



# Week of prayer 2022 'Exploring new Ground'

We have written these notes for churches and individuals to use during the EBA week of prayer, 19-23 September. For each day, we are providing a theme, introduction, Bible reflection, questions for consideration and discussion, prayer points and a video link.

## Planning (Day 1)

Do you like a plan? Does a plan make you feel secure or hemmed in? Does your church talk in terms of 5 year vision plans or longer?

In whatever way you are wired, as human beings, we mostly need to have a sense of which direction we are heading. We have a church in our Association called Haddenham Baptist Church. When I first started as a Regional Minister, I was going to visit the people of Haddenham BC and so I put 'Haddenham into Google maps. The response I received told me that the journey would take me 2hrs 15mins. What!!! I know our association is big, but this seemed ridiculous for a trip to Cambridgeshire. Then I looked more closely and saw this was Haddenham BC in Buckinghamshire. You see the point I am drawing out, is that I had a vague idea in my head of what direction I was heading (Cambridgeshire) and why (to see a church in the EBA) but I didn't have the whole map planned out, so I knew that Google was wrong. So even without a firmly fixed plan, we usually have some idea of our direction and perhaps a little of why we may want to head that way. But is it an adventure to go exploring or is it travelling on very scary ground?

### **Bible reflection: Genesis 11.27-12.5**

Terah set out to go to Canaan with his family, a journey of approximately 1,300 miles. The exact reason for that journey is not recorded, but what we have recorded is that Terah stopped about halfway at Haran. Perhaps he stopped initially for a rest, a break. There were no real maps, certainly no sat nav, or signs to service stations of Premier Inns, a totally different form of travel to our experience. What is recorded in Gen11, is that he stopped and then settled, for 250 years, and he died there. What happened to the big travel plans then for a new life in Canaan?

By contrast, some years later, we have Abram setting out. We know he was 75 at this time, assuming perhaps he was a young man when he travelled with his father, perhaps this is around 50years later. Now we have an encounter with God and some very specific instruction:

*'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.'*

Here is a lot more of a plan, a road map and a reason to travel in verses 2&3. All we are told in vs 5, is that they arrived.

## Questions for Consideration & Discussion

1. When was there a time in your life or the life of your church when you had a real sense of God's vision and a plan of where to go?  
Was it ever fulfilled; did you stop for some reason?
  - a. How did that feel?
  - b. On reflection, why do you think that happened?
  - c. What would you like to see happen next?
  
2. Both Terah and Abram set out to explore new ground, what do you see as the major differences of their journey, their exploration and their reason for travel?
  - a. In the light of this, had Terah failed, was he wrong to travel at all?
  - b. In what way may God have used Terah's journey, his partial trip to Canaan?
  
3. How do you view Abram's decision to pack up his family and travel hundreds of miles in the light of verses 12:2-3
  - a. How does this make you feel?

### For Prayer:

Ask God for fresh vision and direction

Allow God to fill you with His courage, to explore new ground, even when there is no clear plan.

Embrace the Holy Spirit's healing for times when you may feel you have let God down in the past.

Thank God that He continues to work in and through us, even when we veer away from what we thought was his best plan.

**Video link:** <https://youtu.be/F4uWPhS3J-I>



Eastern  
Baptist  
Association

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## Preparing (Day 2)

Do you love packing? When it comes to packing, are you a 'planner with a list' or a 'just chuck it in and hope for the best' sort of person?

How do you know what to pack when travelling? Reflecting on our destination and where we will be living is the best thing to consider. Will we need clothes for a hot or cold climate, will we need adapters for our electrical devices, will there even be electricity?

Packing things, we will need is essential, but knowing what to leave behind is also important. While walking the west Highland way a few years ago, Tracey and I set out on the first day with very heavy backpacks. Thankfully we were staying with my parents that night which meant we could take things out and leave them behind, walking with lighter packs for the rest of the journey. The following year when we walked the Way again with our daughters, we made use of a luggage transfer service. We carried what we needed for each day and let a company transport the rest and this made the walk much easier. A 800g hammock may seem like an essential while walking along the shores of Loch Lomond with the abundance of trees but it is unnecessary weight when you are walking across Rannoch Moor.

*As we prepare to explore the new ground that God is leading us into, let's seek him about what we need to take with us and what we need to leave behind.*

### **Bible reflection: Mark 3.13-14**

Jesus called 12 disciples who were to be with him and sent out by him.

During their three years with him, they were prepared for service as they watched Jesus and then tried ministry alongside him before being sent out. I love the way that the gospel doesn't try to hide the humanity and failures of the disciples. Churches often want leaders who are perfect, but Jesus calls people who are a work in progress and he proceeds to shape them as a potter does with the clay.

Have you ever considered how different Jesus' approach to discipleship is from what we see in many churches?

- Most churches disciple primarily through services and activities, but Jesus disciplined through relationships.

- Jesus prepared disciples for life in contrast to some churches who are primarily equipping their members to serve in the life of the church.
- Jesus took risks and pushes his disciples out of their comfort zones. In many churches, people have to reach a certain standard before they can serve.
- Jesus made disciples who will be sent out, but in our churches being sent out is often regarded as a specialism
- Jesus made disciples who were ready to multiply and make more disciples but in many churches, the discipleship is done by a special few. If revival broke out, our current model wouldn't work, and we would be unable to disciple the new Christians.

*Is it time to look at the gospel afresh and to re-evaluate how we prepare and make disciples?*

### **Questions for Consideration & Discussion**

1. How are we making disciples who can then make disciples?
2. As we step into all that God has for us, what are the things that we need to take?
3. As we step into all that God has for us, what are the things we need to leave behind?

### **For Prayer:**

Ask that we would be open to God's leading and shaping as he prepares us for what is ahead.

Pray that we would become more focused on trying to be like Jesus.

Ask for more faith, that we would become more open to the faith based risk taking that is required in following Jesus.

Pray for a fresh perspective about discipleship as we rediscover the centrality of discipling people relationally.

**Video link:** <https://youtu.be/WYHtTWGZP5c>



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### **Perspective (Day 3)**

If you have ever been to a Disney theme park you have had a first-hand experience with an optical illusion called ‘forced perspective’. This is a tool that Disney and others use that makes an object appear farther away, closer, larger or smaller than the reality. One of the examples of this is Cinderella’s Castle. Using smaller bricks and smaller windows towards the top of the castle, it makes the castle look farther away and taller than it really is. Seeing things from Disney’s forced perspective, makes us see things in a different way.

It’s too easy to get wrapped up in the rhythms of daily life - work, family and social commitments, homes, to-do lists, and even time-consuming distractions, usually focused on earthly demands and pleasures. It can feel like a difficult tension sometimes, to get through each day with appropriate attention on God's priorities and perspective, rather from our own, skewed view of things.

#### **Bible reflection: Numbers 13**

God had delivered his people from Egypt that they might enter the Promised Land and enjoy the blessings prepared for them. Forty years later Moses reminded the new generation of the promise, but they began to walk by sight and not by faith.

They took their first step of doubt when they asked Moses to let them search out the land. Moses agreed and twelve spies were chosen to travel 500 miles during the forty days of their survey of Canaan. They found a rich land flowing with milk and honey and brought back a huge bunch of grapes to show those at home. They even visited Hebron where the patriarchs of Israel were buried but none of this encouraged the people to trust in God.

The survey of the land may have been a good idea from a conventional, military point of view but not from a spiritual point of view. God had already given them the land and had commanded them to go in and take it. He had promised them victory so all they had to do was trust and obey – they had to follow by faith and see things from God’s perspective. This is where they failed; they doubted God was able to keep his promises and given them the land.

#### **Questions for Consideration & Discussion**

1. What does it look like for us to have an eternal perspective as we go about daily life?
2. How can we focus on “things above,” as Paul encourages us to do in Colossians 3:2?
3. What habits or practices might help us redirect our attention to God’s promises?

**For Prayer:**

Pray that you would see things from God's perspective.

Ask that you would see people, each made in God's image, through God's eyes.

Pray for a fresh revealing of God's plans, purposes and promises for you, the church and the whole world.

**Video link:** <https://youtu.be/GwJbpdaL8yM>



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### **Perseverance (Day 4)**

Have you ever been to Clovelly in Devon? If you have you will, I am sure recall the very steep hill, which I read is a 20% incline, this is not for the fainthearted – literally. Many years ago when our daughter was about 5 we were on holiday in that area and visited Clovelly, a very pretty place, but of course we had to walk up the hill. Her brother was two, so he was carried part of the time, she was old enough to walk. This little girl, who was usually very compliant decided to sit down. She sat and flatly refused to walk another step, her only response was ‘no’. She was tired, it was too hard, it was not fair to make her do this etc etc etc. Somehow we overcame this, but to be honest I don’t recall how, but it does make me think of my attitude to my walk with God sometimes.

We start out full of hope, enthusiastic for the challenge and exploration ahead, strong in our faith and trust in God, but then something happens. Either there is strong opposition to what everyone had thought was God’s plan, or we become tired, distracted, unfocussed and figuratively speaking, we sit down and refuse to move another step.

Does that sound familiar to you?

### **Bible reflection: Nehemiah 4 & Philippians 3:12-14**

Here in Nehemiah chapter four we have the first major opposition to Nehemiah’s calling to rebuild the wall. Thus far Nehemiah has found favour with the King, protection for his journey to Jerusalem, the people have risen up and got behind his new task of rebuilding the wall, they are claiming new ground. In chapter three we read of people of all walks of life taking on a section of wall, bringing their skills and abilities, a wonderful team working together for the vision and plan that Nehemiah has birthed among them. Then in chapter 4 we start off with ridicule and plots being hatched by the enemy, taunting the people hard at work, mocking the Jews, saying ‘*What does this bunch of poor feeble Jews think they’re doing?*’ (vs2) and telling them the wall will collapse, it’s a useless plan, and so on.

Finally in vs 10 ‘*the workers are getting tired and there is so much rubble to be moved. We will never be able to build the wall by ourselves*’ The opposition and discouragement has worked and it risks derailing the whole project, then added to this, they hear of plots of attack in vs 11-12. So there are these four elements, ridicule, discouragement, tiredness and now fear. Nehemiah turns to God in prayer and he leads his people with confidence, getting his hands dirty too.

Consider the same things in different words from Paul in Philippians 3:12-14

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. <sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Paul knows who he is in Christ Jesus, Nehemiah knows his strength in God, both know what they are called to do and both hold firmly to that hope. Like a young child struggling to climb a hill, the option is to hold tight to the parent's hand for that parent will get the child to the summit, to achieve the goal for which they set out, Paul binds close to Jesus and Nehemiah close to Yahweh

### **Questions for Consideration & Discussion**

1. Why are ridicule and discouragement such good tools for the enemy to use against God's plans?
2. What happens when fear takes hold of a group?
3. What action does Nehemiah take to combat the downward spiral coming from both outside and inside?
4. When you face opposition or discouragement when trying to break new ground, what verses of scripture help you to hold tighter and persevere with Jesus?
5. In your Christian life what is the goal, the prize which keeps you moving forward?

### **For Prayer:**

Thank God for the excitement of entering new ground, a new project, a new way forward.

Ask God to be always able to see his vision and his way even when opposition and discouragement comes.

Are you weary and tired, finding it hard to persevere? Allow the Holy Spirit to fill you and lift you up, renewing your strength as if soaring on eagles wings.

**Video link:** <https://youtu.be/ekOn-B4JM9U>



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### **Partnership (Day 5)**

More than 400 years ago, a group of Christian believers met in a village in Lincolnshire and made a covenant together. They were facing persecution, imprisonment and even the prospect of death because they wanted to worship God freely in the way they believed God was calling them to. The members joined themselves by a covenant; to walk in all God’s ways, made know, or to be made know to them. This congregation left England shortly afterwards to seek freedom in Amsterdam and in time this group became the first Baptist church. Three years later Thomas Helwys led some of their members to return home and face oppression and hardship as they established the first Baptist church on English soil in 1612, namely Spitalfields, London.

As time went on, these Baptist groups of disciples were committed first to Jesus, but they were also really committed to each other; journeying through life together, praying with each other and seeking to help each other as best they could. They had a strong sense of belonging to each other within the community of the church. [1] [SEP]

Webster’s dictionary defines a partner as *“One that shares; one associated with another especially in action.”* Partnership occurs when two or more people come together in order to accomplish something that neither of them could do alone. The literal meaning indicates that each one has a specific part.

When partnership of vision takes place, something powerful happens. When people or groups of people partner together, it gives them the capability and the strength to do something that did not or could not exist before.

### **Bible reflection: Philippians 1: 1-11**

Paul was not a lone ranger. He consistently looked for partners in ministry. An example of Paul’s partnership philosophy came in his relationship to the church at Philippi. Paul planted this church at Philippi, the leading city of the district of Macedonia, on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:12) and this church ended up being strategic in reaching all of Macedonia with the gospel.

Acts 16 records the beginning of the church in Philippi, with evangelistic conversations at the riverside, and the conversion of Lydia, a slave girl, and the jailer.

Although we cannot be sure how long Paul was in Philippi himself, but whatever the length of time, it was enough to build a quality relationship with them that would last for the rest of his missionary career.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote: *“I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”* (Philippians 1:3–5)

Although Paul was forced out of town after he planted the church at Philippi, he still established a mutually encouraging relationship and partnership with them that lasted long after he departed.

Paul’s chief goal was to build a solid relationship with this church in Philippi because he recognized that they each could strengthen the other. Paul receives support from this church in a number of ways.

Paul, in return, sends this thank you letter - the book of Philippians as we have it today - to minister to the church, to help solve interpersonal conflicts in the assembly, and to encourage them to live contented lives in the midst of suffering.

Plus, Paul’s expressed desire to send Timothy (Philippians 2:19) shows that he was as interested in helping the church as he was in furthering their relationship together.

Paul and the church at Philippi’s partnership was a reciprocal relationship, mutually beneficial. They knew him and he knew them. Ministry, education, and resources were exchanged in both directions.

### **Questions for Consideration & Discussion**

1. Is there someone of whom you can say *“I thank God every time I think of you”*?
2. Why was God’s work in the Philippians so exciting to Paul?
3. Do we get excited about God’s work in each other? Why or why not?
4. Consider the church you are a part of. Would you say that you are in partnership for the gospel? Explain your reasons for your answer.
5. The EBA vision is *“Growing healthy churches in relationship for God’s mission in the East of England”*. What do you need to do to enable true relationship and partnership with others to happen?

### **For Prayer:**

Ask God to strengthen your relationship with other churches for God’s mission.

Using the words from verses 9-11, pray for those you are in partnership with.

*May your love and compassion continue to grow -  
a love that is full of knowledge and wise insight,  
so that you will be able to recognize what really matters,  
and live a pure and blameless life.*

*May you live a life centred in the Holy Spirit,  
a life that bears rich fruit –  
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,  
generosity, faithfulness, tolerance and self-control –  
all the good things that come from following the Spirit,  
for living this way will bring much glory and praise to God.*

#### **Video link:**

<https://youtu.be/GlgcsbqptQ>