



All seeing, all knowing and all loving God, I want to follow you and know your presence in my life. Forgive the mistakes of my past, accept me for the person I am, and by your Holy Spirit help me to walk in your ways and become the person you can make me. Assure me of your forgiveness and promise of eternal life, made possible through Jesus.

AMEN

Love - Hope - Acceptance



Update 2

A weekly prayer outline for "40 days"

The last update encouraged congregations to set time aside during Sunday services to pray and reflect on the challenge to seek the opportunity to help someone else become a follower of Jesus. Please visit www.nwba.org.uk/lha.php to find out more. The LOVE - HOPE - ACCEPTANCE theme is inspired by the story of Jesus and the woman from Samaria recorded in John 4. This Prayer Outline explores different aspects of her story, and can be used week by week as a framework for enabling reflection in church services.

SUNDAY 10th APRIL - The encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman happened in very ordinary circumstances. A woman fulfilling the daily chore of collecting water met a tired, hot traveller who needed a drink. It is not only through special events and evangelistic gatherings that people can encounter Jesus. Invite the congregation to reflect on their everyday lives, to think about the people they will meet or have met in their normal week. Where might God have been at work? Where can we pray for God to be at work? How might these encounters become opportunities for conversations about Jesus?

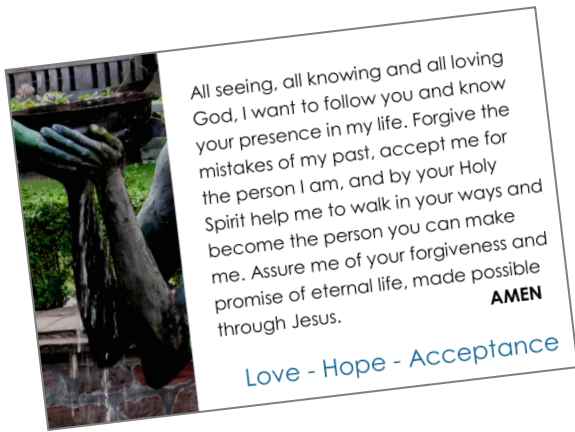
SUNDAY 17th April - The story introduces us to the longstanding animosity between Jews and Samaritans; the popular narrative of the day was that Samaritans had no place within the community of God's people. Pray today for those who also feel that they are "on the outside"; those who believe that faith is only for other people, that they were somehow born "on the wrong side of the tracks". Who are those people in our community? How can we include them?

SUNDAY 24th April - Jesus refused to conform to the cultural prejudices and assumptions of his day. He would have been expected to shun a Samaritan woman, to ignore her and see her as inferior. But he broke through those false barriers and saw her as a human being created and loved by God. What assumptions does our society make about people? How easy do we find it to conform to these? What are the attitudes we need to break and the bridges we need to build?

Sunday 1st May - We learn from the story that the woman's domestic circumstances would have probably attracted disapproval and disdain from many of her peers. Some writers suggest that this was why she visited the well at midday - she was not accepted in the social group who would probably have gone there together in the morning. Pray today for those who feel they are not good enough; whose life circumstances might leave them feeling that God cannot accept and welcome them. How can we ensure they are welcome?

SUNDAY 8th May - We also discover that the woman had experienced five failed relationships. We do not know all of the details, but we can well imagine that would have felt let down, disappointed, perhaps even bitter about the way things had worked out for her. Pray today for those who live with disappointment, who may even blame God for their struggles and circumstances.

SUNDAY 15th May - The woman engages Jesus in a conversation about their different cultural experiences of worship. She returns to her community asking the question "Could this be the Messiah?" She may not have belonged to Jesus' religious "clan", but she was someone who was seeking after God. Who are those people in our world whose religious ideas and behaviours might not be the same as ours, but are nonetheless earnestly seeking God. Where might God be at work in such circumstances?



Pause to pray - week 1 - 10th April

"Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?' [John 4:6-7]

It was the most ordinary and every-day of encounters. A woman locked into the daily routine of fetching water; a weary traveller resting in the heat of the day while his friends went to find food. Yet from this most ordinary of beginnings, emerged a life changing encounter; a meeting that affected an entire township; a conversation that centuries later we still discuss and consider.

In her conversation, the woman asked about the places we encounter God. "Which is the right temple?" she enquired of Jesus "you say Jerusalem, we say Gerizim - which is the place of true encounter?" And even as she asked the question; even as she poured out water for the stranger, she still did not realise that the place of encounter with her God was not a disputed temple, but that place, that meeting, that moment, that conversation.

There are times when we might invite our friends, our neighbours our colleagues to come along to our meetings and gatherings to find out more about Jesus. But Jesus can be found and encountered in all kinds of places. We are more likely to exchange a conversation at a water cooler than a well; more likely to share a coffee with someone than draw water for them to drink. But in those everyday places and ordinary moments God can be at work.

During these 40 days we are praying for God to be at work; we are praying that we might be open and sensitive to recognise where his Spirit is touching the lives of those around us. In these moments think about the places you have been in the last few days; the conversations you have shared. Think about the things you expect to be doing in the week ahead; the people you are likely to meet; the conversations that will happen. As you reflect, ask yourself where God may be at work in the lives of those you encounter; pray for God's Spirit to be at work within their circumstances and pray for the opportunity to be part of that.

**God of every time and place,
Of every encounter and conversation,
Open our eyes to see you at work in the everyday places of our world;
In the lives of those whose pathways cross with ours.
By Your Spirit, touch the hearts of those we might encounter
Be present when our lives meet and our interests combine.
We pray for natural opportunities to share something of you,
Moments of conversation; opportunities to care; space to listen.
We offer ourselves as those who are ready to explain the hope within us
And pray that we might have the chance to share our story.**

AMEN