

Outdoor Church: Light

This is a fairly short session, connecting the idea of trees reaching for the light to us reaching out to God. The tone of this is written to include young children, but you can adapt it if the group is older children / adults only. You need to be somewhere where some trees have had to stretch out to get the light, ideally making funny shapes (e.g. all the branches are on one side of the tree).

1. Welcome prayer and worship

2. Looking up at the trees

Ask: What does a tree want?

- Any answers?

One way to find out is to look at the shape of a tree. If we look at it, what's it trying to do?

- Grow big? Why?

Here's a clue. What is a leaf for?

A leaf is a solar panel, basically. Its job is to catch the sun and turn it into energy for the rest of the tree. (*optional: you could look at photosynthesis at this point*)

In the spring the leaves come out, and all through the long summer days they're there catching the sun, turning the light into energy and sending it down into the rest of tree, helping the trunk to grow, and the branches to grow, and the roots to dig down deeper and reach out further.

And the tree wants to help the leaves as much as it can, so every year it grows a bit higher towards the sun, and it sends its branches out higher and grows to face the sun.

If you look at the shape of a tree, you can see how it's been trying to get as much light as possible. If it's shaded on one side, it will try and grow the other direction. It usually has more branches and leaves on the south side, facing the sun.

Some trees in this park have grown all wonky trying to get their share of light. Let's go and explore, to find the most wonky ones of all.

Optional: If you're in a large enough park/woods, go for a tour of the trees and compare notes. You could also sketch the strangest shaped tree as it angles for the sunlight.

3. Gather back together - Light

So, what does a tree want? It wants light. It wants to reach up towards the sun.

That reminds us of a verse in the Bible, in Thessalonians 5. It's a letter where Paul is writing to a church in a place called Thessalonica. The people there were worried about all the things happening in the world, and they were asking questions. They were saying 'we thought God was in charge, but bad things still happen. We don't understand.' And they were a bit confused.

So Paul wrote them a letter and he said (paraphrasing): "*don't worry, and don't be scared. You are all children of the light and of the day. We don't belong to darkness and night.*" So be alert. Stand strong, and remember God's protection. And live like people of the light."

(actual verse Thessalonians 5:5-11 : For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don't belong to darkness and night. ⁶ So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded. ⁷ Night is the time when people sleep and drinkers get drunk. ⁸ But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation. ⁹ For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. ¹⁰ Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. ¹¹ So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.)

Ask: What do you think being people of the light might mean?

- People who want to do good
- Focusing on good things
- Choosing the right thing when facing a choice
- Helping other people
- Reaching out to God

I think that a tree wants light, and reaches up towards it. And a person of light is someone who reaches up towards God. And they catch the light of God and turn it into energy for doing good things in the world. And as they get older, they grow out towards God and understand more and more about him.

Reflect (you can share this in small groups or reflect silently): How are we going to use our energy to make good things happen in the world? How are we going to catch God's love and pass it on to those around us? Share/reflect on what you are already doing, and where God might be leading you.

4. Action prayer

So here is a prayer. It's a tree prayer, and we're going to act it out. We're going to use what we've learned about trees to pray.

We're going to start off as acorns or conkers. (crouch down)

- God, we're very small, and don't always understand everything. Please keep us safe.

Then we're going to turn into a little shoot (raise a hand)

- God, as we go out into the world, help us to be brave.

Now we're getting bigger and we've got some leaves poking out

- God, let us grow strong in your love.

Now we've got big branches reaching out.

- God, give us your light. Help us to turn it into energy to do good things in the world.

Now we're really reaching up towards the sky, catching all the sun (reach as high as you can)

- God, help us to catch more and more of your light

Amen

5. Further ideas

You could sing a song like "This little light of mine", light a candle as you pray, or draw a tree reaching to the sun and write a reflection or prayer about God's light shining on you, etc.

This was a session from Park Church Luton (www.parkchurchluton.com)

See also www.engageworship.org for creative ideas for all-age worship.