



Walking sticks & Magic tricks



**Biblical reflections about leadership,
decision making and community outreach**

What is Unlock Glasgow?

Unlock Glasgow is a project based in the Church of Scotland Priority Areas office. We are closely linked to Unlock UK, the organisation which we took our inspiration from and which helped to set up Unlock in Glasgow in 2006.

We are here to support the work of any church or community group in Glasgow's Urban Priority Areas. We can provide resources, help to lead a Bible study group, arrange training for group leaders, or simply provide a short Biblical reflection at any type of meeting or event.

How does Unlock work?

Unlock is about meeting in small groups to explore the Bible together - taking as a starting point experiences of everyday life. As people think about the stories in the Bible in the light of what happens in our own homes, in tower blocks, on our city streets, in our lives each day, the pages come to life for us, and we can imagine much better how Jesus' disciples felt or what the situations facing the old testament characters were really like.

Unlock is about sometimes using the Bible stories in slightly unusual ways, not to take anything of the traditional interpretation away from them, but rather expanding the use of the stories by also letting them be tools for analysing what happens in our churches and communities today. The influence and importance of prayer, the Holy Spirit and the endless grace of God is at the heart of these reflections, even if they sometimes seem to deal more with modern and practical matters.

So it's up to every group leader to see what kind of framework is suited for each session, i.e. if you want to start with prayer, a hymn or have a tea/coffee break in the middle. There is a short act of worship suggested at the end of each session. They have a close link to the theme of the session but can of course be left out or substituted for something that more suits your group.

The role of the leader is simply to facilitate the discussion and if need be give minimal input, as indicated in each session

To download free resources or find out more about us, go to:

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Decision making

Life is full of decisions. Many decisions we have to face alone, but some have to be dealt with in a family, community or church. When making decisions in a church we have to listen to other people's opinion, while at the same time try and listen to what God wants to say to us. With the help of a text in Romans we will look at what a decision making process really involves, before the decision is even made.

Starter question

Turn to the person next to you and discuss:

- ***If people ask if you want a tea or a coffee, and how you take it, do you always give the same answer? Why/why not?***

Bible reading

Ask people to think about any decision making process they have been a part of in church, whether in the Kirk Session, or in any other group or situation, large or small.

Let everyone read **Romans 14:1–15:7** individually and see if anything in the text reminds them of any feeling or situation that happened, or could have happened, in that decision making process.

The Bible text should preferably be in quite large writing on a piece of paper for each person. Pens so people can underline/circle words that stand out for them should be provided.

After people have reflected on the text individually: move into pairs and share the decision making experience you thought of, and what in the text reminded you of it?

When you have shared your experiences in the pair, join another pair and discuss the following questions in your small group:

1.

What are we most afraid of when making decisions in church: to hurt other people or go against God's will?

2.

In the text the debate about clean/unclean food was the topic needing deliberation and decisions. Do we have any recurring topics in our church that aren't necessarily hugely important, but take up lots of our time and energy?

Is there anything in the text that can help us deal with similar situations?

3.

Is there anything in the text that can help you the next time you don't agree with other people about a decision that's been made?

Share the group's comments briefly with the whole group.

Short act of worship

NB: This act of worship works best if not in a traditional church space!

Don't arrange chairs in any specific way beforehand. But have a few cushions scattered on the floor in different parts of the room. Tell people to make themselves comfortable anywhere in the room, in whatever way they want, for a very short act of worship. People can stand, sit on a chair or cushion or even lie on the floor. Some might even start to arrange chairs out of habit, but remind people it's up to each person where in the room they want to spend the next few minutes.

When everyone has settled somewhere, read the following short prayer/meditation:

*Here we are, just where we are, in a place and position we have chosen.
It might feel comfortable or strange, but we made the decision to be here.
Think for a second what made you make your decision of where and how to spend the next couple of minutes. Habit? Comfort? The desire to stand out or do something new? The desire to follow an instruction with minimal effort?
Or did you just follow the example of someone next to you?*

Everything we do in life is a decision. And you God, you are the beginning of every decision, because you decided to make us in your image, with all the creativity, wisdom and stubbornness it takes to constantly make, re-make, regret or re-shape decisions every day of our lives.

So thanks for deciding to give us life, and help us fill that life with decisions for and with you, regardless of where and with whom we have to make them.

And just as we were asked to find our own space and position for this prayer, after the blessing we can all get up and leave the room when and in whatever way it suits us...

(Say a blessing, put on some classical music or similar so people can start to move/leave in their own time)

Choosing our leaders

From the early days of the Christian church choosing people to take on leadership has been an important task for congregations.

This session looks at how some leaders were chosen in the Bible, and what we can learn from that story.

Starter question

Turn to the person next to you and discuss:

-Which person would you choose to start up a business with, and why?

(It can be any kind of business and you don't have to mention the name of the person, just the reason why he or she could help you with this)

Bible reading

Read **Acts 6:1-7** and discuss the following questions in pairs or small groups:

1.

The text tells us that spreading the Gospel was the focus for all the disciples. So why do you think this group of leaders were chosen to deal with food distribution and not a mission strategy?

2.

Is there anything about how the men were chosen that we could learn from?

3.

Is there anything that happened after they were chosen that we could learn from?

4.

Look at the seven people who were chosen. We aren't told much about them, but we know that one person, Stephen, was a close man with a strong faith who performed miracles. And then we have Nicolas who came from another country and was a convert to Judaism.

Think about the positives and negatives about having a group of leaders with different backgrounds and perspectives.

What does the mix of elders look like in your church?

Short act of worship

Sit in a circle.

See if between yourselves in the group you can come up with the following items and place them on a table in the middle of the circle:

- A key
- A bank card
- A phone
- A pair of glasses

Tell the group:

The key represent decisions that can open or close doors. Decisions about buildings, church events, membership and outreach.

The bank card represents all financial matters. Decisions about budgets, salaries, investments and repairs.

The phone represents communication. Newsletters and notices, how information is spread within the congregation but also to the wider community.

The glasses represent vision. Not just a shared vision, but also the people who might see things in a different way and challenge our own vision.

The group can either meditate on these items in silence. Or one object at a time can be passed around the circle and those who want can say a word or sentence that they want to pray about in relation to the topic the symbol represents.

Or each person in the group can have a small ribbon which they are invited to tie around the object that represents the area the church needs to think harder about.

What makes a leader? Part 1

In this session we'll look at the story of Moses as a way to discuss what makes a leader.

Leadership is meant in the widest sense possible and people might need help to identify areas where they are leaders. Helping an elderly relative to the bank, being the main cook of the household or owning a dog are examples of simple leadership in our everyday lives.

Starter question

Turn to the person next to you and discuss:

-Name a skill or talent you have that other people might not know about?

(It can be anything from knowing every Corrie actor to telling bad jokes...)

NB: don't share the answers with the big group until the end of the session!

Bible reading

People are going to look at the story of Moses. They can either read the full (but abbreviated) story in a children's or youth Bible. Or take some time with the whole group to write up keywords/events from Moses life on a flipchart through what people in the group can remember.

Make sure all the major events in Moses life are included, both in his private life and as the leader of the people of Israel.

Then present the list below to the group and see if they agree that all these statements are true about Moses, at some point in his life:

- He worked as a shepherd in the desert.
- He committed a crime to protect someone else.
- He grew up with a politician and his family.
- He was opposed to the slavery he saw all around him.

- He came from a poor family with strong religious beliefs.
- He moved to another country and had to learn a new language and new customs.
- He married a minister's daughter.
- He failed as a leader on a few occasions but gained the people's trust again.
- He had a supportive family.
- He had a personal encounter with God.

Discuss the following questions in pairs or small groups:

- ***Which 3 of these events in Moses life do you think most contributed to him being a good religious leader?***

(This question is not meant to be easy, take the time to discuss all the alternatives and see if it's possible to come up with 3 top answers!)

Share the answers in the big group and see if there are any answers that several groups agree on?

Does this say anything about what qualities we think are important in a leader?

Short act of worship

Sit in a circle.

Ask people to sit next to the person they shared the starter question with.

Have a small cross in the middle.

Say a few words about how we as Christians are called to 'follow the cross'.

Be disciples of Christ. Know that important things aren't always easy.

Trust in God to walk with us through both the good and bad times.

But it's not easy to have a role model like Christ. We often fall short, doubt our gifts or our faith. But the story of Moses can remind us that good leaders don't have to be perfect, or have been given any other training than life itself.

Say a short prayer of thanksgiving to God for everyone in the room, and ask that God will let us have the same beliefs in ourselves as God has in us!

Go around the circle and let everyone pray for the person next to them by using a short prayer, like this one:

God, I pray for (name) and the gifts you have given him/her.

Thanks for giving (name) a very special talent which is (name the skill the person said at the start of the session).

When everyone's talent has been mentioned, say a short closing prayer like the one below. Depending on what skills people have shared there might have been some laughter in the circle during the first moment, and this is absolutely fine.

God,

thank you for giving us a variety of skills and talents. Some feel more useful or unusual than others, but all of them are gifts from you. We are all people who are on a lifelong journey, just like Moses, and none of us can say which gifts are going to come in useful at some point in our lives. We just pray that you make us brave enough to use our skills, and humble enough to ask for help when we need it.

And we will follow you in a way so that others might want to follow us.

Amen

What makes a leader? Part 2

In this session we'll continue to look at the story of Moses as a way to discuss what makes someone actually accept leadership when suggested by people around them.

The word 'leadership' might for many suggest that a leader needs to be a role model and very skilled at what they do. But another way to look at leadership is to see a person who can co-ordinate, delegate, accept help and use everyone's resources in the best way.

Starter question

Turn to the person next to you and discuss:

-Do you find it easy to accept a compliment? What makes it easier?

Bible reading

The following are extracts from Exodus chapters 3-18 and Leviticus 19:

- A.** But Moses said to God: I am nobody
- B.** But Moses said: No, Lord, don't send me. I have never been a good speaker, and I haven't become one since you began to speak to me.
- C.** But Moses answered: No, Lord, please send someone else.
- D.** God said to Moses: What about your brother Aaron? I know that he can speak well. You can speak to him and tell him what to say. I will help both of you to speak, and I will tell both of you what to do.
- E.** Moses told this to the Israelites, but they would not listen to him, because their spirit had been broken by their cruel slavery.
- F.** At the time when they spoke to the king, Moses was eighty years old and Aaron was eighty-three.
- G.** Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: *Lord, who among the gods is like you? Who is like you, wonderful in holiness? Who can work miracles and mighty acts like yours?*

H. Moses, Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his arms, the Israelites won, but when he put his arm down, the Amalekites started winning. When Moses' arms grew tired, Aaron and Hur brought a stone for him to sit on, while they stood beside him and held up his arms, holding them steady until the sun went down.

I. Then Jethro, his father-in-law, said to Moses:

You are not doing this right. You will wear yourself out and these people as well. This is too much for you to do alone. Now let me give you some good advice, and God will be with you.

J. The Lord told Moses to say to the community of Israel: *Be Holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy.*

Read these verses and reflect on them individually for a while. Then move into small groups and discuss:

1.

If you were asked to be a leader, is there anything in these verses that reminds you of the excuses you would have to say no?

2.

Is there anything in these verses that helps you think about what it means to support people in leadership?

3.

If you are, or were to be, in a leadership position. Which of the verses makes you most positive about the task before you?

Short act of worship

Sit in a circle.

Have a cross or a candle as a focus in the middle of the circle.

Have a little gift prepared for each person in the room. Something small that has something hidden inside it e.g. lemon sherbets or small chocolates with some kind of filling.

Send around small pieces of paper and pens. When everyone has a paper and a pen, ask them to write something that they feel hinders them from becoming a good leader. Play some quiet music and leave some time for reflecting. Turn off the music

and say a few words about how we have learned that there's so much more to leadership than just being skilled in an area. We can have experiences and friends who help us, but in the end what we do with our gifts is between us and God. And our gifts can be hidden deep inside us, but God sees and knows them.

Have a bowl with the sweets, the exact number of people in the room. Walk around the circle and let everyone put their note in the bowl, and in exchange take a sweetie. When they take it, say these words from **John 15:16** to each person in turn:

Jesus says: You did not choose me but I chose you.

When the sweets have all been taken and the bowl only has the papers in it, place the bowl by the candle/cross and ask God to take our worries and shortcomings and let us discover the strength and goodness inside us.

Reaching out or giving in?

Most churches struggle with how and when to reach people in the wider community. Do we want to meet people on an individual basis, or do big events or campaigns to attract people to the congregation. The Bible text in this session is about a war invasion. We are not for a second suggesting that the local community is a hostile and foreign territory, but the text just opens up lots of interesting questions about how to plan to meet a large group of people in a new place.

Starter question

Turn to the person next to you and discuss:

-Where in your community do you feel like a stranger, and why?

Bible reading

Read Judges **7:1-22**. Let people have the text in front of them so they can refer back to it since it's a long story.

Discuss the following questions in small groups:

1.

When we as a church go out to new places in the community, where do we choose to go, and why?

2.

Gideon brought his servant to spy on the enemy camp beforehand. Who do we bring with us and how do we go about assessing what needs to happen in the community for any outreach to work?

3.

Gideon and his men arrived at the enemy camp with trumpets and torches. What do we want people to **SEE** when they meet their local congregation out in the community? What do we want people to **HEAR** about the church and it's activities?

Share your thoughts in the big group at the end.

Short act of worship

Sit in a circle.

Have lots of fairly new, local newspaper clippings with local news, ads from local businesses and entertainment places etc. on a table in the middle of the circle. The more local the better.

Play some quiet music in the room.

Have two flipchart papers or baskets representing 'torch/seeing' and 'trumpet/hearing'.

Let people in silence pick one or two clippings and choose if they represent a situation where people in the community would need the church to show them something, or tell them something. Let people tape or glue their clippings to the flipchart paper of their choice.

When people are finished say a short prayer, and invite people to have a look at the clippings.

If people who attended the session are elders or similar, offer to let them take the flipchart papers away with them and use them as a basis for any future discussions about activities in the local community.