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8 sessions planned for a youth group in Sandwell, West Midlands, using contemporary film clips as starting points for discussions of issues in their day to day lives.



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The Veronica Sessions

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Is Anybody Listening?

Unlocking real life stories of Urban People:

Aim - to hear the stories that affect this group of young people (YP).

Issues for session 1:

1. This is the first session so YP are to be invited to choose a name for the group themselves so that they have ownership of it. *The youth leader had given it a temporary name of "Veronica". This stuck as the Young People themselves thought it was catchy!*
2. Where to show the film/clips? Main worship area for projector? Show it on a TV but it doesn't have the same impact plus we would have to bring a telly in. *We chose to use the big screen which worked well.*
3. Refreshments just to make it a bit special/different from rest of Junior Church Fellowship (JCF) and to bond the group? Popcorn? *Popcorn worked well.*

Previous discussion with the YP had identified a scenario that raised many issues including:

"No one will listen" - the frustration of being treated as invisible or as a child when you want to discuss your feelings and be involved in decisions.

Questions for group:

- How does it feel when no one will listen or when you think you have no one to talk to?



- How does it make you feel about yourself?
- How does it make you feel about others?

Show film/ film clip that covers this issue & encourages YP to think together about it:

"The Sixth Sense" starring Bruce Willis.

We used various scenes including; scene 1 - Willis' character is blamed for a death because he wouldn't listen & scene 3 - A child will no longer talk because people didn't want to listen previously.



Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ:

The Bible texts that we thought we might use were:-

1 Corinthians 3 As a matter of fact, my brothers and sisters, I could not talk to you as I talk to people who have the Spirit; I had to talk to you as though you belonged to this world, as children in the Christian faith. I had to feed you with milk, not solid food, because you were not ready for it. And even now you are not ready for it, because you still live as the people of this world live. When there is jealousy among you and you quarrel with one another, doesn't this prove that you belong to this world, living by its standards? When one of you says, "I follow Paul", and another, "I follow Apollos" — aren't you acting like worldly people?



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Hebrews 5 There is much we have to say about this matter, but it is hard to explain to you, because you are so slow to understand. There has been enough time for you to be teachers — yet you still need someone to teach you the first lessons of God's message. Instead of eating solid food, you still have to drink milk. Anyone who has to drink milk is still a child, without any experience in the matter of right and wrong. Solid food, on the other hand, is for adults, who through practice are able to distinguish between good and evil.

Sometimes adults forget that young people are not babies any more. The bible talks about being fed on milk until we are ready for solid food in terms of understanding life and faith but that there comes a time when we are ready to be weaned and it is sometimes tough to tell when that is. This is looking at the issue from a parent's perspective to try to get the YP to think from another angle.

It is ok to get angry and frustrated and a whole lot of other feelings beside and to shout them out at God. This is called lament. We can share all our

Psalm 116

I love the Lord, because he hears me; he listens to my prayers.

He listens to me every time I call to him.

The danger of death was all round me; the horrors of the grave closed in on me;

I was filled with fear and anxiety. "I beg you, Lord, save me!"

thoughts with God. Prayer may be alien but it is always worth a try. It doesn't have to be all "thee" and "thou" and big words. It can even be "Oh, for F's sake" if that is the only way we can express ourselves (although we wouldn't necessarily encourage this but would encourage exploring other ways!). The



point is we talk, God listens! *There are additional Bible references on the theme of Lament on Page 10. We only had time to refer briefly to other verses about lament - we might come back to it in future weeks as appropriate.*

Psalm 116

By the rivers of Babylon we sat down;
there we wept when we remembered
Zion.

On the willows near by we hung up
our harps.

Those who captured us told us to
sing; they told us to entertain them:
How can we sing a song to the Lord in
a foreign land?



May I never be able to play the harp again if I forget you, Jerusalem!
May I never be able to sing again if I do not remember you,
if I do not think of you as my greatest joy!

Jesus heard the voices no one else would listen to - to give examples and expand on that as needed (eg Zaccheus, Samaritan woman, teaching via parables....) *(told orally)*

Releasing life-changing skills and confidence:

- How does that knowledge make you feel?
- When can you just shout at someone and get things off your chest or just know that someone will listen?
- Offer to pray with them or for them? They only have to listen and take the words in. *(It didn't feel quite right to do this yet - for future weeks)*
- Challenge them to try praying themselves at home. *(We didn't get this far)*



Play "Listen" by Beyoncé. *(We didn't get this far)*

Listen to the sound from deep within
It's only beginning to find release
Oh the time has come for my dreams to be heard
They will not be pushed aside and turned
Into your own, all 'cause you won't listen.....
(etc)



Lament:

2 Samuel 1:17 [*David's Lament for Saul and Jonathan*] David sang this lament for Saul and his son Jonathan, **2 Samuel 1:17** (in Context) **2 Samuel 1**(Whole Chapter)

2 Samuel 3:33 David sang this lament for Abner: Why did Abner have to die like a fool? **2 Samuel 3:32-34** (in Context) **2 Samuel 3** (Whole Chapter)

2 Chronicles 35:25 The prophet Jeremiah composed a lament for King Josiah. It has become a custom in Israel for the singers, both men and women, to use this song when they mourn for him. The song is found in the collection of laments. **2 Chronicles 35:24-26** (in Context) **2 Chronicles 35** (Whole Chapter)

Psalms 89:38 [*Lament over the Defeat of the King*] But you are angry with your chosen king; you have deserted and rejected him. **Psalms 89: 37-39** (in Context) **Psalms 89** (Whole Chapter)

Psalms 137:1 [*A Lament of Israelites in Exile*] By the rivers of Babylon we sat down; there we wept when we remembered Zion. **Psalms 137:1-3** (in Context) **Psalms 137** (Whole Chapter)

Micah 1:2 [*A Lament for Samaria and Jerusalem*] Hear this, all you nations; listen to this, all who live on earth! The Sovereign Lord will testify against you. Listen! He speaks from his heavenly temple. **Micah 1:1-3** (in Context) **Micah 1**(Whole Chapter)

Micah 1:8 Then Micah said, Because of this I will mourn and lament. To show my sorrow, I will walk around barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and wail like an ostrich. **Micah 1:7-9** (in Context) **Micah 1**(Whole Chapter)

God listens:

Psalms 116:1 [*Someone Saved from Death Praises God*] I love the Lord, because he hears me; he listens to my prayers.

Psalms 116:1-3 (in Context) **Psalms 116**(Whole Chapter)



Dealing With Death!

Unlocking real life stories of Urban People:

Aim - to hear the stories that affect this group of young people (YP).

Issues for session 2:

YP already spoken to in advance and a further issue identified from last week's scenario is "dealing with death" and grief.

Questions for group:

- How does it feel when you lose someone you love?
- How does it feel knowing someone is dying?
- How can we prepare for that?
- How do people react to death?
- Is it always the same?

Show film/film clip that covers this issue/encourages YP to think together about it:

"The Sixth Sense" starring Bruce Willis. (Clips continuing on from last week were selected). One issue is Bruce Willis' character not being ready to die yet (in fact, not being able to accept that he was already dead!). *We selected a number of clips. On reflection, it might have been better to watch the whole film before doing the last session and then this one, as most of the film was covered in these 2 sessions.*



Stages of grief:

Information on stages of Grief is provided on page 15. Bring that to the group for discussion. This was discussed, highlighting the fact that not everyone reacts the same or goes through the stages in the same order, or even goes through all 5. It dealt with a specific issue faced by one member of the group - we spent some considerable time on this.

Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ:

Some scripture responses:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Everything that happens in this world happens at the time God chooses. He sets the time for birth and the time for death, the time for planting and the time for pulling up, the time for killing and the time for healing, the time for tearing down and the time for building. He sets the time for sorrow and the time for joy, the time for mourning and the time for dancing, the time for making love and the time for not making love, the time for kissing and the time for not kissing. He sets the time for finding and the time for losing, the time for saving and the time for throwing away, the time for tearing and the time for mending, the time for silence and the time for talk. He sets the time for love and the time for hate, the time for war and the time for peace.

This was written by someone trying to seek meaning to life and to death.



Death is part of the life cycle of being human. It happens to all of us but comes sooner to some than to others. We may not understand why but it is part of a bigger picture. It may be comforting to know that the fact that someone is dying or has died is not a form of punishment to them or to their families and does not mean that you have been picked on for some reason, but is part of the way nature replenishes itself. We were prompted at this point by another leader to read on from verse 8 to verse 14 and discuss getting on with our own lives in the face of death, that this is not dishonouring to someone's memory, and that God sees our struggles.

Lament - the book of Lamentations and many of the psalms offer poems of lament. Explain what this means and that it is natural to lament, that God listens to our cries of pain and that it is through this that we can create space to grieve and to see newness and hope around us. Because of the extended time spent on Ecclesiastes we didn't cover this but may use for a future discussion.

Jesus promises that he has made a way for us all to share in eternity with God. When we die he will be there to meet us. Our own personal reception committee! Wow! The same applies to our loved ones.

Relates to times and seasons in Ecclesiastes 3. Discuss the resurrection and the fact that the bible teaches us that death is not the end - focus on future hope.

The hope that is offered through Christ is bigger than we could ever imagine. He promises that the person who is dying and suffering now will



John 14:1-4

"Do not be worried and upset," Jesus told them. "Believe in God and believe also in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so. And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am. You know the way that leads to the place where I am going."

no longer suffer; a promise that applies to the whole of creation.

(A whole host of other responses were available on a **separate sheet** for those who wanted to look further, including the leaders)

John 16:20

"I am telling you the truth: you will cry and weep, but the world will be glad; you will be sad, but your sadness will turn into gladness."

Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth disappeared, and the sea vanished. And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband. I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: "Now God's home is with human beings! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared."

Releasing life-changing skills and confidence:

How does that knowledge make you feel? The replies we had were "more secure", "at peace" and "more hopeful"

What do you think "His Father's house" will be like? What do you think Jesus meant by many rooms?



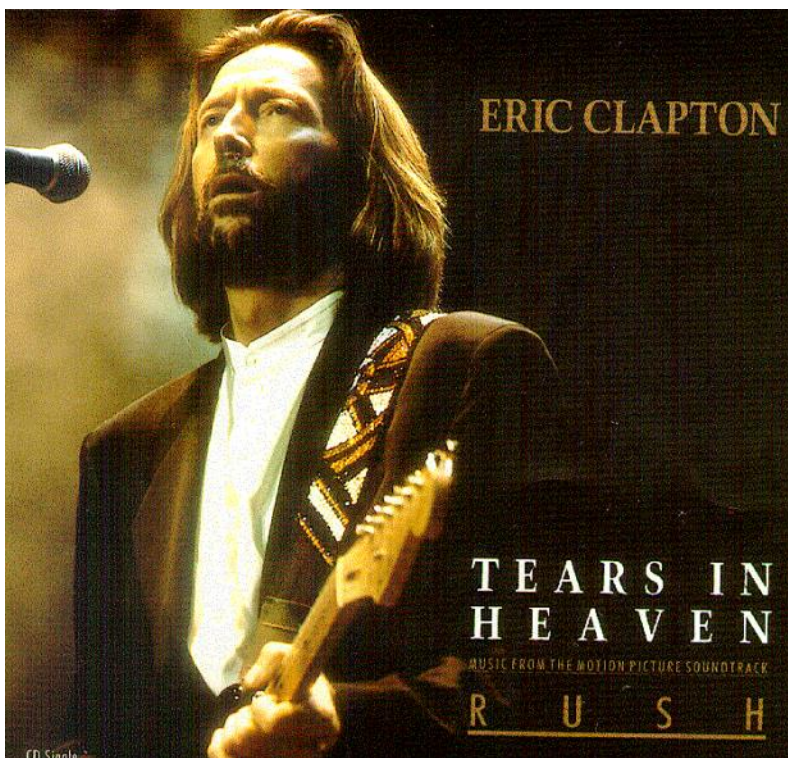
Try this exercise: When it is all too much close your eyes and think of the best place you can (a "wow!" place). This may be somewhere you have been before, a childhood memory, something you've seen in a film or on TV, or somewhere in your imagination. Now imagine it a million times better. Even that doesn't go near the promise that Jesus makes when he talks of his father's house where there is a room prepared for each of us. Hold on to that hope. Although planned, we did not get around to this exercise. In fact, it felt too much as a number of YP were already somewhat emotionally drained.



Play "Tears in Heaven" by Eric Clapton and discuss why he wrote it.

Planned but not used as it felt too much for some members who found this subject difficult:

"Good news story" - One particularly poignant moment of "closure" was expressed by a visitor to the group who sat in on the session and who had lost a parent at a young age but not been able to reconcile that with her faith until now. It seemed fitting to end on that.



Information about dealing with bereavement is available at:-
www.nhs.uk/Livewell/bereavement/Pages/coping-with-bereavement.aspx
<http://psychcentral.com/lib/2006/the-5-stages-of-loss-and-grief/>



The Sex Industry and Trafficking

Unlocking real life stories of Urban People:

Aim - to look at the sex industry and the effects it has on those involved in it. The request for this session was generally to discuss the sex industry but the first part of this session will focus on trafficking. "Trafficking" was not directly what the YP had asked to discuss so it felt to a degree as if we were imposing our own agenda on them. However, there was a student minister on placement in the circuit with links to "Stop the Traffik" and a real interest in this area. This seemed like an opportunity not to miss - you have to grab your moments and free resources while you can!

Show film/ film clip that covers this issue/ encourages YP to think together about it:

"Taken" starring Liam Neeson. (Tony to select appropriate clips)

Several clips were shown including:

- The girls meeting with the member of the gang, highlighting how easy it is for even intelligent people to be lulled into a false sense of security.
- The girls being "taken"
- The sordid scenes in the brothel
- The drug overdose
- The auction where Neeson's daughter was being sold.

Guest speaker: Methodist Student Presbyter (Christopher Collins)

Christopher led a discussion including a quick fire quiz about statistics to highlight the extent of the problem, invited us to think about the motivation behind trafficking, and asked questions of the Young People and staff which encouraged us to think how we would feel in the shoes of those trafficked.

Reference made to the above film being fiction. But this is happening in real life - stories referred to.

Show further film clip

(Select appropriate one from Stop The Traffik website or You Tube
Trafficking advert 2009 -

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izIOSzll_rk

STOP THE TRAFFIK

PEOPLE SHOULDN'T BE BOUGHT & SOLD



At this stage the Young People themselves launched into a long discussion about the porn industry as well as prostitution and about differences between being willing

participants and being trafficked. They openly shared their views on whether they felt there was a difference.



Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ:

Some scripture responses:

Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said, "And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us. They will have power over the fish, the birds, and all animals, domestic and wild, large and small." So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female.

What does it mean to us to be made in the image of God? Not literally/physically but with the potential for God's characteristics meaning we can grow to be like God. But for the purposes of this discussion, consider: if we are made in God's image this gives rise to questions of self-respect and respect for others. (On this theme see also session 1 of the Unlock Resource pack 'Cooking the Book', Liverpool 2009 www.unlock-urban.org.uk/pdf/cookingthebook-ownphotos.pdf)

Psalm 139:

Use as much of the text as you wish, up to and including verse 16. We have not included the Good News Bible text here because it changes the sense of verse 14. Use any version that comes to hand and includes the expression below.

What does it mean to you to be "fearfully and wonderfully made".. talk about each of us being created and known intimately and loved by God.

Talk about self-esteem and our worth to God.

Luke 12:7

Even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth much more than many sparrows!

Matthew 25:40

The King will reply, 'I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these members of my family, you did it for me!'

Deals with the question of "why" we might act to stop trafficking. Jesus taught us generous hospitality. List some of the people Jesus showed love for - no one was beyond his reach.

Releasing life-changing skills and confidence:

- How does that knowledge make you feel?
- Does the knowledge that you are made in God's image help? If so, how about knowing that prostitutes and porn actors/models are also made in God's image?
- Do you think you would know if someone has been trafficked?
- If you were suspicious do you know who to turn to?
- What do you think of the sex industry now?

(This discussion took up quite some time - I would allow longer for it if repeating this session).



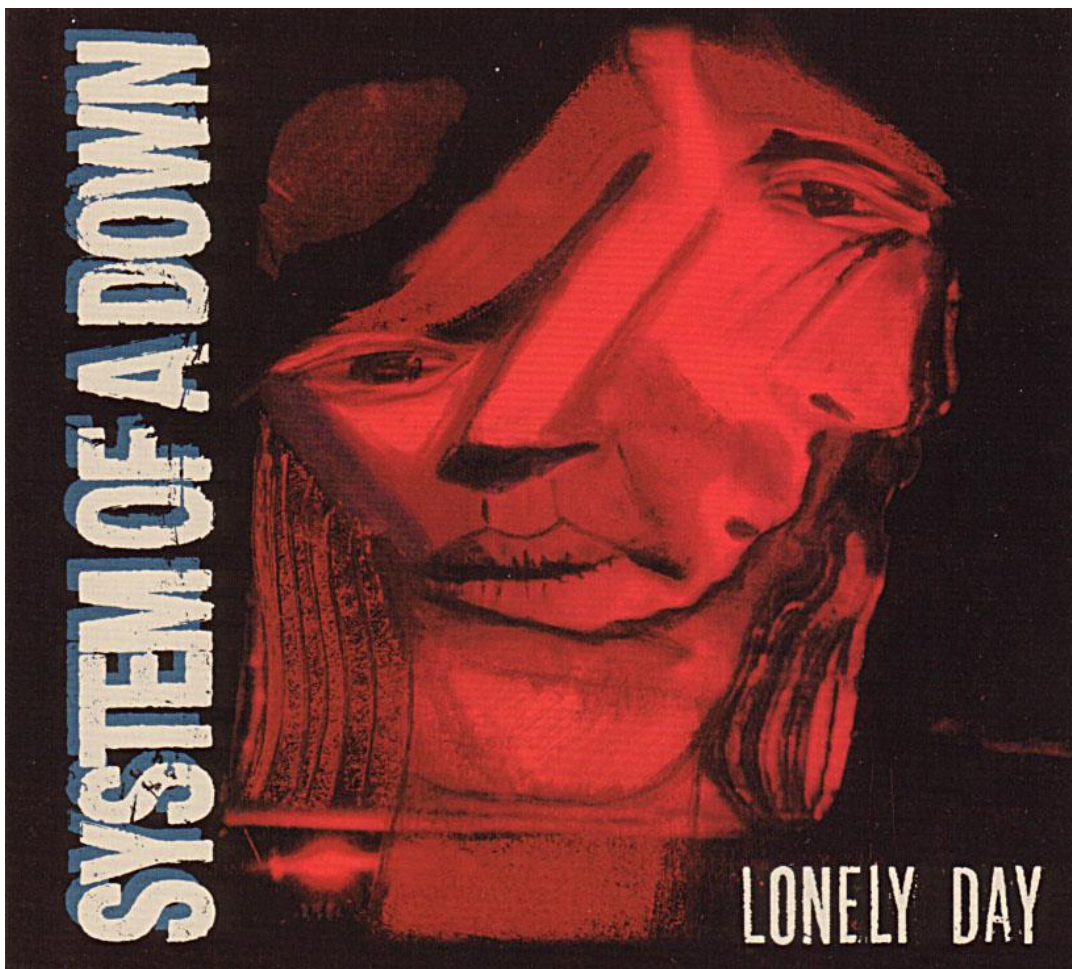
Leading to new experiences:

Challenge: Do you feel differently about porn (films, TV, internet, magazines etc) now you know not all those involved are willing participants?



Play "Lonely Day" by System of a Down - You Tube Video with trafficking images.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1STlukinkU>

(This video had a strong impact - in fact it left a stunned silence.)



Sex!

Unlocking real life stories of Urban People:

Aim - to look at issues relating to sex and how they affect teenagers in particular. Not necessarily to give rules or answers, but to encourage them to think before they act and to value themselves and others as loved creations of God.

Show film/ film clip that covers this issue/ encourages YP to think together about it:

No clips were shown this week as the YP wanted to follow on from the last session (trafficking and the sex industry) to talk about how issues to do with sex affect them:

We led a general discussion in which the YP suggested the biggest issues were:

- Peer pressure/not being ready
- Alcohol and the dangers of casual sex as a result
- Lack of knowledge about relationships and emotion versus too much information about sexual acts.
- Not knowing who to ask
- Unrealistic expectations (eg from films, TV etc)



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Good news story - one young man shared about having a girl throw herself at him at a party when she was drunk and how hard he found it to say no, but that he didn't want that experience of sex. This led to a discussion about keeping safe and many reasons to say no in such circumstances eg protecting your own sexual health, legal reasons (can you be sure of her full and proper consent? or her age?), for your own self-esteem, not being in a loving relationship...



Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ:

Some scripture responses (cross referencing to the previous session):

Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said, "And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us. They will have power over the fish, the birds, and all animals, domestic and wild, large and small." So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female.

What does it mean to be made in the image of God? Not literally/physically but with the potential for God's characteristics meaning we can grow to be like God. But for the purposes of this discussion, consider: if we are made in God's image this gives rise to questions of self-respect and respect for others.

Psalms 139:

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What does it mean to you to be "fearfully and wonderfully made".. talk about each of us being created and known intimately and loved by God.

Luke 12:7

Even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth much more than many sparrows!

Talk about self-esteem and our worth to God.

Song of Solomon (or Song of Songs)

Kiss me tenderly!
Your love is better than wine,
and you smell so sweet.
All the young women adore you;
the very mention of your name
is like spreading perfume.

"Kiss me tenderly" - love is a gift from God, as is sex. But it only has true meaning within a loving relationship. The YP wanted to discuss whether this meant marriage, living together or going out for a long time. No definitive answer was offered. They were encouraged to think this one through for themselves but to think about issues of commitment, honesty, openness, self-esteem/ valuing yourself and others.

Romans 1:24

And so God has given those people over to do the filthy things their hearts desire, and they do shameful things with each other.

1 Corinthians 6:13

Someone else will say, "Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food." Yes; but God will put an end to both. The body is not to be used for sexual immorality, but to serve the Lord; and the Lord provides for the body



1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and who was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourselves but to God; he bought you for a price. So use your bodies for God's glory.

There are many bible references to sex but the general issue seems to be one of whether something is degrading. Does this mean physically? Or morally? When the bible talks of marriage what does it mean? Looked at the bible definition of "marriage" which may not have been the same as today's but still involved giving and long term commitment.

Our bodies are temples, honouring God with our bodies - relates to self-worth. We are loved enough for Christ to have died for us. Love him back by honouring the body that we were given. This doesn't necessarily mean being chaste but about respect. The discussion was opened up to cover the issue of sexually transmitted diseases and the physical as well as moral and emotional risks of not knowing your partner well enough. The YP were pointed elsewhere (NHS) for more detailed information on Sexually Transmitted Infections etc.

Releasing life-changing skills and confidence:

- How does that knowledge make you feel?
- Does the knowledge that you are made in God's image help you make the right decisions?
- Do you see sex and love as the same thing, different, or related?
- How?

This may not have been quite how the questions were worded but the aim was to encourage them to think before acting, to consider the harm that sex outside of a loving relationship can do in the long or short term etc...

We then gave out small cards to take away with the following website addresses/contact details for them to continue their own reflections or to know where to seek advice on practical issues:

www.stophetraffik.org
www.brook.org.uk
[0121 553 2926](tel:01215532926)
[01384 239001](tel:01384239001)
www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Sexandyoungpeople
www.childline.org.uk/Explore/SexRelationships

STOP THE TRAFFIK
PEOPLE SHOULDN'T BE BOUGHT & SOLD



Being Prepared and Protected

This session was opened up to the younger section of the youth group (ages 11-18)

Unlocking real life stories of Urban People:



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Aim - to look at what is going on in the lives of the young people who are facing a new term, or a new school or college, or other life changes and challenges; and to think about the ways in which God protects us through such times.

This session was presented at the beginning of a new term with lots of change going on in the young people's lives so it was felt that we could run a session for all of the ages to encourage sharing of all of their stories. There was also an aim of introducing "Veronica" to anyone new and to revive what appears to be a flagging interest (partly because it was a new term and a time at which some of the older teens have moved on.)

Show film/ film clip that covers this issue/ encourages YP to think together about it:

G.I. Joe: Rise of the Cobra (12)

The whole film can be watched but we selected 2 specific scenes-

- Set up: 2 characters (Duke and Ripcord) have just been recruited by a crack team of soldiers for a special mission and are being shown a new armour suit that has special technology. Play: 27:12 to 30:30 (gym scene)
- And: Chasing a gang with nanomite technology (warheads with nanomites in that simply eat everything in their path, including the Eiffel tower!) Play: 52.20 to 60min. The armour allows them to run faster and jump higher etc. They come across the path of a train and Duke jumps over but Ripcord jumps through.

Reflect - Ripcord didn't know how to use the armour. He didn't listen to the instructions and didn't read manual (famous line: "you mean there's a manual?").



Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ:

The bible is a bit like a set of instructions but it's not quite that simple. It's more like a guidebook than an instruction manual. The meaning is not always clear and we can't always apply what it says literally because different parts were written for different specific people, times and places. But that doesn't mean the bible is not applicable now. There are so many things in it that can help us with what's going on in our lives now. And that includes yours. If you like reading it's a great book but it can be very off-putting - it's hard to know where to start and it's full of big words. But it is also very relevant to your life. It contains law, poetry, epic stories of heroics, family sagas, betrayal, sex, and people facing real issues.

Ephesians 6:10-20

Finally, build up your strength in union with the Lord and by means of his mighty power. Put on all the armour that God gives you, so that you will be able to stand up against the Devil's evil tricks. For we are not fighting against human beings but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age. So put on God's armour now! Then when the evil day comes, you will be able to resist the enemy's attacks; and after fighting to the end, you will still hold your ground.

So stand ready, with truth as a belt tight round your waist, with righteousness as your breastplate, and as your shoes the readiness to announce the Good News of peace. At all times carry faith as a shield; for with it you will be able to put out all the burning arrows shot by the Evil One. And accept salvation as a helmet, and the word of God as the sword which the Spirit gives you. Do all this in prayer, asking for God's help. Pray on every occasion, as the Spirit leads. For this reason keep alert and never give up; pray always for all God's people. And pray also for me, that God will give me a message when I am ready to speak, so that I may speak boldly and make known the gospel's secret. For the sake of this gospel I am an ambassador, though now I am in prison. Pray that I may be bold in speaking about the gospel as I should.

Paul writes about being *protected and equipped* by God in various ways. (We reserved detail on this passage for another session as this was more of an introduction to Veronica.)

One of those is knowing God's word. Jesus promises to be with us through times of change such as many of you are facing now. Examples of 'words of Jesus' were placed on tables for the leaders to go through with the young people - see below.

Another way God protects us is that He gives us each other to share with - introduce the idea of a "love feast" (old Methodist tradition) - sit in small groups over simple food (John Wesley suggested water and plain cake - we have squash and cake) and share what is happening in your life with your friends and leaders.



NB: Warning needs to be given that there is *no* pressure to share and it is out of *choice*. Also, if anything is too personal or confidential then it can be shared with leaders separately.

Releasing life-changing skills and confidence:

Activity: "Love feast".

On each table place a slip of paper or card containing a promise of Jesus.

This applies to you too. Think about what that means to you.

Swap them with the other tables.

Discuss with your leaders if you like.

Share with those on your table what God has been doing in your life this week/month.

How do you feel about the start of a new term/school/college?

Does knowing the promises of Jesus help you deal with the changes?



See page 25 for background information on the Methodist Love Feast Tradition.

Examples of promises:

We explained that a yoke is a wooden bar placed over the necks of work animals so that they can pull carts. Jesus promises he will make it easier for us to carry all the problems of life that we have to deal with.

"Yes I am with you always, until the very end of time" (Matthew 28:20)
"Come to me, all who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Place my yoke over your shoulders, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble. Then you will find rest for yourselves because my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

"For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:20)
"I give you peace, the kind of peace that only I can give. It isn't like the peace that this world can give. So don't be worried or afraid" (John 14:27)

Comments:

We were astonished at how successful this was. We knew it was a risk as it was so traditional but it was new to the young people. They really shared and chatted. The small groups with one or 2 leaders to 3 or 4 young people gave space for the quieter voices to be heard. They sat and chatted for over half an hour, many still there after an hour.



Love Feast

A love feast is a Methodist tradition, received in the 18th Century by John Wesley from the Moravians. It is a form of agapé meal in which the congregation (or small group) gather together to share a simple meal, usually of cake and a cold drink (John Wesley encouraged the use of "plain cake and water") hear a word of scripture, share testimony, pray and talk together about what God has been doing in their lives recently. It is not Holy Communion by another name and does not require an ordained minister to be present. It is a simple but rewarding way of sharing fellowship and encouraging each other to talk about how God is real and present in our lives and encouraging and supporting each other in difficult times.



The five thousand, Eularia Clarke (1914-1970)
Methodist Collection of Modern Christian Art.



Who is in Control?

Unlocking real life stories of Urban People:

(NB: an alternative film is suggested for use with younger ages)

Aim: to look at the issue of control.

Discussion Questions :

- How much of your life do you really have control over?
- Do you ever feel like your life is spiralling out of control?
- Do you have a say in the big decisions that affect your life?
- What sort of decisions are you facing at the moment?
- Who makes your decisions? Perhaps give examples.

Visual/physical learning tool:

Offer a box of chocolates or plate of biscuits/cakes around (must be a good variety). Allow the participants to choose one. If appropriate, don't

give the option to certain people but choose for them and ask how they feel about it. Did they like what you chose? What if their peers chose for them? Would they really know what sort they like best? Their best friends might but the leaders may not.

Alternatively, use Revels or similar chocolates where you can't tell what is in the centre - although participants are "choosing" they may not know what it is they have chosen until too late.

Show film/ film clip that covers this issue/ encourages participants to think together

about it. E.g.- **Click (2006 - cert 12A)**

A light hearted comedy in which Adam Sandler plays a workaholic



Chris McKenna — Wikimedia Commons



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architect who finds a universal remote that allows him to fast-forward and rewind to different parts of his life. Complications arise when the remote starts to overrule his choices.

Awake (2007 - cert 15)

The story focuses on a wealthy young man (Clay) who suffers "anaesthetic awareness" and finds himself awake and aware, but paralyzed, during heart surgery. In dealing with the pain he has an out of body experience in which he sees and hears all that is going



Tom Morris — Wikimedia Commons

on around him, both in the operating theatre and outside it. The plot unravels to show his new wife (Sam) has arranged to deliberately have him killed during surgery and inherit his fortune. His new heart is rejected but his mother discovers the murder plot just in time and commits suicide, leaving her heart to her son.

Warning: *this film opens with some facts about the number of people who suffer "anaesthetic awareness" which are disputed and which may cause viewers to be scared. We would advise caution before showing the very beginning; certainly view it yourself first and decide how to handle it.*

Suggested scenes to highlight:

- 2min 53: "People die. You think you can control when and where but you can't"
- 40 minutes onwards: this is where the action begins after the plot has been set up. Clay is undergoing surgery and tries to focus on something else to escape the pain.
- 1hr 15: Sam tells Clay's mum that Clay won't die as he has too much to live for (in irony of course as she is plotting his death).
- 1 hr 17: Clay "accepts death" (but goes on to live)
- 1 hr 30 to end (1 hr 36): Clay believes he has nothing to live for and has to be persuaded otherwise.



Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ:

Matthew 24:36-51

No one knows, however, when that day and hour will come — neither the angels in heaven nor the Son; the Father alone knows. The coming of the Son of Man will be like what happened in the time of Noah. In the days before the flood people ate and drank, men and women married, up to the very day Noah went into the boat; yet they did not realise what was happening until the flood came and swept them all away. That is how it will be when the Son of Man comes. At that time two men will be working in a field: one will be taken away, the other will be left behind. Two women will be at a mill grinding meal: one will be taken away, the other will be left behind.

"Be on your guard, then, because you do not know what day your Lord will come. If the owner of a house knew the time when the thief would come, you can be sure that he would stay awake and not let the thief break into his house. So then, you also must always be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you are not expecting him.

"Who, then, is a faithful and wise servant? It is the one that his master has placed in charge of the other servants to give them their food at the proper time. How happy that servant is if his master finds him doing this when he comes home! Indeed, I tell you, the master will put that servant in charge of all his property. But if he is a bad servant, he will tell himself that his master will not come back for a long time, and he will begin to beat his fellow-servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. Then that servant's master will come back one day when the servant does not expect him and at a time he does not know. The master will cut him in pieces and make him share the fate of the hypocrites. There he will cry and grind his teeth.

"No one can know the day or hour..." Jesus told his followers (and that includes us!) that he will return one day but no one knows when. He gave an example that if someone knew a thief was coming he would not leave his house unguarded. This story reminds us that however chaotic life seems ultimately God is in control. We are in safe hands.

Jeremiah 29:11

I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for.

Discussion can be opened up on the difference between God being "in control" or "controlling". God does not control us. We have free will and there are some things we must take responsibility for. Jesus' story about the faithful servant tells us this. Knowing God is in control is not an excuse to sit by and do nothing or to become lazy. But it is an assurance that God always has our best interests at heart. We may not understand why things happen but God promises that we can trust Him. Just as in the film "Awake"



Clay realises that his mother always had his best interests at heart when she didn't want him to marry Sam (1 hr 04 - Clay regrets not trusting his mum)

Determination, hard work and will power go a long way to achieving our goals (it was Clay's will power that helped him live) but if things don't work out as we want, we can ask ourselves "was it right for me or has God got something better planned?" -

Supporting verses:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8
See text on page 3

We may feel like we have lost control but the times and seasons under God's control.

Matthew 28:20
... and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.

We may not be in control of what happens but whatever does, God is in it with us.

Releasing life-changing skills and confidence:

- What do you think you might do in future if things don't work out how you planned?
- How does it feel to know God is in control and has your best interests at heart?
- How does it feel to know that "in control" does not simply mean you are being controlled like a puppet but that you have free choice?

Activity: Puppet making.

- www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Sock-Puppet
- www.instructables.com/id/Sock-Puppets-Make-yourself-some-Friends/
- www.daniellesplace.com/html/puppets.html

Message - we are not puppets but have freedom of choice. We must take responsibility for our actions **but** when we feel like we have no control, we can be assured that God loves us and has our best interests at heart.



Who Am I?

Ice-breaker: Invite the group to look at themselves in a mirror (*beware - some people may have an issue with this so encourage but don't push. You may even need to miss this out*).

Then invite them to look at distorted images - you can get phone apps that allow you to take a picture and distort it, or simply look in a shaving/cosmetic mirror that magnifies or on the back of a spoon, side of a saucepan, screwed up tin foil ... etc.



Notes: *The aim is to make this entertaining/engaging and not pressured. If any images are taken using a phone, make sure they are wiped off once they have been viewed.*

Unlocking real life stories of Urban People:

Aim: to look at our self-perception, or self-esteem and know ourselves to be God's children, created and loved by a generous God. .

Questions :

- Who are you? Name all the different "hats" you wear (e.g. daughter, son, sister, brother, class clown, good footballer....) - *perhaps literally draw the hats*
- What do you like to do (e.g. in any spare time)?
- What makes you happy?

If the leader has a skill, talent or hobby perhaps she/he can demonstrate it or bring in a visual aid to express it as it is part of who they are.

Show film/ film clip

Men in Black (1997 - cert PG)

Synopsis: Kay (Tommy Lee Jones) and Jay (Will Smith) are members of a top-secret organization established to monitor and police alien activity on Earth. The two Men in Black find themselves in the middle of the deadly plot by an intergalactic terrorist who has arrived on Earth to assassinate two ambassadors from opposing galaxies. In order to prevent worlds from colliding, the MiB must track down the terrorist and prevent the destruction of Earth.



Themes: This film has many scenes that deal with a number of theological issues. One of the continuing themes throughout is the use of a gadget to delete people's memories every time they have an encounter with aliens so that their existence can be kept secret. Wiped memories are replaced with new ones. This raises the issue of who these people really are if their memories are



false. It is suggested that you watch the whole film. If you have to pick scenes, some scenes to highlight are:

- Approx. 36 minutes in - Jay has his ID deleted. "*Anonymity is your name*".
- Approx. 1 hour in to 1 hour 5 - Jay discharges his weapon in public. A conversation ensues in which Kay says "*There's always an alien...the only way these people get on with their happy lives is they do not know it!*" This is then followed by a scene in which they visit a concession stand where Kay speaks and a dog replies. He then tells a shocked Jay "*Just because something is small does not mean it is not important*".
NB: The galaxy they are looking for is very small!

At the end of the film, Kay also has his memory deleted.

Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ:

Psalm 139:

Use as much of the text as you wish, up to and including verse 16. We have not included the Good News Bible text here because it changes the sense of verse 14. Use any version that comes to hand and includes the expression below.

"For you created my inmost being;

you knit me together in my mother's womb" and 14 "*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made"*

Matthew 10:29-31 For only a penny you can buy two sparrows, yet not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father's consent. As for you, even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth much more than many sparrows!



KLAX999—Wikimedia Commons

John 3:16: For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, son that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.

Luke 19:1-9 Jesus went on into Jericho and was passing through. There was a chief tax collector there named Zacchaeus, who was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was a little man and could not see Jesus because of the crowd. So he ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus, who was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to that place, he looked up and said to Zacchaeus, "Hurry down, Zacchaeus, because I must stay in your house today."

Zacchaeus hurried down and welcomed him with great joy. All the people who saw it started grumbling, "This man has gone as a guest to the home of a sinner!"

Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Listen, sir! I will give half my belongings to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times as much."

Jesus said to him, "Salvation has come to this house today, for this man, also, is a descendant of Abraham



Releasing life-changing skills and confidence:

- Have you ever felt anonymous or unimportant?
- How did you react?

Encourage the group to look in the mirror again if they feel able. Remind them that God knows every hair on their heads. God made them and loves them for who they are. They are each unique and each loved by God so much that God sent Jesus Christ for them.

- How does it feel to know that you are "fearfully and wonderfully made"?
- What do you think that means? (explore this together)
- You are so loved that even if you were the last person on earth Jesus would have died for you to show you how much He loves you and risen for you to show you that you can have new life in Him. How does that feel?

You may wish to explore any feelings of unworthiness - Do you feel worthy of that love? Be assured that you don't need to be worthy of it - God created you and loves you! You may have many roles but you fill them all as "X" (name), a child of God. You may also wish to explore the question: What do you think it means to be a "child of God"?

Activities:

1. Fingerprints

You will need: postcard size pieces of card/blank postcards, ink pad or paints.
Write on the cards "I am fearfully and wonderfully made: Psalm 139"

(you may wish to do this in advance.)

Using the ink pad or some poster paint encourage participants to make a thumb or fingerprint on a card and keep it as a reminder.

Music: play Leona Lewis "Fingerprint" - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUEXsnuHn6o>



Matthew Field—Wikimedia Commons



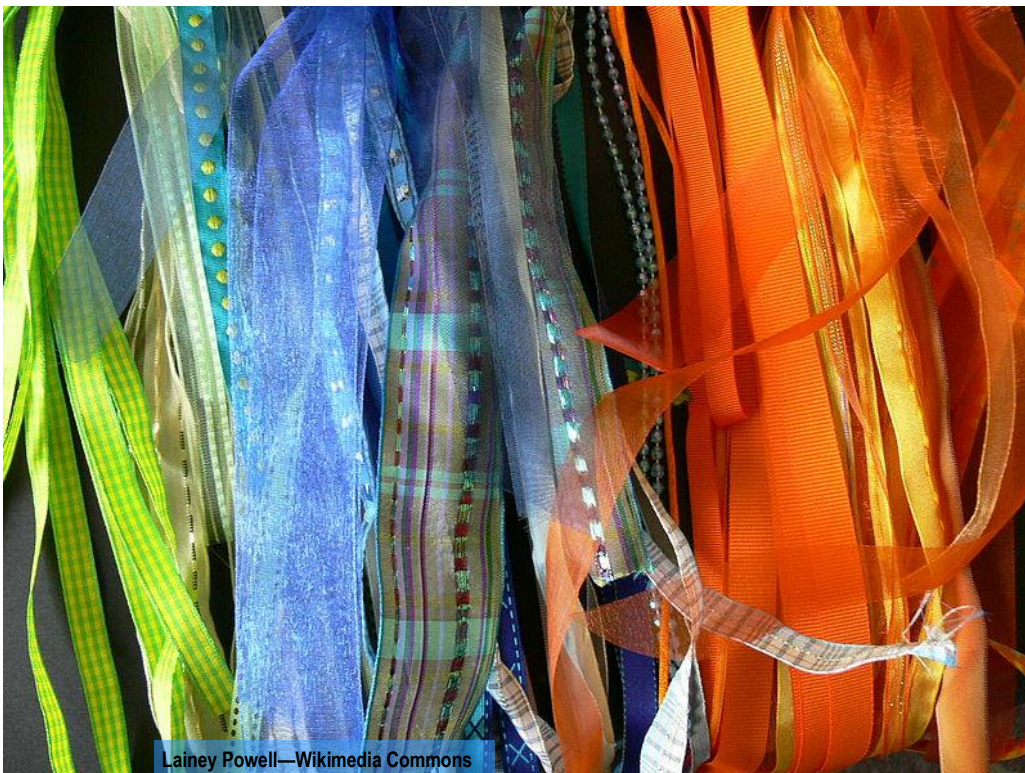
2. Labels

You will need: card, string or elastic bands, hole punch, pens or craft stuff for decorating.

Cut out card to make labels. Each person can write their name on them followed by "Hand made by God" and decorate them in any way they wish.

Then punch a hole and put the string/elastic band through - you each have a label to wear (like a Paddington Bear label).

If you are short of time you may wish to cheat and buy ready-made card luggage tags to decorate.



The Hunger Games

There are so many themes that run through this film that this "workshop" may well be extended over several sessions as the film itself is just over 2 hours long. Two approaches are offered:-

(i) Simply watch the film and look at the many and varied themes that run through it.

The suggestion is to tell the group some of the questions you will be asking to get them thinking about the various themes within the film then simply enjoy it! This still follows the Unlock method as the film should bring out their personal stories.

(ii) Alternatively, you can follow one (or more) of the 4 suggested threads over several sessions for a more structured approach.

Unlocking real life stories of Urban People:



lionsgate.com/publicity.html - Wikimedia Commons

Aim: To bring out a number of issues that the film deals with. This may take several sessions. The 4 suggested main threads are:

- Hope
- Sacrifice
- Power and Manipulation
- Justice

Suggested questions :

1. **HOPE** - Have you ever been through a tough time when you felt hopeless? Or have you ever really hoped for something with all your heart? What happened? Or are you still hoping?
2. **SACRIFICE** - Is there anything or anyone that you love so much you would give your life for it/them?
3. **POWER and TRUTH** - Do you believe everything you read in the newspaper or see on television? How do you decide what you believe?



4. JUSTICE - Do you think the world we live in is fair? Do you have any experience of injustice? Have you ever felt that life for you isn't fair?

Show film/ film clip

The Hunger Games (2012- cert 12A)

Synopsis: According to the Romans, 'bread and circuses' were the key to keeping a population content. As long as their immediate physical needs are met, and they are sufficiently distracted, people will turn a blind eye to almost anything.

In a dystopian* America, people in thirteen impoverished districts struggle for survival, oppressed by a wealthy minority. To keep the peace, the governing Capitol stages a yearly

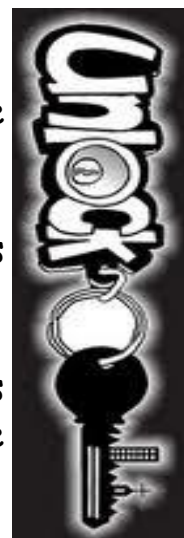
tournament in which 'tributes' from each district fight to the death on live television. These tributes, selected at random, are young people aged between twelve and eighteen.

***A dystopia is a community or society, usually fictional, that is in some important way undesirable or frightening**

When her beloved little sister is chosen, sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) volunteers to go in her place. In a competition where losing means certain death, there's no room for friendship - even with fellow-tribute Peeta (Josh Hutcherson), who once saved her life years ago. Swept away from her family and forced into the arena, under the guiding hand of drunken mentor Haymitch (Woody Harrelson) and the eye of the whole populace, nobody expects her to last very long. A lifetime of struggling against the odds, however, has taught Katniss a few valuable lessons. Not only will she refuse to go quietly, but she might just change the game forever.

Suggested scenes to highlight:

- 12 minutes: Propaganda - a spin is put on the cause of the games as being treason therefore the districts have a responsibility to offer up tributes.
- 15 min: Self-sacrifice- Katniss' sister is chosen but she volunteers in her sister's place.
- 20 min: Poverty v riches - the richness and decadence is obvious.
- 23 min: Haymitch comes onto the scene. It becomes obvious that he is an intelligent man and was a good tribute (he is the



only one from Katniss' district to have won) but he is without hope. When he won he was set up for life financially but it wasn't enough.

- 48 min: The head gamemaker is ordered to contain hope because it is the only thing stronger than fear.
- 1hr 12min: an alliance forms, the apparently stronger members pitting together against the apparently weak. A girl wants to kill Peeta but a boy says to leave him alive to lead them to Katniss which Peeta appears to do.
- 1hr 20min: Katniss receives some ointment with a message to "apply generously and stay alive".
- 1hr 40: The gamesmaster is told to give the people something to root for (young love) and the game rules are changed.
- Ending: rules are changed again resulting in suicide pact which is stopped just in time. But Katniss is warned by Haymitch that she has shown them up and they don't like that.

Questions:

Ask the questions again, along with any of your own but, this time, draw out answers. You may wish to focus on one subject at a time.

1. HOPE -

- Have you ever been through a tough time when you felt hopeless?
- Have you ever really hoped for something with all your heart? What happened? Or are you still hoping?
- Do you agree with the comment that "hope is the only thing stronger than fear"?
- Do you think that hope kept Katniss and Peeta going? Even when the other tributes were killed and the rules changed?
- Do you think hope is important?

2. SACRIFICE:-

- Is there anything or anyone that you love so much you would give your life for it/them?
- Katniss didn't have to die in the end but she was prepared to give up her life for her sister and go to the games in her place. How do you feel about that?
- Would you have done the same?

3. TRUTH and POWER:-

- Do you believe everything you read in the newspaper or see



on television?

- Who held the power in the games? Were they the rich or the poor?
- How did you feel when the rules changed the first time? And when they changed them back to allow only one survivor?
- Who do you think holds power in your life?
- Have you ever felt used or manipulated? If so, how did that make you feel?

4. JUSTICE:-

- Do you think the world we live in is fair?
- Do you have any experience of injustice?
- Have you ever felt that life for you isn't fair?
- How did you feel when you saw the poverty that Katniss's district lived in and the riches in the Capital?

Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ:

Matthew 12:21

... and in him all peoples will put their hope

1. HOPE:

The gospel writer is quoting from Isaiah 42. All through the Old Testament, the Israelite people held fast to a hope that one person (the Messiah) would come to free them from oppression. The writer is telling us that Jesus was that person. The Israelite nation were taken as slaves in Egypt, wandered the desert for years, were defeated and held captive by nation after nation (Babylon, Assyria etc) and then invaded and held captive in their own land by the Romans. Under Roman rule they were treated as second class citizens and kept in their place by legions of Roman soldiers and a Jewish government that was subject to Rome. They paid taxes to Rome but got little in return and saw those in authority get richer (including the Jewish rulers who colluded with Rome) while the people struggled. Their hope of freedom was realised in Christ.

Hebrews 6:19

We have this hope as an anchor for our lives. It is safe and sure, and goes through the curtain of the heavenly temple into the inner sanctuary.

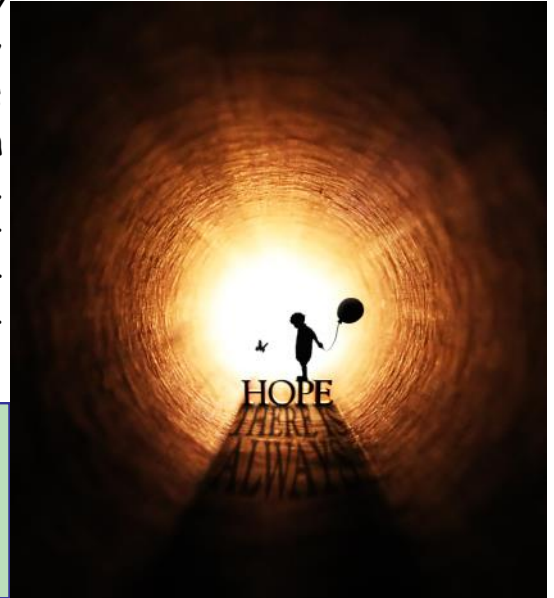
John 19:30

Jesus drank the wine and said, "It is finished!" Then he bowed his head and died.



He is also our hope of freedom from whatever traps us. That might be something physical like poverty or it might be lack of hope or of future. Jesus gives us a future.

Christians talk of a sure and certain hope. To hope in everyday language means to think that something *might probably* happen (e.g. I hope it is sunny, I hope my football team win etc.) But to hope in Christ is to *know* that He saves us if we put our trust in Him. Whatever circumstances we face we have certainty in God's love for us. That enables us to cope with our current circumstances because we know things will not always be this way.



Psalm 77:11-12

I will remember your great deeds, Lord; I will recall the wonders you did in the past. I will think about all that you have done; I will meditate on all your mighty acts.

But how can we know we have hope in Christ?

We can look at the old stories of times when God saved His people and know he will do it again.

Luke 24:1-7

Very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, carrying the spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the entrance to the tomb, so they went in; but they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. They stood there puzzled about this, when suddenly two men in bright shining clothes stood by them. Full of fear, the women bowed down to the ground, as the men said to them, "Why are you looking among the dead for one who is alive? He is not here; he has been raised. Remember what he said to you while he was in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and three days later rise to life.' "

(Or any other resurrection story) - Because he defeated even death.

Eternal life does not mean life as it is now going on for ever. No, it means much more than that - no more pain, sorrow, injustice etc. - see the "justice" thread.

Titus 1:1-3

I was chosen and sent to help the faith of God's chosen people and to lead them to the truth taught by our religion, which is based on the hope for eternal life. God, who does not lie, promised us this life before the beginning of time, and at the right time he revealed it in his message.



Hebrews 10:1-25

The Jewish Law is not a full and faithful model of the real things; it is only a faint outline of the good things to come. The same sacrifices are offered for ever, year after year. How can the Law, then, by means of these sacrifices make perfect the people who come to God? If the people worshipping God had really been purified from their sins, they would not feel guilty of sin any more, and all sacrifices would stop. As it is, however, the sacrifices serve year after year to remind people of their sins. For the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins.

For this reason, when Christ was about to come into the world, he said to God, "You neither want nor are you pleased with sacrifices and offerings or with animals burnt on the altar and the sacrifices to take away sins." He said this even though all these sacrifices are offered according to the Law. Then he said, "Here I am, O God, to do your will." So God does away with all the old sacrifices and puts the sacrifice of Christ in their place. Because Jesus Christ did what God wanted him to do, we are all purified from sin by the offering that he made of his own body once and for all.

Every Jewish priest performs his services every day and offers the same sacrifices many times; but these sacrifices can never take away sins. Christ, however, offered one sacrifice for sins, an offering that is effective for ever, and then he sat down at the right-hand side of God. There he now waits until God puts his enemies as a footstool under his feet. With one sacrifice, then, he has made perfect for ever those who are purified from sin. And the Holy Spirit also gives us his witness. First he says:

"This is the covenant that I will make with them in the days to come, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts and write them on their minds." And then he says, "I will not remember their sins and evil deeds any longer." So when these have been forgiven, an offering to take away sins is no longer needed.

We have, then, my brothers and sisters, complete freedom to go into the Most Holy Place by means of the death of Jesus. He opened for us a new way, a living way, through the curtain — that is, through his own body. We have a great priest in charge of the house of God. So let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith, with hearts that have been purified from a guilty conscience and with bodies washed with clean water. Let us hold on firmly to the hope we profess, because we can trust God to keep his promise. Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another to show love and to do good. Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer.

Genesis 1:27

So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female

2. SACRIFICE:

The Jewish faith demanded that sacrifices be made to God for various things including

*atonement for sin, to pray for forgiveness. But Jesus willingly gave

* Atonement—a repair done for the sake of a damaged relationship



himself as the one final sacrifice so that we could be forgiven forever and receive eternal life. We no longer have to make sacrifices to God. God loves us and accepts us as we are (but that is not an excuse to do as we wish). Jesus paid the price once and for all - that is why he said "It is finished".

This passage is from a letter written to new Christian converts telling them that Jesus has made the only and final sacrifice required. It talks of him as being the high priest who has made the sacrifice on our behalf so that we are forgiven for our sin and are being made perfect in Christ.

Romans 8:38-39

For I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below — there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.

As a result of Jesus death and resurrection, even death was defeated so now **NOTHING** can separate us from God, not even death. We talk about a sacrifice for sin but sin isn't just doing something wrong, it is a state of being separated from God. And a sacrifice isn't just saying sorry, it is about uniting us back with God. That is why Christ's one sacrifice is so amazing. Now nothing can separate us from God, not even our sin.

3. TRUTH and POWER

Jesus taught that truth means freedom. Not knowing who is telling the truth traps us. Knowing we can trust entirely the teaching of Jesus is freeing. In the Old Testament and in Jesus day there were many false prophets who claimed to have messages from God but were not being truthful. The simple truth is that God loves you and Jesus dies for you to prove it. But what about our own truth? How do we live a truthful and honest life pleasing to God?

Have you ever seen the WWJD wristbands that people wear? It stands for "What Would Jesus Do?". If you want to know whether something is right and honourable, look at whether it fits the



pattern of Jesus teaching. "If you hold to my teaching, you really are my disciples...."

Do you want to know the truth about what God is like? You can't see God directly but you can see God in Jesus. Jesus taught that if you know Him



CrazyLegsKC—Wikimedia Commons

John 14:6-7

Jesus answered him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me. 7 Now that you have known me," he said to them, "you will know my Father also, and from now on you do know him and you have seen him."

you will know his Father. So look at the stories of what Jesus was like - he loved everyone, welcomed the stranger and the outcast, was beautiful beyond description, stood up for justice, suffered, gave until he died, etc -this is the Jesus who wants to be our friend and this is the God who created us and loves us. Moreover, we are made in God's image and are called to imitate Christ

1 Corinthians 11:1

St Paul says -

Imitate me, then, just as I imitate Christ.

John 8:31-31

So Jesus said to those who believed in him, "If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples; you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

4. JUSTICE

God does not like injustice or unfairness.

He loves everyone the same and God's ideal world is one where everyone loves and respects each other, where no one goes without (after all, the creator has provided plenty to go around, it's just that we don't share the world's resources fairly). In Amos' time there were many rich people trying to rip off those who

Amos 5:24

let justice flow like a stream, and righteousness like a river that never goes dry.



already had little. Through the prophet Amos, God warned the people that this was not how he wanted humans to live.

Matthew 5:38-42

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But now I tell you: do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap your left cheek too. And if someone takes you to court to sue you for your shirt, let him have your coat as well. And if one of the occupation troops forces you to carry his pack one kilometre, carry it two kilometres. When someone asks you for something, give it to him; when someone wants to borrow something, lend it to him.

See 'The Whole Armour of God' session for an explanation of what this actually meant. Jesus came to stand up against injustice and often spoke in ways that shamed the rich or those who treated others unfairly.

Luke 12:13-21

A man in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide with me the property our father left us." Jesus answered him, "My friend, who gave me the right to judge or to divide the property between you two?" And he went on to say to them all, "Watch out and guard yourselves from every kind of greed; because a person's true life is not made up of the things he owns, no matter how rich he may be." Then Jesus told them this parable: "There was once a rich man who had land which bore good crops. He began to think to himself, 'I haven't anywhere to keep all my crops. What can I do? This is what I will do,' he told himself; 'I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, where I will store my corn and all my other goods. Then I will say to myself, Lucky man! You have all the good things you need for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself!' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night you will have to give up your life; then who will get all these things you have kept for yourself?' " And Jesus concluded, "This is how it is with those who pile up riches for themselves but are not rich in God's sight."



Jesus made it clear that money and wealth should not be our priority but that true freedom comes in serving God and others.

The book of revelation is a vision

Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth disappeared, and the sea vanished. And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband. I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: "Now God's home is with human beings! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared."

received by John in which Jesus came to him and showed him an alternative to the injustice, pain and suffering he saw. Some people think it is a vision of what will happen when Jesus comes again as he has



promised. But it is also a dream of what can be now if we follow Jesus' teaching on how to love our neighbours as ourselves and on how to stand up against injustice where we see it. It is a promise that one day there will be no more pain, suffering or injustice but is also a challenge to us to try to live like that now, to create a world where there is no injustice. This is what we mean when we talk about living by "Kingdom values" or about the Kingdom of God here on earth now.

Releasing life-changing skills and confidence:

Suggested Discussion Questions and Related Activities:-

1. Hope:

- How does it feel to know that there is always hope in Christ?
- How do you feel about the future now?

Activity:-

Provide creative media, clay, plasticine, or collage materials and invite people to make something which they see as a sign of hope.

2. Sacrifice:

- How does it feel to know that whatever you do, you are treated as perfect by God?
- How does it feel to know God loves and forgives you for anything you have done or do wrong?
- Sin means separation from God. How does it feel to think that nothing now separates you from God and you can always be in God's presence?

Activity:-

Each person creates a three piece jigsaw for themselves. One jigsaw piece is labelled 'God' another 'Sin' and the third with the name of the person making it. Design them in such a way that the God and person pieces will fit together so long as the sin section is left out. If you like you can invite people to write Jesus in marker pen over the top of the word 'Sin'.



3. Truth and power:

- Do you feel comforted knowing there is one ultimate truth you can rely on?
- Do you feel challenged to question what it says in the papers or on TV? Or to see a story from another perspective?
- How does it feel to see the truth about what God is like and to hear that this is the God that loves and welcomes us? Does it challenge you to want to imitate Christ?

Activity:-

Play a true or false game in teams.



<http://www.quiz-zone.co.uk/quizrounds/020317trueorfalse/questions.html>
<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20081009192723AAwBq2T>

4. Injustice:

- Do you feel challenged at all to do anything to bring about justice now?
- If you feel something is not fair what will you do about it in the future?

Activity: -

Provide coloured pens and card. Make an illustrated card to remind you of anything you have resolved to do about injustice. It might be helpful to use images from the film to help you remember where your ideas came from.

The Hunger Games sessions have yet to be used.



lionsgate.com/publicity.html - Wikimedia Commons



For Group Leaders

Resource name: *The Veronica Sessions*

Authors / Facilitators: Ruth Childs (Unlock Birmingham 2012/2013)

Aims: To enable participants to engage with their own stories in relation to a number of issues that particularly affect young people (including feeling ignored, dealing with death, sex and self-esteem, freedom and truth, God's equipping us, God in control, identity, hope, power and injustice) using widely accessible film and cinema material. To create opportunities to explore how their own story connects with the bigger story within scripture. To be able to reflect on the impacts, both positive and negative, of our attitudes and actions. To enable participants to reflect theologically on situations in their lives and in society, and to make reflective and informed choices about how they respond to challenging experiences and circumstances.

Outcomes: The group will be more able to engage with each other, using a reflective theological cycle, starting from their own story or the stories of others in the group, or things that have affected them on a daily basis, without necessarily having to have to understand at an intellectual level. The group will be more able to refer to the connections made with Scripture, and intended changed approaches in similar situations in the future. The group will be able to reflect on their own experiences, and topical issues which affect them, and to do this in relation to scripture. The group will be better able to manage the points of crisis and tension in their lives with reference to scripture.

Session Content

Unlocking Real Life Experience

Media: the sharing of participants' own stories is facilitated starting from watching a film or selected clips and inviting them to see if there were any issues they could identify with - this may have to be teased out by *gentle* questioning, giving time for reflection and response.

Own story: Within our own narratives and situations are threads that can be woven into scripture and understood, helping us recognise our connections with God's story. The contents of this resource were designed for a specific group of people with particular needs. Other groups will have different needs.



For Group Leaders

Questions: See individual sessions for questions and challenges.

Revealing the Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

Bible: Passages used (examples):

Nobody's listening - Psalm 116 (God listens) & Hebrews 5:11-14

Dealing with death - John 14:1-4, Revelation 21, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Sex and self-esteem - Genesis 1:26-27 (made in the image of God), Psalm 139, Luke 12:7

Freedom and truth - Matthew 5:38-42 (Jesus highlighting unjust structures), John 8:12

God equips - Ephesians 6:10-20

God in control - Matthew 24:36-51, Ecclesiastes 3

Identity - Psalm 139, Luke 19:1-9 (Jesus does not overlook us)

Hope - Matthew 22:21, Hebrews 6:19, Psalm 77

Truth and power - John 8:31-32

Justice - Amos 5:24 and Revelation 21:1-4

The Bible passages suggested are a selection from which facilitators can choose. It is not necessary to use all of them and if the group's discussions go in a different direction you may need to choose others that are more appropriate.

Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

By connecting God's story with our own, participants begin to encounter alternative responses to the issues and pressures they encounter in their day to day lives.

Reflective Activities

Some sessions only require participants to watch films/clips and begin sharing. Other sessions offer some activities to help them think through the issues. Examples of such activities are:

Nobody's listening - play music track

Dealing with death - play music track

God equips - Methodist love feast or agapé meal

God in control - making glove puppets

Identity - making fingerprint cards and luggage labels

Throughout this material the purple text indicates facilitator's notes, mostly made in the light of the experience of actually running these sessions.



Unlock, by various names, has been around since 1972, trying to help (mainly) urban Christians to understand and share their faith appropriately. Our life experience matters; our stories; our joys and sorrows. The Bible has plenty to say, more than we'll ever know, about our lives, if we know how to read it and apply it - if we know how to **UNLOCK** it!

The work outlined in this pack applies the learning cycle on page 3, **starting by using a 'prompt'** to draw out group member's stories. It is up to you which prompt you use (from those suggested in the sessions) or to find one of your own to connect with your group. Give everyone time to tell their story and listen carefully as they do. What are the themes and issues arising in the stories? Try to remember so that you can remind people later if necessary.

The next stage is to **find part of the Bible** that comes to mind having listened to the stories. These sessions were designed for use with a group that had little or no Bible knowledge. If you are using these sessions with a non-church group you will need to be ready to provide some Bible links, but only if they are unable to do so. It is always worth giving them a chance to come up with a Bible link for themselves first; they may surprise you! Then ask the group to explore **connections**, similarities or differences.

Finally there is a **reflective activity**, giving people an opportunity to reflect on the session and any action they might want to take as a result. The reflective activity creates space in which discussion and reflection can continue in an unforced way.

How well the group know and trust one another will affect the type of story that they share, often the newer the group, the more light hearted the stories are likely to be.



Unlock uses an approach to engaging with the Bible that is different to traditional Bible studies (see page 3). Unlock's approach starts from the stories and experiences of group members, whereas a more traditional approach starts from the Biblical text. Unlock's approach has been found to work well with small groups of urban, oral learners from outside of the church. There are many free resources on the Unlock website designed for use with such groups. However, because each of these resources was designed for a particular group in a particular time and place they are unlikely to be a perfect fit for your group as they stand. They are offered more as inspiration to you to design your own materials along the same lines, rather than as ready to use packages.

Unlock usually works with people outside of church who may be interested in finding out a bit more about faith but perhaps are not attracted to the formal methods of learning often associated with church. Our work is based on a reflective learning cycle and is a tried and tested way of introducing people to the Bible in a non-threatening way. Many churches have activities that draw in members of their surrounding community but then struggle with how to move on from those relationships into exploring faith, especially in urban environments where anything formal might be treated with suspicion.

This resource has been developed by an Unlock worker in Sandwell (near Birmingham) around a number of issues that young people face. The sessions were aimed at 16-19 year olds and discussed issues they themselves had raised.

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The Unlock Learning Cycle

Unlocking real life stories of urban people
Start with the group telling stories from their real life experience.

Leading to more experience
What we learn now is learnt for life and changes us. We also learn to keep reflecting!

Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ
The real life stories are connected to and compared with similar situations in the Bible.

Releasing life changing skills and confidence
Change happens as a result of linking real life experience with the Bible. This change often leads to action among others.

