



## On your marks

Throughout the Bible, there are animal picture clues to help us understand what God is like. They come in both Old and New Testaments and each image helps us understand a little more about the nature of God.

This presentation would work well at a special service celebrating pets and the amazing variety of animals in God's world. It is a reflective story that will appeal particularly to animal lovers.

## Get set

If you're working with a small group, you will need to collect a set of seven animal models in order to tell the story.

If you are using the idea with a larger congregation, you will need to download seven animal images from the internet and enlarge them to A3 size so that they can be seen.

You will also need a long piece of white felt to use as the underlay to the story, approximately 70 cm by 12 cm.

Here are the Bible references for each of the animals used in the story:

### Eagle:

- Exodus 19:3-5
- Deuteronomy 32:10-12

### Lion:

- Revelation 5:5
- Genesis 49:9
- Amos 1:2

### Dove:

- Matthew 3:16-17
- Genesis 8:10 -12

### Goat:

- Leviticus 16:20-22

### Lamb:

- John 1:29-30



- Genesis 22:7-8
- Isaiah 53:7
- Revelation 5:6

### **Hen:**

- Luke 13:34

### **Go!**

*Open up a Bible and lay it down at your side.*

**Say:** God has given us the stories in his book to show us what he is like and to help us discover how we are meant to trust him.

*Begin to unroll, from your right to your left, the underlay of white felt on which you will place the animals. Unroll the first ten centimetres.*

**Say:** In the beginning, when God created the heavens and earth, he gave us the gift of all the living creatures to live with us on the earth, both the tame and the wild animals. God loved the creatures and gave us the job of naming them and caring for them.

Each creature had its own special purpose and beauty. In the pages of the Bible, God compares himself to some of these creatures to help us understand what he is like.

*Put down the model of an eagle.*

**Say:** There is the majestic eagle. God told Moses that he had carried his people on eagle's wings when he brought them out of Egypt to freedom. He had taught them to fly, just like an eagle teaches its young, nudging them out of the nest but then swooping down to catch them when they are falling.

*Unroll another ten centimetres of the white underlay and put down the model of a lion.*

**Say:** There is the mighty lion. The prophets talked about God roaring from Zion, and the tribe of Judah is described as a lion's cub. In the last book of the Bible, Revelation, God is described as the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

*Unroll the next ten centimetres of the white underlay and place down the model of a dove.*

**Say:** There is the gentle dove. She is an image of the peaceful love of God who brought the news of dry land to Noah. She also descended on Jesus at his baptism, when the Father spoke and said that he was pleased with his beloved Son.

*Unroll another ten centimetres of the white underlay and place down the model of a goat.*



**Say:** There is the poor goat. In a particular ritual in the Old Testament, the high priest used to lay his hands on a goat as a symbol of putting all the mess and failure of God's people in one place. Then he sent that goat - the scapegoat - away into the desert as a visual aid of what God wants to do for us, to send away that is bad in us.

*Unroll a further ten centimetres of the white underlay and place down the model of a lamb.*

**Say:** There is the innocent lamb. This is often used as picture of God across the Bible. It was a lamb that was provided to rescue Isaac, and a lamb that was taken to the temple to die as a sacrifice, even though it didn't deserve death. John the Baptist described Jesus as the Lamb of God and, at the end of the Bible, God is described as a lamb that has been killed but is now on the throne in heaven.

*Unroll a further ten centimetres of the white underlay and put down the model of a hen.*

**Say:** There is the loving hen. She is a picture of the great compassion of God, who wants to gather us as his children safely under his wings.

*Unroll the next ten centimetres of the white underlay and place down the model of an ox.*

**Say:** And finally there is the steady ox. Jesus uses the image of oxen yoked together as a picture of what it means to become his follower. We are to link up with him, like one ox to another. It is a picture of God walking alongside us and sharing our load.

*Pause and look back at the different animal images of God.*

**Say:**

- I wonder which image of God you like the best.
- I wonder which is the most important image.
- I wonder which image is especially for you today.
- I wonder which image will stay with you and help you in the rest of the week.

*Allow time for the wondering to run its course and then point to each animal in turn as you say:*

God carries; God protects; God inspires; God takes away our sin; God takes our place; God loves; and God walks alongside us.

Now, I wonder what you would like to make or do to explore these images further.

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At this point you may like to give the group or congregation the opportunity to talk about the images with each other or to make something with some simple craft materials such as playdough or chenille wires.



A good prayer activity might be to focus on the image of the mother hen and hand out small Easter model chicks. Ask people to place the chick on the palm of one hand and cover it with the other hand, as a way of praying for God's compassion to cover us and those for whom we want to pray.