



Benefice of
St Mary the Virgin, Higham Ferrers
with
St John the Baptist, Chelveston-cum-Caldecott



Connecting with God through our walks

Walking in the beautiful countryside is something we all like to do and is one of the things many of us have been finding a lifeline during the lockdown as well as being something we have time to do. As we walk it is good to stop and take in the beauty of God's creation, to reflect and give thanks. So here is something to help you as you take your daily exercise. There are a few words of scripture and some prompts to help us to connect with God through all our senses - in what we are what we are seeing, hearing and smelling as we walk. We hope you find them helpful.

With every blessing and our prayers for you all,

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Prayer stations

God revealed in creation prayer walk

These prayer stations are designed to be used outside – either individually or as a series to form a prayer walk – and aim to help people both connect with God through creation and use natural settings to stimulate prayer for others. They can be done in any order and/or with a selection chosen to fit your specific circumstances and surrounding natural environment. They can also be done on your own as a meditative reflection or corporately with the group pausing at pre-decided points on the walk to read each station and reflect/pray together.

Each station explains the type of natural setting that is ideal so you might want to plan a walk and then see which of the stations best fit particular stopping points along the way – or choose which stations you want to use and then find a walk to match. Each station needs a minimum of 3-5 minutes so that you can read out the scripture and the short reflection or question which follows (in blue), but they can take longer if you want to have extended periods of time to reflect and/or pray. Print off the relevant stations in advance so that you have them with you to read out.

If you're leading a group, don't forget to explain to people what you're doing, making sure that everyone is suitably dressed for the weather and also physically able to walk the distance and terrain.

[NB. We have also included photos beside each station to give you an idea of the ideal setting for each one – but if you're unable to get outside, you could also use the photos to help you do a virtual prayer walk! All of the photos are © Jill Andrews at the Sanctuary.]



Before you set off

Gather the group together and suggest that you're going to spend a few moments stilling yourselves and preparing your hearts and minds to see God revealed in creation today.

You might like to use a song about the majesty of God as Creator to help with this – or perhaps read out Psalm 8 or 19 to the group.

1. Christ at the centre

(anywhere at the start or early on in the walk)

Colossians 1:15-17 (NLT)

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him and for him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.

As you walk on from here, absorbing all the different aspects of creation around you, consider how Christ might be revealing himself to you today in what you see, hear, smell or touch?



2. The water of life

(beside water – a river, stream, lake or the sea – and ideally where there are trees at the water's edge)

Psalms 1:1-3 (NIV)

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers.

Look at how the trees flourish beside the water. Thank God for his living water and reflect on what this psalm prompts us to do to ensure that our lives are truly fruitful.



3. Cast your burdens

(beside water, ideally on a stony beach beside a river, lake or the sea – or if there's no beach beside the water, collect stones from elsewhere in advance so that you can just give out the stones when you reach this station)

Psalm 55:22 (NLT)

Give your burdens to the LORD, and he will take care of you. He will not permit the godly to slip and fall.

Pick up a stone – and then holding it tightly in your hand, think about what is burdening you today. Look at the water flowing beside you. Then when you're ready, throw your stone into the river below, knowing as you do so that the Lord has taken your burdens from you and is helping you stand firm, at rest in him.



4. The majesty of the Lord

(in woodland, ideally surrounded by tall mature trees)

Proverbs 30:4 (NLT)

Who but God goes up to heaven and comes back down? Who has gathered the wind in the hollow of his hand? Who wraps up the oceans in his cloak? Who has created the whole wide world?

Look up to the sky above you. See how tall the trees are, towering up, waving in the breeze. What do they tell you about the majesty of the Lord?



5. Oaks of righteousness

(ideally beside a large oak tree – but if not, any large tree or trees, either standing alone or in woodland)

Isaiah 61:1-3 (NIV)

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendour.

Look at the magnificence of this tree – created and sustained by God, and beautifully displaying his splendour. Consider what these verses say is required of us in order to become an “oak of righteousness”. Ask God to show you how might fulfil this passage more in your life, and through it, display his splendour to everyone you meet.



6. Choosing God's path

(at a crossroads or turning of paths or tracks – ideally at a point where there's an option to choose a narrower path rather than follow the main route)

Jeremiah 6:16 (NIV)

This is what the Lord says: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Look at the choice of paths here. Consider how the journey of faith is often described as requiring us to choose the narrow path, rather than the world's wide road. Ask God to challenge and inspire you to always choose his path.



7. The provision of God

(somewhere with wildflowers in view – perhaps a meadow, hedgerow, river bank or woodland)

Luke 12:22-32 (The Message)

Jesus said to his disciples. “Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest?”



Has anyone by fussing before the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? If fussing can’t even do that, why fuss at all? Walk into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They don’t fuss with their appearance—but have you ever seen colour and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. If God gives such attention to the wildflowers, most of them never even seen, don’t you think he’ll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you?

“What I’m trying to do here is get you to relax, not be so preoccupied with *getting* so you can respond to God’s *giving*. People who don’t know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep yourself in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Don’t be afraid of missing out. You’re my dearest friends! The Father wants to give you the very kingdom itself.”

Look at the bounty and beauty of the flowers that adorn the ground here. Do you trust God to provide for your every need?

8. Creation's song of praise

(anywhere rocky or stony – such as a beach, river bank, hillside or moorland)

Luke 19:37-40 (NIV)

When Jesus came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

What do you think Jesus meant by this response? Do you think that creation praises him too? Even today?



9. Lord of all

(a high place, such as a hilltop or even the roof or balcony of a building)

Psalms 24:1 (NIV)

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.

Look down at the houses, roads, fields, trees and people. Consider how incredible it is that God is Lord of all that you can see – and everything beyond the horizon too. Praise God for his constant creating and sustaining, and ask that he would help you to better care for his creation – including all who live in it.



10. God revealed

(anywhere outside, ideally towards the end of the walk)

Romans 1:20 (NLT)

For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

Paul tells us that people always have a chance to know God because he is constantly revealing himself in his creation – which we all witness daily wherever we are. Pray for friends, family, neighbours and people worldwide who haven't yet come to know God.



11. The groaning of creation

(anywhere outside, ideally towards the end of the walk when you've seen a number of different habitats already)

Romans 8:19-21 (NRSV)

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Like us, creation is subject to death and decay – but also to new birth in the midst of waiting for the full redemption of heaven coming finally and fully to earth. Many believe that God is calling us to help care for his creation as part of his eternal redemption plan – what do you think?



12. Where does my help come from?

(anywhere that you can see hills or mountains – and ideally towards the end of the walk)

Psalm 121 (NIV)

I lift up my eyes to the mountains – where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip – he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you – the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm – he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and for evermore.



Lift your eyes up to the hills, thanking the Creator God that he is your helper and your protector. Ask him to help you to always trust in him, and praise him that the hills give us a continual visual prompt of his majesty and mercy