Creative ideas

For intercession inspired by the breadth and depth of God’s character

An important part of the Sanctuary’s daily rhythm of prayer and worship is our list of characteristics of God. We focus on a different one each day as part of our framework for prayer (alongside other rotating issues, scriptures, nations, and that day’s news headlines).

This list has been created by the Sanctuary’s community using well-known names from the Bible, character attributes explored in the scripture, and at times in helpful, modern imagery designed to provide new ways of describing God or his characteristics that still reflect solid Biblical truth. And it’s constantly expanding; the more we understand and pray for God’s world, the more we see of the breadth and depth of his character! You can see the current list here: www.thesanctuarycentre.org/resources/stimuli+for+the+cycle++our+rhythm+of+prayer+and+worship.pdf

We also find that it’s often invaluable to spend time together unpacking the day’s characteristic and asking ourselves how this particular attribute of God, and our understanding of it, helps us to worship, and then to pray for others and for the needs of the world. So here we’re sharing some of the ideas and tools that have come out of these times.

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- God is the ULTIMATE ARTISAN
- God is our BANNER
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God is the ANCIENT OF DAYS

As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. (Daniel 7:9)

- Reflect generally on the fact that God has been around not just for a lot of days, but for every day there has ever been – and before days were even invented. Then, on a piece of paper, consciously think back over some of his days, remembering, and noting down on a timeline, examples from:
  - your own life, and the key times he’s been faithful to be present or provide in the midst of things that have seemed so hard, or even too hard
  - the lives of even just a few of his followers that come to mind – around the world, in history and in the Bible – who he has also been so tangibly faithful to in the midst of situations that again seemed so hard, even too hard...
- Thank and praise God for his presence and faithfulness through generation after generation and in circumstance after circumstance.
- Now visit the present day headlines, or key areas and situations of concern. As you pray, remember that although he cares deeply about every situation, and every unique individual, there is nothing about the human heart that God has not encountered, and softened or healed before ... and nothing beyond his scope or capabilities.

God is the ultimate ARTISAN

In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. (Psalm 95:4)

- Reflect or discuss the times you have seen true artisans at work – whether potters, weavers, glass-blowers, jewellers ... the list goes on. What was it about their skill, focus, and precise handiwork that struck you most?
- Any, all and more of these traits provide just tiny echoes and glimpses of the kind of attentiveness and expertise God brings in the way he handles our world.
- So as you pray about situations in the world, remember that this is the God – and these are the hands – holding the world.
- You might find it helpful to pray with your hands too... sculpt some modelling clay and pray for God’s shaping of new promise out of seeming formlessness, or weave some strands of wool as you pray about God creating connections between people.
- (You might also find it helps further inspire prayer to look closely at just one example – such as a ‘potter’ – by searching for scriptures that refer to God this way on biblegateway.com and/or looking up a youtube.com video of a potter at work.)
God is our BANNER

Moses built an altar and called it “The Lord is my banner” (Exodus 17:15) and Solomon wrote “Let his banner over me be love” in Song of Songs 2:4.

- Spend some time reflecting on all the things that you are thankful for because God is your banner and his banner over you is love – and jot these down.
- Make a banner or draw one onto a large piece of paper, and write at the top the individuals, people groups or nations you want to pray for.
- Then inside the banner – and using your own list of things you are thankful for – write or pin onto it a prayer of truth and hope for these people, giving thanks that God is their banner too and that his banner of love flies over each one.

God is both BIG-PICTURE AND DETAIL ORIENTATED

I look up at your macro-skies, dark and enormous, your handmade sky-jewellery, moon and stars mounted in their settings. Then I look at my micro-self and wonder, why do you bother with us? Why take a second look our way? (Psalm 8:3-4, MSG)

“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” (Jesus speaking in Luke 12:6-7)

- Take two pieces of paper and on each one jot down as many of the huge, big-picture elements of God’s creation that spring to mind …. Then on the other some of the tiniest things.
  You might enjoy watching this short clip for more inspiration: www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhofN1xX6uQ
- Spend some time praising God in wonder at both the macro scale and intricate detail of his handiwork.
- Then, turn over the page of each sheet and write down the things you want to bring before God that are big-picture (such as nations, complex global issues, or conflicts) on one, and the things that feel very detailed, or small (such as individuals’ particular circumstances) on the other.
- Lay both before God, in confidence that he sees, cares and is sovereign over them all. Pray as you feel led for some of the items on your list in more detail, with the new-found faith this perspective has brought.
God is our BURDEN-BEAVER

In Matthew 11:30, Jesus says “My yoke is easy and my burden is light” – but many of us, and the people we know, are weighed down by the burdens of life.

- Take some time to read one or more of the following Bible verses in which God confirms that he is more than able to carry our burdens – and that he actually desires us to give them to him!
  - Philippians 4:6-7
  - Romans 8:26-27
  - Psalm 55:22
  - 1 Peter 5:7
  - Psalm 68:19
  - Matthew 11:28-30
  - Galatians 5:1
  - Galatians 6:2
  - Joshua 1:9

- Either for yourself or for someone you know (or both!), think about the burdens you/they are carrying.
- Take a stone and using a felt-tip pen write that burden down on it.
- Hold the stone and bring back to mind some of the verses you have just read – slowly place the stone at the foot of a cross*, praying as you do so that God would help you/they give him this burden.
  *NB. If you don’t have a cross for this activity, another way we have done it is outside by water (river, lake/pond or sea would work!) and thrown the stones into the water to symbolise giving them to God

God CARRIES US

Blessed be the Lord— day after day he carries us along. (Psalm 68:19, MSG)

- First write your name on a piece of paper and fold it up. Place it in the palm of your hand and close your hand around it. How secure is your grip on it? How heavy is it to hold?
- Thank God that he can, and does, carry you and everything on your heart; with care, with ease and with total reliability.
- Now write the name of the individual, group of people or situation on your heart to pray for on a piece of paper and fold it up.
- Put the paper into your pocket, or phone case so that it travels around with you all day.
- Every time you see or feel it and, most especially at the end of the day when you remove it, thank God that he carries this individual, group, or situation constantly – effortlessly, but with great care; there is not a single moment when he puts them/it
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down; there is no terrain, or season, too hard for him to lift them, and carry them through.

God is our COMPASS and our TRUE NORTH

Give me your lantern and compass, give me a map, so I can find my way to the sacred mountain, to the place of your presence. (Psalm 43:4, MSG)

- Find and hold a compass, or draw one to hold if you don’t have one.
- Turn to face North. Thank God that he is a sure and certain True North to focus, and guide our lives by, and re-dedicate your own life’s navigation to him.
- Consciously move to stand somewhere else, and face in a fresh direction to repeat the symbol of finding North again, and turning to focus it.
- Pray now for other individuals and/or groups on your heart to discover God as their True North, to re-orientate their lives and hearts to him, and to seek and find new direction and guidance by the light of his love and wisdom.

God is the ultimate COMPLETER FINISHER

... he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)

- This description of God is a modern-take on the above verse, often used to describe particular individuals and their skill and role within a team.
- Look up some definitions of ‘completer-finisher’ and jot down some of the phrases used to define this that particularly resonate with who God is.
- Then use this characteristic, and accompanying words and phrases to help inspire your prayers for situations that seem entrenched – praying for movement and positive resolution; whether this comes now, or at the restoration of all things.

God is our CORNERSTONE

My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus Christ, my righteousness. (from the hymn by Edward Mote, 1834)

- The image of Jesus as ‘Cornerstone’ appears a number of times in the Bible – take a look at:
  o Isaiah 28:16
  o Psalm 118:21-23
  o Acts 4:8-12

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- 1 Peter 2:4-9
- On a large piece of paper, write out “Jesus is our Cornerstone”.

- Now brainstorm what this truth means to you and how it helps us all pray for others – write each idea onto a smaller piece of paper and place it on top of the large ‘Cornerstone’ piece of paper, so that you slowly build up your wall of truth on top of Jesus your solid rock foundation.
- Finally, write out each of the local/national/global situations you want to pray for onto even smaller pieces of paper – and again lay these down on the top of the existing pile, praying as you do so that Jesus would be the cornerstone, and bring the breakthrough and restoration that is needed.

God is our DEFENDER

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. (Psalm 68:5)

- Find and print off an image, or graphic of a wall. Spend some time looking at it and reflecting on God’s strength and reliability. Then write, with marker pen, other words and phrases you associate with the nature of God’s defence.
- On a separate piece of paper, write the name or situation of the vulnerable individual (or group of people) you want to pray protection over. Then put the wall over this.
- Using post-it notes if it helps you, bring to mind the particular dangers, threats or concerns that those you are praying for are facing – knowing that God’s wall of defence protects the core of those sheltering behind it.

God is ENCIRCLING US

For the Celtic Church, the circle symbolised eternity and completion and formed the inspiration for ‘caim’ or circling prayers, where the pray-er would physically turn in circles whilst praying for Christ’s protection, to better connect with the truth of his Spirit’s presence surrounding them at all times - above, beneath, before, behind, to the left and to the right...

- Use printed out circles that you can write in – or circling movements you can make with your finger over photographs, maps, or other visual symbols – as a powerful way to help you connect with praying blessing and/or protection over individuals, groups of people, nations or regions.

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God is the GATE/DOOR

“I am the gate for the sheep.” (Jesus speaking in John 10:7)

- Begin by reading the scriptural context of this statement in John 10:7-11, and its cultural context too, summarised overleaf:

  In ancient Middle Eastern culture, a sheep pen out in the open countryside was usually just a circle of rocks piled up to make a wall with a small opening as the entrance. Shepherds would herd their sheep into these enclosures overnight - but there was no door/gate and therefore, to keep the sheep in and the wild animals out, the shepherd would lie down across the entrance, literally becoming the door himself.

- Thank Jesus for his humility and protecting salvation – in general, and in your life in particular.

- In Jesus' statement in John 10, he makes it clear that this is an invitation – he is the gate but a person must choose to enter. Who comes to mind to pray for to make this all-important choice? It might be an individual known to you personally, a world leader or celebrity figure particularly on your heart, or a whole nation or people group ...

- Take a sheet of paper and draw a circular sheep-pen with a door. Write “JESUS” on the gate. Then write the person's name outside the pen. Slowly as you pray, cross out their name on the outside, and re-write it on the inside as a faithful declaration of your hope for them to fully accept Jesus' love.

- Give thanks to Jesus that his invitation remains open to this person/nation and for his perseverance in seeking out every lost sheep.

- Repeat the same pattern with as many people or nations as you want to pray for.

God is the LIFTER OF OUR HEADS

But you, O LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, and the one who lifts up my head. (Psalm 3:3)

- Begin by looking at the floor, and then – mirroring the action a parent might take to connect with, and comfort, a child – gently place your hand on your chin and tilt it up … taking in how your perspective changes as you begin to look up rather than down.

- Thank God that in any situation – however desperate – he comes close by his Spirit, ready to lift our countenance to him; our hope, and our very present help in trouble.

- Now think of individuals – or groups of people – who you want to pray for because they are downcast. This might be because they are lonely, or bereaved, or because they are experiencing some kind of mental or emotion distress. For each one, slowly repeat the same kinaesthetic prayer motion you did for yourself a few moments ago – praying each time, that these people would become aware of God’s invitation to look up to him for transformative comfort and hope.
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God is our LIGHTHOUSE

We have found that thinking about God as a lighthouse who guides us to safety has been particularly useful when praying for nations that are going through stormy times, for situations that seem dark or unreachable, or for individuals who feel lost.

- Draw a picture of a lighthouse (or print out a photo!) and write down around it all the reasons why a lighthouse is so important for those out at sea, expanding the list outwards to include the reassurances of God as our ‘lighthouse’.
- Imagine God as that lighthouse beckoning all to safety – and one-by-one lift to him the particular individuals, situations or nations, asking for his guiding light to bring them out of the storm and into the safety of his harbour.

God is POWERFUL

There are countless references to God’s power in scripture. But, it can be easy for us to lose sight of even a fraction of the scale we are really thinking of. That’s why, in situations where we really need to have more of a grasp on it to pray with confidence, we’ve found it helpful to use the following reflective questions to magnify our understanding, even just a small amount:

- What’s the most powerful force of nature you can imagine? How much stronger do you think God is than what you are imagining?
- Who’s the most powerful person you’ve ever met? How much more influential do you think God is than this person?
- What has the power to deeply move your emotions? How much more inspiring and compelling do you think God is compared to these things?
- And finally, think about the most powerful encounter/s you’ve had with God so far... Praise and thank him for this/these and ask for more revelation and encounter with him as he is - our POWERFUL God!

God is our RIGHTEOUSNESS (Jehovah Tsid Kenu)

Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. (1 Corinthians 1:30)

- Take a few minutes to consciously jot down on a piece of paper, and give thanks for, everything you can think of that enriches,

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fuels and strengthens your walk with God… especially specific things that are making a tangible difference to you right now.

- Reflect on the following:
  
  *God is so generous with how he speaks, inspires and encourages us in the every day… scriptures, songs, beauty in creation, books, these emails, friends and fellow disciples illuminating the way, good teaching and education that grows our understanding of how our faith fits together, incredible testimonies and answered prayers, pictures or words to hold on to in a specific season; evidence of sanctification and transformation in our lives; the list goes on and on. But all of these things - all these good and perfect gifts that come from God... all the maturity in discipleship and depth of relationship with God they help develop are not our RIGHTEOUSNESS. It is only God himself in Christ who is our RIGHTEOUSNESS.*

- Turn your piece of paper over, and simply write on it – as big as you can – ‘Jesus, you alone are my righteousness.’
- Thank him again for all the good gifts he gives to help us learn about, and draw closer to, him that you wrote down earlier. But pray for help too to stay way back from the temptation of ever seeing anything besides him as your righteousness.
- On a second piece of paper, now write (as big as you can again) – ‘Jesus, you alone are your church’s righteousness.’ As you look at this statement, pray that no doctrine, denomination or detail of any kind would ever take the place of Christ as the central focus in his followers’ lives and hearts.
- Pray too, for special blessings, on parts of the church you are less familiar with and/or have hurt you deeply in the past, remembering that Christ died to cover the institutional and individual disunity and sin of the church too. It is covered by him. In him, it is righteous.

God is the greatest STORY-TELLER

*Once upon a time, there was neither time nor story ... only the One-in-Three who always has been, and the Three-in-One who always will be...*

- Begin by reflecting on the mind-bending truth that God is not just the greatest STORY-TELLER, he is the creator of the concept of story, narrative, meaning and metaphor... and the designer of people, who he crafted with a deep need to receive story to relate to God and each other, and to make sense of the world.
- Take a moment to think, and jot down some answers, to these questions about Jesus’ stories:
  1. which parables do you find yourself coming back to again and again? Are there any you can point to which have especially helped you see more of who God is, speak life or healing to you, or follow him more closely?
  2. how about the gospel accounts? Which parts of Jesus’ own story - lived out for the people he walked amongst, for you and for each one before, along side and after you in history, that he so deeply loves - reveal more of his character to you, or simply catch you up in wonder, adoration or deep, intriguing questioning?
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Thank him for the gift of these specific, transforming stories to you again today...

- Now visit the stories featured in today’s news – or re-visit some recent headlines that are still on your heart – with the greatest STORY-TELLER ever, remembering he can transform broken narratives into opportunities for deep redemptive meaning, character transformation and radical changes in direction… that in him there are no loose ends or forgotten sub-plots.

God is STRONG

*This is a more commonly discussed characteristic of God – but how might it help us pray for others with more confidence?*

- Spend some time thinking about the strength of God represented in any Bible stories you know – how did God’s strength and power help those in need?
- Do you feel you can depend on God being strong when you or others are weak or vulnerable?
- Using these stories and reflections, jot down how praying to a strong God helps you intercede for difficult, protracted or dark situations.
- Now, with these reflections in mind, bring the situations concerning you today to God, asking him to show you how his strength brings hope in each one.

God is a WING OVERSHADOWING US

*This picture of God is used numerous times in scripture, most especially in the Psalms. Look up 36:7, 57:1, 63:7 and 91:4 to get a sense of the strength of protection and comfort conveyed through this image.*

- Draw a simple wing:
  - on it, write out all the things that you are grateful that God offers you in the safe place under his wings… things like hope, comfort, joy, perspective, healing…
  - by contrast, write around the outside – or above it – everything that you feel you need protection or rescue from today.
- Now, using a fresh wing drawing, or simply adding another arc of words and phrases alongside those reflecting on your own concerns, write down the people, places or situations you want to consciously speak – and remember – God’s ‘wing’ is overshadowing too.