

A hand holding a magnifying glass over a landscape. The magnifying glass is held in the foreground, and the lens is focused on a dirt path that leads through a field of tall grass and crops towards a distant mountain range under a soft, hazy sky. The background behind the hand is a blurred, light-colored surface.

***Slow Down***  
***Songs of Lent***



I wait for the Lord,  
my whole being waits,  
and in his word I put my hope.

I wait for the Lord  
more than watchmen  
wait for the morning,  
more than watchmen  
wait for the morning.

- Psalm 130:5-6 -





# ***Lent 2023***

## ***Slow Down: Songs of Lent***

As you drive around, you may have come across one of those road signs that flash at you if you're going too fast. Some of them will tell you your speed, some will flash big red faces at you, others will simply tell you: 'Slow down'.

Lent is a time to slow down, to repent of our sins, and to prepare our hearts and minds for Easter. Easter is an explosion of emotions: worry, sadness, happiness, and hope. Lent is a time of slowing down and preparing our hearts for the most joyful time in our Christian calendar.

This year we've chosen to focus on the Psalms in our preaching and in this devotional booklet. We read psalms regularly in church, but we don't often spend enough time diving into their beauty and the themes they cover.

Jesus knew the Psalms. His parents would have taught him these verses from birth. He would have grown up singing them in the synagogue and the Temple. He would have recited them walking from place to place. Jesus quotes from the Psalms over sixteen times in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Over the next 40 days we're going to slow down together and work through these beautiful psalms which have given people hope and comfort for thousands of years. In this booklet, you'll find a section for each week of Lent. There is a 'Think' devotional and then some 'Chat' questions which you can look at by yourself or with others. Finally, there is a challenge in the 'Do' section, designed to help stretch your spirit.

We hope this booklet helps you slow down, read the Psalms, and make the most of Lent. God bless you as you read through the Slow Down songs of the Bible.

*Rev'd David Browne*  
*Dalby Anglican*



Read: Psalm 32

**Think:** What is your natural reaction when you do something wrong? It is to confess your wrongdoing? Or is it to hide it away? In this psalm, David tells us in v.3 that his initial reaction was to hide it away. He states that he had sinned, and kept it silent. But what was the outcome of David's silence? He says that during the period of time that he tried to hide his sin from God, it ate him up inside. David writes, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away... My strength was sapped as in the heat of summer."

But in v.5 there is a change in the story. David did something unnatural to humankind. He did something courageous! He confessed his sin to God. He laid himself bare before God and seemingly asked for forgiveness. Wow - what a brave thing to do! How would God respond? Would God scold him for not coming forward sooner? Would God tell him to go away? Would God tell him to come back after he'd cleaned up his act? No... David writes in the same sentence, that he confessed and God forgave. It's like God forgave David in the same breath that David confessed his sin. Therefore in v.11, David shouts for joy! He has found freedom in his confession.

**Chat:** Do you find it hard/awkward/easy to confess your sin to God? Why? Do your human relationships have an influence on how you perceive God's willingness to forgive? How can you build your relationship with God in a way that grows openness and trust?

**Do:** Take some time to write a prayer to God. Tell him honestly how you feel about confession. Ask God how he feels about his willingness to forgive. Confess anything you've been holding onto.







**Read:** Psalm 121

**Think:** Many of us turn to our phones it seems, for all kinds of help. We go to Facebook or other kinds of social media, we call or text to see what others are thinking or doing. And when we have exhausted all of these sources, we are left with our own thoughts, which can quickly become filled with doubt and anxiety, hopelessness and despair. And then we go back to the phone and the cycle repeats.

Psalm 121 begins with “I lift up my eyes to the hills.” To lift up our eyes means that we can’t have a downward gaze. When we’re looking down, we can’t see anything that is up. The exercise of lifting up our eyes is important. It is important to be aware of what is going on around us. It is important to see the beauty of God’s creation and the people in it. It is important to look around to see who needs help. So, let’s not keep our eyes down on the screen but lift them up, to the possibilities of glorifying God and helping others around us to see the glory of God.

**Chat:** What stands out to you in this psalm? What do you cling to and where do you look when you need help and comfort? How can this psalm encourage and strengthen you in your faith and worship of God?

**Do:** Spend some time this week having a cuppa at a café or the shops and don’t look at your phone or a book but look up. Look around, look at God’s creation, look at the people going by. Take note of what you see and as you do, think about how the Lord has helped you and how He calls or might be calling you to help others.



# ***Notes / Prayer points / etc.***

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## **Prayer**

Loving Lord God, author and perfecter of our faith. Help us to slow down and lift up our eyes to you. Thank you, Holy Spirit, that you are our helper and our guide. Help us to fix our hearts on you. Amen.



Read: Psalm 95

**Think:** Every Sunday morning I read Psalm 95 before I get ready for church. It's a funny psalm because it starts with a glorious worship party, but ends in a solemn warning. The first seven verses are a call to worship, and God is central to every line. We go from a place of singing and dancing in vv.1-2, to high mountain peaks in the middle of vv.3-5, and down to kneeling in a green pasture like lambs in vv.6-7. This first section is a reminder of God's goodness and how worthy He is of worship!

The final four verses, vv.8-11, bring us back down to earth. Meribah means quarrelling and Massah means testing. This part reminds us of a tragic episode where the Hebrew people, slaves freed from Egypt, get thirsty whilst en-route to the promised land. They quarrel with Moses and challenge the Lord's capacity to provide for them. The people get their water, but grumbling locks them out of the promised land for 40 years! Let this psalm draw you into worship but also slow down and be mindful of the toxic fallout of a grumbling heart. While grumbling tears down, worship lifts you and those around you up. Slow down and reflect. Don't harden your heart - sing for joy before the Lord!

**Chat:** What are your favourite hymns/worship songs? Read Exodus 17: what hurt the people most at Meribah? What hurt God most at Meribah? How can this serve as a caution for worshippers today?

**Do:** Spend five minutes today listening to worship music with your eyes closed. You might want to listen to old hymns or new gospel songs but slow down this week and listen with closed eyes. This will help you hear the lyrics and the melodies in a whole new way.

# ***Notes / Prayer points / etc.***

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## **Prayer**

Lord God, make our lives a song of praise to you! Thank you for your justice, mercy, and kindness. Forgive me when I harden my heart and choose worry and selfishness over worship and the freedom found in you. Help me to trust you in all circumstances and to worship you in Spirit and in truth. Amen!





**Read:** Psalm 23

**Think:** Psalm 23 is one of the most well-known chapters of the Bible. Psalm 23 doesn't shy away from the fact that you and I will face troubles in our lives, but the story doesn't stop there. Instead, David, the psalmist, again reminds us of the hope and rest we can have in the Lord.

We read of still waters and green pastures – these are peaceful images that make us pause. Like sheep led to water, the Lord leads us to rest. Here, David reminds us of a God who is in our corner, a God who is with us, a God who is for us!

This promise is something we see throughout the whole book of Psalms, but it is especially clear in v.4: “for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” We can hope in God's direction, in God's comfort. He is the good shepherd; God's staff guides us, and God's rod will protect us. Here we see a God who chases after us, a God who is with us in all the trials we face.

**Chat:** What stands out to you in this psalm? Is there an area of your life where you need God's guidance or comfort? In what ways is God trying to 'shepherd' your heart towards him in this Lent? How does this passage inspire hope in your heart?

**Do:** Find a moment this week to sit in God's creation and ask God where is he leading you. Is it to green pastures, beside still waters, or through the valley? If you're comfortable to do so, share this with a friend or your Bible study group and think about how they can pray and support you at this time.



# ***Notes / Prayer points / etc.***

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## **Prayer**

Loving Lord God, great shepherd of the sheep, thank you that you provide for us, guide us, and give us a hope and a future. Help us to follow your call and to trust you when we walk through life's dark valleys. Thank you for your guidance and for the promise that we will dwell in your house forever. Amen.



**Read:** Psalm 130

**Think:** Waiting... Waiting... Waiting... Aargh! Why can't I just have it now?!? The more I parent my two year old, the more I realise that I'm not so different to him. Learning how to wait is not just for children - it's for us adults too! In vv.1-2 the psalmist clearly proclaims, "I'm not in a good place." "Out of the depths" gives us the imagery of drowning and he cries out to God for help. He is pleading for mercy and praying that God would hear his voice.

Maybe you have found yourself in a place like this before? Waiting - but also drowning - praying for help... But then in v.5 the psalmist seems to be calmly waiting. He is hoping and expectantly waiting for deliverance just as a watchman waits for the morning. It almost feels peaceful... But what has changed? Have his circumstances changed? No, it seems not. The end of v.5 give us a great clue, because the psalmist is hoping in God's word. Maybe the psalmist is referring to the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) or maybe he is thinking of what the Prophets have spoken across the centuries.

Regardless, it seems that in vv.3-4 and vv.7-8, his hope is stemming from a deep knowledge of God's character. In God there is forgiveness, unfailing love, and plentiful redemption. Even though the psalmist remains in "the depths", he continues to wait and hope because he knows that God sees, knows, and loves him.

**Chat:** Can you relate to this psalm? Do you find it hard to wait for God? How does knowing God's nature and character help us to wait with him rather than for him? What else stands out to you in this psalm?

**Do:** There are many reasons to pray for God's love and redemption to come upon ourselves and the world. Take some time to pray for God's kingdom to come. As you do, ponder and focus on God's character.

# ***Notes / Prayer points / etc.***

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## Prayer

Lord, you have always given strength for the coming day; and though I am weak, today I believe. Lord, you have always given peace for the coming day; and though my heart is anxious, today I believe. Lord, you have always lightened this darkness of mine; and though the night is here, today I believe. Lord, you have always spoken when the time was ripe; and though you be silent now, today I believe.

*(An excerpt from Celtic Daily Prayer: The evening office)*





Read: Psalm 31:9-18

**Think:** Imagine kneeling down in the Garden of Gethsemane and praying Psalm 31. You're frightened and tired, your soul is drained and you know things are about to get worse. This psalm understands how you're feeling and knows what you're going through.

This is the power of the Psalms, they understand the full gambit of the emotional journey we go through as people. Psalm 31 understands our despair and suffering but it also takes us through the valley and out to the other side.

In v.14, the psalm changes tack from pouring out grievances to a covenant of trust. The psalmist commits themselves to God, knowing that in him there is justice and hope. This is one of the reasons why Jesus quotes this psalm as he takes his last breath on the cross. He quotes Psalm 31:5, saying: "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*". No doubt Jesus had the rest of the psalm in mind as he breathed his last. Jesus knew that his Father would not abandon him. This Easter, we can commit our spirits into God's hands knowing that in him there is justice, mercy, and hope beyond the grave.

**Chat:** What has been a really tough period in your life? How can Psalm 31 speak into the tough times in our lives? Read the whole of Psalm 31: what parts remind you of the story of Jesus' crucifixion? How can you share the goodness of this passage with someone going through a tough time?

**Do:** Make a cross. You might want to draw one or make a cross with sticks, wood, or palm leaves. See where your imagination takes you. Once you've made your cross, spend some time slowing down and giving thanks for what Christ did for you on the cross.







Come,  
let us sing for joy to the Lord;  
let us shout aloud  
to the Rock of our salvation.  
Let us come before him  
with thanksgiving and extol him  
with music and song.  
For the Lord is the great God,  
the great King above all gods.

- Psalm 95:1-3 -



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