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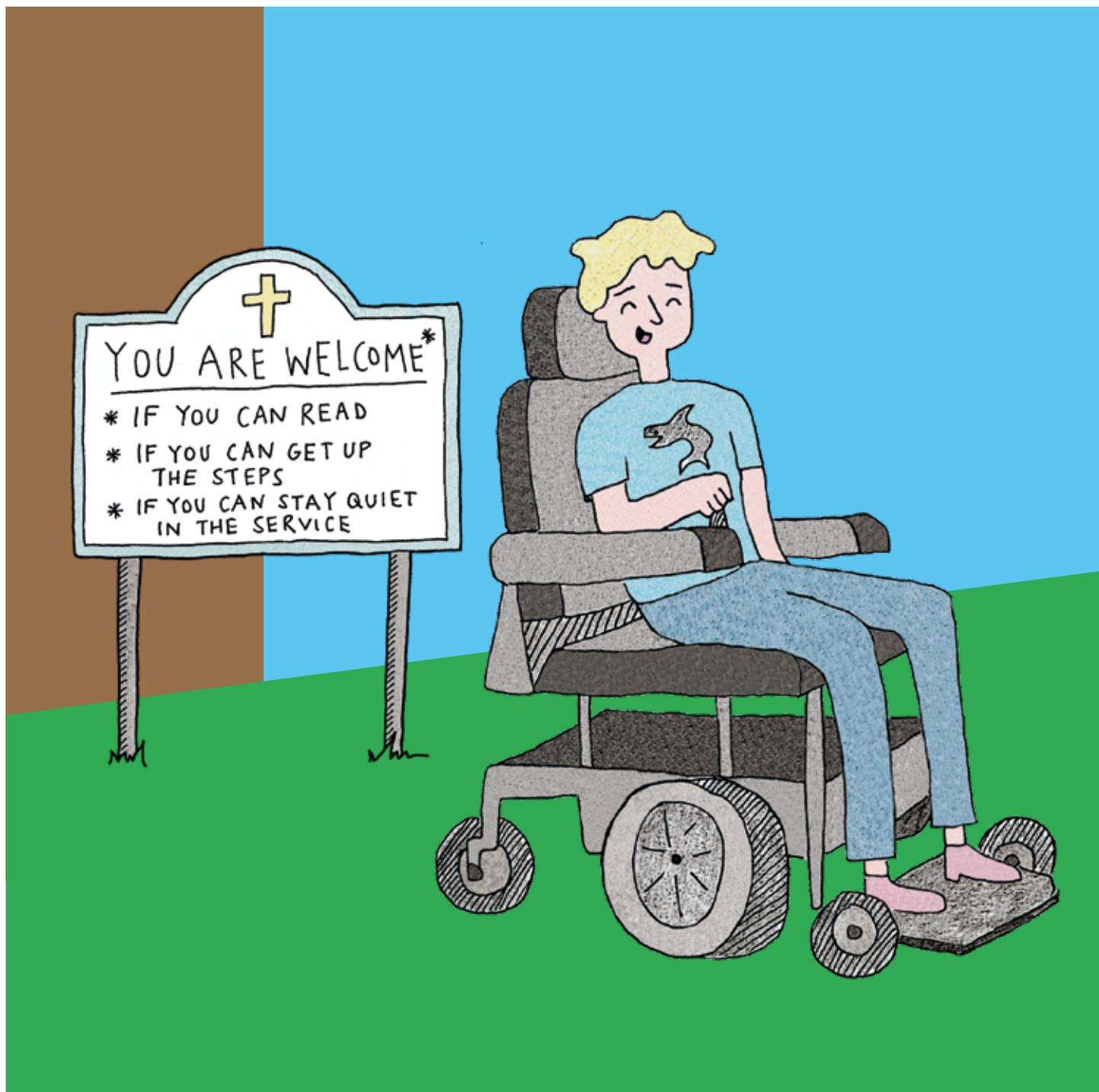
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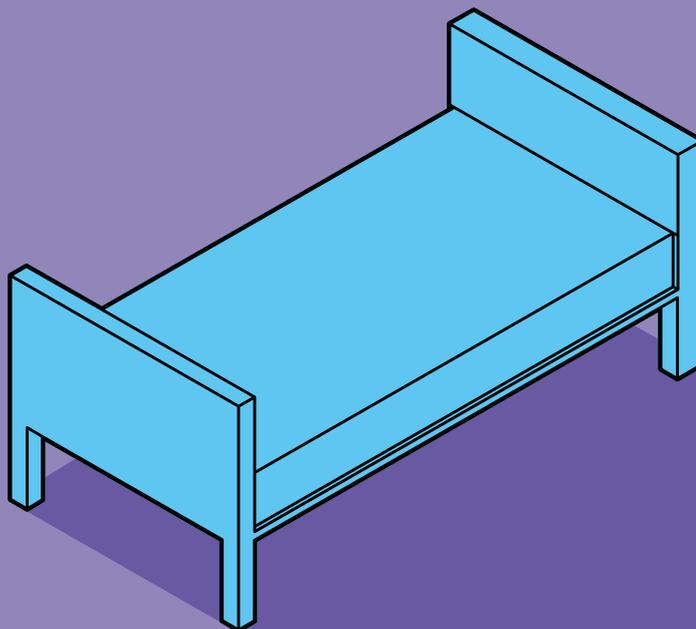


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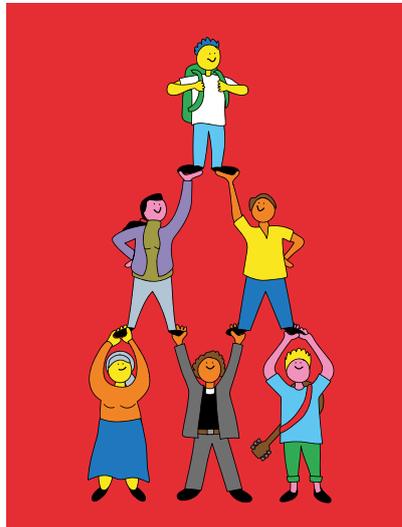
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Children are God's secret weapon. I believe he wants them to fight for their own generation

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This month is packed full of all the usual *Together* sessions, looking at bullying, difficult relationships and revenge, along with an all-age service, games, crafts and many other ideas.

See resources contents on **page 52** for more information

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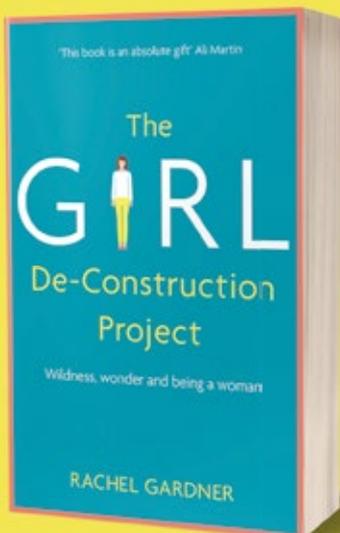
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SUBSCRIPTIONS
subscriptions@premier.org.uk
Annual price: £47.95
(UK Direct Debit),
£74 (Europe),
£79 (rest of the World).
01892 611180

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Premier Youth and Children's Work magazine is published by Premier Christian Communications.

PREMIER YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S WORK
MAGAZINE ISSN 2399-6889

FIND US ONLINE:
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Printed in the UK by
Stephens and George



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First word



I preached at my twin's wedding yesterday. I was initially worried I'd focused too heavily on how hard marriage is and how difficult life can be, but when about the 30th person thanked me for my brutal honesty I realised I'd struck a chord.

See, I think people are fed up of sugar-coated platitudes from platforms, because sometimes stuff just really sucks. A lot of the contributors to this month's magazine have encountered tough situations, and I'm so thankful to them for sharing their thoughts, fears and advice in these pages.

As National Adoption Week falls in October, we wanted to have a special focus this month on vulnerable children and young people. We've spoken to numerous parents, carers, practitioners, pastors, and youth and children's workers about bullying, adoption, fostering, family breakdown, mental health struggles and additional needs. I'm aware that we're only scratching the surface of the amazing work that goes on in these areas, but we want to honour all of those involved. On behalf of all cared-for children, I want to thank you for your time, tenacity and love.

One of these tireless advocates is Carrie Grant (page 18). She is powerfully vulnerable ("I've sat on suicide watch six times in three years with one of my children, and that's a very dark place to be, but there is no place that God doesn't go"), but also challenging ("inclusion isn't just about allowing people to join in on the outsides, on the edges. It's about putting people in the centre").

Thank you for urging us to do better. I was convicted by Tim Alford's challenge when defining our vision (page 33), and I hope you will be too: "The best place to start is with things that break your heart. What is happening in our society that you just can't stand? What patterns do you see in the lives of your children and young people that you just can't tolerate? What is happening in your community that you just have to see change? These areas of holy discontent are often the birthplace of vision. It can be painful to dwell on them, but if you are to allow vision to rise, dwell on them you must."

As the *Instant Family* review on page 17 points out, 40,000 children and young people go into care in the UK every year. As a Church, we are in a unique position to welcome these children, care for them and place them in loving homes. When I spoke to an adopted mum (who was adopted herself) about her experience, she said: "I will never change [my child's] past, but I can change the story from here on. They are broken little people who have had an incredibly difficult start, but actually their potential is phenomenal, and I think it is about knowing we're in it for the long haul."

There is so much hope. Which, you'll probably be pleased to hear, is how I ended the marriage preach. Left to our own devices, things look pretty bleak. But thankfully that's not the end of the story. As so many of the people within this magazine will attest to, we have access to a God who breathes peace into the bleakest of situations and draws alongside each one of us, whether we are able to verbalise that in a way that other people can understand or not (see page 24).

As aid worker Lana Vasquez says (page 31): "We teach the kids: 'It's not the missionaries who rescued you. It's Jesus.' We say they are rescued to rescue. We raise them up not only to know their rescuer, Jesus Christ, but to become rescuers for their generation." Let's encourage our children and young people that, with God's help, they can be hope-makers.

"I waited and waited and waited for GOD. At last he looked; finally he listened. He lifted me out of the ditch, pulled me from deep mud. He stood me up on a solid rock to make sure I wouldn't slip. He taught me how to sing the latest God-song, a praise-song to our God. More and more people are seeing this: they enter the mystery, abandoning themselves to GOD" (Psalm 40:1-3, *The Message*).

RUTH JACKSON

is editor of *Premier Youth and Children's Work*.

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Top tweets

@YCWmag

@LizSkudder

Hey @YCWmag my 1-year-old has just got into colouring and spent ages on this! I don't think he's done too bad of a job...



@garethcrispin

Helpful thoughts on latest @YCWmag from @timgoughuk.

Thanks for this, Tim.



Tackling kids' questions: J John blog

I love this *Not kid's play* blog! Reminds me of a bedtime conversation with my 4-year-old about the second coming and what it would look like. Felt pretty smug at his deep thinking, and then came: "If we meet all those who have died when Jesus comes back too, does that mean the dinosaurs come back too? Will Jesus arrive riding on a T-Rex?" I hope so, mate. I hope so.

Victoria, Poole

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Recharge is a Bible study just for you, to nurture your own relationship with God. So before you even look at the rest of the magazine, take some time out to focus on him. Grab a coffee, sit, breathe and read.

 **GRANDE LATTE** Haggai 2:10-19; Matthew 8:1-4; Ephesians 5:25-27

 **FLAT WHITE** Haggai 2:10-19

 **ESPRESSO** Haggai 2:19 "From this day on I will bless you."



You've aced the talk, completed all your prep for next week and the kids in your group love you. In starts to sneak a hint of pride. You know you're forgiven because of Jesus. You know he's enough. But it's dangerous when we start to think that somehow our acts of service can bring us closer to God. Shouldn't God bless me because of my faithful service to him?

Clean and unclean

Previously in Haggai...After being taken captive by the Babylonians, King Cyrus of Persia sent God's people back to Jerusalem to rebuild the ruined temple. But it wasn't long before they had given up, more concerned with their own lives than with God's glory. So God sent them a prophet, Haggai, to encourage and motivate them into obedience. Three weeks later the people start work on the temple again. God speaks to them, encouraging perseverance even when it seems hopeless. He promises his presence will be with them and that he will one day bring them to the future eternal glory. So here we are. It's 18th December 520BC and Haggai has another message for the people from God.

God has sent Haggai to ask the priests two questions about the law (2:11-13). Here's the first: if someone has some holy meat (leftovers from a sacrifice, let's say) and they carry it using the bottom of their coat, what happens if the coat touches some other food? Does that food become holy too? The priests discuss and answer with a no. And they're right. God's law says that there is no transfer of holiness. You can't catch perfection.

Here's the second question: if someone touches a dead body, God's law says they become unclean. But if that person

touches some food, does that food become unclean too? The priests discuss and answer with a yes. And they're right again. Numbers 19:11-13 shows that if you touch something unclean, such as a dead body, you too become unclean. Uncleanness is contagious.

The heart of the issue

Haggai probably knew full well the answer to both questions, so why did God want him to ask them? He wanted to show up what was going on in his people's hearts (2:14). God's people had started building the temple, but they had begun to think that their service to God was somehow making them holy. Even though they had started to obey the Lord by working on the temple, their work was unclean. In fact, their sin was defiling it. Holiness isn't contagious, but sin is. The people were probably a bit proud of themselves. "Look at us!" they most likely said. "We're doing God's work. We're rebuilding his temple. Aren't we amazing?"

The people had forgotten a crucial truth. God had already declared that they were his treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6). They didn't need to earn God's favour because they already had it. God had set his people apart from the rest of the world. Building the temple didn't make them any more or less holy. It wasn't like the holiness of the temple-building project was rubbing off on them because of their involvement. The temple wasn't a good-luck charm. God chose his people and made them holy, longing for them to obey him out of gratitude.

“
They didn't need to earn
God's favour because they
already had it

Loving Christianity more than Christ

Do you ever think God will be more pleased with you because of your work for him? Often we love Christian things more than Christ himself. We love Jesus' ways of doing things. His rules are good. Yet we forget Jesus himself. Being involved with Christian stuff doesn't make you right with God. *Jesus* makes you right with God. You go to church, you celebrate Christmas and Easter, and you serve people in need, yet all this can be done without following Jesus himself. Why? Because holiness isn't contagious.

Doesn't it remind you of the Pharisees? You can obey all the rules and simultaneously walk off in the opposite direction from Jesus. And worst of all, following Christianity over Christ himself will simply lead you to spiritual death. That's why Jesus says: "Follow me." And yes, then you will gladly be involved in building God's Church. That will be the outcome of being made holy, but it's not the means. You're not made good by doing good things. You're good because of Jesus.

“
Holiness isn't
contagious,
but sin is

Eternal blessing

Obedying God's word doesn't make you more holy, but it does bring great blessing (2:15-19). He loves it when his people joyfully serve him from a place of gratitude. God's people are reminded here of the mess they were in because of their half-hearted service and mixed-up priorities. Their situation before they started work on the temple was pretty hopeless, filled with famine, drought and economic disaster. Learn from the past and enjoy God's goodness now!

In Haggai 2:18, God reminds the people that it has only been three months since they started building his temple. The seed isn't in the barn, but in the ground. The time for them to gather in the fruit hasn't yet come, but it is coming. God isn't against his people. In fact, he's *for* them and will help them. So the encouragement is a simple one: consider your ways. Remember your position before God as his holy people and keep working on building his house. God promises to bless you. He didn't just care about the people's agriculture, but about *them*.

Those who have given God his proper place in their lives will find that he blesses them, and these blessings will far outweigh any temporary hardships we face. And how is that blessing ultimately shown? He will give them an eternity of blessings with him in perfect glory, for ever.

Obey God above all else. Lay down your life in loving obedience and just see what God does. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and just wait and see. Because he's made a promise that when you do this you will be blessed. Serving God doesn't make you holy, but obeying God brings great blessing.

Perfection you can catch

Take a look at Jesus. As he walks the streets on his way to Capernaum he encounters a man with leprosy (Matthew 8:1-4). This man can do nothing but say: "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Picture it. Jesus reaches out his hand and touches the man. "I am willing," he says, "be clean!" Immediately the man was cleansed of his leprosy. There is a way for us to 'catch' the holiness and purity we so long for. Contagious holiness is found in Jesus.

Ephesians 5:25-27 captures what Jesus has done so beautifully: "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, and to present her to himself as a radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

Jesus not only removes your uncleanness, but he gifts you his holiness. So remember, it's not your service or your ministry that saves you, it's the blood of Jesus. Then, out of a deep joy and genuine gratitude to God, lay down your life in wholehearted obedience. That's what God loves. And he *will* bless you.



TAKEAWAY

"If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,
Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness,
So that we can, with reverence, serve you."
Psalm 130:3-4



PRAYER

"Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain, he washed it white as snow." Thank you, Father.
(Words taken from 'Jesus paid it all' by Elvina M Hall.)

DAVE CORNES

is head of youth ministry at St James Muswell Hill.

Bullying in schools

New research shows that more than half of children have experienced some form of bullying. The Diana Awards said this is having a “shocking” impact on mental health, with 78 per cent of victims left feeling anxious and 56 per cent unable to sleep as a result.

I’ve been involved in schools’ work since 2008 and this has always been an issue during that time. Even going back to my own youth, I was bullied. It does seem to be getting worse, though. Peer pressure has increased, and social dynamics are making things worse, as we are seeing more and more unemployment, and families struggling on benefits.

When you look at some kids caught in the poverty trap who can’t afford trainers or the latest gimmick, they’re often pointed out and vilified because of the situation they were born into. Kids play ‘follow the leader’ and there is always one leading the way with others following because they don’t want to have the finger pointed at them.

Everyone has a role to play in this situation. Parents have to be open and ready to listen, but also need to take a lead in bringing bullying into the light. Teachers are a lot more empathetic than

they were in my day. In my experience, teachers today see their role more as a calling, so we should have the confidence to take any bullying-related issues to them.

These latest stats around bullying and mental health paint a worrying picture. I have seen first-hand the lengths young people will go to get away from difficult times. One girl in my choir took her own life because her situation became too much for her. We can’t just stand by as our young people suffer.

I’m really grateful for Christians who are able to come alongside young people in their situations, whether at school or in the community. That is exactly what Jesus did. He reached out to the woman at the well and he reached out to blind Bartimaeus.

For me, the greatest fulfilment I get is reaching the kids who are struggling. We have the opportunity to sow the seed of hope, the seed of love and the seed of grace. That, to me, is the real gospel.

LIAM MOORE

is the project director for Liverpool-based Christian youth organisation Voice in the City.

Can happiness be found in drink and drugs?

New figures from NHS Digital showed that 51 per cent of young people aged 11 to 15 who had recently drunk alcohol, smoked cigarettes and taken drugs had experienced low levels of happiness. This compares unfavourably with 36 per cent who had recently done just one of these things, and 22 per cent who hadn’t recently smoked, drunk alcohol or taken drugs.

“Everyone I know smokes weed,” one young person said to me at a recent youth group. It seemed to him as though everyone around him was smoking cannabis on a regular basis. We chatted it through.

“Do your parents smoke cannabis?” I asked.

“No, of course not,” he replied. (Phew! That’s a safeguarding relief!)

“OK, so what about your closest friends? Do they smoke cannabis?”

“No, my closest friends would never smoke weed!”

As the conversation continued, we identified that he actually knew very few people who were involved with cannabis. However, I can really relate to this young man’s attitude. It often feels as though everyone is doing something, even if that isn’t actually the case.

A recent NHS report shows that most young people do not use drugs. Around nine per cent of 11-year-olds have done so compared with 38 per cent of 15-year-olds. As far as Hope UK is concerned this is still too many, and its impact is far-reaching, but this by no means represents everyone.

One of the activities we do with young people is designed to highlight how it is much easier to resist peer-pressure when they are in a group rather than when they feel as though they are on their

own. One of our jobs as youth workers is to resize the giants in our young people’s lives and to open their eyes to how much support they have. We need to help them, particularly in the case of drugs, to realise that the giant isn’t nearly as big as they think it is, especially when they know that the majority of people are not using them.

The NHS Report also showed that pupils who have recently smoked, drunk alcohol and taken drugs are more likely to be unhappy. Drugs fall into four categories: stimulants (such as cocaine), depressants (such as cannabis), hallucinogens (such as LSD) and painkillers (such as morphine). People take drugs for a host of reasons, for example to have fun, to forget, to relax, for energy and to rebel. At Hope UK we are constantly reminded when we meet with young people that there is a sense that drugs will help them achieve or feel something they could never achieve or feel without drugs.

There are many reasons why drug use will likely cause unhappiness, particularly in young people, for example separation from society and chemical changes in the body. But the truth is, it’s a Jesus thing! It’s our role as youth workers to help young people realise that true joy can only be found in one place: the place where we meet with the living God, Jesus Christ. Hope UK does this through an exercise that shows young people how Jesus is the best way to excite (stimulant), to relax (depressant), to experience things they never felt possible (hallucinogen) and to take pain away (painkillers) without any of the known side effects.

JOE GRIFFITHS

is deputy CEO at drugs education charity Hope UK. To set up a visit to your youth group email enquiries@hopeuk.org.

Church of England to start research into Messy Church



The Church of England has partnered with the Messy Church movement in the hope of deepening the faith of families and children that attend these non-traditional church services.

The Messy Church movement was set up by the Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) 15 years ago, primarily offering families and children food and activities such as arts, crafts, sports and worship. The movement has spread across the world, with churches now meeting all days of the week.

A grant of £100,000 has been awarded to the Church of England's Evangelism and Discipleship Team to study how to deepen the discipleship of Messy Church congregations.

Discussing the desired outcomes with *Premier Youth and Children's Work*, director of the team Dave Male said: "Deepening the discipleship is really [about] helping people in their journey of faith and learning how that might be applicable for families who come to Messy Churches. Part of the research will be to say what the most effective ways of doing that are.

"It could include things like online help, face-to-face conversations, developing younger leaders, social action, mentoring and a whole host of things."

Insights from the work will be used to help the Church of England inform its ongoing work around developing new forms of church gatherings – known as Fresh Expressions – in the Church of England.

A recent Church of England background paper found that 50,000 people who do not normally engage with church attend 2,000 Messy Churches based at Anglican churches.

The Church Army published research earlier this year showing that one in five Messy Churches had held baptisms and 13 per cent had reported child or adult confirmations.

Lucy Moore, Messy Church founder and team leader, said: "We're looking forward to working together with the pioneering teams in each diocese to find out what approaches make the most difference in coming closer to Christ, walking in his way and growing the kingdom of heaven.

"It's an unmissable opportunity for local teams to benefit from expert advice and take part in something of international significance."

The study will focus on Messy Churches in the Bristol, Durham and Hereford dioceses.

New report looks into safeguarding during mission trips



A Christian safeguarding charity is asking anyone who has been on a mission trip in the last three years to share their safeguarding procedures.

Since it was revealed that staff at Oxfam had hired prostitutes while in Haiti, other missions, charities and NGOs have become increasingly aware of the importance of having good safeguarding procedures in place. However, Christian safeguarding charity thirtyone:eight says more research is needed to enable a full understanding of the challenges faced by those in this field to ensure that best practice is carried out across the board.

In its questionnaire, the charity will look into the challenges those who go on mission trips face when trying to protect children

and vulnerable adults, and will explore issues such as whether those travelling abroad are required to have a DBS check or not.

Thirtyone:eight, which assisted the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in the Church of England and helps churches with their safeguarding practice, will work with the University of Chester's psychology department to launch an academic study into the challenges and training needs of organisations sending people abroad for mission.

CEO Justin Humphreys said: "We have a strong track record of conducting and commissioning research in the UK and overseas in order to help with the development of best practice in safeguarding within the faith sector. We are particularly excited about this study, which comes at a crucial time amid growing scrutiny of organisations working with vulnerable groups overseas."

The research will be conducted by Dr Lisa Oakley, senior lecturer at the University of Chester, and Professor Moira Lafferty, deputy head of the university's School of Psychology.

Dr Oakley said: "There is an absence of research in the area of safeguarding children and young people in international Christian work. Literature that does exist tends to review past cases and demonstrates significant mistakes that have been made, which include protection of institutions, failure to recognise abuse and ineffective reporting mechanisms.

"Through this new research, we hope to build a current picture which can be used to inform the development of best practice and therefore support organisations further in safeguarding children and young people."

The deadline for completing the questionnaire is 31st October 2019. Visit thirtyoneeight.org for more details.

Sir David Attenborough calls for end to creationism teaching in Welsh schools

The question of whether creationism should be taught in Welsh schools is currently being re-evaluated. The Welsh Government is consulting on a new national curriculum that will drastically overhaul education in Wales. Unlike England, it does not explicitly prohibit teaching creationism.

Sir David Attenborough has joined around 50 scientists in signing a petition that calls for the teaching of creationism to be banned. In a joint letter they said: "Nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution."

Geologist historian Rev Michael Roberts believes teaching creationism in a science class makes no sense: "It simply has no scientific credibility whatsoever, as it's based on a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of what science says; not only biology, but particularly geology with the vast age of the earth." He added that although he believes God is the creator of everything, science teachers should remain neutral on whether there is a creator.

Creationist John MacKay disagrees and says that it is important for creationism to be included in the classroom: "It's nonsense to say we've got to leave creation out because it's the concept of creation and the creator that gave rise to the belief that there are rules and laws." Speaking about those who signed the petition, he said: "They're rallying against real history...and they're pretending that they're trying to be objectively scientific when they're anything but."

250,000 unhappy children

The Children's Society is calling on the Church to help instill confidence in young people following reports that childhood happiness is in decline. The charity's annual report revealed that nearly 250,000 children are unhappy, and that their overall well being is at its lowest level since 2009.

Spokesperson Matt Hussey said: "Children are particularly worried about the future: about things like Brexit and climate change, all the way to more personal issues, such as not having enough money in the future and not being able to find a job. It's really worrying that children feel weighed down by these big issues of the day."

The study found that factors such as friendship, school and body image were also contributing factors to children's self-esteem, with nearly one in 12 boys aged 10 to 15 saying they were unhappy with their appearance. Body confidence is still a bigger issue among young women, but the gap between boys and girls is narrowing.

Children are also feeling more isolated and alone in their problems. Matt said: "Substantial numbers of children feel they have nobody they can turn to. A good way of building friendships is spending time with other young people outside of school, but we're seeing children doing less of that in recent years." He thinks the Church is well placed to help young people struggling with loneliness and self-esteem issues: "Youth groups are a great way to bring young people together to promote positive relationships and friendships, but also to give them a safe space to talk about issues concerning them."

News in brief

Mental health help

Phase Trust is inviting anyone who wants to learn how to better support children and young people in relation to mental health to a new conference. Organisers say they often come across youth workers who want to stand alongside young people on issues such as self-harm, anxiety and trauma but feel ill-equipped. The conference takes place at Lifecentral Church in Halesowen on 26th October. To book tickets, visit youthandchildrens.work/links.

New Methodist youth president

Thelma Commey from Milton Keynes was elected as the new Methodist youth president at this year's annual Methodist Children and Youth Assembly. The 18-year-old, who attends Queensway Methodist Church in Bletchley, will be the voice of young people within the Methodist Church, listening and raising concerns on behalf of young Methodists. She decided to stand for youth president to help "spread the good news and encourage other young people to become involved in the life of the Church".

Harvest memories

A new poll shows two-thirds of people think there is still value in children taking part in a harvest festival. The ComRes survey of more than 4,000 adults also showed that two-thirds had fond memories of celebrating it in the past, including bringing in food, singing hymns and saying prayers. Just half of the respondents said their children currently participate in the festival at school.

Another faith school U-turn?

The government says it will be "looking closely" at whether faith schools should be free to select all pupils based on their religion. Despite being a manifesto pledge, Theresa May's government U-turned on the idea of allowing new free schools more freedom on their admissions policies. The current law only allows them to select 50 per cent of pupils on grounds of faith, but critics of the cap say faith schools are forced to discriminate against pupils of their own faith.

More than 2,000 new Christians this summer at Soul Survivor

This summer's Soul Survivor festivals saw more young people come to faith than any other year over the past decade. It is believed that 2,100 made commitments with over 30,000 people attending the events in Peterborough, Stafford and Kinross. Mike Pilavachi said he has no regrets about their decision to close the summer festivals "because we know God has spoken to us". Listen to our special Soul Survivor podcast at youthandchildrens.work/Media.



Orphanages



For many young people, volunteering at an orphanage is a common activity during a short-term mission trip or gap year. A quick scan of social media shows countless images of young people surrounded by cute children in these institutions. On the surface this seems to be an impactful use of time, but could it actually be doing more harm than good?

An estimated 8 million children are living in orphanages around the world. Of these, between 40 and 90 per cent have a living parent. In some cases, children have ended up in orphanages due to bereavement, abuse or neglect; however, for the vast majority it's due to poverty. Poverty is the main driver for children being relinquished into orphanages by parents who are desperate for them to access basic necessities such as food, shelter, health-care and education. More than 80 years of child development research shows that children develop most favourably in families where they can receive the love, commitment and belonging they need. Even the best orphanages cannot adequately provide this, and sadly it has been proven that they are detrimental to children's emotional, physical and psychological development.

As Psalm 68:6 says: "God places the lonely in families." God designed the family as the best environment for children to develop and thrive in. So if children are being separated from their families because of poverty, shouldn't we be directing our efforts toward strengthening families and communities rather than investing time and money into institutional models of care?

Is it really that bad?

What harm could volunteering at an orphanage do? Surely it can only be a good thing if children receive a bit of love from the volunteers? Well, perhaps not. I've heard stories of children who have had hundreds of people visit them over the space of a few short years. Hundreds of people hugging them, playing with them, loving them – and then leaving them.

Most people opt to spend time caring for children in orphanages with the best of intentions, but what they don't perhaps know is that the revolving door of volunteers coming and going is actually harmful to children. It represents a stream of broken attachments and further exacerbates existing trauma and attachment disorders. It is true that children need and deserve consistent love and attention, but these needs should be met by permanent caregivers rather than volunteers who come and go.

Another problem with orphanage volunteering is that many overseas orphanages do not conduct background or security checks on those who visit. While most people are well-meaning, normalising access to children could open the door to those with harmful intentions. Very little thought is given to safeguarding and child protection, or to what would be appropriate in the Western world. Therefore, the simple act of volunteering at an orphanage could unintentionally support and perpetuate an exploitative system. A high percentage of children living in orphanages are abused, maltreated, exploited and even trafficked into or out of them (known as orphanage trafficking). And many of these institutions are kept open by the support of and demand from international volunteers. Visiting and volunteering at an orphanage unhelpfully fuels this lucrative industry, with money being sent to fund orphanages rather than to cover programmes that strengthen and support families.

So what can we do instead?

The best way to help vulnerable children is to support programmes and organisations that strengthen families and communities, or that promote family-based care alternatives, such as local fostering or adoption. This important work helps to prevent family breakdown and stops children being separated from their parents or relatives, and also helps to find the best family-based alternatives when reunification is not possible. It is important to find ways of supporting children that are sustainable and in their best interests while also respecting their rights, privacy and identity. This should be the overarching motivation, superseding the preferences, desires and expectations of the volunteers.

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The revolving door of volunteers coming and going is actually harmful to children

A good model is one where there is no direct contact or interaction with children but instead focuses on supporting parents, caregivers, staff and the local community. We suggest a four-step model through which you **investigate** the issue, **evaluate** your skills and the intended partnership, **participate** as a volunteer, and then return home to **dedicate** yourself to continuing to learn about, support and advocate for the needs of vulnerable children.

Rather than volunteering at an orphanage, could you be part of the global movement that is working to see every child come home to family? Visit homecomingproject.org for more information, including alternative ideas to orphanage volunteering, a guide to best practice, videos and much more.

Ten best practice principles:

- Put the well-being and best interests of children first.
- Set healthy expectations and clear objectives.
- Learn about orphans and vulnerable children in context.
- Conduct due diligence checks on the organisations you support.
- Pursue sustainable and long-term partnerships.
- Use your skills to support local staff.
- Safeguard and protect children from harm (abide by safeguarding and child-protection policies and procedures).
- Share stories, photographs/videos with permission and caution.
- Advocate on behalf of children and their families.
- Work with organisations that strengthen families and communities.

REBECCA PATTERSON

is the policy, research and engagement officer at Home for Good.

Losing my religion

In light of Joshua Harris and Marty Sampson's recent announcements, Ruth Jackson urges us to prioritise creating safe spaces for our children's questions, doubts and objections to faith



In recent weeks we have seen two high-profile Christians publicly airing their doubts about the Christian faith. Joshua Harris, author of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, recently said in an Instagram post: “By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian.” Within days, Hillsong’s Marty Sampson, whose writing credits include ‘O praise the name’ and ‘King of majesty’, also took to Instagram, saying: “Time for some real talk...I’m genuinely losing my faith...and it doesn’t bother me.”

I’m absolutely gutted for Joshua and Marty. I can’t imagine the confusion and pain they’re going through, and our response as Christians must be one of compassion, prayer and support. But this is also a stark reminder of the importance of discipling our children and young

people well. Marty’s original post (which has since been removed) listed some of his many unanswered questions, claiming that no one talks about them. Whether this is true or not, it sadly seems to be many young people’s experience.

Like Joshua and Marty, I grew up in a Christian family. I definitely had a genuine faith of my own, but I never really questioned *why* I believed. And I never thought to interrogate any of those beliefs. Then I studied theology at Oxford, and it felt as if every part of my faith was not only questioned but brutally ripped apart by my atheist professors and fellow students. Gradually, with the help of some great Christian theologians and a lot of personal Bible reading, I began to put my faith back together, and it actually came out much stronger post-questioning.

However, a few months into my second

year of university, a family friend tragically took their own life. The faith I’d just begun to reconstruct started to crumble away again. This time my objection was emotional rather than intellectual. And once again it took a while to get back to a place where I could believe in a loving God or trust him with my life. And I think this is the crux of most of the questions our children and young people have about God, no matter how they are articulated: is God loving and can I trust him?

Our children often have profound questions or doubts that are a blockage to belief in God. I don’t think any of them are ever asked purely from an intellectual perspective – just look at the emotion behind Marty’s posts – but we need to gently work with our young people to help them unlock some of their head barriers before we can engage their hearts.

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Our children often have questions or doubts that are a blockage to belief in God

Encourage critical thinking

About 40 years ago there was a shift in education, particularly among primary-aged children. Pre-mid-70s, teaching largely used a ‘didactic model’. It was very teacher-centred, with lots of learning by rote. Since then, we have gradually seen the rise of the ‘critical method’. This is more student-centred and encourages children to learn by asking questions, explaining and formulating truth for themselves.

Too often in our churches and (dare I say it!) our Christian homes, we’ve told our young people what to think rather than letting them have their own opinions. But if our children are learning through this critical, questioning model at school (and elsewhere), it doesn’t make sense for them to just be learning by rote in our youth and children’s groups, or at home.

I know this makes our lives much more difficult. It means stuff is going to get messy. It means there will be a lot of questions we inevitably won’t be able to answer. It means we’ll have to leave room for our children to disagree with each other, with us and maybe even with the church leadership! But I think it’s really important that we encourage this critical approach to faith, because if they don’t get the chance to ask their honest questions they’ll either abandon their faith – as Joshua and Marty are in danger of doing – or they’ll end up with a blind faith.

Foster genuine faith

I also honestly believe – and it worked for me – that encouraging our young people’s questions will strengthen their faith in the long run, ensuring that they are not just borrowing our faith. On her blog about Christian parenting, Natasha Crain says: “Make no mistake: a borrowed faith leaving home can be just as dangerous as a broken faith. The result is often the same, just delayed.” She goes on to say: “The number one sign your kids are just borrowing your faith is that they rarely, if ever, ask questions.” We’ve got to encourage our children to ask questions, to grapple with their faith and to think about the difficult stuff that we would probably rather avoid!

I’ve met some people who think that apologetics is not for teenagers, and especially not for younger kids. But our young people have ideas and arguments thrown at them all the time by the beauty industry, by the fashion industry, and by their teachers and friends. If we don’t do apologetics with our children, somebody else will!

No young person wants to be treated as if they are their true age. When I worked in TV we were told to aim our content at a higher age group than our target demographic because children always want to be older than they are. If we want to engage with our teenagers we have to stop patronising them and start treating them like adults. We’ve got to trust them with this stuff, creating space in our homes and in our churches for questions, doubts and objections. And we’ve got to trust that God is big enough to handle all of our questioning!

Accept the tensions

John Lennox, a former Oxford maths professor and an absolute wizard at answering difficult questions, suggests that saying “I don’t know” is a powerful thing because it shows that we’re all on the same level. We shouldn’t be afraid of not knowing the answers.

Perhaps we can explore the answers to some of our children’s questions alongside them. But I also think we must learn to live with the tension of loving God even when we don’t know the answers; to trust him even in the midst of doubt; to hold on to him even when it feels like we’re falling.

It’s that Lamentations 3 thing (emphasis mine): “I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. *Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this:* The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness” (3:20-23 NLT).

No matter how rough things get, let’s cling to the ‘yet’. Let’s point our children and young people to this amazing hope. Let’s pray that they have genuine and profound encounters with the author of this hope. And let’s provide a safe space for them where they can always bring their questions, doubts and objections.

RUTH JACKSON

is editor of *Premier Youth and Children’s Work*.

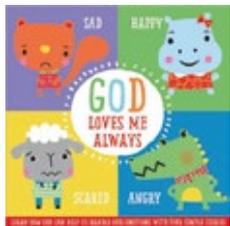
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Let’s pray that our young people have genuine and profound encounters with the author of hope



GOD LOVES ME ALWAYS

Rosie Greening



My 3-year-old daughter and I have absolutely loved reading this book together. It contains four stories that educate children about different emotions: sad, happy, scared and angry.

At the end of each story there is the Reading Together section: an explanation of the story, what the Bible has to say

about this particular emotion and questions to help you engage a child with the story.

We read the stories over a series of bedtimes, some of them on multiple occasions. My daughter asked several times if she could

read “the special book” and said: “I’ll read it to my baby when I have one.” It was great to read these stories and to ask how things made her feel, even when she told me that my telling her off made her sad.

This would be a great book to read with preschoolers in a small-group context or for parents who want to read stories with their children. This is definitely going on my list of things to give as presents.

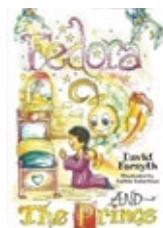
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SUSY DAND

is a part-time curate in West London.

FEDORA AND THE PRINCE

David Forsyth (illustrated by Robbie Robertson)



I was initially puzzled as to who *Fedora and the Prince* was aimed at. The title and illustrations imply that it is a book for children, but the length and style of the text indicate a much older audience.

Reading David Forsyth’s brief life story at the end of the book, however, clarified things slightly. He has been working with unchurched

young people in Glasgow, and his book seeks to explain why angels didn’t prevent Jesus’ crucifixion.

The book tells much of Jesus’ life story, from the angel’s announcement to Mary up to the resurrection. Everything is told from the perspective of an angel named Fedora, who

struggles to understand why the forces of heaven don’t save Jesus.

As a text, I’m certain this would help teenagers understand something of God’s mission to a fallen world, but I have two reservations. Firstly, the young style and number of illustrations would possibly dissuade this age group from reading the book. Secondly, the complexity of vocabulary and overly long sentences might prevent understanding of the text for many teenagers.



SARAH BROWN

is the Derby diocesan children’s adviser.

ESSENTIAL SONGS FOR KIDS: I’VE FOUND JESUS

Various artists



Long journeys are a problem in our family, mainly because there are often arguments about who controls the music. It’s very difficult to find something that will entertain children of different ages.

This is maybe the biggest compliment I can pay this CD. There is nothing new

in terms of the songs, but in our car that was a strength. Many of them could be sung straight away, which meant the CD stayed on until it had played right through, and was asked for again. The versions of the songs are lively, energetic and upbeat. They will certainly get your foot tapping.

Songs on the album come from worship leaders such as Martin Smith, Becky Drake and Doug Horley. I’m not entirely sure what the point of the CD is, but it definitely made our car a loud, happy, worshipping place, and made a long journey go just a little quicker!



ANDREW PHILLIPS

is a Baptist minister and North Western Baptist Association (NWBA) children and families enabler. Based in Stockport, he runs the charity Shine like Stars.



INSTANT FAMILY

Directed by Sean Anders (Rating 12A)

***Instant Family*, which came out earlier this year, is simultaneously heartbreaking and side-splitting. But most importantly it raises awareness around fostering and adoption.**

The Hollywood blockbuster charts the story of Ellie (Rose Byrne) and Pete Wagner (Mark Wahlberg), who, almost on a whim, embark on a journey toward fostering. Initially, they're not convinced they have what it takes ("People who take in foster kids are really special," says Pete). But after meeting social workers, foster parents and adopted children, they decide to give it a go.

The Wagners have previously taken in a rescue dog, and they spend their time fixing up houses and flipping them. Pete jokes with social workers that there might be more interest in fostering if they speak of "rescue kids" or think of them as "fixer-uppers". However, once the children are settled into their house and the honeymoon period has worn off, Pete suggests to Ellie that they have made a terrible mistake: "Our life is mainly gonna suck now."

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As a church you can be part of a community that is supporting some of society's most vulnerable people

An adoptive parent told me that dramatised depictions of cared-for children often paint either too bleak or too rosy a picture. But *Instant Family* seems to get it just right. The film balances light-heartedness (one of the children shouts: "You guys are overthinking this" when the Wagners are debating whether to kiss them goodnight), with the gritty reality of caring for hurting children. A particularly poignant moment presents itself when Ellie wonders why 10-year-old Juan has so many teddy bears. As more fall out of his black bin liner, Ellie is informed that they receive a bear every time they go to family court.

Perhaps the realistic depiction is achieved partly because it is inspired by writer, director and producer Sean Anders' own experience of adopting and fostering. In an interview with *HeyUGuys*, Sean said of the film: "My family changed me in so many wonderful ways and I'm so in love with my kids that this movie is kind of a love letter to all of that."

Both lead actors were excited about the film from the beginning of the project. Rose Byrne had just given birth to her second child, but once she read the script she knew she had to be

involved. Mark Wahlberg signed up mere hours after receiving Sean's pitch. Speaking about the impact of *Instant Family* (also on *HeyUGuys*), Mark said: "There are lots of kids in foster care, in need of a family, in need of a home and if this inspires people to go down that road, that would be amazing"

Instant Family doesn't sugar-coat or shirk away from difficult moments, such as the often-complicated relationships between foster parents, birth parents and their children. As one adoptive mother wrote in a Home for Good blog: "I was so grateful that their birth mum was not presented as a monster – she was shown to be hurting, struggling, battling, loving. With typical adopter guilt and lots of other conflicting emotions, I wept for her and the loss she was experiencing." But as the Wagners point out in the film: "Things that matter are hard."

There are some differences between the US and UK care system, but *Instant Family* is still a helpful depiction of the joys and struggles of cared-for children. It focuses particularly on hard-to-place kids, such as older children and sibling groups. But the real question is: what are we going to do about it? Every year, 40,000 children and young people go into care in the UK and, as a Church, we are in a unique position to welcome these children, care for them and place them in loving homes.

Adoptive parents Anya and Damien Sizer said the film highlighted the amount of support an adoptive family needs, and suggested that the Church has a really important role in this. They said: "We're really excited as Christians at the potential the Church has in this whole area of adoption because adoptive families so need your help. We need your help practically, emotionally, spiritually and with food rotas; to be at the end of the phone for prayer, to give respite when things are getting really tricky and to offer help for siblings. There are so many ways that the Church can get really stuck in. Even if you don't feel called to adopt yourself, as a church you can be part of a community that is supporting some of society's most vulnerable people."

I spoke to a lady who was adopted and is now an adoptive mum, who said: "I look at my life and think where I'd be if I wasn't adopted." Drawing parallels with *Instant Family*, she said: "I will never change [my child's] past, but I can change the story from here on...They are broken little people who have had an incredibly difficult start, but actually their potential is phenomenal, and I think it is about knowing we're in it for the long haul."

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RUTH JACKSON

is editor of *Premier Youth and Children's Work*.

Carrie Grant

Carrie Grant, who works closely with her husband David, is a singer, TV presenter and vocal coach to the stars. She is a mother to four children (three birth daughters and one adopted son). Two are autistic and two have ADHD. Carrie is a passionate advocate for children with additional needs and for adoption.



Ruth Jackson: What was your experience of God as a child?

Carrie Grant: I grew up with just my mum from the age of 7, so I think just to get a few hours peace she'd send me to Sunday school at the local church. When I met David, he talked to me about his Christian faith, but it didn't really have much impact. Then I met up with an old friend who'd been a dancer with me on *Top of the Pops* and she'd completely changed. She'd become a Christian and I spent the whole day at hers. David spent that day saying to God: "I've fallen in love with this woman, but she is nowhere with you. It's never going to happen, so I'm going to tell her I can't be with her any more." He came to pick me up from my friend's flat and rang on the intercom. My friend said: "Oh, hurry up, darling. Carrie's about to give her life to Jesus!" David gave his life back to Jesus and I gave my life to the Lord on the same night.

It completely and utterly changed my life, because I'd had so much trauma. Immediately there was a really massive change, but I think that change continues. All those influences that you've gone through as a child still have to be processed, and that's lifelong. I'm in my 50s now and there are still things I'm learning. God takes me very gently through those things.

RJ: You have four children with additional needs, three of them complex. How does that affect family life?

CG: I live in a neurodiverse world. I'm probably not neurotypical, and I've embraced that diversity. The Church obviously does incredible things, but I think

in my experience it was trying to become white middle-class suburban in a sort of nuclear family way, and that was never going to work for me and David. Having our children has really helped embed the thought that diversity is incredible. God is right here in the midst of all this difference and madness! My children are very different, and they're very wonderful and there are lots of assets, but there are also lots of challenges.

RJ: Often children with additional needs help us to see things differently. Are there ways your children have helped you break out of the box in the way that you see God?

CG: We don't just break out of the box, we've annihilated the box! It's gone, and I love that. Now it's messy Godly life in all its brokenness and confusion. My children have taught me to not just embrace diversity and difference, but to actually begin to celebrate it. We need to put people in areas of leadership. Inclusion isn't just about allowing people to join in on the outsides, on the edges. It's about putting people in the centre.

I think they have taught me to really listen. I'm a vocal coach, and I can tell you who's singing out of tune if there are 200 people singing. But listening is very different from just using your ears. It's about looking at every mannerism, behaviour and question. Why did you ask me that question? Why is that important? What are you wanting from me? How do I want to respond to that? It's slowing everything down a little bit. So if my son's just hit me, my first response isn't going to be to make him sit on the naughty step. I need to ask:

"What's going on in you, babe?" I'm not going to punish him for it. I'm going to de-escalate him. And when we come back to this – I'll strike while the iron's cold – I will say: "Tell me what's behind that. Can we talk about what happened and how we can help that not to happen? Because it's not helpful behaviour."

The way my autistic children see detail is incredible. I walk into the kitchen and see the whole kitchen. My children will say: "Have you noticed there's a mark on the tea strainer that's in the shape of Africa. Let's talk about Africa today." I love that.

RJ: How, as youth and children's workers, can we draw that out of the children we work alongside?

CG: I think the biggest thing is to never judge. You need to be kind, to have understanding and to be listening beyond what you're seeing in front of your eyes. It's about really celebrating – not just tolerating or accepting, but actually actively celebrating – people who are different so that they feel they are just as important as everybody else. Children with additional needs have so much to contribute.

Both inside and outside the Church we invite people to tell us their truth. And then we try to control what they show us and how they do it and what parameters there are, and we box them in until they feel so reduced they've only got one sentence left rather than trusting that the child might give us 20 sentences and that the other young people there can edit. They can take out the stuff that's not for them. Not everything's going to be for you, and that's OK, but it's allowing people just to speak; allowing them to get it all out and not trying to control it. Really it should be this way with all people.

RJ: How do we support parents in this area?

CG: It's thinking: how am I, as the parent, going to receive the information you're telling me about my child? What's the purpose of telling me? Are you telling me because you really want to be collaborative (which is great) or are you telling me because you want me to know how bad it was for you trying to handle my child? It's about having grace and patience with parents as well. Often those parents are absolutely at their wits' end. They have no acceptance anywhere they go. You might be the only person who has actually given them one word of kindness that week.

RJ: What is the dynamic like between your daughters and your adopted son?

CG: I parent four different ways. So of course they're not going to like that. No

one likes to be treated differently from each other. You want equality. But what one needs the other one doesn't, and their needs mean that sometimes there's conflict. That's just how it is for us SEN [special educational needs] parents. But we chose to adopt because it's the right thing to do. If you've got a spare room in your house and love in your heart, then I think everyone should be doing it. A friend had said: "This is the 79th child I've fostered. He's about to turn 2 and he's mixed-race, and those three factors – age, race and sex – mean it will be harder for him to be picked up. Would you consider adopting?"

and maybe what we're calling neurotypical now will become obsolete. People are made differently and that's what makes us so incredible. I look at the Bible now and I'm thinking: "That writer, it's so interesting the way they write. Such autistic traits." Just look at Silicon Valley. They now operate a system where they only get autistic people in for some jobs. An autistic person will sit at their computer for 18 hours a day. Talk about focus!

There's a scripture that says: "Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he won't depart from it" and that's what it's like with my children. It isn't about putting our blueprint for their lives

you've got to earn it", that doesn't work. It's a bit like grace parenting, really. And now my kids do indiscriminate acts of kindness for one another.

Of course, there are consequences to doing stuff wrong. I understand biblically where we're at on that. If my son decides to jump the whole flight of stairs he's going to break his leg. What he doesn't need is me then sending him limping up to his bedroom, saying: "Sit on your bed for an hour." He's going to think: "I was left for months on my bed. That's easy. I've been neglected in the past. You sit me on my bed, you're just affirming everything I already know." So that's not going to work.

RJ: Tell us about the book you've contributed to...

CG: It's called *Girls and Autism* (Routledge Publishing). It's like a blueprint for life really. The whole book is so gracious. It's written by educators and health professionals, by autistic women and girls themselves, by parents, by BAME [Black, Asian and minority ethnic] individuals – everyone at every angle. Girls present in a slightly different way from boys – not always, but very often – and they can be under the radar. They mask; it's a bit like being bilingual. They'll act neurotypical. So you think: "That girl's fine, she's just laughing with her friends." But inside she's hugely anxious, really struggling and trying to hide it. If that isn't acknowledged and helped, eventually that girl is likely to develop mental health problems.

One of my daughters is like this, and then the other doesn't mask; she just blurts out whatever she's thinking. So what's the answer? Is it that we try to make her mask more and make her more bilingual, and tell her not to blurt and just hide it? I don't want her to blurt, but I also don't want her to mask because I know that if she masks she's hiding anxiety, and that's what is making her blurt. She's feeling uncertain in the space she's in. So the book has loads of strategies. It shows you how girls present.

The book is helpful for understanding mental health, too. I was hearing some figures the other day on girls who come into the system in different ways. So you go to an eating disorder unit where maybe 20 per cent of the girls are actually autistic but they've been diagnosed with anorexia or bulimia. Their autism is not really being looked at because the big thing is their eating problem, suicidal ideation or self-harm, or even the criminal justice system. These girls are vulnerable. They'll pop up in other ways because they're left undiagnosed.

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*I don't want to be told
that my autistic child
needs healing. My child
doesn't need healing*”

David and I and the family decided yes, we would. We had individual chats with each child, and they all said: "We have to do this." Our eldest daughter, who would have been about 17 at the time, said: "If there's a family that can do this it's ours." And I just thought: "Oh my gosh, I love you. I love who you've become."

RJ: How do you bring God into your parenting?

CG: I don't think I have ever intentionally thought: "Let's bring God into this relationship." I think out of the overflow of my heart my mouth speaks. God is in me and God is in them, so he is a natural part of conversation, really. There are many times where they say: "Could you just pray please, Mum?" I've sat on suicide watch six times in three years with one of my children, and that's a very dark place to be, but there is no place that God doesn't go. He's right there in that, and we all know that as a family. So God's just a part of everyday life, and we acknowledge that he has created us all very differently, and that's to be celebrated because it's his plan.

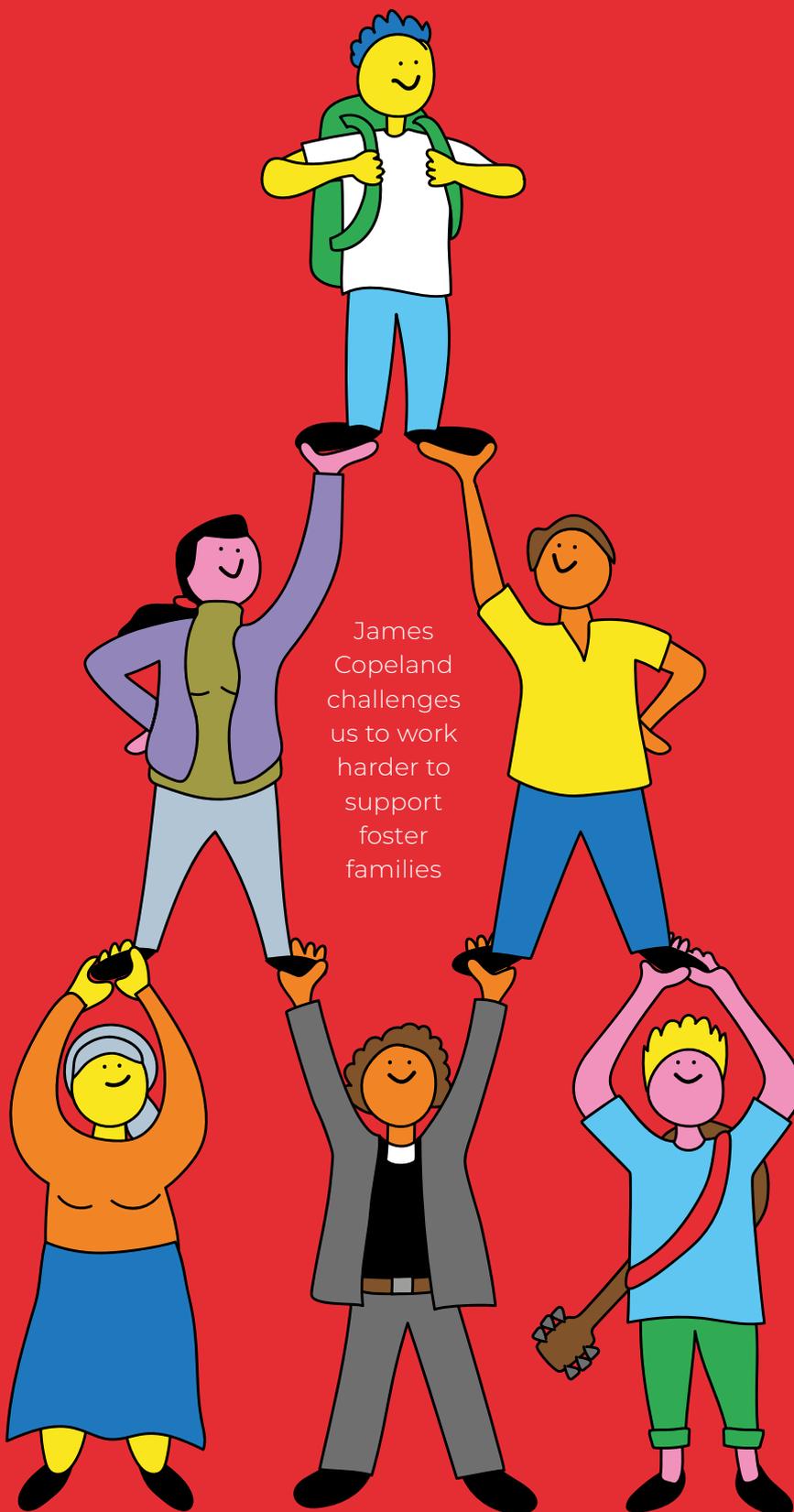
I don't want to be told that my autistic child needs healing. My child doesn't need healing. Maybe in 20 years' time autistic people will be the predominant brain type,

on them. It's about saying to each child: "Who are you?" That's what I do with my vocal coaching students, too. Let's explore this together, and whoever you are, let's make that more and let's grow that. What a privilege parenting is. What a privilege coaching is. What a privilege pastoring is. To be able to be that seer; to be that person who looks and sees everything that's in that person, and is able to bring that out. That, to me, is the most wonderful and terrifying job as a parent.

RJ: If you could go back to the first week you became parents, is there anything you'd tell yourself?

CG: I would say to be myself in my parenting, and to stop worrying about trying to be somebody else's mum. Non-violent resistance (NVR) is something that was started in Israel to make peace between different groups of people, and it's now used in parenting – particularly in adoptive families, but it works for all of our children. It takes out all punishments and all rewards, which I found really challenging to begin with. So our son might find a little Lego set on his pillow, and the first thing he'll say is: "What did I do to get this Lego set?" I'll say: "Nothing. I've just put it there because I love you." If I'm teaching unconditional love and then saying: "But

It takes a church to foster a child



James
Copeland
challenges
us to work
harder to
support
foster
families



It was a Thursday afternoon and my wife called to say: “Help! I’ve just agreed to foster four children. You’re going to have to call the social worker back and say we can’t take in that many!”

Sure enough, I called the social worker and this conversation happened...

Me: “Hi, I think my wife just said we will have four foster children. I’m afraid we can’t possibly take them as we don’t have four beds.”

Social worker: “That’s a shame, as they’re currently in a taxi to your house.”

Thankfully, our church rallied round, and before the taxi had even pulled up members of the congregation appeared with travel cots and provisions.

My wife and I have been foster carers since the first year we were married. Six years into fostering we’ve learnt a lot about what church support looks like and what it should look like. Often those two things don’t quite match up.

Biblical context

A quick flick through Acts 6 gives a bit of biblical context as to what caring for vulnerable children should look like in the Church. Here we are told about a situation that threatened to tear the early Church apart. During the daily distribution of bread to the poor and widows, Greek Jews were not receiving food. This was partly because the apostles were too busy with the growing numbers and increasing needs to have put a system of management in place. I’m sure growing too rapidly is a problem we’d all love to have in our churches! But the response to ministry with vulnerable people in their community tells us a lot about the way support for those working with vulnerable children should look today.

The apostles realised something needed to be done and appointed seven people to lead this ministry. The first thing to note is that Luke uses the Greek word *diakonís* to describe their ministry. This refers to the ministry of the Word and to meeting the needs of the poor and marginalised. Just like the original seven, those who choose to care for the vulnerable by fostering should be rooted in the Word and in providing care. The two ministries are designed to work hand in hand, not focusing on one to the exclusion of the other. (What I say here is also true for adoption and those who adopt. Though in practice these options are different, their outworking can be very similar.)

Luke also notes that the seven were chosen because they were full of the Spirit and wisdom. Their role is going to be tough and they’re going to need both, just like foster carers. Finally, Luke makes a point of noting that between them they represented every people group within the early Church. As such, foster carers are a diverse bunch, unified by a ministry to vulnerable children.

Indeed, foster care is a ministry, and as such it deserves a culture of honour. When a volunteer joins any sort of church ministry we work out how we can support them. We provide training for them, leave gaps in the rota so they can rest and tell them their ministry is appreciated. The same should be true for foster carers in our churches. If caring for vulnerable children is treated as a ministry, the onus is on the church body to reach out in support rather than on the foster or adoptive parents.

Take a moment to think. If you have any foster carers in your church, do you treat their caring as a ministry? Does it engender the same honour as your pastor, children’s or youth workers, worship leaders or missionaries do? How can we intentionally put the right support structures in place for them in our churches?



All children in the foster care system will have some level of additional challenges because of the trauma they have experienced

Offering help

Studies have tried to gauge which types of people put themselves forward to become foster carers. They have found that it is usually pioneers who step up to this ministry: those who see an issue and want to be part of the solution. They see a child in need of a family and they step in to be the answer to that child's need. The thing about these people is that they are often the worst at asking for support, yet the nature of the all-embracing challenge they are taking on means they are most in need of it!

I know this feeling personally. Asking for help can feel like admitting failure. I often think that doing so imposes my choice to foster on others, or that their response will be that I should give the child back and do something else.

But what does 'support' mean? It is a much-used word in church contexts, covering a myriad of different things. It can be overwhelming to know where to start. Too often, support looks like: "Let me know if there's anything I can do." This is very hard to access, as it puts the onus on the person who is already over-stretched to work out what they need. This is especially difficult if asking for help feels like a big enough hurdle in itself; crossing the lines of pride that consider admitting the need for help as failure. For many, being supported means being known. Take time to get to know the foster carers in your church community. Talk to them and try to understand what they're going through so you can work out together what good support might mean for them.



If changes work for those who are most in need they're likely to work for everyone else

This is where I want to issue a warning. In an honest attempt to show support, people often respond to a challenge by saying: "Oh, my children are the same." This may be an innocent attempt at offering solidarity, but I can assure you that they are very unlikely to be the same. Birth children will operate from a place of secure attachment. Children who have experienced early life trauma (as all children in care will have) may go through the same challenges in their childhood as birth children, but their experiences are likely to be intensified, as they have not been able to develop the same coping strategies. All children in the foster care system will have some level of additional challenges because of the trauma they have experienced, which led to them being cared for outside their birth family.

As for the foster carers, they are not relating to the child from the same place birth parents would with their children. This alone can be tiring. They may also be facilitating contact between the foster child and the birth parents, which is emotionally bogging at the best of times.

A better way

Rather than normalising difficult behaviour, find ways to say: "I see you." In one church we know, a foster carer's child had a problem with bed-wetting. Church members encouraged the carer to leave the sheets out each day so they could return them freshly laundered. Another church bought an industrial iron and volunteers ironed the foster family's laundry, releasing them from a mundane chore so they could focus on the children. Others have restructured their church services and children's and youth ministries to meet the needs of the foster children in their churches. After all, if changes work for those who are most in need they're likely to work for everyone else.

Here are some ideas for churches:

- Check out the Foundations Course from Home for Good. You could run it in your church. This will give everyone a better understanding of the needs of vulnerable children, and what fostering and adoption really look like, as well as providing a biblical basis for why we need to respond.
- Celebrate and pray for those who foster or adopt. You could have an Adoption Sunday once a year to do just that.
- Make sure your volunteers are trained up to understand the needs of looked-after and adopted children.
- Work through your safeguarding and risk-assessment policies to make sure they are appropriate for the complexities of children who have experienced trauma. This shouldn't be done in response to children who have arriving at your church, but should be in place before they do.
- Organise meal rotas (make this your standard practice) for those who are newly fostering or adopting. But be aware that they might say no. A foster child might need to see the food being prepared every day to know that they are safe and well fed. Alternatively, food just turning up at the door could leave them nervous in case it doesn't come every night.
- Think outside the box. Maybe you can advocate for carers and find someone to help them around the house. Household jobs can sometimes come second for those who are helping a child live through the after-effects of their trauma, so a helping hand could be useful.

Here are some ideas for individuals:

- Listen without judgement and be willing to have your thinking changed with regard to what is going on.
- Welcome them and embrace the chaos.
- Turn up with a meal that is child-appropriate (remember to check first).
- Be a support carer (if you can). You will need two forms of photo ID and a utility statement to get a DBS check. Often that is the first thing needed for you to support them by either taking the child(ren) out or giving the carers a night off (this obviously isn't the case with adoption). So many offers of help fall at this administrative hurdle, so jump the gun and provide copies that your friends can pass on to their agency.
- If the foster carers have birth children they may be feeling a little left out. You can always take them out to do something fun.



Ending well

When you're fostering, a placement can come to an end. Sometimes this is a happy situation: the child goes back to the birth family, as they have worked out what they needed to, or to adopters (which can be bittersweet for the carers). But sometimes for reasons beyond our control a placement has to come to an end. This hurts and the carers need to grieve. It can be really complex and those who haven't fostered might struggle to understand it. A placement ending is not a failure, though a carer might feel it is.

Children's and families' workers should be aware of this. The other children in the foster family should be given some sort of narrative by their grown-ups, but any children who have moved on will leave a gap in your youth or children's work. We are a family in the Church, and as such we are inextricably impacted by one another. Other children will wonder what has happened, so talk with the adults involved to know how to respond to questions or to explain what has happened in an age-appropriate way.

Endings are a good time to remind ourselves that God loves these children (and carers) more than anyone else could. It is his job to redeem all things; we are just bit-part players in that story. One day this hurt will all be explained, but for now it is our job to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. Let's all make sure that we are there to do so in our broken, yet wonderful, church families.

JAMES COPELAND

is head of partnerships and innovation at Home for Good, and has been a foster carer for six years.

Discipling children with additional needs

Kay Morgan-Gurr explores spiritual development in young people with additional needs





Last year, I had someone quietly sit next to me and whisper a question that really shocked me: “Is it really possible for those who have learning disabilities to become Christians?” The subtext was: “If they can’t tell me what makes them Christian to the level I expect, how can they be?” My answer was remarkably restrained, especially knowing that I can get very cross when faced with such ideas: “Yes they can, but often no thanks to a church that doesn’t see the need to teach these children and young people in a way they can access.”

I often speak on this subject, making the point that when the Holy Spirit is at work we don’t have the automatic right to understand or know what he is doing. Here’s the shocker: the Spirit doesn’t always need our help either. A child or young person doesn’t have to explain their faith with five points of clear theology. Their God is just as powerful as ours, and he speaks to them in a way they can understand and respond to. Their worship is a sweet aroma, cherished by God. Sometimes the depth of their faith can only be “Jesus loves me, this I know”, and God loves it and them. Thank goodness, and God, for that.

You don’t have to have an additional need or disability to face the “Can they be Christians?” question, but it is an issue that many of our children who happen to have disabilities and additional needs face all the time. And so do their families. Those of us leading and ministering in the Church – including children’s, youth and families’ work – are more than aware that part of our remit is helping to grow enduring faith in the lives of those we are responsible for. We do this by supporting families, working through the wider church family and operating within age-appropriate groups. For some reason when we think of young people with additional needs and disabilities we go as far as physical and sensory inclusion, but we sometimes fall short when it comes to spiritual inclusion.

We also put the ‘additional needs’ children into a single silo where one size fits all, and it doesn’t work. In fact, this method tends to favour one specialism and forget the rest. If our starting point is to think of two silos – for want of better words: those with additional needs or disabilities and those without – we will inevitably forget one of those silos. Not deliberately, but because our thinking often prioritises physical and emotional access ahead of spiritual development. Our starting point needs to be looking at all our children and then asking: how can I remove the obstacles in the way of how some of them will learn, and instead put in place things that will boost access and understanding?

“
A child or young person
doesn’t have to explain
their faith with five points
of clear theology

As part of my role with Children Matter, I have been looking at lifelong, resilient faith formation for young people in every sphere of life. We have built on the Australian Here2Stay research and found that there are at least five areas that help to build this resilient faith. In looking at these areas we can see that there is no difference for those who have additional needs and disabilities.

Community

The first of these areas is community: helping the Church to thrive as a growing, intergenerational faith community while supporting the family as a key place of spiritual nurture. The Bible tells us in various places how important community is to all of us. Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIRV) says: “Let us consider how we can stir up one another to love. Let us help one another to do good works. Let us not give up meeting together. Some are in the habit of doing this. Instead, let us cheer each other up with words of hope.”

When we consider that many children with additional needs have been forced out of the Church and their families have effectively been ostracised, this passage takes on an extra dimension. Where and how do these young people find community when the Church is out of bounds?

Rachel had one child on the autistic spectrum and a child with specific medical needs requiring many stays in hospital. She had been turned away from the church she grew up in, having been told to “find a church more appropriate to her needs”. She found her new church by searching the internet for one that mentioned access on their website. She met with the children’s leaders to talk about her children, but in doing that found many others in the church started to do small things to help them as a family. Some sat alongside them on a Sunday and assured her that noise and movement was not a problem in services, and they took time to build trust with both her children. Sometimes there would be a postcard through the door saying “We’re praying”. Sometimes a casserole would magically appear on the days her child had a hospital appointment.

“

We must allow children with additional needs to contribute as active participants in mission

Encounter

The next area is encounter: creating opportunities for children to connect with the big story of the Bible and making space for them to encounter the living Jesus for themselves. As youth, children’s and families’ workers this is another part of what we do. We get the importance of this. Most of us also see the difficulties some of our young people face in this area. There are no resources for many because most producers of resources tend to go for a one-size-fits-all strategy (which is more financially viable). For those who do consider additional needs in their publications, we generally get another layer of one size fits all. Many think that repurposing material for younger children with older young people is fine if they have additional needs, when actually it is just patronising for many. Disability or not, they are still the age they are.

But what about those with physical disabilities? A lot of the discussion around additional needs at the moment covers social, sensory and learning difficulties. We forget that we have children with sight loss, hearing loss and mobility difficulties. There are precious few resources for young people with sight problems and other reading difficulties. Where can they find resources that encourage an ongoing encounter with Jesus? It’s even harder if you are between the ages of 9 and 16, as most of the specialist material is aimed at the younger and older ends of our work.

Harry loves colour. He talks to God using colours and he says that God talks back to him in colours too. When he doesn’t know what to say or how to express his feelings in ‘real words’, he knows God understands his colour language.



Dialogue

Dialogue is another area we consider: encouraging faith to be both talked about and lived out within peer relationships, supported by mentors and the wider church family. It's good to talk, and when we use the word 'dialogue' we naturally think of the verbal version of talking. But there are many forms of communication: signing, using symbols, written communication, facial expressions, actions and even behaviour. I've worked with young people with cerebral palsy who 'nose spell', using their noses to spell out words in the air. For me as a dyslexic, trying to decipher and put together letters that were back to front made for some hilarious (and very long) conversations! But it was worth it.

Some of the questions I was asked using this method would challenge even the most qualified theologians. But my young friends felt listened to, and many became Christ-followers. Sadly, they were let down big time by their churches and slowly walked or rolled away from the Church, just because people couldn't understand that 'non-verbal' didn't equate to 'non-Christian'. There were no peer relationships with other young Christians on offer and there was no suitable mentoring in place.

Some young people are non-verbal because the stress of speaking is too much. Also known as being selective mute, this part of the autistic spectrum is not understood well. But it shouldn't be a barrier to the dialogue needed to support faith. For those who need it, let's find new and imaginative ways to support this vital part of faith formation.

Belinda has cerebral palsy and a whole load of questions about God. She used an electronic talker to communicate her questions using her thumb knuckle to type. Over a coffee slurped through a straw, her youth worker spent a lot of time going through each of Belinda's questions. She appreciated being spoken to like the 15-year-old she is.

Milestones

Milestones in our children's lives are also big things: enabling peak experiences and celebrating key moments or anchor points in their lives and spiritual journeys. You can probably recall those moments when God felt extra close, or when you understood more about God. I've had a few of those. For many children and young people those moments occur on residential camps and at festivals, but for a significant number these events are not accessible. There are still organisers who turn those with additional needs away because "it might affect the enjoyment of others".

For some, that defining moment comes at a special activity put on at their church, where they feel safe and understood. Then there are those anchor points that are familiar to all of us, such as baptism, confirmation or moving up to the next group. These things can be celebrated by the whole community, possibly videoed or being given a certificate to mark the day.

One member of the Additional Needs Alliance community tells of a young person who had grown up going to his additional needs group. He later opted to go to the church's Alpha group, which she supported him through. He is now preparing to be baptised. She says: "Some of his understanding is a bit mixed up, but when I asked him questions in order to help him write his testimony, he was very clear about knowing that God loves him, that Jesus died for him and forgives his sins, and that the Holy Spirit gives him power both to make good choices in his life and to help him battle temptation. Because of his needs, he would have found it very difficult to be part of the young people's groups, and I don't think he would have got to this stage of faith if the option of our group wasn't there for him." This shows a whole mix of things that have helped to develop faith, with each area of faith formation underpinning another, culminating in a key moment in this young man's faith journey: baptism. This is a great example of the different areas of faith development in action.

Action

Another area remains – action: allowing children to contribute as active participants in mission and giving them the opportunity to respond with compassion to the world around them. This area continues to be one that is often neglected for children with additional needs. There are many reasons for this, including the historical view of disability being something we pity. Many people

think of disabled people as recipients of our action rather than the source of action. I agree with the idea that our young people need the space to prayerfully decide where God would have them serve, with us being the facilitators. But we need to remember that when we are facilitating action for those with additional needs we may need to present the options, create the space to see and understand, and, where necessary, give a social story to support them in putting their faith into action. (A very simple explanation of a social story is a story that accurately describes a context, skill, achievement or concept for young people, usually those on the autistic spectrum. Do find out more from those who know how to write them.)

For me, as a predominantly non-verbal child until my early school years, I learnt a great deal by watching others. My mum baked and took pies to people who were ill, taking me along with her. She did their ironing and explained to me why she did so. As I grew and found my voice, I would independently go and visit older church members, all because someone showed me the way.

Rebecca struggles with severe ME. She wanted to "do something for God", but knew how limited she was. She had found many other Christian teenagers with ME in social media groups. They came from all over the world. They now have a Skype prayer meeting every Thursday afternoon to pray for the world.

There is plenty of discussion about faith development in our young people, and how we support families as the key place for spiritual nurture. But for many families who have children with additional needs the struggle is greater and the resources are minimal. If you are the parent of a child with additional needs or a disability the struggle is even harder, as much of the material out there – with the occasional exception – is made for people who can physically read print. Young people with additional needs and disabilities have the right to be disciplined in faith, to grow in the Spirit and to practically live out their faith. Please don't forget them.

KAY MORGAN-GURR

is chair of the Children Matter group and co-founder of the Additional Needs Alliance. She is also part of the Evangelical Alliance council and is the additional needs and disability advisor to Spring Harvest. She has been in children's ministry for over 26 years, prior to that she was a children's nurse specialising in additional needs.



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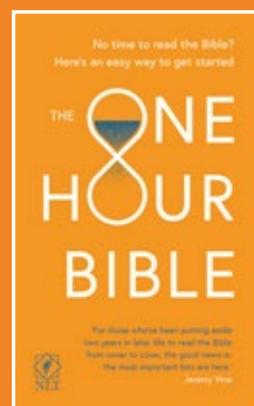
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Welcome to your brand-new mental health column. Each month I'll try and answer your questions about children, young people and mental health. We know this is an issue everyone is talking about, but how can we practically help the children and young people in our care? And how can we bring the hope of Jesus to a generation in crisis? If you or those you work alongside have a question you would like me to address, tweet or direct message me at @RachaelNewham90 or email ycw@premier.org.uk.

How can I support families when their child is living with mental illness?

The best youth and children's work is done when it includes the whole family, but that doesn't mean we should have to do all the pastoral work needed to support a family that is coping with a young person's mental illness.

When supporting parents, we need to ensure that our churches have a pastoral care policy and structure. Pastoral care structures needn't be complex, but they should involve a team because pastoral care isn't the job of a one-man band! That might be the clergy along with volunteers, specific staff or a mixture of both, but ensuring that pastoral care is organised means that the whole family can be effectively cared for and that no one is forgotten. In this case, pastoral care for the parents can be initiated by a youth or children's worker but backed up by the wider church leadership and congregation. For more information about pastoral care and structures, check out youthandchildrens.work/links.

“

Mentoring can enable families to feel cared for and give them space to process their own feelings

Mental illness often enters families like a grenade, destroying previously strong relationships and fracturing bonds between parents and their children. Peace of any kind can be elusive, so we can support parents by sharing 'shalom'. We can have a tendency to think of shalom as nothing more than 'peace', but the reality is far greater and more beautiful. While shalom won't ever be experienced in all its fullness in our fallen world, the gospel is clear about the fact that we can share it in the here and now.

Shalom isn't just a concept, it's intensely practical. Theologian John Wilkinson describes it like this: "The root meaning of the word shalom is wholeness, completeness and well-being...It does, however, have several second meanings encompassing health, security, friendship, prosperity, justice, righteousness and salvation, all of which are necessary if wholeness, completeness and well-being are to come about." In other words, sharing shalom with parents whose child is living with a mental health condition

is about offering friendship, coming alongside to advocate for justice, encouraging healthy lifestyles and cultivating places where people can feel safe to share the challenges they are facing.

Practically, supporting parents and carers is about encouraging and equipping the wider congregation to step up. Here are a few ways to do this:

- **Prayer:** It's important to galvanise the congregation to pray, but check first whether the family is happy with this or if they would prefer any prayer to be more general or anonymised.
- **Funds:** When a child is hospitalised as a result of mental illness it can mean being treated far away from home, resulting in huge costs just for families to spend time together. By having a pot of money specifically for pastoral care you can relieve some of the financial burden these families are facing. If money isn't an issue, it might be that organising a meal or lift rota helps to ease the load.
- **Friendship:** Mental illnesses are all-consuming and can leave other members of the family feeling isolated, so mentoring can enable them to feel cared for and give them space to process their own feelings about the way the illness is affecting them.
- **Advocacy:** The mental health system can be difficult to navigate, so offering to accompany families to meetings to take notes or be a spokesperson can help the mechanics of mental health care to run more smoothly.
- **Talk:** Encourage parents to seek pastoral or professional support to talk through their own emotions and the way the situation has affected them and their relationships.

Does your church have a pastoral care policy? How can it best be put into practice?

RACHAEL NEWHAM

is founder of Christian mental health charity ThinkTwice (@ThinkTwiceInfo) and author of *Learning to Breathe*, a memoir and theological reflection on mental illness.



Jesus helps us rescue trafficked children

When I was 8 I didn't know God. I remember watching a broadcast from Feed the Children and it had these kids from Ethiopia. Their stomachs were protruded, flies were landing on their faces and their bones were sticking out of their chests. I remember them saying: "This Christmas these kids don't want toys, they want food."

I'm from a Mexican background, so we have a lot of family at Christmas and the living room is filled with gifts. I remember crying in the dark under the Christmas tree and saying to my mum: "I want to send my Barbies to Ethiopia. I don't want any gifts this Christmas."

Fast-forward about 20 years, and I was on the war zone border of Thailand and Burma around Christmas. I had brought a big tub of dolls, trucks, sweaters and cookies. We went to bed for the night, and all of a sudden I heard little voices outside our window and they were singing. They sounded so beautiful. And we were like: "Who is singing at this hour? It's freezing cold outside. We're in the mountains. We're in the war zone."

We went out and saw these little kids in raggedy clothes. I couldn't tell what they were singing because it was in their hill tribe language, so I asked my interpreter. She said: "These are war zone orphans, but they believe in Jesus, and so they're singing. They don't have anything to give this Christmas, so they go around Christmas carolling, giving their voices. That's the present they give."

So we gave them the cookies, sweaters and toys. They were playing with the dolls in the plastic, and I said: "Please tell them it's theirs. They can open it up." Our translator said: "This is the first toy they've ever seen. They want to keep it for ever. That's why they're playing with it in the plastic."

I just couldn't stop crying. And God spoke to me. He said: "Do you remember when you were 8 and you wanted to send your Barbies to Ethiopia? I never forgot that, and I put that dream in your heart. You didn't know me, but I knew you. From now on you're not only going to send Barbies to Ethiopia, you're going to bring Christmas to children all around the world. You're going to give them their very first gifts and tell them about me."

I had a dream to rescue children. I went straight from Bible school to the mission field and became mama to 52 kids. At that time God gave us a plan and a strategy: prevent, rescue and heal. Firstly, we prevent child exploitation by going to the places where the traffickers would go to get the children. If you give a child an education you can lessen by 50 per cent their chances of being exploited or trafficked. In our prevention projects we have 500 children. We keep their families together and we stop the parents from selling the children.

We raise children up not only to know their rescuer, Jesus Christ, but to become rescuers for their generation

In a slum in one of the migrant communities there were no children because they'd be in the field helping their parents. Then as soon as they turned 12 they were sold to Bangkok, so there were no kids over 10 at the school. Since we've stepped in we have 100 children in that school.

Secondly, we rescue children out of their desperate situations. We've got 145 children in our rescue homes. There are up to ten children in each safe house, and we give them a mum and a dad. They see a mum that doesn't sell them and a father that doesn't abuse them. They see a loving family unit.

Thirdly, heal is our aftercare, where we provide education and vocational training so children can have hope for their future. We teach the kids: "It's not the missionaries who rescued you. It's Jesus." We say they are rescued to rescue. We raise them up not only to know their rescuer, Jesus Christ, but to become rescuers for their generation.

I did not know one believer when I was growing up. My parents divorced at 13 and I was a very troubled kid. I was very angry.

I had to change schools. My aunt became a Christian when I was 19, and she acted differently. Something drew my heart to call my aunt, and I asked: "Can I come over to your house and dye my hair?" When I pulled up they were leaving for church. I'd never been, so I was curious. I walked in and couldn't deny what I felt. I felt peace. I felt whole. I felt love. The preacher said: "You've been trying to fill that hole in your heart with everything else, but only Jesus can fill that hole." My 14-year-old cousin asked if I wanted to go up for the altar call, so I gave the mess of my life to Jesus. At that moment it was like warm honey from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet, and I felt cleansed and whole.

I remember calling my friends and saying: "I've just met the man of my dreams: Jesus." They later said: "We didn't know how you went from bar girl to Mother Teresa in two seconds, but if he could save you then he could save us." And one by one I led my friends to the Lord, which was my prayer, because nobody had ever told me.

I was also instantly healed of epilepsy. I haven't had a seizure since I was 19. The first scripture I ever turned to was about Christ making us a new creation. That's exactly what happened to me. I knew it was my second chance in life. I knew I would: one, fight child exploitation and two, tell as many people as possible about Jesus in my lifetime, because nobody ever told me.

Children are God's secret weapon. Firstly, I believe he wants children to fight for their own generation. Children are bold and they have faith. Children will speak up, and they won't be embarrassed. They can advocate and be God's voice. Secondly, I've seen children raise support. I've seen them fundraise. Thirdly, they can donate: a doll, a toy, a backpack. They don't realise that their trash will be somebody else's treasure. Fourthly, I think children can go. They can serve, they can volunteer. I saw a little girl in church yesterday and she's a chaplain at her school. We need to not underestimate children. They are powerful.

LANA VASQUEZ

works for Life Impact International.



THE VIDEO SERIES

We have teamed up with Limitless to launch a brand new video series of Leadership 101, designed to help busy youth and children's ministry leaders invest in their leadership development.

Each month we will release a new video of Tim Alford sharing his leadership wisdom. So, why not schedule a regular slot in the diary to gather your team and volunteers, then watch and discuss these videos together.

You can find out more and check out the videos at youthandchildrens.work/leadership101.

- *How To Lead Change*
- *Pause, Reflect, Innovate*
- *The Paradox of Apology*
- *Receiving Feedback*
- *Giving Feedback*
- *Do Less Better*
- *...and many more.*



For many of us, leadership is a by-product of youth and children's work. But we want to lead well, so each month we'll unpack an issue we face as leaders, and offer some guidance to traverse it.

What, where, who? Part 2

When was the last time you went to see a 3D film? Did you remember to take the glasses you were forced to buy last time?

Of course you didn't! And when you got to your screening with your brand-new set of overpriced glasses and the film started playing, did you tip your glasses to see what the picture looked like without them? Of course you did! What was it like? Fuzzy, right? The image was messy and difficult to define. But when you popped those glasses back on the image came back to life and clarity resumed.

Defining your mission, vision and values will do exactly that for your ministry: give you clarity and bring it to life. The decisions that once felt fuzzy will be made clear. The direction that once felt unknown will come with a new certainty, and the trajectory of your ministry will come alive.

Last month we explored *mission*, which we defined as what you do. The next stop on our journey is *vision*.

Vision: where you are going?

Your vision dictates where you are going. It is a clearly defined destination; a measurable goal. Vision paints a clear picture of a God-ordained future, which mobilises people to journey together toward that destination. Vision is the fuel that leaders run on; the rallying cry that teams gather around, sustaining focused effort week after week, year after year. As Andy Stanley puts it in his book *Visioneering*: "Vision is a clear mental picture of what could be, fuelled by the conviction that it should be."

Without a clearly defined vision we are in danger of leading our teams around in circles, doing the same things over and over because it's what we've always done, or doing new things that seem to be working because they're what someone else has done! Leading without vision is what Jesus described as "the blinding leading the blind". And do you remember how that worked out? I'll give you a clue... it wasn't good!

If you don't have vision you will get lost. Now, that's one thing if you're out

there on your own, but another thing entirely if you are a leader and are taking others with you. So if vision is really that important, how do we get it?

Holy discontent

Andy Stanley writes: "Visions are born in the soul of a man or woman who is consumed with the tension between what is and what could be." The best place to start is with things that break your heart. What is happening in our society that you just can't stand? What patterns do you see in the lives of your children and young people that you just can't tolerate? What is happening in your community that you just have to see change? These areas of holy discontent are often the birthplace of vision. It can be painful to dwell on them, but if you are to allow vision to rise, dwell on them you must.

“

Our vision was a solution to a problem that we had to do something about

At Limitless, our vision began when we discovered that 111 of our churches had no young people. This broke our hearts. It was clear that unless we helped those churches change their trajectories they would die out with their current congregations. We had to do something. Our vision – born from our subsequent prayers and discussions – was to pioneer 100 new youth ministries through churches that are not currently reaching young people. We launched a new initiative called Limitless Pioneers, and have thus far worked with eleven churches to start up brand new youth ministries.

Our vision was a solution to a problem that we had to do something about. Which problems are you compelled to act on? Could it be that God is stirring vision in your heart in that area?

Leaders who listen

As we begin to identify the problems that need addressing, it is paramount that

we bring them prayerfully before God. Vision is not simply thinking up the next great idea, it's about getting ourselves on God's agenda. That's why he is looking for leaders who are listening. Have you prayed? Have you fasted? Have you been quiet and waited on God in solitude? Because any vision worth acting on is worth waiting on.

Good idea or God idea?

When the Lord begins stirring something in your heart, how do you know whether it's really from him? Here are a few checkpoints that might help:

- A God-ordained vision will always help to fulfil the wider mission of God.
- A God-ordained vision will never contradict scripture.
- A God-ordained vision will keep you awake at night.
- A God-ordained vision will be too big for you to handle yourself, because divine vision necessitates divine intervention!
- A God-ordained vision will be financially implausible, logistically challenging and practically improbable.
- A God-ordained vision will require a maturity and leadership skill you don't have yet, and will cause you to place your dependency on God.

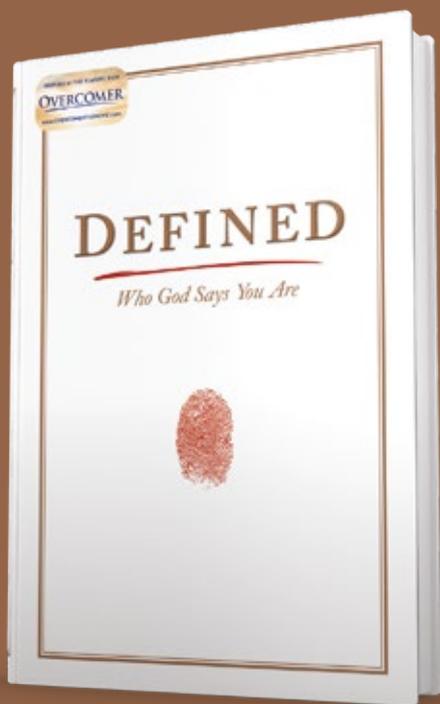
Leaders, if we want to see God do something supernatural we must attempt something that is beyond our natural ability to accomplish. So don't hold back. Dream big. Let vision for transformation stir in your heart. Drive relentlessly toward that vision of a preferred future, and let the kingdom of God come on earth as it is in heaven!

We have launched a new video series based on Leadership 101. Visit youthandchildrens.work/leadership101.

TIM ALFORD

is national director of Limitless and youth ministry specialist lecturer at Regents Theological College.

“THE DAY WE
QUIT LETTING
OUR FEELINGS
RUN OUR LIVES
WILL BE A
GREAT DAY OF
LIBERATION.”



Scripture teaches that we are all made in the image of God. We do not define ourselves—the Creator does. We were all created to be known and loved by God. Once the answers are clear, we can move forward and discover all God has called us to be. In the *Defined* book, join Alex Kendrick and Stephen Kendrick to know who they are in Christ and understand how their identity in Christ shapes their life.

Available at LifeWay.com or CLC Kingsway bookstores.

LifeWay



Faith at Home

Welcome to Faith at Home, our monthly resource for those seeking to develop children's faith at home. We know that raising the next generation of Jesus-followers isn't easy, but hopefully the ideas and stories inside these pages can help us all along the way. You could tear out these pages to give to parents you work with or point them in the direction of youthandchildrens.work/faithathome, where it's available to download for free (and won't hurt your beautiful magazine).

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Fair's fair



Bob's Bedtime Stories

Download a free ebook of Bob's stories at youthandchildrens.work/stories



We're also on the radio

Join us every Saturday at 8:30am on Premier Christian Radio as we talk about parenting and faith development

Download free at youthandchildrens.work/faithathome



Sharing our kitchen table

Krish Kandiah explores how we can practise radical hospitality and encourage our children to do likewise





I was sitting at the dinner table, and although I was physically present I was a million miles away. Things were kicking off at work; a major dispute had led to more than a dozen staff leaving the organisation. On top of that, I had just found out that my mother was dying of cancer. Church was proving difficult as my work colleagues attended with me. My sleep was disrupted and I lost interest in food because I couldn't switch off from all the turmoil. I was not taking things well. I felt betrayed by the Church, by fellow Christians, by the whole machinery behind Christian ministry and even by God.

I was also disappointed in myself. I should have had enough resources to cope with this. I had always believed that the God of the gospel was big enough to handle any problems we might face. And I thought I was pretty clued up when it came to understanding struggles. I had been mentored by youth workers, trained by Christian university campus workers, apprenticed by church leaders and had even invested in theological education. I had a CV that included missionary, pastor and lecturer at a prestigious university. I had even written books. But all of this proved inadequate for handling what I was facing.

I always remember that dark period of my life when I hear otherwise shocking stories of the faith struggles of prominent Christian leaders. The recent public faith deconstructions of pastor Joshua Harris and Hillsong's Marty Sampson may have reflected mine: let down on too many fronts at the same time, with a theology that seems to have answers to tragedy and disappointment but can't really stand the rigour of circumstances beyond our control.

New life

The game changer for me was that in the middle of the lowest point in my life our family became foster parents. We already had three children aged 7, 6 and 5, and had just finished the necessarily invasive fostering assessment process. Suddenly, we received the call for our first placement: a newborn baby girl.

That little girl lived with us as our foster daughter for two years before we finally adopted her. As I nourished and nurtured her, she brought me back to life. On 11th September, her status in our family became legal and permanent. It is a date that brings to mind the worst atrocities mankind can wreak against one another. But for me that courtroom date will always signify one of the highlights of my life. Perhaps it shines even more brightly because of the darkness that surrounded it: the darkness of 9/11 and of terrorism wherever it occurs; the darkness of a world where workplace bullying is allowed to continue unchecked; the darkness of a world full of cancer, mental health crises and children legally removed from parents who had not been protected themselves when they were young.



The most important place when it comes to following Christ is the kitchen table

I never did rediscover my relationship with God. I say that because I encountered a whole new relationship with him. The developing relationship with my adopted daughter opened my eyes to the truth that God was my adoptive father, and that I was his adopted child. To be honest, it still surprises me how much this revolutionised my faith. But in researching my two latest books I have discovered that this link is plainly written throughout the pages of our Bibles.

I thought I understood the Bible pretty well – I lectured in theology around the world! But the experience of welcoming someone else's child into our family opened my eyes to an essential aspect of Christian discipleship I had previously failed to notice. Whether you start with the story of Abraham inadvertently welcoming God into his tent for dinner, or with Jesus visiting Zacchaeus' house, or with the kingdom of heaven being likened to a feast that was rejected by the establishment and offered to outsiders, or with Jesus' explanation of the final Judgement Day in Matthew 25 swinging on whether we welcomed the hungry, the thirsty, the sick and the stranger, it's hard to avoid the simple and scary truth that hospitality is an essential part of Christian discipleship.

This is repeatedly illustrated in the worked-out examples of Naomi and Ruth, David and Mephibosheth, Pharaoh's daughter and baby Moses, John and Jesus' mother and countless others: invitation and inclusion, despite natural barriers. Somehow, I had missed it. I had reduced the gospel down to a set of propositions that needed to be believed about Jesus, sin, the cross and salvation. And by doing so I had managed to ignore most of what Jesus actually said and almost all of what he actually did for most of my Christian life.



Move to the table

Too often we have made the study the most important room in the house of Christian discipleship. We assume that it's what you know that saves you, it's what you believe that shapes you and it's what you say that defines you. But I have come to discover that, biblically, the most important place when it comes to following Christ is the kitchen table. Who do we let into our homes and hearts? Who do we share food with regularly? Who is offered a listening ear, sustenance, help, time and hope, with a bit of food and drink thrown in for good measure?

I am passionate about helping children and young people make this connection from desk to kitchen table, and about giving them a vision for the normality of radical hospitality that could save lives, maybe even their own.

Teach about it

It's surprising how much of Jesus' most important work and conversations took place around food. Jesus' first miracle was providing wine at a wedding. His last meeting with his disciples before the cross was celebrating the Passover meal with them. His first visit with his disciples after the resurrection was when he barbecued fish for them after they had been fishing and caught nothing. Why not look at the life of Christ based around meals, and not only teach it but model the transformational power of hospitality? My book *God is Stranger* looks at some of the most difficult-to-understand Bible texts and shows how hospitality lies at the heart of them. Why not use this as a curriculum for your youth and children's groups, or discuss it together as a family around the kitchen table?



“ *A child's life could be changed by an invitation to supper*”

Practise it

When I was in sixth form, a youth worker challenged me to invite three of my friends over for a campfire barbecue, and to explain to them why I had become a Christian. It was out of my comfort zone. But while we were making s'mores I shared a little about my journey to faith. They were open to hearing about it, asked intelligent questions and – after a short evangelistic course – one of them became a Christian. I have loved being in churches where the young people have run their own Alpha courses: cooking food for their friends, doing the talks themselves and hosting tables. I have seen hospitality as a powerful opportunity for rich evangelistic dialogue and delicious conversation starters.

Welcome the stranger

I was definitely an outsider at my school. I was the brownest boy there. I was relentlessly teased about being from Pakistan (I wasn't), my dad running a corner shop (he didn't) and my mother growing up in the jungle (she didn't). I was intrigued when one of my friends became a Christian and showed remarkable kindness and compassion toward me in my class. He often invited me to his home, where he shared his kitchen table with fostered and adopted siblings.

I couldn't articulate it then, but his home was a remarkable picture of the hospitality of God. His life and words brought me to faith in Jesus. In every classroom our children and young

people study in there will be children like me. Those that feel like outsiders. Those who need to know and feel unconditional love. Those whose lives could be changed by an invitation to supper. We need to release our young people to demonstrate and articulate the welcoming grace of God to them. And we need to open our homes and share our kitchen tables.

My life and faith were transformed after welcoming our tiny little guest into our home. I understood something more of grace, unconditional love, hope and relationship with a new father. It wasn't an instant fix, like some spiritual magic bullet. But it set me on a path from which I saw that practising the hospitality of God could make a real impact. It can open up something more of the riches of the Christian faith, give a deeper appreciation of the character of God and provide an immersive, life-transforming encounter with the mission of God. If our kitchen tables are among the simplest and best places for our Christian faith to find expression, we need to share this great secret with everyone.

DR KRISH KANDIAH

is a speaker, activist and author. His latest book *The Greatest Secret* explores the radical impact that fostering and adopting a little girl had on his life, faith and hope.

Multimedia Bible exploration

What springs to mind when you hear the word ‘multimedia’? Do you think of a video projector? Smoke and lights? Complex editing suites or mixing desks? In the art world, multimedia means the artist using more than one form of content in their work, for example clay in a painting or music with a sculpture. Wikipedia puts it this way: “Multimedia is content that uses a combination of different content forms such as text, audio, images, animations, video and interactive content.”

A multimedia Bible exploration sounds far too complex for a parent to have time to organise at home. However, I’d like to propose that it isn’t, especially when we use resources others have already made.

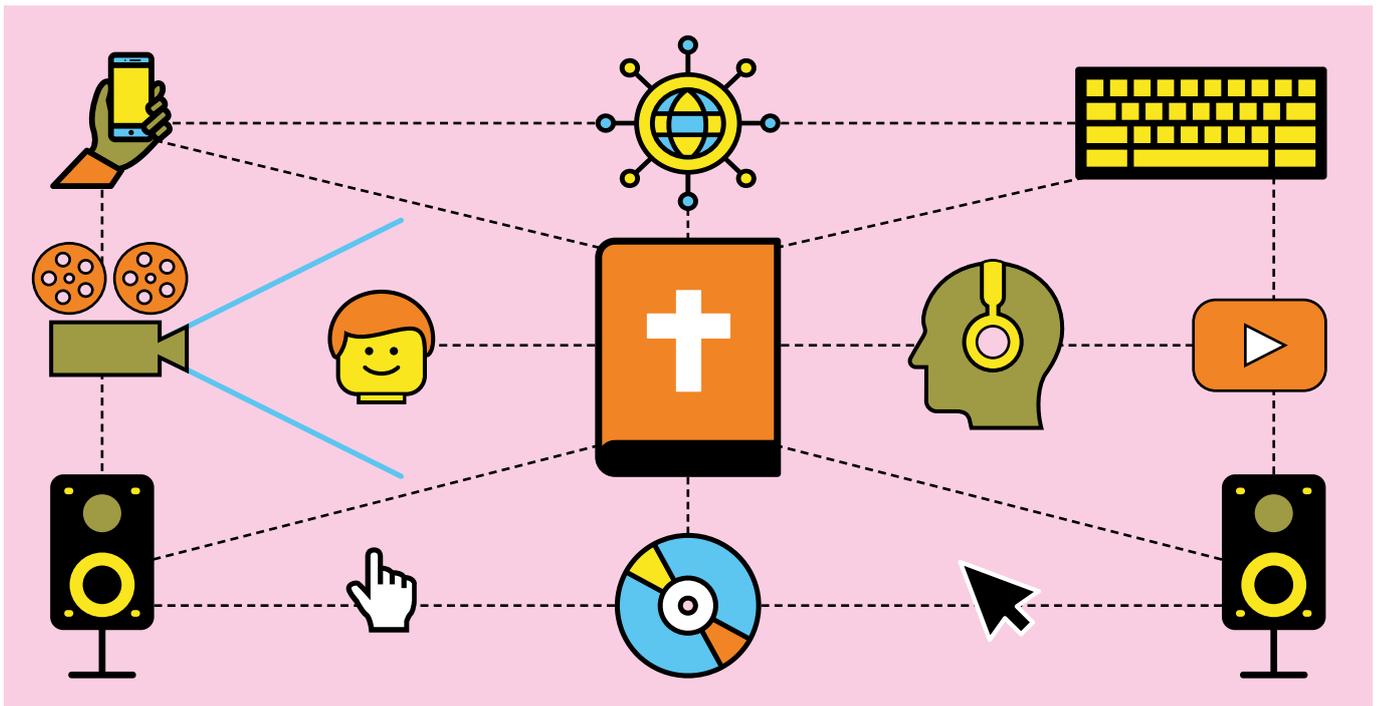
When helping people work out how to do faith at home, I’m always keen to work with them to find ways to make it work for their family (see my article in June’s issue). However, that doesn’t mean we’re looking for the one thing that will work, as we’re still talking about a family: a group of unique individuals, each on their own journey of faith and with their own preferred way of connecting with God. My solution for this is similar to when I’m planning something intergenerational in a church setting: variety!

Earlier this year I wanted us to focus on a psalm together, Psalm 121. I was keen for us to learn it, as I learnt lots of scripture as a child and have found it useful throughout my life. However, I wanted it not just to be learnt, but also meditated on and explored a bit. So this is what I did:

- I created a series of four playlists on YouTube (you could make use of the method you use to organise your music), each with two tracks: one with the psalm being read and one with the psalm being sung. I tried to stick to the NIV version, as I felt this would be an understandable version to remember and use in life. To be honest, one playlist would have been fine, but the four gave us a bit of variety. By changing the playlist each week we heard a different voice reading it, which helped us hear it

differently, as well as learning different songs taken from the psalm. (I tried to pick a wide variety of voices and songs so we could all find at least one we liked.)

- We listened to each playlist for one week, once a day, usually after breakfast while getting ready to go out, or during the first five minutes in the car (before we listened to the *Lego Movie 2* soundtrack. Again). I found that by doing this fairly consistently three to five days a week, my 6 and 8-year-olds learnt pretty much all the words of the psalm off by heart without even reading it themselves!
- In week one I set out a creative activity using squares of origami paper and giant Post-it notes to create collages. I wrote out the words of some of the verses to inspire our pictures. I find creating things like this gives me time to meditate on the words of a particular part of the psalm. Often the words I choose to collage are those that are resonating with me, so it gives me time to chat with God and think over what they mean, and to let them settle deeper in my heart. We each created one of these collages. I would have loved to make one for each verse but my daughters weren’t very keen, so I didn’t push it.
- I recently read that Psalms could well have been written while God’s people were in exile, and I can see how this psalm has a different meaning when it is read in that light. To explore this a little we watched a few videos from The Bible Project about the exile on YouTube. These are highly visual five-minute videos that explore different aspects of the Bible in a lot of detail and very quickly! Even my 6 and 8-year-old liked watching them, and they understood and remembered some of what we learnt there. It was great to watch them and learn together, modelling that we are never too old to learn more about the Bible or to discover more of the treasures God has placed within it for us.



- It may be a coincidence, but when I asked my children which Bible story they would like to listen to on *biblegateway.com* (you can listen to the whole Bible for free there!), they asked for Daniel and Jonah, both of which are based in a similar timeframe to when the psalm may have been written. As we listened they spotted overlapping themes in those stories. For example, Jonah prayed to God from inside the big fish. What did he pray? I wonder whether he prayed a prayer like Psalm 121? And later, when the Lord makes a plant grow up to shade Jonah from the sun, the Lord becomes his shade at his right hand, just as Psalm 121 describes.
- I spent three or four mornings exploring words from the psalm using a Hebrew Lexicon app on my phone to reflect on the wider meaning of the words. I discovered that in the short eight verses of this psalm, words stemming from the word *shamar* occur five times. It's a definite theme, so I looked up the meaning of the word and found that it means to protect, to care for, to preserve and to keep. It's the word that is used when it says: "The Lord watches over you" (verse 5), "The Lord will keep you from all harm; he watches over your life" (verse 7) and "The Lord will watch over your coming and going" (verse 8).

These are multimedia options that work for me and my family in the season we're in. They may not be ways that would work for your family, but I hope they give you some ideas of how you could use various resources to explore a Bible passage in different ways over a set period of time (such as a month).

We are more likely to get some traction with our ideas and resources if they are ones that tap into our own family's preferred styles of connecting with God. This might involve answering a few questions, so try asking yourself and then the others in your family the following:

- When you last felt connected with God, what was it that helped you connect?
- If you could only choose one aspect of church life to help you grow in your faith, what would it be? Sermons? Worship? Fellowship? Creative activities? Games? Quiet space? Opportunities to serve? Something else?

If your family doesn't want to chat over these questions, spend time watching and listening, then reflect on these questions:

- What are they into? What do they enjoy doing? What behavioural patterns can you spot? (For example, a child who likes to play with Sylvania families or Playmobil, or who makes Lego models to tell stories, is into small-world play. Therefore, they might engage well with telling and exploring Bible stories using small-world characters.)
- Which skills are they developing? What interests do they have?
- How do they like to connect with God and other people?

If you would like to read more about different ways in which people connect with God, I can recommend Carolyn Edwards excellent book *Slugs and Snails and Puppy Dogs' Tails*. It ostensibly looks like a book about boys and God, but in her research she discovered that the way we connect with God is more to do with our spiritual styles than with gender. It's well worth a read!

If you'd like to use Victoria's Psalm 121 playlists, you can find them on her website or on her Facebook page.

VICTORIA BEECH

runs GodVenture to inspire family faith at home. You can find lots more ideas for using different media in your faith at home activities on her website (*GodVenture.co.uk*) as well as on her Facebook and Instagram pages: @GodVenture.



Here is a story for you to tell at home, perhaps at bedtime or as part of a God time during the day. You could also use it as part of a children's session. To read some of Bob's other stories, download our **FREE** ebook at youthandchildrens.work/stories.



Fair's fair



Long, long ago, before there were police or judges or laws, justice was pretty hard to find.

A man from Village A would hurt a man from Village B. *Divide your children into Village A and Village B, or choose whether you and your child are going to be Village A or B. Have everyone from Village B say: "Ow!"*

So a man from Village B would go and kill a man from Village A. *Village A says: "Ow!" a bit louder.*

Then a couple of men from Village A would kill ten men from Village B. *Village B says: "Ow!" louder still.*

So Village B would form an army and raze Village A to the ground. *Village A says: "Ow!" loudest of all.*

It wasn't really justice at all. It was just revenge. And it caused more and more damage as it went along.

So someone came up with an idea for justice. It's in the Old Testament part of the Bible, but you can find it in other places, too.

And the idea was: "An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth."

It still sounds pretty harsh, though, doesn't it?

If a man from Village A poked out the eye of a man from Village B (*Village B says: "Ow!" and points to their eye*), a man from Village B got to poke out the eye of a man from Village A in return. *Village A says: "Ow!" and points to their eye.*

But only one eye. Not two.

If a man from Village A knocked out the tooth of a man from Village B, (*Village B says: "Ow!" and points to their tooth*), a man from Village B got to knock out the tooth of a man from Village A in return. *Village A says: "Ow!" and points to their eye.*

But only one tooth. And no more.

It was still a kind of revenge, but it was meant to limit what you could do back to someone if they hurt you. *Only an eye for an eye. Only a tooth for a tooth.*

And then Jesus came along, and he had a completely different idea about justice altogether.

"You have heard the saying: 'An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth,'" he said to the people he was teaching.

"But here's what I say. Don't push back against the person who hurts you. If he hits you on the right cheek (*have everyone point to their right cheek*), turn your left cheek in his direction, too. *Have everyone point to their left cheek.*

It sounds a little crazy, and dangerous, too. But Jesus knew what he was doing. If someone hits you, part of what they are trying to prove is that they are more powerful than you; they are in charge. When you don't fight back, when you turn the other cheek, you show that you are in charge of the situation; you have made a choice not to fight. And you show them up for the bullies they are.

But that's not all that Jesus said.

"If someone sues you in a court of law and takes your shirt (*have everyone pretend to take off their shirt*), let him have your cloak as well." *Repeat action.*

Yeah, that's right. In those days, if someone took both your shirt and your cloak you'd pretty well be naked. But then people would look at the man who had taken your shirt and your cloak and would say what a greedy, evil person he was. And they would likely shame him into giving it back. It would make his evil clear to everyone without a fight!

And finally, Jesus told people that if someone forces you to go a mile (*have everyone make a walking motion*), go two miles, instead. *Repeat motion.*

Roman soldiers often did that to people, forcing them to carry stuff. They did it to show that they were more powerful than the people in the nations they ruled. Again, the action Jesus taught puts the person who is pushed around on an equal level with the person doing the pushing because he chooses, and is not *forced*, to go that second mile. And by returning kindness for harsh treatment he shows that there is a better way.

Hopefully, both Village A and Village B will keep all their eyes and teeth, and will discover that if you return something other than harm for harm you can challenge the other person to think about what they are doing. You will maybe even see them change, and potentially make a just world for everyone!

BOB HARTMAN

is an author and performance storyteller, who has spent many years writing and telling stories.



Vulnerable families

What springs to mind when you hear the word ‘vulnerable’? As a play therapist and project lead for families at Urban Devotion Birmingham, I encounter many children, young people and families that are considered vulnerable.

I live and work in an area of Birmingham that is ranked within the top ten per cent on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, and many of the surrounding areas we serve are in the top one per cent. For various reasons, many people experience poor-quality and overcrowded housing, life-limiting long-term illnesses, poor mental and physical health with a subsequently low life expectancy, and high levels of crime and unemployment.

Too many young lives are significantly impacted by circumstances that are beyond their control. However, there are also many others who, despite societal vulnerabilities, are secure and don’t fit the stereotype of what it means to be deprived. I want us to challenge ourselves to question pre-existing assumptions we may have about vulnerability, to consider the power dynamics involved and to encourage ourselves to begin by listening.

In Luke 18:35-43 Jesus encounters a blind man who is crying out for mercy. I find it interesting that Jesus asks the man: “What do you want me to do for you?” I mean, isn’t it obvious? And of all people, Jesus would know, right? But rather than ploughing ahead and giving the man his sight, Jesus listens first and allows the man space to express himself. It is simple and beautiful. Where the rest of the blind man’s community has asked him to hush, Jesus gives him space to express exactly what he wants. The crowd knew that Jesus was the expert, but he gave authority to the man by asking him a question and then responding to his answer. How often do we allow our understanding of vulnerability to amplify an unintentional superiority that keeps us at arm’s length from those we are called to love and serve? The simple act of asking and listening disarms this power dynamic.

I am deeply challenged by this story. Do I take the time to actively listen to what a person wants and needs, even if I think I know? Last year I began play therapy with 10-year-old Syrian refugee Ahmet (not his real name). Ahmet was aggressive with his peers and with staff members. He did not speak (and seemingly refused to learn) English. He was disengaged from the rest of his class. Play therapy is based on the premise that play is the natural language of children. Through play, children can process thoughts and feelings relating to themselves and the world around them. Play offers an alternative method of communication that doesn’t rely on talking.

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It is easy to assume
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When I heard that Ahmet was a refugee I thought of bombs, blood and trauma, and assumed that he was traumatised from such events. I had images of him drawing pictures of his war-torn homeland and acting out scenes of gun battles and violence. Instead, Ahmet spent time forming pizza out of playdough, making animal masks and playing catch. His time in play therapy gave him a chance to express himself and communicate in ways that he appreciated.

Was Ahmet vulnerable? Yes. His behaviour at school was a cry for help. Was he vulnerable in the way I imagined: a traumatised victim of war? I’m not certain, but he didn’t communicate this as being the most pertinent issue to him. His choices in play told me that he needed a safe place to be understood and to find

joy. Ahmet challenged my assumptions and reminded me to listen to what a person actually wants and needs rather than simply providing support for what I imagined they might need.

In our work with vulnerable children, young people and families we must continually ask: “What do you want?” As I found out with Ahmet, it is all too easy to assume that we know what people *need* without taking the time to find out what they *want*. A helpful check is to ask yourself which words come to mind when you think of the children and families that you consider to be vulnerable in your community. Then ask yourself why those particular words arise. Is it because you have asked the question: “What do you want?” If the answer is no, the follow-up question should be: “How do I ask what they want?” This may be seen through words, but often people are already communicating their desires through their behaviour and choices.

Let’s return to Jesus and his encounter with the blind man. After he had restored the man’s sight the man began to follow Jesus and praise God. Jesus didn’t just offer him physical healing, he offered him hope and genuine acceptance. Once Jesus had closed the power gap he reasserted his authority in a completely different way to offer a deeper level of transformation. Having responded to the man’s desire, he goes on to – as John 10:10 puts it – offer him life in all its fullness. Once we establish relationship with those we want to serve, we can tell of the hope that Jesus offers.

Whether we are deemed by society to be vulnerable or not, we are all on a level playing field when it comes to needing the hope of Jesus.

EMMA WINMILL

lives and works in north Birmingham with her husband, three daughters and their dog. She is a play therapist and works with vulnerable children and families through Urban Devotion Birmingham: urbandevotion.org.

Does safeguarding make you think of bureaucratic hoops you need to jump through? Does it conjure up nightmares of damaged children and young people? Or do you see it as a practical expression of God's love by keeping them safe? Here's how to turn a chore into a core part of your ministry.



How can churches support children affected by family breakdown?

The consequences of family breakdown often have a serious impact on children. Churches can play an important role in providing positive teaching on family relationships and promoting the Christian values of loving and honouring one another.

When families are experiencing pressure and adversity of various sorts, pastoral care provided by the Church can make a real difference. However, it is naive to think that churches won't be affected by family breakdowns within their own congregations, and therefore we must respond wisely and compassionately.

Safeguarding vulnerable children

Children can be especially vulnerable during times of family breakdown. A significant body of research shows that children who experience family breakdown are more likely to experience behavioural problems, perform less well at school, leave school earlier, become sexually active, pregnant or a parent at an early age, and report more depressive symptoms along with higher levels of smoking, drinking and other drug use during adolescence and adulthood. A review of the evidence available in 1998 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation concluded that the children of separated families have approximately twice the probability of experiencing poor outcomes in the long term compared with children from intact families. At the most extreme level of family breakdown there has been a relentless rise in the number of children entering the care system.

Children and family breakdown

With regard to divorce and separation, the principle of parental responsibility attempts to ensure continuity for the child, because parental responsibility continues, by law, until the child reaches 18. With very few exceptions (such as when parental responsibility is extinguished through adoption) parental responsibility continues, post-separation, until the child reaches 18. This is in recognition of the fact that, although the relationship between the parents may have broken down, the child still needs its mother and father. Parental separation means that the child can no

longer live with both parents full time but will have regular contact with the non-resident parent.

Church support

We know from our own experience and observation, as well as from publications and research, that children have the basic needs to be loved, affirmed, valued and believed in. They need to know, at a deep level, that key adults in their lives (their parents and carers, especially) pay attention to them, notice them and hold them in their minds, both when they are right there beside them and when they are not physically there. They need stability, consistency and continuity; a life that is ordered and has boundaries, but within which they are free to explore and grow. Of course, there are transitions in every child's life – the arrival of a new sibling, a new family home or starting at a new school – but the child's attachment to its main caregivers provides an anchor, and helps them stay rooted and settled.

Changes in arrangements

Any change in the child's caregiving arrangements, however, is a different level of change, which requires an adjustment that is more difficult and potentially very painful for the child. Parents who are dealing with their own, often conflicted, feelings about what is happening to their family have the added pressure of trying to talk to their child about an emotive subject. All members of the family will be affected by this change, and the effects will ripple into the wider family and even into the church family.

Conflict between parents

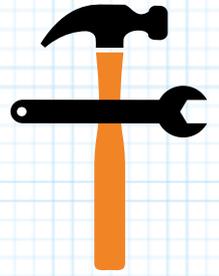
A high level of conflict between parents can be very damaging to children. Where there are concerns around domestic abuse there will need to be close liaison between the church and the statutory authorities. Any attempts to counsel the adults with the aim of family reunification would be inappropriate and possibly dangerous. It is particularly important for the church to remain neutral and child-centred in acrimonious and conflicted separations, as there is a danger of well-meaning church members getting caught up in endless disputes about childcare.

What can churches do to help?

- Understanding: churches should be accepting, inclusive and non-judgmental toward families while they are going through this difficult transition. Taking sides and allocating blame will not help.
- Information and advice to families: parents need to know where they can find legal help and mediation services.
- Pastoral care for the adults: it may be very challenging, in practice, for a church to provide pastoral help and support to both parents who are going through a separation, especially if it is contested. If the children stay with the mother, which happens in the majority of cases, then the local church may be better placed to support the mother and children while arranging for the father to be supported elsewhere (if this is what he wants).
- Time for the children: the children will need lots of reassurance and time to get used to the new arrangements. If they are involved in children's activities at church, the children's workers will need to know about the changes that are going on in their home lives.

Many churches are family-friendly environments, which are well placed to support contact between children and non-resident parents. There is a desperate shortage of warm and welcoming venues where children can enjoy some contact time with their non-resident parent, and this is one area where churches, with some professional support and supervision, could make a significant contribution. Although the requirements for providing supervised contact are likely to be beyond the capacity of most churches, providing a safe and neutral environment for supported contact is well within the means of many churches and other community organisations.

Thirtyone:eight is an independent Christian safeguarding charity. Call us on 0303 003 1111 for independent, professional and compassionate support around safeguarding in your organisation: thirtyoneeight.org.



Ever wondered how some leaders seem to have the ability to tackle and sort each situation, from programme planning to breaking up a conflict? Many have a phenomenal talent (or gifting), but what is less obvious is that most will be drawing on theories (or 'tools') to help them make sense of each situation. Good tools will help you understand what is happening and give you a range of viable options. In this column we'll look at different tools. Some are about understanding human behaviour, some are about organisation and some will help you set the right goals. We'll explore how consistent each tool is with scripture and acknowledge any limitations or weaknesses involved. Your job is to try to apply it in your own context.

TOOL: Think win-win

BLUEPRINT: the background

Win-win is less about coaches' half-time motivational talks and more a way of looking at our ministry relationships and thinking about who will benefit. To get the full insight, read Stephen Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. This is just one of the 'habits' he discusses.

Covey's argument is that in any human interaction (for example, if I'm asking you to volunteer at Sunday school or for a school assembly) there are four possible outcomes of what we are going to call a 'transaction': win-lose, lose-win, lose-lose and win-win. In each case, the first word describes how I come out of the transaction, while the second describes your outcome.

Let's imagine I'm trying to sell you my car. Outcome one: I convince you that my old banger is an absolute gem. After buying it, you realise I have swindled you. I win, you lose: that's a win-lose outcome. Outcome two: you persuade me that demand for my car is dropping, so I'd better let you take it off my hands. Afterwards I realise you have swindled me. I lose, you win: a lose-win outcome. This concept is illustrated rather nicely in Proverbs 20:14: "It's no good, it's no good" says the buyer; then off he goes and boasts about his purchase." Outcome three: we try to negotiate but things turn nasty. In exasperation and anger I set the car on fire, saying: "Nobody gets the car!" We both lose: a lose-lose outcome. Outcome four: I'm completely honest about the car and we reach a reasonable price agreement. Both sides feel they have a good deal and walk away happy: a win-win!

NAIL IT DOWN: the insight

Covey's first insight is that we are often encouraged by society to think in win-lose terms. If I can get one over on you I have succeeded. Think about this for a moment. In the short term I may seem to win, but in reality our relationship will suffer. You may tell your friends, and then my reputation will suffer. Equally, we all know what it feels like to be on the receiving end of a lose-win transaction. The other party has achieved what they wanted but we are left feeling used and undervalued. Lose-lose scenarios may sound rare but they do happen, very often when both sides are angry and frustrated. The old phrase 'cutting off your nose to spite your face' sums up both the futility and destructiveness of a lose-lose scenario.

One of the unique aspects of Christian youth and children's work is that we spend a lot of time working with volunteers. Win-win thinking is vital to success here. For example:

- As a church-based youth worker I would occasionally be asked by another youth worker to be the guest speaker at their residential. This was flattering, but required a lot of time, energy and preparation. Thinking win-win, I'd say something like: "OK, yes, but I've got a couple of older teenagers who I'm training and mentoring. Can I bring them along so they can maybe do a talk or two and get some experience?" It's me who has managed to make this a win-win. I get

a brilliant discipling opportunity for some of my young people, and the other youth worker gets their guest speaker.

- The local primary school resists all offers of Christian assemblies. I want to build a relationship with them and eventually find that they would love me to run a small project with children at risk of exclusion. I get a foothold in the school and a chance to build trust, while they get some help with the children they are struggling with. Both parties win.

SPIRIT LEVEL: looking at scripture

Though not a Christian, Stephen Covey was a God-fearing man, which is perhaps why much of his thinking has a generous and loving core, verging on the spiritual. Win-win works not because it somehow spiritual but because it is about how humans – made in the image of God – should be. There is much in the Old Testament wisdom literature and law about honesty; about being fair and straightforward in our dealings with people.

There is little value in shoehorning theories into scripture, but the Bible contains a whole load of transactions that pretty much cover all possible outcomes:

- 2 Samuel 3:13: Abner offers to betray his boss Ishbosheth and hand the kingdom over to David in return for peace and security. David agrees, but on one condition: that Abner brings Saul's daughter (his estranged wife) as part of the deal. Both sides get what they want: a win-win.
- Genesis 29: a fantastically complex negotiation! Jacob falls for Laban's daughter Rachel. He works for nothing (lose-win for Jacob?), then Laban says: "Tell me what your wages should be." It looks like a win-win, but the twist is that Laban palms off his elder daughter, Leah, on his son-in-law. Jacob has met his match in Laban, and neither seems to have much concept of 'win-win' negotiations!
- Matthew 26:14-16: Judas does the most awful deal in history by agreeing to betray Jesus' location to his enemies in return for 30 pieces of silver. In the short term this is a win-win as both sides got what they wanted. But it does lead into a final thought:

I'm a huge fan of win-win thinking. I use it at work and in my family. It's an incredibly positive, life-affirming way of making agreements. However, like all concepts it has its limits. Some things simply shouldn't be up for negotiation. They are too precious or have already been agreed within a promise or commitment that should not be broken. For everything else, think win-win!

NIGEL ARGALL

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Ask the profs:

Is religion just a useful fiction?

Professor Alister McGrath is a bit of a legend. As a young man and a convinced atheist, he went to Oxford University to study biology. However, by the end of his undergraduate years he was a committed Christian.

What produced this remarkable turn-around? Alister realised that, while biology could be helpful in explaining human origins, science alone could not explain the human condition. He also met intelligent Christians at Oxford, through whom he discovered that the story of Jesus was both historically reliable and spiritually compelling.

Since then, Alister has gone on to help countless Christians and sceptics put science, faith and reason together. He has also debated with some of the biggest names in the anti-God squad, including atheist-in-chief Richard Dawkins. But when Alister sat down for a live audience edition of *The Big Conversation* with secular biologist Bret Weinstein it wasn't your run-of-the-mill intellectual fisticuffs. The conversation between atheists and Christians seems

to have moved on recently, and Dawkins' tub-thumping 'religion is evil' rhetoric has lost its appeal.

Bret is a rising star among those looking for a more nuanced conversation. Where he differs from his more dogmatic colleagues is that he believes people are religious for very good reasons, and that evolution has wired them that way. Religious rules, rituals and sacred texts have all helped human groups cooperate better. Consequently, he believes the sneering rejection of religion from people like Dawkins is an unhelpful (and even dangerous) thing.

Of course, none of this actually makes religious belief true, and there's the rub. Bret is still an atheist. He describes religion as "metaphorically true but literally false". Essentially, it's a useful fiction. So have we explained away religion now that we have an evolutionary story about its social value?

In their conversation, Alister was happy to agree that many religious values offer great social benefit. However, he also

reminded Bret that Christianity hadn't been particularly socially advantageous for Jesus' first followers. In fact, a lot of them ended up getting killed for their belief in a crucified saviour. Yet, against the odds, that movement ended up spreading across the globe, because those who started it said something true had happened that changed the world.

This was the decisive factor in Alister's journey. He didn't ditch his belief in the usefulness of science to explain humans when he became a Christian. But science wasn't enough. Something happened 2,000 years ago in a garden tomb outside Jerusalem that went beyond scientific explanation. It changed those first followers' lives. It changed Alister's life. And it continues to change countless more people's lives.

Watch Alister McGrath and Bret Weinstein's debate 'Religion: Useful Fiction or Ultimate Truth' at thebigconversation.show.



There are many questions that stop children and young people wanting to know more about God. Rather than trying to answer questions they're not asking, we thought we'd go straight to the source and hear from the experts themselves.

What do you think about evolution?

I don't know. Would that mean Adam and Eve didn't exist and the Bible is wrong?

Maybe. What if none of it is true? Do we even need God now there's science?



Marty Sampson had been a Hillsong worship leader since he was a teenager, but this summer he announced that he had stepped away from his faith after an intense season of questioning (see Ruth Jackson's article on page 14). One of the reasons Marty gave on his Instagram was that "science keeps piercing the truth of every religion".

Marty isn't alone. I've heard from many others who think that modern science disproves the Bible. The tragic thing is that there are good answers to these questions, but too often we don't hear them in our youth and children's groups or in our churches.

I wish Marty could talk through his doubts with someone like Dr Francis Collins. Francis is a top US scientist who led the team that decoded the human genome. He believes in the theory of evolution, but he's also a committed Christian who says: "God is most certainly not threatened by science; he made it all possible."

That's not to say that the theory of evolution is beyond question. Like any scientific theory, it's open to revision. For many people there are big question marks over parts of the fossil record and whether the theory can explain the diversity of life. Nevertheless, the general principle that humans are part of a wider tree of life going back millions of years isn't likely to be overturned any time soon.

If you've been told that the only way to understand the biblical story of creation is that God made the whole world in the space of six days 6,000 years ago, you'll definitely run into problems squaring Genesis 1 and 2 with most of mainstream science. But is that the only way to read those chapters?

Here are three of the main ways Christians respond to evolution and the Bible:

- **Young earth creation.** We should take Genesis literally. If mainstream science disagrees with a six-days-6,000-years view of scripture the science must be wrong.
- **Old earth creation.** The 'days' in Genesis 1 refer to long periods of time (*yom* in Hebrew), so we don't have to believe in a 'young earth'. Nevertheless, God still has a direct hand in bringing us into being, as evolution couldn't have done it alone.
- **Theistic evolution.** The theory of evolution is perfectly compatible with Christianity. That's the way God chose to create all living things. Scripture must be understood in light of modern science.

When conflicts between science and Christianity pop up, it's often because we have been fed a faulty view of the Bible to begin with. Personally, I think it makes sense to read the Bible in the way that those who wrote it intended. Most Bible experts agree that the creation story in Genesis is written like a poem, and we shouldn't expect a poem to give us a modern, scientific account of how humans were created. That would be like listening to Stormzy singing 'Blinded by your grace' and assuming he needs a guide dog!

What if the famous story about the garden, Adam and Eve, the fruit tree and the talking snake actually tell us something more? When you consider that the name Adam is literally the Hebrew word for 'the man', it's not hard to see that this is a story about all of humanity.

What if the story isn't there to answer the 'how' questions but is aimed at the 'why' questions? Why did God create? Why are we here? Why has the world gone wrong? The story tells us something amazing: that humans are made in the image of God and created to be in relationship with him, but that we choose to go our own way and are separated from his goodness and life. Whether you take that story literally or poetically, you only need to skim through the news to see that it is absolutely true. We live in a 'fallen' world and need to return to God.

The problem comes when people take God out of the picture altogether and think that science is the only story going. That's when you and I become one more accidental by-product of evolution – a cosmic accident and nothing more. And when people lose their sense of purpose they lose hope.

Science can tell us what we are made of, but it won't tell us who we are. It can provide theories on how we came to be, but it won't tell us why we are here.

That's why we need a story that answers the 'why' questions. The good news is that the story which starts in Genesis ends in Jesus. God came as a real flesh-and-blood saviour to bring us back into relationship with him. He came to let you know that you are not an accident, and that you were made to know and love him: the creator of everything.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY

is theology and apologetics editor for Premier and host of the *Unbelievable?* radio show and podcast. Watch *The Big Conversation* video series at thebigconversation.show.

Children and young people spend a huge amount of time at school. How can we better support them while they're there? And what can we do to help schools?



As I write this piece the sun is shining, the summer term is in full swing and schools are taking their children and young people out for the day, or away for the week, more than at other times in the year.

As youth and children's workers we know that taking children out of their usual routine can be transformative for most groups, and it is this same principle that forms the rationale for school trips.

Three main voices on the matter of outdoor learning have made a significant impact on the experiences of children and young people since the turn of the 20th century: Kurt Hahn, founder of (among other things) the Duke of Edinburgh's Award; Ernest Thompson Seton, founder of Woodcraft Folk and Chief Scout of the USA; and Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Scout movement.

Each of these men had a different approach. Baden-Powell, for example, was particularly keen on military-style drills to instil discipline and order, whereas Seton preferred a less rigorous approach with the Woodcraft Folk. Hahn also founded Gordonstoun, the school Prince Philip attended, where his principles included giving children opportunities for self-discovery, making games important but not predominant and "free[ing] the sons of the wealthy and powerful from the enervating sense of privilege". His approach allowed students to work at their own academic pace rather than pushing them to achieve – a rather paradoxical view compared with the current system!

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Taking part in a school trip is a good way to help support the school

Each man emphasised the importance of nature in educating children, recognising that there is something deeply spiritual about encouraging children and young people to connect with the natural world, something that is often lacking in the classroom experience. We see this acknowledged today in the rise of forest and beach schools, with educators recognising the crucial role of nature in enabling children to understand their own place in society and the world. There is a sense in which beginning to understand nature means that we begin to understand ourselves, and it is also a space that is largely free from assessments and pressure. It has been said that learning in the great outdoors brings a certain 'elemental mystery' to learning. We can probably all think of young people who have been faced with a challenge in the outdoors and have exclaimed: "I can't do this!" Yet they have gone on to complete the challenge with all the exhilaration it had the ability to bring.

The Rank Foundation has produced a booklet called *Learning Through Outdoor Experience* (available as a free download from infed.org). If you are considering taking children away, I would recommend reading it. The authors explain that there are three interdependent areas that need to be considered when planning an outdoor experience: the elements, the relationships and the physical. Crucially, they have noticed that young people are more likely to carry their learning back to their own routines and home life when the experience combines these three elements: a direct experience of nature and the elements of earth, air, water and fire; an encounter with the reality of relationship in a setting that creates much more reliance on and acceptance of our fellow beings; and a physically challenging setup, meaning that our bodies are expected to do things we may not have contemplated previously.

School trips that are just for the day might not meet these criteria, but often they are experiential in a more hands-on way than learning in a classroom. For example, taking children who are learning about the ancient Romans to a local site where they can walk around Roman ruins and handle the artefacts will bring the topic to life in a way that is difficult to do in their classroom. These trips still have the potential to transform group dynamics, particularly if it involves a small group going to see a musical or film together, which means they experience heightened emotions together. A residential school trip is more likely to combine all three elements mentioned above, and therefore have a longer-lasting impact on the group as well as on the individual.

The amount of paperwork required for a school trip is astonishing: risk assessments; group allocations; coach allocations; insurance; emergency contact details; contingency plans; informing parents of the trip; announcing the cost (and giving a breakdown of how that cost is arrived at – an element that had to be introduced at the school where I was a governor because so many parents complained at how expensive school trips were); parental consent; and volunteers, if needed. All of this must be filled out every time there is a new trip. And then you have the rare occasion when a parent complains about something that happened on a trip and everyone has to scramble back over the paperwork to verify what might or might not have happened. Organising a trip or residential is not for the faint-hearted!

As schools' workers, our role is to support the schools we serve. Offering to take part in a day trip or residential is a really good way to do this, especially if you're working with, say, year 6 and they are heading to an outdoor adventure experience for their end-of-year camp. This is a great way to transform your relationship with the children and staff, to serve the school and to enjoy an outdoor learning experience!

JENNI OSBORN

is head of further education studies at CYM.



The value of school residentials

Mel Best is a year 6 teacher based in Milton Keynes. She has been taking her classes on residentials for many years, so Premier Youth and Children's Work spoke to her about the benefits of school residentials.

It's really nice in a strange way to give children a break from everyday life, especially in cases where they have a sibling who is very demanding or might have additional needs. However, that's not the most intentional thing about a residential. I think one of the biggest things I see is growth in children's confidence and growth in how they get on socially with other children or adults. It's also about how they learn respect and trust, possibly trusting people they wouldn't normally choose to work with. Generally, as a rule when they're on a residential, they don't get the choice of who they're in a group with. So when they're doing activities they have to trust the other child they're with.

I have always found that the better activities for developing children are the higher-risk ones. They're the ones the children seem to gain most from. So if you're abseiling, for example, but you have to climb to the top of the tower so you can abseil down, sometimes just going up one ladder is a huge confidence boost, something they haven't been able to do before. This knowledge

that they can now do something they didn't think they could do is very empowering. Any success you have is success. If you fail you can give it another go, and that can be a great learning experience.

Water activities – kayaking or canoeing – are good for team-building, even if the children are in individual kayaks. When they're rafting up it's amazing how they help each other. Perhaps this is different from how they have been at school, and maybe you wouldn't expect them to work together so well.

In the evenings they have chill-out time when we go away. They have the option of doing lots of things. We take a whole load of games, there is art equipment that is just lying around so the children can take it when they want to and there is sports equipment so they can play football, rounders or frisbee. They tend to play well with each other unless they're really tired! We also do team games together.

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The whole process of being away without parents or carers breeds a sense of independence

This year they wanted to do a talent show. We were going to cancel it because there were only two acts, but it was really nice to see children up there performing who you didn't think would get up and perform. They did it on the spur of the moment; they hadn't practised anything. It was great to see them all supporting each other, regardless of their needs and abilities. Everyone was really positive about each other, and nobody switched off during someone else's performance. These kinds of activities are really good for developing the children, helping them to build a confidence and awareness of those around them and learning how to support them.

In addition, we have a reflection time as part of the evening programme. We talk about things we have gained the most from during the day. The children also talk about another child they think has done really well on that day and why they think that child has succeeded. They get to share that with the rest of the group. It's really nice to take that time at the end of the day to reflect on what we've done. Some of the children say that is one of the best activities.

The whole process of being away without parents or carers breeds a sense of independence. They have to make their own beds. They have to get themselves showered, then find and put on clean clothes! They have to get to breakfast on time. They have to get to their activities on time without us moaning at them constantly. They have to get used to sharing a room with other people. These kinds of things, in addition to the activities, really benefit the children.

And you can see a difference once the residential is over. Children have a bond with new friends that they didn't have before. You see a step up in confidence and attitudes towards other children. It is possible that some of the good work will disappear when you all go home. The children may fall back into the way they usually are with their parents at home. However, this often serves as the start of a journey of development that the children can continue to work on as they move on to secondary school.

If you're a teacher and your school has never done a residential before, I'd say go. It'll be more than worth the money you'll be asking parents and carers to spend on it.



What can you offer on a school residential?

While we were chatting to her, we asked Mel Best what a schools' worker, volunteer or governor might be able to offer on a school residential. Of course, any opportunity to join a residential will come about as part of an ongoing relationship. You'll already need to be a trusted part of the school's life. Here's what Mel said, along with some ideas you might want to try if you're interested in getting involved:

If a schools' worker or volunteer offered to come with us we would consider taking them. It's always difficult for schools to find people to take, particularly to cover the ratio of children to adults. However, I don't think anyone has ever offered! I've seen that other schools have people, such as governors or other volunteers. Of course, you wouldn't just take anybody; it has to be someone you know and trust. We wouldn't be averse to someone coming for a day visit, either.

People generally don't offer, but then we are taking 60 to 90 children away. When you're responsible for them 24 hours a day (and it is 24 hours, because they'll come and get you in the night) it can be a daunting prospect for some people. It's fine as long as you aren't a parent of one the children you're taking, because that would be a hinderance to that child being able to achieve.

Here are some things you can do as part of a school residential:

Offer to go

This might sound obvious, but as Mel said it's not something schools' workers or volunteers often do. Find out if any of the schools you visit go on a residential, and whether they need any additional adults to go with them. By going, you can continue to serve the school and build relationships. And if a school can send you rather than a teacher or teaching assistant it will save money as they won't have to get a supply teacher in!

Get stuck in

Joining in fully with all the activities is key. The children will enjoy it if you kayak, abseil or even do something as simple as

playing Uno. It's important not to sit separately drinking coffee (even though that's what you might feel like doing). And if the children want you to fall into the lake, fall in!

Activity reflection

If the school doesn't already do this, hold a short time of reflection after each organised activity. Ask the children these questions:

- What did you enjoy about the activity?
- What did you find most difficult?
- What surprised you about the activity?
- Who surprised you in a good way? Why?
- If you did this again, what would you do differently?

Day reflection

As Mel said on the previous page, an end-of-day reflection can be helpful for children to think back over the day's events. This could purely be a reflection on the events that have taken place. However, your relationship with the school might be such that you can introduce a more overtly spiritual element to this. It might be easier to do this if you're working with a church school, but even if you're not the school may be happy for you to do it.

Morning reflection

Just as an end-of-day reflection can be beneficial, a morning quiet time can help children think about their objectives. Guide them through any plans for the coming day, and give them space to consider how they would like the activities, mealtimes and free time to pan out. What would they like to achieve? Who would they like to talk to or get to know better? Again, if your relationship with the school is such that they are happy to include a spiritual element, you could do that here.

What other activities might a schools' worker or volunteer bring to a school residential?

Residential work

Being part of a school's residential programme can be a great support for the school and for the students. Of course, our taking part relies on us having a relationship with the school that is built on trust, reliability and a shared vision.

- Think about the schools you work alongside. Which ones run residentials? Which are you in a position to take part in?

- What can you do as part of the residential? It might just be making yourself available as a helper, or perhaps you could run some evening activities. If it's the latter, what could you offer?

- If you're not yet in a position to go away with the school, in what ways do you need to develop your relationship so that you will be in the future?

- What about day trips? How can you help to facilitate and be a part of those? (These might be an easier option than a residential, depending on what stage your relationship with the school is at.)

Resources

53 First Steps Together

54 Growing Together

55 Journeying Together

56 Ready to use all-age service plan

57 Ready to use parable & mentoring

58 Ready to use games

69 Ready to use craft

60 Ready to use movie & music

61 Ready to use reflective journal

What's in this month?

This month we explore bullying, difficult relationships and revenge.

You'll find one session of *First Steps Together* (for young children), one session of *Growing Together* (for older children) and one session of *Journeying Together* (for young people). The three other sessions for each age group (and PDF versions of all sessions) are available for download at youthandchildrens.work/together.

Plus we have all the regulars, including film and music activities, ideas for mentoring, games, an all-age service plan and more.

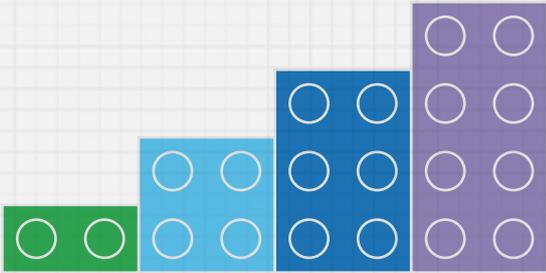
How do I use them?

Our resources are designed to save you valuable planning time, but remember to adapt them to fit your context. Cut what you don't like, can't do or have no time for. Or just use them as a springboard for your own ideas!

Where can I find more advice?

To delve more deeply into the thinking behind our resources, read *Children's Spirituality* by Rebecca Nye; *Will our Children have Faith?* by John Westerhoff III; any of the books coming out of the Faith Forward conference or some of the papers from Lifelong Faith journal.

For more resources and the rest of the Together session plans visit youthandchildrens.work/resources.





SESSION 1 of 4

Joseph and his brothers

MEETING AIM

To think about family relationships and how we live with siblings.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Genesis 37

BACKGROUND

Some children have siblings, others don't. Some will get on with their brothers and sisters, others won't. Whatever a child's family situation they will feel conflict and changes of circumstance keenly. Be sensitive as you explore the story and stay aware of different home situations. Reassure the children that although the brothers' relationship fell apart God used it all for the best (Genesis 50:20), and they were eventually reconciled. Make sure you follow your church's policy if the children raise any safeguarding issues.

5

CIRCLE TIME

As the children arrive, welcome them by name and invite them to sit together in a circle. Encourage them to share stories from their week, and celebrate any birthdays or special events. Ask the children if they have any siblings, or any other family members who are close to them in age if they don't have siblings. Talk about how we sometimes get on with these family members and sometimes don't.

10

INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: large sheets of paper; felt-tip pens or crayons; pictures of people in rich-coloured robes (for example the Queen, university chancellors or archbishops) Give out your large sheets of paper and encourage the children to draw patterns on them with dark-coloured pens or crayons. Once everyone is finished, ask them to colour their patterns using bright colours. Do the same yourself so you can use your paper in the 'Prayer' activity later on.

As you work, talk about their favourite colours. Show the pictures of people dressed in rich-looking robes and ask the children what they think of them. Drape

their finished patterned paper around their shoulders to wear as a cloak. Then admire everyone's handiwork!

10

BIBLE STORY

You will need: leaders to play Joseph, Reuben and a narrator; paper cloaks from 'Intro activity'; a larger coloured cloak for Joseph (this could be an actual coat or something like a patterned tablecloth)

Gather the children together, still wearing their paper cloaks. Explain that you're going to meet some people from the Bible story. One is called Joseph and the other is his brother Reuben.

Joseph: Hi everyone, my name's Joseph! He looks at the children's cloaks. I love your cloaks! Do you like mine? He swishes around in it. It was made just for me. I have lots of brothers, but my dad loves me best because I'm the most special. I'm very important in my family, and my dad gave me this coat to prove it!

Narrator: How do you think Joseph's brothers felt? *Let the children share their ideas.* Joseph often had unusual dreams, and he liked to talk about them.

Joseph: Listen to this dream I had. We were binding big bundles of wheat out in the field when suddenly my bundle rose and stood upright, while everyone else's bundles gathered around mine and bowed down to it.

Narrator: Let's stand up and pretend to be bundles of wheat, and let's all pretend to bow down to Joseph. What do you think the dream meant? *Let the children share their ideas.* The brothers thought it meant that Joseph would be put in charge of them, and that they would have to bow down to him. They were not happy about it!

Joseph: I had another dream, and this time the sun, moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.

Narrator: Let's stand up and pretend to be shining stars bowing down to Joseph. This time even Joseph's dad got fed up. He said: "Do you really think your mum and I will actually bow down to you?"

One day Joseph's dad sent him out to check on his brothers, who were looking after the sheep quite far away. The brothers saw him coming in the distance. They decided he had made them so angry that they would kill him! But the oldest brother Reuben wasn't sure.

Reuben: Brothers! We can't kill Joseph! Throw him into this empty well but don't hurt him.

Narrator: Reuben thought he would come back later when all the other brothers had gone and rescue Joseph. But while he was away the others sold Joseph to some passing traders so that he would become a

slave. They tore his wonderful coat and put animal blood on it so they could pretend to their father that he was dead.

5

CHATTING TOGETHER

Continue exploring the story by discussing these questions:

- Which is your favourite part of the story?
- What didn't you like?
- What does this story tell you about God?
- Are your siblings or family members ever unkind to you?

10

CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: yogurt pots; sterile compost; sunflower or cress seeds; cover-up and clean-up equipment

Give each child a yogurt pot to fill with compost and plant a seed. Sunflower seeds are a good choice as you can check in with how tall they are getting over the weeks. Cress is simple and grows more quickly than sunflowers.

Ask the children to tell you how the brothers would have felt in the story. Have they ever felt jealous? Talk about how the brothers' little niggles of jealousy were as small as a tiny seed to begin with but grew and grew until they were ready to kill. What can we do if we feel jealous? (Talk to adults, pray, remember that God made us all and loves us all the same.) Instead of growing seeds of jealousy we can plant seeds of kindness and patience in our hearts, watering them with prayer and love.

Encourage the children to take their seeds home and ask their parents and carers to help them grow.

5

PRAYER

You will need: your coloured cloak from 'Intro activity'; scissors

Cut up the coat you (not the children) made in 'Intro activity' and give each child a piece to hold while they pray:

Heavenly Father, thank you that you made each one of us special, and that you love each us all equally. Help us not to be jealous of other people and to be good friends to those around us. Amen.

XANA RIDLEY

is an early-years specialist. She lives in Worcestershire with her two children.

For the rest of this month's sessions go to youthandchildrens.work/together.



SESSION 1 of 4

Joseph and his brothers

MEETING AIM

To learn that God knows about everything we are going through, and to discover that bullying is never OK.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Genesis 37

BACKGROUND

Many children will be familiar with this story, if only through the ever-popular musical. Knowing what happens to Joseph in the end we understand that God has everything in hand, yet in this chapter God is not mentioned. The focus is entirely on the human drama of an unwise father, a favourite son and the brothers' simmering resentment, which boils over into violence. It's a way into thinking about bullying and the complex feelings involved. It is important for children to learn that bullying is never 'deserved', even if the victim is as cocky, annoying and careless of others' feelings as Joseph appears to have been. This session helps children explore the emotions in Joseph's story and gently to consider their own before placing all their feelings within the context of God's love and care.

5 CIRCLE TIME

As the children arrive, chat about some of the highs and lows of the past week. Share about times when you have felt happy, bored, excited, angry, sad or proud, and encourage the children to do the same. Discuss who we tend to share these feelings with. Friends? Family members (including pets)? God?

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (1999), available on Netflix or to rent on other streaming services; the means to show the clip Show the children the song 'Joseph's coat' from *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (starting at 00:08:44). Encourage them to sing along if they know the song. Chat together about Joseph and his story. What do the children already know?

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: scenes from Joseph's story printed on separate cards; a camera or smartphone; a laptop and projector

Before the session, print out or write these scenes onto separate cards:

The favourite: Joseph had eleven brothers, but their dad loved him best. Joseph received a special coat from his dad, which made his brothers really jealous. They started to hate him.

The dreamer: Joseph had a dream that he and his brothers were collecting sheaves of corn at harvest time. He dreamt that his brothers' sheaves all bowed down before him. He had another dream that the sun, moon and eleven stars were bowing down to him. These dreams made his eleven brothers hate him even more.

The victim: Joseph's brothers got him while he was on his own, then ganged up on and attacked him. They threw him into a pit and left him there to die.

The slave: Joseph's brothers decided to sell him as a slave instead. They sold him to some passing travellers who took him to Egypt.

The lost son: Joseph's brothers covered his special coat with goat's blood and told their dad that a wild animal had killed his favourite son.

Give out the cards with the scene descriptions and read them together. As a group, work together to create freeze-frames of these key scenes, as if you have paused a film of Joseph's story. Focus on using bodies and faces to express emotions. Encourage the children to take it in turns to be the director, standing outside each scene to compose it. Take a photo of all the scenes and show them to the group at the end. (Remember to follow your church's safeguarding policy when taking pictures of the children.)

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Explore the story further by discussing these questions:

- How did Jacob feel about Joseph?
- How did the brothers feel about Joseph?
- How did Joseph feel when his brothers bullied him?
- How do you think God felt when Joseph was being bullied by his brothers?
- Did Joseph deserve what happened to him? Why? Why not?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: jam jars (with lids) or mason jars; different coloured sand in separate bowls (you can mix play sand with powder paint for this and potentially add biodegradable glitter)

Talk about the many different emotions involved in today's story, asking the children to name some. Introduce the coloured sand and invite them to suggest which colours might represent which feelings. (You don't all need to agree on this.) Give the children a jar each and ask them to fill it with different layers of sand to represent how they are feeling at the moment. There might be a broad band of one colour, a thin sliver of another and a repeating stripe to represent a feeling that keeps coming back.

As you fill your jars of many colours, chat further about the emotions in the story or about the children's own feelings. Let them take the lead and don't force the conversation. They may find it easier to focus quietly on the coloured sand, and they don't have to explain what they have put in their jar.

It might be useful to share this advice from the Childline website (childline.org.uk): "Nobody has the right to bully you. Bullying could be done by friends, family, people at school and strangers – but it's never OK. Where to go for help: tell someone you trust, or phone Childline: 0800 1111."

5 PRAYER

You will need: jars of many colours from 'Creative response'; a long red ribbon or a piece of red wool outlining the shape of a heart

Gather everyone around the heart shape with their jars of many colours. Say this prayer:

Loving Lord, you understand all our feelings. To you they are as clear as the colours in these glass jars. We bring all our feelings to you now and entrust them to your loving care.

Place your jars of many colours inside the heart and say amen together.

Be watchful and available for children who may need to talk to you after the session.

CLAIRE BENTON-EVANS

writes for Kevin Mayhew and is the youth and children officer for the Diocese of Edinburgh: www.clairebentonevans.com.

For the rest of this month's sessions go to youthandchildrens.work/together.



SESSION 1 of 4

Joseph and his brothers

MEETING AIM

To explore family tensions and how God can transform these.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Genesis 37

BACKGROUND

This chapter is loaded with reasons why this family would implode as it did. A favourite son, jealous brothers, boasting, strange dreams... This story is also a fantastic tool to explore tensions and failures in our own family relationships and what we can do about it. This session does not explore the 'what happened next' for Joseph and his family, but it can be helpful to share how God's hand was at work at every stage and brought restoration to this family in the end.

5

GATHERING TIME

As you begin the session, serve refreshments and gather the young people together. Use this time as an opportunity to catch up with any news from the last week and see how your young people are. Ask the group about their own family experiences (being sensitive to particular situations within your group, and reminding them of the need for confidentiality and respect). Encourage the group to think particularly about their relationships with their siblings: what makes them good? When are they more challenging?

10

INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: large sheets of paper; marker pens

Invite your young people to gather in small groups together with others they are comfortable working with. Give each group a large sheet of paper and a selection of marker pens and ask them to work together to create their own 'ideal sibling', drawing and annotating their ideas on the sheet. Encourage the young people to be creative and imaginative, but also to be sensitive and not share any particularly personal details of their own siblings! What features

would their 'ideal sibling' have or not have? Why did they choose these ideas?

15

BIBLE EXPLORATION

You will need: Bibles; selection of simple props and costumes

If you have a large group, you may wish to divide into smaller groups for this activity to ensure that everyone is actively involved. Distribute Bibles for everyone to look at the story of Joseph's dreams in Genesis 37. Read the story together and discuss briefly to ensure that everyone has a good understanding of the tensions in the relationships here.

Explain to the young people that this story may be a little difficult to fully understand because of some of the cultural references. Ask the young people to consider what this story would look like in a contemporary setting. What would Joseph's father have given him to show he was the favourite son? What images may Joseph's dreams have involved?

Challenge the young people to work together (in smaller groups if appropriate) to create a short drama to retell this story in a modern setting. Give them permission to change anything from the story, so long as they remain accurate to the central plot. When they have had enough time to plan and rehearse their sketches, gather the group together to watch one another's performances.

As a group, discuss how these retellings help us to better understand this story and add power to the tensions in the relationships. What do we discover from seeing the story told in this way?

As you draw this time to a close, explain to the young people that in many ways this episode is the prequel to a great saga that would follow Joseph's whole life. Through it, we see how God works in big ways to use Joseph to effect entire nations, but also restores the relationships between Joseph and his family.

5

CHATTING TOGETHER

Continue the discussion about the story, using these sessions as a prompt:

- How do you feel about this story?
- Who do you feel most sorry for?
- Is there anyone in this story that you can relate to?
- What would you like to change in this family's relationships?
- Where is God in this story?

15

CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: a selection of examples of 'in this family' rule posters; paper; pens; art materials or laptop and graphics programme
Before the session, gather together a selection of examples of 'in this family' family rule images, either as posters to display or as images which can be shown via a projector. (Many examples of these can be found on Pinterest.) Show these to the group and talk about which examples they like, which ones they think are important and which ones they would like to include.

Invite your young people to take some time to create their own 'in this family' rules, either thinking about something they would like to uphold in their own family, or if they are more comfortable, to direct them to Joseph and his family. Provide paper and pens for them to begin drafting their lists.

Depending upon the skills and interests of your young people and leaders, you could either provide art materials for them to create a poster displaying their rules artistically, or provide laptops with graphics programmes which the young people can use to design and print out their posters.

Display the finished posters together and provide copies for the young people to take away for their own families.

5

PRAYER

You will need: paper

Gather the young people together and give each of them a sheet of paper. Ask them to crumple it in their hands and hold it outstretched in front of them. Explain that you are going to be praying for your families and encourage them to think about their own family relationships, bringing them to God, as you pray.

Begin by leading them in a prayer for all those families who find themselves under pressure, where relationships feel crushed or crumpled. Encourage the young people to slowly smooth out their sheets of paper with their fingers and, as they do so, pray that God would bring restoration to those relationships, bringing peace, calm and wholeness to those relationships which have been damaged.

Remind your young people that you are available for prayer and support as appropriate later.

BECKY MAY

is a writer, children's and youth work leader and cofounder of The Treasure Box People.

For the rest of this month's sessions go to youthandchildrens.work/together.

Joseph and his brothers

MEETING AIM

To think about family relationships and what God has to say about them.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Genesis 37

BACKGROUND

Families are tricky. Every single one is different, with different flashpoints and histories. Exploring the disfunction around Jacob and his sons is a way into these issues, but be aware of the potential this may have to bring up difficult memories or issues from ongoing situations. Have a pastoral team ready to help those who have had or are having difficulties.

5

WELCOME ACTIVITIES

OPTION ONE: Family portraits

You will need: a range of family portraits
Before the service, find a range of different family photographs on the internet. Try awkwardfamilyphotos.com or search for some Victorian photographs. Display the images around your space and ask people to try to work out the different relationships or stories that lie behind the photos.

Bring everyone together and ask for any thoughts people may have about the families in the portraits.

OPTION TWO: Family stories

You will need: volunteers with funny stories about their brothers and sisters
Before the service, find some volunteers with funny stories about sibling rivalry or escapades they got up to with their siblings. Interview the volunteers about these stories and ask them about their sibling relationships now.

10

BIBLE STORY

You will need: volunteers to play the characters in the story; appropriate costumes; a fancy robe; twelve bundles of corn

Before the service, gather together your volunteers and rehearse this story so that they can perform it confidently. Make sure you have a range of ages, and although all the characters in the story are all men your volunteers can be any gender.

Once there was a man called Jacob. *Jacob stands centre stage.* Jacob had twelve sons. *He is surrounded by his sons.* But Jacob loved Joseph most of all and gave him a special robe. *Jacob puts a robe on Joseph.* When his brothers realised Joseph was more loved than them they hated him. *All the brothers turn their backs on Joseph.*

Joseph had two dreams. One night he dreamt that he and his brothers were in the fields, gathering up corn. They all made big bundles of corn, but Joseph's was the biggest and best, and all the other bundles bowed down to it. *All the brothers get bundles of corn but Joseph's is the best.* He also dreamt that the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to him.

When they heard these dreams, the brothers and even Jacob were angry! *Some of the brothers try to attack Joseph but are held back by others who shout: "Leave it!" and "He's not worth it!"*

One day the brothers were out grazing their sheep. *The brothers gather on one side of the stage.* Jacob asked Joseph to check up on them. Off Joseph went wearing his fancy cloak. *Joseph crosses the stage towards his brothers.* When they saw him coming the brothers attacked him, took off his cloak and threw him in a well. *The brothers do this and then stand in front of Joseph so he can't be seen.*

Some merchants from the south came by. *The merchants come on stage.* The brothers decided not to kill Joseph, but to sell him as a slave. *The brothers drag Joseph over to the merchants, who give them a money bag. They tie Joseph's hands and take him off the stage.*

The brothers tore up Joseph's robe and covered it with the blood of goat. *They mime doing this.* They took the robe to their father and lied to cover their tracks. *They take the robe to Jacob.* They said he had been attacked and killed by a wild animal. *Jacob is upset; the brothers look shifty.*

5

SMALL GROUPS

You will need: copies of the questions below; Bibles

Break into small groups – made up of one or two families, or different mixed-age groups – then give each group a copy of these questions and a Bible:

- What do you think of Joseph's dreams?
- What do you think of the brothers' actions?
- Who was to blame for this dysfunctional family? Why?
- What does this story tell you about God?

Give the groups time to chat about these questions, referring to the Bible passage if they need to.

10

REVIEW

You will need: a roving mic (if needed)

Get some feedback on the questions from 'Small groups' using a microphone to hear people's contributions if your meeting space is large.

10

RESPONSE ACTIVITIES

Set these three activities up in different parts of your meeting space. Explain what each one is and encourage people to go to the one that will help them process what they have discovered most effectively.

OPTION 1: Reflection

Set aside a space (a corner of your meeting space, side chapel or adjoining room) for quiet reflection. Some people may have their own difficult family circumstances and wish to think or pray about those. It might help to have some spiritual focuses on hand, such as holding crosses, wooden figures, candles or sand.

OPTION 2: Role play

You will need: a leader who is experienced at improvised role play and can deal sensitively with any the issues that arise

Come up with some family scenarios and invite two or three people to role-play one of them. At various points the leader should stop the action and ask the rest of the group what could have been done differently, what the actors should say next, and so on.

OPTION 3: Creative response

You will need: art materials; writing materials

Set out your art and writing materials, then invite people to draw, paint or write something to help them explore what God is saying to them about their family or their relationship with him. Have someone on hand to help people access the materials or to chat if needed.

5

CLOSING

Bring everyone back together and ask if anyone would like to share what they did, thought about or discussed during the response time. Thank everyone for taking part and say an appropriate blessing to close the service.

ALEX TAYLOR

is resources editor for *Premier Youth and Children's Work*.

Betsy and the baking breakdown

"Maggie, have you got the eggs?"

"Yes!" yelled Maggie, getting the box out of the shopping bags. She took them through to the kitchen and gave them to her sister Betsy.

"Is that all you got?" asked Betsy.

"It was the last box they had. There are more than enough here though, surely?"

"S'pose so."

Betsy cranked up the food mixer and started beating huge amounts of butter and sugar together. Their cake was going to be the best at the Manchesterford Sponge and Tart Spectacular.

"Crack three eggs into this and whisk them with a fork, will you?" she said, handing her sister a bowl.

Maggie took the first egg out of the box and cracked it against the table. With a flourish, she dropped the yolk and white into the bowl.

"Eurgh!"

"Oh my hat, what is that smell?" said Betsy, screwing her face up.

"Maggie, have you farted?"

"No! Shut up!" Maggie pushed her sister. "It's this egg! It's off."

"Argh, I think I'm going to throw up! Take it outside."

Maggie ran out the back door and chucked the offending egg into the food waste bin. Then she came back, picked up the rest of the eggs and headed outside.

"Where are you going with those?" Betsy asked.

"They're off, aren't they?"

"They might not all be off. Try another one."

"No way! Once is enough. That smell was so bad I almost saw my lunchtime brie and banana bagel again. In fact," she sniffed her jumper, "I think the stink is sticking to me."

"Give them here," said Betsy. "I'll do it."

Maggie held her breath as Betsy tentatively cracked another egg into a clean bowl. She gave it a quick sniff.

"Well, this one seems OK." Betsy sniffed it again, then tipped it into the mixer. Then she took another and cracked it. A familiar smell filled the kitchen again.

"Argh!"

"Not again!"

"Get rid of it!"

Betsy ran outside and chucked it in the food waste bin, then threw open all the windows. Maggie was leaning against the fridge, breathing through her mouth and looking distinctly green.

"Let's try again," said Betsy. "We still need two more..."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Should Betsy and Maggie have thrown all the eggs away?
- What do you think of the saying: "One bad apple spoils the barrel"? Is that always true? Can good and bad things live side by side?
- Can you think of an example in your own life where good and bad have lived side by side?

This story is based on Matthew 13:47-52. Read this passage to the group and compare Jesus' story and words with this one. Discuss what Jesus might have been saying through his parable, encouraging the group to think about it in a new way. In February 2019 we explored a similar parable about the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30). If you still have it, read that story now and compare the stories together.

ALEX TAYLOR

is resources editor for *Premier Youth and Children's Work*.

Who do you think you are?

I've always disliked the question 'Who do you think you are?'. It's too black and white. Too final. Too blunt an instrument. It's like asking patients to diagnose their own conditions. In mentoring, most people need subtler approaches that help them understand who they are by looking at themselves from many different angles.

The answer is a combination ('mess') of characteristics, abilities, behaviours and ideas; we cannot be summarised by a simple word or phrase. We are not what we do, just as we are not (always) what we say.

Here's a way to explore the idea of 'Who are you?' with your mentee. Lead into it by discussing the place where you live. What are its unique characteristics? What is unique about its people? If you were a city in the UK, what would that city be known for? Ask your mentee to start thinking of himself or herself as a city and describe it to you.

- Is it a big, smoky, well-organised city or a small, friendly, more organic village? (Are you a big loud character or a quieter, gentler one?)
- Are there more sports grounds, shopping centres or music venues?
- Is it a happy place or a serious one?
- Is it complex or easy to navigate? (Are you complicated or simple and straightforward?)
- What do the landmark buildings represent? (What are the most noticeable things about you that you are most proud of?)
- Write or draw how this city would look with labels and notes. Then discuss these questions:
- Are there lots of hospitals or charities? (Are you a caring person or are you better at looking after yourself?)
- Are there historic areas? (What are your memories and your sense of where you have come from?)
- Are the foundations strong?
- Does it have tall, thick city walls to protect itself or to keep everything hidden away inside?
- Are there lots of fires and disasters? How well-equipped with fire stations and police stations is it for coping with crises?
- How obvious are the dark, poorer areas? Is there work going on to rebuild broken-down areas? (Are there areas of your life that you are working on? How ashamed of them are you, and how much help do you seek?)
- Does it have a strong military base? (Are you combative or aggressive towards others?)

This exercise can be approached as a working document; something that can be added to and change over time. You can return to it in later sessions.

For children and younger teens, emphasise drawing their 'city' and allow it to be mostly fun. For older teens or mentees who particularly want to investigate who they are, ensure that they understand this is a metaphor and really get specific, using it to ask them deep questions about themselves.

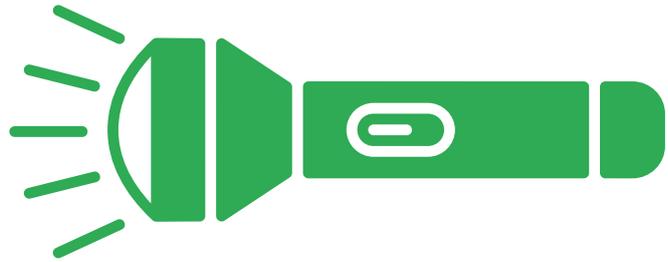
Consider reading together about the city of God in Revelation. You could even compare it with the garden of Eden in Genesis.

JOEL TOOMBS

has an MA in Christian mentoring and wrote the *Mentoring and Young People Grove* booklet. He is a volunteer youth worker.

Light games

October is the month of Halloween. However you engage with the day – fully taking part or running a Light Party or event – these games should be useful (or at least adaptable to fit the aims of your session).



GLOW STICK TAG

You will need: plenty of glow sticks (at least three per player)

Give each player three glow sticks and encourage them to attach the sticks to themselves in some way. This could be around their wrists, threaded through their belts or tied into their shoelaces. Choose two or more people to be 'on' (depending on the size of your group). The players who are on should try to tag the others. When they do, they should claim one glow stick from the person they have captured. When a player surrenders their last glow stick they are out until the next game. The winners are the last person who is not 'on' to still have glow sticks, and the person who has captured the most sticks.

REFLECTOR TREASURE HUNT

You will need: reflective strips (available online or from shops such as Halfords) or an old reflective jacket; scissors; glue sticks; small pieces of card; torches

Before the session, source some reflective strips or cut up pieces of reflective jacket and stick them to small pieces of card. Hide these around your playing space.

Give each player (or small group of players, depending on how many children or young people you have) a torch. Turn all the lights out. Each player (or small group) has to search the playing space and collect as many reflective cards as they can. The torches should help them find them, as the cards should reflect the torchlight back. The player or team with the most cards at the end is the winner.

GLOW-IN-THE-DARK DANCING

You will need: glow-in-the-dark paint; paintbrushes; large sheets of paper, cardboard or plywood; music and the means to play it; different lights

An activity for older children or young people. Show the group the sheets of paper / cardboard / wood you have brought and encourage them to paint decorations, pictures or graffiti all over them with the glow-in-the-dark paint. Once they have finished, hang the sheets up around your room and set up any lights you have brought.

Ask the group to work on a playlist together for dancing. (If you have a large group, the DJ team could be working at the same time as those doing the decorations and lights.) Once everyone is ready, turn off the main lights and enjoy dancing to your playlist!

TORCH SEEK AND TAG

You will need: a torch

Dim the lights as much as you can (while still making sure everyone is safe and doesn't trip over). One player is 'on' and has the torch. They should shout out a countdown while the others hide. The player with the torch starts to search the playing area to find someone. Once they have done so they pass the torch to that player and go off to hide themselves. This new person is now 'on' and goes to find another player.

Play continues until you have reached a time limit. Congratulate anyone who remained unfound during the game.

TORCH GROUPS

You will need: sheets of newspaper, chalk or masking tape; torches; music and the means to play it

Before the session, mark out areas on your playing space with the newspaper, chalk or masking tape. Make them large enough for three or four children or young people to stand in. Make sure you have enough marked-out spaces for the whole group to fit in. Give a leader a torch and ask them to train their beam on one of the marked-out spaces (have one leader and torch per space).

Play the music and encourage your group to walk or dance around. When the music stops, the players should choose an area to stand in. If the area they choose is full they have to go to another. On the count of three, one or more of the leaders should turn their torches on. If the young people are standing in an area that is not lit by a torch they are out. (They could be out for just one round or for the whole of one game, in which case play until you have just one player left.)

BLIND MAN'S BUFF

You will need: blindfold

A classic game, ideal for all ages. Blindfold one player (make sure they are happy to be blindfolded, as some children don't like it) and place them in the middle of the room. The blindfolded player has to catch the others while they try to avoid being captured. They can try to tease the catcher but will run the risk of being caught more easily!

If the players are keen, play again with a different person blindfolded.

ALEX TAYLOR

is resources editor for *Premier Youth and Children's Work*.

Joseph and his brothers

The story of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis 37 is very famous but also fairly shocking. There is fault on both sides. Joseph's lack of awareness causes him to insult his brothers, while the brothers turn to violence in their jealousy and anger. None of this is good news. This month's craft ideas explore themes of anger, feelings, behaviour and sadness, but point toward the hope that, whatever happens, God is still there.

ANGRY EXPLOSIONS

You will need: white vinegar; water; food colouring; bicarbonate of soda; a washing-up bowl or deep tray; cups

Fill a third of a cup with vinegar and add a little water. Mix in some food colouring to give some colour. Put the cup in the washing-up bowl. Talk about the anger building inside the brothers when Joseph tells them about his dreams, and gradually add some bicarbonate of soda to the cup, teaspoon by teaspoon. The liquid will eventually bubble up and explode over the top of the cup, making a sticky mess. Use the mess to think about what happens when we let ourselves get worked up and angry, as the brothers did.



FUZZY FELT DREAM COATS

You will need: felt scraps; felt cut into coat shapes

Let the children decorate the coat shapes with felt scraps. During the creative time, open up a conversation about the story and the feelings of the various characters. How might the brothers have felt about Joseph's dreams and the fact that he had been given a special coat? How might Joseph have felt when he was sold to the Midianites? How might the characters have behaved differently in the various parts of the story? What might have happened if they had?



EASY TIE-DYE FABRIC

You will need: A5-sized white or pale fabric (you could cut up an old pillowcase, for example); liquid food colouring in various colours; elastic bands; water; bowls; cover-up and clean-up equipment

Pour food colouring into separate bowls for the individual colours and water them down slightly. The food colouring should still be fairly bright in colour for this craft to work well. Take your fabric and fold it up, scrunching it in various places and tying it with elastic bands. (Look for examples of how to tie-dye on the internet and you will get some ideas!)

Take the tied-up fabric and dip the corners and other parts of it into the various bowls of food colouring. When you are satisfied, carefully take the elastic bands off and unfold the fabric. Hang it up to dry and admire the coloured designs your folding and scrunching have made.

Think about the fate of Joseph in the story so far. He is tied up like the fabric, but this is not the end of his story. Even though something bad has happened, God is with him. Look at the tie-dyed patterns and think about the hope that this bad situation will not leave Joseph hurt and tied up for ever.



SKITTLES TEARS

You will need: a plate; Skittles sweets; warm water

By the end of Genesis 37, the actions of the brothers mean that Jacob is left devastated and crying for his lost son. This craft helps to explore the idea that our actions can sometimes cause sadness in others, but that we have the chance to be forgiven (this, of course, comes much later in the story).

Arrange the Skittles in a ring around the edge of the plate. Use any pattern of colours you want. Carefully pour some warm water onto the plate to cover its surface so that the sweets stay in place. Wait a few moments and the Skittles will gradually release their colour. As the Skittles 'cry', talk about times when we have done things to upset others, or vice versa, and how that makes us feel. Speak about the fact that we can always say sorry and find forgiveness. Add more sweets to the plate and think about being forgiven.



MINA MUNNS

is founder of Flame: Creative Children's Ministry flamecreativekids.blogspot.co.uk.



The Fundamentals of Caring

CLIP: 01:00:00 – 01:07:40

RATING: 15

SYNOPSIS

Writer Ben (Paul Rudd) retires after a personal tragedy and becomes a caregiver. The teenager he is caring for, Trevor, is a very angry wheelchair-using teen whose father has been absent since he received his diagnosis at the age of 3. He has never left the house, kissed a girl or travelled anywhere. When Ben and Trevor embark on an impromptu road trip to find Trevor's father, their ability to cope is severely tested as they start to understand the importance of hope and friendship.

Netflix's *The Fundamentals of Caring* is an indie comedy that balances quirky characters with tragedy. Over the course of the film, the central duo end up meeting and picking up several colourful characters, learning plenty about themselves and each other along the way. This would usually signal a rather syrupy film filled with forced emotion, but luckily *The Fundamentals of Caring* manages to stay on the right side of funny and charming. There is plenty on offer for young people to engage with, and there is even the potential for a few tears along the way.

This particular clip focuses on two scenes. The first shows Trevor on a date with Dot (a runaway teenager who has joined them on their journey) while Ben watches from afar. Ben is joined by Peaches, and the pair discuss Ben's experience of being a father. In the second scene, Trevor visits his absent father. Trevor has been receiving letters from his father for years and wants to respond to his letters in person. Having journeyed halfway across the country, Ben is hopeful that this reunion will be a life-changing moment for Trevor, who has finally begun to embrace certain aspects of life. Note that there is some mild bad language in this clip.

DISCUSS

After showing the clip as a stimulus, break into small discussion groups (you may wish to have a designated discussion leader in each group) and consider the following questions:

- How many views on and versions of parenthood were displayed?
- Is the traditional family model an outdated concept?
- How do you think Trevor was feeling during his meeting with his father? How does that contrast with his father's feelings?
- Do parents always have a responsibility towards their children?

Many themes could be explored from this clip, from parenthood to suffering. Having watched these scenes, it is likely that a lot of young people will be drawn to the theme of disappointment that Trevor feels. As a prompting stimulus to explore this further, read Isaiah 40:27-31 together. Then return to your smaller groups and discuss the following questions:

- How does this passage make you feel?
- Are its teachings consistent with the world's? Why or why not?
- What does this passage encourage us to do with disappointment?
- What does this passage teach us about our relationship with God?

The Fundamentals of Caring is currently available on Netflix.

TOM WADE

is the head of philosophy and theology at Haileybury and Imperial Service College.



Crown

ARTIST: Stormzy

SUITABLE FOR: Over-13s

INTRODUCTION

Following his appearance at Glastonbury this summer, Stormzy has gained even more attention and perhaps also a wider fanbase! This song explores some of the issues associated with this attention, for example what it means to be placed on a pedestal and carrying a burden of responsibility. It explores how each of us can be a role model to others through our words and actions. Note to leaders: this track contains some expletives.

Begin the session by asking the group to think about some of the people they look up to. Who would be on their list? What makes a good role model? Encourage the young people to talk a little about what causes them to look up to others and what they look for in a role model.

LISTEN AND DISCUSS

Play the track, providing copies of the lyrics for the young people to follow. As a group, discuss:

- What is the first thing you notice about this song?
- Can you relate to any of these comments?
- What would you say to Stormzy in response? What advice would you give?

Distribute Bibles and ask the group to read 1 Timothy 4:12 aloud together. As a group, discuss:

- Would you like the opportunity to share this verse with Stormzy?
- What might this verse mean to him in his circumstances?
- Where can you see Stormzy living this out? Where do you think he could be challenged over this?
- What does it mean to you in your situation?
- What would it mean for you to put this advice into action? What might need to change?

Explain to the group that this verse is both an encouragement and a challenge for all of us. It is not just for those like Stormzy, who find themselves thrown into the limelight and have to live up to other people's expectations of what they should be and how they should behave; it is up to all of us to live our lives as role models for others. It is easy to look at someone like Stormzy in the public eye and point out all the things that we think he is doing wrong, but it is much more challenging for us to think about ourselves and put this teaching into action so that we act as examples to others.

Invite the young people to share some of the situations they have found themselves in where they can be a role model or a good example to others. What do they find particularly challenging about this? What encourages them to do it well? How can the group members support one another in this?

As you draw to a close, take some time to pray that each of the young people would be able to be an example to others. Remind them that we may not all get to perform on stage at Glastonbury but that we all have different spheres in which we can be positive role models.

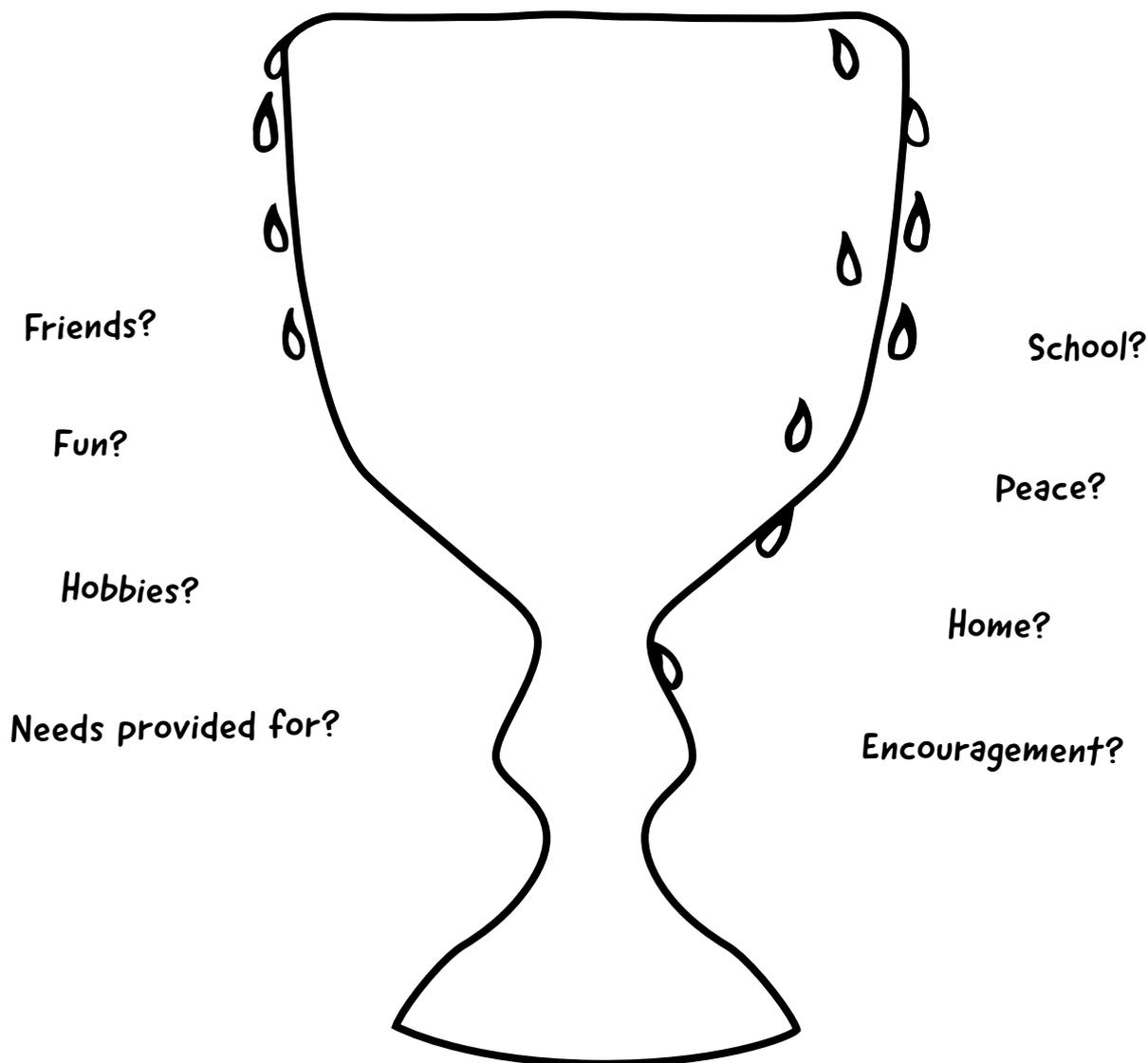
BECKY MAY

is a freelance writer and experienced children's and youth leader. She can be found at theresourcescupboard.co.uk.

MY CUP OVERFLOWS

In Psalm 23, the writer says that even in the presence of his enemies and difficult situations God blesses him. He says he is so blessed that his cup is running over - overflowing with good things.

What are some of the good things in your life? Draw a cocktail of blessings in the cup below. We've given you some ideas to get you started. You can make the layers of blessings different colours or decorate it however you like.



How could the blessings you have 'overflow' to other people? Think of one or two people you could help or encourage with some of the good things in your life. Write or draw a prayer for them next to your cup of blessings.

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Deadlines

The deadline for the November 2019 edition is 12pm on **Monday 7th October**. All artwork, amendments and payments must be finalised by this date. Bookings made after this date will appear in the next issue of the magazine.



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Families and Young People's Worker Neighbourhood Church Beckenham

An exciting opportunity for a committed and growing follower of Jesus, to oversee and grow our work with young people and families in a local church ministry.

Hours: Part Time (24 hours / wk) **Salary:** £22-25k pro rata

For an informal conversation please contact our pastor, Simon Lang.

Email: hello@neighbourhoodchurch.org **Tel:** 07726 126 092

Or visit: neighbourhoodchurch.org/vacancies

Closing Date: 31st October 2019



Children, Young People & Families Lay Employee Ilkley, West Yorkshire, £19k - £24k

We are looking for an enthusiastic and gifted person to lead and develop our outreach and ministry among children, young people and families, and to help us build on our opportunities for growth.

Christchurch is an outward looking and welcoming Methodist / URC church with many varied activities throughout the week. Ilkley is an attractive town, with easy access to Leeds and the Yorkshire Dales.

This permanent role offers a competitive salary, contributory pension, a friendly and supportive working environment and an opportunity for development in your ministry.

For an application pack or for further info contact Christine Henney on christine.kaicheri@gmail.com or 01943 600275 (eve) or download from our church website: www.christchurchilkley.org.uk

Youth Minister

For Yate and Fromeside
Mission Area,
Diocese of Bristol



An exciting opportunity to lead the development of a Youth Movement across the Yate and Fromeside Mission Area, taking particular responsibility for engaging people from 11-18 years of age on a journey of faith based on a growing relationship with Jesus.

Hours: Full time | **Salary:** £24-£29k | **Closing date:** Tuesday 15th October

For an application pack or more information please contact our Parish Administrator, Sue Harrison at Yate Parish Office:

Email: parishoffice@yateparish.org.uk

Phone: 01454 313105

Online: www.yateparish.org

sunnysidechurch

Youth Team Leader

We are seeking someone to lead our ministry and outreach amongst 11-18s both in the church and the local community.

For more information please visit:
www.sunnysidechurch.org.uk

YOUNG PEOPLE'S WORKER

Bilton St John & St Luke,
Harrogate



Hours: Full/Job Share
Salary: £20-24k (depending qualification)
Closing date: 25th October

At St John's and St Luke's we are stepping up our investment in our young people's work through this new appointment. The post holder will focus on discipleship, outreach and schools ministry as well as on building up our existing team of volunteers and developing relationships with our many families. His/her primary focus will be on the 10-14 age group.

For job description and application form visit www.stjohnsandstlukes.org.uk
Phone: 01423 565129 Email: church@stjohnsandstlukes.org.uk

Youth Minister

For Yate and Fromeside
Mission Area,
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Email: parishoffice@yateparish.org.uk
Phone: 01454 313105
Online: www.yateparish.org



St Peter's Bishop's Waltham
with Blessed Mary Upham



Families, Children and Youth Worker

To love, engage and disciple families, children and young people

We are a warm hearted and lively church in Hampshire near Winchester, Southampton and Portsmouth. We are seeking someone to lead, energize, develop, grow and participate in our Families, Children and Youth Work. We would love to hear about God's calling on your life and whether he is wanting you to join us! We are open to a part time more focused role if your calling is in a specific area e.g., families, children or youth.

Hours: Full Time or Part Time (Pro-rata) **Salary:** £22,000-£26,000 per annum plus pension contribution, plus possible accommodation

For more information and a job description please contact Revd James Hunt on:
jameshunt1966@gmail.com or 01489 892618
www.stpetersbw.org.uk/about-us/vacancies/

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The post is a Genuine Occupational Requirement (GOR) for the holder to be a committed Christian. The post is also subject to ongoing EDBS checks and safeguarding training.

Children and Families Minister



This is Sam. 2 years ago, he and his whole family had no connection with Church and no faith in Jesus. Today, Sam & his family love being a part of the Church family & are living as disciples of Jesus.

Are you able to come and help Sam, and lots of other families like his, to know Jesus better and make him better known here in Eastleigh, Hampshire? If so, we'd love to hear from you!

For a full-time post, your salary would be £17,550 to £20,000 pa. Call **07809 668 118** or visit EastleighParish.com for more info.

Chalfont St Giles Parish Church: Family Worker

We are a rural church in Buckinghamshire seeking to refresh our family outreach. You will be a proactive individual with strong interpersonal skills, comfortable sharing the joy of faith with families and will collaborate with our ministry team.

Salary: Flexible package for the right person (which could include discussions around hours, housing, holiday entitlement and theological training and development)

For more information or an application pack please email:
Rev Ian Brown: rectorcsg@stgileschurch2.plus.com
Hannah Tew: snowdrophannah@gmail.com

Application closing date: 1st November 2019
Interviews held: 7th November 2019



Children and Family Leader Epsom Methodist Church

We are looking for a full-time **Children and Family Leader** to provide drive, vision and inspirational leadership to our work among children and families in Epsom. This is an exciting role within a supportive team and offers the opportunity for a varied and fulfilling ministry.

Salary: £26,500 - £29,000pa (depending on experience)
Closing date: October 30th 2019

Email: office@epsommethodistchurch.org.uk
Tel: 01372 728535

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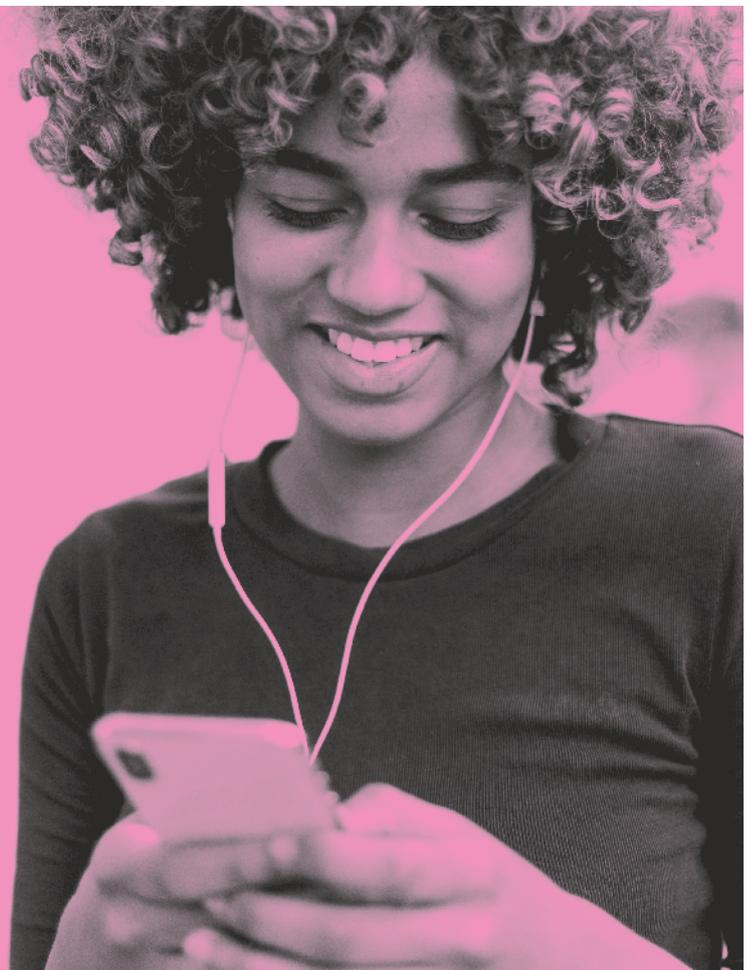
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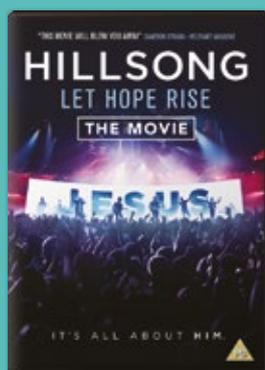
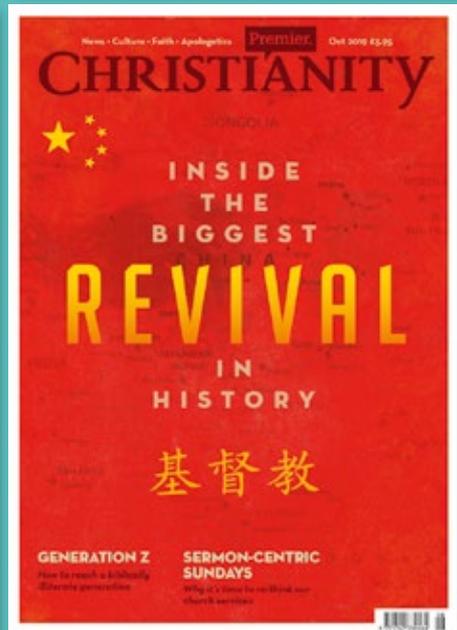
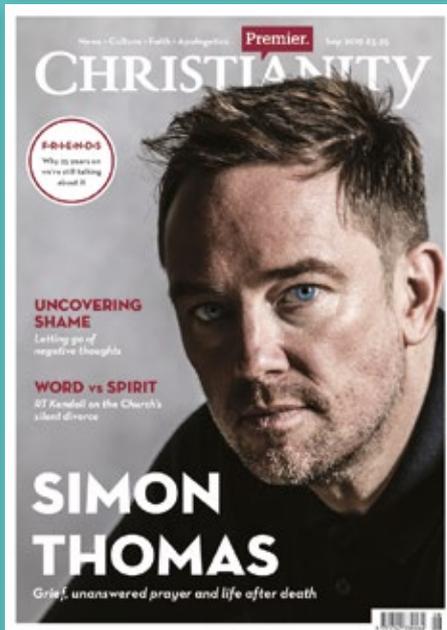
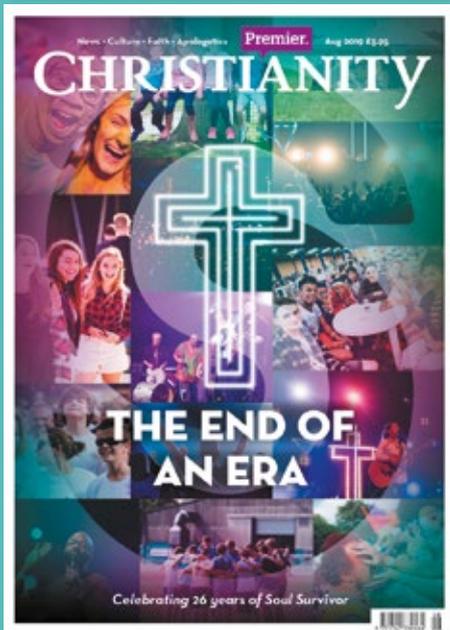
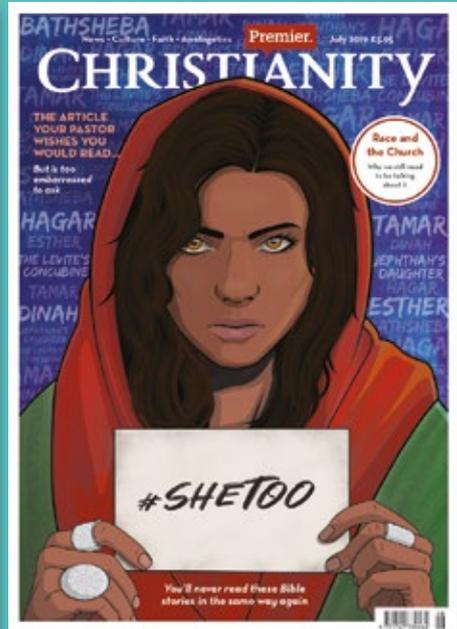
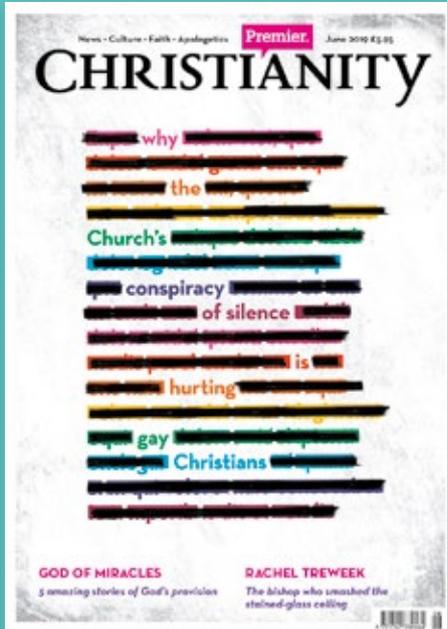
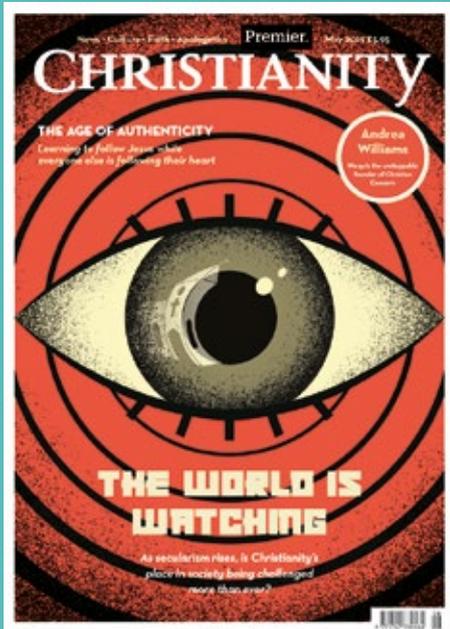


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Ten uses for a pumpkin

Pumpkins will be all over the supermarkets as we get closer to Halloween. So what can we do with them?

HOPE IT TURNS INTO A CARRIAGE

You've seen *Cinderella*, right? Well maybe, just maybe, it'll turn into a carriage if you stare at it long enough.

GROW MORE PUMPKINS

A single pumpkin is filled with hundreds of pumpkin seeds. Think how many pumpkins you could grow! Time to unleash your inner Monty Don!

MAKE A PIE

An American thanksgiving classic, there are recipes all over the internet.

ADOPT IT LIKE A TAMAGOTCHI

A pumpkin is less likely to play the guilt-inducing music signalling the start of its demise.

MAKE A SPICED LATTE

Or give it to Starbucks and ask them to make you one...

USE IT AS A HAT

For fancy dress or as a bold fashion statement.

MAKE A LANTERN

Cut it into a cross or heart shape, obv's. Or a very British passive-aggressive sneer.

PROP OPEN A DOOR

Or if your children's resources cupboard is so full it won't shut, jam it closed with the pumpkin.

SAVE IT FOR CHRISTMAS

Wrap it in a tea towel and, hey presto, you have a ready-made baby Jesus.

PLAY FOOTBALL WITH IT

Though your 'ball' may or may not shatter into a million pumpkiny pieces.

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

MAKE A BOAT OUT OF THE PUMPKIN, JUMP INSIDE AND SAIL AWAY TO FREEDOM

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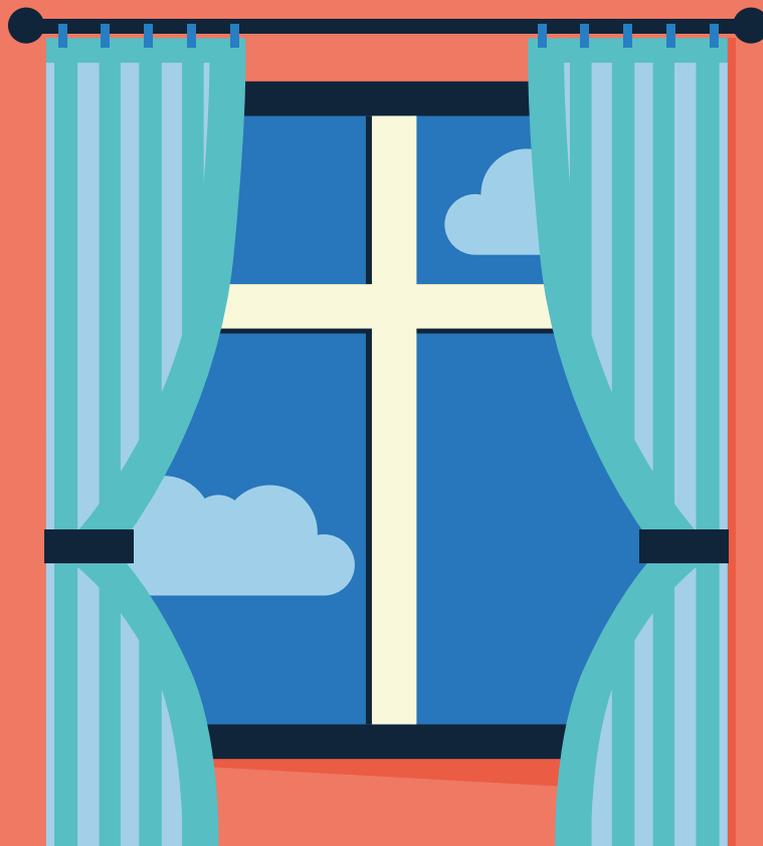
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