

A large globe is formed by numerous interlocking puzzle pieces. The pieces are colored in shades of blue and white, representing the continents and oceans. Several hands of different skin tones and wearing various colored sleeves (blue, green, red, grey, yellow) are reaching towards the puzzle pieces from all directions, symbolizing global unity and collaboration. The globe is set against a light-colored wooden background.

# Toward Easter

## A Lenten Reflection

## What is Lent, and what does it have to do with Easter?

Lent is the season in the Christian calendar when the focus turns to simple living, prayer, self-examination, sacrifice and fasting in preparation for Easter. The specific observance of Lent varies throughout Christian denominations.

For the Anglican Church, the 40 days of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and continues up to Holy Saturday, with Sundays excluded.

The Bible does not mention the custom of Lent, although there are plenty of '40-day' stories, including Moses on Mount Sinai and Jesus' time in the wilderness. Often these stories highlight actions including humbling ourselves, self-examination and being open to God.

### The Lent journey invites us to walk the journey of Jesus

Lent has traditionally focused on the idea of penitence and sacrifice in preparation for Easter. Underpinning this preparation is the biblical concept of *shalom*, which shows us

that Jesus' death and resurrection is part of God's plan for the healing and renewal of all things, including ourselves, (have a look at Colossians 1:19-20 and 2 Corinthians 5:19-20).

Usually translated inadequately into English as 'peace', the biblical understanding of *shalom* is much broader. *Shalom*, as used by Jesus himself, captures the notion of human beings flourishing in healthy relationships at four levels – with God, ourselves, others and the world/creation.

As we look at ourselves and our world, we see

that these connections are often unhealthy and broken; seemingly beyond repair.

The Lent journey invites us to walk the journey of Jesus, the Saviour who bore the brokenness of these relationships, but whose life, death and resurrection declare that they can be healed. They will be made right again in the *shalom* of the Kingdom of God.

It is this hope of Jesus' resurrection that sustains us through Lent and allows us to reflect without despair.

## What is Shalom?

For the writers of the Old Testament, *shalom* was a communal state of well being in which everyone in the community enjoyed justice, righteousness, forgiveness, joy, abundance, and healing, all with the presence of God. It is the harmonious bringing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfilment, and right relationships.

The Christian gospel is an invitation to live in this new age of *shalom* right now. Imagine a world where everything was as God intended. This can be difficult when we constantly hear about violence, poverty and pain.

### Questions for reflection

1. Do you agree that *shalom* involves God, us, each other and the whole of creation?
2. We tend to separate the presence of peace, justice and God from each other. Do you agree?
3. Where do you see *shalom* appearing in your own life and community?

# Shalom



**‘For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things...’** *Colossians 1: 19-20*

## Our relationship with God

We often see God as someone “up there” who is distant and removed from the reality of life.

But what if we could have a connection with God? And what if that connection enabled us to live lives that had a ripple effect on the world around us. Our connection with God would then be personal and social, and would impact all around.

Our connection with God is more than just going to church, or reading the Bible. There are many and varied spiritual disciplines that people practice to connect with God.

### Questions for reflection

1. What is your idea of God? How would you describe your connection with God?
2. What do you think a right connection, or relationship, with God looks like?
3. What practical steps could you take to deepen your relationship with God?

# God



**‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.’** *Matthew 18:3*

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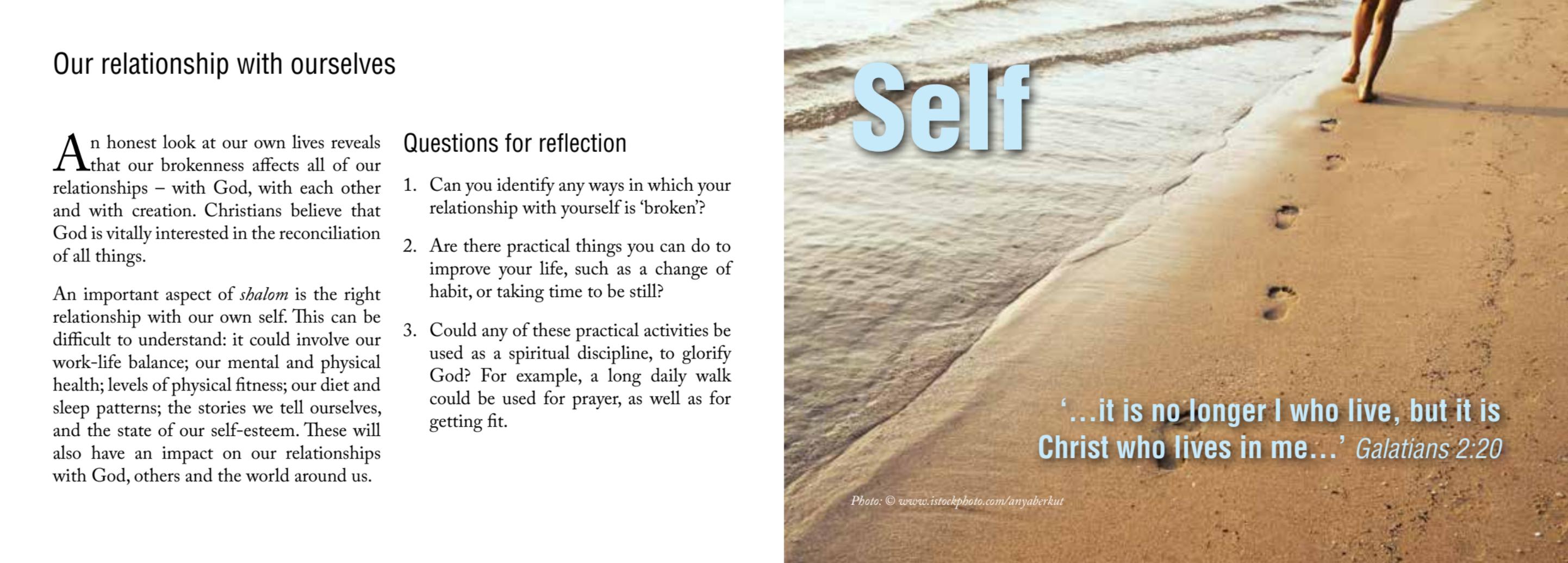
## Our relationship with ourselves

An honest look at our own lives reveals that our brokenness affects all of our relationships – with God, with each other and with creation. Christians believe that God is vitally interested in the reconciliation of all things.

An important aspect of *shalom* is the right relationship with our own self. This can be difficult to understand: it could involve our work-life balance; our mental and physical health; levels of physical fitness; our diet and sleep patterns; the stories we tell ourselves, and the state of our self-esteem. These will also have an impact on our relationships with God, others and the world around us.

### Questions for reflection

1. Can you identify any ways in which your relationship with yourself is 'broken'?
2. Are there practical things you can do to improve your life, such as a change of habit, or taking time to be still?
3. Could any of these practical activities be used as a spiritual discipline, to glorify God? For example, a long daily walk could be used for prayer, as well as for getting fit.



# Self

**'...it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me...'** *Galatians 2:20*

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## Our relationship with others

Part of the concept of *shalom* is the restoration of relationships with others and the community.

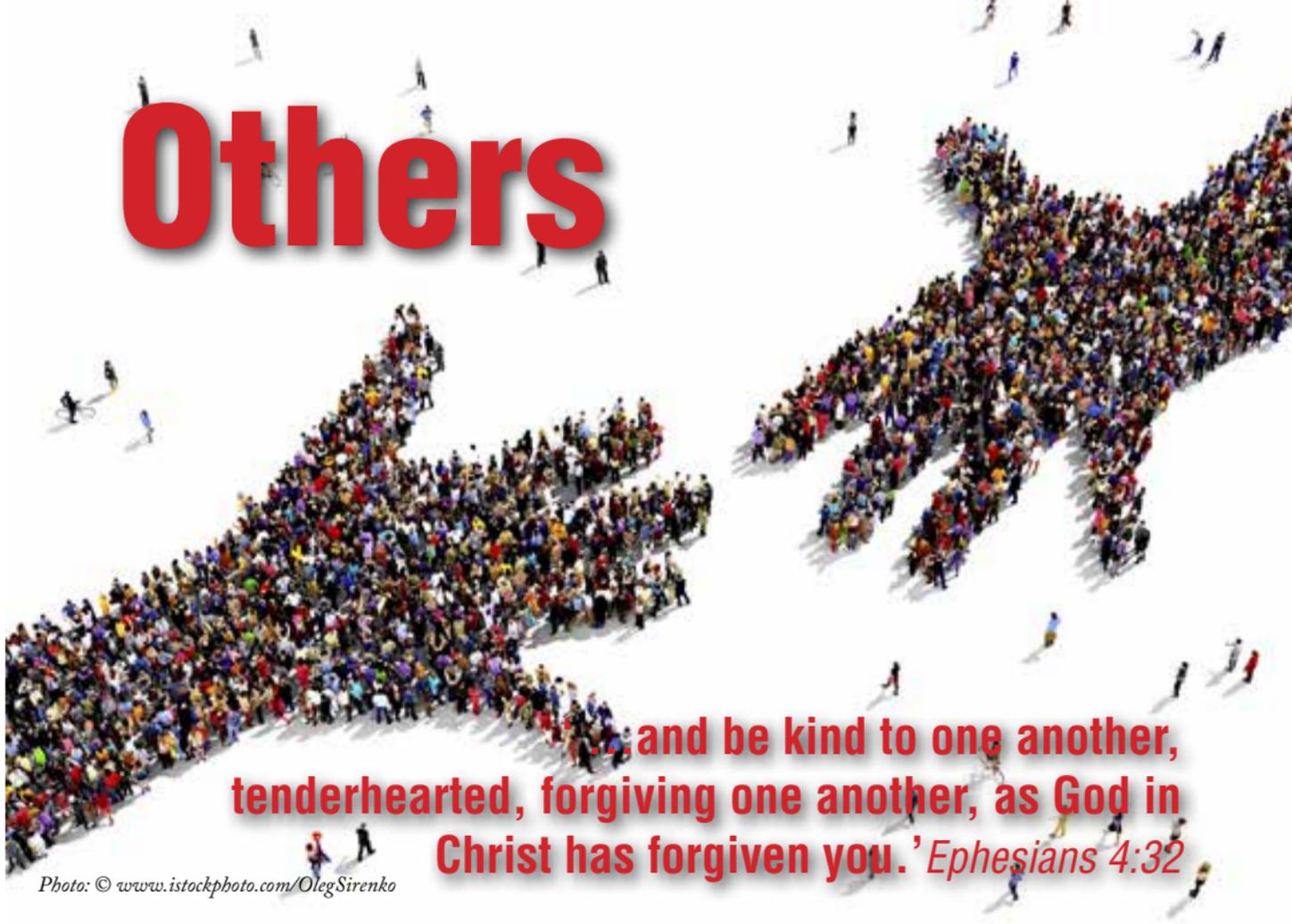
Living in peace with others is something we long for. It is not just an absence of conflict in our communities; it is about actively looking out for others. Peace with our neighbours and loved ones allows us to be more peaceful inside ourselves.

The Christian hope is for communities where all are welcomed, valued, and included. Obviously, our communities can be close to home, but they can also be in other parts of the world.

### Questions for reflection

1. Think about your current relationships with family and friends.
2. What steps could you take to make things better for all?
3. How can you bring *shalom* to your wider community? What about talking to neighbours? Volunteering for a local organisation? Campaigning for the rights of others, including people living overseas?

# Others

A large crowd of people, seen from an aerial perspective, is arranged to form the shape of a large number 7. The people are diverse in age and appearance, and they are standing on a light-colored surface. The word 'Others' is written in large, bold, red letters above the crowd.

**...and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.' Ephesians 4:32**

## Our relationship with the world and creation

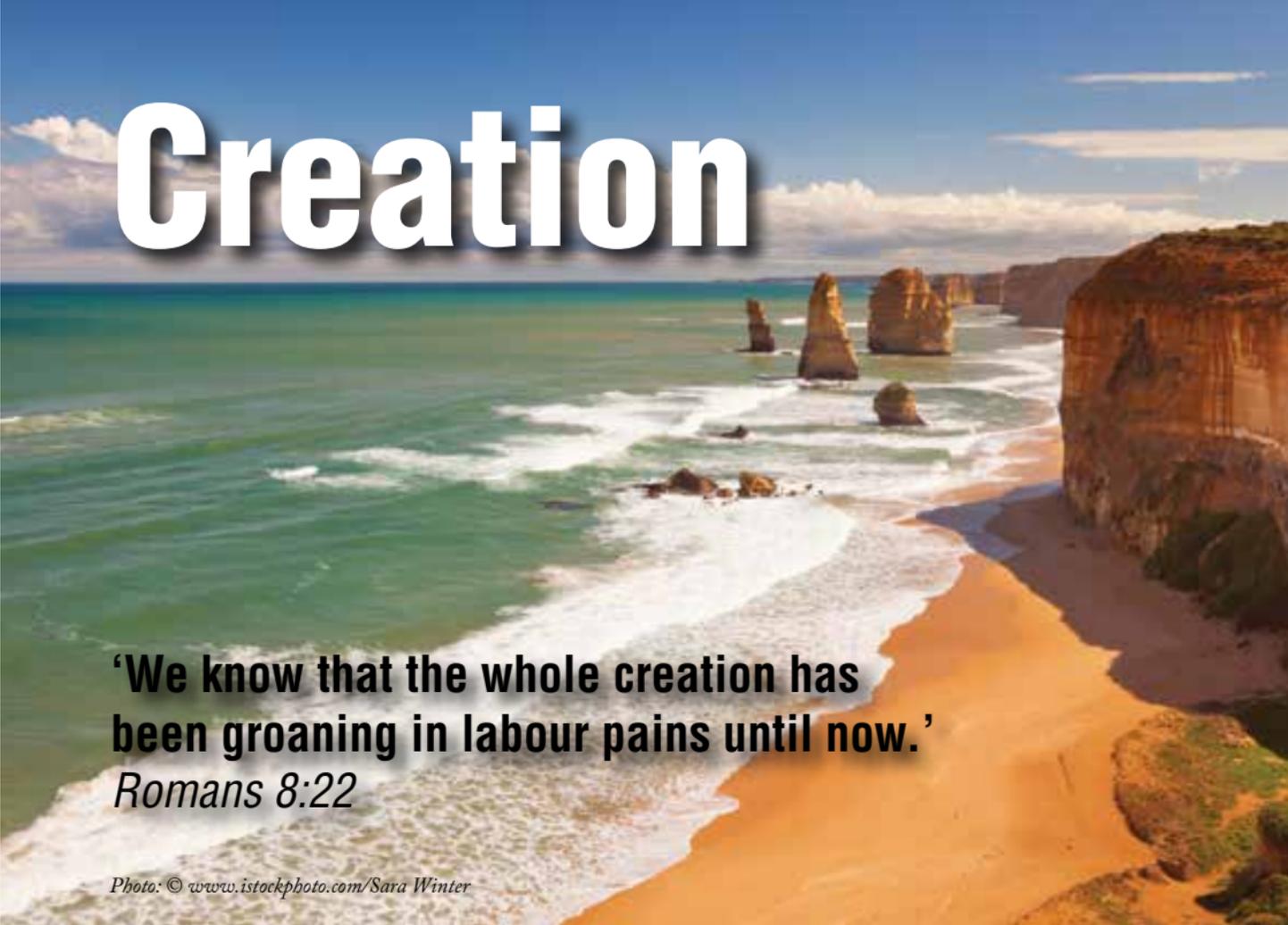
The natural environment is generally not something that comes to mind when we think of Lent. *Shalom* covers even this aspect of life too. It is very much about the flourishing of creation. This involves being a good steward over God's creation, and also sharing with justice the resources of the world for the benefit of all.

There is a lot to grieve about when we look at the physical world around us and the mismanagement of God's bounty. Regardless of our own opinions concerning climate change, our relationship to the environment is linked to our relationship with each other, ourselves and God.

### Questions for reflection

1. How is your relationship with creation 'broken'?
2. Are there any practical ways in which you can give thanks for God's creation? For example: picking up litter; planting a tree; growing your own food; helping a neighbour with their gardening.
3. Spend some time pondering creation during Lent, whether it be a sunset, a storm or the natural beauty of the landscape.

# Creation



**'We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now.'**

*Romans 8:22*

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## Our relationships redeemed

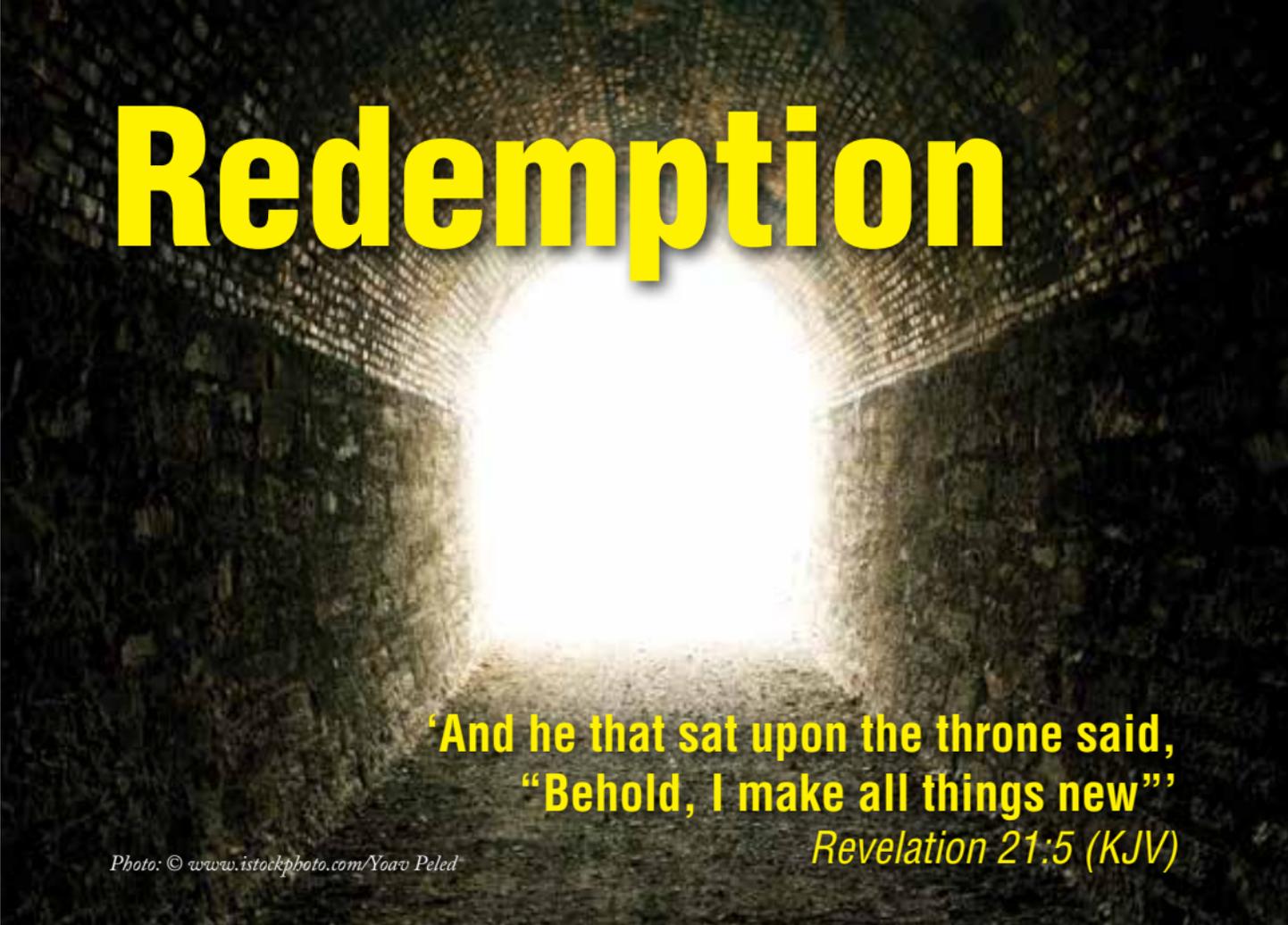
Jesus is the central point of the Scriptures. In his life, death and resurrection, *shalom* has come to us. Our relationship with God, ourselves, others and the creation are all renewed because of Jesus. This is the great Christian hope.

The Scriptures show the resurrection of Jesus as a foretaste of a new order where there will be no more tears, no more pain and no more death, where *shalom* will reign. The wonderful privilege of Lent and Easter is that we get to participate in working for *shalom* that will one day be fulfilled.

### Questions for reflection

1. What thoughts or feelings come to mind when you think of the death and resurrection of Jesus?
2. Think of some acts of love you could perform for others during Lent.
3. Where do you find hope in the lead up to Easter?

# Redemption



**‘And he that sat upon the throne said,  
“Behold, I make all things new”’**

*Revelation 21:5 (KJV)*

Lent is a time to prepare for Easter, in remembrance of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Scripture defines these events as signifying the defeat of evil and death, and as pointing to the new order, or *shalom*, that Jesus has brought the world.

We have produced this Lent booklet in the hope that it will provide a sense of understanding about this time of year, and how we can prepare ourselves by setting some time aside to be still and reflect on the significance of this season.

Our work is an attempt to live out the hope of Jesus' resurrection and the inbreaking of the *shalom* that Jesus brings, in response to the brokenness of the world.

We hope this booklet has helped you reflect on the journey of Lent and the promise of Easter.