

Using gravity to carry heavy burdens in Nepal



Service outline

Practical Action is delighted to offer these worship resources to your church family. It is a chance to focus on fellowship with some of the poorest people across the globe, and the ways they can transform their lives. The ideas are suitable for all ages, and can be adapted for particular audiences. If your church has projection facilities, you can find videos and slides which have more information on the theme in this sheet, and which will help with your service, at www.practicalaction.org.uk/churchservices

Note that this service is especially suitable during Lent, when we take time to focus on our own relationship with God, and the special part that prayer plays in that relationship

Much of our church life is rightly focused on our Christian community, and on those in need, and on the wider world around us. *If service held in Lent, then, 'In this Lent season,'* It is good to also turn that focus inwards, and deepen our personal relationship with God, through His son Jesus Christ. Today, we are going to do this, with a project from Practical Action in Nepal, where villagers living high in the mountains face long and dangerous hikes, to carry their crops to the markets which are usually on lower ground, by the rivers. There is a clever solution – a 'gravity goods ropeway', which

takes goods to market, and returns the empty baskets to be refilled. We are going to use this image to think about our prayers, and how they carry our heaviest burdens to God. Even better, our baskets don't come back empty – they are filled with God's love, and His hopes and wishes for us. And if we feel inspired by the example, we can even help Practical Action to install more Gravity Goods Ropeways in Nepal, which is one of the poorest countries on earth. By doing so, we will be helping women like Kaushi, whose story is overleaf.



Welcome and explanation

Welcome the congregation and explain that this is a service with a special focus on deepening our relationship with God through prayer. Explain that you will be using the example of Practical Action, and their work in Nepal, to explore what happens when we treat prayer as a dynamic, two-way, intimate connection to God. You can read them the introduction on the front of this sheet, if that fits with your service.

In Western Nepal, there are many women subsistence farmers, providing for their family (their husbands work in far-away construction jobs, from which they may not return). They sell their goods at markets, which are usually at the bottom of the gorges, in places which have been carved out by fast-flowing rivers, near the roads. But it's not safe to live here, due to seasonal flooding, so they live in upland villages and face an arduous journey with a heavy basket on their back, every time they want to sell their surplus. But with a gravity goods ropeway, which is easy to install and maintain, women can send their goods to market the easy way, and they can club together, to employ someone to sell their goods for them. The hours they save, from not having to trek and wait, can be used to grow more crops, and to spend more time with their children. Today, we are going to think about the parallels in our own lives, to these miraculous ropeways, which are literally saving lives.



Opening prayer

Lord God, just as Jesus, the night before his death, went to pray, let us open our hearts to You when we are burdened. And when our lives are busy, and voices clamour for attention, help us to remember that if we make You the rock on which we build our faith, we can hold fast in times of hardship, and we will never be alone, because You are our lifelong friend. Thank you for always being there for us, and for the gift of Your son, who showed us how much You love us, now and always, Amen.

Opening song/hymn suggestions

Dear Lord and Father of Mankind
– Whittier and Maker

Laudate Dominum – Taize chant

Confession

Loving God, we are sorry for when we don't make time to talk to you, or ask for your help, or take your advice, and for when we are so full of ourselves that we can't make space for You, and for others. Help us to put the most valuable things life first, and the least valuable things second, and help us to be able to tell the difference. Be our guide and our friend, every day, everywhere, at our best and our worst. We ask this in the name of Your son, our saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Bible reading

Matthew 6: 5-15

1 Samuel 3: 1-10

Luke 10: 38-42



Talk

We said we were going to talk about prayer, using the example of Practical Action's gravity goods ropeways in Nepal. So, find out how much people know about Nepal, for example, what countries surround it? (China and India). What is its capital? (Kathmandu). What's its flag like? (it's the only flag in the world that isn't four-sided, and it shows a sun and a crescent moon). Who was born there as Prince Siddhartha Guatama in 623BC? (Buddha). What is its highest mountain? (Everest).

Describe how the gravity goods ropeway works: people load their crops and livestock into a basket and write their name on it, gravity takes the basket down to the market at the bottom, one person at the bottom unloads it, then sends the empty baskets up on the other side of the rope. All goods will be sold by a village representative, to the many people who come to the market by road or river. The rep will settle up with everyone later, but often keeps them updated on how their crops and animals are selling, by sending messages in the empty baskets!

In the readings, we hear how central prayer is to our relationship with God – in Samuel, God calls His servant, in Matthew, we are told to pray to God like we would talk to a parent, in a prayer which must have

seemed incredibly intimate and personal to those who heard it first, compared to the public praying with which Jesus contrasts it. Luke tells us what Jesus said to Martha, who complained that she was doing all the work while her sister Mary listened at his feet. Many of us, hearing that reading for the first time, have sympathised with Martha, grumbling that someone has to do the work. But Martha is described as anxious and troubled about many things – who needs to hear the words of God more than she does? Yet she pushes her most crucial need to the back, and distracts herself with serving food.

To pray is to put God at the centre of that moment, and it is uniquely personal. All of us can do it, and no-one is judged for doing it better or worse than someone else. Praying regularly is like building a Gravity Goods Ropeway – a power we can overlook, suddenly transforms everything we do.

Ask people to share times in their life when they have prayed, and felt a connection with God. What did they feel they were sending to God, and what was being returned? Was it through words, or senses? Write these on pieces of paper, and attach them on the strings of the Gravity Goods Ropeway.



Words from Kaushi to your community:

'Everything is hurting; my back, my neck, my legs, my head...'

Carrying a huge load is extremely painful. It also makes the journey perilous but due to extreme poverty and hunger, she has no choice.

Kaushi said:

'I have slipped many times. I worry about my children if something serious happens'

And make no mistake; people do fall to their deaths here.

By helping more communities like Kaushi's to build their own Gravity Goods Ropeway, you can dramatically reduce the number of hungry families, and prevent unnecessary deaths.

Song/hymm suggestions

How great Thou art – Carl Boberg

Abide with Me – Lyte and Monk

Activities

- Talk about ways of solitary praying, other than through words. Do you feel close to God when you walk, or look at art, or meditate? How different does it feel from having a personal conversation?
- Make a working Gravity Goods Ropeway – you will need a long length of string, bits of egg cartons for the baskets, paper clips to attach the baskets to the string, and two toilet roll ‘inners’ to act as pulley wheels. Put one ‘inner’ toilet roll up high, and another down low, and loop the string around each. Attach baskets, and then load them with small items, going down the mountain to be sold.
- Hold your own ‘Nepalese market place’ in church, and sell cakes, preserves, books, and bric-a-brac in aid of Practical Action. £683 could buy five weighing machines, brake shoes, and brake handles to ensure each basket comes down safely, benefitting many communities.
- Have a look at our ropeway challenge activity for children - you can find it here: www.practicalaction.org/squashed-tomato-challenge-5

Prayers of intercession

Loving God, we pray for all those in countries like Nepal, where life is lived on the edge – make us compassionate to those who face tough choices, so that we can be Your hands and Your voice. Be with the lonely and the grieving, and let them call You friend. We pray for the sick, for those who suffer in wars and for those who face mental illness. We ask You to help us all to make time for our spiritual life, so that the prayers from our hearts can ascend to Your, and Your words can descend to us, like the two sides of a Gravity Goods Ropeway. And can we all say together the prayer known as the Breastplate of St Patrick, which asks Christ to be wherever we turn.

*Christ be with me, Christ within me
Christ behind me, Christ before me
Christ beside me, Christ to win me
Christ to comfort me and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger
Christ in hearts of all that love me
Christ in mouth of friend or stranger.
Amen.*

Closing song suggestions

Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!
– Reginald Heber

There's a wideness - Faber and Tourjée

Blessing

*May the road rise to meet you.
May the wind always be at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
and the rains fall softly on your fields.
And until we meet again,
May God hold you in the hollow of His hand.*



Thank you for sharing Practical Action's service ideas with your church. We are an international charity which uses technology to challenge poverty in some of the world's poorest countries. We help men and women to find practical solutions to the hardships they face, without damaging the world.