

Outdoor Church: Seasons – Autumn - Rhythms

This session is designed to use in autumn. We have referenced a holly and beech tree, but you could talk about any evergreen and deciduous tree.

You will need:

- Somewhere with both deciduous and evergreen trees, access to fallen leaves
- Bible / print out of Bible verses
- Felt tip pens to write on some leaves
- Optional – 2 balls to represent the earth and sun

1. Ice-breaker

What's been thumbs-up this week? What's been thumbs-down? Each person can name something if comfortable. Pray a welcome prayer.

2. Genesis 1

Read Genesis 1:1-28 – if possible different people reading each "Day".

OR – ideally - use the Genesis 1 rhyming reading from the Doxecology book (which is great!) <https://engageworship.org/store/product/doxecology-study-guide>

3. Discussion: rhythm

One of the things Creator God set in motion was rhythm, as we read. And part of that rhythm is our seasons.

- What is your favourite season?
- What is your least favourite season?
- What season are we in now?
- What signs can you see that we're moving into autumn?
- Can someone show with two balls representing the sun and earth how summer moves into autumn? (tilt of axis means the UK gets more sun in summer and is tilted away during winter).
- What does this mean? (shorter days and less sunshine = colder and darker)

4. Learning about Leaves

Leaves changing colour and falling from the trees is one sign of Autumn.

Optional —> ***Dress someone as a tree game.*** In pairs, collect leaves and dress one person (no stuffing in pockets), then see who looks most like a tree.

Not all leaves drop in the autumn. Can you go and find a holly leaf and beech leaf (or evergreen and deciduous leaves?)

- Compare for example a holly leaf with for example a Beech leaf - what's the difference? The evergreen leaf has hard waxes and resins protecting it from the cold, but non-evergreens are more sensitive to the cold.

- What happens if you leave a closed glass bottle full of water in the freezer? It explodes as water expands when it freezes. The same would happen in the leaf if it tried to stay on the tree. Then the tree would be full of dead leaves that it wasted energy on and gave no nutrients in return. Also, the damage might spread into the tree, putting the whole tree - not just the leaves - in danger.

Two other dangers if leaves stay on tree over winter:

1) wintry storms - the leaves have a bigger surface area (like sails) and would make branches move more = more likely to break.

2) Snow - if snow lands on leaves, it's more likely to stay and weigh branch down.

So dropping leaves is a form of self-protection.

What happens to the leaves once they fall off?

The nutrients from the decaying leaves feed the tree, giving it a head start to grow new leaves in the spring.

The leaves don't just fall off in the autumn because it's more windy. Rather the rhythm of nature and the earth moving the way it does communicates with the tree. When the days gets shorter and it gets cooler outside, hormones are kickstarted in the tree to begin the process of letting go of the leaves. It sort of gradually shuts-off water and life to the leaf until the leaf stalk and the twig manages to break off without leaving an open wound on the tree.

- Identify at least three trees around you. Which ones have dropped some leaves? Or changed colour? Can you see some that won't drop their leaves? Pick up some dropped leaves to use later.

5. Letting Go

We're living in strange times where there's a lot of uncertainty.

- What have we had to cancel this year?
- What have we had to let go of?
- What are some things that are uncertain and hard to plan at the moment? (eg. holidays, schools continuing undisturbed, exams, meetings, Christmas)

Where we live, we most often have the luxury of certainty. Just like the tree knows that autumn is coming, we have expectations of what are about to happen. Perhaps the cooler weather reminds us that it's nearly time for our birthday? Or we're used to a certain kind

of start of the academic year. People in other times and places don't live with our level of certainty, who could you think of? (eg. people in war zones, where food is less plentiful)

The Bible shows us that we shouldn't put our trust in plans and the things we think are certain.

There's a small book called James in the New Testament, most likely written by James, Jesus' brother, who was the leader of the first church in Jerusalem. It's an interesting book because it reads a bit like wisdom literature, has very practical advice, almost like proverbs. At one point it says:

"Humble yourselves before God" (4:7) - what does that mean? (*putting God over my own plans, I'm not god...*)

and then:

¹³ Look here, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit." ¹⁴ How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone. ¹⁵ What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that."

We should always be humble before God, knowing that we don't know what tomorrow holds. But right now, it seems more important than ever.

If we hold on to our plans and put all our trust in them, we'll be like trees holding on to leaves in winter.

not just the leaves will die, but the damage might spread into the tree itself. If we fight the letting go of our plans with anger and rage, we might cause more damage to ourselves than simply letting go. Letting go might bring nutrients to new life later on.

That is not to say that it's easy to let go. Read the passage of Jesus in Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-44)

- What did Jesus want?
- What did God the Father want?
- How did Jesus reconcile the two? (struggle and prayer)

6. Respond / Pray

Think about the things we hold on to, that we think we can't cope without. Maybe seeing family at Christmas. Continuing some after school club. Having a meeting or a party. If those things can't happen, we can trust that God would hold us and strengthen us, so we can let go of our tight grasp on them.

- Draw, colour and cut out a leaf.

- Write on leaves the things we can let go of and trust that God will take care of us.
- Find a windy spot and let go of the leaves.

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

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