



On your marks

Many of us long to pray with our different groups, but get stuck with the same old ideas. In her book *Creating a Learning Church*, Margaret Cooling takes the idea of using biblical metaphors and images as starting points for prayer.

'The metaphors of the Bible are a rich source of ideas for prayer. Alongside these, we can also create our own metaphors and images' (p. 75).

While there will always be a place for simple straightforward prayer with no added extras, we can also explore God's goodness through the images he has given us in his word. The image may help us understand something in a new way and go deeper into him.

Get set

The basic idea is very simple. What sort of prayer do you want to lead – a 'praise' prayer? A 'thank you' prayer? A 'sorry' prayer? Which Bible verse or story comes to mind when you think about this sort of prayer? Can you turn that passage or verse into something three dimensional? For example, if you were looking at the story of the widow's offering from Mark 12, you might have a money box and cardboard coins.

Then turn the noun into a verb. Use your imagination and work out how your objects can be used as a starter to prayer. For example, could the group draw or write what *they* can offer Jesus, then put their offerings into the money box?

Go!

Here are just a few of Margaret's examples from pp. 75-78 to get your confidence going. She gives 20 ideas altogether!

1 Develop James' image of the small spark:

A big forest fire can be started with only a little flame. And the tongue is like a fire. James 3:5

Light a long match and let it burn. Use it to think about the destructive power of words – for example, lying, criticism and gossip.

Have damp sand nearby to dispense safely with the spent match.

2 Use a rucksack as an image of the burden of guilt. One person can bring a rucksack to the altar while appropriate prayers of forgiveness are said. Forgiveness is the lifting of the burden.

My guilt has overwhelmed me; like a load it weighs me down. Psalm 38:4

3 Place a tray of sand on the table. Trace the word 'sin' in the sand with your finger, then brush it



smooth as an image of forgiveness. Leave the tray in church for people to write and smooth privately during the week.

Over to you!

How might you lead the prayers using objects or pictures on the theme of the following:

Praying for people who are in trouble

He lifted me out of the pit of destruction, out of the sticky mud.

He stood me on a rock and made my feet steady. Psalm 40

Praising God

The Lord is great; he should be praised

In the city of our God, on his holy mountain.

It is high and beautiful and brings joy to the whole world. Psalm 48

Thanking God for our families

While the son was still a long way off, the father saw him and felt sorry for his son. He ran to him and hugged and kissed him. Luke 15:20

Enjoying how much God loves us

He brought me to his banqueting hall and his banner over me is love. Song of Songs 2:4