



Meeting God in a Valley

sunday 22 august

connect group resource

How to use this resource

These notes support the message shared each Sunday morning. There are four sections with thoughts and ideas for connect group leaders. Use the bits that best suit your group rather than try to cover all parts of this resource.

Each week there is a one page resource on the [church website](#) for individuals to use for their personal reflection or in discussion with family or friends.

In Palestine, where rain falls only at a certain time of year, the landscape is cut by many narrow valleys and stream-beds, wet only in the rainy season. Often water may be found below ground in such places during the dry months (Genesis 26:17, 19). Rivers which flow all the time pass through wider valleys and plains or cut narrow gorges through the rock. Valleys also served as places for battle in the Old Testament. Keep this imagery and symbolism in mind.

Valleys in the Bible are usually place names but then there are times where the title is used metaphorically (like a symbol for something else). Often when used like this they summon images of hard trials and places no one wants to venture, but if they are in a valley they want to get out of it before they are overwhelmed and give up. As with any experience and test in life they also become amazing places for God to teach us, to change us and to make us stronger. It is in this context we look at valleys for this week's part in the series.



IN THE BIBLE

There are several valleys mentioned in the Bible which have a metaphorical meaning and the one Christians and a lot of non-Christians alike know is the Valley of the Shadow of Death from **Psalms 23**. This powerful psalm has comforted millions for three thousand years. The photo here is said to be of the actual valley in Israel called the Valley of the Shadow of Death – it is said that sunlight only reaches the bottom when the sun is directly above the valley floor at mid-day. The picture seems to capture this so it was aptly named.



Take time in the group to study this well known psalm. The following are some ideas for how you might approach this option.

- Using an [online Bible service](#) read the passage in different versions
- Take each section of the psalm and allocate a part to about three people to read, wait a couple of minutes upon the Holy Spirit to show you insight on the verse/s, then compare insights for sharing with the whole group later on. Suggested sections: 1-3; 4; 5-6.
- Invite each person to think about and key words of the psalm, give them time to hear from the Holy Spirit and write down some thoughts before sharing. Suggested words: shepherd, green pastures & still waters, He leads, valley, shadow, rod & staff, prepare a table, cup runs over, dwell in the house.

- Consider these cross-references by allocating them to individuals to reflect upon and give short feedback to the group: Psalm 5:8, 31:3, 34:9, 34:10, 92:10, 118:6, 138:7, 139:10, 143:10, 84:11, 65:11-13; 73:24; Philippians 4:9; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; Revelation 7:16-17; Luke 7:46; John 10:9 & 11.

This is a psalm not just to be read at funerals or in times of trial. It has hidden treasure for all times. Close by using this psalm and insight from the group to create a prayer for the group by turning the words into declarations of truth. You might want to write it out something like this example:

Jesus you lead me through all stages and experiences in my life.

You make sure I have what I need for life:

good food, a place to live, restful sleep, work to do, a church of believers.

When I'm discouraged or distracted or wary,

you will make me feel washed, dressed in clean clothes and wide awake for the day.

You train me up to bring glory to your Name and to the Father.

I trust you to get me safely through dark times when fear, failure, illness and death threaten me.

Your promises, your nature, your power protects me so I can never be taken from You.

The enemies of doubt, fear, unworthiness and traps of temptations from our enemy fail.

When I praise and worship You they lose their power to harm me.

Thank You for your body and blood Jesus – I remember your victory as I take communion with You.

Holy Spirit wash over me at these times and anoint me with Your presence.

Give me so much that I have plenty to give away to other people.

God, You show mercy, grace and love to me every day of my life.

I will live with you forever when it is time to meet You in Heaven.

Jesus I love You.



SPIRITUAL GROWTH

In the first part of this series we looked at meeting God in a cave and in this part we look at meeting God in a valley. At first glance these can seem to be the same, but they are not. Caves are places of refuge where we might go to hide from life, troubles and enemies or they can be where we might go to get alone with God and have a powerful encounter with Him. Valleys are usually places where we involuntarily find ourselves and our greatest desire is to escape them and get back up on the mountain top, or at least the top of the hills creating the valley. We want to be in the light and warmth of the sun able to see far into the distance. We want to be free of fear, pain, loneliness and shadows of all sorts.

If we accept that most Christians will encounter at least one major valley in their life and perhaps several, **ask the group - what should we do? Ask them what are all the options available?** The responses should be interesting because those who easily pass through valleys or who have not encountered the hardest types of valleys will see them differently to those who have come through a hard one or compared to anyone currently in a hard valley. Value all the feedback.

Pick a person or two who has successfully negotiated a deep valley and look for the lessons which others can apply. Look for how they grew through the experience in the valley. You might not have someone who can share like this but if you do it will be powerful to stop and listen. One question you might ask at the end of their sharing is 'what do you wish you knew before you entered the valley or what do you wish you had done to prepare before your journey reached the valley.'

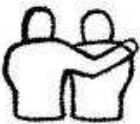
Ask each person to take several minutes to reflect in silence about how prepared they are for passing through a future valley. It is always wise to stop and review our strength before a battle arises. Read **Luke 14:25-35** especially versus 28 & 31. Now this is a challenging passage and easy to be misinterpreted so prepare beforehand to gain an understanding of the principle Jesus is teaching about putting Him before others (He doesn't want us to hate our parents – it is a comparison He draws). As people sit and reflect suggest they have paper and a pen to write down thoughts. You might want to play suitable background music or you might wish to ask some of these questions every so often to stimulate the reflection. Invite

the Holy Spirit to come and search everyone's heart and show them the things God the Father wants them to examine.

- *What is the picture I have of God when everything is going well in life?*
- *How do I relate to Him in the good times?*
- *Do I think that if everything is going well I am doing the right thing and He is happy with me?*
- *If things are getting hard and stuff is going wrong do I think He is unhappy with me and punishing me and loves me less?*
- *Do I think God will abandon me?*
- *Do I believe in my heart that He will never leave me even when everything is overwhelming and the way out seems impossible or out of reach? Even when I struggle to find Him when I'm in a valley?*
- *Do I fear the pain and struggle of the valleys in life?*
- *Do I ever encounter valleys and come through them without learning anything or changing anything?*
- *Is it possible to be going through a valley and yet feel like you are on the top of the hills? Is this possible or should I always feel burdened and bad because I am in a valley?*

In the natural, if we were explorers or soldiers penetrating a dangerous land full of valleys, rivers, enemies, shadows and desert regions we would try and find an honest and trusted guide if any were available. We would put our lives into the guide's hands trusting them to find water and food when needed, to keep us away from enemies too powerful for us and to take us through safe crossings. You might have seen movies or TV programmes like this with people on dangerous rope and wood bridges or trekking through jungle, crossing rivers etc. Livingstone, the missionary explorer, did this in the 1800s. **Finish with this reflection and then a time of prayer for each other:** God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are all ready to be our personal guide through our spiritual, emotional and physical valleys and mountain-top experiences. Our part is to learn to hear them speaking to us in any situation ([John 10:1-6](#)); to prepare ourselves before we encounter valleys ([2 Timothy 2:15](#) & [1 Peter 1:13](#)); to become increasingly righteous in all parts of our life ([Galatians 5:22-26](#)) and to learn to trust God ([Proverbs 3:5](#)).

Sometimes in a valley God will look like a person who comes alongside and guides us to safety. One of our jobs after being in a valley is to help others to safety so that we also become His hands and feet to another believer or soon-to-be believer.



CARING & SHARING

If you have people in your group going through a Valley of the Shadow of Death experience now then this can be an opportunity to minister to them. Life is a mixture of pain and pleasure, of victory and defeat, of success and failure, of mountain tops and valleys. Our valleys will be different but they have some common aspects. **Ask the group what is common to most valley experiences we encounter.**

On Sunday we heard that valley experiences will happen to everyone, often arriving when we don't expect them, but they do end and they change us so that we grow as a result of them. Something common at these times is the attack of fear. It is said that the Valley David wrote about was a dangerous place with caves in the rock walls for animals to hide and attack the sheep. The photo shows an example of such a journey for sheep. They had to rely upon the shepherd to guide and protect them.



Sometimes the threat could come from robbers and murders to attack someone on a journey through the valley. Sounds like life for us with Satan being the thief, destroyer and liar. Maybe Jesus got the inspiration for His parable from actual accounts in such a valley - [Luke 10:29-37](#). Actually His instruction in the last verse is an instruction to us in Connect Groups helping one another.

Let's just focus upon the shadow of fear. What is the opposite of love? Some will say hate but it is actually fear. We often hate what we fear. Perfect love casts out fear – [1 John 4:18](#). **Ask the group to share their thoughts about how love will overcome the terror of the Valley of Shadow of Death** – other examples of valleys with metaphorical meaning are 'weeping' and 'trouble'. Look for answers which show how we gain this love protection. Look at the In the Bible section of this resource for some ideas.

Invite people to think of a painful valley experience and to briefly share about it if they wish. Ask them if they are worried and concerned about this experience being repeated. It is common for us to be attacked with the shadow (a threat) of it happening all over again. For example, someone who has gone through a time of burn-out when they were physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually unable to function as normal will probably feel the threat of it returning all over again if similar early signs or feelings arise. Or it might be from the premature death of a loved one or the failure of a close relationship such as a deep friendship or marriage.

This is a time to name the fear and then as the leader to lead prayer for the release of the love of God the Father over the person and circumstance. It will take pastoral skill to guide the group through a time of personal ministry for people. This can be very powerful so allow time to pray and prepare yourself beforehand. Some people might require more help than you can provide at the meeting. The help might be practical support or counselling or a ministry like [Cleansing Stream](#) which starts this week in each campus (24th in the City; 25th in East; 26th in the South). We strongly recommend the Cleansing Stream course and ministry time available at the weekend retreat.



REACHING OTHERS

In the Caring & Sharing section we mentioned the story Jesus told about a traveller being attacked and then who helped the injured person. We know the story as the Parable of the Good Samaritan – [Luke 10:29-37](#). Here was a man attacked in a valley he was passing through it. A truth from this story is that the person not expected to help was the one who did end up helping and generously at that. In a world where Christians are not known for their outrageous love for one another let alone non-Christians we can be like the Good Samaritan. Sadly this picture of Christians can be so true when we see parts of the Body criticise each other in the media and internet or when graceless Christians call judgement upon others in society just like James & John (the disciple of love) wanting to kill an entire Samaritan village for Jesus (they were still in training) - [Luke 9:51-56](#). Oh look, it comes just before the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Interesting.

So here is an idea to try. Live your life expecting each day to be the answer to someone else's need. You are their miracle answer to a prayer, hope, or a wishful thought. Here is how in just a few lines.

Expect God to give you a nudge to do something or say something to someone you meet each day. Usually it comes as a thought that just appears in your mind and is easily ignored.

Expect Him to give you the idea what to say and do – you might need to give some money, or to lead them to forgive someone or you might speak hope and dreams into their life. You'll show compassion, love, grace instead of judgement, pity and apathy.

You'll probably find the process looks like this:

1. You identify the person who the Holy Spirit guides you to speak with
2. You will talk with them and isolate the need - the Holy Spirit will give you a word of knowledge
3. You will open your heart to their circumstance – accept the person
4. You deliver the miracle (an answer to their prayer or hope) – faith takes over at this stage
5. You then help the person to give credit to Jesus

In just a few minutes you can have amazing impact for showing Jesus as He actually is. This happens all the time for people like Bruce Wilkinson so he wrote a book called [You Were Born for This](#). If this form of personal faith & love sharing appeals to you buy the [book](#) and checkout [Videos](#) on his [website](#).