



STORY. STORY. STORY.

Resources for everyone
engaging with children, young
people and young adults



The
United
Reformed
Church Youth



The
United
Reformed
Church Children

Welcome to the United Reformed Church Children's and Youth Work resources



Story, story, story! Jesus knew that the best way of sharing the good news was through story – not necessarily religious stories, but stories that sparked the imagination and were instantly relatable to the people who listened. The Bible is full of them – glimpses of heaven given to us through the medium of narratives, rememberings and parables shared through the spoken word and on paper (or similar) and, more recently, technology. God's is the one true never-ending story.

We each have a story to tell, too, no matter how old or young we are, how easy or difficult we find it to verbalise it. Stories of our everyday, stories of our lives, stories of our faith – and all part of God's big story.

Gathered in this resource pack, you will find a wealth of material to use for your work with children, young people, young adults, and in intergenerational contexts – all centred around the Children and Youth Work (CYW) theme for the year. Be creative. You will find there is plenty that can be adapted, so don't limit yourself to looking only at the section that most obviously fits your context. By following links to our website, given throughout this publication, you will find further supporting material.

The layout of our resource pack this year will be slightly different to previous years. Among various pages which are intergenerational in design, you will find a section dedicated to different genres of story, where prayers and activities will be included for a range of ages exploring five different genres through two Bible stories for each.

A new free downloadable Holiday Club resource related to this theme, called *Sparks and Stories*, has been added to our bank of resources. See bit.ly/47WpDs1 for details. You can also find a downloadable version of this booklet there. We'd love to know how you use these resources and how we might improve on them for next year – please do email us at children.youth@urc.org.uk with your feedback and ideas. If you don't have any children or young people connected with your church, please do:

- enjoy the colouring pages and use selected prayers and other materials with your adult groups
- pray for those churches nearest to you that do – maybe share some ideas with them
- offer these resources to your nearest uniformed organisation or school.

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The Bible – fact or fiction? Or something else altogether?



But did it really happen?

Did God really create the world in six days?
Did Jonah really get swallowed by a whale?
Did Jesus really walk on water?
Was Jesus really raised from the dead?

These are not just questions that children ask – it is just that children are more likely to ask them! But where do we start? How do we talk about true stories and stories that communicate truth?

What is truth?

In the Western world, we often equate truth with fact, with something we can observe, demonstrate or touch. Fact is either black or it's white. The opposite, we're told, is fiction – it is something made up, the realm of story and fantasy, and this is often given less value. The problem is, this is far too simplistic a view of reality. Unfortunately, the UK's national curriculum is skewed towards this view of truth, with its emphasis on acquiring knowledge and over-testing how many 'facts' can be remembered. This approach to truth and knowledge can easily squash out children's natural curiosity and their ability to wonder and imagine.

When it comes to answering children's questions about the Bible, faith and God, then, can we find ways to encourage and nurture that questioning and expand their understanding of truth and knowledge? This might seem daunting, especially if you yourself like to have firm answers to things. But perhaps there is a way to cultivate children's curiosity and model to them a way of wrestling with the difficult questions, without causing confusion. Questions like 'I wonder...' can open up an invitation to children to think through something for themselves, and can often lead to a depth of thinking about God, humans and the world that adults can learn from.

As adults, we can offer truthful answers – "I'm not quite sure if it happened or not; sometimes God gives us stories in the Bible and we have to work out what they mean."

How should we interpret Scripture?

In our Reformed tradition, the Bible is authoritative for what we believe and how we should live. But God's Word is dynamic and so the Bible has to be interpreted by the Holy Spirit. This interpretation is not just the job of one individual, but of the whole Church. So if you are stuck on how to answer a child's question, encourage them to ask others what they think about a particular story or teaching and what it means to them.



What is the Bible for?

It can help to think through what we think the Bible is for, and therefore what we want to teach children and young people. The Bible itself says that it is to give us hope and encouragement (Romans 15:4). How can what we teach enable children and young people to feel hopeful? It also says that it is for teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness and to equip us 'for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:16-17). How will our teaching inspire children and young people to live as God's people?

In the URC's Basis of Union 13, it says we believe that "in the ministry of the Word, through preaching and the study of the Scriptures, God makes known in each age his saving love, his will for his people and his purpose for the world". Whenever we teach the Bible, then, let us help children and young people to look for God's saving love, will and purpose.

What kinds of books are in the Bible?

It is really helpful to introduce children and young people to different kinds and styles of writing in the Bible. If you are reading the first two chapters of Genesis like a science textbook, for example, you will have lots of questions about why they clash with scientific explanations of how the world came to exist.

If we see Genesis more as a deep reflection on who God is, who we are as children of God, and how we relate to the world around us, we will start to ask different questions.

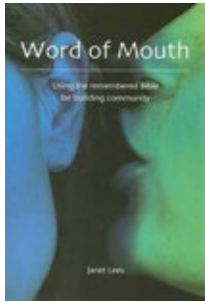
In the Hebrew Scriptures, there is a lot of theological narrative – that is, stories about God’s chosen people, Israel, and God’s relationship with them. The use of ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ need not imply that particular events did not happen in history, but that these are woven together in a way that is more important than just historical facts. They are part of a bigger story with a bigger message. Laws and commandments are woven together with stories of journeys, leaders, disasters and rescues. In the prophetic books, there are teachings, warnings, encouragement, and conversations between God and God’s people, Israel. But there are also prayers and songs and poetry that help us to glimpse different aspects of God’s character.

In the New Testament, the Gospels paint different portraits of Jesus – these can be understood as different reflections on who Jesus is and what he said and did. The Book of Acts gives us accounts and stories about the kinds of things the early Christians did and taught. And then there are lots of letters, written by Paul and others, teaching, preaching and leading new Christian communities by giving them advice or words of challenge or encouragement.



The longest word in the Bible is the name of the prophet Isaiah’s son, Mahershalalhashbaz. A bit of a tongue-twister!

Using oral story telling in worship and Bible exploration



Former URC school chaplain and speech and language therapist, and a member of the Lay Community of St Benedict, Janet Lees, is the author of a book entitled *Word of Mouth – Using the remembered Bible for building community*, and its sequel, *Tell me the Stories of Jesus*. These books, available from ionabooks.com, detail an approach developed by Janet in her ministry in churches and with all ages and abilities, and especially in more deprived areas. The concept focuses on communal oral storytelling, the way Bible stories would originally have been shared before reading and writing became more universally established.

When a group of people remember a story together, it connects them to one another and to the story being told, enabling them to connect it to their own lives and lived experience. A Bible study where no written Bibles are used and the gathered group contribute their own recollections of what the story involves can produce new meaning and relevance and can draw everyone in at whatever level is appropriate for them.

It is important that everyone is encouraged not to worry too much about 'right or wrong' but to throw themselves into contributing and listening to one another, working collaboratively to reach a version they can share. It can be good to have someone 'scribing' the story visually in pictures as the group agrees on what to include. People can share bits of their own story as it resonates with them. Sometimes it will work just to explore the story together, especially with the more widely known stories. Sometimes prompts and questions might be useful to get people going. In her book, Janet gives examples of each. The approach, based on pedagogical foundations, helps people engage with the Bible on a more personal level and to share with one another in community.

Anyone can tell a story by Bob Hartman

Bob Hartman is a renowned professional storyteller and best-selling writer who writes for the Bible Society, Lion Publishers and Engageworship.com, among others. His style is engaging and he tells stories in a way that draws people of all ages in and involves them in the story. He is best known, perhaps, for his writing in *The Lion Storyteller Bible*, which is also used in assemblies across the country as the basis for Open the Book.

Why not look at his *Act-Along Bible*, a retelling of 29 Bible stories in a way that involves storyteller and listeners alike through fun, humour and creativity, or his *Play-Along Bible*, aimed at a slightly younger audience? His book *Anyone Can Tell a Story* is now sadly out of print (but still available second hand) and introduces some of the principles of oral storytelling. He looks at how to create connection between narrator and listeners, story and listeners, characters and listeners, building relationships so the story becomes more than just one person telling and others listening.

Bob Hartman's Top Storytelling Tips

(Thanks to Bob and to Lion Publishing for permission to use these)

- The heart of good storytelling is **PLAY**. Imagine yourself back to when you were a child and you made up imaginary worlds
- Get lots of eye contact with your audience
- Set some simple ground rules with the children before you start: eg 'When I hold up my hand I want you to be really quiet'
- Practice different voices
- Practice different expressions: lock yourself up in the bathroom and look in the mirror. Throw yourself into it 100%. Don't hold back!
- Find an intriguing or fun 'way in' to the story
- Think carefully about your characters
- Choose your setting (make it easy for the children to imagine)
- Find a good, clear central problem (the way the characters resolve the problem is the thing that keeps the audience hooked)
- Use repetition. Keep coming back to some phrases throughout the story. They will keep children's attention and help you keep the flow, too
- Get your audience to participate
- Don't be afraid to give it a go, and have fun!

We have heard the story, and we know it well.



PSALM 78:3

Fantasy

Theme: We can learn from creation



Readings

Balaam's donkey (Numbers 22: 21-39) and the parable of the sower (Mark 4: 1-9).

Fantasy is a genre of storytelling which has a sense of 'otherness' and involves using the imagination. It is different from science fiction or horror, as it does not contain either of these themes. Using the term fantasy in relation to the Bible can be questionable as it has a suggestion that the contents of the Bible are not real or true, but it has been used here to focus on the need for imagination when interpreting the story, together with an element of surprise. The story of the donkey who speaks to Balaam because it sees an angel in its path, and the story of the sower randomly scattering seeds into different types of group, both show how we can learn from creation.

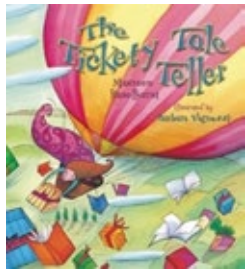
Alex and Alice dream of an eco-friendly world

Alex spoke to the church during a service, making a statement of his faith, which included lots of ideas for caring for the world. He told them about many different ways of recycling — new ideas to many. Alice wrote a poem about caring for the world called God's Garden. From their ideas, the church expressed an interest in working towards becoming an Eco Church. Alex and Alice have since made a video of themselves reading the items, which was included in the URC service for World Environment Day. Alex and Alice received the Lundie Memorial Award for playing their part in the mission of God. bit.ly/3T0CcOw



Fantasy theme for under-fives plus

Modern day parables



The Tickety Tale Teller
by Maureen Haselhurst

The Smartest Giant in Town
by Julia Donaldson and
Axel Sheffler



- a fantasy animal (eg mermaid, unicorn) or a talking donkey (from *Shrek*) – have you ever seen one?
- a fantasy book – we can learn from books which are fantasy stories.

Wondering questions

- I wonder what fantastic creature or plant you would be
- I wonder what the most fantastic thing you have seen is
- I wonder what your favourite animal is.

Crafts

Seed bombs

What you need:

- wildflower seeds
- soil
- flour
- water
- a mixing bowl.

What you do:

1. Mix ten parts soil to one part flour.
2. Slowly add water and mix to form a sticky dough. Roll this into a golf ball-sized ball.
3. Put seeds on a tray and roll the ball over them until it is coated with seeds.
4. Allow to dry for two days.
It's then ready to throw in your garden or on a patch of unused ground.

Fantasy animals

Use bits and pieces of card, junk modelling materials, ribbon, collage materials etc to create your own animals.



What's in the box?

Use a decorated bag or box and fill it with items related to a story that could be handled by under-fives. One by one, with an air of excitement, draw the items out and explore them together.

This box could contain:

- some seeds (I wonder what they might grow into)

Games

Beans game

Shout out the name of a bean. The children should demonstrate the action, as follows:

- string beans – stretch up as high as you can
- broad beans – make yourself as wide as you can
- runner beans – run on the spot
- jumping beans – jump on the spot
- jelly beans – shake your whole body like jelly
- beans on toast – lie flat on the floor
- bean bags – huddle in a ball on the floor.

Prayers



Put out bowls of cut up fruit – try to have quite a few different types so that everyone finds something they like. (Remember to cut grapes in half lengthways to avoid risk of choking).

Talk about God's creation and how he made good things for us to eat. Ask the children what their favourite fruit is and why they like it. Encourage the children to say thank you prayers to God for their favourite fruit. This could be as simple as, "Thank you, God, for apples".



Fantasy theme for URC Children plus



Games

Dress up chocolate game

What you need:

- some donkey ears (made beforehand, perhaps on a headband)
- a donkey nose (made beforehand, perhaps on some glasses or some elastic)
- a donkey tail (perhaps use a scarf that ties or tucks in to waist band)
- some over-sized gloves
- chocolate bar
- plate
- knife and fork.



What you do:

1. Set two teams against each other. Place the ears, tail, nose and gloves at spaced out intervals, a set for each team.
2. When signalled, the ones at the front rush to the ears and put them on, run to the next item and so on until they are dressed in all the items.
3. When they reach the end they have to run back, placing the items back where they found them (to make this obvious, consider placing a cross on the floor or buckets for where they are to drop the items).
4. They then rush to the back of the line.
5. The winners are the first ones to all do it and sit down.
6. To add an extra challenge, add a table at the end of the race with a chocolate bar and a knife and fork on it. Players try to cut off a piece of chocolate and eat it while still wearing the costume.
7. The first one to get the chocolate wins a point for their team.
8. Place the clothing back and play again until everyone has had a go.

Animal Actions

What you do:

1. Have the children sit in a circle and think of an animal (can be a fantasy one if they wish, such as a dragon or a unicorn).
2. Choose one child in the circle to begin. This child must do the actions of their animal.
3. Now move clockwise, to the next child. This child must repeat the animal actions from the first child and then act out the animal that they chose.
4. Move on to the next child, this child must do the animal actions of the first child, the second child and then add their own.
5. Go around the circle and see how far you can get before someone forgets an animal!

Giants, Wizards, Elves!

This game is a variation of Rock, Paper, Scissors. Before you begin, demonstrate the actions needed for the game:

- Giants: stand on their toes, raise their arms and growl or roar.
Wizards: crouch slightly, wriggle their fingers and cast spells.
Elves: crouch down low, cup their hands behind their ears and squeak.

In this game, giants squash elves; elves outsmart wizards; wizards zap giants.



What you do:

1. To begin, create two teams. The teams huddle together and decide which character they're playing.
2. The teams then line up, facing each other.
3. The leader shouts go and all members of the teams must act out the characters they chose.
4. They continue until the leader shouts stop. The leader then announces who won the game, awards a point to the team and play another round. This can go on for as long as you wish.

Activities and craft

Seed pots to plant seeds

1. Cut or shred several sheets of newspaper into strips, cover with warm water in a bowl and then soak for two to three days.
2. Put the soaked paper in a blender and blend until it's an oatmeal consistency, adding more water if needed.
3. Strain the excess liquid from the pulp and squeeze it. You want a little water left in, but not too much.
4. Add a couple of tablespoons of flour.
5. Knead the flour into the pulp until it forms a clay-like consistency.
6. Press it into muffin trays to form little pots and allow to dry for several days or cook in a pre-heated oven (approx 100 C) for 30-60 minutes until completely dry.
7. Fill the pots with damp soil and plant your seed.
8. Put a lollipop stick in and glue a speech bubble cut out of card onto the top of the lollipop stick with a message from your plant (eg water me, take care of me, plant me somewhere safe, or, take care of God's world).
9. When your seed starts to sprout, you can plant the whole pot in the garden.



For a slightly quicker seed pot, use a cardboard tube from a kitchen roll (cut down) or toilet roll. Cut slits in the lower part of the tube and fold together to close off the end of the tube, as in the image.

Creation bag

You need a bag and a selection of toy animals or animal pictures.

In turn, dip your hand into the bag and pick an animal at random. When you have chosen, look at your animal, show it to the rest of the group and give it a voice. What might this animal sound like if it could talk? And what would it say? What advice would it give you about life or faith or God or creation?



Animal Puppets

We have to learn from creation by observation, but I wonder what we would learn if the animals and creatures could talk. There are various ways that you could make a puppet creature that could 'talk' to you, whether you decide to make an actual creature (eg a donkey or fish) or whether you choose to make a real fantasy creature of your own.

Peg puppets can be made by cutting out and decorating a shape from cardboard with a slit across for the mouth (see photo). Glue the two parts of your creature to the upper and lower parts of a peg so that they meet when the peg is closed, but opening the peg causes the mouth of your creature to open. A fish or whale shape is a good one for this puppet but it can be adapted for most creatures.



You could create a creature using a sock to make a sock puppet, in its simplest form just gluing eyes on and tucking in the toe part of the sock to form a mouth. Similarly, you could make an octopus or spider or a four-legged creature with a long neck by using an old glove and sticking eyes onto it. Paper bag puppets can be made using a paper bag with a fold down top or by folding paper as shown on bit.ly/47uxXPK

Seeded pictures

What you need:

- collage paper or card
- glue
- pens
- a variety of seeds and dried beans and pulses (out of date is best for craft).

What you do:

1. Encourage the group to create a creation collage picture, using the different seeds and beans.
2. It can be time consuming, so bear this in mind. Younger children may appreciate a simple outline to fill in with their seeds and beans.
3. Alternatively, make a bookmark using live seeds and gift it to someone to plant.

Wondering questions

- I wonder what you might have learned from creation
- The Psalms talk about creation singing and shouting God's name. I wonder what this looks/sounds like
- What images does this create for you?
- God created the heavens, the earth and everything in it, then created us. I wonder why God did it in that order
- I wonder what you think is the most important part of God's creation. What could we get rid of?

Prayers



Sand prayers

Use this prayer to pray for God's beautiful creation.

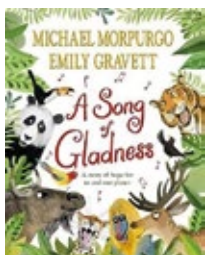
1. Fill a tray with sand or compost.
2. Give each person a seed or bead, then allow some space to think about creation or ways that we are not looking after God's world. You could look at pictures from newspapers or share pictures on a screen.
3. Invite people to make a hole in the sand or compost to plant their seed or bury their seed prayer completely in the tray.
4. Close the time of prayer with a spoken prayer:

**Mysterious and creative God,
Thank you for this mind-boggling world,
For the miraculous,
For the spectacular,
For the weird and wonderful.
Help us to take better care,
And may we never take your astonishing masterpiece for granted!
Amen.**



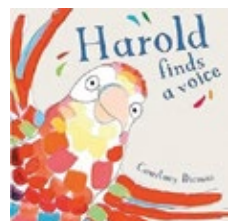
You can find more about learning from creation in Faith Adventures: Children Together bit.ly/47AYPOi and bit.ly/3Gkiwh6. Families on Faith Adventures @ Home has an issue on the parable of the sower at bit.ly/47CTrKn.

Read



Harold finds a voice by Courtney Dicmas: bit.ly/3GhNXJ9

A Song of Gladness by Michael Morpurgo and Emily Gravett.
Read by Cozy Bedtime Reads: bit.ly/3uA3CRn



Fantasy theme for URC Youth and young adults plus

A Fantastical Faith: Dragons, Donkeys, and the Divine by the Revd Phil Wall

Bible reading



Numbers 22:21-38 and Matthew 13:1-23.

"There's nothing in the world more powerful than a good story."

– Tyrion Lannister, Game of Thrones

While some in the Church forbid any interaction with the fantasy genre or dismiss it as frivolous, it is hard to deny that – with talk of sea monsters and demons, giants and witches – our scriptures are laden with the fantastical. In fact, far from being inappropriate, fantasy takes us from the everyday to the existential; from our own recognisable worlds to mysterious others, enabling us to engage with concepts which are beyond literal description yet are fundamental to our faith. More than any other genre, fantasy stokes our imaginations and transports us to strange lands in which lions embody incarnation, yew trees speak of forgiveness, and stones reveal resurrection. So let's consider three key lessons that fantasy might reveal about our Biblical passages and faith in general, before we further explore how we can use the genre with the 11-25 age range...

Lesson one: Be prepared for surprises

"You're a wizard, Harry!"

– Hagrid, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

Fundamental to almost all fantasy stories is the protagonist's journey from their usual, safe routine to a risky and remarkable adventure. Whether going down the rabbit hole, up the beanstalk, through the wardrobe, or onto platform 9¾, both the characters and the reader are in for a world of surprises! And surprises are fundamental to our scriptures – from a Creator who makes the cosmos out of nothing to the Saviour who defeats death by dying. This element of surprise can be seen in both the story of Balaam – a hidden angel, a diverted journey, a talking donkey (with no Shrek to be seen!) – and in the parable of the sower. In fact, central to all of Jesus' stories is the element of surprise. Just take the parables in the chapter as a whole – a mustard seed becomes a tree; a man finds treasure and reburies it; a sower throws about some seed and the crop is a hundredfold! I mean, Isabela Madrigal has nothing on this dude! In other words, both Jesus' parables and the fantasy genre tell us that the ordinary can reveal the extraordinary; that the magical, the magnificent, the miraculous can be glimpsed in our midst. So, be curious, be imaginative, be attentive... which leads us to lesson two...

Lesson two – Pay attention to any signs

"Listen! You smell something?"

– Dr Ray Stantz, Ghostbusters

With few things ever being what they first appear to be, paying close attention to what's going on around you is key to navigating the many twists and turns of the fantasy genre. You need to follow that yellow brick

road, crack the code of those Christmas lights, heed the warnings and wisdom all around you. And, more often than not, that means listening to the lessons that the natural world has to teach us – whether that be a narrative of abundance, as in the parable of the sower; or a donkey’s caution about journeying onward. In fact, with the ignorance of the human, the displeasure of God, the warning from the natural world, and threat of death if Balaam doesn’t change direction, could there be a better metaphor for the climate crisis?! So, with the Spirit blowing where it will, it’s up to all of us to listen, to reflect, to pay attention to the gifts, fruits, and lessons that will aid and guide us along our way.



Lesson three – Hope wildly

"Go where you must go, and hope!"

– Gandalf, *The Lord of the Rings*

Even when dealing with the darkest realities of life, fantasy fiction is always suffused by, and ends with, a message of hope. The spell is broken; the ring is destroyed; the princess returns to her underground kingdom. Hope is – of course – at the very core of our faith and found throughout our scriptures. Balaam sets out to curse Israel but can only bless the people instead; the seed falls in all sorts of soil, yet yields a miraculous crop; we throw our brokenness, anger, and hatred at the cross, and God responds with solidarity, forgiveness, and love. It doesn’t mean we won’t face monsters, lose companions, or wrestle kraken – or even God – along the way, but it does mean that our story begins and ends in love. That’s what we’re called to hold on to and live out along the way.

Engaging with fantasy

Read

From hobbits to Hogwarts, there are many classic fantasy books which intentionally contain Christian themes and values. Why not read and discuss one of the following, asking where the good news is to be found in each:

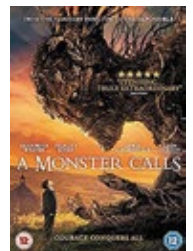
1. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*
2. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*
3. *The Life of Pi*



Watch

A Monster Calls (12A)

A Monster Calls is an epic young adult book, turned play and film, which looks at childhood bereavement and how stories help us process trauma. With appropriate sensibilities and warnings, watch the film and discuss the following questions, referring to passages such as John 8:32 and 14:1-4, as needed. What was your response to the film? What did you like/dislike about it? Was there a quote or a scene that particularly stood out for you?



"Everything will be fine Conor."

Conor’s family do not share with him the truth of his mum’s condition. Have people ever kept things from you because of your age or another reason? If so, how did that make you feel? Do you believe in life beyond death? If so, should/does that change the way we talk/feel about death? What was your response to the monster’s stories? Did they have a clear meaning? How are they similar/different to Jesus’ parables?

In the film, both stories and art are means which allow Conor and his mum to explore truths about life and meaning. Is there an art/medium/hobby that allows you to explore this? Who/what do you think the monster in the film represents?

"The monster ... symbolizes God... For all his harshness, he is also incredibly tender. He gives Conor the ability and freedom to forgive himself. He comforts Conor in grief. He heals. He provides hope..."

– from Stacey Tuttle's blog, part of The Shepherd Project: bit.ly/46CEhDL

What do you think of this interpretation of the Monster?

Conor: *What do I do?*

Monster: *What you did just now. You speak the truth.*

Conor: *That's all?*

Monster: *You think it's easy? You were willing to die rather than speak it!*

Have there been times in your life when speaking the truth felt difficult/liberating? Do you think speaking the truth always sets you free? What was your response to the film's ending? What did you take it to mean?

Play

Use one of these *Taskmaster*-style icebreakers to open a Bible study/discussion on fantasy and faith:

Emoji Story

1. The Taskmaster picks a genre (fantasy, romance, action etc).
2. You have to write a film plot within that genre, by only using emojis.
3. The team with the most correctly identified films wins.

The Madrigals

1. Everyone writes down what superpower they would like and passes the answer to the chair who shuffles them and reads them out.
2. Players then have to guess who wrote what. If the person guessing is correct, the person guessed joins their team. Keep going until there is only one big team!
3. You could repeat this for another subjects – which Biblical character you most identify with; favourite hymn/worship song etc.



Fantasy Animals

1. Think up the most absurd fantasy animal and write it down.
2. Mime your fantasy animal to your team in 60 seconds.
3. Team with most correct answers win.

Prayers



Take a cue from Mary Poppins ('Can you imagine that?') and St Ignatius by leading a prayerful exercise which invites participants to imagine themselves into the text. There are many examples of this to look at online, but this gives a general idea of the process:

Read a passage from scripture eg Mark 4:35-41. I wonder:

- Who are you in this story?
- What time of day is it? What is the weather like?
- What do you see around you?
- Who is present? What do they look like, and what are they doing?
- What ambient sounds do you hear? What do you smell?
- How do you feel? Hot? Hungry? Tired?
- What does Jesus do? What does he look and sound like? What does he say to you?

Exploring story outdoors - Forest Church

FOREST
CHURCH
WEEKLY

The Story, Story, Story theme this year is about exploring Jesus as a storyteller through parables and Bible readings. We know that, for the majority of Jesus' teaching, he is outside, and in the world God created. So, for me it is a natural lead to Forest church, Church without walls, just like Jesus. We just take everything we need in a backpack and use only natural or recyclable items where possible to use for craft or to help with the story.

The location/environment can enhance the story telling and, for many, bring it to life in a three-dimensional way, enabling our young people to engage in a deep, more connective manner, and the more mature members of the church to connect in a deep spiritual experience. One afternoon, our Forest Church families were learning about Joseph and how his brothers threw him in a pit before they sold him as a slave. Finding a badger hole to tell the story sparked an impromptu drama, with all the group joining in, just wonderful. Don't worry if your reading or Bible verse leads onto other things – just go with it!



Talking about how God made the world in Genesis 1 could lead on to a playful nature walk, teaching how to look after our world and all creatures in it. Using magnifying glasses to look at mini beasts and bugs shows us how wonderful and unique we all are, and that we all have a place in our world.

If learning, for instance, about the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, you could be in your church garden and, by sowing the seeds on different soil in advance, like in the story, you have a visual way to supplement reading the parable, to really magnify it to all. Especially for some with learning difficulties or younger people, this can help to keep their attention and enable them to remember the story in a new and hopefully exciting way.



When talking about the Holy Spirit and the power it brings, how about getting your group to stand on a hill, mountain, or by the sea to illustrate God's power and awesomeness? By using the natural world to connect and engage your group, it can create powerful and personal experiences as well as a personal, quiet, and deepening prayer time with God, depending on the group's dynamics and what you want to illustrate.

With this different way of Church, remember there are no rules. If you suddenly feel you need to stop for prayers, do it. Or read the story at the end of the session instead of at the beginning – why not? Work with the environment and the seasons and have fun discovering all God has planned for you.



Jo Hopkins (Petersfield and Liss URC)





This is an initiative believed to have begun in Denmark in 2000, when a group of students wanted to do something about the violence and discrimination they were observing. They believed that if people had the chance to meet and share their stories, understanding and peace would follow. The concept is simply about sharing your story or a part of your story with others. These are libraries where, instead of borrowing a book, you borrow a person for a short time and they tell you their story. This has led to some churches and communities using the same idea and running living library sessions. This is how you run a living library session:

Find a few people who will become the living books. Try to find a range of ages, genders and experiences. They will need to be willing to share part of their personal story with whoever comes to listen. Consider the different categories of book you might find in a library. Choose some people who will share a romantic story, or perhaps an action-packed story, and so on.

Prepare. Gather the living books together and give them the opportunity to understand the living library event and consider which part of their story they would like to tell. Support them in finding a catchy title and a brief synopsis (like you might find on the back of a book). Then help each other to write their story and practise telling it well and briefly. You want to aim for between five and ten minutes. You will need to decide how to begin and end the story and decide whether you will use visual aids, props or pictures.

Create the living library space. You will need some librarians, people who will welcome and ensure the smooth running of the day, including looking after the living books. The living books sit in their own area (comfy chairs are best) with a low coffee table (handy for any props) as well as displaying their book cover. (A simple A4 book cover design with the author's name, book title and brief synopsis. It is sometimes helpful to give it a rating too; is it suitable for all ages?) You will need another two or three chairs for the visiting book 'browsers'.

The library opens. Guests arrive and mill around the library, looking at all the book titles and choosing which ones they would like to listen to. Once the chairs by each living book are full, the storytelling begins. When it is finished the 'readers' are welcome to stay for a few moments to ask questions or chat about the story before moving on. Then the storyteller prepares themselves to tell the story to the next group.

This year, the theme of Story, Story, Story gives us an opportunity to share our stories together and celebrate each other as well as find commonality and understanding.

"Just like paper books, living books can be either mirrors or windows."

– Micha Meinderts, author and living book in Denmark



Tragedy

Theme: Be careful who you trust



Readings

Samson and Delilah (Judges 14:1-9, 12-14 and 16:4-17) and the parable of the vineyard tenants and the landowner's son (Matthew 21:33-41).

We might struggle with the idea of discussing tragedy and betrayal, with children in particular, but it occurs frequently in our Bible and, sadly, is not unknown in many children's lives. Children are more aware than ever of events in the news such as war, the plight of refugees, violence in our streets etc. They see people who are homeless or dealing with poor mental or physical health, bereavement, unemployment and so much more. The story of Samson reminds us to be careful who we trust – an important message for all ages. And the story of the tenants in the vineyard, a parable told by Jesus, which prophesies his own betrayal and death at the hands of those he came to save, reminds us of the risks many take in following their faith.

Our story – Bethany Davies supports those experiencing dementia

Bethany was completing her 'A' Levels when her studies took her into the area of dementia. This sparked an interest in how her church could respond to the needs of those around it and within the fellowship. Bethany and her mum started up a Messy Vintage, which was met with a great response from her church fellowship and local community. The space and time was well thought through to meet the needs of those living with dementia and also those isolated due to physical disabilities and infirmity. It involved creating appropriate activities to engage all senses and abilities, worship, chatter space and the essential afternoon tea! Bethany received the Lundie Memorial Award for playing her part in the mission of God. bit.ly/3T0CcOw



Tragedy theme for under-fives plus

Modern day parables



The Tear Thief by Carol Ann Duffy



The Paper Dolls by Julia Donaldson

Crafts

Happy/sad faces

Use a paper plate and glue on two large wobbly eyes. Thread a piece of wool or string through a small hole on each side of the circle to form a mouth. You can then move the mouth into different shapes to show different emotions.



What's in the box?

Use a decorated bag or box and fill it with items related to a story that could be handled by under-fives. One by one, with an air of excitement, draw the items out and explore them together.

This box could contain:

- tissues. I wonder what makes you sad? What cheers you up again?
- hearts – we have all different feelings. Hearts remind us of people who love us
- a lock – a lock can remind us of things we keep locked up
- cross – the cross reminds us of Jesus who loves us, even when we make him sad by the things we say and do. I wonder what Jesus' love feels like
- small world play.

Wondering questions

- I wonder who you trust
- I wonder who never lets you down.

Games

Play a 'follow the leader' game.

Prayers



A breathing prayer:

As the child inhales, say
"When I am afraid..."

As they exhale, say,
"I will trust in you."

**How long is the
longest sentence
ever published (so far)?
Written by Victor Hugo
for his book Les Misérables,
the sentence is 823
words long.**

Tragedy theme for URC Children plus



Games

Chinese Whispers

Trusting the sender. The players sit in a circle. One player begins by whispering a phrase to the next player; whatever that person hears, they pass on to the next person, and so on. When the message gets back to the first player who started it, they speak aloud the message they have just received.

Does the original message make it around the circle and back to its sender intact? How different is the message at the end of the game? Do we always hear correctly before passing a message on?

Sleeping Lions

The players lie down on the floor and for a specified time must not move. The leader can walk amongst the lions, checking for movement. The player who can stay asleep the longest, wins.

Blowing and bursting bubbles

Pride and downfall. Have some bubble mixture and large blowers. Choose two or three people to blow bubbles; the rest have the joy of bursting them. Change 'blowers' and 'bursters' after a few minutes.



Jenga

Knocking down the temple (Judges 16:29-30). Jenga can be played as a team activity or use a giant Jenga set for the whole group if you have access to one.

Blindfold Obstacle Course

(Judges 16:21). Trust a friend to guide you safely.

Set up a simple obstacle course using chairs tables etc. Play proceeds with two players, one blindfolded, one not. The blindfolded person is guided by the 'seeing' player, safely through the obstacles without bumping into them. The player doing the guiding can only speak instructions, such as three paces forward, two to the left etc.

Two Truths and a Lie

Have each young person or leaders (!) tell three things about themselves; two of them must be true and one false. Let the rest try to guess which is a lie.

Shuffle Up!

The servants were prevented from entering the vineyard. The object of this game is to prevent the person in the middle of the circle from getting a seat.

Players sit on chairs in a circle with chairs touching. One chair is left empty. One person is in the middle of the circle. The object of the game is for the person in the middle to sit down but the seated players keep shuffling from chair to chair – filling up the spare chare.

When the person in the middle does make contact with a seat, the person who left the space, that is the person to the right of the space, goes in the middle and play resumes.

Pennies Game

An active scavenger challenge to find all the pennies. It's all about money!

The bigger the space in which to play it, the more the fun and the bigger the challenge. Have at least £1 in pennies, more if you have a big group. Place, not hide, the pennies in the room(s).

Players run and gather as many pennies as they can in a given time. This could be played as a team game, with one team member at a time running and bring back one penny only until the leader calls time.

Activities and craft

Riddles

Make up a riddle. Read the Bible verses about Samson's riddle, 'Out of the eater came something to eat and out of the strong came something sweet' (Judges 14:5-6 and 14). Try, in groups of four perhaps, to make up a riddle. Have a time when you can share and guess the riddles. (eg question: Which cheese is made backwards? Answer: Edam).

Climate change

As a group, talk about climate change and the difficulties affecting different parts of the world. Discuss the tragedy unfolding in Tuvalu, which will worsen unless action is taken.

Make a list of actions which, as individuals, we could take to limit the effects of climate change eg less use of mobiles phones and the internet – digital activity contributes to the carbon footprint.

bit.ly/49X00Y0.

Do a 'green audit' of your church:

bit.ly/3RIT2Xa.

Mosaic pictures

Broken bits can be used to make beautiful things. Tear up pieces of different coloured paper or cut squares. Make a mosaic picture of the lion, a bee or the temple. The Japanese art of Kintsugi celebrates brokenness: the cracks from repairing broken pottery become part of the history of the pot.



Samson/Delilah head bands

Cut wide strips of sugar/ construction paper and tape the ends together to make a head band to fit the wearer's head.

Cut long pieces of dark sugar/ construction paper about 1cm wide and as long as they want within reason. Stick this 'hair' to the headband.

Wear this and be Samson. To be Delilah, make the same headband but decorate with 'jewels' etc.



Read the story of Lego

Tragedy struck the vineyard owner in the parable. Tragedy also struck Ole Kirk Christiansen, founder of Lego. Sometimes from a tragedy, good can come. This can be seen in the early days of the Lego story. Make a scene from the story using Lego.

You may know of other such stories of good coming from tragedy, such as those of Tony Hodgell or H B Reese. What can you find out about them?

Make a miniature vineyard

Have a look at a picture of a vineyard. Using an old shoe box as the base, create the vines and trees using small twigs, clay, paper etc. These could be made in groups or this could be an individual activity by making the vineyard on a paper plate.

Collage of Acceptance and Rejection (older)

Discuss the themes of acceptance and rejection in the parable. From magazines and newspapers provided by the leader, plus craft materials, create a collage that represents on one side acceptance and on the other rejection.

Paper weight stones

Have some large smooth stones. Paint or draw vines and/or grapes. Use a light varnish when the paint has dried.

Wondering questions

- I wonder how you know who to trust
- Who do you trust the most and why?
- Do people trust you?
- I wonder whether it is always easy to trust God
- I wonder what happens when trust is broken.

Prayers

Wool chain prayers

Use this prayer to pray about difficult situations in families, local communities or globally.

1. Cut different colours of wool, ribbon, string or thread into similar length pieces.
2. Ask the group to each choose one and think about a person or situation to pray for.
3. Tie the pieces together while listening to music or using a simple spoken prayer. You could also use headline strips cut from newspapers, stuck together rather than tied.
4. When all the threads have been tied together, hold the completed length as a group.



You can find more resources on the story of Samson here: bit.ly/3GhRxD3.

Tragedy theme for URC Youth and young adults plus

"When you can't go on, it's tragedy"

Parable of the tenants

Matthew 21:33-46

Written version bit.ly/49VGGMx

YouTube bit.ly/3RIJKKL



Trigger alert for anyone dealing with a current tragedy in life – ensure pastoral support is available.

Activities

Stories from childhood

Most traditions have fairy tales, nursery rhymes and legends, and many of these are surprisingly disturbing when re-read when you are older. Gather suggestions of fairytales and nursery rhymes the group can remember – are there any particular favourites? It may be helpful to have a few fairytale and nursery rhyme books to hand to stimulate the conversation.

Have a discussion about the stories – why do they like them? Are there any tragedies in the book? Which ones have happy endings? You could widen the story scope if there are not many present who have read or know of fairytales. Why do you think children's books might include tragedies and why

might they generally have happy endings, at least for some of the characters? Do you know of any that don't have a happy ending?

What makes a tragedy?

Prepare pieces of paper with lots of different situations that may occur in an individual's life or the world written on them. Attach several large pieces of paper to the wall with different weather symbols, from sunny to thunder. Encourage people to place the situations where they feel they fall in terms of tragedy; things considered a terrible tragedy on the thunder, and not a tragedy at all on the sun. Discuss their reasons – can you reach a consensus?

The parables sometimes reflect a certain genre, the parable of the tenants in the vineyard is rather tragic as several people, including the owner's son, were murdered.

Discuss

- What does this tragic story from the Bible teach us?
- What other tragedies do you know of in the Bible?
- How would you define tragedy? Is the way we use the word in story the same as the way we use it in the world around us? What makes a news story a tragedy?
- Often films are made, and stories written, about tragic situations that occurred in the past or are happening currently, eg *Titanic*. What do you feel about this? Is there any time limit to a situation being tragic?
- How should we respond to a tragedy? As an individual, as a Christian. Do the answers change?
- If someone shares a tragic story from their own experience, how can we best respond to that story?

Prayers

Listen to *Cornerstone* by Reuben Morgan
bit.ly/49VixSJ

Ensure everyone has some large white stones to write on – if you wish you can make your own from air dry clay. Spend two minutes initially just listening to the music and meditating on the words in the chorus:

Christ alone, cornerstone
Weak made strong in the Saviour's love
Through the storm
He is Lord, Lord of all
He is Lord, Lord of all

As a response, and while the rest of the music is playing, use the pens to decorate your own 'cornerstone' to take home.

Samson and Delilah – a tragedy

Who is the strongest superhero?

Invite everyone to write their favourite superhero down on a slip of paper, then set up a world cup style competition of pool groups, quarter finals, semi-finals and final – everyone votes for a winner at each stage until the overall winner is selected. Alternatively, hold a balloon debate where each superhero states why they should not be thrown out of the balloon and then the group votes to decide who should be saved and who should go. Who is the strongest? Have a 'thumb wrestling' knockout competition to find out.

Read

Read the story of Samson in Judges 14:1-9 and 12-14 and Judges 16:4-17 Samson: www.bbc.co.uk/teach/school-radio/assemblies-ks1-ks2-samson-and-delilah-the-judge/z7dstrd

This is the story of flawed hero, a supernaturally strong warrior avenger, caught up in a cycle of revenge. He has a weakness for foreign women, and gives into their demands, which leads to his capture and downfall – but he ensures that his dramatic death is an ultimate act of revenge. Samson is an Israelite, part of the nation of settler farmers following the exodus from Egypt. Their enemies are the Philistines, a nation of traders settling the same land from the sea. Both are seeking control of the same territory. Samson is seen as a leader with the title of 'Judge', but we don't hear anything about his leadership among the tribes of Israel, just his encounters with the Philistines.

Discuss

- Do you think this is a tragedy – if so, for whom?
- The only time Samson calls on God is right at the end of the story – have you ever asked God for something 'only this once'?
- Samson seems to make the same mistake (loving/trusting/giving in to Philistine women) twice. In his letter to the Romans (7:14-25), Paul talks about how he keeps falling back into the same wrong behaviour: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Romans 7:19 NRSV). Do you find you keep 'falling down the same hole'? How might Paul's perspective of being rescued by Jesus from this help?
- What echoes of Samson's story can you hear in the life of Jesus? What are the key differences between Samson and Jesus?

Challenge the group to set each other a riddle. Samson's riddle is used as a slogan for Tate and Lyle Golden Syrup. Samson didn't seem to take to heart the idea that something sweet (apart from revenge) could come from something strong.

Here is a prayer by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who was a key leader in the peaceful struggle to overcome apartheid in South Africa, and went on to oversee the peace and reconciliation commission – bringing enemies face to face to end the cycle of revenge:



Goodness is stronger than evil.
Love is stronger than hate.
Light is stronger than darkness.
Life is stronger than death.
Victory is ours through Him who loved us.

Which of these statements stand out to you and why?

Prayers

Pray together for a situation where God's strength is needed – in your life, in the Church and in the world. Jesus has promised to be with us always. Challenge everyone to remember the strong loving presence of God every time they eat or drink something sweet over the next week.



Jesus used stories to tell all these things to the people. He always used stories to teach them.

Prayer stations



Humour – Emotion Stones

Set up a station with some emojis or emotions stones and images from the film *Inside Out*. Have a selection of small pebbles in a bowl for people to take away with them.



1. Take a small stone from the bowl and, as you hold the stone in your hand, talk to God about how you are feeling.
2. As a reminder that God is always with us, put a stone in your pocket and carry it with you.
3. Say this prayer as you reflect:

**I am your strength when you feel weak,
I am your joy when you are sad,
I am the way when you feel confused,
I am your peace when you feel worried or angry,
I am your defender when you feel fearful,
I am your comforter and hope when you are grieving,
and I laugh with you when you are happy.**

Romance – Hearts with the heart of God

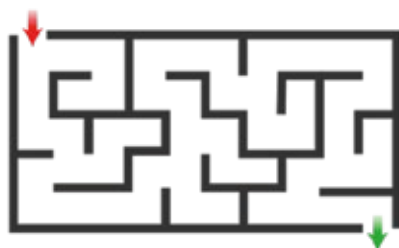
Set up the station with a large heart shape on a large piece of card, lots of small heart shapes in a bowl, a selection of pens, and some glue sticks.



1. As you pray, take a heart from the bowl. Think about family, people we love and people who care for us and write their name on your heart.
2. Then stick your heart into the big heart poster.

Action – God makes a way

Set up a station with a large maze, some dots to stick onto it, a large tennis ball and a pen.



1. As you pray, place a dot on the places where life is difficult, or you find yourself at a crossroads.
2. Once you have placed your dot, write on the tennis ball the thing you want to pray for and pass this on to someone else to add their prayer.

Tragedy – Tear thief prayers

Set up a station with a copy of the book *The Tear Thief*, or have a laptop with the story on it.

bit.ly/46IYGqy



Have a box of tissues with a label "It's ok to cry" and also have a block of ice hanging with a bowl underneath it.

1. As you reflect on the story and listen to the ice dripping, think of the tears we shed, tears of frustration, anger, laughter, and sadness.
2. Sit in stillness and pray for all those facing tragedy or sorrow today.

Fantasy – Layers

Set up the prayer station with a large sheet of paper with some coloured pens.



1. Reflect on the many layers we have within us, how some are shown to the world and some are hidden.
2. Write some words that reflect who you are and some words of praise for God's amazing creation, starting in the centre of the page and working out in circles to resemble the rings of a tree or a fingerprint.



Refugees and asylum seekers – stories of welcome

This session is designed to help participants learn about the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, and to explore how we can help create a welcoming environment for all.

Icebreaker

What does the word ‘welcome’ mean for you?

Give participants pens and paper and ask them to reflect on the question above and write or draw their responses. Invite participants to share and discuss their responses with the group.

Discuss

- Can you think of a time when you were made welcome? How did this feel?
- When have you offered welcome to others?

Introduction

What is meant by refugee and asylum seeker?

This activity will help the group to define the meanings of migrant, asylum seeker and refugee. Start by asking each group member to write down a short one-sentence description for each of the words.

Discuss

- How easy did they find it to come up with a definition for each word?
- Did they have similar answers for each word?

Write out the terms and definitions below on separate pieces of paper. Ask the group to match each definition with the correct term.

- Migrant: Someone that leaves one place to live in another
- Asylum seeker: A person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations by another country
- Refugee: A person who has left their country and is given protection from persecution and serious rights violations by another country
- Un-documented people: A person living somewhere without legal documentation or with incorrect documentation.

Watch

Show one of the short animations below produced by Kazzum Arts (Videos and accompanying resource packs available via this link: www.kazzum.org/free-resources/migration).

- Younger children (primary school) “Help Them Feel At Home” animation bit.ly/feel-at-home-video
- Older Children (secondary school) “Joe Like This” animation bit.ly/joe-like-this

Bible Reflection

Welcoming the stranger

Let love continue among you. Don’t forget to extend your hospitality to all – even to strangers—for as you know, some have unknowingly shown kindness to heavenly messengers in this way.

Hebrews 13:1-2

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Discuss

- What stands out to you from this passage? Why?
- Is there anything that you find challenging in this passage? Why?
- Who are the 'strangers' in our communities?
- In what ways might our society today be unwelcoming to strangers?
- What would it look like for us to truly extend hospitality to all?

Stories of welcome

Spend some time exploring ways in which communities across the UK are taking action to create places of welcome.

- Look at the examples below – how do these projects create 'welcome'?
- Can you think of any opportunities to welcome others in your local community?

A Great British Welcome Photo Series

A Great British Welcome tells the story of how communities across the UK welcome people who have been forced to flee their homes. Stories are told by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and photographed by Andrew Testa. www.unhcr.org/uk/news-and-stories/special-features/great-british-welcome

Our Second Home

(OSH) Our Second Home is a youth movement that helps refugees and migrants flourish in the place they call home. Our Second Home runs residential events which give young people a space to just be kids. A place to learn. A place to make friends. A place to find a community. Watch the videos below and visit www.oursecondhome.org.uk to find out more.

- Meet Adil: bit.ly/meet-adil
- Meet Mohammed: bit.ly/meet-mohammed.

Refugee Tales

Refugee Tales is a community which walks in solidarity with people who have been detained. Rooted in the work of Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group, Refugee Tales shares the stories of people held in immigration detention and those who work with them. The UK is the only country in Europe that detains people indefinitely. Refugee Tales calls for an end to indefinite detention. Watch the video below to hear Refugee Tales community member AJ share their own personal story. Read more about the project at www.refugeetales.org

The Foster Child's Tale as told by 'AJ' bit.ly/foster-childs-tale (*Content warning – contains reference to abuse, mental ill health and suicide. Some strong language.*) More stories are published in Refugee Tales Volumes 1-4 (www.commapress.co.uk/bundles/refugee-tales) and recordings can be watched online at www.28for28.org.

Prayers



God of the nomad, asylum seeker and refugee,
Journey with those who have left all
To find safety on our shores,
Accused of lying, hungry and homeless,
Vulnerable, away from families and the familiar.
God of the stranger be with them we pray
And help us to open our arms and our hearts
To those who seek sanctuary from afar,
Following the one who left all for us,
Amen.

The Revd Pat Nimmo

Prayer taken from JPIT hostile environment resources

www.jpit.uk/issues/asylum-and-migration/endhostility





Story, story, story is a perfect theme for children and young people with additional needs, as most folk enjoy stories, though some may prefer dealing with fact and non-fiction, where there is not the same demand on imagination and creativity.

Sensory stories

A sensory story is a means of story telling that draws on as many of the senses as possible, in order to help memory and language processing. You can have great fun telling Bible stories as sensory stories.

- First, choose your story carefully and hone it down to the key points – maybe between seven and ten sentences. Think about the main things you want the children to take away from the story – what are the key details and the overriding message? Miss out anything that is just extra and unnecessary information. For example, in the story of Jonah, it didn't matter where God sent him or where he fled to, it was just important that God wanted him to convey a message and Jonah ran away
- Identify which parts of the story could be told by stimulating certain senses. Could there be sound effects, visual elements, things to touch, taste or even smell? Can you engage the children in saying some words, or making some movements, or pulling some faces?
- Keep your sentences short and with familiar vocabulary
- Try some repetition – children and young people with additional needs may need to hear something more than once in order to process or remember it
- Illustrate your story with tactile boards. If you're doing a story about Jesus, make a picture of Jesus with various fabrics that feel different to the touch – wool for hair and beard, for example, something leathery for sandalled feet, fabric for his cloak, sand underneath his feet etc
- Tell the story slowly and with slightly exaggerated use of tone and facial expression/body language to add life to the words. If you know some Makaton for any of the words, use it.

This is a story Jesus told:

There was once a farmer.

Use a tactile board with a picture of a farmer – it is OK for the farmer to be a modern day UK farmer, as this will make slightly more sense for the children. Sing a line of Old Macdonald had a farm, E I E I O.

And the farmer wanted to plant some seeds.

Have some seeds – sunflower seeds might be a good choice as they are safe if eaten. Shake them in the packet to hear the sound, then open it and shake the seeds out so that children can see and feel them.

The farmer threw them over the field, some here, some there, some everywhere.

Encourage the children to mimic you throwing the seeds in every direction. Use shakers with rice in to mimic the sound of the seeds falling.

Some seeds fell onto the path.

Have a tray covered with a sheet of paper coloured to look like paving slabs for the children to sprinkle seeds on.

Oh no! They couldn't grow there!

Exaggerated Oh No! – get the children to join in, and cover their mouths with their hands.

The birds flew down and gobbled them up.

Use a toy bird or puppet to swoop down onto the seeds, and a tactile board with a picture of a bird with a seed in its beak. Use the real seed and make the bird out of feathers. If you have a sound button, you could record the sound of birds – maybe seagulls or starlings, as those have very distinctive sounds and are less musical than songbirds.



Some seeds fell on soil with rocks and stones in.

Have a tray with a little soil and lots of rocks and stones for the children to touch and handle.

Oh no! They couldn't grow there!

Exaggerated Oh No! – get the children to join in, and cover their mouths with their hands.

They grew a little bit, but the sun was hot and they shrivelled up.

Encourage the children (by modelling it) to start small, like a seed, and to get taller and taller, and then suddenly to shrivel down. Make a big sunshine to illustrate the sun, maybe one you could shine a torch through to make it glow (using cellophane or tissue paper).

Some seeds fell where the weeds were growing.

Have a tray with some soil and either lots of weeds already growing in it (obviously needs preparation) or some twigs and spiky bits.

Oh no! They couldn't grow there!

Exaggerated Oh No! – get the children to join in, and cover their mouths with their hands.

But some fell on good soil. No birds, no stones, no weeds.

Have a tray of good soil for the children to feel and to plant a seed each into.

This is where the seeds will grow, and grow, and grow. Hooray!

Loud cheers.

Sensory Bins

A sensory bin will have items to do with the story set in a tactile environment. You could use a tuff tray for big groups, a storage box, even down to a tray, a food container or a shoebox for individuals. Be aware of their tactile needs and likelihood to put things in their mouths before deciding what to put into the sensory bin.

Suitable media might be rice or lentils, feathers, pasta (you can dye pasta and rice easily by mixing with a few drops of white vinegar and a few drops of liquid/gel food colouring in a ziplock bag and then spreading out to dry overnight on baking paper), shredded paper, jelly, water beads, spaghetti, water, sand, mud – anything that gives an interesting texture to run your fingers through. The story of the treasure in the field could be reinforced by hiding coins and jewellery in the sensory bin for children to find and put in a treasure box (beware of coins going in mouths), while the story of Balaam could have toy donkeys and angels, for example. For children who don't like touching things, you could provide big tweezers or spoons etc for them to pick or scoop items with.

Story Sacks

Another way to present stories is by using a story sack. Story sacks make stories more accessible to everyone, including children with additional needs or English as a second language.

1. Use a pillowcase or make a sack or bag with attractive materials and add a drawstring if possible.
2. Make a label with a picture illustration to represent the story inside.
3. Fill your story sack with at least one copy of the story (ideally a picture book), small play figures to represent characters, items connected with the story, especially thinking of how to appeal to the senses (variety of colours and textures – soft, rough, smooth, shiny; things that have a particular smell; things that make a noise etc).
4. You could also add things to do or make that are connected with the story, ensuring that everything needed is in the bag. It is especially good to include some mark-making materials eg a laminated piece of card and some dry-wipe pens, or a chalk board and chalks.



Using modern parables



Matthew 13:34 tells us that Jesus “told the crowds all these things in parables, without a parable he told them nothing”. Whether it was the one about the son who took his share of the money and squandered it away, or the one about the man who sowed a field, or perhaps the one about the woman who lost her coin; Jesus took everyday things and used them as metaphors in his storytelling to encourage people to consider God and God’s Kingdom. I wonder what he would use today as a modern parable.

Our children are surrounded by fabulous picture books and stories, many of which can be watched online as animations too; we can use these familiar stories to encourage children and adults alike to consider God, Bible passages and God’s kingdom. This can take place in any session at any time, whether it is in a holiday club, or during a service, in a toddler group or in a Sunday school session; stories are powerful metaphors. Using a story that children may already be familiar with also gives children the space and freedom to play with the concepts or themes, as well as providing a hook that the child may remember the next time they hear the story.

Using modern parables is simple. Choosing the right one from such a rich collection is the hardest part, which is why we have given you some suggestions in this (and other URC) resources. Here are some top tips for using modern parables:

1. Choose a story that fits well with the Bible story you are using or that is linked to the theme you are exploring in the session.
2. Share the story alongside the Bible passage, not instead of.
3. Decide where in your session or service is best to share this story, before or after the Bible input. Are you using it to introduce the theme and encourage thinking in your group or do you want to offer it as a reflection after the Bible input?
4. Resist the urge to explain why you have chosen the story or to explain what you think the story says to us about God or God’s Kingdom.

5. Remember that Jesus rarely explained his parables; he simply told them and left space for the Holy Spirit to speak to the hearers in different ways.
6. Leave the story book where people may be able to find it and revisit it later.
7. Wondering questions leading into the story or after the story can support and encourage deeper thinking.

An example to offer:

When leading a Mother’s Day service, Ruth finished the service by sharing *The Boy who lost his Bellybutton*. She led into the story by saying, “I want to finish with a modern parable,” then after the story she asked a wondering question: If our bellybuttons are a sign that we have been connected to our mothers (whether we know them now or not), I wonder what in our lives are signs that we are connected to our heavenly Parent God.

When sharing with a group at Easter, Ruth used the book *Guess how much I love you*. She opened the session by saying that, in the Bible, we read Paul’s prayer that we might understand how high, wide and deep God’s love is for us. She then read the story and continued the service.

Modern parables

Little Rabbit Waits for the Moon
by Beth Shoshan bit.ly/3RoajyV



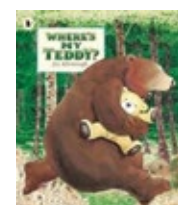
The Path by Bob Staake
bit.ly/3NcWzV5

How did the Animals help God?
by Nancy Sohn Swartz bit.ly/3N9n4KW



The Signmaker’s Assistant
by Tedd Arnold
bit.ly/3GprQ3f

Where’s my Teddy? by Jez Alborough
bit.ly/3sQYeJc



Romance

Theme: Love will find you



Readings

Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 2-4) and the parable of the treasure in the field (Matthew 13:44).

There are a lot of love stories in the Bible – indeed, one might say that the entire Bible is a love story, the story of God’s immeasurable love. This genre gives us opportunity to explore this further, how God seeks us out even when we are least expecting it and loves us despite the times we might reject that love. It also enables us to talk about what we treasure, and why. What is important to us in our lives and also in our relationships?

Our story – Emily Cheer shares God’s love for the vulnerable

Emily volunteers at Sanyu Babies’ Home in Kampala. They take up to (and often over) 50 children under five, many of whom have been abandoned. Emily set up a programme of small-scale outings, run by the Sanyu driver, one Mama and her, for a small group of children travelling in the Sanyu car. When lockdown started, she was in the process of withdrawing herself from the actual trips to evidence that they didn’t need her – just a small stream of dedicated funding and a programme to follow. She’s really keen that everything she does is sustainable. Trips included the zoo, the airport, shops – massive experiences for children who only knew the home, and vital preparation for being fostered or adopted and entering the outside world. Emily received the Lundie Memorial Award for playing her part in the mission of God. bit.ly/3T0CcOw



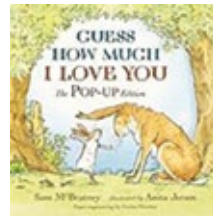
Romance theme for under-fives plus

Modern day parables

Guess how much I love you by Sam McBratney



Don't be Afraid, Little Ones
by M Christina Butler,
Caroline Pedler



Activities

Layers Hearts

Cut out hearts of different sizes and colours and encourage children to glue them one above the other.



Printing

Use a heart-shaped cookie cutter or a shaped potato. Dip in paint and create heart prints on scrap paper.



What's in the box?

Use a decorated bag or box and fill it with items related to the story that could be handled by under-fives. One by one, with an air of excitement, draw the items out and explore them together. This box could contain: heart, spy glass, child's Bible, treasure box, engagement ring, small world play.

Wondering question

- I wonder how much God loves us.

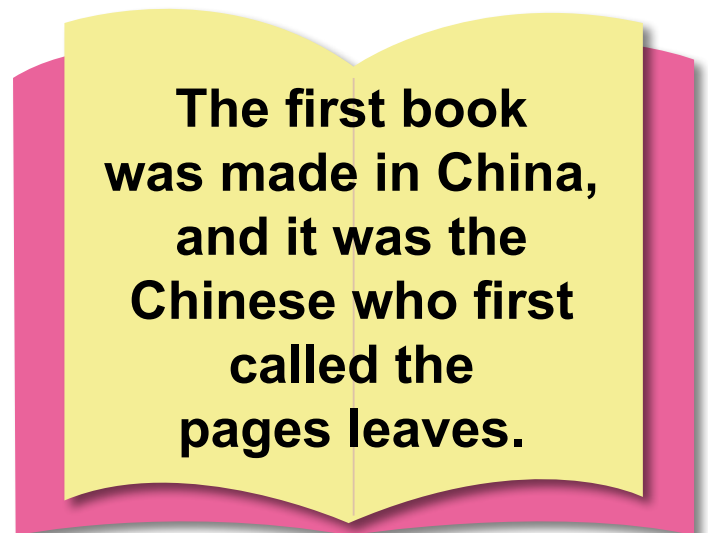
Games

Find the heart

Hide hearts around the room and then set the children to find them.

Prayers

Draw a heart on a child's hand and remind them how much they are loved by God.



**The first book
was made in China,
and it was the
Chinese who first
called the
pages leaves.**

Romance theme for URC Children plus



Games

Treasure hunt

Create a treasure hunt that makes full use of the space available to you. It would be beneficial to use more than one room if possible.

1. Devise eight clues which describe a place, area or room in your location – for instance, where we go to wash our hands.
2. The first clue is given to the group/individual. Once the clue has been worked out, the person makes their way to that area and searches for a letter and the next clue. They write the letter down and read the next clue.
3. This continues until they have done them all and have a set of random letters, the letters then need to be arranged into a word (Treasure).
4. If you have a large group, you could pair everyone up and wait two minutes between sending them off to do the hunt.

Ruth meets Boaz Singing Game

Everyone stands in a circle and does the actions as you sing the song together. (Use the tune of 'There was a princess long ago' bit.ly/3GqZW7g).

Follow the instructions as shown for each verse. (Choose someone to be Ruth to stand in the middle of the circle).

**A lady lived whose name was Ruth,
name was Ruth, name was Ruth.
A lady lived whose name was Ruth,
name was Ruth.**

(Everyone to act cutting down the wheat)
**She went working in a field,
in a field, in a field.
She went working in a field,
in a field.**

(Choose someone to be Boaz and to stand in the middle of the circle with Ruth)
**Farmer Boaz came along,
Came along, came along.
Farmer Boaz came along,
came along.**

(Everyone act out searching for Ruth – by shielding eyes with hand and looking around)

**Saw Ruth working
in the field,
in the field, in the
field.**

**Saw Ruth working in the field,
in the field**

(Everyone to act out sharing food and eating food, perhaps rubbing tummy)

**He helped Ruth get much to eat,
much to eat, much to eat.
He helped Ruth had much to eat,
much to eat.**

(Everyone to act out pretend battle against invisible people or hug selves to show safe)

**He made sure that she stayed safe,
she stayed safe, she stayed safe.
He made sure that she stayed safe,
she stayed safe.**

(Either make a heart with hands or put both hands over heart)

**Ruth and Boaz fell in love,
Fell in love, fell in love.
Ruth and Boaz fell in love,
fell in love.**

Pan for treasure

What you need:

- sand
- variety of items with holes such as strainers, colanders, spoons with holes
- large tray if group activity or small trays if to do individually
- variety of treasure (gems, sequins, coins, buttons).



What you do:

1. Hide a certain number of objects in the sand. The aim is for the person to use the equipment to try to find the treasure by scooping up the sand, shaking it out into the trays and seeing what treasure they find.
2. Put the found treasure to one side. If you would like to make it a bit more interesting, then set a stopwatch and see who can find ten objects the quickest or else set a timer and see how long it takes to find all the treasure.

Jelly Baby Relay Race

Suitable for all ages. Check for allergies and dietary requirements.

1. Make two bowls of jelly. Once the jelly is cool and starting to set, push jelly babies (or jelly teddies, worms etc.) into the jelly.
2. Place the bowls of jelly on a table on one side of the room.
3. Create two teams and have them placed at the opposite side of the room.
4. Give each player a teaspoon. When the leader shouts go, one member from each team must run up to the bowls of jelly.
5. They must then put the spoon in their mouths, hands behind their back and start trying to dig out a jelly baby/bear.
6. Once they have a jelly baby/bear, they must run back to their team and sit down. Then it is the next player's go.
7. First team to have all members seated, or all jelly babies gone, wins. You could make it more difficult by sending players back to the team if they drop the spoon or flick jelly everywhere.

Harvesting Game

You will need:

- lots of small balls (like you get in a ball pool)
- some rope to tie people together
- a simple relay obstacle race set up.

What you do:

1. Split the group into pairs. Each pair is tied together round the waist or wrist with a metre long rope and must stay together.
2. Explain that the pairs need to number themselves A and B. A must carry a load of balls from one side of the room to the other, across the obstacles.

3. Give them too many balls to easily carry. B must follow A and keep up with them, while collecting any balls that are dropped.
4. Working together they are trying to be the fastest team to get to the other side with as many balls as possible.

Finding Love – a hide and seek game

This game is best played outdoors as a wide game. You don't need any equipment.

1. All the group will go hide and need to help the seeker to find them, similar to Marco Polo.
2. The seeker shouts, "I'm looking!" The hiders reply with, "I'm Here!" Then they quickly attempt to move to a different place, making it harder for the seeker to find them.
3. They must keep out of sight. If the seeker finds them or sees them moving, they are found.

Activities and craft

Time Capsule

You will need:

- a sealed container, preferably made of tin/metal.

What you do:

1. This is a group project that encourages individuals to consider what they treasure the most.
2. Explain that we will be creating a treasure capsule. It's up to the group if it's going to be buried outside or just placed in a secret hiding place for a year or two in the building.
3. Encourage the children to consider what things matter most to them, that they treasure the most. The group could share their initial ideas and then go away to think about it some more.
4. On a set day, the group bring in pictures and writings of the things they treasure, to be placed in the capsule.
5. Take some time to enable the group to share with each other what they treasure and why before placing it in the capsule.
6. Add a brief explanation of who the group are and what the capsule is about and then seal it.
7. As a group, bury it or hide it away in the building and agree what date it will be opened and explored. I wonder if we will still see these things as the greatest treasures after time has passed or if our priorities will have changed.



'Find the Treasure' Bottle

Use an empty transparent bottle or jar with a lid. Fill $\frac{3}{4}$ full with rice, then add a few 'jewels' or beads and push them well down into the rice so that they can't be seen. Fasten the lid on firmly (you may want to use duct tape to ensure it isn't accidentally loosened) and then shake the bottle/jar to try to 'find' as many of the jewels

as you can as they move around in the rice.

'Find Me' Hat

This is a just a silly bit of fun to explore the theme of being found.

You will need:

- plain card hats, simple cones or shapes are best
- a variety of things to embellish your hats
- glue and pens, craft supplies.

Explain to the group that we will be designing and making hats that makes us stand out and easier to find. Imagine that you are in a crowded space. What could you do to the hat that would make you stand out in the crowd? Have some fun; you could take some pictures of the finished articles or even wear them out and about in a crowded place as a group to see if they work.



Valentine's Card from God

Using card and various materials for decorating it (eg colouring pens, paint, scissors, collage materials, scrapbooking materials etc), create the card that God might send to you for

Valentine's Day. What might God write inside it?

Treasure Box

Use an empty lidded box, a shoebox would be ideal, to decorate as a treasure chest to keep all your special possessions in – maybe a keepsake box to remind you of special people in your life, or of what's special about your faith. Decorate with paints, felt tips pens, glitter, stick-on gems etc.

Love Hearts

Love Hearts are sweets that have very short messages of love on them. I wonder what God's love heart would say to you, or what yours would say to God. Use a round biscuit and cover with pastel coloured icing (maybe pink!). Then use writing icing to draw a heart shape on the biscuit and to write your short message inside the heart. You might want to look at a packet of Love Hearts to see what they look like.

Wondering questions

- When we find love or love finds us, I wonder what we do to treasure it.
- I wonder what you treasure. I wonder how God can have all of us as his special treasures all at the same time. How does that work?
- I wonder whether God has favourites and, if so, how do you become one?

Prayers

Sticky Note Prayers

Praying for people we love and care for.

- Each person writes the name of someone they would like to pray for, on a sticky note – use a variety of shapes and colours
- Attach them to a large, heart-shaped piece of cardboard or paper
- People can be given the opportunity to say the name of the person they are praying for out loud, or space to name them silently to God
- Close with some music or a shared prayer.

You can find more activities on the earlier parts of the story of Ruth in Families on Faith Adventures @ Home bit.ly/47Boy9j and in the Supersleuths Holiday Club materials bit.ly/Supersleuths_HC



Romance theme for URC Youth and young adults plus

There's something about Boaz...

In modern culture, Boaz could be likened to a successful business man; wealthy, powerful and respected among local leaders and politicians. He owned farm land and an estate and had many workers. It is likely that Boaz was a very busy man. Nevertheless, in Ruth's story, he proves himself to be a provider and a protector to Ruth. He is humble enough to respect a converted Gentile woman and wise enough to admire her compassion and devotion to Naomi.

Boaz has many admirable qualities. Use the list below to discuss what qualities are important in a life partner. You could challenge the young people to identify their top five and even invite them to add to the list.



Patient	Kind	Tolerant	Understanding
A good communicator	Empathetic	Self-aware	Confident
Compassionate	Honest	Reliable	Intelligent
Hard-working	Forgiving	Vulnerable	Grounded
Trustworthy	Stable	Compromising	Selfless
Powerful	Wealthy	Respectful	Godly
Affectionate	Loyal	Courageous	Fair
Humorous	Romantic	Supportive	Humble
Wise	Gentle	Bold	Protective

A Language for Love

The Hebrew verb 'ahav' means 'to love' or 'to give' and 'ahavah' is the noun form of this word, which is 'love' or 'affection'. Ahav and ahavah cover a broad spectrum of concepts of love. The English language does not have any way of identifying the different kinds of love that exist; we can experience them and we can describe them, but we cannot name them. For example, we may have friends whom we love dearly, a partner who we love in a more intimate and passionate way, and also love for our parents, siblings and children.

In different languages around the globe, including Hebrew, there is more than one word for 'love'. To have an understanding of these Hebrew words for love can help us to have a greater insight into God's love for us. Below are some of the words from ancient Hebrew that are used to capture the different facets of love in scripture.

Ahava

Ahava is the most common Hebrew word for love and relates to the love between two people. It is both romantic and platonic and can also be used to describe love for God, family and friends.

Hesed

Hesed describes a deep, abiding love based on great kindness, loyalty and promise. It is the love between people, but also the love of God for the people.

Chasadim

Chasadim is a word that describes the act of performing acts of kindness or charity towards others.

Re'ut

Re'ut describes a loyal and loving friendship. It is the Hebrew word for the name 'Ruth' and more loosely means friend or companion.

Eemunah

Eemunah describes the faithfulness and loyalty that is demonstrated in a relationship.

G'milut Hasadim

G'milut Hasadim is a Hebrew phrase that describes the selfless practice of loving another person, without expecting anything in return.

Rachamim

Rachamim describes the feelings of deep compassion and mercy towards others.

Chibah

Chibah is the deep and committed love between two people.

Which types of love are present in the book of Ruth? Consider the relationships between Ruth and Boaz, Ruth and Naomi, Boaz and his workers, Ruth and God, God and Boaz.



**One tree can
make the paper
for up to 50
books.**

What is your love language?

The five love languages has become a popular tool in western society. The concept was developed by Dr Gary Chapman and aims to help you to identify the primary way in which we give and receive love. The five categories are words of affirmation, acts of service, gift-giving, quality time and physical touch. You can find our more, and take the quiz here: www.5lovelanguages.com/quizzes/love-language. The concept has also been reimaged to include 'self-love' and how we can take better care of ourselves.

God's plan for romance

The story of Ruth and Boaz ends with the birth of a child; a son named Obed. Obed will become the father of Jesse and the grandfather of David and consequently this ultimately becomes part of God's love story because Jesus is born from the line of David. Any romantic relationships that we might have today may not seem so significant in comparison. So what is God's plan for romance in our lives? Is romantic love important to God?

These can be difficult questions to consider for young people today, especially as more and more people remain single out of choice, circumstances, or both. Those who do enter into long-term relationships may never marry, and many couples today choose not to have children.

God cares about all aspects of our lives, including the romantic. God wants romance to be a great blessing to all humanity. 1 Kings 4:32 tells us that an ancient Israeli king, King Solomon, composed a collection of over one thousand love songs and poems. God cares so much about romance that an entire book of the Bible was dedicated to it. The Song of Solomon celebrates passionate romance in love, in both frustration and fulfilment.

Romance is a wonderful gift from God, but at the same time it is not the most important thing.

Listen

Listen to '*Don't You Worry Child*' by the Swedish House Mafia (lyrics right) and consider some of the following questions for discussion:

- What can be the good things about romantic relationships?
- What can be the bad things about romantic relationships?
- Does romance mean different things to different people?
- Do romantic relationships change as we get older?
- Do you believe that God has a romantic plan for our lives?
- Do you believe in 'the one'?

The story of Ruth and Boaz can be read as a romance. But there are other perspectives too:

- Boaz can be seen as abusing power as a land-owning man in relation to a vulnerable refugee woman. Is this in any sense an equal relationship? Does Ruth have any choices if she is to survive?

**There was a time
I used to look into my father's eyes.
In a happy homel was a king,
I had a golden throne.
Those days are gone; now they're memories on
the wall.
I hear the songs from the places where I was born.
Up on a hill across the blue lake;
That's where I had my first heartbreak.
I still remember how it all changed, my father said,
Don't you worry, don't you worry, child;
See heaven's got a plan for you.
Don't you worry, don't you worry now. Yeah.
Don't you worry, don't you worry now. Yeah.**

**There was a time
I met a girl of a different kind.
We ruled the world, I thought I'd never lose her
out of sight.
We were so young; I think of her now and then.
I still hear the songs reminding me of a friend.
Up on a hill across the blue lake;
that's where I had my first heartbreak.
I still remember how it all changed; my father said,
Don't you worry, don't you worry, child;
See heaven's got a plan for you.
Don't you worry, don't you worry now. Yeah.
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh-oh (x7)
See heaven's got a plan for you.
Don't you worry, don't you worry, child;
See heaven's got a plan for you.
Don't you worry, don't you worry now. Yeah.
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh-oh (x3) Yeah.**

- Naomi can be seen as manipulative of a younger woman who does not understand the customs of the country she now finds herself in as a powerless foreigner. Is Ruth an example of modern day slavery? Does Ruth have to prostitute herself for Naomi? Does everything work out to benefit Naomi rather than Ruth?
- Ruth's story can be seen as part of a whole Bible emphasis on everyone's responsibility for proper care for the most vulnerable. Widows epitomised this because land (and therefore home, security, food, income etc) was owned by men as fathers and husbands, and inherited by male relatives. So, widows were dependent on their sons (if they had any) or the next nearest male relative to look after them. God had given the people of Israel laws to follow that should ensure every widow was cared for through remarriage within the wider family (even to those who already had wives). However, caring for others is always costly and so many conveniently forgot or avoided this responsibility. Also, if they had sons with the widow, those sons would be treated as sons of the dead first husband, so his land could be passed on and his name preserved (rather than be added to the second husband's land).
- Explore some other passages about widows: Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38), Psalm 68:5, Isaiah 10:1-3, Malachi 3:5, Mark 12:38-44, Jesus' parable of the widow, Jesus raises the widow's son, and the early church teaching (James 1:27, 1 Timothy 5:3-5).

Treasure in a field, Matthew 13:44

You could use a clip from Detectorists BBC series bit.ly/47TX2DB – a gentle comedy showing the romance of finding hidden treasure in a field using metal detectors – as a modern parable on this theme.

- Ruth finds treasure in field – food to glean, kindness and protection, love.
- Boaz finds treasure in a field – a woman who becomes his wife.
- In Jesus' parable (Matthew 13:44) the finder of the treasure does not run off with it (finders-keepers) but reburies it, puts together all they have to buy the field and then possess it. What might this be about?
- Think of all the reality TV shows you know (and perhaps watch!) about romance and finding love (*Love Island, Married at First Sight, The Undateables, I kissed a boy, First Date* etc) – what do you think our culture thinks about romance?
- How might this compare and contrast to the time and effort of selling everything to enable this person to buy the field – does this tell us anything about romance and love?

World-wide there are four main types of marriage:

1. Forced arranged marriage: parents or guardians select; the individuals are neither consulted nor have any say before the marriage.
2. Consensual arranged marriage: parents or guardians select, then the individuals are consulted, who consider and consent, and each individual has the power to refuse; sometimes, the individuals meet – in a family setting or privately – before engagement and marriage.
3. Self-selected marriage: individuals select, then parents or guardians are consulted, who consider and consent, and where parents or guardians have the power of veto.
4. Autonomous marriage: individuals select; the parents or guardians are neither consulted nor have any say before the marriage.

Are any of these inherently more or less Christian? Research if different Christian cultures around the world use these different types of marriage today. Where might romance and love be found within these different types of marriage?

"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be"

– Matthew 6:19-21, Luke 12: 32-34

God describes his rescued people as his treasure: Exodus 19:3-6, Psalm 135:6. What does it mean to you to be God's treasure? Are you hidden treasure? God encourages us to search for wisdom like hidden treasure: Proverbs 2:1-5.

This is re-expressed by Paul in Colossians 2:

² My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

So we are God's treasure and we have God's treasure within us:

"Yet we who have this spiritual treasure are like common clay pots, in order to show that the supreme power belongs to God, not to us."

– 2 Corinthians 4: 7

Does the image of treasure-seeker and treasure-sharer fit with your idea of being a follower of Jesus?

Lectio Divina – Treasure in a Field

If possible, go outside and think of the environment as another 'text' created by the word of God.

Read the poem and parable:

The Bright Field by RS Thomas

I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
of great price, the one field that had
treasure in it. I realize now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying
on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.

The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

(Matthew 13)

⁴⁴ "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

LECTIO (reading)

Read the poem/passage/place slowly and repeatedly. Become aware that this may include a phrase or image, idea or thought that is a gift to the 'reader' at this time.

MEDITATIO (meditation)

Give attention to the phrase or image, idea or thought that has come to the surface: turn it over in your mind, wonder at its meaning, look at it from all angles, meditate on this particular gift.

ORATIO (praying)

Allow the phrase or image to become your prayer – silently let it carry your deepest thoughts and yearnings, offer the gift back to God in prayer.

CONTEMPLATIO (contemplation)

Move beyond the phrase or image into a deeper sense of God's presence. Put aside your yearnings and receive God's love, joy and peace.

Uniformed organisations (with thanks to URC Guide and Scout Fellowship)

In uniformed youth groups, we use badges to tell the story of who we are, where we've come from, and what we have done.

As each individual badge is awarded it is attached to the uniform recording perhaps our belonging to a particular group, a time spent camping, a sport that has been played, or other skills developed. We might also recognise important times in history, such as a jubilee year, or a coronation. There might be badges for how long we have been with the group, or to show that the adult leaders trust a young person to be a peer leader, like a Sixer, or Team Leader.

1. Think of a Bible character – what badges would they have earned and worn? Perhaps for Ruth when she meets Boaz, they would already include resilience (keeping going when things were hard), faith (your God will be my God), hiking (the long journey to Naomi's homeland). What other award might there be?
2. In the account of Noah and the Ark, a rainbow is given as a reminder of what has happened and of God's love in the future. At the Lord's Supper, we receive broken bread and wine to remember Jesus. After reading a Bible story, what is the key picture from it that might remind people in the future of the whole story? Can you design a simple badge? It can be a shape that isn't round.
3. In the United Reformed Church, we use the cross and fish design as an emblem or badge. Some local churches also have their own design, as do the churches of other denominations. What logos, designs or badges could you draw to show the groups that different characters in a Bible story belong to? What does the badge say about them?

Story telling – social media

Often church services, and our sharing of the Word, are too 'wordy'. Online communication and social media often encourage us to keep things shorter.

Here's a couple of challenges to concentrate the mind – and the story.

1. Read the Bible story then retell it in the length of an SMS – 160 characters.
2. If you were a character in this Bible story, what three images, with what hash tags, would you post on your social media?



Find out more at: www.urcgsf.org.uk.

The world's most expensive book was Da Vinci's science diary. It sold in 1994 for 21 million pounds.

Using film (or film clips) as a stimulus for discussion



Humour

The Banshees of Inisherin (15)

Two lifelong friends find themselves at an impasse when one abruptly ends their relationship, with alarming consequences for both of them.



Barbie (12)

Barbie suffers a crisis that leads her to question her world and her existence.

Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery (12)

Tech Billionaire Miles Bron invites his friends for a getaway on his private island. When someone turns up dead, Detective Benoit Blanc is put on the case.

The Mitchells Vs The Machines (U)

A quirky, dysfunctional family's road trip is upended when they find themselves in the middle of the robot apocalypse and suddenly become humanity's last hope.

Tragedy

Promising Young Woman (15)

A young woman, traumatised by a tragic event in her past, seeks out vengeance against those who crossed her path.



Judas and the Black Messiah (15)

Offered a plea deal by the FBI, William O'Neal infiltrates the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party to gather intelligence on Chairman Fred Hampton.

The Lion King (U)

Lion Prince Simba and his father are targeted by his bitter uncle, who wants to ascend the throne himself.

Titanic (12)

A seventeen-year-old aristocrat falls in love with a kind but poor artist aboard the luxurious, ill-fated RMS Titanic

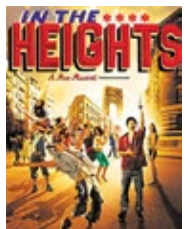
Romance

Palm Springs (15)

Stuck in a time loop, two wedding guests develop a budding romance while living the same day over and over again.

In the Heights (PG)

A film version of the Broadway musical in which Usnavi, a sympathetic New York bodega owner, saves every penny every day as he imagines and sings about a better life.



Past Lives (12)

Nora and Hae Sung, two deeply connected childhood friends, are wrestled apart after Nora's family emigrates from South Korea. 20 years later, they are reunited for one fateful week as they confront notions of love and destiny.

The Map of Tiny Perfect Things (12)

Two teens live the same day repeatedly, enabling them to create a map of things to remember.

Fantasy

Ghostbusters: Afterlife (12)

When a single mum and her two kids arrive in a small town, they begin to discover their connection to the original Ghostbusters and the secret legacy their grandfather left behind.

Dungeons and Dragons: Honour Among Thieves (12)

A charming thief and a band of unlikely adventurers embark on an epic quest to retrieve a lost relic, but things go dangerously awry when they run afoul of the wrong people.

Turning Red (PG)

A thirteen-year-old girl named Mei Lee is torn between staying her mother's dutiful daughter and the changes of adolescence. And as if the challenges were not enough, whenever she gets overly excited she transforms into a giant red panda.



Psycho Goreman (15)

After unearthing a gem that controls an evil monster looking to destroy the universe, a young girl and her brother use it to make him do their bidding.

Action

The Suicide Squad (15)

Supervillains Harley Quinn, Bloodsport, Peacemaker, and a collection of cons at Bell Reve prison join the super-secret Task Force X as they are dropped off at the remote, enemy infused island of Corto Maltese.

Free Guy (12)

When Guy, a bank teller, learns that he is a non-player character in a bloodthirsty, open-world video game, he goes on to become the hero of the story and takes the responsibility of saving the world.

We Can Be Heroes (PG)

When alien invaders capture the Earth's superheroes, their kids must learn to work together to save their parents and the planet.



Prey (15)

Naru, a skilled warrior of the Comanche Nations, fights to protect her tribe against one of the first highly-evolved predators to land on Earth.

Wondering questions

- I wonder what you enjoyed most about the film and what you liked least or did not understand about the film
- I wonder who you empathised with most in the story
- I wonder what you would do if you were in their situation
- I wonder what you can learn from the story
- I wonder where God was in the story.

Ruth White (Wessex Synod) and Jess Poole (National Synod of Scotland) have, together, produced a series of Family Film Night Resources with ideas for setting the scene to watch a movie together, making snacks, chatting about the movie and doing some family activities – see their Synod websites.

**There is a total of
365 verses in the
Bible that tell us to
not to be afraid!**

Action

Theme: God makes a way



Readings

The Exodus from Egypt across the Red Sea (verses from Exodus) and the parable of the persistent friend (Luke 11:5-10).

The Bible is full of action stories, especially the Old Testament, but some of the New Testament too. Battles and murders and chases can prove an exciting read but also provoke some profound debate about where God is in these stories. It is important to set the Old Testament into the context of the New, Jesus bringing new meaning to the covenant between God and humankind. While many may feel uncomfortable with the concept of using action stories with children and young people, it is worth remembering that much of their reading and viewing contains similar material. Our two action stories (one somewhat more action-filled than the other) remind us that God makes a way where sometimes our own actions are insufficient.

Our story – Henry Stapleton turned an interest into action

It goes dark around 7pm and there is no electricity in York Village, Freetown.

Meanwhile... in Nottingham there is a seven year old boy with a fascination for street lights.

A visitor told Henry about two friends from Nottingham who live and work in Freetown, a village with no lights at night. They had found a solar streetlight that be installed and they were asking donations to pay for it. Henry took this on board and along with his brother, Toby, held a cake and lamppost-shaped biscuit sale at their church, raising more than enough to fund it. Henry received the Lundie Memorial Award for playing his part in the mission of God. bit.ly/3T0CcOw



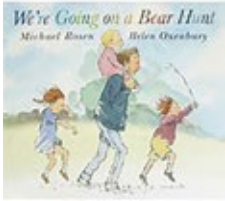
Action theme for under-fives plus

Modern day parables



Stick Man

by Julia Donaldson



We're Going on a Bear Hunt

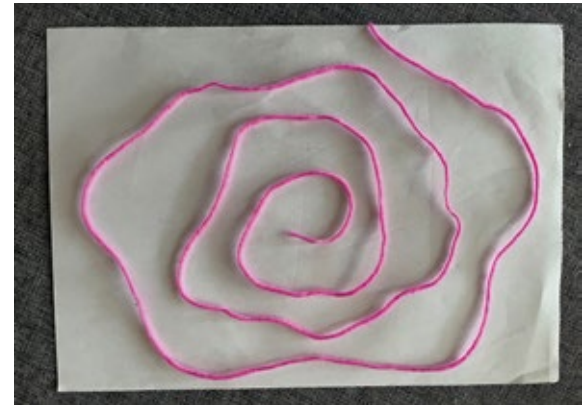
by Alan Ahlberg



Activities

Finger Maze

Use string or wool to create a spiral shape on paper and then follow the maze to the centre with a finger. The same could be done on sand or other sensory materials, or the trail could be made with other items such as small stones, sticky gems, pipe cleaners etc.



What's in the box?

Use a decorated bag or box and fill it with items related to the story that could be handled by under-fives. One by one, with an air of excitement, draw the items out and explore them together. This box could contain: an action figure, an adventure map, small world play.

Wondering question

- I wonder what adventure you would have.

Games

Play hide and seek or peek-a-boo.

Prayers



Do a prayer scavenger hunt.

- Find a door – pray for God's love to everyone
- Look for a bird – pray for creation
- See an airplane – pray for those who have to travel away from home (refugees)
- Find an ambulance or police car – pray for those who help us
- Make a bridge – pray for peace.

The whole of the Old Testament has been nano-printed onto the a five-by-five millimeter aluminum disk called the Nano-Bible. You need an electron microscope to read it.

Action theme for URC Children plus



Games

In My Box

The object of the game – to hear the recipient of the box say “Thank you” on receiving it, before saying what is in the box. This information is not given to the players, they have to work out what makes their response fit the rules.

An imaginary box is passed from player to player. Each player peers into it and says what they can ‘see’ in there. If the receiver doesn’t say “Thank you” when receiving the box and begins to say what’s in it – the leader says “No” when the receiver has finished their turn. If the receiver says “Thank you”, the leader says “Yes”. Whichever is said, the box is passed on to the next person in the circle.

Players ‘put into’ the box whatever they want to. It could be an impossibility like your favourite animal or something amusing like “the remains of last night’s dinner”. Play continues until everyone has worked out what the secret instruction is.

Follow My Leader or Simon Says

Cross Tag

An action game – rely on God for your escape, Jesus died to free us.

This is a game of tag. One player is the ‘catcher’. Players run around and the ‘catcher’ tries to catch them. When a player is caught, they must stand still where they are caught, legs apart, and spread out their arms to form the shape of a cross. They can only be freed by another player going through their legs.

Shoe Run

Moses had to take off his shoes when standing on holy ground.

This is a team game. The players each remove one of their shoes. These are piled up at the opposite end of the room to the teams. Each player runs to find their shoe, put it on and run back to the team and sit down as the next player goes.

Once all the players in a team have their shoes on, the team stands up. The first team standing up is the winner.

Bring Me

The persistent friend/neighbour asked for things. An assortment of items need to be identified by the leader before this game is played. Some items may be in the room, such as a pencil, book or cup. Others might be in another room or garden, eg a flower, stone or leaf. Items could be on a person such as a scarf, hat or shoe.

The leader has a list of these things. Players are in groups or teams. Each group chooses a runner. The leader sits in the middle of the room at an equal distance from each group. When the leader calls ‘Bring me...’ anyone in the group can find the item but it MUST be given to the runner to deliver to the leader. A point is won for the first one to get the item to the leader.

The Floor is Water

You will need enough blue and green fabrics or coverings to cover your hall floor. A large room to play in is best.

Prepare the room so that the group enter by the door and then see all the floor coverings. Very similar to ‘the floor is lava’ game, Explain to the group that they are the Israelites, fleeing from Pharaoh’s army in Egypt, and here they have come to the sea. As a group, they need to figure out how they can get across. You could leave occasional gaps where they could place their feet, or even some extra bits of carpet tile left lying around that might be used as stepping stones.

Encourage the group to be as creative as possible to get everyone across.

I wonder how long it will be before someone suggests doing what the Israelites did and asking for help. If they do this, a leader could then separate the fabrics, making a clear path to cross.

You could make it a longer game by including the rule that if one person ‘gets wet’ the whole





group goes back to the beginning.

Activities and craft

Peg Locusts

God sent plagues, including frogs and locusts.

1. Take a clothes peg. This can be wooden or coloured. If you use a wooden peg, you may like to paint it. This stage is not necessary.
2. Take three chenille stems 15cm long (pipe cleaners).
3. Open the peg and place the pipe cleaners across the peg. Close the peg.
4. Bend the pipe cleaners into an M shape.
5. Draw an eye either side on the front of the peg.

Burning Bush

God calls Moses through a burning bush. Make a finger paint picture of the burning bush. This could be done as individual pictures of the burning bush which are then put together and made into one big burning bush. Alternatively, make a group collage of the burning bush using torn up magazine pictures, fabric, leaves etc to produce lots of different textures.

Make flat bread

Read Exodus 12:14. This was an instruction from God to his people about their food on the night of the Passover. It was very specific about the bread. They were not to use yeast. Try making flat bread and bring a tub of humous along and share the food. bit.ly/3uCZzns.

Knock Knock

Have a session of 'Knock knock' jokes.

Foodbank (older).

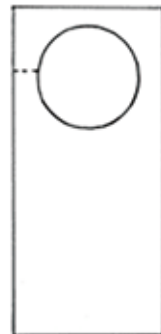
Find out if your church supports the local foodbank or similar. Discover how, as young people, the group could contribute.

Inspiring people

Being woken in the middle of the night by a persistent friend or neighbour may have been irritating. However, it pays to persist, as the parable showed. Read the story of Derek Redmond and his father Jim. Discuss the sort of occasions/situations that young people may encounter today that need persistence, eg school work, sport, the work place, dealing with difficult friends or acquaintances.

Ask, Seek, Knock

(Luke 11: 9-10) Make a wall hanging/poster including the words Ask, Seek and Knock – decorate with question marks (Ask), drawings or pictures of eyes (Seek), and pictures or drawings of doors (Knock). Write the Bible reference on the poster.



Make a door hanger

Use a template to make a door hanger that will hang on your doorknob or handle. What might you put on it, either to discourage or encourage people to knock? Come up with your own original door knocks – do you know of any distinctive knocks?

Wondering questions

- I wonder whether you know of any other examples from the Bible where God has made a way, or modern stories of where God has made a way
- I wonder what situations you are in at the moment that you can't see a way through. How might God help you? Could God already be helping you? Does God always make a way?
- I wonder how we can be God making a way for others. Does anyone need your help? Does anyone need your prayers?

Prayers

Sensory Prayers



Using your senses can be a helpful way to focus on prayers, particularly if you find it hard to be still and quiet. Focusing on one sense might be best or you might prefer to mix and match a few different senses. Your group may be able to suggest some ideas, or some can be found below. Remember that some people may find particularly strong smells, bright lights or loud noises difficult, so allow space for people to opt out or voice their difficulty and change the activity accordingly.

- See: Fairy lights, each other's faces, nature, dark or nothing (by closing your eyes or wearing a blindfold).
- Hear: Quiet, a well-known piece of music, background music with words or natural sounds.
- Taste: Sweets, herbs, breadsticks or bread.
- Smell: Essential oils, incense, air fresheners and candles.
- Touch: String, playdough, pebbles or rocks, water and kinetic sand.

Action theme for URC Youth and young adults plus



Parable of the persistent neighbour

"Neighbours – everybody needs good neighbours"

Neighbours theme tune: bit.ly/49YT6TT

Luke 11:5-13 bit.ly/3Rp56qE

Dramatised version of the Bible reading bit.ly/3RoZ1KP

Activities

Puzzle Challenge

Try a variety of puzzles and games of varying difficulty. Spend a few minutes trying to solve them.

Which games gave you more trouble than others? Did you have to give up on any? Which ones did you persevere with and win? What made the difference?

Midnight Gameshow

Have you ever seen Michael McIntyre's game called '*Midnight Game Show*'? You can watch some clips from it here: bit.ly/3RpCBsA. With permissions from the other people living in the chosen house, Michael and his team enter a celebrity's house in the middle of the night. They burst into the bedroom to wake the celebrity up and involve them in a fun quiz.

Could you consider doing this to your minister or youth group leader? (Gain permission first!) Maybe you could quiz them about people of action in the Bible.

Game

Bring Me

In the story, the person who knocks on the door is hoping their neighbour will bring them some bread, some food for their guest. Eventually the neighbour does bring the bread to the door.

1. Make a list of items you are going to ask the players to find.
2. In the middle of the room have a pile of items, some from the list, some not. You could have several of the same thing in the pile.
3. Split into groups or pairs (unless online and people play solo). Ensure the groups are spaced out fairly from the pile in the middle. If you wish to make the game more challenging the items could be hidden in the room or things which are already in the room (such as a tea towel/cushion cup)
4. Shout out the item to be found, then one person from each group/pair tries to find the item first.
5. The group/pair at the end who has the most items wins. (For online it's the person who comes back with the item first who wins a point – most points at the end wins overall).

Neighbours

I wonder how many of you live next door to, or a few doors away from, a good neighbour. Someone whose door you could knock on, any time of day or night. Perhaps you live in a street a little like that on the TV programme *Neighbours*. They always seem to be in and out of each other's houses and seem to persistently engage with each other until the neighbour has heard what they have to say. This can often pay off as the person may be in trouble or danger or alternatively the neighbour may miss out on something if they don't open the door. The person in the Bible story knew he needed to feed his friend; they had come a

long way, it was late and their friend was tired and hungry. There is a famous portrait of Jesus knocking on the door. What does this picture say to you? What can we learn about God's persistence from it?



Response activity

Use a variety of different mediums to scrapbook how God makes a way, and some examples of how we can be persistent.

Discuss

- Whose door could you knock on and know you won't be turned away? What is special about that relationship?
- Is there a difference between being called into action and taking action?
- What things make you want to take action? What things do you feel called to act upon?
- What stops us from taking action? And what qualities do you need to enable you to take action?
- Can you think of any examples where you have experienced God making a way?
- Does God ever say no? Does this story mean that we can pester God into doing as we want?

Prayers



Labyrinth

- 'God will make a way' by Don Moen bit.ly/481YmEF
- 'Here I am Lord' bit.ly/415pzE2

Mark out a large labyrinth for people to walk around. You could quietly play some music during or after if you wish. At certain points pause for people to think about when they may feel called to action: in the world, in your local area, in school/college/workplace, in your family.

**God,
in all things, in all ways,
in all places, with all people,
call me to action.
God make a way.
Amen.**

Exodus – Crossing the Red Sea

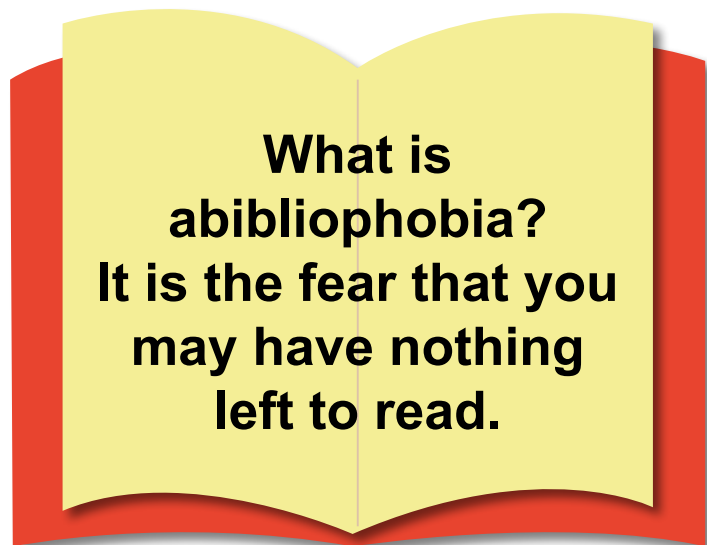
Remembered Bible

As a group see how much you can remember about the story of Moses and God rescuing the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt.

Use wallpaper lining paper on a roll to plot out the events in order as people remember them (clues: burning bush, plagues, Passover, Red Sea). Then check it out against the book of Exodus: 3:1–4:17; 5:1–6:12; 7:1–14:31.

Discuss

- In this action story, who is the hero?
- How does God provoke first Moses and then Pharaoh into action?
- This is the story of a whole people – everyone is involved and has to take action to be part of it.



What do you think you would find most challenging if you were one of the Hebrew people in this story? Moses is a reluctant man of action – look at the excuses he gives to God as to why he is not the right person to do as God asks (Exodus 3:1- 4:17). What excuses do we use to persuade ourselves (and try to persuade God) that we are not the right people to act in a situation? What stops us stepping out for God or confronting injustice?

Today, many people have to flee their homes due to war, fire, flood, famine, persecution and injustice. The rescue they need is asylum – a safe place to live. JPIT (Joint Public Issues Team – the URC is one of three churches in this partnership) has lots of resources about asylum and migration. Does anyone in your group have any experience of this among their families or friends? Is your church involved in any work to support migrants and asylum seekers? Look here for ways to find out more and get involved:

bit.ly/3uBkhUt

When the Hebrew people arrive safely on dry land having passed through the Red Sea and seen their pursuers meet their end, Miriam (Moses' older sister who saved his life when he was a baby) leads all the people in worship with a drum (Exodus 15:19-21). Make some percussion instruments using household items – things that make a noise when shaken or struck. Have a go at circle drumming/percussion as a way of praying together for those having to leave their homes: sit in a circle and take it in turns to say a simple prayer and beat out the rhythm with your instrument – everyone else join in as they catch the rhythm (eg we pray for safety for all on dangerous journeys/may families be reunited/compassion and welcome).

Tactile Prayer

Make a large amount of oobleck (cornflour and just enough water to make a smooth thick paste, add some blue food colouring) and pour into a large tray. Invite everyone to sit around and pray silently about a situation that feels impossible (could be in their life, the lives of people they know, in the news etc) and ask God to make a way. As they pray, invite them to push a path through the oobleck with a finger – it will open up and then close behind them like the Red Sea. Finish by praying together for God to make a way:

"Nothing is impossible with God"

– Luke 1:37

"with people this is impossible but with God all things are possible"

– Matthew 19:26

Song

- 'God will make a way' by Don Moen
- 'Exodus' by Bob Marley and the Wailers – listen to this and consider the lyrics. How might the Exodus story speak to other people suffering oppression and injustice?

Research


A black woman action hero, Harriet Tubman (code name 'Moses') led slaves to freedom in America:

www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/harriet-tubman

Movies

- *Veggie tales: Moe and the Big Exit* – western version of Exodus
- *The Prince of Egypt* (Dream Works).





If all the other
events in Jesus'
life were written,

the whole world
could hardly
contain the books!

JOHN 21:25

Humour

Theme: Stay alert and keep your eyes open for God



Readings

Eutychus falls during a sermon (Acts 20:7-12) and the parable of the wise virgins (Matthew 25:1-13).

It may seem odd to have a section on humour in this resource book, but the Bible is full of it, and there are hints that even Jesus has a sense of humour in some of the things he says. Indeed, humour is often a great way to draw people in and capture their attention and imagination, to build relationship and warmth between you and your listener.

Our story – Ashley and Ryan Fey raise money in an unusual way

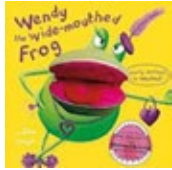
Ashley and Ryan actively and enthusiastically participated in The Big Sleep, the fundraising effort supporting Alabare, a charity responding to homelessness. To help raise awareness of homelessness and raise some funds, they created a JustGiving page, slept out in their lounge (it was lockdown) and raised £814. Ashley and Ryan received the Lundie Memorial Award for playing their part in the mission of God. bit.ly/3T0CcOw



Humour theme for under-fives plus



Modern day parables



The Boy who Lost his Belly Button by Jeanne Willis



Wendy the Wide-mouthed Frog by Sam Lloyd

What's in the box?

Use a decorated bag or box and fill it with items related to the story that could be handled by under-fives. One by one, with an air of excitement, draw the items out and explore them together. This box could contain: laughing emoji shape, binoculars, a child's Bible, clock fidget toy, small world play.

Activities

Tickle Puppets

Using a glove, create a tickle puppet by gluing a wobbly eye on each finger and thumb and putting a feather or other soft fabric on the tip of each finger and thumb.



Funny Faces

Use a mirror and pull funny faces.

Dress up

Have a pile of dressing up clothes and see who can dress up in a funny costume.

Wondering questions

- I wonder how we can stay wide awake
- I wonder what makes us laugh
- I wonder what makes God laugh.

Games

Belly Laugh

Each child places his or her head on another person's tummy, so that everyone is connected. The first child says "Ha", then the second child "Ha-ha" and so on. The goal is to get all the way through the group without anyone laughing.

Prayers



'Fill in the blanks' prayers Some of these may be funny but go with it because it is the child's prayer. Say "God is great, God is good, thank you God for"

**The Old Testament
was put together
with 39 books
written over a total
of 1,000 years.**

Humour theme for URC Children plus

Games

Try Not To Laugh

The aim of the game is for the group to make one person laugh using whatever means necessary but without touching the person. Suggested ways to make them laugh: tell a joke, act silly, make funny faces. Let everyone have a turn if time and see how long it takes for them to laugh, see who can last the longest.

Animal Pairs

This is a fun game packed with movement and noise.

1. Divide children into two groups and assign an animal to each child (eg elephant, lion, chicken, etc). Tell them to keep it a secret!
2. You should have two elephants, two lions etc. (If you have a large number of children, then you can have whole groups of lions and tigers and bears, oh my!)
3. Get the children to mix and spread out across the room. When you say "Go" they have to start acting out their animal and find someone else who is the same animal as them.
4. Note, if you have children that are noise averse, you could play this game silently, getting the children to exaggerate the movements of their animals.

Trust Games

Can the children fall backwards and trust someone to catch them? Can they do an obstacle course blindfolded? Put them to the test and find out.

Catch

The most obvious trust game is falling. Have a young person (or for safety, two or three) who will be the 'catchers'. Have another young person who is the 'faller'. Have the 'catcher/s' stand behind the 'faller' (not too close and not too far away) and then, on the count of three, get the 'faller' to fall back into the 'catcher/s' arms. Be sure to catch them!

Obstacle

Create a simple (to start with) obstacle course. Get two young people to face each other; one should have their back to the obstacle course.

They have to join hands and the person facing the obstacle course has to guide the other person around it, BUT they can't talk! They can use their eyes, head nods, etc. but they are not allowed to say anything. Quickest duo around the course wins.

Cat and Mouse

In the area, mark out a mouse hole. This is where the mouse is to get to for safety.

1. One person is the cat and one person is the mouse; both are blindfolded and both have a guide with them.
2. The aim of the game is for the mouse to get safely into the mouse hole; the cat's aim is to catch the mouse.
3. The guides are going to direct the cat or mouse, but they can only do this through clapping their hands, clicking their fingers etc.
4. They cannot use their voices or touch the cat and mouse.
5. A code can be created beforehand. For example, one clap means Go!; two means stop; clicking fingers twice means go left, and so on. The mouse must get to the mouse hole before the cat catches it.

NB – make sure the area is safe with no trip hazards and make sure the young people are comfortable being blindfolded.

Activities and craft

Person Drop Experiment

What you need:

- something fragile to represent the person you will drop eg an egg decorated like a person, a gingerbread person.
- a variety of crafting and junk modelling items along with lots of elastic bands and tape.

What you do:

1. Split the group into pairs or small groups and encourage the groups to design their Eutychus. Decorate the egg to make it look like a person or decorate the gingerbread person.
2. Explain that you will be dropping the 'people' out of a high window: the highest window you have in your buildings, or stairwells, or even a high step ladder will be suitable.

3. The groups must now design some protection around their 'Eutychus' that will hopefully protect him when he is dropped from the great height.
4. Give the groups a set amount of time for the challenge.
5. One by one, throw the 'Eutychus's' from a great height and see which ones survive.

Quick Reaction Activities

What you need:

- a ruler
- pop up toys
- a balloon.

The idea is to test people's reactions. Have some fun, encouraging the children to have a go at each activity. Keep a record of the winning reactions. Create your own challenges too.

- **Catch It** – Sit in a circle with a pop-up toy in the centre. The idea is to wait for it to pop up and be the first to catch it.
- **Drop It** – One person holds the ruler hanging down by the tip while the catcher holds their fingers apart, just below the base of the ruler, ready to catch it. Once it is released, how quickly can you catch it? This is easy to measure using the ruler markings.
- **Fetch It** – A leader stands at one end of the room with a large balloon blown up but not tied. Without giving warning, the leader lets the balloon go. Who can be the first to catch it?

Asleep or Awake Mask

Use a simple sleep mask and use glue or stitching to fasten two fake eyes on. These could be cut out of fabric or could be stick-on wobbly eyes! Now you can look as though you're wide awake even if you're having a nap! Alternatively, you could use face paint crayons to gently draw an eye onto each of your eyelids.



Make an oil lamp

Here are two ways to make an oil lamp.

Method one:

1. You need a cork, a piece of string, a jam jar, a sharp point (eg needle or metal skewer), olive oil. You can add a drop of essential oil to add aroma, if you choose.

2. Cut a circle of cork and use a large needle to make a hole through the middle, just wide enough to thread your string through but not so loose that the string falls out again.
3. Thread the end of your string through the cork and pull so that about 2½ cm (no more than this!) sticks out at the top.
4. Trim the long end of string so that the whole piece of string is just a little shorter than the jam jar, so that when you float the cork on the oil, the end of the string touches the bottom of the jar.
5. Fill your jar ⅔ to ¾ with oil – olive oil is best as it does not smell or give off any fumes – and float the cork on top so that the wick is sticking up above the cork. If you prefer, you can water down the oil half and half.
6. Wait 15 minutes before lighting the lamp.



Method two:

1. Use air-dried clay to form a fish shape, bending the edges up to create a wall around the edge and a dip in the middle.
2. Use the point of a pencil sideways to make a slight dip in the wall where the mouth of the fish would be.
3. Allow to dry thoroughly for at least 24 hours, flipping over after eight hours to ensure that the bottom also dries.
4. Lay a piece of string or wool so that the majority of the string/wool is curled in the base of the fish shape and the end is balanced over the slight dip by the mouth of the fish.
5. Fill your fish with olive oil and leave for about fifteen minutes so that the oil saturates the wick. Although some of the oil will be absorbed into the clay, this light should burn for up to two hours.



Wondering questions

- I wonder what it means to be ready. What might you need to be ready for? What does it mean to be ready for God?
- I wonder when you have been the most bored. Share some top tips for boredom busting
- I wonder if it is ever good to be bored.

Prayers



Being prepared

Praying for ourselves and being prepared for the plans God has for us.

- Pack a bag with items that might be useful if you were going on a journey, such as a drink, a snack or sun cream
- As a group, decide on what you would like to ask for God's help with. Perhaps you need strength or patience for a situation
- Each time you place an item back in the bag, repeat the prayer below, adding one of your chosen prayer requests.



Loving God,

I know you are with me,

Travelling beside me.

Help me to (be patient, be strong, listen, be kind, be loving, help others)

As I walk with you.

In Families on Faith Adventures @ Home you can find more about Eutychus bit.ly/47DwW83 and the story of the Wise Virgins bit.ly/3T5PyZR.



Humour theme for URC Youth and young adults plus

Bible reading



Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids

Matthew 25:1-12: bit.ly/3uOOYWg

What are you prepared for?

Get into pairs/small teams and ask everyone to empty out their pockets or bags. Which adventures or activities might they be prepared for if this was all the pair/team had as resources?

Video clip links:

- Hermione's bag bit.ly/3t0CIHo
- Michael McIntyre's Man Drawer bit.ly/3GrHoDH



Fear of missing out (FOMO) – do you tend to say yes to everything and then end up double or triple booked (and have to let people down and miss something) OR do you tend to not commit yourself until the last minute in case a better option comes along (annoying people who need you to commit and sometimes missing out because you are too late)? Which is better? Is there another way to manage this fear of missing out?

Read

Read Matthew 25:1-12.

Is this a funny story told by Jesus? If so, who is the joke on?

Challenge

Retell this as an updated funny story substituting something for lamps (eg phone battery/credit/data) and some other event for the wedding.

How might this story link to the wise and foolish builders in Matthew 7:24-27? bit.ly/3Gp4db9

Reflection

This is the first of a series of parables Jesus tells while talking about the final time God will send the Messiah and call time on the world as we know it – they relate to the future and describe different aspects of the kingdom of heaven.

This one starts happily enough – there is going to be a wedding and we are to be ready to welcome the bridegroom. Who doesn't love a party! We are all cast in the role of the bridesmaids, traditionally girls or young women. Everyone thinks they are ready – but some have only prepared for the arrival, while some have also prepared to wait, should there be a delay.

The surprise in this parable is that Jesus doesn't want us to 'be nice' and share our oil (if we are one of the wise) but rather to 'be prepared' for the big moment when it comes, AND the wait in the meantime. So we will be ready to join in with the celebration banquet when it starts. The consequences for the foolish and unprepared seem harsh – they are too late and unknown, forever on the wrong side of a closed door.

'Keep awake' we are urged (yet both wise and foolish bridesmaids fall asleep in the story). Perhaps 'Be prepared' is more helpful – be ready in body, mind and spirit – we truly never know when or where we might be called to respond to God's presence and invitation. So we are left waiting in readiness. The song 'Give me oil in my lamp' is based on this parable – and was a hit record in the 1960s for two very different groups. Challenge: rewrite the lyrics to make this a song you could use in worship today – and add further verses.

Prayers

Give me oil in my lamp – keep me burning
 Give me joy in my heart – keep me singing
 Give me love in my heart – keep me serving
 Give me peace in my heart – help me keep waiting
 Waiting til the break of day
 Ready to join in the heavenly wedding feast.
 Amen

Activities

Make an oil lamp

You will need:

- empty tin can
- 100% cotton string
- copper wire
- cooking oil
- scissors
- round nose pliers.

What you do:

1. Trim the candle wick after each use: just cut off the black part of the cotton string.
2. Wash the tin can with soap and water and dry it.
3. Use the round nose pliers to bend one end of the copper wire into a coil, big enough so that you can insert the wick easily, but small enough to hold the wick. Bend the other end of the wire into a large spiral.
4. Pour cooking oil into the tin can up to the wire coil or slightly above. Wait some minutes until the wick has soaked up the oil.
5. Then light your DIY tin can oil lamp and enjoy the beautiful glow! bit.ly/46MRABG



Dad jokes

Take turns to tell these – the challenge is to not laugh. Lie in a circle with one person's head on the stomach of the next person all the way round the circle and try not to laugh!

The story of Eutychus – Humour

Bible verse: Acts 20: 7-12: bit.ly/46AevzL

Dramatised version: bit.ly/47StyG6

Discuss

What do we know about Eutychus? Let's find out a bit more about him.

Research who Eutychus is.

You could create a cartoon strip with the answers.

- What age is he?
- What does the name Eutychus mean? Why is that ironic?
- Where is he? Who else was with him?
- Why might he have fallen asleep?
- What happened to him at each stage of this story?



Activity

As people noticed Eutychus nodding off during Paul's talk, there may have been nudging of elbows, some pointing and sniggers. Perhaps before people realised how serious it was, they may have laughed when he fell out of the window too. Why do we enjoy laughing at other, especially at someone's downfall?

It is common within our culture to record things when they go wrong or when someone slips up, even getting paid for sending videos in to share on TV. Why do we video it?

Can we relate to Eutychus? Have you ever fallen asleep in class/on the bus/with friends? What response did you get? The story could even prompt us to think about what makes for a boring or an interesting sermon!

This story could easily have changed from humour to tragedy, had Paul not been able to bring Eutychus back to life. It may raise a smile to read that Paul then returned and continued his very long sermon once Eutychus was healed.

Laughter is good for us

Share some of the funniest clips you have seen. What sort of things make you laugh? What's the funniest thing that you've seen happen in church?

We are told by those who have studied it that, when we laugh, it boosts our immune system, lowers our blood pressure and makes us less anxious. bit.ly/48gvc4P. There are even classes you can go to where you can laugh together, and The BodyWorks exhibition had an area dedicated to laughter and what happens inside our bodies when we laugh.

Game

Whack a Mole

You will need:

- a piece of drainpipe or tubing for the mole to fall through
- something to represent a mole (could be a ball of wool).

What you do:

1. Stabilise the drainpipe so that someone can reach the top but ensure there is a gap at the bottom for the mole to fall out of.
2. The mole is to be dropped through the pipe/tunnel and another person is to try and catch it as it drops out the bottom. The person dropping the mole needs to build the tension and release the mole when they think the catcher is least likely to catch it.
3. The catcher needs to be alert and ready to catch the mole at all times.
4. You could score who is able to catch the mole and play it a few times each to see who gets the highest score.

Discuss

This story is also about being alert, being aware of what is going on around you and awake for God's words.

There is a passage in the letter of 1 Peter, chapter 5, that says this: "Be alert, be on watch! Your enemy, the Devil, roams around like a roaring lion." We are also told in Matthew 24: "So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."



We are told to be alert. It doesn't literally mean always stay awake but to prioritise Jesus, not to be so distracted by other things in the world that we forget him. We should make time each day to engage with God with no distraction.

What things do we do to remain alert? (eg substances/energy drinks/caffeine/set timers/Alexa/phone alarms).

Some are good and some not so good ways of staying alert. Often, some of those things are short lived and give a big high but then the low is very low. Whereas listening and talking with Jesus is long lasting and constant and can keep us alert to our relationship with God. What can we do to stay alert to God in our everyday?

Prayers

Play the game Pass the Bomb, if you have it, or else pass round an item and set a hidden timer to go off. The person who is holding the item when the timer goes off then can pray, either silently, saying a prayer of their own, or you might want to have prayer suggestions or some written prayers available for those who are not feeling confident. Obviously, the option should be there for people just to pass if they feel uncomfortable with leading prayer in this way.



In 1631, London printers Martin Lucas and Robert Barker accidentally forgot the word 'NOT' in 'Thou shall not commit adultery'. Known as the Sinners' Bible or the Wicked Bible, only nine copies of this book still remain.

How to tell stories



Introduction

“We have story shaped minds. Jesus used stories to help us to think and explore” (see Matthew 13:34).

It is important that we tell and hear stories. It is part of healthy development to listen to stories and to begin to share our own story. Be interested in each other’s stories, spend time listening and telling, sharing stories together.

When telling a story, tell it well, in the best way you can. Bring the story to life, consider the emotions of the story, use your voice and body and encourage a curiosity of each other’s stories.

Consider the different styles of storytelling and be creative. We don’t need to only use one story; stories and storytelling can be used throughout a session for different reasons. At the beginning of a session you might use a story to introduce the theme or to recall an already known story to check how well it is known. In the middle of a session you might introduce new ways to tell a familiar story or create a new story based on the theme. At the end of a session you might use a story to provide room for people to reflect on the theme and bring their thoughts together, reinforcing points from the session.

Ways to tell and explore familiar/known stories

Puppets, drama and video

These forms of storytelling are visual, engaging and can bring the story to life. They are able to convey emotions, simply from the look on someone’s face, to the way a puppet may hang its head in sadness.

They are easy to do and, for simple retellings, only a little preparation is needed. Thanks to today’s modern technology, we can create videos just using our phones! Scripts/skits can easily be found online.



Small world

Using any small world toys or Lego, allow your group to explore a story they have heard through an open time of play. Join with them, occasionally asking questions about how the characters are feeling or what they might do next. You could decide which figures represent which characters before you start and build or draw backgrounds for the figures to help set the scene. Godly Play also offers quality resources and scripts for telling and exploring stories.



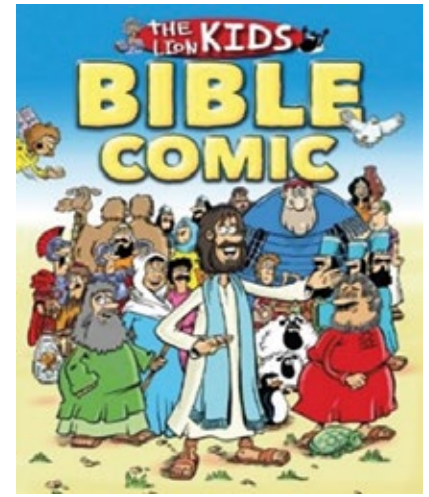
The Remembered Bible

This is a technique that begins with what the group already knows about a story or a timeline from the Bible. For example, the parable of the sower may be well known to your group; so you begin by asking them to retell it for you. This may involve drawing scenes and hanging them on a washing line as the story builds. It’s important that the children tell the story without you correcting them. You might ask if anything’s missing or what happened next. Once the story timeline is finished, you are ready to delve deeper into the story. This technique empowers children who have some Bible knowledge and often brings a richness to the storytelling as the children recount parts you may have never heard before.

Picture stories, graphic novels, cartoons, storyboards, flipbooks

Again, these methods of storytelling are visually engaging and easy for children to understand. They look and feel more approachable than standard books and the images add extra support to children who may struggle with reading. They also inspire and encourage creativity within the child.

You can encourage children to tell stories using these methods, increasing their confidence and their creativity. Children can also create their own.



Soundscape

Break the story into sections and agree, as a group, a sound that represents each section. Choose sounds – not words – that can be made easily, such as a clap or cheer. Each group member must choose a sound, then sit in a line or a circle, with the sounds in the correct order. A conductor is chosen to start the soundscape and point along the line or circle to keep the sound moving. Can you guess the following well-known Bible story?

Roar! Scream Roar! Scream Whoosh Whoosh Whoosh Clap Cheer!

Pause, Reflect, Create

Bring a story to life and help children to dig deeper into the plot by using Pause, Reflect, Create.

At key points during the story, pause. You can make this fun and hold up a stop sign. Ask the children, “What’s going on? I wonder how the characters feel. Make the scene!” At this point, the children can act out what has happened and/or introduce Freeze Frame. While they’re acting you can shout “Freeze!” and everyone has to hold the position, while you wonder about different characters. Or you can just get them to do a Freeze Frame by choosing a scene and standing still. This can be great fun and you could take photos of the Freeze Frames to recreate the story afterwards.

Godly Play

Godly Play begins with children’s innate sense of the presence of God. It offers Christian language as a support for their ongoing spiritual formation. It teaches a process that aims to promote an inner working model for life-long Christian learning. Through the medium of story told with a script and artefacts, children, young people and adults are given opportunity to wonder about the story and to respond in their own way. Godly Play training is available through the URC Children’s and Youth Work team, for URC churches, and through www.godlyplay.uk for others who are interested in exploring this further.



Simply telling it round a campfire or story circle

The Bible began with stories being told by God’s people as they sat around campfires and in marketplaces. Jesus would gather people to him to hear a story; nothing beats telling a story simply, sitting together and losing yourselves in a good tale. Whether it’s using a picture book or simply retelling a story, let’s get back to simple story telling in groups.



Ways to create new stories or tell your own

Story cubes

Story cubes can be bought in all good toy stores. They are simply small dice with images on. The idea is to throw the set of dice and begin to create a new story (possibly on a theme), taking your inspiration from the images on the cubes.

You can also make your own cubes by taking a blank cube template and drawing your own images on them. This allows you to create a slightly Christian focus to your cubes.



You choose

The book *You Choose* by Nick Sharratt and Pippa Goodhart can be used to build storytelling confidence with groups of all ages. Each page is filled with fun, creative ideas to build characters and share stories. This resource could be used with younger children as a prompt for communicating about themselves or to help a group create brand new stories together.

Pass it on stories – a simple storytelling game

The leader starts the story with the first sentence and then passes it on to the next person in the circle, who gives the second sentence and so on. See where you can take your new story with everyone involved. Sometimes it is easier to agree a theme to the story before you start and agree the title once it is finished.

Telling your own story using a talking tool

A talking tool is anything that you can hold or fiddle with as you tell your short personal story. It could be wrapping a piece of wool around your finger as you speak and stopping when the thread runs out. Or it could be a simple stick that is passed around the group; when you are holding it, you can talk. Whatever your group uses, it's a good way of encouraging children to begin to tell their own stories. Start simple with "What have you been doing this weekend?" Next you can do more detailed personal stories such as "Times when I have felt lost", and so on. Always give children thinking time before the storytelling to consider the story and always allow children the right to not take part.

Sharing part of your own story to find similarities and differences

(Idea from Yvonne Naylor from the Corrymeela community)

Have a selection of images or items for participants to choose from or ask each group member to bring in something that is meaningful to them. These could be on a theme or just random. Ask each person to choose one item that 'speaks' to them. Then encourage everyone to wander around the room, meet another person at random, and swap items. Each person should then tell the other the story of what the item they have been given makes them think of, some event from their own life or a relationship etc. (Remind all participants that they are in control of what they share or hold back.) Then swap the items back so that each person gets their item back and can move on to swap it with somebody else and share stories. This is particularly good for intergenerational or interfaith settings, or where people are less accustomed to talking to one another, as people begin to find a place where their stories and the stories of others intersect.

Using puppets to help tell people's story

Yvonne Naylor from the Corrymeela Community (bit.ly/46DTRPo) has produced patterns for knitted puppets, which can be used to help people tell a story through the medium of a puppet that they identify with or that they wish to identify with. Using a puppet somehow frees people to speak more openly. They can speak 'as' the puppet and tell either their own story or the story the person represented by the puppet might tell.



Song/hymn suggestions



There are many hymns and songs for intergenerational settings and for children and young people which are based around specific Bible stories or the themes expressed within them. You can find them in your hymn books or by a simple search on the internet, especially YouTube. The few detailed here are a little more general.

- '*Books of the Bible*': bit.ly/3NsNxDt
- '*Every Move I Make*': bit.ly/47XIlzL
- '*Faithful One so Unchanging*': bit.ly/3GJAuS
- '*God has Spoken by his Prophets*': bit.ly/3v2SPzu
- '*I'll go in the Strength of the Lord*': bit.ly/4anFrpy
- '*In Christ Alone*': bit.ly/3RoO2zz
- '*I will Sing the Wondrous Story*': bit.ly/3RjN0VH
- '*Jesus is Greater is than the Greatest Heroes*': bit.ly/3RomQ45
- '*Seek Ye First*': bit.ly/3RnjH4v
- '*The Splendour of the King: (How great is our God)*': bit.ly/41kygdO
- '*This is my Story, This is my Song*': bit.ly/41tOiSM
- '*Tell me the Stories of Jesus*': bit.ly/3to5r3p
- '*We are Marching in the Light of God*': bit.ly/3RprNJS
- '*Write your Story*': bit.ly/3tn2SyA
- '*The Bible in Four Minutes*': bit.ly/3NrxOou



Children and young people leading worship

We are all part of God's story and each of us has our own story to tell. Intergenerational worship enables us each to bring something into the mix and to gain something from someone new, without age or other differences getting in the way. It is easy to underestimate what insights and spirituality the youngest of us can bring in worshipping and exploring our faith together.

Preparing children and young people to lead worship

Always remind them that this is not a performance and the congregation is not an audience. They are offering their best to God, whatever that might be, and encouraging everyone else to do the same. Remember to pray for and with them beforehand (and during!) Ask God to be with them and help them. Explain they are trying to help people get a little bit closer to God and respond to his love. Perhaps ask them about when they have felt close to God, how they can notice if someone else is responding to God's love in worship, how they think they might be able to help other people stay in God's presence throughout the service.

The best way to lead others into worship is to be worshipping yourself!

Worship is something we do together because it is easier to become aware of God's presence with us when we are with others doing the same (where two or three are gathered together in his name, Jesus promises to be in the midst, or middle, of that gathering (see Matt 18:20). We all bring different aspects to that worship (a song, a verse from the Bible, a concern, a word of encouragement, finances, a prayer and so on). It is important to recognise and honour everyone's contribution, whether or not it looks like worship to us (think of Mary pouring perfume on Jesus' feet, John 12:3, or the children shouting out in excitement as Jesus enters Jerusalem, Matt 21:14-16). Expect them to bring insight and understanding that only children and young people could bring (Luke 10:21).

Worship is something we do together because God tells us to (Psalm 150, Revelation 5:13) and because it helps grow bonds of love between us as sisters and brothers of our Heavenly Father (1 John 3:1). We are sharing intimate moments. We are seeing each other at our most vulnerable, in the presence of God, confessing and rejoicing, weeping and laughing. We are sharing our stories and discovering life in all its fullness together. Worship helps build community, and therefore should help us love each other. Enabling children and young people to lead us in worship will enable us to experience different aspects of our life together as a worshipping community, and different dimensions of our loving God and Saviour. Some churches hold a Pilots Sunday service for the non-uniformed group Pilots. This order of service is designed for use when members of this group lead worship but could also be used as a structure for any service led by children or young people. Items in red are for Pilots only. Find out more at: www.urcpilots.org.uk.

All Aboard! Or call to worship

Introduction to the theme – Story Story Story

Hymn/song (on a general Bible theme)

Prayers (use prayers from the Resource or ones written by children/young people) and **Lords Prayer**

Reading (from the chosen story)

Chosen story/stories (action/tragedy/humour/romance/fantasy) drama or other retelling

Hymn/song (on a theme related to the story)

Dig deeper into the story

Talk about and show some of the crafts/activities the Pilots/children/young people have done which are associated with the story.

Maybe get the congregation involved.

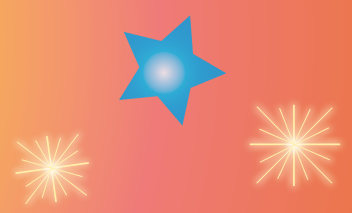
Prayers of Intercession

Hymn/song (on a closing theme)

All Ashore! Or blessing



More activities on the story theme



Story writing workshop

Please allow two hours (this may need to be spread over two sessions, one for planning and another for doing and then showing).

A story writing workshop could allow your children or young people to be creative and to explore different stories within the Bible or perhaps give an opportunity to write a modern day parable. The stories could be presented in a variety of media eg stop animation, tiktoks, Snapchats, Instagram stories and reels as well as comic book version, written or dramatised. This could be done individually, in groups or as a whole group.

(Please remember that social media has a minimum age requirement of 13).

1. Start by having a discussion about what a story is, what each person likes and dislikes in a story. Have a couple of illustrations of parables from the Bible to look at. What's the hook? What's the point of the story? (15 minutes).
2. Give out a list with the Bible references of parables from the Bible and explain they could choose one to retell or write their own modern day version (15 minutes).
3. Leave a good amount of time for planning (30 minutes).
4. Have time at the end for presenting the end product. If you are brave, you could take feedback from the group about each story presented (one hour).

Scrapbooking/journaling/book making

Provide a canvas for all, pens, material and patterned paper, glue, stickers, gems and scissors.

Encourage people to create their own canvas using different mediums. The canvas could focus on a book they like, a story in the Bible they like or just story/books in general. If wanted, once the activity is finished share your thoughts and reasonings around your canvas with the group.



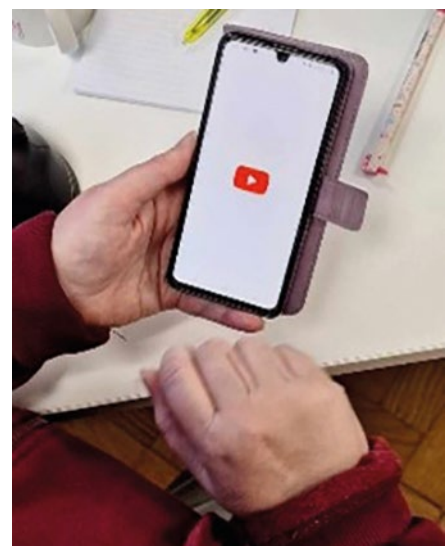
Podcast/Ted talk

Your group could use one of your sessions to host their own podcast about stories in the Bible, and what books have to offer. What do the stories tell us about God, Jesus and God's kingdom? Alternatively, you could find a suitable podcast to listen to (listen to it first to ensure it is suitable).

Watch clips

Youtube has various retellings of parables and Bible accounts. After each clip, use these questions to prompt discussion:

1. What stands out to you in this story?
2. What is God/Jesus telling us through this story?



3. Do you have a favourite part? Why?
4. How would you convey a message today?

Freeze frame/Whose line is it anyway?

Each person chooses a parable or Bible story and finds it in their Bible. They then read just one line from that story and others have to guess which one it is. Start difficult and then, if people struggle to guess, say a slightly easier line. The more clues you have to give, the fewer points the guesser gets. Three points if guessed straight away, one point less for each extra line given.

Alternatively split into teams and create a freeze frame of a story and, if necessary, quote a line from it too.

Charades of books

On slips of paper write the titles of well known books. One person chooses a slip of paper and proceeds to act out the title written on it and everyone else guesses.

Consider setting a timer. Score a point for each win within the time.



In addition to sheep and goats, there are about 100 other animals in the Bible, including some that are no longer found in the Middle East such as hippopotami (Job 40:15–25), crocodiles (Ezekiel 29:3–6), hartebeest (Deuteronomy 14:4), cheetahs (Habakkuk 1:8), bears (2 Kings 2:24) and lions (mentioned over 150 times).

Monologue (the Revd Roger Jones)

"Missed it!"

– Matthew 25:1-13

My sister is a dork! Honestly, I despair sometimes.

She was asked to be a bridesmaid at a friend's wedding. Excited wasn't the word! You wouldn't believe the times she tried on the dress. The times she walked along the path and practised not tripping up. So excited was she about being a bridesmaid you would have thought nothing would stop her getting to that wedding. That nothing would stop her being ready for the joy of being part of a most wonderful day.

But you would have to think again.

When the day came, she got into her dress and was all ready. She just had to prepare the lanterns with oil and go to meet the bridegroom. You could never be quite sure when everyone would turn up but it was going to be lovely and who would want to miss it? I wouldn't, for starters. But apparently I was too young to be a bridesmaid and even I had to finish my chores at home before I would be allowed to go and see the wedding! Anyway, off she went, giggling and chatting with the other nine bridesmaids. But then, would you believe it? A few hours later she comes rushing in! "I can't go. I can't – I'm missing it!"

"Wait up sis," I said. "What's wrong?"

She was crying when she said it. "We all fell asleep".

"What, all of you?" I cried. "Yes," she said. I think she missed me shaking my head! "At least you had the spare oil in the flask..." Then I realised what I had said. She didn't have any spare oil at all. She had said she wouldn't need it. "After all," she said "he's bound to arrive early for his own wedding. I've got enough to last that long." She couldn't even buy any at the shops this late in the evening – they'd all be shut by now. She just threw herself on her bed and wailed!








"Aren't you going then?" I asked... I knew the answer. I slipped out and went to watch. Some guy came up to me and stood there watching with me.

"Not many bridesmaids," he said. So I told him what had happened. The groom had been late and not all the bridesmaids had been prepared for that. The wise ones had taken extra oil for their lamps, but half the bridesmaids had only taken what was in their lamps and had run out before he got there. No lamps, no party.

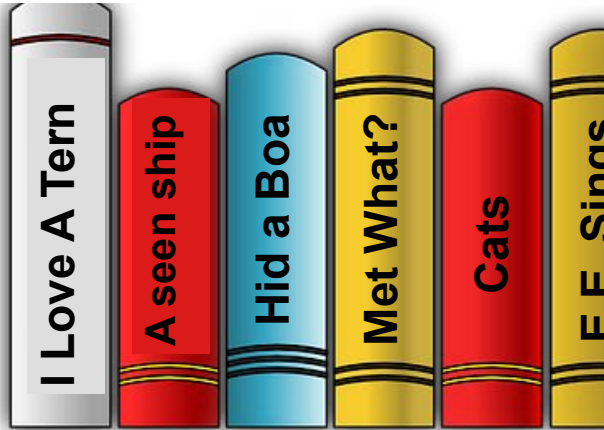
"That was foolish," he said. "Now they've missed the whole shebang."

"You're telling me," I said. "You wouldn't catch me missing something as important as this. What a joy!"



Walking the Way challenge Can you complete at least one challenge from each column?	Stories 	Tragedy 	Romance 	Action 	Humour 	Fantasy 	God's Story 
	Read a book or tell a story to a younger child.	Gift your week's pocket money to a charity for refugees or homeless people.	Call a friend you haven't spoken to for a while to see how they are doing.	Take part in a sponsored walk or other activity to raise money for charity.	Get on and do the things that someone keeps nagging you about.	Say a prayer for someone you find it difficult to like.	Choose two to five verses you particularly like from the Bible and try to learn them by heart.
	Offer to do the Bible reading for your church or group.	Carry a small pack of tissues with you so you have them if anyone needs one.	Craft or paint a bunch of flowers and give it to a neighbour or to someone you wish to thank.	Do some guerilla gardening or litter picking on a patch of ground in your neighbourhood.	Donate some unwanted toys or books to a charity shop or to someone who would use and enjoy them.	Have a 'no complaining or moaning' day.	Read your favourite Bible story in a different version to usual – maybe a paraphrase, children's book or video.
	Invite someone to tell you their story – and ACTUALLY LISTEN.	Every night before you go to bed, think of three things you are thankful for.	Put your phone away while you're with someone and focus properly on your time together.	Offer your seat to someone on the bus or train or hold the door for people following you through.	Spread joy to your friends by learning some good jokes to share.	Send a picture postcard to someone who doesn't get out of their house much.	Write a poem based on a favourite quote or story from the Bible.
How did it go? Which did you do, and when?							

Solve the clues, then sort the answers into the right places on the grid to find another name for the Bible.



Unscramble the book titles to find six books of the Bible

Can you guess the story from the synopsis?

Boy meets girl but a close shave tests the strength of their relationship

Construction workers expect bad weather conditions.

Prison officer and his family are saved after an

Find these Bible characters in the wordsearch. The unused letters will reveal another Bible name.

communication

- | | | |
|-----------|---------|---------|
| Abigail | Eli | Luke |
| Ananias | Esau | Matthew |
| Asher | Goliath | Paul |
| Bathsheba | Job | Ruth |
| David | Judith | Stephen |
| Dan | Leah | Zebedee |

Down-in-the-mouth prophet has several changes of heart.

4 letters

The series of events that make up a story.

5 letters

Another word for stories – sounds like something dogs have.

A journal recording your life story.

We use this oral storytelling.

7 letters

Jesus' stories with a message.

Not fact.

8 letters

Number of books in the Bible.

Jesus told stories with a...

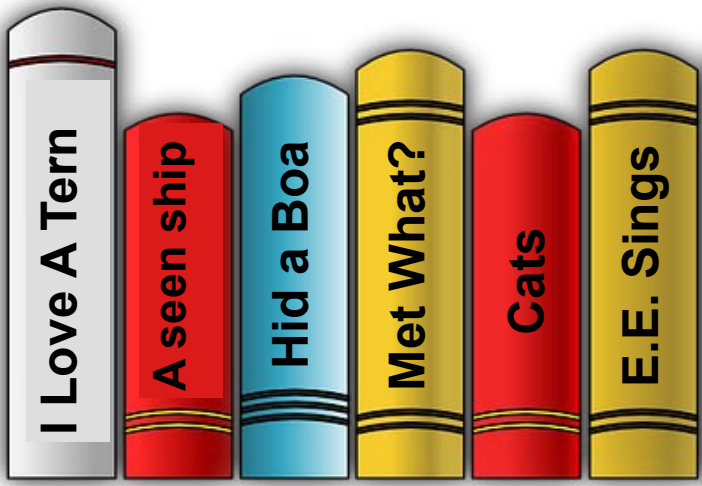
9 letters

The Bible starts "In the..."



Which two stories are told in these groups of emojis?

Guess the Bible story



Unscramble the book titles to find six books of the Bible

Can you guess the story from the synopsis?

Boy meets girl but a close shave tests the strength of their relationship.

Construction workers experience mixed results in bad weather conditions.

Prison officer and his family are saved after an earthquake.

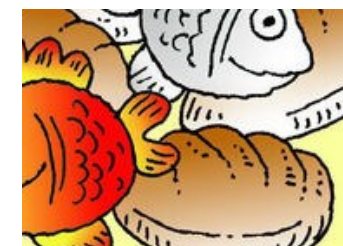
Building work is halted due to poor communication.

Split decision in custody fight.

Victim of a mugging receives unexpected assistance.

Tweenager wanders off on a family trip and is surprised at the family's reaction.

Down-in-the-mouth prophet has several changes of heart.





Explore a set of conversation starter materials to help you engage with a question concerning many churches:

Where are the young people?

Free resources available here: bit.ly/WATYPCards

Where are the young people?



Faith Adventures for Children Together

is a free weekly resource from the United Reformed Church to support church children's group leaders and volunteers as they plan and deliver Bible-based, child-centred, engaging sessions for ages 12 and under.

From January 2024, it is accompanied by Faith Adventures: Youth Resource which seeks to supplement the sessions with prayers, discussion and activities which extend the material to engage the 11 to 14 age range.

Session outlines provide ways to experience, explore and express faith together through Bible readings, stories, prayers, activities, and wondering together, with a postcard home to enable children and families to nurture their faith in daily life.

Check out the resource here: bit.ly/FACT_resource
Join the Facebook Group for those using it here: bit.ly/FACT_FB



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