you for your generosity to us for the gift of Jesus Christ.

Help us to show such generosity towards others, especially those in need, so reflecting in our imperfect way, your generosity toward us all. Amen.

[Back to menu](#)

An Invitation to Rest: Matthew 11:28-29

²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

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Some first words of explanation:

These words are in the form of an invitation from Jesus. Who are these words for? They are for those who find themselves weighed down with the difficult circumstances of life.

What does Jesus offer to all who come to him? He offers a personal relationship with him in which we come to him, submit our lives and our burdens to him and in return we receive his rest for our souls. The rest that Jesus offers does not free us from responsibility and work, but in our duties we discover that submission to him each day is not burdensome.



A question to ask:

“What are the burdens that are weighing you down just now?”

A possible response:

The greatest burden we all have is our human, sinful nature. We may not realise this but, when we do, it is such a relief that we can bring this burden to Jesus too. He is the great burden bearer. Jesus himself

took the full weight of our sin through his death on the cross for our salvation.



Suggested prayer

(This is a prayer you can encourage someone to pray if they are ready and happy to do so – alternatively you could drop the first line and pray for the person, adapting the words below.)

Lord, thank you that Jesus died on the cross to bear the full weight of the world's sin, including my own.

Thank you that I can also trust you with the other burdens I face just now. Please help me as I name them and transfer them on to you.

Help me to realise that no burden is too heavy for you to carry. Amen.

[Back to menu](#)

Running the Race: Hebrews 12:1-3

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

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Some first words of explanation:

‘The witnesses’ refers back to those people in the Old Testament whose faith was in God's promises. They are an inspiration to

us because they all kept going in their faith in God, despite many pressures, obstacles and the temptation to give up when everything seemed to be against them.

The Christian life is like running a race. Just as every runner keeps their eye on the finish line, so every Christian keeps their focus on Jesus.

Jesus is our Saviour but also our example in that he endured the suffering and shame of the cross for our salvation. He gives us the perfect example of one who kept going despite the opposition.



Two possible questions to ask:

“Is there anything in your life that holds you back as a Christian?”

“Is God making you aware of any habit or specific sin that needs to be confessed to him and turned away from?”

A possible response:

Ask God for grace to turn away from these sins and receive his forgiveness.



Suggested prayer

Lord, please help _____ to turn away from whatever has become a hindrance to running well in the Christian race.

Help _____ to fix their eyes on Jesus every day. Amen.

[Back to menu](#)

The Ultimate Healing: Revelation 21:1-5

¹ Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first

earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

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Some first words of explanation

This passage is a description of the apostle John's vision of a new heaven and a new earth. It's



not a case of God making all new things but of God making all things new (v5) – especially including us who trust in him – our bodies, our minds and our hearts.

This is a restored and transformed earth where God is present with his people in the fullest sense of that relationship. We can enjoy God's presence here and now, through Jesus saving work and by the presence of the Holy Spirit. His presence today can mean healing of body and mind as we pray and trust God to answer according to His purposes.

But however wonderful such answers are, we all will die. In this new, redeemed creation however, we won't have to pray for healing any more, or pray for grace to cope with bereavement and other painful

experiences in this life. Here in this 'new Jerusalem', death, mourning, tears and pain will be gone.

A question to consider

- What do you look forward to being gone in this new earth when God makes all things new?
- What do you look forward to about knowing the perfect presence of Jesus as you dwell with him in the new earth?



Suggested prayer

Lord we thank you that we can know your presence with us here and now. Thank you also for many answers to our prayers. As we look forward to your perfect new creation may we rejoice in anticipation of the freedom we will have to enjoy your presence when we will be released from all the restrictions caused by pain and suffering. In Jesus name, amen.

Dealing with Anger: Ephesians 4:26-27, 31-32

²⁶ “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,
²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold.

³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

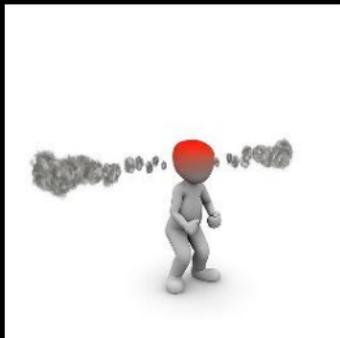
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Some first words of explanation

There so many angry people in the world.

We hear it all the time - from political leaders to ordinary people and even ourselves when



we react angrily to something said or done.

Genesis chapter four has the first mention of human anger in Scripture – Cain is angry with his brother and sadly, that anger led to murder. Not all anger ends that way and these words in Ephesians help us to see how to take a different path. They make it clear that anger itself is not necessarily a sin – it's an emotion that can rise within us whether justified or not.

But what we must not do is give the devil a foothold, like Cain did, and let it lead to sinful thoughts and actions. Verse 32 gives us the positive teaching about how we should react in situations that could lead us to anger (read verse again)

A question to consider

- What is our normal response when we get angry?
- What do these verses tell us to do instead of that normal response?



Suggested prayer

Lord, we confess that we have been guilty of the sin of anger on many occasions. Some of our anger has been contained within our own hearts and minds. On other occasions, the anger has spilled over into words and even actions.

Please forgive us and give us the grace to get rid of all such sin. Help us to be led more and more by the Holy Spirit in order to produce spiritual fruit like kindness, compassion and a willingness to forgive others rather than remaining angry. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

[Back to menu](#)

Christmas – God with us: Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to

a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

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Some first words of explanation

“Bah! Humbug!” was Ebenezer Scrooge's attitude to Christmas as described in Charles Dickens famous book, *A Christmas*

Carol. If you remember the story, it's about a mean spirited old man who had three ghostly visitors one Christmas eve.

Those ghosts took Scrooge on a

journey of his life: past, present and future. As a result his life was transformed from being mean and miserable to becoming joyful, kind and generous.



Christian faith is all about lives that are being transformed by God through his son Jesus Christ. In this Bible passage there are two names or titles given to Jesus at the time of his birth. His name, Jesus, simply means Saviour (v 21). Jesus perfectly lived up to his name throughout his public ministry as lives were transformed, but supremely by his death on the cross – paying the price for the sin of the world. The salvation he offers to us has the power

to transform us as we receive him as Saviour and Lord.

The other title given to Jesus is 'Emmanuel' – 'God is with us' (v 23). That means that we have a Saviour who promises to be with us in all the ups and downs of life, in the good days and in the bad days and in the difficult seasons of our lives.

Questions to consider

- In what aspects of my life do I need Jesus to be my Saviour and Emmanuel to be present with me?
- Do I need the transforming power and grace of God to change me more into the likeness of Christ, perhaps, like Scrooge, to become more loving, kind and generous towards others?



Suggested prayer (*for the person to pray or to adapt so that you are praying for them*)

Lord I thank you that through the death and resurrection of Jesus my life can be changed. As I commit myself each day into your hands may you transform me more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ. May this transformation make a difference in all my relationships with people in my family, in work, in the community and in my church. Amen.

[Back to menu](#)

Easter – Mission Accomplished

Luke 24:1-8

¹ On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.

² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed

like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' " ⁸ Then they remembered his words.

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Some first words of explanation

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

is the wonderful question put to the women by the

angels at the tomb on that first Easter morning (v5). Were the angels rebuking the women for forgetting Jesus teaching



that he would rise again? Or was this a gentle loving reminder that this event was sure to happen and now they were about to witness it?

Someone once said that the authorities could no more prevent the sun from rising than preventing the rising of the Son of God. On the cross, Jesus cried out that his redemptive work was now completed. The resurrection was the consequence of Jesus' death on the cross for our salvation. He had defeated death and conquered the grave.

Because of this, everything has changed. We have a living hope and an inheritance that we cannot lose. This means we can rejoice even when we face suffering and trials. We can give ourselves wholeheartedly to serving God in this hope.

A question to consider

- In what ways, perhaps like the women in this account, do we need reminded of the reality of the resurrection of Jesus?
- In what ways does this reality of the resurrection of Jesus and his finished work on the cross bring you hope?



Suggested prayer

Lord we thank you that by your death and resurrection you have defeated sin and death. Help us now to worship, trust and serve you as we rejoice in the words of Jesus who said “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die and whoever lives by believing in me will never die”. In Jesus name, amen.

(Quote in prayer from John 11:25-26 NIV)

[Back to menu](#)