

*The Valley of the Shadow, One More River and
The City of Gold*

SESSION NINE



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*Outline: The Valley of the Shadow,
One More River and The City of Gold*

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER FROM LAST TIME?

CONTINUE THE STORY

DRAMA: JUST ONE MORE RIVER

THIS ONE LAST RIVER

SONG: YOU'RE HOME

CELEBRATION AND TEA

WE HAVE TRAVELLED WITH CHRISTIAN A LONG TIME NOW....

IN THE GUIDEBOOK WE READ WORDS THAT JESUS SAYS TO US

MOST IMPORTANT TRUTH TO REMEMBER: Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

CLOSING PRAYER: GATHER US IN AND PERSONAL PRAYER

PREPARE BEFOREHAND:

Read Chapters 12 and 13 of the book and Session Nine notes.

Print off Drama and circulate to those taking part.

Print off Prayer Cards to circulate to each person at the appropriate time during the Session.

Artwork: Valley of the Shadow and the City of Gold.

(Decide how you want to use artwork and print it off as background or as a reminder of the session)

Suitable Songs: 'Come on and Celebrate' words and music to be found in Songs of Fellowship No 73.

'Journey's End' - words & music on **City of Gold CD**, track 17.

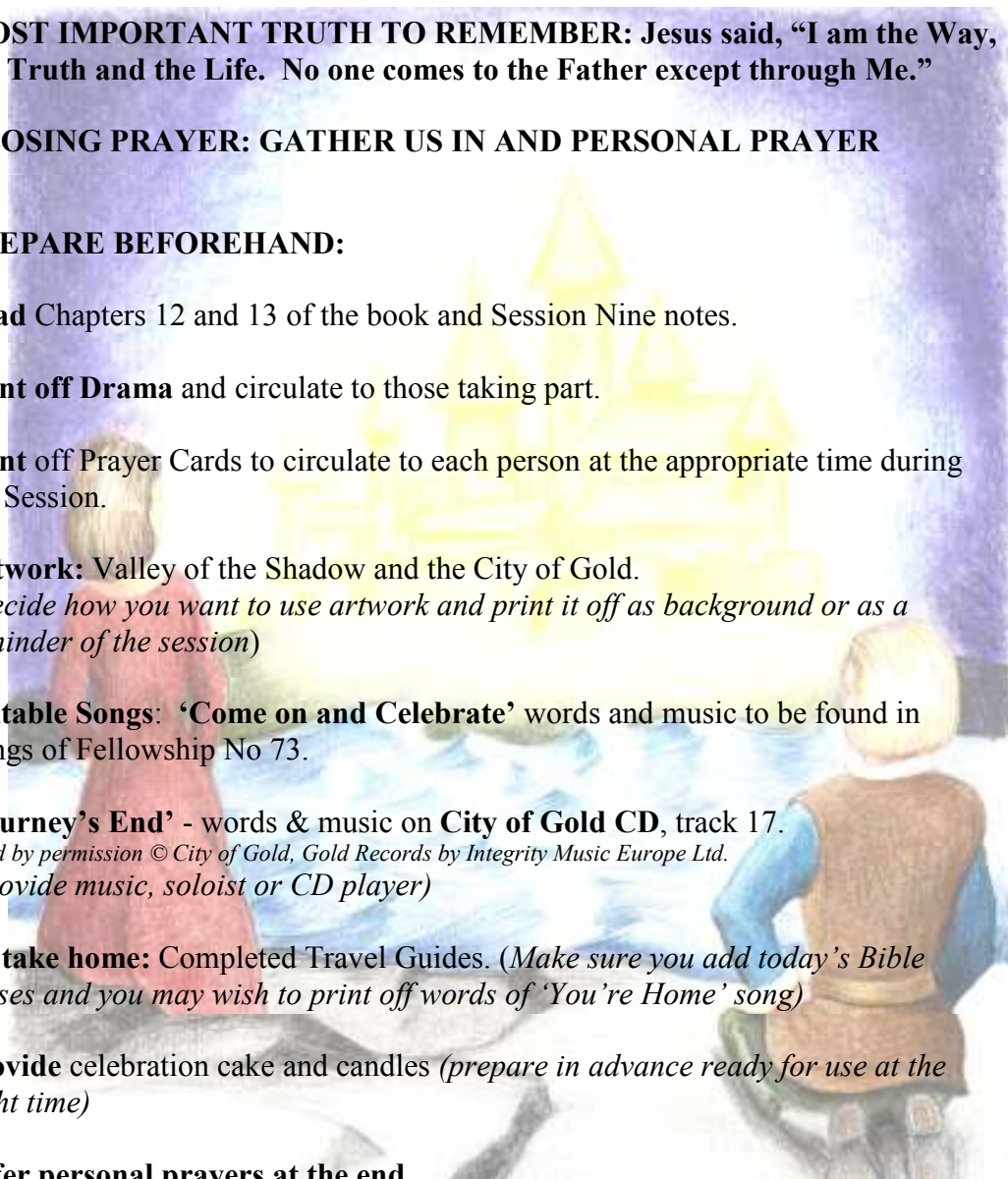
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(Provide music, soloist or CD player)

To take home: Completed Travel Guides. *(Make sure you add today's Bible verses and you may wish to print off words of 'You're Home' song)*

Provide celebration cake and candles *(prepare in advance ready for use at the right time)*

Offer personal prayers at the end



Session Nine The Valley of the Shadow, One More River and The City of Gold

(Use picture 'The Valley of the Shadow' to start the session)

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER FROM LAST TIME?

THE SHEPHERDS AND THE DOOR IN THE HILLSIDE:

The King's Champions, Mr Smug & Miss Stake

THE AMBUSH:

Where they were taken off the Straight and Narrow Way and caught in a net by a little Irish man called O'Flaherty, who pokes and prods them and insults them and leaves them hanging in mid air. Along comes Atheist who cuts them down, but also brings them down by his negative comments.

THE POPPY FIELDS:

Where they have to fight a great sleepiness. As they struggle on, they find Miss Stake lying on the grass and carry her to safety.

WE HAVE ALMOST REACHED THE END OF CHRISTIAN'S JOURNEY:

A journey full of challenges!

Challenges....that have rocked his confidence....challenged his faith....and caused him to doubt. Challenges that made him fearful and anxious....challenges that have brought with them....great temptations.

These challenges have resulted in Christian taking his eyes off the goal....and often taking his feet off the Straight and Narrow Way.

Not unlike your life and mine....you may say.

And that is exactly what Pilgrim's Progress is really about. It's a story about an ordinary man, Christian, who decides to leave the City of Destruction where he has been living and go on a journey which will take him to the City of Gold. His journey becomes a journey of faith.

We are all on a life journey and have many choices and many opportunities as we travel along. Just like Christian....we are likely to get some things wrong.

Today, we are almost at the end of Christian's journey....but he still has the most challenging part of the journey ahead.

CONTINUE THE STORY:

When Christian and Hopeful leave the Poppy Fields behind, they find themselves in a very pleasant land, the land of Beulah. It is here they experience the sweetest days of their pilgrimage and their happiness increases.

Time is passing....they notice signs of ageing in each other....but do not hurry out of the land of Beulah. They seem to have all the time in the world to dawdle on their way.

Then, one day, they look around and realise that everything has changed. Bare granite hills swell like tumours out of the ground, enclosing them in a fearful glen. They find themselves in the Valley of the Shadow, a place where they ponder their own death.

As well as a complete change of landscape, everything is different. From bright and beautiful to dark and gloomy - hard rock, cold winds, no sun, dark skies and the occasional flash of lightning. A very fearful place to be!

And this is exactly how Christian and Hopeful feel - very fearful.

What do they do? They pray....and the prayer is this:

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of The Lord for ever.”

And the prayer brings them through....brings them from the Valley of the Shadow....to rich, cultivated countryside; a colourful patchwork of fields seemingly stitched together. A fine mist is covering everything, the sort that hangs over the world before a full sunrise burns it away.

The whole picture....a huge contrast to what they had just come through

It brought with it a very real sense that even better things were in store....

(Drama)

DRAMA: JUST ONE MORE RIVER

(Use the Picture 'The River and the City of Gold')

Cast: Narrator, Christian, Hopeful and Voice/Farmer

Narrator:

Christian shakes his head....but the noise in his ears only grows louder....and he realises that he is listening to the sound of a rushing river.

Hopeful: *(tugging on his sleeve, pointing and gasping)*

There it is, Christian! There it is....the City....I can see the City! We've done it....we've arrived.

Narrator:

Almost directly in front of them....just a few miles away....the outline of the City of Gold is clearly visible.

Christian begins to run. Hopeful runs too, still clutching her friend's sleeve.

Christian:

We could be there in an hour or so....nothing can keep us from reaching it now....nothing!

Narrator:

The noise of rushing water grows louder....spray begins to wet their facesthe Straight and Narrow Way comes to an abrupt end....and they find themselves on the edge of the river....but there is no bridge....no visible way across.

Behind them a voice says:

Voice:

Cross over....the water is cold, but the prize is worth it!

Narrator:

The voice belongs to one of the white clothed farmers they had met earlier on in their journey....he seems surprised they should hesitate.

Christian:

Is the water very deep?

Farmer:

Here and there.

Hopeful:

Can we cross it on foot?

Farmer:

It's deeper in some places than others....it really depends on what faith you have in surviving. One way or another you have to try and cross - everyone does.

Narrator:

The river is deep and wide....tormented by currents and strong whirlpools. Hopeful sits down....dangles her feet in the water....and slips off the bank into the river. The water comes up to her neck. Christian....follows her....not so confidently....the cold water robbing him of his breath and he is hardly able to speak. He calls out....

Christian:

I'm drowning....I'm drowning....Save me!

Hopeful:

Don't panic....reach out to me....here....give me your hand! I'm on solid ground.

Christian:

Oh no....no....I'll drown....I'll drown....I know it!

I'd only drag you under....you cross over....leave me....I'm done for!

Hopeful:

Look yonder Christian! Look at the City! That's where we're going....soon we'll be there....just keep your eyes on the City.

Narrator:

He could see it....his unreachable goal....and just when he was about to go under....Hopeful wades over and rescues him.

Christian: (*gasping*)

You always had more faith than I did, Hopeful! Only *you* are meant to reach the City!

Hopeful:

This is only death, Christian....that's all. It comes to each of us. But it isn't the end for us....we're Pilgrims....we have further to go....we have to get to the City....we are expected....and the best is yet to be!

(End of drama)

THIS ONE LAST RIVER:

From what we have heard and read, the river....is very deep and wide....very powerful....and very frightening.

Let's think for a moment what it was like for Christian and Hopeful....as they stand on the edge of the river. They can see the City of Gold....but there is one last frightening river ahead....

Can you think of what may have been going through their minds?

(Use flipchart for comments)

What if I don't make it?

I don't know if I can do this

I can't swim

I can't see the bottom

What will happen to me?

Right from where Hopeful joins our story at Vanity Fair, it seems that she has much more faith and trust than Christian does. She is not frightened by what she has to face. She keeps her eyes on the City of Gold and confidently slips into the water. She finds her feet on solid ground!

Christian, on the other hand, is fearful, unsure, doubting and floundering....so, when he follows Hopeful and slips into the water, he doesn't find a reassuring bed of pebbles under his feet – only coiling manacles of weed which imprison his legs and overbalance him. He thinks he is drowning. He can see the City of Gold in all its glory, but he thinks it is not for him. He doubted in Doubting Castle, he listened to the words of Atheist and knew that Hopeful had more faith than he did.

What do you think this is trying to tell us?

Have faith and trust!

Christian still makes it to the City of Gold even though his faith wavers

He is welcomed and accepted because he has his Scroll – his name is in the Book of Life – his Passport to Heaven.

(Continue with the story....)

Christian wants to give up, but Hopeful won't let him and insists on helping him. Together, they finally make their way across the river, where angels are waiting to help them onto the shore.

So Christian makes it across with the help of Hopeful and, in spite of his doubts and fears, he is received and accepted.

Hopeful's hair was no longer grey, her face no longer lined. The river had washed away all signs of sorrow, hardship and age and Christian knew, for himself, that the river had washed away all pain, too.

It had taken all their clothing and ripped the Guidebooks out of their hands, but their Scrolls remained intact. A miracle in itself!

With their Scrolls intact, they all but ran the last few yards.

"Enter Pilgrims", said the guard, beaming.

SONG: 'Journey's End' (*City of Gold CD – Track 17*)
(Play this track or get someone to sing it)

At the gates of the Golden City, by the walls of precious stone,
 Stands a band of tired Pilgrims, weary from the road.
 They see a place so beautiful, they see a place so free.
 And with His arms wide open to embrace each one,
 They hear the Father's welcome as He says, "Well done!
 You are home, you are home."

Through the gates of the Golden City come the keepers of the faith,
 They're the ones whose hearts were humble, the ones who ran the race.
 They see His face so beautiful, shining like the sun.
 And with arms wide open, full of love and peace,
 They hear the Father's welcome, "Won't you come inside?
 You are home, you are home."

(Spoken):

Who knows from where we've come or what our stories are,
 from North or South, East or West, we all have travelled far.

(Sing):

So meet me at the finish line, it's where our story ends.
 With the Hosts of Heaven singing endless praise,
 Yours a crown of glory for eternal days.

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There was an air of celebration....and exultation....a sense of festival and
 fun....lots of fun. People dancing in the streets out of sheer joy....
 Christian and Hopeful join in....they couldn't help themselves.

They see Faithful coming to meet them with Christian's mother and father, who
 arrived some weeks before.

There is great rejoicing!

Have an unexpected celebration with tea and cakes at this point

*We used a Celebration Birthday cake covered in lighted candles and burst through
 the doors of the room where we were meeting bringing the cake right into the
 middle of our group and singing 'Come on and Celebrate, God's Gift of Life, let
 us Celebrate'.*

*We all had some tea and cake and at an appropriate time, when everyone had
 been served their refreshments, we continued)*

LEADER: WE HAVE TRAVELLED WITH CHRISTIAN FOR A LONG TIME NOW....

We have identified with him in his struggles....and....we rejoice with him today as he and Hopeful reach the City of Gold.

Christian's journey is now complete....he has reached his destination....the City of Gold.

John Bunyan finishes the Pilgrim's Progress by saying these words, "I could not describe what Christian saw when he came face to face with the King....nor what Hopeful felt when all her hopes were fulfilled.

My dream ends here....no one can dream the unimaginable.

I shall have to cross the river myself before I can say exactly what the City of Gold contains. I would not have chosen to wake, but I did.

I am awake now and it's time to get up and continue the journey. I am on a pilgrimage, too, you see. Everyone is!"

And there the story ends....

But we are still on our journey, Pilgrims in the John Bunyan sense, travelling a road, sometimes going on detours, sometimes struggling. This is the Christian journey.

I just want to tell you....that right now....the Lord Jesus is preparing a place for you in heaven when your journey ends.

He doesn't want anyone to go there unless they want to....we all have a choice....and a chance....to make the decision to go or not to go....just like Christian at the very beginning of our story.

We need to let Jesus know if we want to go and be with Him....and in faith receive from Him His gift of salvation and eternal life, trusting Him for all the other wonderful blessings that He has promised us.

IN THE GUIDEBOOK WE READ WORDS THAT JESUS SAYS TO US:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in Me. In My Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me."

John 14:1-3 NIV

"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

John 14:6 NIV

THE MOST IMPORTANT TRUTH TO REMEMBER: Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except by Him.

PRAYER:

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**GATHER US IN,
the lost and the lonely,
the broken and breaking,
the tired and the aching
who long for the nourishment
found at your feast.**

**GATHER US IN,
the done and the doubting,
the wishing and wondering,
the puzzled and pondering
who long for the company
found at your feast.**

**GATHER US IN,
the bright and the bustling,
the stirrers, the shakers,
the kind laughter makers
who long for the deeper joys
found at your feast.**

**GATHER US IN,
from corner or limelight,
from mansion or campsite,
from fears and obsession,
from tears and depression,
from untold excesses,
from treasured successes,
to meet and to eat,
to be given a seat,
be joined to the vine,
be offered new wine,
become like the least,
be found at your feast.**

GATHER US IN!

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(Distribute prayer of commitment cards at this point)

So, as we travel on our journey....with our Knapsacks filled with worries and cares....we come to the cross....and, just like Christian, we can leave our burdens here.

It's here....we can receive forgiveness from Jesus....and the promise of eternal life....simply by saying this prayer.

(Leader read from prayer card)

Dear Lord Jesus,

I am so sorry for all the things I have done wrong in my life. I ask You to forgive me. Thank You for dying on the cross for me to free me from all my burdens and cares. Please come into my life, fill me with Your Holy Spirit and help me as I journey with You, to the City of Gold.

Thank You, Lord Jesus.

Amen

SESSION NINE

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SESSION 9: THE CITY OF GOLD

Jesus himself says to us:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in Me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me.”

“I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”
John 14:1-3; 6,27 NIV

THE MOST IMPORTANT TRUTH TO REMEMBER:
Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.
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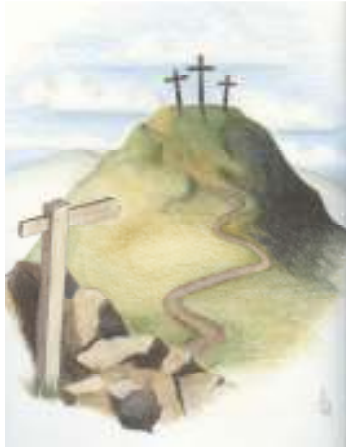
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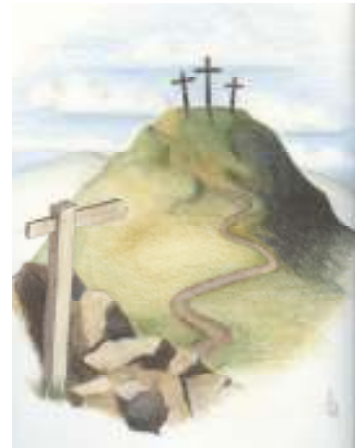
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DOUBLE SIDED PRAYER CARD FRONT: (3 Crosses x 4 with cutting lines and John 3:16)

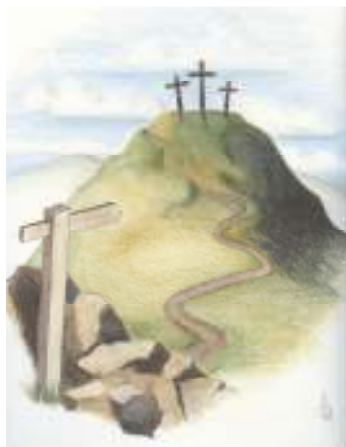
For God so loved the world
that He gave His one and only Son,
that whoever believes in Him
shall not perish
but have eternal life.
John 3:16 NIV



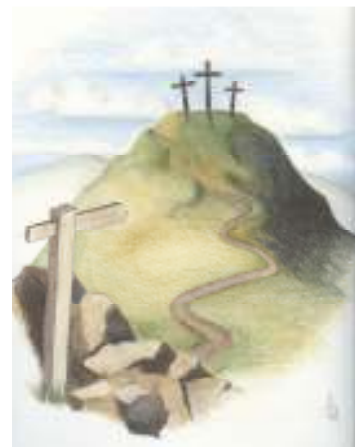
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Dear Lord Jesus,

I am so sorry for all the things I have done wrong in my life. I ask You to forgive me.

Thank You for dying on the cross for me to free me from my burdens and cares.

Please come into my life and fill me with Your Holy Spirit, and help me, as I journey with You to the City of Gold.

Thank You, Lord Jesus.

Amen.

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THE CITY OF GOLD

**At the gates of the Golden City,
by the walls of precious stone,
Stands a band of tired Pilgrims,
weary from the road.
They see a place so beautiful,
they see a place so free.
And with arms wide open
to embrace each one,
They hear the Father's welcome
as He says, "Well done."
"You are home, you are home."**

**Through the gates of the Golden City
come the keepers of the faith,
They're the ones whose hearts were humble,
the ones who ran the race.
They see His face so beautiful,
shining like the sun.
And with arms wide open,
full of love and peace,
They hear the Father's welcome,
"Won't you come inside?"
"You are home, you are home."**

**(Spoken)
So meet me at the finish line,
It's where our story ends.
With the Hosts of Heaven
singing endless praise,
Yours a crown of glory for eternal days.**

"You are Home, you are home."

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OTHER PICTURES



LOCK AND KEY

BIBLE AND SCROLL



Pilgrim's Progress

A PILGRIM'S PROGRESS PUBLICATION

MINISTRY FOR SENIORS

Mrs Elizabeth Stacey, 36 Plough Way, Winchester SO22 4PW Email: liz@winbap.org.uk or Telephone 01962 808783

I hope you have enjoyed using your Pilgrim's Progress Interactive Study Guide? I would love to receive some feedback from you so I have included this questionnaire in the hope that you may find some time to complete and return this to me.

Did you find the Study Guide easy to follow?

Did you find the ideas/questions, etc easily adaptable to the needs of your group?

What did you find the most helpful?

Were there any sessions you found more difficult to understand or apply?

Can you suggest any changes?

Are there other resources that would be useful to you in your ministry to Seniors?

Any other comments:

Name:

.....

Address:

Town.....Post Code:

Telephone Number(s)

Email:

Church:

Group:

If you would like to go on my mailing list for information about other resources for Seniors,

please tick this box.

☐

This resource is based on John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress and is particularly aimed at older people who have no church background or personal faith, although it is relevant for everyone.

John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress was first published in 1678 and has since been reprinted and updated many times. It has been translated into various languages and is well known throughout the world.

I used this material initially with a group of eighty and ninety year olds as an interactive study.

Over the weeks, as the participants journeyed with Christian, (the main character in the story) so their understanding of the Christian faith deepened, resulting in many individuals making a personal commitment to the Lord.

It was in telling others about this experience that I was asked to make this resource available for others to use. In it, you will find many ideas, suggestions, dramas, props and pictures; in fact, everything you will need to run a Pilgrim's Progress Group of your own.

There is a Copyright restriction, but permission is given to those who purchase the book to print up to ten copies of anything that is needed.

CDs are also available and can be ordered from liz@winbap.org.uk

