

Reflections



Day one:

Mark 10: 13-15 Mark 10:13-15

Like a car tyre with a slow puncture, the URC has experienced a slow, steady leak of younger people and their families, over the years. It is now not unusual for many of us to have a dusty but hope filled corner in our churches where visiting grandchildren occasionally play. Sometimes there can be the hope that a programme like this can be a 'silver bullet' and have children flooding back into your church.

Alas, there are no silver bullets, and this includes the excellent resource you have in your hands. Running it will not suddenly reverse years of decline. Instead, you have something better. You have a resource that can invite people into a relationship with you for five sessions during their holidays. From there, you can hopefully build more long-lasting relationships that are about mutual growth and learning. The small people and their chaperones you meet are may be from an alien culture that seems bewildering, unless you have had a lot to do with children recently.

Please note that I have put the emphasis on us learning from those we meet this week. If we carefully read the scripture for today, it is not just an invitation for children to go to Jesus. It was an instruction for us to emulate them. To be open, curious, ready to make friends and learn how the world works.

This is the week's invitation to you – create a bubble between two worlds that often has little to do with each other. Create a mutually beneficial environment where everyone in the bubble may learn, grow and flourish!

Of course, you might shake your head and saying we've got a brilliant youth provision already. If so, give yourself a pat on the back before also seeing that the observations above also apply to you. Hopefully, there will be people attracted to this offering beyond your normal church group. Please learn from them as you reach and communicate God's love in all that you do.

We genuinely hope that this resource is an opportunity to learn and grow together. Relax, have fun, and let Jesus do his work in the hearts and minds of those people attracted by your Holiday Club.

Blessings and Good Luck!

Prayer (which builds all week)
Loving God, help us to welcome all who come this week.



Day two:
1 Corinthians 12:12-27

As a spotty, skinny, bespectacled and unsporty kid, there were many times when I felt entirely inadequate in the presence of my peers. But I remember my flamboyant and rather eccentric High School Art Teacher saying to me one day, 'don't worry about this all now, you're going to be a fascinating adult, and your life will be very interesting'. After the prediction, she then departed in a swirl of perfume and colour.



Of course, I can't comment if all her predictions came true – I'll leave that to people who know me well, but I always remember her encouragement with gratitude. As someone who didn't (and doesn't) always seem to fit in, her promise to me was something I have always remembered, and it told me there was more in life that my limited life experience had told me as an awkward teenager.

Sometimes we all feel like fish out of water. We don't always fit in, and it's sometimes easy to feel insignificant and overlooked. It's important to remember that feeling because there may be young people (or indeed a parent or a fellow volunteer) feeling like this during this week. This may be your chance to be like my art teacher, of blessed memory giving encouragement where it is sorely needed.

Paul writes to the squabbling Corinthians in our scripture for today. He tells those who are giving themselves airs and graces that we are all important. We are wanted, needed, loved and included in the body of Christ- even when we don't feel it or see it in others. It's important that we behave in ways that are inclusive and loving. So please think about how you can reach out to someone this week who may need some encouragement. Think about how you can model the inclusion Paul is writing about. Remember that we are all part of the Body of Christ. May all your words and actions embody encouragement and respect as the week goes on.

Prayer (which builds all week)
Loving God, help us to welcome all who come this week.
Help us to be inclusive and encouraging to all we meet this day.



Day three:
Luke 5:17-26

Let's call our friend on the mat, Matt the Mat Guy. Matt must have been a special person because most disabled people in New Testament times were objects of pity, if not scorn. It was considered that someone who was as severely disabled as Matt had done something wrong to deserve it. Or their parents had been even worse. As such, disabled people weren't so much people as issues or moral object lessons.



But Matt the Mat Guy was more than that. He had friends who were determined to help him. He was a person. And it is with his friend's help that he meets Jesus and is healed. It is important for us to see that Matt and his friends looked at what they needed to do and were ingenious in doing it. Taking tiles off a roof is lateral thinking at its best.

This week we may need to be a bit ingenious ourselves. There is always the temptation to see the person with additional needs as a problem to be solved. Instead, we need to focus on the barrier that is preventing that person from participating and work out how to remove it. Inclusion can't be discarded when it is inconvenient. This week is an opportunity to show that God loves everyone equally. Our values are what we do, not just nice things we say.

I'd like to think that Matt the Mat Guy was the person who came up with the plan, but we don't really know. Certainly, I would suggest that when we are trying to deal with any participation issues, we ask the people who are the experts – the parents and the young person themselves. What, in their experience, can they suggest? And more importantly, what do they want to do?

It often seems easier to try to solve the 'problem' and make ourselves feel better rather than asking what is needed by the person involved and doing what they ask. Let's make sure we

work together and do what is needed so we can all get the most out of the week together.

Prayer (which builds all week)
Loving God, help us to welcome all who come this week.



Help us to be inclusive and encouraging to all we meet this day.

Help us to listen to the needs around us and work together to meet them.

Day four:
John 4:1-26

It is true that Jews and Samaritans hated one another for many reasons, but mostly because they shared a religion that differed in a few details that somehow become more important than their shared humanity. When Jesus thought about the most despised person he could think of, he came up with the Samaritan in the Good Samaritan parable.



We often hear stories and half truths about groups of people we don't understand or have little direct experience of. It's a bit like a stalagmite- little drips of misinformation and misunderstanding creates a pillar of untruth and negative stereotypes. Sadly, it often feels like we haven't moved much further than the people of Jesus's day. If we look at the state of the world, there seems so much distrust and barriers to peace and understanding. We all have more in common than we admit. While we can't necessarily fix the whole world, we can try our best to be part of the solution in our neighbourhoods and our churches.

Being part of an antiracist church means more than just tutting over people we feel are less enlightened than us on matters of race and culture. It means taking a good and hard look at ourselves and recognise that we all have growing and learning to do. It means speaking up and acting when we find there is prejudice, whether it is in ourselves, in the acts of others or barriers in institutions. Isabel Wilkerson, in her excellent book *Caste*, uses the image of an old house to explain being an antiracist. She says

we might have not built the house, but we have inherited it and are responsible for mending it while we live in it. We have the obligation to mend where it is broken otherwise we are passing on the problem to yet another generation.

This week may involve a clash of cultures- anything from not understanding the customs or language of some of our participants to maybe them not understanding what 'our' church culture is and how it works.

Consider this a gift from the barrier breaking Christ who once chatted to a foreign woman at a well. Many people hearing the story of their encounter in the Early Church would have felt that she was very different from Jesus and beneath his notice. But as Jesus shows us in John's account, these cross-cultural encounters are one of the places where God reveals God to us.

Prayer (which builds all week)

Loving God, help us to welcome all who come this week.

Help us to be inclusive and encouraging to all we meet this day.

Help us to listen to the needs around us and work together to meet them.

And welcome all as your children and marvellous creation.



Day five:

John 20:24-29

I always feel sorry for Thomas. He always gets bad press because he asked for a bit of proof that the disciples were not in some kind of PTSD situation and hallucinated the resurrection. I like to think Thomas as an 'every person'- he stands in for many of us who need more than someone insisting they are right to accept what they are saying is true. Doubt is not a bad thing when it is coupled with openness to explore and the ability to change our opinions.



This week there may have been many reasons for people to have come to the sessions- everything from a budget-friendly way to entertain their children to a parent or grandparent hoping that this is the grounding for a life informed by Christian belief. You may feel you have had many conversations about faith- or none at all.

But even if you don't feel those conversations have been had, you will have been speaking about faith all week. How you have dealt with the inevitable challenges, how you have dealt with a recalcitrant child, or the generosity of provided food and activities will have communicated to those who have participated. All these things will have spoken more loudly to the people who have experienced the week than anything you could have said.

This last session may be the occasion for a little sadness. After all, you have come to the end of the journey. You may not see some of these people again for a while. But hopefully, the relationships you have started to build will continue. Think about what you can offer the people you have met. Is there something you could now do monthly as a way forward? Whatever commitment you make, make sure that it is sustainable long term for you and them. But take this moment to be thankful. Take this moment to celebrate that you have managed to do something wonderful! Just remember now to take a little time to rest and recoup- you've earned it!

Prayer (which builds all week)

Loving God, help us to welcome all who come this week.

Help us to be inclusive and encouraging to all we meet this day.

Help us to listen to the needs around us and work together to meet them.

And welcome all as your children and marvellous creation.

May that our deeds speak of your love and kindness so that your love is mirrored in all we do.

Amen.

