

Living Waters



LIVING WATERS

A Hazelnut resource for befriending your river



INTRODUCTION

Do you know your nearby waterways well? Perhaps you're not sure where your nearest river is! This resource is designed to help you spend prayerful time with the waters that bring life to the land where you live.

Water is life. Everybody knows this.

There is not one living thing on this planet that can live without water. All cellular life in God's creation is kept alive by water. There are no exceptions. Even our bodies are more than half made of water. The rivers and the oceans are the life of creation, and so the state of our waterways will tell us a great deal about our situation. It is a curious reality that people who live in the "developed world" may well be the last to notice what's going on. For many of us, a river is not a source of life, but a pleasant place to visit. The water we trust comes from a bottle or a tap, not a river.

But it is not so everywhere.

In the Canadian province of British Columbia lies the ancestral home of the Wet'suwet'en people. The Wedzin Kwa river runs through their ancient forests. The river has been a source of food, water and life for that people for countless generations. In recent years the Canadian government have been building an oil pipeline through the land and across the river, against the wishes of the Wet'suwet'en people. In the documentary *Yintah*, we see a gesture that has been common to this struggle and others like it: government negotiators seek to gain favour with land-based people by bringing gifts of bottled water. But who would trade a clean river for bottled water?

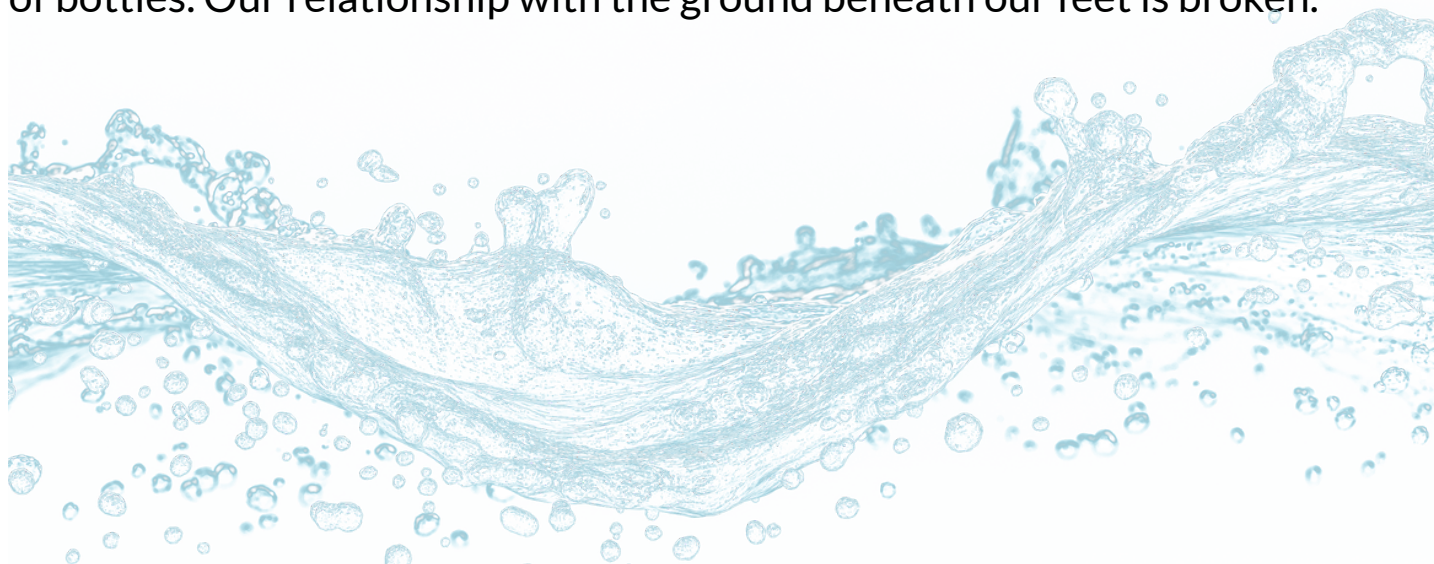
In the Bible the first human is called Adam, which means "earth-creature", because he was made of the earth. The word "human" similarly comes from the word "humus", meaning "soil". There is a bond at the heart of what it means to be human; it is the bond between our bodies and the earth beneath our feet. We are happiest and healthiest when we live in good relationship with the land we live on. And just as living soil is full of water, we also are full of water. Most of our bodies are a bit more than half-composed of water. We bond with soil beneath our feet by eating what the soil produces and we take into our bodies the water that runs through our environments, in various ways. We are made of our environments; when we love our environments we care for ourselves and one another.

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But, of course, this is not really how it is for most of us. Many of us know very well that much of the food we eat comes from somewhere completely different to where we live and that our water comes from somewhere else again. We no longer rely on the clean river near to our homes. We drink out of bottles. Our relationship with the ground beneath our feet is broken.



When the book of Revelation finally concludes, it gives us images of an earth healed from exploitation, greed and violence. God's throne comes down from heaven and settles on the soil, and then from out of God's throne there flows a river. The river nourishes a tree, and the tree produces leaves, and the leaves are for the healing of the nations. In this wonderful vision we see an image of the world as it should be.

The river of life may seem a long way off, but it is a sibling to every river in the world.

How well do you know the river nearest to where you are now?
Do you know the river that collects the rain that falls where you live?
Have you walked it? Have you seen who or what lives there?
Is it a happy place, or not so?

All the secrets of your environment are washed down into the river.

What do you learn by spending time there? Perhaps it is time to befriend your river once again.

RIVER WALK

Perhaps you know your nearby waterways well. Perhaps you sometimes walk along them. Perhaps you're not sure where your nearest river is. This resource is designed to help you spend prayerful time with the waters that bring life to the land where you live.

You can do this by yourself, with friends or family, or with your faith community.

First you will need to decide where your walk will take you. You may already know, but in any case you may learn a lot by looking at a map. Where is your nearest river? Where does it come from and where does it go to? Are there rivers and watercourses nearby that you didn't know about? Perhaps you live near a lake or a pond or a canal.

For this exercise, we recommend choosing a river or a natural lake, because these are the water-courses that naturally collect the water in your bio-region (unlike canals, for example, which are human-made and imposed upon the land).

You will need to do a little bit of research and plan your walk. It can be as long or short as you like. If you're walking with others, it's worth thinking about how far they will want to walk! Do you or others have access needs? Think about how you could make time by river accessible to those who might like to come.

Remember, sometimes there is a good path, but not always. Tragically, more than 75% of the riverbanks in England are private and inaccessible. You may go for your walk but find you have to change your route. But don't be discouraged if you run into complexity. You are not going to the river just to have a nice time (though that might happen too). You are going to re-connect with a - perhaps - forgotten old friend. You are going to learn how your river fares. You are going to see it and feel it and listen to what it has to say about the health of the land where you live.



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SOME QUESTIONS

Here are some questions to ask yourself or your group during or after your walk.

- Who lives by the river and in the river? Which creatures and plants do you notice?
- Include the human creatures too. What signs do you see of how people meet the river? What stories might these signs tell?
- What is the most beautiful thing you experienced on your walk?
- Did you encounter places of sadness or grief? Share what you saw or felt.

This last question is not to be answered in words, but held for a few minutes in prayerful silence.

The book of Romans says that Creation groans, longing for liberation and redemption. If the river had a voice, what do you think it might say?

READINGS

Here are four readings for your riverwalk. Read them quietly, or out loud together, or however suits you.

Blessed is the one

*who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
That person is like a tree planted by streams of
water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.*

Psalms 1:1–3

*On the Sabbath we went outside the city
gate to the river, where we expected to find a
place of prayer. We sat down and began to
speak to the women who had gathered
there. One of those listening was a woman
from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a
dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper
of God. The Lord opened her heart to
respond to Paul's message. When she and
the members of her household were
baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you
consider me a believer in the Lord," she said,
"come and stay at my house." And she
persuaded us.*

Acts 16:13–15

*The beginning of the good news about Jesus
the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in
Isaiah the prophet:*

*"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way"—
"a voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.'"*

*And so John the Baptist appeared in the
wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance
for the forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean
countryside and all the people of Jerusalem
went out to him. Confessing their sins, they
were baptized by him in the Jordan River.*

Mark 1:1–5

*Then the angel showed me the river of the
water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from
the throne of God and of the Lamb down the
middle of the great street of the city. On each
side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing
twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every
month. And the leaves of the tree are for the
healing of the nations.*

Rev 22:1–2

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WHAT'S NEXT

Here are a few suggestions:

- You will have noticed from the Bible readings above that the river has always been a place where people have gone to pray. Perhaps your local river could become one of the places you go to pray regularly.
- Water is life, and our life is bound to our waterways. Go to rightsofrivers.org and sign the *universal declaration of the rights of rivers*.
- If you would like to support the Wet'sewet'en people as they defend their river from big oil, you can do so through *Amnesty International*: amnesty.ca/wetsuweten-land-defenders

CLOSING PRAYER

*O God, maker of soil and sky
Of spring and dew, of river and rain
Living waters flow from your throne
Downriver to sea and back again*

*The earth is made alive in your care
The rivers run like free horses
The mountains sing together for joy
The waters follow their chosen courses*

*Here we meet where the river bends
To pray to you with the wounded
creation
Here we immerse our tired hands
To seek forgiveness and liberation*

*May we care for the land as we care
for our bodies
Seeking the peace of all that you have
made
May we care for the river as for our
being
May it flow with rejoicing and grace*



**Tag us on social media -
we love to see your River walks!**