

Guidelines for a weekly Bible study

There are many ways to organise and lead a Bible study, and the needs of every group of people who engage in Bible study will be different. What is offered here is therefore one example of what can be done using ROOTS resources. It is aimed at the non-specialist (i.e. it assumes no particular Bible knowledge or training) and/or a home group that may not have a formal leader. It should be adapted to suit local needs.

Preparing for Bible study

It is important to consider what those present want to get out of the time together. Adults learn best when they are 'in charge' of their own learning. So, don't assume you already know what is wanted; ask the members of the group. Use the insights gained to plan the session and choose from the many options available. Also, keep this principle in mind during a session. That is, allow people to ask the questions that are relevant to them, then use the resources to help answer those questions, rather than always using pre-prepared questions. At the end of the session, ask people what they liked and if there is anything that they would prefer to do differently next time.

A structure for Bible study

It is helpful to have a good structure – to know how you will begin, where (in broad terms) the journey will take you, and how it will end. Here is a suggested structure or shape for a Bible study lasting about an hour (excluding breaks, refreshments, etc.).

- Welcome, opening prayer [5 mins]
- Read the Bible text [10 mins]
- Explore and respond to it [30 mins]
- Pray together [10 mins]
- End the session; final prayer [5 mins]

It is no accident that this outline mirrors the order in which items are presented in the ROOTS resources, which in turn reflects the fundamental shape of all worship. Bible study is worship too!

Using ROOTS resources for Bible study

The next two pages show you where to find the various resources that are useful for Bible study. They include suggestions about how to use them, what questions you may need to consider, and what alternatives there are within the ROOTS Adult & All Age resources – the full content is available to subscribers on the [WEB](#).

Producing a handout

Bible study as described here does not need any handouts. But you may decide that you need one – e.g. a copy of the Bible notes, or a prayer to use during the week. The printable 'ROOTS at home' resources include the reading and Bible notes; everything else that may be required can be copied from the relevant section on the [WEB](#).

Exploring and responding

To understand the text, it is helpful to consider several contexts or layers. For example, in the four Gospels there are at least three contexts: the original events and the eyewitness accounts of them; the writing down of these accounts; and the collection and editing of them to form the Gospels as we have them now. Then there are layers of interpretation: e.g. how the Church has traditionally understood them; how we do so today; and how they relate to our own, very different, culture and context.

To untangle this complexity, we need to explore the Scriptures and respond to them – which we can do in many ways. But whichever method(s) are chosen, it will be most effective when what people are discussing resonates with their everyday lives as followers and disciples of Christ. Therefore, encourage group members to consider questions such as:

- What does this text mean to me?
- What I have learnt?
- How can I apply it (live out my faith)?
- What, specifically, can I do this week?

Bible reading(s) – this week's focus reading.

Overview – an introduction to the focus reading and the thinking behind the theme explored in this week's resources. The theme is summarised in a helpful single statement: 'This week we explore...'.
Bible notes – informed and up-to-date Bible notes written with the week's theme in mind, as well as contemporary resonance and relevance, and application in living out the Christian faith. They can be printed out for participants to take home.

Share the Word – each week there is a suggestion for presenting the focus reading. Sometimes this may need adapting for use in a small group. For example, a drama script could simply be read through. Alternatively, particularly if there are several voices in the reading, you could share the parts between different readers. Or you could read the passage more than once, but from different versions.

Opening prayer – every week here in the 'Gather' section is a *Call to worship* and *A gathering prayer*. Other prayers from the **Prayers** section may be appropriate too – e.g. *A prayer of approach* – or could be adapted to suit your context.

First impressions – some people will be helped by a visual stimulus. A carefully-chosen image is provided each week, with three questions designed to help you explore the week's themes.

21-27 February 2021

Beloved

Mark 1.9-15 Lent 1

In Mark's typical style, it is 'immediately' after Jesus' baptism that he is 'driven' into the wilderness. The baptism shows God's affirmation of Jesus as God's beloved Son. This is in stark contrast to the tough temptations Jesus then faces in the wilderness. But Mark, by placing them in this way, indicates that Jesus' baptism prepared him not only for his future ministry but also to endure the temptations.

This experience places knowing who he is before what he does. Thinking about our identity, both our own individuality and our identity as a child of God – knowing God, and that we are loved by God – may help us cope with our difficult 'wilderness' experiences, whatever their nature might be.

This week we explore being ready to face the wilderness of today's world.


Bible notes

RCL Lent 1 Year B

Genesis 9.8-17

This is the climax of the great sequence that begins with the creation of the world and ends, after the destruction of every living thing that was not in Noah's ark (7.23), with the renewal of God's relationship with the earth (8.13). The covenant God made with Noah, which imposed obligations on both sides (6.18), is now reaffirmed as everlasting, and extended to include all humanity and every creature. God's decision never again to destroy the earth (8.21-22) is revealed by the sign of the bow, which may represent the weapon hung up at the end of battle (see Lamentations 2.4; Habakkuk 3.9-11). But this monotheistic vision removes the conflict between deities that is found in otherwise similar ancient epics of creation and flood. The blessing of Noah and his sons, who are to 'be fruitful and multiply' (9.1), suggests that this first and universal covenant is nothing less than a new creation (see 1.28). These opening chapters of Scripture set the covenant with Abraham (15.7-21), and the history of the vulnerable people of Israel, in the context of all creation's relationship to the only God. Israel's calling extends beyond itself because of the covenant between God and the world.

Psalm 25.1-10

For Walter Brueggemann  Psalm 25 demonstrates the pattern of the whole psalter. It moves from Israel's unquestioning obedience to creation's ecstatic praise, but in between come suffering and hope. Inner anguish (vv.7,17-18) and external threat (vv.2-3) make

the psalmist question God's faithfulness. Although still willing to trust, he knows that all is not right. But prayer enables him to see the world's injustice and violence in the light of his past experience of God's 'steadfast love' (*hesed*, vv.7,10). He waits on the Lord in grateful confidence that the *hesed* of Israel's God will prevail.

1 Peter 3.18-22

1 Peter offers a Christian reflection on Jewish Scripture. Addressing 'the exiles of the Dispersion' (1.1), the author likens his Gentile Christian audience, living in Roman Asia Minor, to the Jews exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon, the name he gives to Rome (5.13). Here he sees his readers' baptism, being 'born anew' (1.23) 'so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness' (2.24), as prefigured by the salvation of Noah and his family 'through water' (v.20). Much more than washing away past sins, baptism marks a renewing of the mind, 'a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (1.3). This new creation is even greater than that following the flood, because it goes to the depths to deal with the disobedience that led to the flood (see Genesis 6.1-7). 1 Peter says that 'the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that... they might live in the spirit' (4.6; see Matthew 27.52-53). The inclusion of Christ's descent into hell in the Apostles' Creed is a powerful reminder of his capacity to meet us at our deadliest peril and in our deepest need.

Mark 1.9-15

In Mark we first meet Jesus at his baptism by John. Rising from the waters, Jesus sees the heavens opening, recalling the prophetic voice in the wilderness, 'O that you would tear open the heavens and

come down' (Isaiah 64.1). As 'a wind from God swept over the face of the waters' (Genesis 1.2), so Jesus rises from the deep to see the Spirit descending like a dove on him. Anointed as God's Son (Psalm 2.7), the beloved servant equipped with the Spirit (Isaiah 42.1), he perceives God's pleasure, echoing Genesis 1.31, 'God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good'. The scene also recalls the dove flying over the receding waters in Genesis 8.8-12, and 'the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature' from the first reading (Genesis 9.16). As God's creative wind swept over the waters and blew the clouds of the covenant with every creature, so Jesus is driven by the Spirit to test his calling, which like Israel's is for the sake of the whole world. Living with wild animals fulfils Isaiah's vision of creation renewed (Isaiah 11.6-9; 65.25), and the ministry of angels includes their singing the Creator's praise (Job 38.7). Jesus is ready to preach the good news of God's rule of God, 'the King of Israel, and his Redeemer' (Isaiah 44.6). In Galilee, with its mixed population of Jews and Gentiles, Jesus announces that now is the time to accept this rule, which calls for a change of heart and a deep commitment.

Hymns & songs

Songs in italics are suitable for all ages.


*All I am offer to you
All the room was hushed and still
Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
Beneath the cross of Jesus I find a place to stand
Breathe on me, breath of God
Breathe on me, Spirit of Jesus
Deliver, come set me free
For the beauty of the earth
From heaven you came, helpless babe
Here we are standing on the edge
Holy Spirit, rain down, rain down
How shall I sing that majesty
I am a new creation
In this place, with God's word
I will never be the same again
Jesus you are changing me
The Kingdom of God is justice and joy
To your majesty and your beauty I surrender
When I survey the wondrous cross
When sunlight breaks and the day has just begun*

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Beloved Mark 1.9-15 Lent 1

This week we explore being ready to face the wilderness of today's world.

All-age worship ideas These two pages offer an outline for worship, with choices at various points. Individual items can be used alone or as part of your own worship design. Bible notes, more prayers, and suggestions for hymns and songs, and sermon/talks, are on the previous two pages.  Resources on the reading to use with under 5s.

Gather

Use the activity and prayers to gather the group and introduce the theme.

What are you wearing?

- Invite people to think about the clothes they are wearing. Why did you choose those particular items? Are the clothes different from what you wear to go to other places? (You could ask for volunteers to come to the front and talk through their clothing choices.) Do we judge people – or make assumptions about them – based on what they are wearing? What do your clothes say about you?
- Today we are going to explore how Jesus discovered who he was, what God wanted him to be and how that helped him to face difficult challenges. And we will ask how that helps us to know who we are, and how we might face the challenges in our lives and be the person God calls us to be.

Call to worship

Come together to be God's people.
Come together and be yourselves.
Bring to God your joys and your struggles.
Bring to God your hopes and your fears.
Come together to be God's people,
and let us worship the living God.

A gathering prayer

Loving God, thank you for drawing us together to be your people.
Help us, as we meet together, to see ourselves as you see us.
Give us faith to hear your words of love beyond some of the hard realities of our lives.
May your Holy Spirit guide and inspire us to recognise your presence in all we do.
Amen.



First impressions

Questions for reflection

- What do you see when you look in the mirror?
- Who or what helps you to feel affirmed?
- What challenges you about your identity/who you are?

Share the Word

Genesis 9.8-17

You need a narrator; two actors to be God and Noah (optional: up to seven members of Noah's family); a large sheet of paper with 'Agreement' or 'Covenant' written on one side of it; colour marker pens. While the passage is read, God and Noah meet beside the paper. God adds these words to the paper: 'For Noah and all people and creatures in the future'. God looks at Noah as if checking this is alright; Noah nods keenly. Then God writes: 'I will not completely flood the earth again' – again, checking with Noah. Finally, God adds his stamp to the bottom of the document in the form of a rainbow (either drawn with the pens, or one made in advance on a piece of card which can be stuck on). Everyone shakes hands and hugs (or the 'socially distanced' equivalent). Optional: if you have the facilities, project – fade in – a large rainbow image, and leave it there for as long as possible.

Mark 1.9-15

This reading is very short. Before it is read, introduce it as a meditation. Invite people to shut their eyes and to imagine the river Jordan with John the Baptist standing in the water, baptizing people. What can they see? What can they hear? Smell? What does it feel like to be there (e.g. exciting, or worrying)? Read verses 9-11 slowly. After a brief silence, invite people to imagine a wild and desolate place – hot and desert-like. Again, ask people to imagine what they experience and what it feels like to be there (e.g. are there any wild animals?). Read verses 12-13. After a slightly longer silence, draw everyone slowly back 'into the room'. You could offer a short prayer, or use a known ending to the reading – e.g. Reader: For the word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Alternatively, or to help those who find it hard to imagine the scenes or don't like to shut their eyes, you could project images of the two scenes (do an internet search for 'John Baptist river Jordan Jesus').

Explore and respond


A sequence of active worship ideas; individual items can stand alone.

An interview

Exploring who we are by telling our story.

- In advance, arrange an interview with a member of the congregation.
- If possible, project or display a photograph of the person with the caption 'Who is this?' Ask them questions about their life that will elicit something of their past, as well as their present life.

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Spiritual styles (as defined by David Cisno) key: **Word**, **Emotion**, **Symbol**, **Action**. Find out more  in Worship and learning support.

Sermon ideas

Ideas for a sermon or interactive talk. See [WEB](#) for a 'thought for the week' to read out in place of a sermon; and *In touch*, linking the readings to the news.

● The literary critic Peter Brooks says any narrative with beginning, middle and end makes us think about the shape of our lives, asking 'Who am I? Jesus recognises he is God's Son, 'the Beloved', now living in the middle of the story that begins with creation and ends when God's rule is realised. We belong in this story, together looking for God's way of raising us from our depths, because we too are 'beloved'. Wretch 32, the 'rappers' rapper', says of his dysfunctional upbringing, 'You can join the chaos or you can narrate the chaos.' Despite his literary success, he chooses to remain with his disadvantaged community: 'If you move away that narrative doesn't change.'

● The Spirit drives the Father's beloved Son into the wilderness. There the Son

recognises a calling extending beyond himself, returning with good news for all. Lent is an opportunity for us to be driven into the wilderness perhaps by things we rely on to protect us from our fears and our hopes. The 'wild beasts' we fear might be able to direct us to more generous insights and exciting possibilities, for our own and others' flourishing. The 'angels' we often overlook might seek to renew our hope by recognising those who minister to us: perhaps an inspirational teacher we have almost forgotten, or a kind friend with whom we are losing touch.

● Reflecting on her 1987 masterpiece *Beloved*, the late Toni Morrison wrote about memory, as in recollecting and remembering, is reassembling the members of the body, making the population of the past. The novel's searing, as a mother recollects the death of the beloved daughter she killed to save her the fate she herself suffered as a

slave. But remembering brings chances for liberation, as those who were treated as 'objects of history' learn that they can be 'subjects within it'. This reassembling is a new creation, both new and old, as she messages the fugitive Sethe's shredded and swollen feet, "It's gonna hurt, now," said Amy. "Anything dead coming back to life hurts."

● A lot of people today live with identity crisis – either not knowing who we are, or not happy with who we are. At the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, two key events happen that help him be sure of who he is. In his baptism, he receives the assurance from God that he is loved and that he is God's Son. Jesus goes from this beautiful experience to be alone and tempted. Even here, God looks after him. When Jesus leaves the wilderness, he is so sure of who he is, he begins his ministry.

Prayers

More prayers overleaf. [WEB](#) Welsh translations. Topical intercessions [WEB](#) each Thursday.

A prayer of approach

To you, O Lord, we lift up our hearts, offering worship and praise. Show us your path. Teach us to follow. Guide us in your truth. For our hope is in you all day long. Amen.

A prayer of adoration

Loving, faithful God, your love is absolute, your promises irrevocable. We look up after a shower of rain, marvelling at the colourful beauty of your rainbow – a reminder of your promise and faithfulness to all generations. Wherever we happen to be – wilderness, mountain or valley bottom – your Holy Spirit is with us. We adore you, loving, faithful God. Amen.

A prayer of confession

Beloved Lord Jesus, you stepped from water to wilderness, from God's voice to the taunting voice of the enemy. In the wilderness of today's world, we face many enemies, many temptations. Forgive us for succumbing to selfishness, greed, lust, anger, power.

Lord most high, forgive us, we pray.

Sometimes difficult times follow fast on the heels of one another. And it's hard to keep our focus on you. Forgive us. Help us not to wallow in selfish self-centredness.

but to remember your promises and recognise you in those you bring alongside.

Lord most high, forgive us, we pray.

Forgive us when our minds fail to focus on you and your word. Help us to remember that no matter what we're going through, you've been there before us. Whether we're swimming in the warm waters of your love, or journeying through the arid wilderness, help us not to lose sight of your hand guiding us to eternal glory at rainbow's end.

Lord most high, forgive us, we pray. Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

Lord Jesus Christ, you went from water to wilderness to suffering on the cross. There you, beloved Son of God, died in your physical body for our sins. Through your blood we are washed clean of all our guilt. And we are able to enter the presence of God with whom you now sit, having been raised in the Spirit. All angels, power and authorities submit to you. Because of you, we are forgiven.

Praise be to Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

We thank you, faithful Lord, for your patience, provision and power; for your tenderness, trust and triumph; for your security and strength; for your compassion and wisdom. We thank you, Lord, that through your grace and mercy, the blessings of faith, and your covenant love, you equip, teach and guide us as we traverse today's world, ever mindful of your steadfast love. Amen.

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● Invite a second person to join you – someone who knows the interviewee well (again), arranged in advance. Ask them to tell a story that shows what kind of person the interviewee is, and/or what they like most about them.

● Invite everyone to contribute to an open discussion about what they have heard. What sort of things, in today's world, define who we are and how others see us? Which of those things say something about the 'real person' and their values or beliefs, and which do not? [WEB](#)

A pen and paper activity

Thinking about how God sees us.

● Give everyone a piece of paper with three concentric circles on it, and a pen. Invite them to write on the paper:

- in the outer ring: how they think other people see them.
- in the middle ring: what they think about themselves.
- in the inner circle: how they think God sees them.

● Invite people to share something encouraging or uplifting that they have written in the inner circle – what God thinks of them. Focus – from what people share, or the Gospel reading – on how we, like Jesus, are much-loved sons and daughters of God.

● Ask everyone to draw a heart enclosing the whole of their circle diagram, and to write on the paper: 'I am God's child' and 'God loves me'. [E S A](#)

A prayer for all ages together

Holy God, open our hearts and minds to know who you made us to be. Help us to live every day knowing that we are your children. Open our eyes to see not only others, but also ourselves, through the eyes of your love. Amen.

A small group discussion

Exploring wilderness experiences in our lives.

● This week's Gospel story shows us a time when Jesus' life wasn't easy (others might include when John the Baptist was killed, when Lazarus died, the Garden of Gethsemane). Sometimes, people feel deeply touched by God during difficult or dark times. Others may feel that God has abandoned them.

● NB this is a sensitive subject; it may be helpful to have someone on hand to provide one-to-one support, if required.

● Display an image of the sculpture, 'Hand of God' [WEB](#). Working in twos and threes, invite people to comment on this sculpture (emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers). How does it speak to them? Have they ever felt like the person in the sculpture? If so, can they look back and see that God was with them – or is that hard to do?

● Allow enough time for everyone to take part in the discussion, then invite the group members to pray with and for each other – either giving thanks for the way that God has brought them through hard times, or asking God's guidance in helping those who may still be in a difficult place. [WE](#)

A simple worship activity

A litany asking God to show us that we are loved.

Each of the five petitions focuses on an image that could be projected or displayed by someone walking slowly through the congregation. [W S A](#)

Holy God, you are good and great. (display an image of planet earth) You created the world and said that it was good – and that includes us.

Help us to see as you do.

See [WEB](#) for all five petitions. The sequence ends with: Holy God, forgive the times when we have not believed how much you love us. Help us to live every day knowing that, first and foremost, we are your children. Open our eyes to see not only others, but also ourselves, through the eyes of your love. Amen.

Go with God

Consider together what you have explored, what that means for each of you and how it might influence your daily lives.

● What, in today's worship, has helped you to know better who you are? How might you face the challenges in your lives, and be the person God calls you to be in all the places you will be this week?

● Give out pens and A4 sheets folded to make A6 passports (template on [WEB](#)).

● Invite people to fill in the places they will visit this week (work, school, shops, home etc.). Why will they go there? Who will be in each place? [E A](#)

A sending out prayer

Creator God, you made us in your image to be your people, wherever we go. This coming week, whatever we experience, wherever we find ourselves, help us to know that you are with us – guiding, revealing and sustaining – always. Amen.

Go with God 24/7

Encourage everyone to put their faith into action. Faith at home resources [WEB](#)

We all know people who are going through wilderness experiences or who have no confidence in who they are. Take one idea from today's worship that you have found helpful and share it with someone. [E A](#)

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In touch – is published every Thursday morning. It is a reflection on the reading in the light of news and current events, together with questions, prayers and ideas for action. It can help the group to make connections between their study and what is going on in the world around them.

Sermon ideas – each week ROOTS provides several ideas for preachers to use in preparing sermons and all-age talks; these can also be used to help you start a discussion about the Gospel reading. Choose an idea that speaks to the particular interests or concerns of your group. It may help to express the idea in your own words, and then to use any suggested questions as a way to get people talking.

Prayers – a range of prayers is offered each week. The sequence matches that used in many denominations. Any of the prayers could be used 'as is' or adapted to suit the local context.

More prayers and prayer activities are offered within the worship outline on the next two pages (see below), and up to date and topical **intercessions** are published on the website every Thursday morning, written just a day or two in advance.

Active worship – each week in the outline for worship section, several ideas, in a range of styles – including discussions, film clips, craft activities, prayers and prayer activities – are offered to help people make a personal response to the reading and the themes that are being explored. Many of these ideas are designed for, or can be adapted for use in, small groups.

These letters indicate **spiritual styles** or preferences. Spiritual styles help you plan a session so that everyone's needs, and the different ways in which people connect with God, are taken into account. Some people like 'doing' more than 'talking'! You can read more about spiritual styles on the [WEB](#) – see the link to spiritual styles in the 'Worship and learning support' menu online.

Go with God – a practical suggestion, related to the week's reading and themes, for living out your faith during the coming week. You could end your study time by spending a few moments discussing the suggestion, before saying together a final prayer. A 'ROOTS at home' sheet is also available online.

Copy and paste text and images from the ROOTS website.

All the text and images from the magazine are available to subscribers on the **WEB** to help you prepare Bible studies, worship and other activities.

For more details on the content of each section, see pages 2-3.

The screenshot shows the ROOTS website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like 'Subscribe/Renew', 'Login help', 'How to use this website', 'FAQs', 'Contact us', and 'My ROOTS'. Below this is a search bar and a 'LOG OUT' button. The main content area is titled 'Worship and learning resources for the whole Church' and includes a 'Welcome Martin' message. A navigation menu at the top lists 'About ROOTS', 'Subscription packages', 'Subscribe/Renew', 'Lectionary/Bible', 'Worship and learning support', and 'ROOTS community'. Below this, there are tabs for 'Week by week', 'Month by month', and 'Seasons and festivals'. The main content area displays the date '21 - 27 February 2021' and the theme 'Beloved'. It includes a 'Mark 1.9-15' section with a paragraph of text and a small image of a person in a room. Below this is a 'Ready-to-go service outline and complete sessions' section with a grid of buttons for 'All ages', 'Young people', 'Children', and 'Very young children'. The grid also includes buttons for 'Prepare', 'Gather', 'Share the Word', 'Explore and respond', and 'Go with God'. At the bottom, there's a 'Faith 24/7' section with buttons for 'ROOTS at home', 'Bible study', and 'Activity sheet'. Callout boxes point to various elements: 'Introduction and themes' points to the 'Beloved' title; 'First impressions image (see Gather for questions)' points to the image of the person in the room; 'Share the Word Ideas for reading the texts' points to the 'Share the Word' button; 'Explore and respond Sermon ideas Active worship ideas' points to the 'Explore and respond' button; 'Go with God – a practical suggestion for living out your faith during the coming week' points to the 'Go with God' button; 'The week in focus includes In touch, which looks at the week's reading and theme through the lens of current news, and up to date topical intercessions – published every Thursday morning' points to the 'The week in focus' button; 'Prayers and Bible notes' points to the 'Prayers' button; 'ROOTS at home – a specially-written selection of ideas, prayers and activities, in a printable form, to encourage everyone to read, pray, reflect and live their faith.' points to the 'ROOTS at home' button; and 'Bible Study – a carefully-chosen selection of the week's resources, drawn together and all ready to lead a weekly Bible Study.' points to the 'Bible study' button.

Introduction and themes

First impressions image
(see **Gather** for questions)

Share the Word
Ideas for reading the texts

Explore and respond
Sermon ideas
Active worship ideas

Go with God – a practical suggestion for living out your faith during the coming week

The week in focus includes **In touch**, which looks at the week's reading and theme through the lens of current news, and up to date topical intercessions – published every Thursday morning

Prayers
and
Bible notes

ROOTS at home – a specially-written selection of ideas, prayers and activities, in a printable form, to encourage everyone to read, pray, reflect and live their faith.

Bible Study – a carefully-chosen selection of the week's resources, drawn together and all ready to lead a weekly Bible Study.