

# Living Faith in Suffolk



## Living Word 2

## Images

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Living Word 2 is one of the Living Faith in Suffolk resources produced by the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich and available on [www.cofesuffolk.org](http://www.cofesuffolk.org)

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## Introduction

At one time the majority of people knew at least the gist of the Bible story. This is no longer the case; often the elements of the story that are known are remembered in isolation rather than as part of a big picture.

*Living Word 2 – the Big Story* is a Living Faith in Suffolk course for people who would like to gain an overview of the story contained in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Focusing on the nature of God as loving creator, it tells of God's desire for a loving relationship with his precious creation, and the lengths he goes to in order to make this possible, under the following headings:

- 'In the beginning God' (page 4)
- 'Adam, where are you?' (page 6)
- 'You will be my people' (page 8)
- 'I will forgive' (page 10)
- 'For God so loved the world' (page 12)
- 'I am coming soon' (page 14)

It is only one perspective on the biblical narrative – but it is one in which participants should find a framework for understanding their faith, and for giving context to the Bible passages they read or hear.

### **For facilitators:**

- Each session should last between 60 and 90 minutes overall including the settling down and welcome.
- The rooms used for the sessions need to be comfortable enough for people to be able to focus on what is going on and to be able to hear each other.
- A clear structure is given; this course is in a narrative style interspersed with discussion questions to enable participants to relate to each aspect of the story and to reflect on its relevance to them. Discussion may lead off at tangents and there is no need to be afraid of this so long as ample time is given to ensure that the entirety of each session is covered.
- Bible passages are referenced throughout; whether or not these are read will depend on the nature of the group as, for some, this will detract from the narrative while for others it will support it.

**Truth and myth** are often seen as incompatible. However, myths are stories that are designed to convey truth. The story itself may or may not be literally true, but the message it contains is truth.

**Within Christianity there is disagreement** about whether the creation myths are literally true. While some hold that they describe exactly how the world was created, others see their truth in the depiction of God's responsibility for, and relationship with, his creation. This then removes the incompatibility between the stories and the discoveries of modern science.

**Being made in the image of God** has connotations of humans as spiritual, moral, relational beings, a visible representation of the invisible God.

## Session 1. 'In the beginning God'

This session aims to introduce people to the Bible as a love story: God creating a world that gives him pleasure and people whom he loves and with whom he wants a loving relationship.

Welcome people and allow time for introductions: if there are people who do not know each other then perhaps use some kind of ice-breaker such as asking everyone to give their name and a piece of information about themselves. Introduce the course.

The opening verse of the Bible says 'In the beginning God...'. The 'Big Story' begins with God. Creation begins with God.

- What does this opening tell you about the role and importance of God in creation, and in this story?

The Bible doesn't tell us why God decides to make the earth. But God's nature is to be a creator, that is part of who he is; and so creating is something that he likes to do, something which pleases him. He takes pleasure in what he has made. Throughout Genesis 1, after each burst of creativity, come the words 'and God saw that it was good'.

- The word 'good' is used in the sense of being pleasing and desirable. How do you feel about the idea that all of creation was good? What examples can you give of the natural world being pleasing and desirable? To what extent does this still apply today? What are the challenges here for you?

There are two creation stories in the Bible. In the first, in Genesis 1:1-2:3, humankind is the last thing to be created. Having made a desirable, beautiful world, God makes people in his own image, reflections of who God is. He takes pride and pleasure in this creation; he blesses them and sees all that he has made as being very good - it is even more pleasing and desirable now that humans are in it. He makes them his representatives, to care for and maintain all that he has made.

- What does it mean to you that human beings have such a significant place in God's creation, knowing that he takes pride and pleasure in you? How might this challenge the way you see yourself, and the way you see others?

**The word that is often used** for how we are to care for creation is 'stewardship' - looking after something for someone else. Our role is to care for God's creation for God, to show his care on his behalf.

- In what ways might you live out your role as God's representatives?

In the second creation story, in Genesis 2:4-25, the man is made before the plants and animals. God breathes life into the man, creates a garden for the man to live in and care for, and creates companionship for the man because he is not designed to be alone. The creator God, who loves his creation, provides all that his creation needs.

In creating humans, God makes something that he can relate to and teach, something with whom he can share the beauty of the world, something with whom he can spend time; something that will reason, feel, and love him. Genesis 3 tells of God walking in the garden that he has created, looking for the humans (verses 8-9).

- What does this tell you about the kind of relationship that God wants with you?

From the outset humans have choice. In the beautiful garden, full of good food, is a tree which the humans are not allowed to use for food. Why make such a rule? Why make such a tree? The tree is a reminder that human life is lived within limitations and boundaries. In order to have choice, free will, there have to be options to choose between. God didn't create humans to be puppets; he created humans to have lots of choices, some of which he hoped they wouldn't choose - because he told them not to, and because of their love and respect for him. By choosing to love, the relationship between humans and God can be a joyful relationship with depth and meaning. Love that is commanded, that is not freely given, is not really love at all. But love makes you vulnerable, even when you are God. Out of love, God chose vulnerability, allowing us the freedom to choose whether or not to love him.

- How does the image of God as vulnerable challenge your understanding of God's nature?
- In what ways can this first part of the 'Big Story' be seen as a love story? How does this compare to your previous understanding of the story? What questions does it raise for you?

**Relationship with God** can be a difficult idea to grasp. How can it be possible to have a relationship with an invisible being? What does it mean to love God? How can we know that he really loves us, not just at the beginning of creation, but still now? As we travel through the 'Big Story' we will find some of the answers to these questions.

'Sin' encompasses anything which doesn't fit with God's purposes for his creation. The Bible is clear that we all do it (1 John 1:8).

**Humans are made free.** This means that we are able to make choices about our actions, attitudes and relationships. God instructs, but he does not force us to obey. We are free to disobey God, to hide from him, to reject him.

**Is there such thing as evil?** If so, where did it come from and why does God allow it? In order to be free, there need to be possibilities to choose between. A limited range of possibilities give a limited choice; in order to have free will a wider range of choice is necessary. This includes the possibility of choosing evil.

## Session 2. 'Adam, where are you?'

This session aims to help people reflect on what goes wrong in relationship with God.

Welcome people and introduce today's session. Ask whether people have any reflections on the material from last session, now that they have had time to think about it.

If the creation myths provide us with truths about the goodness of creation and God's desire for a loving relationship with humankind, the story of the 'Fall' shows us how it all goes wrong.

The man and the woman (also known as Adam and Eve) are living in the beautiful garden God has created for them, in relationship with God. In his vulnerable love God has given them one rule: not to eat from a certain tree. The snake engages the woman in conversation and questions this rule (Genesis 3:1-5). Twisting God's words, he suggests that they are not allowed to eat from any tree. He then goes on to tell her a half-truth: eating the fruit will enable her to become like God (who she loves and reveres) by knowing good and evil. He doesn't tell her what this transformation will do to her. God has told her that eating the fruit will result in death; the snake denies this and the humans at this stage have no understanding of what death is. The apparent clarification of God's words that the snake provides is, in fact, a subtle deception.

- Why is it that subtle temptation is so difficult to resist? What strategies did the snake use to deceive the woman? How is this mirrored in the ways in which you are tempted?
- How easy do you find it to talk yourself into giving in to temptation? What happens when you do this?

As soon as the fruit is eaten, the couple understand what they have done - this is the knowledge that the fruit has given them - and they are ashamed; they cover themselves and when God looks for them, they hide from God.

- In what ways does sin make you ashamed? Why does it lead you to hide from God?
- Why does it matter when people behave in a way contrary to God's purposes for them?

### **The idea of God punishing**

is sometimes seen as vindictive or vengeful. A better image, perhaps, is that of the loving parent who wants his children to understand the boundaries which will protect the relationship and each party in it, and allow the relationship to flourish.

### **Boundaries are necessary in a loving relationship**

in order for the relationship to be healthy, open and appropriate, not leading to distrust or resentment. To love someone is not a free-for-all, it involves respecting their boundaries.

Love makes you vulnerable, even when you are God. In giving the couple the freedom to choose, God opens himself to the possibility that they will not love him in the way he loves them. Their defence is to blame each other and all three - man, woman and snake - are punished. Sin has consequences, which extend to the created order itself (3:16-19).

- What are your reflections around these ideas of love, vulnerability and consequences?

This isn't the end of the relationship between God and humankind, however. Part of the penalty is banishment from the garden in order to protect the humans (Genesis 3:22-24). But outside the garden, the relationship continues.

Genesis 4 tells the story of Cain and Abel. When Abel brings some of his best produce to offer to God, God is pleased. When Cain brings something that is not his best, God rebukes him, not as a rejection, but as an attempt to teach him that although God wants a relationship with him, it needs to be a right relationship, one flowing out of love, not duty.

- How easy is it to find yourself acting out of duty instead of love? Why do you think God doesn't want this kind of relationship with you?

Cain doesn't understand this love and responds in anger, killing his brother. The consequence is that he is no longer able to be in a relationship with God (Genesis 4:14). Even now, however, God still loves him and ensures his protection (Genesis 4:15-16).

- What does this tell you about God?

The picture of God looking for his people ('Adam, where are you?' - Genesis 3:9) is one which is repeated throughout the biblical narrative. People turn away from God - by deliberate choice, subtle change or by accident - and God comes looking for them, wanting to continue his relationship with them.

- How do you feel about the idea that God so greatly desires relationship? What does this session tell you about the boundaries for the relationship? What one word might you use to sum up God's approach to humankind?

**A covenant** is an agreement between two parties, with obligation on either side. The Old Testament covenants explain what God's love for his people looks like and how he would like them to love him.

**In biblical times names were important.** Their meaning conveyed a message. The changing of Abram's name from 'exalted father' to 'father of many' reinforced God's promise to him, as well as marking a new era in his and Sarah's lives.

**Circumcision** (removing the foreskin from the penis) was common practice in the Middle East but, in this context, became a visible reminder to each individual of where their allegiance lay.

## Session 3. 'You will be my people'

This session aims to give people a basic understanding of the Old Testament covenant relationship and the structures put in place by God to allow the relationship to be maintained.

Welcome people and introduce today's session. Ask whether people have any reflections on the material from last session, now that they have had time to think about it.

God desires a loving relationship with humankind - so much so that he makes himself vulnerable so that humans can choose to love him, and continues to want a relationship with them when they reject him. By the time of Noah, however, this rejection is on such a great scale that people have become evil and God is broken-hearted (Genesis 6:5-6). Sin has consequences, and so God wipes out all that is evil in a flood, preserving only those who love him: Noah and Noah's family (Genesis 6:9-8:29). Noah consistently has a good relationship with God and God promises that he will never again deal with rejection in this way, giving the rainbow as a sign of this covenant (Genesis 8:20-9:17).

- How easy is it to punish someone you love? Why do you think that God decided to punish people in this way?
- God makes this promise even though he knows that humans will continue to reject him (Genesis 8:21): what does this tell you about his feelings concerning what he has done, and concerning humankind?

Having made this decision, God has to find another way to deal with being rejected by those he loves. He establishes a covenant with those who love him, beginning with Abram. He calls Abram to set out on a journey, leaving behind his old life, and promises him the land of Canaan, a son and countless descendants (Genesis 12:1-7). Abram obeys, because that's what loving God entails. When Abram and Sarai, his wife, try to do things in their own way instead of trusting God (Genesis 15-16), God still loves them and the promise is reiterated. Abram and Sarai are given new names - Abraham and Sarah - to represent the promise; and the human side of the agreement is for all males to be circumcised (Genesis 17). The covenant is repeated in future generations, to Abraham's son and grandson, Isaac and Jacob, and beyond.

- The covenant consists of a call (to Abram), a promise (by God) and a sign (of opting in, by all males). How



### **The story of the tower of Babel**

(Genesis 11:1-9) demonstrates one way of rejecting God - by exerting authority aimed at demonstrating human greatness. Their God-given creativity was being used without thought of God.

### **Sodom and Gomorrah**

were two cities, almost the entire population of which rejected God, leading to their destruction (Genesis 19:1-29). But in amongst judgement comes a picture of God's loving relationship with Abraham, when Abraham was able to negotiate with God about the extent of the destruction (Exodus 18:16-33).

demanding is what God asks of humankind in this covenant?

- When God still loves his people despite their lack of trust, what does this tell you about their relationship? What feelings does this evoke in you?

Several generations later Abraham's descendants, the Israelites, have become a group of several thousand and are slaves in Egypt. God reiterates the covenant to Moses (Exodus 6:1-8) and, using Moses as his spokesman, and through a series of plagues and miracles, sets the entire group free from slavery. He leads them away from Egypt, through the Red Sea, into the wilderness where they can learn to live as a free people, God's people (Exodus 7:1-14:31). He gives them the Passover festival as a way of celebrating and remembering his giving them freedom (Exodus 12:14-20; 13:3-16).

- Imagine what it might be like to live as free people after 400 years in slavery. What might be the pleasures? What might be the challenges? In what ways could this change of circumstance impact on relationship with God? How do your circumstances impact on your relationship with God?

The Israelites live in the wilderness for forty years, during which time God demonstrates his love for them and his desire for them to be his people, providing for them, guiding them and training them to trust him (see, for example, Exodus 15:22-17:16). God gives them the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) and an array of laws governing daily life and worship, offerings and sacrifices (Exodus 20:22-Leviticus 27:34). These spell out how people are to show their love for each other and for God; acknowledging that people will mess up, they provide a way to put things right when that happens, in order for the relationships to be maintained.

- How could the giving of these rules be seen as demonstrating love? In what ways might they make it easier to show love for God? What could be the problems with this? What does it tell you about God's desire for relationship with humankind?
- In what ways is your understanding of God challenged by this understanding of covenant relationship? What questions does it raise for you?

**The prophets** were communicators between God and the people. They conveyed God's message about the people's immediate future: speaking out about the people's sin and about God's love for his people, spelling out how God wanted the people to change in order to come back into relationship with him.

**The prophets communicated in different ways:** through poetry and song, through oracles, and through acting out their message as in the case of Hosea.

**The prophets' context is important** because each prophet spoke God's message to a particular group of people in a specific situation and time. When we understand this, we can draw out the underlying principles that can speak to us.

## Session 4. 'I will forgive'

This session aims to demonstrate God's love for his people in his attempts to protect them, teach them and, when they reject him, make it possible for their relationship with him to be restored.

Welcome people and introduce today's session. Ask whether people have any reflections on the material from last session, now that they have had time to think about it.

God so desires a loving relationship with humankind that he has a covenant with those who love him, enabling them to understand what his love means, how to love him back, and how to put things right when they sin. Over time, however, people forget what kind of relationship it is meant to be. They forget about their history - how God set them free from slavery, they get caught up in the customs of other tribes, they practice God's laws by rote and treat God and each other in an unloving way.

God uses the prophets to remind the people of their history and of his love for them. Through the prophets he pronounces judgement on those who hurt his people, and he tells his people what they are doing wrong and how they can better show their love for him. The Bible contains sixteen books of prophets' messages to God's people, spanning a period of about 300 years, as well as the messages of other prophets interspersed in the narrative.

- What does this tell you about God's desire for relationship with humankind?
- How easy is it to forget about your history with God? What gets in the way of your remembering? What happens when you forget?

By the time of the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 17 (in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC), Israel had had a succession of kings who utterly rejected God. God uses Elijah to point Ahab, the current king, back to him. Though a drought and a challenge to the prophets of the Canaanite god Baal (1 Kings 17-18) he challenges Ahab about his behaviour until Ahab turns back to him (1 Kings 21).

- In what ways has God challenged you? His challenge can sometimes be painful; how does this still demonstrate his love?

**God's love for his people** is described

in a wide range of images in the Old Testament. For example:

Isaiah 49:15 speaks of God's love as beyond that of a mother for her child.

Psalms 91:4 speaks of God providing shelter and protection for his people as a bird for its chicks.

Deuteronomy 14:1 talks of Israel as God's children.

The book of Hosea illustrates the relationship between God and Israel as that of lovers (see, for example, 2:16 and 3:1).

The book of Hosea tells God's message through Hosea's family life. People had rejected God and were worshipping pagan gods, oppressing the poor while still going through the motions of their festivals and sacrifices. God uses the analogy of marital unfaithfulness and breakdown to show the breakdown in their relationship with him. Hosea marries a promiscuous woman who commits adultery and is then received back by Hosea as an illustration of God's love for his wayward people. God speaks of his love for Israel and his forgiveness of them (Hosea 11, 14).

- What do you make of the analogy between Hosea's unfaithful wife and Israel's unfaithfulness to God? What might it mean, now, to 'commit adultery' in your relationship with God?
- How easy is it to go through the motions of religious practice rather than living out a loving relationship? What leads to this happening, for you? What helps you to return to relationship?

The book of Haggai is God's message to Israel when they return to their homeland having been in exile. People had shown incorrect priorities by rebuilding their own houses and getting on with life, while leaving the Temple in ruins (Haggai 1:4). Their current drought and lack of productivity is the consequence of this mistake (Haggai 1:4-11). God points out to them that if they love him then they need to make him a priority. They begin to rebuild the Temple and in response God blesses them (Haggai 2:15-23).

- How easy is it to ensure that God remains a priority in your decision-making? What does this look like in practice? What do you make of the idea that this correct priority results in being blessed by God?

The message of the prophets could be summed up as saying 'God loves you - pay attention.' Each time this message comes there are those who renew their relationship with God and those who don't.

- What are the challenges involved in hearing a message like this and wanting to renew your relationship with God? What feelings does it evoke in you to hear of such persistence in God's love?

**The gospel writers** quote from the Old Testament to show how they believe Jesus fulfils prophecies - see, for example:

Matthew 1:23 quoting Isaiah 7:14.

Matthew 2:6 quoting Micah 5:2, 4.

Matthew 2:15 quoting Hosea 11:1.

Matthew 2:18 quoting Jeremiah 31:15.

Matthew 4:16 quoting Isaiah 9:1-2.

Matthew 8:17 quoting Isaiah 53:4.

Matthew 21:5 quoting Zechariah 9:9

Matthew 26:31 quoting Zechariah 13:7

**The gospels portray Jesus as someone with authority:** there are stories of him forgiving sins (for example, Luke 7:48), healing diseases (for example, Matthew 9:27-31) and controlling nature (Matthew 8:23-27).

## Session 5. 'For God so loved the world'

This session aims to introduce Jesus as the ultimate expression of God's love for humankind, showing how Jesus makes possible a new kind of relationship with God.

Welcome people and introduce today's session. Ask whether people have any reflections on the material from last session, now that they have had time to think about it.

During and after the time of the prophets, while many people reject God, the ongoing covenant remains, with God's repeated message: 'I love you... I still love you... Even though you're ignoring me, I still love you...' (see, for example, Isaiah 49:15).

- How does this image of God compare to how you have come to understand and experience what God is like? How easy is it to accept this image?

Some of the later prophecies point towards a time when God will express this love in a new way and, eventually, God sends the ultimate expression of his love for his people: his son, Jesus (John 3:16-17). The gospel writers make a point of showing how these prophecies are lived out in Jesus in the circumstances of his birth, life and death, identifying Jesus as 'God with us' (Matthew 1:23).

- What does it mean to speak of 'God with us'? How does such an action demonstrate God's love and his desire for relationship?

During his ministry Jesus teaches and shows what it means to love God and each other, what it means to be loved by God, and what it means to live as God's people. As someone who is truly God he illustrates who God is. As someone who is fully human he enables God to understand human life from the inside, to gain a human perspective on what causes people to sin. All of this means that a new kind of relationship is possible between God and humankind.

- In what ways might God's understanding of humans differ once he experiences living as a human? What would you want to tell him, about what human life is like and the impact this has on trying to love and be loved by God?

Jesus demonstrates a Kingdom of God that turns upside-down

**The Kingdom of God** (or 'Kingdom of Heaven' in Matthew's Gospel) doesn't refer to a geographical place but rather to a way of being in which God rules and life is lived accordingly. Jesus models what this looks like.

**The sacrificial system** enabled people to offer a sacrifice as a physical demonstration of repentance, with the sin offering, made to ask forgiveness for sin; the peace offering, eaten as a sign of the restored relationship with God; and the Passover sacrifice as a symbol of liberation.

the traditional ways of being, a Kingdom where love, humility, justice and service are all taken to extremes (Matthew 5:43-48, John 15: 9-17, John 13:1-17, Mark 8:34-38). He is the epitome of compassion, healing people, forgiving their sins and making them whole (Mark 2:1-12). He is clear that it is loving like this, rather than relying on the array of laws and customs, which maintains a relationship with God (Matthew 22:36-40).

- How might this transform your understanding of relationship with God? What does it say to you about how God views you?
- What does it look like for people to be whole?

During his three years of ministry Jesus' radical approach gains him enemies as well as followers and eventually he is killed (Mark 14:32-15:37). His death, though, removes the need for the system of sacrifices given by God to Moses; at the point of his death the curtain in the Temple is torn (Mark 15:37-39), removing the symbol of separation between God and humankind. Instead of continuing with the sacrificial system it is now possible, when humans mess up, to come to God directly to ask for forgiveness (1 John 1:8-2:2). The visible symbol of that forgiveness - and the ultimate symbol of God's love for humankind - is Jesus' death. This is the new version of the covenant, to make it as easy as possible for God to have a relationship with all of his beloved creation.

- How is Jesus' death meant to make relationship with God easier?

As God, Jesus is stronger than death, and so on the third day after his death he is raised to life, witnessed by many of his followers (John 20), and so vindicated. Having broken the power of death, people can be free and so have no need to be afraid of death because the loving relationship between God and humankind begun in this life carries on for eternity (John 3:16).

- What does today's session say to you about the strength of God's desire for relationship with humankind and the extent to which he is prepared to be vulnerable? What questions does it raise for you?

**This Holy Spirit** is the same Spirit who was present at creation (Genesis 1:2) and who was promised by Jesus to be the Advocate and the Spirit of truth (John 14:15-26).

**The Bible gives a number of pictures of judgement** in the end times. All will be judged according to what they have done (Revelation 20:12, Matthew 25:31-46) and its quality (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). This is a loving judgement, though: Jesus came so that we will not be condemned (John 3:16-21).

**There is no need to be worried** about the end times. Paul explains that those people who are in a loving relationship with God have nothing to be afraid of (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11).

## Session 6. 'I am coming soon'

This session aims to give a picture of the future God has in store for those he loves who respond to him with love.

Welcome people and introduce today's session. Ask whether people have any reflections on the material from last session, now that they have had time to think about it.

God's desire for a loving relationship with humankind has motivated him to make himself vulnerable in order for humans to be able to choose to love him. It has motivated him, throughout history, to find ways of expressing that love for people and of making it possible for those who reject him to return to him – ultimately through Jesus' death and resurrection. After this, as Jesus returns to heaven, a different method of communication is needed to maintain the relationship, and so God sends his Holy Spirit to live with and in those who love him. When the Spirit comes he fills believers with a new power and confidence (Acts 2:1-41), he assures them of God's love for them (Romans 8:14-16), he helps them to grow in the characteristics modelled by Jesus (Galatians 5:22-25), he gives them gifts to help them to live out their relationship with God and to share it with others (1 Corinthians 12:7-11), and he guides them so that they continue to live in a way that demonstrates their love of God (John 14:23-27).

- How might the presence of the Spirit make a difference to the way you carry out your relationship with God?

But God's intention is not for us to continue indefinitely in a world where the temptation to sin is present. In Jesus' death and resurrection he has broken the power of sin and death and at some point in the future Jesus will return and get rid of sin and death altogether.

- How might life be different when there is no sin and death?

The Bible says little about what these 'end times' will be like and most of what is said is in symbolic pictures which are difficult to interpret. But there is a clear image of the creation of a new heaven and a new earth that will be whole, without the brokenness that exists on this earth (Revelation 21:1-5). The evil that still has power in this world will be thrown out and destroyed when Jesus returns (Revelation 20:10). Life on earth

**In this fresh start,** in the new heaven and earth, we will have new bodies. Paul likens the difference between our current and resurrection bodies as similar to the difference between a seed and the plant which grows from it.

**There are signs of the end times** which we can watch out for – wars, famines and earthquakes (Mark 13:7-8) – but these don't give any indication of the timescale involved in the waiting. Because God's timing is very different from ours, and because he is giving every opportunity for people to love him, (2 Peter 3:8-10), the waiting continues.

will make a fresh start, God in loving relationship with all those who have chosen to love him through the ages, the people who are filled with his Spirit and live as part of his kingdom (Revelation 21-22). Just as God was in close relationship with the first man at the beginning of creation, symbolised in the picture of them walking together in the garden, so that relationship will be realised again. In a world without evil, sorrow, pain or death people will once again be face-to-face with God (Revelation 21:3-4, 22:1-5).

- In what ways is this earth, and life on earth, 'broken'? What does it mean for the new heaven and earth to be whole?
- When you think about the kind of relationship with God that will be experienced at that time, what are your hopes and fears?

When will all this happen? No one knows, not even Jesus (Mark 13:32), which means there is a need to be ready all the time, just in case. When it happens no one will miss it (Mark 13:26), but it will happen unannounced, unexpectedly, like a burglar breaking into a house (Matthew 24:42-44). Until then the task is to build a loving relationship with God and share that with others, showing them how much he loves them and wants a relationship with them.

- What might you need to do in order to 'keep watch' and be ready for Jesus' return? What help might you need to do this?
- In what ways is it possible to show others God's love and his desire for relationship?

There are many ways of reading the Bible and many ways of understanding the 'Big Story' it contains. This course has attempted to give one particular perspective: the love story between God and his creation.

- How has this course affected your understanding of God and of humankind?
- What do you need to do to build your own loving relationship with God who so greatly desires relationship with you?