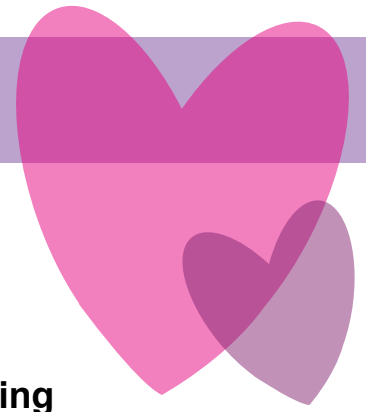




# Snapshots

2023 URC Children's and Youth Work Holiday Club

# WELCOME



**Welcome to the third official United Reformed Church (URC) Children's and Youth Work (CYW) Holiday Club – *Snapshots*. Tying in with our theme for the year, Love is... , we are exploring the snapshots in an old photograph album to find out more about God's story and what they might reveal about our relationship with God.**

This material is not designed to be prescriptive, although you may use it that way if you wish. Nor is it designed to be exclusive; feel free to swap and change the ideas included here for ones you think more suitable for your groups. It is written as a five-day plan but you may decide to do a one-day extravaganza, a club once a week through the holidays, or maybe just select a couple of the sessions to do on two or three days in the week.

At the back of this resource you will find several appendices. You may be thinking of adapting this material in a variety of ways and the appendices will give you suggestions and ideas of how to do so for various different settings.

As always, we would really love some feedback. Do let us know what you found helpful and if there is anything else you wish we had included. Should we do another such resource next year, what would be most helpful to you? And do let us know how you use it – some pictures for our Facebook page would be greatly appreciated. Contact [lorrainewebb@urc.org.uk](mailto:lorrainewebb@urc.org.uk) or [children.youth@urc.org.uk](mailto:children.youth@urc.org.uk).

## Credits

Main writing team: The Revd Chris Dowd, Nicola Grieves, Judy Harris, Sharon Lloyd, Hannah Middleton, Jess Poole, Lorraine Webb, Jo West, Ruth White

Appendices: The Revd Carole Marsden, Cliff College, Judy Harris, Sharon Lloyd, Sam Richards, Leo Roberts, Jo West

Songs: Leo Roberts and Cathryn Craig (music and lyrics) and Roo Stewart (score)

Proofreading: Laurence Wareing and Heather Wilkinson

Graphics: Sara Foyle and Laura Taylor

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# IN THIS RESOURCE

## Appendices

**11 to 14s:** While the main resource is written with the five to eleven age range in mind, you may have some young people who are just outside that demographic or come as junior helpers. The first appendix gives ideas for extending the material to take them a little deeper.

**Under fives:** You may have some children of pre-school age within your holiday club so we have added an appendix on how to adapt the theme for little ones, including some age-specific and more sensory activities you might introduce.

**Vintage:** Perhaps you are running a vintage holiday club and want the theme to tie in, so there is an appendix of ideas for the elderly and for those with dementia. This theme is an excellent one to develop with elderly people as you look back over old photographs and think about relationships together.

**Intergenerational:** Why not develop the holiday club as an intergenerational adventure, inviting adults and young people as well as children to participate together? There is an appendix with some ideas for running an intergenerational event, which may help in adapting these materials.

## Overarching themes and activities

In the first section of this resource, there are some overarching themes and activities. Here are some ideas for decorating your hall or Zoom background and for ongoing/cumulative activities for your groups of children and adults. There are also the two songs which have been purpose-written for this material by Leo Roberts and Cathryn Craig.

## Reflections for volunteers

It is important for the volunteers running the holiday club to ground it in faith and sound theology and to know where the theme is taking

them. For this reason, we have included some initial reflections for the team to include in a daily pre-session briefing, with discussion points to stimulate their own thinking and learning. Obviously you will also want a prayer time together, maybe focusing on your thinking and the session ahead.

## Arrival activities

You will need something to keep your children occupied from the moment they arrive until the holiday club session actually begins. These activities usually take place in the team areas and encourage children to feel welcome, engaged and to start them thinking about the theme from the very moment they step over the threshold. They will be able to work on their own photograph album as well as doing a challenge and creative activity, engaging all learning styles.

## Story

We have chosen to deliver the stories in a variety of styles and encourage you to be experimental with different ways of presenting Bible stories. For those of you not confident with storytelling or drama, or for those of you running your holiday club over Zoom, there are videos of the stories being told by our team on our YouTube playlist

<https://bit.ly/SnapshotVideo>

There are also suggestions for YouTube videos you may wish to use to retell the story later in the session. These are chosen because they tell the story in a way suitable for this age range and are true to the Bible accounts.

## Craft

These crafts are not prescriptive – you may substitute them with crafts of your own. We recommend checking Pinterest for ideas or referring to past issues of Families on Faith Adventures @ Home to stimulate your creative juices: [www.bit.ly/fofaadventuresathome](http://www.bit.ly/fofaadventuresathome).

Do try to use recyclable or eco-friendly materials wherever possible. Craft time is a good time to talk – maybe use the reflective (wondering) questions to prompt a conversation while you are engaging in the craft together or ponder on what you have found out so far. We have included a variety of crafts and science experiments – you will probably want to choose one or maybe two, depending on your group and circumstances.

## Games

Two games are described here for each session, each with a link to the theme. You will undoubtedly want to include more games – probably some of the children’s favourites.

## Small group prayer activity



This is an opportunity for the small groups to pray together and to encourage a bit of creativity in prayer. Prayer during this time can be far more personal and encourage children and adults alike to build their personal relationship with God. Remember to allow time to listen and be still.

## Recipes

Here are suggested recipes and food activities that are themed to our days and are quick and easy for children to make themselves during the session if you choose. If you are using them, it would be helpful to consider also serving fruit and a healthy drink. Alternative suggestions to cater for those with allergies are included in brackets in the ingredients list.

## Photographs

When you leaf through an old family photo album, you often think, “I’ve still got that dress somewhere” or, “I’ve still got a bag just like that one”, so we have included several random things in each of our photographs. You could choose one from each picture to have lying around in the hall where the holiday club is taking place and encourage the children to try to spot what and where it is.

## Out of the album drama

As you leaf through the photo album, characters from the scene will step out to greet you. We recommend setting up so that dressed up characters or puppets appear through a door or from behind the screen. These dramas are also available on our YouTube playlist.

## Song

You will want to include songs as you gather the group to begin and also in your closing worship time; probably throughout the session too. One of our songs is about love in general, the other is a cumulative song with different verses to go with each of the Bible stories. You could sing just one verse and chorus each session or could build up by adding a verse on each time. Your church probably has additional songs which your children will enjoy – think about the lyrics and make sure they are age-appropriate and theologically sound.

## Closing prayer



The closing prayers are designed to be a little more active and for everyone to get involved in them. Remember that prayer is for adults as well as children – this is not a time for the adults to go off and start tidying up! You might even want to encourage parents and carers to arrive slightly before the end of the session and join in the closing prayer with their children.

## Bible version



For the purpose of this resource we have used the *International Children’s Bible*. Please make sure that you credit them, using the wording on the first page of this resource if you copy the text, and please ensure that you do not change the text in any way. Obviously you may choose to use the Bible preferred by your church family, but please ensure that it uses language which is accessible and inclusive while remaining a true translation.

# OVERARCHING THEMES AND ACTIVITIES FOR THE WHOLE WEEK

**A typical holiday club might run like this. Suggestions for a daily timetable, 2.5 hours:**

## Arrivals

Arrival activities in small groups – daily activity as detailed in that day’s session instructions

## Upfront session 1 (45 minutes)

Active warm up (music and exercise routine)  
Song  
Check the photo of the day  
Story

## Small groups (1 hour)

Refreshments – recipe of the day  
Crafts  
Reflection  
Prayer activity  
Games

## Upfront session 2 (25 minutes)

Song  
Out of the photo  
What have we learned?  
Closing song and group prayer activity  
Goodbye wind-down and gather up ready for collection from small group

## About each session

Personnel – attic explorer: dressed in old clothes, maybe a bit dusty. Maybe even carrying a duster (a feather duster, even) or dustpan and brush. They could have a toy spider hidden in a pocket and find it at some point, exaggeratedly throwing it into the assembled group of children.

Play up the theme of curiosity – the explorer is taking the children into an old attic to see what they can find there. On the first day they might explore a couple of things – find some curiosities in the attic or things that might make the children laugh, maybe their childhood teddy bear or unusual things they wore in times gone by – before finding the photograph album.

## Team identity

Designate one area of the hall for each team of attic explorers and get the teams to come up with their own team name. The team might decorate the walls of their area with pictures – perhaps some cobwebs and spiders of their own, maybe decorate some big cardboard boxes etc.

As one of the activities they can make a photo album for their team out of pieces of thin card and put in print-outs of photos of their team, creating a tableau, or photocopies of photos their team might bring in (remember to check for permissions) or drawings made to look like photos.

## Decorate your venue

The scene is set in an abandoned attic. You may want to decorate it with cardboard boxes, old suitcases, bits and pieces. Even a few cobwebs! And a pile of old photograph albums, the top one containing the five photographs you are using as the stimuli for each day.



These may be photos you have taken yourself in advance, or you may prefer to use the ones which we have pre-done for you. These are provided in black and white or in colour and you will need to cut them out, preferably on glossy paper if possible, and put them into an album as well as having them on a computer screen so that children can all see the detail of the photographs.

## Ongoing activities

### Hotseat

(Optional) Arrange a time for someone from the church congregation to come and visit the holiday club and talk about their own relationship with God through the hard times and the good times in their lives and how that relationship developed, answering questions from the children.

### A challenge for the end of the session

Can you find any photos at home that you can bring in which show memories of special relationships or times when you were brave, surprised, included, adventurous or felt that you really belonged? If you can't bring and share your own photos, maybe you can find pictures of people in magazines or newspapers.

### Continuing craft

Each team can put together their own photograph album to illustrate each of the 'Love is...' themes, using photos from magazines, printed photos taken during the session, photocopied photographs from home (check for permissions to include these from anyone pictured in the photographs), or drawings made to look like a photo. You might even set up a photobooth and take photos of the children with various photobooth props. These can be purchased relatively cheaply.

## Songs

One song is a theme song entitled 'So Love', which would be perfect for the start of your session and possibly also at the end.

The second song 'Always and Everywhere', is cumulative. It has a general verse and chorus and then specific verses for each day. You may choose just to sing the relevant verse for the day's theme or you may choose to build this song up. Find the sheet music overleaf.

Sing along with Leo videos available on <https://bit.ly/SnapshotVideo> or from [children.youth@urc.org.uk](mailto:children.youth@urc.org.uk) on request.



# Always and Everywhere

♩ = 95 **Unhurried**

Leo Roberts & Cathryn Craig

**Chorus**

C G F G C Am

Love is all\_ a-round us, love will al - ways be, love for one an-oth - er,\_\_\_

4 F G F G C

love for you and me. There in the be-gin - ning and there un - til the end,

7 Am F G

\_\_\_ God has shown true love for us\_ be-cause\_\_\_ God is our friend.

**Verse**

10 C *Fine* C G F G

1. First-ly there was noth-ing, just dark-ness, no light,

14 C Am F G

till God's love cre-at - ed the day and\_ the night. The

16 F G C Am F

land and the sea and the birds\_\_\_ in the air, ani - mals and fish-es God has

19 G C G

put in - to\_\_\_ our care. God start - ed\_\_\_ with noth - ing,\_\_\_ now

Lyrics: ©2023 Leo Roberts | Music: ©2023 Leo Roberts & Cathryn Craig | Transcription: Roo Stewart for URC Children and Youth

21 F G C Am

look what's a-round: a sky is up a-bove us, our

23 F G F G C Am

feet are on the ground. Cre-at-ed from noth-ing, ex-cept God's de-sire, we

26 F G *D.C. al Fine*

love God's cre-a-tion, so let's raise our voi-ces high - er.

#### Chorus

Love is all around us, love will always be,  
 love for one another, love for you and me.  
 There in the beginning, and there until the end,  
 God has shown true love for us, because God is our friend.

#### Verse 1 – Love is creative

Firstly, there was nothing, just darkness, no light,  
 till God's love created the day and the night.  
 The land and the sea and the birds in the air,  
 animals and fishes God has put into our care.  
 God started with nothing, now look what's around:  
 a sky is up above us, our feet are on the ground.  
 Created from nothing, except God's desire,  
 we love God's creation, so let's raise our voices higher.

#### Verse 3 – Love is adventurous

They had a good job fixing nets on the shore,  
 when Jesus said, "Follow me, I'll show you more."  
 And picking up others they met on the way,  
 they gave up their jobs and they walked in the Way.  
 They had no idea of what lay ahead,  
 but they all loved Jesus and did what he said.  
 Love leads to adventures, excitement, you see.  
 Will you answer when Jesus says, "Follow me.?"

#### Verse 2 – Love is brave

To walk upon the water, what a strange thing to do.  
 I don't think I would try it, what about you?  
 But Jesus loved Peter and told him to try,  
 and Peter loved Jesus: he didn't ask why.  
 Stepped out of the boat and stepped onto a wave,  
 no fear for his safety, his love made him brave.  
 And while, in our story, it ended in tears,  
 when you love somebody, you can overcome your fears.

#### Verse 4 – Love is belonging

Abraham, Sarah were both getting old,  
 too late for a family till they were told  
 by God that some children were theirs to be had  
 and God knew that they'd be a great mum and dad.  
 Those children had children, and so it went on,  
 a whole family to which they could belong.  
 And Jesus was part of that great family  
 'cause love is belonging: guess what? So are we!

#### Verse 5 – Love is surprising

An angel appeared to young Mary one night.  
 Mary was scared – what a terrible fright!  
 She blocked up her ears and screwed up her eyes.  
 "Fear not," said the angel, "I have a surprise!  
 You're having a baby, the father is God."  
 "I am the Lord's servant", she said with a nod.  
 That baby was Jesus, a friend we all love,  
 the biggest surprise from our God up above.



# So Love

Leo Roberts

♩ = 98 **Steady 4**

**Chorus** C F

Love is kind, love is good, love's ex-act-ly what we should be show-ing.

5 C

God loves me, God loves you and, when

7 F

we share God's love too, it keeps grow-ing... Love is

10 G F C

ne-ver wast-ed, ne-ver lost, and Je-sus showed, de-spite the cost, that

*Last time to Coda*

12 F G C G C

lov-ing is the best that we can be, so love.

Words and Music: ©2023 Leo Roberts | Musical Transcription: Roo Stewart for URC Children and Youth

## Verse

15 F C F C

1. Love is in your heart and love is in your head.  
 2. Love is ma - ny co - lours, and love is tall and short,  
 3. Love is ne - ver boast - ful, love is ne - ver rude.  
 4. Love is al - ways pat - ient, love, it al - ways hopes.

17 F C Dm G

Love is there when you wake up and when you go to bed.  
 Love is some-thing that you learn but love can - not be taught.  
 Love's a hap - py feel - ing, it's a love - ly kind of mood.  
 Love will keep you stea - dy when you feel you're on the ropes.

19 F C F C

Love is ne - ver end - ing, real love ne - ver dies. We  
 Love is some-times chee - ky, love of - ten ob - eys and  
 Love does not cost mon - ey, love's free to re - ceive.  
 Love is al - ways trust - ing, love shows that you care.

*D.C. al Coda*

21 F C Dm G

know when some-one loves us: we can see it in their eyes.  
 love will keep you nice and warm on the cold - est days.  
 God loves ev - 'ry one of us, that's what we all be - lieve.  
 Love can - not be locked a - way, it's some-thing we must share.

## Coda (Ending)

23 C G C G C

love, so love so love.

# ESSENTIAL THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

## Online Holiday Club

You may have decided to do your holiday club over Zoom or a similar online platform. Much of the material here can also be done online, with children provided with a pack of resources to use during each session, although some of the games may need to be adapted. It might be fun to dress up and/or decorate your background. Please make sure your volunteers have all read [www.bit.ly/safeguardingappendixc](http://www.bit.ly/safeguardingappendixc).

You can do small group activities online by using breakout rooms, but remember that you must have two adults who are DBS checked in each breakout room. You might also like to watch this helpful video from Ruth White to help you think about the pros and cons of online engagement with children <https://youtu.be/NzIzkG8-H4o>.

## Outdoors

You may have decided to run your holiday club outdoors. While some of this material is suitable for doing outdoors, you will need to enhance it with extra activities more appropriate for taking advantage of the outdoor space. Alternatively, you may have access to a marquee or large gazebo which you could use, or go outside for part of the session if you have the facilities for that. If you are using outside space, you will need to ensure that the area is clean and free from litter and animal faeces before and after your session and you will also need to consider how you will ensure that children do not wander off from the area.

You will need to think about safeguarding – how to ensure that no adults who are not on the team engage inappropriately with the children in your care. You will also need to consider issues such as access to toilets and availability of a first aid kit.

## Registration

It is important to keep an accurate register of the children and adults who attend on each day of your holiday club. This information will need to be kept according to your church's data protection and safeguarding policies.

Parents/carers must also fill in a registration/consent form and children should not be accepted into the holiday club without it.

The registration/consent form must include name and date of the event; child's details; details of two emergency contacts; details of any additional needs; any health needs, medication or allergies; acknowledgement of liability; consent for photographs; consent for first aid and emergency treatment; details of who will be collecting the child at the end of the session. Do not include any information which you do not actually need (e.g. gender).

Ensure that your registration/consent form states where parents/carers can access your data policy and safeguarding policy. These forms must be kept securely and used sensitively. Sample registration forms are available here: <https://bit.ly/URCCYWpaperwork>.

## Safeguarding

Make sure you are familiar with your church's safeguarding policy and that volunteers have received training. Everyone over the age of 18 who is taking part in your holiday club must have an enhanced DBS check for the church. Occasional visitors who do not have a DBS certificate must not be left alone with children and the leadership of the club are responsible for ensuring that a leader is with them at all times. See URC Good Practice 5 [www.urc.org.uk/good-practice-policy-and-procedures](http://www.urc.org.uk/good-practice-policy-and-procedures).

You may find that volunteers have children at the holiday club to whom they are related or have a close bond. They should be encouraged to remember not to treat those children any differently – hugs and kisses, sitting on lap, being alone with a child, these things are fine for at home but not advisable in a church club situation where they may blur the boundaries for others.

## Photographs

One or two people should be identified as designated photographers for the event and should wear a badge identifying them as such. Where possible, they should use a camera rather than a smartphone to take photographs and should only photograph those children whose parents have given permission. Photographs should not be used on any social media other than the church's or Church House official social media. See URC Good Practice 5 [www.urc.org.uk/good-practice-policy-and-procedures](http://www.urc.org.uk/good-practice-policy-and-procedures). You are, however, encouraged to share any photographs with Church House Children's and Youth Work (with appropriate permissions) for use on the website, CYW Facebook page and in URC publications.

## Mobile phones

It is good practice that no mobile phones are brought into the holiday club area unless absolutely necessary.

## Risk assessments

It is essential that you do a risk assessment for the venue you are using for your holiday club and also do risk assessments for the activities you will engage in. Your church may have its own policy and template for risk assessments but you may wish to use or adapt the ones available here: <https://bit.ly/URCCYWpaperwork>.

Risk assessments are useless if just put in a file. Ensure that all your volunteers have read the risk assessment or, better still, discuss it during your pre-session briefings. Please be aware that all risk assessments should be approved by your church leadership team.

## Safety

Check the premises you use are safe, hygienic and suitable for children – think about stacked chairs, flooring, toilets etc.

Children should not be allowed unaccompanied into kitchen areas.

Think about how to make your toilets a safe place without compromising privacy and dignity, so that you know when children have gone to the toilet and how long they have been gone. As far as this is possible, designate separate toilets for adults.

Have a routine for checking throughout the session that children have not gone missing from the group. Have a routine for the end of the session – perhaps tell children that they are superglued to the floor until their parent or carer comes to collect them and then get the parent/carer and child to come together to a leader to be signed out.

Although it is not compulsory to have someone on the team who is a trained first-aider, it is a very good idea. Make sure everyone on the team knows where the first aid box is and nominate someone to ensure that the box is fully stocked. Have a first aid recording sheet or book and keep clear and full records of any injury, however minor, who treated it and what was done. Ensure that the record is dated and signed and take note of anything that needs to be done to minimise the risk of that happening again. See here: <https://bit.ly/URCCYWpaperwork>.

## Behaviour

Remember that the children are at a club and it should be fun for everyone. Do not impose rules that are not necessary or enforce participation if a child feels uncomfortable. One member of the team should be the key person to speak to for any issues that arise, and this should be the only team member who liaises directly with parents or carers

about behaviour. Remember that the best way of encouraging appropriate behaviour is to model it and to build positive relationships. You may want to watch the video on strategies to support behaviour that challenges, which was prepared for leaders of the Pilots organisation: [https://youtu.be/9XxpVUGVT\\_o](https://youtu.be/9XxpVUGVT_o).

It is good to have a behaviour policy which all team members read and which is available for parents. An example can be found at <https://bit.ly/URCCYWpaperwork>.

You may also want a simple code of conduct which all participants sign (including leaders and volunteers), an example of which can be found at <https://bit.ly/URCCYWpaperwork>. It is helpful to have a short and punchy list of around five golden rules, framed positively ('we will' rather than 'we won't') and with visual cues as well as words. This can be put up in each room and referred to whenever necessary.

## Inclusion

All we do in our churches and fellowship should be as inclusive as we possibly can make it. Nobody should be excluded due to their background, ethnicity, physical or learning needs, gender, language, or for any other reason. Children may come with additional needs or English as a second language, they may be refugees or have experienced trauma. Consider what adjustments may need to be made to enable all children to feel welcome and take part.

You may find it helpful to watch the video on strategies to support additional needs which was prepared for leaders of the Pilots organisation: <https://youtu.be/usZWfOfEhm8>. Contact [children.youth@urc.org.uk](mailto:children.youth@urc.org.uk) for some practical tips on supporting transgender and non-binary children and young people.

## Timetable

Ensure that everyone is familiar with the timetable for the sessions. It is a good idea to establish a routine for your sessions and

stick with it as far as possible. It is also helpful to have a large-scale visual timetable for the session up where everyone can see it, maybe with smaller versions in any other rooms you use. If you would like help with putting together a visual timetable using Widgit to create symbols, please do speak to your synod CYW specialist or Children and Youth Development Officer (CYDO).

## Debrief and review

Although you will be tired after an energetic session and want to clear up and go home as quickly as possible, it is good practice and helpful to have a daily debrief of how everything went and to consider whether anything needs adapting for the next day; capturing positives and negatives for an overall evaluation of the holiday club. You might also like to include the children and families in your evaluation in some way and encourage children to share ideas for any future holiday clubs.

## Feedback

The writers of this resource would greatly appreciate any feedback on how your holiday club went, which parts of this document were useful to you, whether there was anything additional that you needed. Please email [children.youth@urc.org.uk](mailto:children.youth@urc.org.uk). Remember, we would also love you to share with us any photographs for which you have the appropriate permissions.



# REFLECTIONS FOR TEAM MEMBERS AND LEADERS

## Love is Creative

Genesis 1:1-31

<http://bit.ly/40Hekk6>

### And love is..... Let there be light!

The first (probably priestly) account of Creation always reminds me of Mickey Mouse as the sorcerer's apprentice in the film *Fantasia*. In my mind's eye I see a figure standing in the middle of celestial fireworks, orchestrating the beginning of creation like a conductor of an orchestra bringing a creation into being from nothing.

One of the things we often struggle with is the question, "Why did God bother at all? Why did the being who creates everything need to be bothered to bring such frustrating beings into existence? Certainly, if we read the soap opera we call the rest of Genesis, we aren't painted in a particularly positive light. And that makes us sometimes feel a little less than wonderful about ourselves.

But that would be to ignore what God has created in us. We are beings capable of incredible creativity and love. The fact that you are sitting reading this holiday club document is a testament to thousands of minds dreaming, inventing and creating everything from paper to microchips – and that's before the team even got together to think up this programme. These things are not an accident. Our creativity is part of the Creator's love. And we were created in love to create.

So when using this guide, trust this gift. Don't rely on being safe and predictable. Take a risk to do something a little bit out of your comfort zone. Listen to that creative spark in you that is part of the spark from the very beginning of creation. Let your creativity and imagination soar!

## Things to ponder

- What is your spark from the beginning of creation – how can you fan it into a flame?
- Having leafed through the booklet, what has fired your imagination? What holds us back from being creative – what gets in the way of us trusting ourselves?
- What holds you back from being creative – what gets in the way of you trusting yourself?

## Prayer



Take some time together to pray together at the beginning of the week. Pray about how you can create a safe space for creativity to flourish, both in the delivery team and also in the sessions with the young people.

## Love is Brave

Matthew 14:22-33

<http://bit.ly/439liQD>

I think sometimes it is surprising that we can do anything at all post-pandemic in our churches. Covid disrupted so much. Many people put things down they have never taken back up. Some found two years of stasis has made them lose their confidence in their physical and mental abilities. Other people lost that Sunday morning habit and now go for a walk or do brunch. We lost wonderful irreplaceable people to the ravages of pandemic. The sad truth is that some congregations will never recover, and some have closed and more will close.

There has been a permanent disruption and things will never settle back to where they were before. I hate the term "new normal". Principally because it implies we should stop whining and get on with it.



But sometimes there is a point to our whining.

One reason may be fear. When we are afraid, we find all sorts of reasons not to go forward. And ignoring those fears simply means that they linger on rather than being dealt with.

And we need to face down our fears to move onwards.

Imagine Peter first of all thinking that he was seeing a ghost and then later starting to sink because he was afraid and crying, "Save me Lord". I suspect we all feel like that sometimes.

If you are not afraid, there is no occasion to exhibit bravery. Bravery means facing down our fears and acting anyway. Not noticing danger isn't bravery – it's inattention. And in our current situations facing our fears may be as daunting to us as it was to Peter.

But if we don't take a risk will anything ever change in a positive way?

### Things to ponder

- What are the fears current in your own church community?
- How can you deal with these fears positively while still acknowledging their impact?
- How might your fears impact on this week and what you deliver as a team?

### Prayer



*Sometimes, God, it feels choppy and I am afraid. Sometimes I struggle to hear you calling me over the roar of events. Help me to get out of the boat and achieve the miraculous with your help.*



## Love is adventure

**Matthew 4:18-22 and 9:9-13**

<http://bit.ly/3GmCsAh>

<http://bit.ly/3KjvkG4>

One of the exciting things about an adventure is it creates deep bonds between everyone who experiences it. We all have people we know because we have shared something special, and when we get together we reminisce about our adventure together.

I often wonder how the families of the four fishermen felt when they simply left what they were doing to embark on the adventure of their lives. I can imagine there was quite a bit of consternation and grumbling – "What do you mean that you are heading off for who knows where and who knows how long? How are we supposed to eat if you aren't catching fish?"

An adventure comes at a cost – it means we are having to abandon the known and the familiar in order to experience something different and exciting. We change because of our experiences when we adventure.

While our adventures may be a little less exciting than the disciples', we should try to have them none the less. This week is an opportunity to provide children with an adventure in faith and fun. It is also an opportunity for us to travel outside the confines of what we normally do as Church and have an adventure on our own. We have permission to do things we normally would not have time to do.

Give yourself permission to have an adventure yourself this week. You might be surprised what happens!

### Things to ponder

- When was a time you had an adventure? How did it change you?
- How can you encourage each other to have an adventure this week? What permission do you need to give each other so you can?

- How has planning and running these sessions changed your relationships with each other?

## Prayer



*Dear God, do not let us be too timid to hear your voice and risk going on an adventure with you. Let me travel the untrodden paths where you call me.*

## Love is Belonging

### Genesis 15:1-6

<http://bit.ly/3ZRqWnw>

I have a new puppy from a rescue centre. Our two older dogs (one ancient cavalier spaniel and a middle aged one who will need a new friend soon) have been somewhat affronted by this impertinent bundle of fur. It didn't help that the first time they snuggled together, the puppy decided to chew ears and tails! It's taken a few weeks for them to accept each other.

Belonging is when we start to see each other as having something to do with each other. It's when we begin to care about our welfare and see it as collective rather than individual. The Genesis story we read today relates to a very special family who were given a special blessing to carry to the world. And we are part of that family.

And being part of that family has obligations. It means welcoming those annoying frisky puppies into our stable relationships even when they nip our tails. It means accepting them and allowing ourselves to be reinvigorated and changed by them... as I see a somewhat middle aged portly dog playing chase'ems with a fuzzy puppy out of the window.

Hopefully you have had new people at your sessions. Of course, there are all sorts of motives why they might be there. You might

suspect this is cheap childcare or simply the opportunity during holidays to dump a child and have a harass-free cup of coffee. But that doesn't mean that the children you have received have not had an invitation to become part of our special family.

If possible, engage with the families who come as, often, people are so afraid that they will be rejected – or judged. And, like my puppy, they do not know our funny pack ways and may do the equivalent of chewing our tails. So, suspend any assumptions you may have and be open to the gifts you may receive from them – who knows, maybe this is the beginning of a wonderful relationship!

## Things to ponder

- Think about how you could engage beyond this week with the families who have come. What could be possible?
- My puppy only really came out of her shell when the other dogs accepted her. What can you do to truly welcome anyone new who has come to these sessions?
- What are the things we can learn from any new families? What is the best of us we can share with them?

## Prayer

As the old hymn goes:

*Bind us together  
with cords that cannot be broken.  
Bind us together, Lord,  
bind us together,  
bind us together with love.*



## Love is surprising

John 1:1-51

<http://bit.ly/3nST4cN>

(Note: the children's session uses the reading from Luke 1:26-38)

I recently ran a series of Bible studies about the early arguments about the nature of Jesus. The one that disturbed us the most was Docetism, the idea that Jesus only seemed to have a body and was not really incarnate (in flesh). Putting it rather simplistically, it suggested Jesus was some sort of spiritual hologram. The reason that disturbed us so much was summed up in the comment "So how would he know what it feels to be me?".

If we know Jesus laughed, cried, felt hungry, felt discouraged and even had the occasional snuffle it makes God far more approachable to us. It tells us that God knows what it is to be human. Logically, we know that of course God knows what it is to be human – she did create us after all – but sometimes it doesn't feel like that. The illusion of a majestic unapproachable God is shattered in the incarnation.

Similarly, Church can seem scarcely human. Too often, people see buildings and assume a chilly bunch of saints assemble there. Often, we shelter in them trying to create an unchanging sanctuary from a hostile world. This is your opportunity to shatter both illusions. Let yourself be a bit vulnerable and human this week. Share a bit of yourself. Be a bit like a Jesus with smelly feet and an infectious laugh. It might be the surprise that everyone needs.

## Things to ponder

- What reassurance do you need to be more vulnerable to everyone involved in this week?
- What blessings can you be this week and what blessings can you receive?
- How can you embody the best of your church to those who have come this week?

## Prayer



*Jesus, help me to be as vulnerable and human as you were. Work through me to continue the miracle of incarnation.*



# LOVE IS CREATIVE

## THE CREATION STORY



### Bible reading



#### Genesis chapter 1

<http://bit.ly/3KppBi9>

In the beginning God created the sky and the earth. The earth was empty and had no form. Darkness covered the ocean, and God's Spirit was moving over the water.

Then God said, "Let there be light!" And there was light. God saw that the light was good. So he divided the light from the darkness. God named the light "day" and the darkness "night." Evening passed, and morning came. This was the first day.

Then God said, "Let there be something to divide the water in two!" So God made the air to divide the water in two. Some of the water was above the air, and some of the water was below it. God named the air "sky." Evening passed, and morning came. This was the second day.

Then God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered together so the dry land will appear." And it happened. God named the dry land "earth." He named the water that was gathered together "seas." God saw that this was good.

Then God said, "Let the earth produce plants. Some plants will make grain for seeds. Others will make fruit with seeds in it. Every seed will produce more of its own kind of plant." And it happened. The earth produced plants. Some plants had grain for seeds. The trees made fruit with seeds in it. Each seed grew its own kind of plant. God saw that all this was good. Evening passed, and morning came. This was the third day.

Then God said, "Let there be lights in the sky to separate day from night. These lights will be used for signs, seasons, days and years. They will be in the sky to give light to the earth." And it happened.

So God made the two large lights. He made the brighter light to rule the day. He made the smaller light to rule the night. He also made the stars. God put all these in the sky to shine on the earth. They are to rule over the day and over the night. He put them there to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that all these things were good. Evening passed, and morning came. This was the fourth day.

Then God said, "Let the water be filled with living things. And let birds fly in the air above the earth."

So God created the large sea animals. He created every living thing that moves in the sea. The sea is filled with these living things. Each one produces more of its own kind. God also made every bird that flies. And each bird produces more of its own kind. God saw that this was good. God blessed them and said, "Have many young ones and grow in number. Fill the water of the seas, and let the birds grow in number on the earth." Evening passed, and morning came. This was the fifth day.

Then God said, "Let the earth be filled with animals. And let each produce more of its own kind. Let there be tame animals and small crawling animals and wild animals. And let each produce more of its kind." And it happened.

So God made the wild animals, the tame animals and all the small crawling animals to produce more of their own kind. God saw that this was good.

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image and likeness. And let them rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the



sky. Let them rule over the tame animals, over all the earth and over all the small crawling animals on the earth.”

So God created human beings in his image. In the image of God he created them. He created them male and female. God blessed them and said, “Have many children and grow in number. Fill the earth and be its master. Rule over the fish in the sea and over the birds in the sky. Rule over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

God said, “Look, I have given you all the plants that have grain for seeds. And I have given you all the trees whose fruits have seeds in them. They will be food for you. I have given all the green plants to all the animals to eat. They will be food for every wild animal, every bird of the air and every small crawling animal.” And it happened. God looked at everything he had made, and it was very good. Evening passed, and morning came. This was the sixth day.

## Bible video

A very precious thing

[https://youtu.be/dBAHBy\\_C60M](https://youtu.be/dBAHBy_C60M)

The Creation Story – Bible Project for Kids

<https://youtu.be/cstDniigA-w>

## Arrival activity

As it is the first day, you can begin by creating the group photo album that will be added to each morning.

Let’s begin to bond as a group and develop our creative group identity by creating a team name, team colours, and a team banner to use as we join the main group each day. You might even create team chants with actions.

Big Questions: (To use as you create together)

- ♥ What are you looking forward to this week?
- ♥ What is your favourite part of creation and why?

## Drama

### Stepping out of the album (Adam or Eve)

Anyone for an apple? I’ve gone off them a bit, to be honest. Let me introduce myself – I’m just one part of God’s amazing creation. That may sound a bit boastful, but actually you’re part of God’s amazing creation too, we all are. And just take a look around. Every single person here is different, just like everything God’s created. You’re all amazing! God never seems to run out of ideas, such creativity.

Did you know, there are about 400,000 different species of plant alone? And as for insects – I hope you’re not afraid of creepy crawlies because there are 925,000 known species of insects and there could well be millions we don’t know about yet. That’s a lot of bugs!

And what about snowflakes? Did you know every single snowflake is different too, just like every person’s fingerprint is different? And there are even 2,500 different types of apple grown in the UK, would you believe it? And the most amazing things is that God didn’t only create all these things, but God looks at it all and loves every single bit of it.

God said it’s all good. Best of all, there’s a tiny bit of God in each one of us, so we get to be creative too – art, craft, music, inventions, building, designing, writing stories and poems and making jokes. What did Adam say on the 24th of December? It’s Christmas, Eve!



## Story

What's this? What's this?  
A bright and starry sky!  
What's this?  
The moon is in my eye.  
What's this?  
The sky is changing, bright and blue,  
There's just so much to see and do!  
What's this?

What's this? What's this?  
An ocean, deep and blue.  
What's this?  
A dolphin admiring the view.  
What's this?  
A clown fish telling jokes galore,  
A sea horse race and so much more!  
What's this?

What's this? What's this?  
A bear with pure white hair!  
Oh my,  
He wears it with such flair!  
What's this?  
A lion with his giant paws,  
Look at those massive claws!  
Look, there's more!

What's this? What's this?  
A horse with all his stripes,  
Look there!  
A funny little snipe.  
What joy, what fun,  
A lizard bathing in the sun,  
The birds are singing, bees are humming.  
What's this?

What's this? What's this?  
People enjoying rain showers?  
What's this?  
Meadows growing pretty flowers  
What's this?  
So many sights, so many wonders,  
All for me to sit and ponder.  
I can't contain, I must proclaim!  
Exploring creation is my aim.

## Wondering questions

- ♥ I wonder what you have created that you're really pleased with?
- ♥ I wonder what different ways there are to be creative?
- ♥ I wonder if God created anything that God doesn't love?

## Small group prayer



You need windmills, battery operated candles, bowls of water, and something to eat.

As the group lights the candles, remember the light that God give to us all.

As they blow the windmills, think of the Holy Spirit who blows a creative breath over the whole of creation.

As they dip their hands in the bowl of water, think of the water which is vital to life for the whole of creation.

As they eat the food, think of the earth which grows food to keep the whole of creation nourished.

Thank God for the wonders of creation and pray that we might always value it and take care of it.

## Activity/craft

### Creation bauble

You will need:

- Something round to use as a template
- White paper or card
- Colouring pencils
- Ribbon for hanging





What to do:

1. Place your paper on a flat surface and draw seven circles around your template lightly with a pencil.
2. Draw your creation images into the circles, keep them simple.
3. Cut out each circle and fold in half, with the side you want to be seen on the inside. Arrange them in order.
4. Take the first folded circle and glue one side, then stick a second folded circle to it, making sure the straight edges line up neatly.
5. Repeat with your other circles, until you get to your last circle. And before you glue them into a globe shape, insert a piece of ribbon.
6. Complete your globe by gluing the first and the last circles together.



## STEM activity

### Growing bubbles

What you need:

- Small paper cups
- Small trays
- Bicarbonate of soda
- Teaspoons
- Food colouring
- Pipettes (optional)
- Vinegar



What to do:

1. Give each child two cups.
2. Spoon a heaped teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda into the bottom of each cup.
3. Use the pipettes to drop some food colouring into the cup, using a different colour per cup.
4. This is a messy activity, so consider placing the two cups into a small tray before the next step.
5. Pour a little vinegar into each of the cups.
6. Watch what happens when the vinegar and coloured bicarbonate of soda meet; see what they create.
7. As the bubbling slows down, you could try stirring up the residue at the bottom of the cup to prompt more bubbles.



## Recipe

### Creation trifle

What you need:

- Ready-made jelly – preferably green or blue (though the jelly in the pictures is red!)
- Sponge cake (*Free From*)
- Squirty cream (vegan friendly)
- Gummy animal sweets – land and sea (gluten free variety)
- Jelly babies (gluten free version)
- Paper cups
- Optional: star sprinkles



What to do:

Build up layers to create sea, land and sky, with animals and people. The following is a suggestion as to how you might do this:

1. Place a spoonful of jelly at the bottom of the cup.
2. Stir in a couple of sea animal sweets.
3. Layer it with a piece of sponge cake
4. Place two jelly babies and an animal sweet on top of the cake to one side
5. On the other side of the cake squirt some squirty cream
6. Sprinkle some stars on top of the cream.
7. Enjoy!



## Games

### Draw it!

Divide the group into teams of approximately eight players and give each team a pack of felt tip pens. At the far end of the room have a large piece of paper for each team. A leader should shout out a colour and the first member of the team has to find that colour pen and run with it to their team's piece of paper. The team is aiming to draw a picture of God's world.

As the team member reaches the paper, they start to draw something which is appropriate to draw in that colour (e.g. if they have brown, they might start drawing a tree trunk; if they have blue they might start colouring the sky).

They only have 15 seconds to run to the paper and draw (adjust this timing to match the children playing and the distance they have to run!) and after 15 seconds the leader shouts out "Change to..." And calls out a different colour.

They run back and tag the next member of the team, who runs to the paper with the new colour and starts to draw.

When you've played for long enough (e.g. 5 minutes), stop and look at the pictures and vote on which one the children like best.

### Fashion Parade

Split your group into teams of five or six and give each team a newspaper and some Sellotape. The aim is to create an outfit for one of your team by folding, tearing and sticking sheets of newspaper.

Give a set amount of time for groups to work on their design, dressing one of the team. Then get the team members who are wearing the design to do a catwalk, showing off their outfit, including sitting down on a chair and standing up again. Hold a vote to decide on the winning design.

## Large group prayer

### Creation prayer



Use some larger images of light and dark; sea and sky; sun and moon; land and plants; fish and birds, people and animals, and God resting. These could be from magazines or old calendars or, if necessary, print some out. Position the images around the table upside down.

Invite individual children to come out and turn one picture over and call out what it's a picture of. The group can then make the shape or do an action – e.g. they could cover their eyes for night or pretend to be an elephant for animals. While they do this, the volunteer can say a one sentence prayer (thank you, sorry or please)

e.g. Sun and moon – Thank you God for giving us the day and night.

Land and plants – God who loves creation, please help us love it too.

After each short prayer, everyone can call out the phrase, “God loves being creative” together as a response.

End with, “*God made an amazing world. Help us to love and care for it. Amen*”



# LOVE IS BRAVE

## PETER WALKS ON WATER TO JESUS



### Bible reading



#### Jesus walks on the water

<http://bit.ly/3nXRlmp>

Then Jesus made his followers get into the boat. He told them to go ahead of him to the other side of the lake. Jesus stayed there to tell the people they could go home. After he said good-bye to them, he went alone up into the hills to pray. It was late, and Jesus was there alone. By this time, the boat was already far away on the lake. The boat was having trouble because of the waves, and the wind was blowing against it.

Between three and six o'clock in the morning, Jesus' followers were still in the boat. Jesus came to them. He was walking on the water. When the followers saw him walking on the water, they were afraid. They said, "It's a ghost!" and cried out in fear.

But Jesus quickly spoke to them. He said, "Have courage! It is I! Don't be afraid."

Peter said, "Lord, if that is really you, then tell me to come to you on the water."

Jesus said, "Come."

And Peter left the boat and walked on the water to Jesus. But when Peter saw the wind and the waves, he became afraid and began to sink. He shouted, "Lord, save me!"

Then Jesus reached out his hand and caught Peter. Jesus said, "Your faith is small. Why did you doubt?"

After Peter and Jesus were in the boat, the wind became calm. Then those who were in the boat worshiped Jesus and said, "Truly you are the Son of God!"

### Bible video

Peter walks on water –  
Saddleback Kids

<https://youtu.be/oVy9HGr3Qig>

### Arrival activity

Big entrance challenge – As children arrive at the front door create a path of Lego. Who is brave enough to walk on it into the church to get to their groups? It's just for fun, don't pressure anyone to do it.

Create a bravery challenge, just for fun. Invite children to take part and test their mettle. Ideas could include:

Taste challenge. Taste things that might be new to them, e.g. unusual fruits etc or tasting unusual concoctions like pancakes with chilli powder. Be aware of allergies.

What's in the box? Have a collection of boxes with a hand hole in each, and challenge the children to put their hand in and see what they can find in each box. You could give the boxes weird and wonderful names to add to the tension, for example on a box with a toy snake the clue could read, "I slither and slime all the time".

Trust games. Have some fun testing their trust, for example with the trust fall activity. Will they fall back into the group's arms?

Big Question:

♥ When was the last time you had to be brave?



## Drama

### Out of the album (Peter)

Anyone got a towel? Honestly, if it weren't embarrassing enough getting a dunking in the Sea of Galilee, without some smart Alec getting a photo of it! And I tell you, that water's pretty grim! But it was just so wonderful seeing Jesus again. We'd seen him do some amazing stuff but I'll tell you, it was mindblowing to see him walking out to our boat RIGHT ON TOP OF THE WATER in the middle of a storm!!! He was like a bloomin' hovercraft or one of those beetles that skates across the top of the pond.

Anyway, I've done some stupid things in my time, but somehow it didn't feel stupid – he was my friend and my leader and I just wanted to be with him – so I climbed straight out of the boat and walked towards him when he called me. I don't like the water much – we fishermen aren't really great at swimming, believe it or not – so I had to be brave, but knowing Jesus loved me made it so much easier that I just walked across the water, just like Jesus, and didn't even think what was under my feet. Until suddenly I did, that is. I stopped looking at Jesus and looked down at my feet and that's when I panicked and started to sink. Thank goodness Jesus was there to save me – he wouldn't let me drown.

## Story

**[The Conductor enters and organises the children, and leaders sat with them, into rows and starts a Mexican wave. Ask the leaders beforehand to make sure the children keep the wave going, even when The Conductor gets distracted by the scene.]**

**The Conductor:** Come on now, let's get ourselves organised! Small ones in the front. That's it, starting gently. Lovely! Let's keep it like this, just to make people regret coming out without their coats. Simmer down at the back, don't get carried away with yourself, we're working as a team.

OK, you're doing great. Now, give me a little bit more. I want foreboding but not menacing; risky but not dangerous. Keep it tight everybody, let's remind those humans who's in charge.

**[The disciples move into the middle of the 'waves' miming rowing their boat.]**

Oh really! Who thought this was a good idea! Couldn't they tell there was a storm coming? **[Shouting at the disciples.]** You won't catch any fish in this weather!

Well, we won't let it bother us. Things are hotting up nicely now! We're all in a good rhythm with no sign of tiring!

**[Jesus enters in front of the children making waves. The disciples start to sway with the waves then mime looking out at Jesus as though they can't believe their eyes.]**

Now I've seen it all! Walking on water as if it were a pleasant enough day for a stroll and a picnic in the park. Who does he think he is? The other ones can barely stand up and he's wandering through these waves as if they were nothing – and I can tell you're all really putting your backs into it now.

**[Peter mimes stepping out of the boat.]**

Oh, that's a bold move! So brave! He must really trust him... and love him.

**[Peter starts to wobble.]**

**[To Peter]** Oh keep your eyes on him, don't look at what we're doing – we'll only distract you!

**[Jesus walks quickly to Peter and mimes helping him back into the boat.]**

**Jesus:** **[From the boat – to the waves]** Stop! **[Leaders encourage the children to be still and sit down.]**

**The Conductor:** **[Walking off, shaking their head.]** Who is this man? My waves only listen to me!

## Wondering questions

- ♥ I wonder why Peter took his eyes off Jesus?
- ♥ I wonder why Peter felt brave when Jesus called him?
- ♥ I wonder if you've ever had a time when you had to be really brave and what helped you?

## Small group prayer



### Floating people

You will need:

- Paper people shapes (you could draw round a gingerbread man cookie cutter)
- Pens
- Scissors
- A container filled with water

1. Ask children to think of people or things they would like to bring to God and then ask them to write them onto their paper person.
2. Fold the corners of the people shapes into the middle.
3. As the children place the people into the water, say, "We ask our prayers, bravely trusting in God's love."
4. Place the bottom of the prayer shapes on top of the water and watch as the arms, legs and head of the paper people gradually open out, symbolically opening out the prayer to God. The opened shape will then float on top of the water. This will take some time to happen fully so there is plenty of opportunity to watch and reflect on their prayers!



## Activity/craft

### Oobleck

Oobleck is neither a liquid nor a solid – it's what is called a non-Newtonian fluid. If you place your hand on it firmly, it acts as a solid but if you run your finger through it, it acts like a liquid.

What you need:

- Cornflour
- Water
- Trays
- Wet wipes
- Play people



What to do:

In our story Peter was able to walk on water to reach Jesus until he suddenly realised what he was doing, but then he started to sink.

1. Mix cornflour and water in a ratio of 3:2 to make the oobleck. Give each set of four children a tray and pour enough oobleck into the tray to cover it.
2. Encourage the children to experiment with the oobleck, seeing how much pressure is needed to keep it a solid or to turn it back to a liquid.
3. Have play people to hand for those who have a sensory challenge with the mixture and for an additional way to experiment.



## STEM activity

### Will it sink or will it float?

You will need a large bowl or box full of water. (Be aware of the risk of spilling water – protect surfaces and wipe up spills straight away).

Use a selection of items such as the suggestions below and explore which things float and which sink.

Peter expected to sink but was brave enough initially to trust Jesus and walk on the water when Jesus called him.

### Float suggestions

Cork  
Ping-pong ball  
Pencil  
Paper clip  
Apple  
Leaf

### Sink suggestions

Teaspoon  
Pebble  
Coin  
Key  
Marble  
Scissors

### Surprises

Tennis ball  
Wood  
Sponge  
Cup



## Recipe

### Cheesy feet

**Make the dough before the session begins**

Dough recipe:

- 50g plain flour (gluten free)
- 100g grated cheese (vegan friendly)
- ¼ tsp baking powder (gluten free)
- 25g soft butter or margarine (vegan friendly)

1. Put all the ingredients into a bowl and mix with a wooden spoon until the ingredients are all mixed together and look like breadcrumbs, then use your hands to work it into a dough.
2. Wrap the ball of dough in cling film and put it in the fridge to cool for 15 minutes (No more than 24 hours).
3. If not using a foot-shaped biscuit cutter, then prepare card templates in advance.

### During the session

You will need:

- Baking parchment
- Flour for rolling (gluten free)
- Rolling pins
- Blunt knives
- Spatula
- Pencil
- Foot cutter/ template

1. Heat the oven to 200 C or Gas mark 5 and lightly grease a baking tray.
2. Provide a small ball of dough for each person.
3. Roll out the dough onto a floured surface.
4. Ensure the dough is not rolled out too thin, about ½ cm.





5. Use a foot-shaped cutter if you have one or, alternatively, use the prepared foot templates. Use a knife to cut around the templates.
6. Lift the feet carefully (using the spatula) and place them on the baking parchment.
7. Put the baking tray in the oven, remembering to use oven gloves, and cook for about 10 – 12 minutes depending on how big your feet are!
8. When they are a lovely golden colour and still slightly soft, take them out and cool them on a wire rack. They will become firmer as they cool.



## Games

### Splash

This is an outdoor game! You need the same number of cards as there are children in the group, a water pistol and a supply of water. Children may need a change of clothes and a towel!

Write numbers on the cards, starting with one and numbering them for as many as there are children. Children stand in a circle with one child in the centre holding the water pistol. The child in the centre picks a card out of the pack without showing anyone what it is and remembers the number on it (maybe showing it to a leader to prevent cheating).

The children then in turn call out a number that hasn't been said by anyone else. (If they repeat a number, get them to choose a different one.) As soon as someone says the number that's on the card, the child in the centre squirts them with water from the water pistol.

The child who was squirted then goes into the centre and takes over control of the water pistol and the game begins again.

### Walking (lying) on water

You need an inflated airbed or lilo for each team. Participants need to get into groups of six. Five of them lie or sit on the floor and place an inflated airbed or lilo on top of them. The sixth person gets onto the airbed/lilo, lying down on it in order to avoid risk of falling off (i.e. absolutely not standing!!!).

The aim of the game is for the group to transport the person on the lilo from one side of the room to the other without touching the lilo with their hands and without dropping the person. This could be a race between teams. (The easiest way is log-rolling but don't tell them that unless they get really despondant!)

## Large group prayer



You will need:

- Paper
- Pens
- Scissors

Get the children to draw around one of their feet, cut it out and write their name on the foot. (You may want to do this part of the activity in small groups.)

Ask everyone to bring their feet into the centre and spread them out with the name facing towards the floor. Encourage everyone to walk around using the feet like stepping stones.

Play some gentle music and then stop the music and ask everyone to pick up the nearest footprint to them. Say, "God bless..." and get everyone to shout out the name of the person on the foot nearest to them. You could do this as many times as you like. End with a prayer of blessing for all the children.

Talk about how we can pray for each other and encourage them to take the foot they last stood on home with them and continue to ask God to bless that person.





# LOVE IS ADVENTUROUS

## CALLING THE DISCIPLES



### Bible reading



#### Matthew 4:18-22

#### Jesus calls his first disciples

<https://bit.ly/3GmCsAh>

Jesus was walking by Lake Galilee. He saw two brothers, Simon (called Peter) and Simon's brother Andrew. The brothers were fishermen, and they were fishing in the lake with a net. Jesus said, "Come follow me. I will make you fishermen for men." At once Simon and Andrew left their nets and followed him.

Jesus continued walking by Lake Galilee. He saw two other brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets to catch fish. Jesus told them to come with him. At once they left the boat and their father, and they followed Jesus.

#### Matthew 9:9-13

#### The calling of Matthew

<https://bit.ly/3KjvkG4>

#### Jesus chooses Matthew

When Jesus was leaving, he saw a man named Matthew. Matthew was sitting in the tax office. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." And Matthew stood up and followed Jesus.

Jesus had dinner at Matthew's house. Many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with Jesus and his followers. The Pharisees saw this and asked Jesus' followers, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

Jesus heard the Pharisees ask this. So he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor. Only the sick need a doctor. Go and learn what this means: 'I want faithful love more than I want animal sacrifices.' I did not come to invite good people. I came to invite sinners."

### Bible video

Jesus calls Levi by CartoonBible

<https://youtu.be/-Mv7mVcqJaQ>

Jesus calls ALL the disciples by Crossroads

Kids <https://youtu.be/j1N6YNFhpp4>

### Arrival activity

Big entrance challenge – As children arrive at the front door tell them that the floor is lava, so they must get to their group without stepping on the floor. You can add paper islands and objects like chairs along the route to help them.

Group activity: design a giant adventure map. You could add details in 3D using Lego, for example perhaps a dragon that flies over the map, or create the mountains on top of the map. What is the adventure map leading to and what challenges are along the way?

Big Question:

- ♥ If you were to go on an adventure, where would you go and who would you take with you?

### Drama

#### Out of the album (Andrew)

Well, whoever would have guessed that the moment that photo was taken would be the very moment that my life changed beyond all recognition? You know, there I was, having a bit of a break from fishing while I mended my nets. They're always getting snagged on things, fishing nets, you know, and they're not much use for catching things if they've got a great big hole in them, are they? So that was my life really – sleeping, eating, fishing on the lake with my

family, and mending my nets ready for it all to start again.

That was until Jesus came along, not that I knew it was Jesus at the time. It was just this chap on the lakeside making the most outrageous proposition. He walked up, took one look at me and my brother, and said, "Follow me". Follow me! I ask you, what sort of a thing is that to say to a stranger who's hard at work, earning an honest crust to keep the wolf from the door for himself and his family? I looked up from my nets to send him on his way, and not too politely either, if I'm honest. But one look at this man and I knew he was calling me on an adventure and I just couldn't say no.

I've not looked back since – even during the tough times – and the same can be said for the others who joined our merry band too. When Jesus calls you, you don't know what adventures are in store, but you know he'll be in there, right along with you. He's so full of love, you just have to say yes!

## Story

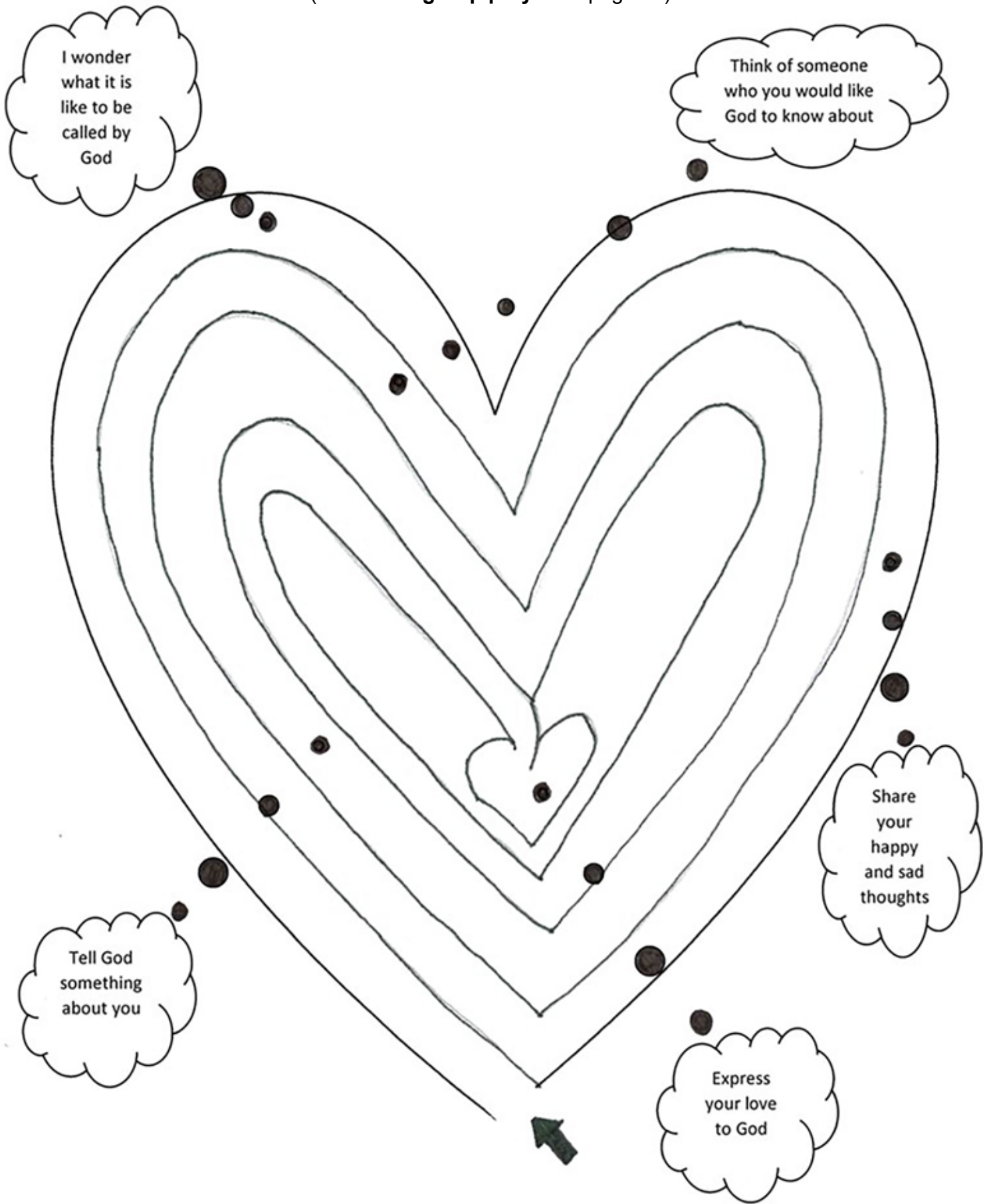
### Come with me, let the adventure begin

Jesus came to show God's love,  
To bring glimpses of heaven, down from above.  
He came to heal the sick and help the poor,  
To stand up for others left outside the door.  
He came to tell stories about widows and kings.  
He also did miracles and such amazing things,  
But he didn't want to do this on his own.  
He knew it wasn't good to do it all alone.  
So, he went on a search for a group of new friends  
To join in an adventure that would never end.  
He wanted to find people who would leave all they had  
And follow him, watching and learning from the good and the bad.  
His plan was to build a team, kind and strong,

To continue his mission when he would be gone.  
So, where did he go and who did he choose?  
Did he go for the best, strongest people who never lose?  
NO! Jesus didn't want to choose the bravest or most clever,  
Or the wealthiest people or the best looking ever!  
He chose Simon, renamed him Peter, and Andrew his brother,  
But this wasn't enough, he wanted another.  
He chose the fishermen, James and John, the sons of Zebedee;  
He met them on the beach and said, "Come follow me."  
He chose Philip, Bartholomew and the one called Thomas,  
He chose Matthew the tax collector and James (son of Alphaeus).  
Nine chosen so far, but Jesus wanted more.  
He chose Thaddaeus (son of James) and Simon who was keen,  
And chose Judas Iscariot to complete his team.  
To each of these people he said, "Leave what you know  
And come follow me, Oh the places we will go!  
The adventures we will have and the things you will see  
If you just take a step, and come, follow me.  
Together we'll go and together we will stay.  
You will see that I am the Light, Truth and the Way.  
I will be your teacher and you will be my friends;  
We will show God's love to others, the love that never ends."  
So they joined his adventure, they answered his call,  
And they each had a part to play, something for all.  
You can read of their adventures if you come take a look  
In the stories of Jesus that are found in God's book.  
And Jesus hasn't finished, he still invites people to join in –  
Jesus says to you now, "Come with me, let the adventure begin."

# Heart labyrinth

(See **Small group prayer** on page 33)





## Wondering questions

- ♥ I wonder how Jesus chose his friends ?
- ♥ I wonder what the disciples thought life as a follower of Jesus might be like?
- ♥ I wonder what adventures God might have in store for you ?

## Small group prayer



### Heart labyrinth

One purpose of a labyrinth is to have the opportunity to focus time and attention on prayer and God.

Jesus calls his disciples, which includes us, to follow him through the adventure of life and faith.

One way to enable us to focus our hearts and minds on this prayerfully is to use a finger labyrinth, as you slowly and mindfully follow the path with your finger from the arrow to the heart in the middle. You will find a template on page 32.

As you use the labyrinth, intentionally take deep breaths in and out. At the speech bubbles, stop for a moment and think about what is written. When you reach the middle, close your eyes for a few seconds while you think about your love for God and God's love for you. Then slowly follow the path back the way you came.

It may help to play some music as you do this. <https://youtu.be/t68StIVbLBA> (Peace of God – children's melodies – Marcus Stanley)



## Activity/craft

### Follow me sensory bag

Jesus called the disciples to leave what they were doing and follow him.

You will need:

- Zip lock bag
- Cheap hair gel
- Small figures made from recycled yogurt pots or milk bottles (four per person)
- Permanent markers
- Strong tape
- Paper
- Felt tips



Colour in and draw faces onto the small figures, making one of them obviously represent Jesus (Maybe draw a big letter J on them or make them slightly bigger.) Use permanent markers and allow them to dry completely. Fill the zip bag with the hair gel and put the figures inside, making sure they are all facing upwards. It is a good idea to seal the bag with strong tape to prevent the bag from opening whilst in use.

On a sheet of paper, draw a landscape including a lake with boats, town and countryside, and put this on the table underneath the bag or tape it to the back of the bag. Spread the gel and the figures out across the bag then have some fun moving Jesus around the bag and getting the other figures to follow. Remember the story of how Jesus called the disciples to follow him.



## STEM activity

### Magnetic hearts

(Be alert to children who might put the magnets in their mouths.)



What you need:

- Heart shaped coloured card
- Strips of card 4" by 1"
- Magnets <https://www.bakerross.co.uk/large-self-adhesive-magnetic-discs>
- Sellotape/ glue
- Scissors

What you do:

The aim of this activity is to bring together two halves of a heart using a magnet.

Each child needs a heart shape and two strips of card.

Cut the heart in half from bottom to top.

Fold the little strips of card into five equal squares, secure to create a little box shape.

Secure a magnet onto the outer edge of the box on each half of the heart.

Sellotape the boxes to the edge of each half of your heart with the magnet side facing out so that the two magnets meet when you bring the two halves of the heart together.



Experiment with moving the two heart halves together and apart. Jesus calls us to be his friend and follower and this requires us to respond.



## Recipe

### Chocolate Krispie hearts

You will need:

- 200g white chocolate
- 75g Rice Krispies
- 1 tablespoon golden syrup
- Red food colouring

What you do:

1. Carefully place 12 cupcake cases on a tray and set to one side.
2. Melt the white chocolate: this can be done over a pan of simmering water or in the microwave in short bursts until it is all melted. Remember to stir it. The bowl will be hot so be careful!
3. Add some red food colouring into the chocolate and mix well.
4. Stir in the golden syrup and Rice Krispies.
5. Divide the mixture into 12 portions and press into a heart shaped cookie cutter before placing into the cupcake cases. Add sprinkles (optional).
6. Put in the fridge for 15 minutes to set.

## Games

### Send me the best

This is a fun team game that plays with the theme of being chosen when not really knowing what for.

Place your children into smaller teams, around six to eight children works well. The leader will ask for each group to choose one person to send, with special criteria each time. The challenge is, the teams will only know half the criteria. The leader might say "Send me the person with the longest..." but won't say any more. The team need to guess what the sentence ending is and choose someone to come forward. It could be anything: longest toenails, longest hair and so on.

Once every team has sent their chosen person, the leader then reveals the full sentence e.g. it was the longest tongue. Each person then shows their tongue to see who was really the best to choose and we see who wins. They return to their group and the leader continues asking for someone with new criteria. Lots of silly fun.

Criteria could include someone with the longest tongue, shortest sister, hairiest ears, loudest laugh, silliest walk... the world is your oyster.

### Parachute game

This game is a mix of Fruit basket and Follow my leader combined with a parachute for that extra bit of silliness; if you don't have a parachute it can be played in a circle as a run around game.

All children and adults gather around the parachute, standing holding the parachute at waist height. The leader will choose someone who will be the leader, but who will follow them?

As we all raise the parachute up high above our heads the adult leader shouts everyone wearing red, or something that connects two or more of those around the parachute. At that point the child leader and all those wearing red have to

swap places before the parachute comes back down. BUT they also have to do it in the same way the child leader does, for example the child might belly crawl, or hop, or walk like a chimp. Those around the parachute steady the bringing down of the parachute to allow time for the swap to happen. And the game continues.

## Large group prayer



### Love is an adventure – calling the disciples

All sit on the floor to start and a leader reads the following, encouraging everyone who fits the criteria to stand up and shout "We're ready for adventure" and then everyone together to shout "Amen". Adapt what you call out in order to ensure that everyone is included and stands up at least twice, including the adults.

Jesus calls us on an adventure. On the team, Jesus needs some people with brown eyes. (We're ready for adventure. Amen)

On the team, Jesus needs some people who are nine years old or younger. (We're ready for adventure. Amen)

On the team, Jesus needs some people with glasses. (We're ready for adventure. Amen)

On the team, Jesus needs some people who are older than nine. (We're ready for adventure. Amen)

On the team, Jesus needs people who have curly hair. (We're ready for adventure. Amen)

On the team, Jesus needs everybody here! (We're ready for adventure. Amen)

Jesus, you call us to follow you, whether we are old, young, tall or small, no matter where we are or what we're doing. Help us be adventurous enough to go where you lead us, to do what you call us to do, and to be the people you know we can be. Amen.

# LOVE IS BELONGING

## ABRAHAM AND SARAH LOOK AT THE STARS



### Bible reading



#### Genesis 15:1-6

<https://bit.ly/3ZRqWnw>

After these things happened, the Lord spoke his word to Abram in a vision. God said, “Abram, don’t be afraid. I will defend you. And I will give you a great reward.”

But Abram said, “Lord God, what can you give me? I have no son. So my slave Eliezer from Damascus will get everything I own after I die.” Abram said, “Look, you have given me no son. So a slave born in my house will inherit everything I have.”

Then the Lord spoke his word to Abram. He said, “That slave will not be the one to inherit what you have. You will have a son of your own. And your son will inherit what you have.”

Then God led Abram outside. God said, “Look at the sky. There are so many stars you cannot count them. And your descendants will be too many to count.”

Abram believed the Lord. And the Lord accepted Abram’s faith, and that faith made him right with God.

#### Genesis 17:3-7

<http://bit.ly/3zPtUM>

Then Abram bowed facedown on the ground. God said to him, “I am making my agreement with you: I will make you the father of many nations. I am changing your name from Abram<sup>[a]</sup> to Abraham. This is because I am making you a father of many nations. I will give you many descendants. New nations will be born from you. Kings will come from you. And I will make an agreement between me and you and all your descendants from now on: I will be your God and the God of all your descendants.

### Bible video

God’s story: Abraham and Sarah – Crossroad Kids’ Club <https://youtu.be/NdqrwGJYePQ>

### Arrival activity

Big entrance challenge – As children arrive at the front door offer a huge big welcome and be sure to use their name. Then, as they get to their group, the group could all welcome them too.

This is the day to create secret ways of belonging together, such as secret handshakes, team colours to wear for the day, a secret group language.

The group could also create self-portraits that could be displayed as a group gallery.

Big Question:

- ♥ What do you belong to?
- ♥ How do you know you belong?

### Drama

#### Out of the album (Sarah)

Hello there, my children, how lovely to see you all. You’re all looking pretty bright eyed and bushy tailed – goodness, that makes you sound like a load of squirrels, doesn’t it? I’d rather think of you as... well, as stars.

God said that to me and my hubby once. We were getting on a bit, as you can see, and we’d given up on having children, but God said we’d have as many children as there were stars in the sky! Can you picture that? You can’t even count the stars – can you imagine getting



that many children to wash their hands before dinner? Of course, he didn't mean they'd all be our sons or daughters directly, but that we'd be the beginning of a big family. Little Isaac came along first, and when he grew up he married Rebecca and they had twins, Jacob and Esau.

You should have seen them – as different as chalk and cheese they were, despite being twins, my grandsons. Then they gave me fifteen great-grandchildren or more, and they went on to give me great-great-grandchildren and great-great-great-grandchildren and... well, don't ask me to draw my family tree because there'd be far too many twigs and branches to include. Even Jesus would be on there! In fact, I bet you'd be on there somewhere too – a twiglet, maybe. God's love is so great that we all belong, everyone's included and nobody's unwelcome. It's a great big family of God!

## Story

**A box filled with items and images/photos from Abraham and Sarah's story. This can be done up front with all the children or in smaller groups.**

You will need a box with various clues relating to the story inside (see below).

The box could be at the front when the children arrive, to get them thinking and curious about its purpose and contents.

Begin by explaining that this box is full of things that tell someone's story. I wonder whose story it is?

Who do we think it belongs to? Are there any clues? **The stickers on the outside could have a big love heart with A and S in it. Turn the box round to show another bit of writing that says Abraham 4 Sarah.**

OK, so we know this story box belongs to Abraham and Sarah. Does anyone know anything about them to start us off? Take comments and suggestions from all groups.

Shall we open it and see what's inside?

Encourage children to come and lift an item out of the box and explore what it might be telling us about Abraham and Sarah's story together. **Here are the items and which part of the story they might link to, but you could add others.**

**Walking sticks:** To show that they were old.

**Birth certificates:** For Abraham and Sarah to show their age (100 year old), and one for Isaac too. Perhaps lots of blank ones for the family that is to come.

**Baby nappy/cloth:** Showing that they had a child, perhaps followed by LOTS of nappies for their big family to come.

**Bible:** With the story marked in Genesis so you can follow along and fill in gaps.

**Bag of laughs/a laughing picture:** To remember how Sarah laughed when she heard God's promise.

**God's promise written on a scroll:**

Read out the promise that God gave to Abraham.

**Lots of stars in a jar or a picture of the night sky with the question, "How many stars?":** Ask the children if they can guess how many stars there are. Explain that God gave Abraham a promise that his family would have as many people in it as the stars in the sky.

**A family tree:** either a wooden one (like a prayer tree) that you can add name tags onto OR a paper version showing Abraham's family tree leading all the way to us.

**Blank name tags (could be star shaped):** I wonder whose names should be on here? Encourage each child to write their name on a tag and come and add it to the giant family tree.

We all belong to God's big family that was part of the promise to Abraham and Sarah. And look, there's more blank name tags for lots more names to be added.

**Put all the pieces back in the box and close it. This can be used by any of the groups during the day. Leave the family tree out on display.**



## Wondering questions

- ♥ I wonder how many stars there are in the sky?
- ♥ I wonder how many different places you feel you belong and if there's anywhere you feel you don't belong?
- ♥ I wonder what it means to be part of God's family?



## Small group prayer

### Prayer star light

You will need:

- Paper
- Glue
- Star stickers
- Battery operated tea light

Make a cone out of the paper and decorate the cone with the star stickers. As the children are sticking on the stars, remind them that they are all part of God's family. Encourage them to think about their friends and family and add a star for each person.

They could also think about other people or situations they want to pray for and stick on more stars. Play some quiet music while they are doing this. When everyone has completed their cone, place a tea light under each one and have a few moments of quiet just looking at the lights together.

The cones will be used again in the large group prayer.

## Activity/craft

### Sensory jar

You will need:

- Small jars
- Star sequins
- Baby oil



What you do:

1. Pour some oil into the jar.
2. Add some star sequins
3. Secure the lid and shake the jar.
4. You can decorate the lid as desired.
5. Watch the sequins float in the jar.

## STEM activity

### Coffee filter colouring

You will need:

- Coffee filter papers or kitchen towel
- Felt tips
- Water
- Pipettes (optional)

What you do:

1. Decorate a coffee filter paper or a piece of kitchen towel using felt tips, trying to fill as much of the space as possible.
2. Use the pipette or end of a teaspoon to drop droplets of water onto the colour. Watch as the colours spread out and merge together.
3. Explain that, although we are separate beings, we all belong to God. We can come together with God (the water) and belong as a part of God's family.





## Recipe

### Handprint toast

We all belong to God's family, but God made each of us unique. This recipe uses handprints and fingerprints to help reflect on how we all belong to God but how we are all different.

You will need:

- Sliced bread (white works best – gluten free if needed)
- Food colouring in different colours
- Milk (or milk alternative)
- Paint brush (new)
- A toaster

With a slice of bread for each child, get them to press down in the bread with the flat of their hand to make a handprint in the bread. Mix some food colouring into some milk or milk substitute. Using the coloured milk, decorate around the handprint using a paint brush or fingertips. Lightly toast the bread and then enjoy eating it.



## Games

### Tell me something

This game is played sitting in a circle. Some children might need some support thinking of responses. The game helps children get to

know each other a little bit and realise how much they have in common. Of course, the one thing we all have in common is that we are members of God's family and are loved by God.

The first person tells everyone a fact about themselves e.g. "I was born in a hospital in Scotland".

The second person then tells everyone a fact about themselves, but it must link somehow to the previous sentence e.g. "I went to hospital last week when I bruised my finger" or "My granny lives in Scotland".

The third person then tells a fact about themselves based on the thing the second person said, and so on. (If the group struggles, you could do it so that anyone can respond if they can link to the previous sentence in some way.)

### Join us

This game is a tiny bit like musical chairs. Set out chairs around the room in sets of three and get the players to sit on the chairs so that they are in threes, apart from one set of chairs, which only has two players sitting there. Players keep their hands on their knees. You may need to manipulate the numbers by one or two leaders joining in to make up groups of three.

When the music begins, the group which is just two people hold hands and run to another group to "steal" one of that group by grabbing their hand and running back to their chairs to sit down as a threesome.

As soon as that new threesome has sat down, the remaining pair now join hands and run to "steal" a member of another threesome and take them back to their chairs, though not from the team that has just stolen from them.

When the music stops, any group which is not sitting down is out and their chairs are removed from the game.

## Large group prayer

### Tealight meditation

Place the tea lights made in the small groups in the centre of the room.

Ask everyone to sit in a comfortable position in a circle.

Take a few mindful breaths, feel the body where it is, and allow your energy to settle.

Focusing on the lights in the centre of the room:

Think of the stars and how many there are. Abraham was promised that his descendants would be as many as the stars.

We are all part of this one big family – we all belong.

*PAUSE...*

You belong to it too.  
Know you are loved,  
You are never alone.  
You are loved by God, and you belong.

*PAUSE...*

Look around slowly,  
Look at everyone here.  
We're connected.  
You are loved by God, and you belong.

*PAUSE...*

Think of the earth and everything in it,  
The stars in the sky,  
All are magnificent.  
All unique but all connected.  
We're more similar than different.  
You are loved by God, and you belong.

*PAUSE...*



You're worthy and you belong,  
Knowing that you are welcome.  
This world is yours,  
You are loved by God, and you belong.

*PAUSE...*

Slowly come back to the present and stretch up to the top of the room.

Bringing your senses back to the present.

***And we all say AMEN.***



# LOVE IS SURPRISING

## THE INCARNATION



### Bible reading



#### Luke 1:26-38

<http://bit.ly/3nT2ZiB>

During Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to a virgin who lived in Nazareth, a town in Galilee. She was engaged to marry a man named Joseph from the family of David. Her name was Mary. The angel came to her and said, "Greetings! The Lord has blessed you and is with you."

But Mary was very confused by what the angel said. Mary wondered, "What does this mean?"

The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary, because God is pleased with you. Listen! You will become pregnant. You will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and people will call him the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of King David, his ancestor. He will rule over the people of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end."

Mary said to the angel, "How will this happen? I am a virgin!"

The angel said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you. The baby will be holy. He will be called the Son of God. Now listen! Elizabeth, your relative, is very old. But she is also pregnant with a son. Everyone thought she could not have a baby, but she has been pregnant for six months. God can do everything!"

Mary said, "I am the servant girl of the Lord. Let this happen to me as you say!" Then the angel went away.

### Bible video

An unexpected Christmas  
– St Paul's Auckland

<https://youtu.be/TM1XusYVqNY>

Saddleback Kids

<https://youtu.be/XkEypzmHwCl>

### Arrival activity

Big entrance challenge – As children arrive at the front door, surprise them with a huge welcome using party poppers and cheers. Make it as surprising as possible.

Gather as many games that have the element of tension and surprise and encourage the group to simply enjoy playing them together. Good examples would be Buckaroo, Operation, buzzer games, Jenga. Charity shops are usually good for these type of games.

Big question:

♥ What has been the best surprise ever in your life?

### Drama

#### Out of the album (Angel Gabriel)

Don't be afraid, I bring good news. Oops, sorry, got a bit carried away there. You know, I always have to introduce myself by telling people not to be afraid! I think it's probably because nobody ever expects to see an angel appearing all of a sudden. It tends to catch people unawares and make them jump. I've not yet worked out quite how to do it without risking them having a bit of a funny turn when I suddenly pop up with a message from God.



I made Mary jump, despite telling her not to be afraid, and I don't think the message I brought was quite what she was expecting either. She knew there was a wedding to Joseph lined up in the distant future, she'd even dreamed about what it would be like to be a mum one day, but I'll eat my halo if she'd ever thought she might be chosen by God and give birth to God's own son in baby form before she'd even had a chance to get married. All credit to her, though – she didn't hesitate. Even though she was probably in for a pretty rough time, she simply said yes to this surprising news and even sang a song of joy on the spot about how loved she felt by God. I must have prepared her well.

So I always say, "Don't be afraid" when I appear to humans. Not like when I'm greeting another angel – do you know what one angel says to another when they meet? Halo, Halo, Halo !!

## Story

Hello everybody. I'm not sure what you're all doing here in our yard, but I'll just introduce myself. I'm Cock-a-doodle-Dougal the rooster. I'm a very important member of the household here, though not everybody notices me. They'd notice if I wasn't around though. I make sure everyone's awake bright and early for the start of the day – I'm kinda like an alarm cluck! I'm sure you'll notice me – whenever I come on the stage, remember to greet me with "Cock-a-doodle-doo, Dougal!" Let's have a practice:

Not bad. A bit wormy though. Let's give it a bit more oomph!

That's better. Hey, do you know which side of a chicken has the most feathers? Ha, the OUTSIDE, of course! But enough of that. I'm here to tell you about a strange thing that happened here, a story of rather surprising love. It was to do with the daughter of the house. Some people call her the Madonna but we....

(Woman in Madonna costume struts or dances across, humming the tune to "Like a Virgin")

No, no, no. I'm not talking about you! Get out of it! Some people call her the Madonna but to us she's just quite simply Mary. Here she is now.

(Mary walks on stage with a basket and pretends to hang the washing on the line)

She's a lovely girl, going to be married to that Joseph fellow, carpenter in the town. Seems a nice enough chap.

(Joseph walks across in the background, carrying a rug under his arm)

No, no, no, not a carpetter, a carpenter. Don't any of you listen?

(Joseph looks puzzled for a moment, drops the carpet and picks up a toolbox. He wanders off, singing, "If I had a hammer")

So Mary was in the garden, minding her own business when all of a sudden, well, would you believe it, she had company. I'll leave you to watch what happens – it's time I was off to band practice. Now, where did I put my drumsticks... (Dougal wanders off stage, walking like a chicken)

(Mary continues hanging out the washing singing, "Mary, Mary quite contrary" and an angel walks in and stands behind her)

Mary: I've got that funny feeling I'm being watched. Is there anybody there?

Everyone: He's behind you!

(Mary turns, keeping her back to the angel)

Mary: Don't go giving me the heeby-jeebies. There's nobody there, is there? It does feel as though I'm being watched, though.

Everyone: He's behind you!

(Mary turns, sees the angel, and jumps!)

Angel: Don't be afraid, Mary



Mary: Don't be afraid? When the likes of you goes creeping about taking people by surprise with your feathers and your halo and you... you... you... Hold on, you're a blooming angel, aren't you?

Angel: Yes. And I've got some news for you. You're going to have a baby.

Mary: Oh no I'm not.

Angel: Oh yes you are.

Mary: Oh no I'm not.

Angel: Oh yes you are.

Mary: Oh no I'm not. I'm not married, you know. I'm engaged to Joseph but we're not going to have children until we're married and that won't be quite yet. So I'm sorry, but I'm not planning on having a baby.

Angel: *You* may not be planning on it, but God is. Here's the surprise news. It's God's baby. God has chosen you to be the baby's mum but it won't just be any old baby, it'll be God's son. And you're to call him...

Mary: Bertie! Oh, I've always wanted a son called Bertie.

Angel: No. You're to call him Jesus.

Mary: Oh my, *however* am I going to tell my mum!

(Mary and the angel wander off and Dougal reappears on stage)

(Children shout: Cock-a-doodle-doo, Dougal)

Cock-a-doodle-doo, now there's a surprise. God loved the world so much that God's own son was going to be born as a tiny baby, no different to you or me when we were hatched. (aside) *Hey, I'm such a tough old bird, I was hatched from a boiled egg! What, you mean it's different for humans?* Well, back to the story, Mary wasn't the only one in for a surprise.

(Joseph wanders in, hammering here and there, then stretches and lies down for a nap in the sun)

(Angel enters and stands at Joseph's head)

That's one scary angel. I'm chicken (checking) out for a while ! (Dougal wanders off, pecking)

(Joseph turns onto his left side, then onto his right, then onto his left again, then onto his back, opens his eyes and sees the angel, and leaps to his feet)

Joseph: What're you doing? You nearly gave me a heart attack, surprising me like that.

Angel: There's a bigger surprise coming – you'd better sit down. You know Mary?

Joseph: (all dreamy) Oh yes, I know Mary, my beloved, my sweetheart, my coochie-coo, my...

Angel: Well, she's going to have a baby.

Joseph: My valenti... She's what?

Angel: She's going to have a baby.

Joseph: Oh no she isn't.

Angel: Oh yes she is.

Joseph: Oh no she isn't

Angel: Oh yes she... Look, I'm not going through all this again. She's having a baby, but you're not exactly the daddy.

Joseph: Hold on a cotton-pickin' minute. What are you saying?

Angel: I'm saying that it's God's baby. The people find it difficult to get to know God and follow God properly, so it's time for God's son to come and live among them, and Mary's going to be the mum. You'll be like a foster-dad. God's chosen you both. Mary will have a baby and will call him...

Joseph: Joe, we'll call him Joe. Nice solid name for a baby boy. Name him after his dad.

Angel: Sometimes I wonder whether God's picked the right people for the job. No, you will name him after his dad, and that dad will be God. Jesus means God Saves, so you'll call him Jesus, after his dad.

Joseph: Jee... Joe... Jee... (*sighs*) I guess we can do that. Don't you worry, I'll stick by her and be a good dad to little Joe... er... Jesus. That's what you do when you love someone, I guess.

(Angel and Joseph wander off stage and Dougal reappears)

(Children shout: Cock-a-doodle-doo, Dougal)

Cock-a-doodle-do, what a to-do! Surprising news for both those two. I was a surprise to my mother too – I really wasn't all I was cracked up to be! Sorry, just my little yolk! I am a bit of a comedi-hen, you know. Sorry, got a bit carried away there. Was that the end of the story? No, it was only the beginning.

(A very pregnant Mary appears with Joseph, a donkey and a suitcase on wheels)

Mary: When I said I'd like to travel for our honeymoon, I didn't exactly have this in mind, Mr Carpenter.

Joseph: I'm sorry, Mrs Carpenter. I wasn't expecting everyone to get a royal command to go to the place their family originates from to be counted. You'll like Bethlehem, I'm sure. Nice little town.

Mary: So where have you booked? Somewhere nice? I hope it's somewhere palatial with a king-sized bed. We can't have God's baby born just anywhere.

Joseph: Er... booked?

Mary: Don't tell me you didn't book anywhere for us to stay.

Joseph: Oh yes I... er... did? (questioning)

Mary: Oh no, you didn't!

Dougal: I think where they ended up was a bit of a surprise too. But it wasn't a surprise for God, because God had planned it that way. God's son was to be born to ordinary people, in an ordinary place, surrounded by ordinary folk and animals. Because God's love is nothing if not surprising!

## Wondering questions

- ♥ I wonder what would have happened if Mary had said no?
- ♥ I wonder if anything else God does surprises you?
- ♥ I wonder if someone you love has ever surprised you?

## Small group prayer



### Opposites prayers

Not only was Jesus's birth a surprise, but Jesus never did what people were expecting him to do; it was like Jesus turns everything upside down, a big surprise! As we remember God and Jesus doing the opposite of what people expected and surprising people, we're going to say a prayer thinking about some things that are opposites.

It may surprise you how many you can find to pray for.

For example, we pray for people who are feeling happy and for those who are feeling sad.

- Big and small
- Light and dark
- Happy and sad
- Loud and quiet
- High and low

After each prayer share the phrase "Love is surprising: God is always with us"

## Activity/craft

### Nativity in a matchbox

You will need:

- Match boxes
- A peg doll or some brown card
- White tissue
- A star

What you need:

1. Open the box and colour the back of it dark blue.
2. Glue or stick a star in the corner.
3. If using a peg doll, wrap it in the strip of white tissue and draw in a face.
4. If using brown card, cut a strip of card to fit the box. Roll this up into a cylinder shape and then secure.
5. Wrap it up in the tissue.
6. Place it in the box and close it.

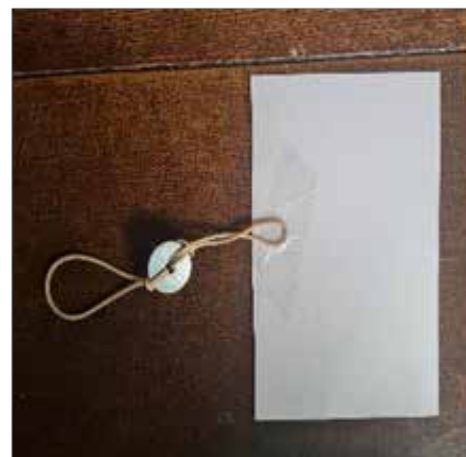


## STEM activity

### Surprising card

What you need:

- Piece of card
- Felt tips
- Envelopes
- Elastic bands
- Metal washers
- Masking tape/ Sellotape
- Sharpies (optional)



What you do:

1. Decorate the card using the felt tips, including the words... "Surprise... God loves you"
2. (If you have time, you could decorate the washer with small hearts using the sharpie)
3. Tie an elastic band to either side of the washer, through the hole in the middle.
4. Tape the ends of the elastic band down onto the card.
5. Twist the washer round and round until the tension is really tight; the card might start to bend slightly but that's OK.
6. Now, while holding the washer to stop it unwinding, put the card in the envelope.
7. When someone opens the envelope and takes out the card, the washer should quickly unwind, surprising the recipient.



## Recipe

### Surprise cake

God's rescue plan came in the form of a tiny baby; this was a surprise to many. Once created, these cakes will have a surprise hidden within them.

What you need:

- Fairy cakes (Free from)
- Teaspoon or cake corer
- Surprise ingredient – jam / cream / sweets / sprinkles / jelly bear – (it helps to have a couple of options on offer)
- Butter icing (Free from)
- (Optional) sprinkles

What to do:

1. Decide what surprise ingredient is going to be placed inside the cake.
2. Use the spoon or a cake corer to remove a small section of the middle of the cake. Ensure you do not make a hole all the way to the bottom of the cake.
3. Spoon/pour the hidden ingredient into the hole.
4. Put back the piece of cake you removed (if possible).
5. Cover the top of the cake with butter icing.
6. Scatter sprinkles on the icing (optional).





## Games

### Board games

There are a lot of 'element of surprise' games on the market so you might choose to play one of these either as a whole group or in smaller groups – games such as Kerplunk, Buckaroo, Jenga etc.

### Mary and the Angel

This is an adapted version of Duck, Duck Goose. It plays with the idea of Mary waiting for the visit and then being surprised by the angel into action.

All children sit or stand in a circle facing inwards. Someone is chosen to be the angel, who walks around the outside of the circle. The angel touches everyone on the head as they walk, saying "No" until they get to the one they have chosen. They tap this person on the head, say "Mary" and run off round the circle.

Mary then gets up and chases the angel round the circle. Either Mary will catch the angel and become the next angel or Mary doesn't catch the angel and the angel gets another go.

If you have some boys who don't like the idea of being called Mary, they could use the name Joseph, who was also visited in a dream by an angel.

## Large group prayer



### Mary's song of praise

A simple version of Mary's song with actions. When the angel Gabriel told Mary she would give birth to Jesus, he also told her that her relative, Elizabeth, was going to have a baby, too. Mary went to see Elizabeth and Mary was so filled with joy that she sang a song of praise about what God had promised.

Stand in a circle together and encourage everyone to join in with the actions.

I am singing, that the Lord is great, *(thumbs up)*  
I am full of joy: God is best! *(clap hands together and then punch the air)*

God has done great things for me, *(stretch arms out wide)*

God knows me. *(thumb to side of forehead)*  
Like all who know God, I can feel his kindness to me. *(cross hands on your chest)*

God has shown his strength and majesty. *(Bend arms and clench hands)*

He sends away people who are boastful, who only think about themselves and how important they are. *(Sweep arm across in front of you as if clearing something out of the way)*

The poor and hungry are welcomed and fed. *(Wave arm as if to welcome people)*

God remembers the promises made to God's people. *(With palm up, circle arm in front of you)*

**Amen**





Further information and appendices can be found on the United Reformed Church website: <http://bit.ly/3ZZaQrS>



[www.urc.org.uk](http://www.urc.org.uk)





The United Reformed Church Children's and Youth Work  
86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT  
020 7916 8637 [www.urc.org.uk](http://www.urc.org.uk)

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