

MY PANDEMIC EXPERIENCE

The pandemic has affected us all. This guide helps you to reflect on your experience of the pandemic. Maybe you can do this with your youth group. Or find some time on your own to think everything through. Use the questions and links below to explore what has been going on for you and talk to God about it all.

THANKSGIVING

What are you thankful for? Think about small daily things, such as food, music, friends, the smell of coffee, as well as bigger, wider things, such as frontline workers. Write or design a word cloud to express those things.

With people concerned about their mental health, it's becoming popular to keep a gratitude diary – writing down each day at least three things that you're grateful for. Even on the hardest days. The reports are that it proves very helpful. It's a great habit to get into. For Christians, thanksgiving is part of how they live. They believe that God is listening with delight as they give thanks for all the gifts he has given, just as a parent delights in watching a child enjoy food or toys or play or learning. 'Give thanks in all circumstances' (1 Thessalonians 5.8).

PRACTICES

Keep a written or phone gratitude list, diary or jar. Write down or draw your three things each day. You can start with the space here.

There have been so many things over the last year to be sad about. To lament is to describe all that sadness. We might talk about it, make a piece of art about it (without it mattering if we're any 'good' at painting, or drawing etc...). We might sing sad songs or make scrapbooks or photobooks to remember people by. We might need to cry or walk or exercise or light a candle in memory. Lament is an important thing Christians have always done. Jesus made a point of caring for people who were sad, or in trouble, ignored or despairing. Jesus said, 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28). They believe that he always listens to us, day or night, when people tell him their sadness, anger and lament. (As well as all the good stuff they may want to tell him about too.)

PRACTICES

- Read aloud Matthew 11:28 (above) or Psalm 42 and write, draw or speak your sadness to express all the lament.
- You might also want to write your own list or poem about how you feel and read that aloud too.

LAMENT

What are you missing, longing for? This may be people or things you have lost, hopes that have been dashed or longings for a better future.

LEARNING

What have you learned? What have you learned about your life, about what and who is important to you, about how you want to live your life well? What do you want to do differently as a result of the pandemic?

The Bible is full of people finding God helping them in the midst of the muddles and difficulties and challenges of life. Pain and suffering have always been part of life, and Christians, like everyone else, want to make sense of them. That's not always possible, but it can be possible to find God with us in the dark places of life. Jesus said 'I am the light of the world', and countless people around the world have found that to be true.

PRACTICES

- Write or draw or type several times a week about how things are going. Keep this private. It's just for you and God.
- Find someone you trust to talk through your experiences of the pandemic – good and bad. You need to find someone who will listen to you carefully.

PRAYER

Many people pray – people of all faiths and none. In a crisis we long to know that there is someone bigger than us who can help us, so we cry out, hoping there is a God who is loving and who is listening. Christians believe that praying is not just for emergencies. We believe that the whole of life is meant to be a conversation with God. Jesus lived like that and his friends wanted to learn to live like that too. So Jesus gave them what we call The Lord's Prayer (found in Matthew 6:9-13). If you've never prayed regularly before, it's a great starting place. You could read the prayer every day, thinking about each bit. And then ask God for help for other things and other people. You might also want to find out more about praying. Christians also find it helpful to pray with others, as well as alone. You could ask a Christian you know how to join in.

PRACTICES

- Set an alarm on your phone to go off at the same time each day. Pray the Lord's prayer at that time.
- Maybe find or buy a Bible, or download a Bible app. You can get the Bible online at biblegateway.com. You will find a modern translation of the Bible like the NIV, ESV or CEV version much easier to understand.

Write a list here of the things you want to pray about. People, places, and situations that worry you - local and global.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Take a look at beheadstrong.uk for great ideas on all things from well being to surviving lockdown.
- For advice on coping with COVID take a look at the blogs and ideas on the Young Minds website at youngminds.org.uk and search for Coronavirus.