

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS:

A small group session for Lent 2010



**Thank you is more than a word.
It's a way of living.**

In Britain and Ireland we buy more than two million tonnes of clothes per year. It's so easy to see what's missing in our lives and to become centred around what we do not have, rather than what we have.

But when we focus on what we have, our view of the world is transformed. Truly seeing the blessings present in our lives prompts us to be thankful. With thankfulness comes worship, and with worship, a clearer view of God's gifts. Could thankfulness be the key to a worshipful life?

Lent is a time to say thank you. Thank you for the simple things; for food, health and education. Thank you for the riches of our relationships. Thank you for God's grace and the unconditional forgiveness of the cross. Thank you for life in all its fullness.

For this session you will need:

A Bible and enough copies of *Count Your Blessings* for every person attending (these can be downloaded at www.christianaid.org.uk/lent)

Readings: Encircling the throne

Ask a number of people in the group to read the following short passages:

Exodus 14:10-12 and 15:11-13

Exodus 16:1-8

Exodus 17:1-7

Revelation 5:6-14

Worship: Forever praising

Individually, think about the things you long for in your life at the moment. Now think about the blessings in your life. Ask God to show you how you can best live, holding these two in balance.

Together, consider singing 'Forever in my heart' by Matt Redman. Words and music can be downloaded at www.kingsway.co.uk

World: 'We are all family'



Read aloud Leandro's story:

'My boy was sick. I had to carry him to the health post, but no one was there... So I had to carry him back again and watch him die. He died and I couldn't do anything.'

Leandro Gutierrez has lost four of his 13 children. Eighty per cent of his family's diet is made up of potato. In Norte Potosí in Bolivia many children suffer the debilitating effects of malnutrition, harming their mental and physical development and putting their lives at risk. Leandro will do anything to protect the future of his remaining children, often endangering his own life by working in an unsafe mine nearby, in order to earn enough for their food and education.

But now Christian Aid partner CIPE is now supporting Leandro to build a greenhouse where he can grow vegetables to eat and sell. So far, 700 families like Leandro's have built greenhouses, and now many are supporting other families within their communities. Leandro is determined his whole village will see the benefit of the training he has received: 'We will all share the food we produce because we are all family in the community.'

Discussion: A life of worship

- **Look at Exodus 14:11-12.** Talk about the Israelites' immediate response to the challenges they faced. How is it similar to our own response to the things we lack?
- **Now read 16:2-3 and 17:3.** Why is it that as humans we are so quick to forget what we have? Are there times in your life when 'grumbling against God' (16:8), either knowingly or unknowingly, has become a way of life?
- **Return again to Exodus 16:3.** Can you remember the last time you were hungry or thirsty or feared for your life or the lives of your children? Unlike Leandro and the Israelites, we rarely lack life's basics – yet hunger for other things in our lives can make us blind to our blessings. How can we shift our focus so that we are able to enjoy what we have, while living lives that are fully awake to the injustices in our world?

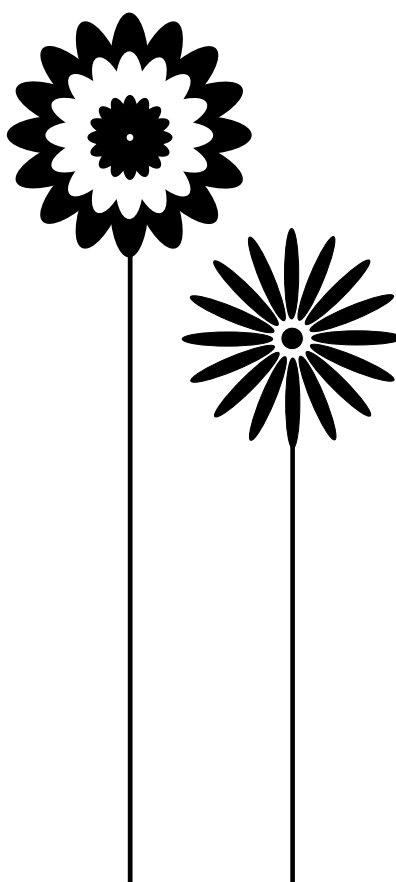
- **Re-read Exodus 15:11-13 and 16:6-7.** 'In the morning you will see the glory of the Lord': How does focusing on what we have transform us?
- **Look again at Revelation 5:8, 11-12 and 13.** As they look in wonder at the risen Christ, those present here can do nothing but worship him. Why is this?
- **Re-read verse 14.** When the elders look up, they bow down yet again in response to what they see. Looking at God's great gifts to us leads us to worship, which in turn helps us better see the riches in our lives. How can we learn to live lives of continual worship?

Response: Open-hearted

'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' Psalm 95:7-8

Individually, think about Leandro and others like him. Now contemplate the blessings you listed earlier. Ask God to help you live in prayerful awareness of the gap between the two.

Together, read aloud Psalm 95:6-9. Give out copies of *Count Your Blessings* and discuss how you will continue your journey of worship through Lent. Close by praying for all who suffer today as a result of injustice and inequality, and praise God as you focus on his gifts to you.



POVERTY