

MY PANDEMIC EXPERIENCE

The pandemic has impacted us all. This guide helps you to reflect on your personal experience. Try to find a quiet place, and around 30 minutes, to use the questions and underlined links to explore what has been going on for you. You can either print the sheet off, or type in the white areas by clicking in them.

THANKSGIVING

What are you thankful for? Think about small daily things, such as food, as well as bigger wider things, such as frontline workers.

Thanksgiving is becoming increasingly popular as a mental wellbeing tool. People struggling with their mental health are often encouraged to keep a gratitude diary, writing down three or more things each day that make them feel grateful. Even on the hardest days. The reports are that it proves very helpful. For Christians, thanksgiving is part of our regular practice. We believe that God is listening to us with delight as we 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.

PRACTICES

- Keep a gratitude list or jar. Write down three things each night you are grateful for from the day.

LAMENT

There is much 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 (whether we're 'good' at painting or drawing or not). 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 woven through the Christian tradition. In the middle of the Bible you may have on a shelf, there is the book of Psalms, which are ancient songs to God. Some of them are hugely helpful at expressing our sadness and anger and lament. For example, Psalms 42 involves honest recollection of how we are feeling, and a passionate expression to God of the pain and difficulty that we are experiencing

PRACTICES

- Read aloud Psalms 42 every day until you have expressed all the lament, or listen to this song.
- You might also want to write your own list or poem about how you feel and read that aloud.

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 use 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 – that his light shines in the darkest places when we give ourselves to him. You may like to read a poem on this theme.

PRACTICES

- Write or draw in a notebook for a few moments several times a week to help you reflect on your life and think things through. After a few weeks, it can be helpful to look back and see how things are going.
- Talk through your experiences of the pandemic – good and bad – with someone you trust. Invite them to ask questions and to listen carefully. Sometimes it's in talking with someone else that things become clearer. If you don't have anyone, contact a church.

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. 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 and worship together, rather than trying only to get to know God by ourselves. Ask a Christian you know how to join in some praying at church – either online or in a meeting.

PRACTICES

- Ask a Christian you know if they pray, and how they pray. Ask them what difference it makes to their life.
- Maybe find or buy a Bible or a Bible app, and start reading one of the accounts of Jesus' life, for example the section in the Bible called Mark. Make sure you find a modern-language version of the Bible that is easy to understand.

What would it be good to think about in your praying over the coming weeks? People, situations, and concerns – local and global.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- If you have experienced the death of a loved one through this time you may find this informative online booklet on Death, Grief and Hope helpful, or these resources from MIND on bereavement.
- If you would like further help, find a Church near you and make contact. You'll be warmly welcomed.

CHURCH CONTACT: