



God Finds Us



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An Advent course by Roy Dorey

2013 Update

God Finds Us

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Advent is the time when God finds us!

We all know that on Christmas Eve Father Christmas searches out every home so that he can take gifts to everybody.

We don't know how he does it in the time, and how he so often gets the right gift for the right person.

Some even doubt if there is a Father Christmas because it all seems so unlikely.

The story about the preparation for Christmas seems just as unlikely to many people. Mary's song of praise tells us how surprised she was when she was told she would be the mother of Jesus, God's greatest gift to all humanity.

In our thinking and talking together we will find out more about God and about His gift.

This unit contains material for 5 group discussions:

You may photocopy this material for use in your group. In particular, it may be useful for everyone in the group to have a copy of page 4, Mary's song, which they can bring to the group each week.

Mary said,



"My heart praises the Lord;
my soul is glad
because of God my Saviour,
for you have remembered me,
his lowly servant!
From now on all people will call me happy,
because of the great things the Mighty God has done for me.
His name is holy;
from one generation to another



Mary's Song of Praise

He shows mercy to those who honour him.
He has stretched out his mighty arm
and scattered the proud with all their plans.
He has brought down the mighty kings
from their thrones, and lifted the lonely.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away with empty hands.
He has kept the promise he made
to our ancestors,
and has come to the help of his servant Israel.
He has remembered to show mercy
to Abraham
and to all his descendants for ever!"

Luke 1 v 46-55

Explain what is going to happen during the session.

Unlocking Real Life Stories of Urban People

Ask those in the group to share their experiences:-

- **Have you ever felt that no-one noticed you?**
- **Have you ever been put on the spot, and made to feel important?**



Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

Read through Mary's song, on page 4: either one person or 'reading around'. Then have a short time (perhaps a minute or two) for people to think about it, keeping in mind the title of 'The Upside Down God.'

Ask:-

- **Can you spot anything here that is different from the way things usually work?**
- **Can you see any links between your stories and this song of Mary?**

You may want to emphasise that God seems to be seeing as important very different things from the way most of us think.

He chose a young woman from an unimportant family to be the mother of Jesus.
He scatters the proud, and brings down the mighty kings.
The rich are sent away with nothing and the poor are fed.

Revealing some more

<https://play.spotify.com/album/2PYKKXpqDgtblrTYu8LMC5>—audio version

Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ



The Upside Down God

Session One

Ask:-

Are there stories about Jesus when he turned ideas upside down?

Encourage the group to think together of as many stories as they can.

Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

Ask:-

How would our lives change if this God was setting the agenda now

... for us?

... for our church?

... for our neighbourhood?

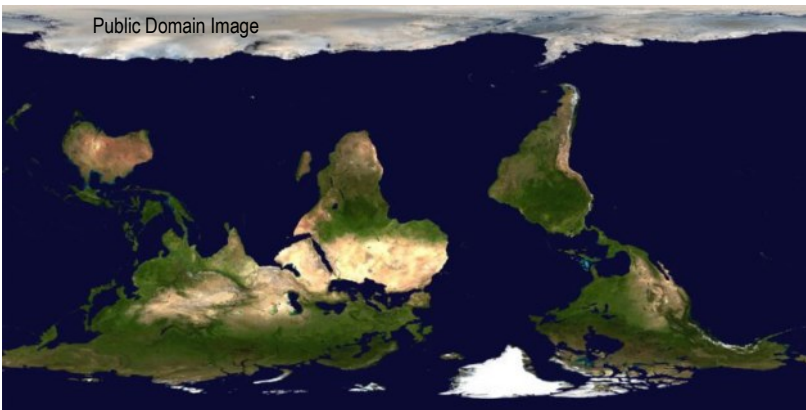
... for the world?

- **Does this change the way we look forward to Christmas and the coming of Jesus?**
- **What can we tell our neighbours about Christmas and the coming of Jesus?**

You might like to write these answers on a sheet where everyone can see it. You may want to take it into church next Sunday— or when you meet for worship— to tell people about it.

Creative Reflective Activity - Paper Collage

Use pictures cut from magazines or a selection of coloured tissue paper, to make up a prayer in the form of a collage, which reflects what we have



understood. Depending on the size of the group they might all work together or in 2's and 3's to make their collage(s). Then each small group can share theirs with the rest of the group. Try looking at them upside down and see if you see

them differently. A few minutes can be spent in silence together, or listening to music, reflecting on what people have made.

How can what we have learned become part of our church worship together?

Explain what is going to happen during the session.

Unlocking Real Life Stories of Urban People

- **How have you met God in the past?**
- **How do you experience God in the present time?**



Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

Affirm with the group that the coming of Jesus was planned by God, and was the keeping of the promise.

Read through Mary's song, on page 4: either one person or 'reading around'. Then have a short time (perhaps a minute or two) for people to think about it, keeping in mind the title of 'The Past and Present God.'

Remind them of the scripture verses:

- **In what ways does Jesus tell us of 'the past and present God?'**
- **Compare these things with the experiences you have shared.**
- **Can you spot any connections?**

Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

Give good time to this part of the session, and the next part, "Activities"

Ask:

- **Does this change the way we look forward to Christmas and the coming of Jesus?**
- **What can we tell our neighbours about Christmas and the coming of Jesus?**

You might like to write these answers on a sheet where everyone can see it. You may want to take it into church next Sunday—or when you meet for worship—to tell people about it.

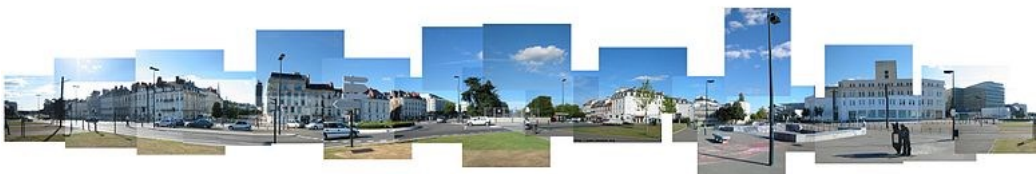


Creative Reflective Activity - Wax crayons and paint

Use one of these wax crayon techniques to create picture prayers. Depending on the size of the group they might all work together or in 2's and 3's to make their pictures. Then each small group can share theirs with the rest of the group and a few minutes can be spent in silence together, or listening to music, reflecting on what people have made.

How can what we have learned become part of our church worship together?

Explain what is going to happen during the session.



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Unlocking Real Life Stories of Urban People



The Past and Present God

- In what ways do you, as individuals feel unimportant?
- In what ways do you as a group or as a church feel unimportant?

**For planning purposes see practical tip on page 8*

Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

Read through Mary's song, on page 4: either one person or 'reading around'. Then have a short time (perhaps a minute or two) for people to think about it, keeping in mind the title of 'the God of the Unimportant.'

- Who are the important people in the Bible passage?
- How has God treated them?
- Why has He done this to them?

Imagine you are Mary, singing this song.

- How do you feel?
- What are you thinking?
- In what ways did Jesus' life follow Mary's song?

Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

Think about what we have said about 'The God of the unimportant.'

"My soul is glad. Great things He has done."
"One generation to another."
"He has kept the promise He made."
"... mercy to Abraham and his descendants for ever."

- How does this apply to our group or church?
- Who is overlooked?
- What should we do about it?
- What can we do about it?
- Does this change the way we look forward to Christmas and the coming of Jesus?
- What can we tell our neighbours about Christmas and the coming of Jesus?

You might like to write these answers on a sheet where everyone can see it.



You may want to take it into church next Sunday—or when you meet for worship—to tell people about it.

Creative Reflective Activity - Junk Modeling

Use a selection of junk (i.e., things that are unimportant), to make a model, or models, which reflect what we have understood.

Depending on the size of the group they might all work together or in 2's and 3's to make their model(s). Then each small group can share theirs with the rest of the group and a few minutes can be spent in silence together, or listening to music, reflecting on what people have made.

How can what we have learned become part of our church worship together?



Explain what is going to happen during the session.

Unlocking Real Life Stories of Urban People

- **Have you ever been broke?**
- **Have you ever had to miss out on something because you didn't have the money?**
- **Has anyone ever stood up for you, when you've been left out?**
- **Who is poor in our area? In our country? In the world?**
- **What is it like to be poor?**



Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

<http://makeartbehappy.wordpress.com/2012/09/17/five-ways-to-use-crayons-to-spark-your-creativity/>



**Practical Tip—if you will need to allow time for paint to dry you might want to begin these at the start of the session so that they are ready for the next stage by the time you get to this point.*

Read

through Mary's song, on page 4: either one person or 'reading around'. Then have a short time (perhaps a minute or two) for people to think about it, keeping in mind the title 'The God Who Stands Up for the Poor.'

- **Who was poor in Jesus' time? Share Bible stories together.**
- **What was it like to be poor in**

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The God of the 'Unimportant'

Session Three

Biblical times?

- What stories and sayings of Jesus show us that Jesus stands up for the poor?

You may want to add other brief Scripture passages: Luke 6 verses 20-26 (The Beatitudes) and other stories of Jesus' life. **Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence**

In 3's or 4's produce an **action plan** for your group or church in affirming 'the poor.' Then bring it back to the whole group. It could be something they then take to church to include in its worship, and could be given to those who make decisions for the life of the whole church.

An action plan should be specific things that can be done—not vague, good ideas!

Give less time this week to the 2 questions, it's the action plan that's important this week

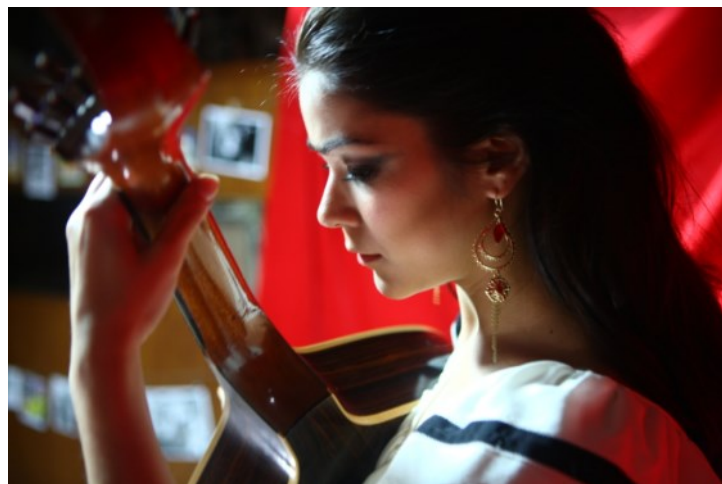
Does this change the way we look forward to Christmas and the coming of Jesus?

What can we tell our neighbours about Christmas and the coming of Jesus?

You might like to write these answers on a sheet where everyone can see it. You may want to take it into church next Sunday—or when you meet for worship—to tell people about it.



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Session Three



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<http://nurturestore.co.uk/junk-modelling-ideas>



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The God who Stands Up for the Poor

Session Four



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Jesus looked at his disciples and said,

"Happy are you poor; the Kingdom of God is yours!
Happy are you who are hungry now; you will be filled!
Happy are you who weep now; you will laugh!

"Happy are you when people hate you, reject you, insult you, and say that you are evil, all because of the Son of Man! Be glad when that happens, and dance for joy, because a great reward is kept for you in heaven. For their ancestors did the .



Continued from page 11

... very same things to the prophets.

"But how terrible for you who are rich now; you have had your easy life!
How terrible for you who are full now; you will go hungry!
How terrible for you who laugh now; you will mourn and weep!

26 "How terrible when all people speak well of you; their ancestors said the very same things about the false prophets.



Session Four



Creative Reflective Activity - Plasticine Models

Use plasticine to make models or pictures, which reflect what we have understood.

Depending on the size of the group they might all work together or in 2's and 3's to make their models. Then each small group can share theirs with the rest of the group and a few minutes can be spent in silence together, or listening to music, reflecting on what people have made.

How can what we have learned become part of our church worship together?
Some of the ideas are more suitable than others - you may want to be selective about which you share!



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Session Four



The God Who Takes Risks

Session Five

You may want to underline the need for the things being shared to be confidential to the group.

Begin the session as before, but keep in mind that this is the last of the group meetings. The theme lends itself to 'endings' but it should be an ending that encourages people to 'move on' in their Christian lives.

Unlocking Real Life Stories of Urban People

Ask:-

- **Do you have any childhood memories of taking risks?**
- **Do you know whether your own birth was straight-forward?**

Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

Encourage the group to remember the stories of Jesus' birth and early life.

Ask:-

- **What would it have been like, for Mary to give birth in the 1st century? What medical help do you think there would have been?**
- **What were the religious risks of Jesus' birth, with the Jewish authorities, and the political risks with Herod and later on, Pilate?**
- **How would the respectable people have looked at Mary?**
- **Without making it all about Easter, complete the cycle of God's risk-taking with the cross and resurrection.**



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Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

Ask:-

- **What risks (personal, religious, and political) do we as individuals, as a group, and as a church take?**
- **What risks do we avoid? Why?**
- **Does this change the way we look forward to Christmas and the coming of Jesus?**
- **What can we tell our neighbours about Christmas and the coming of Jesus?**

(You might like to write these answers on a sheet where everyone can see it. You may want to take it into church next Sunday—or when you meet for worship—to tell people about it.)

Creative Reflective Activity - Mosaics

If you are willing to take a risk you could try:-



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Session Five

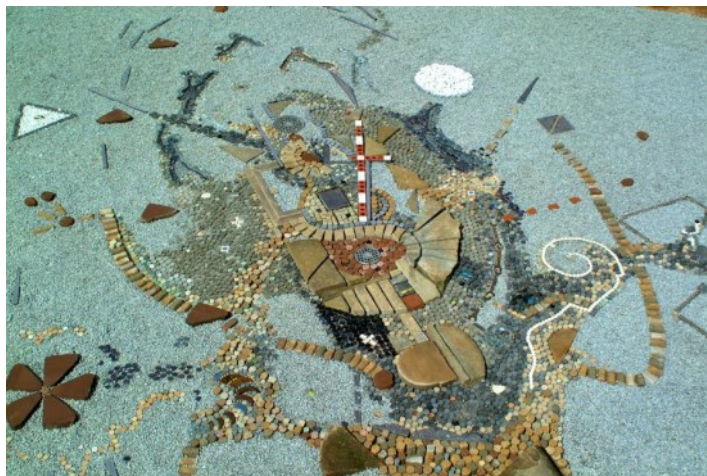
*If that seems too ambitious you could go with this option:-
Depending on the size of the group they might all work together or in 2's and 3's to make their mosaic(s). Then each small group can share theirs with the rest of the group and a few minutes can be spent in silence together, or listening to music, reflecting on what people have made.*

How can what we have learned become part of our church worship together?



http://www.ehow.co.uk/how_5898576_make-mosaic-tile-broken-china.html

<http://glitteringshards.com/mosaic-courses-london/make-mosaics-with-children/>



This Mosaic is in the Priory Gardens in Coventry
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Notes for Group Leaders

Notes for Group Leaders

This pack is based on stories—people's own stories and the story of Jesus. Be positive about everyone's contribution! There are no right and wrong answers when it comes to stories. If you've got some Bible knowledge, use it to help the group when it's useful—it's an added extra, not the starting point! You will need to decide as a group leader where you draw the line and say "No, you can't say that about this Bible passage." Our experience has been that taking risks and being positive about whatever people say brings new energy to passages you may have looked at many times before, as the Biblical story engages with people's experiences.

Before the course ...

It will help to talk over with the church leader(s) how what you learn can become part of the worship and life of the church.

Make a copy of page 4 for each person in the group.

You might decide to write things on a large sheet of paper, for all to see—if so, you'll need the paper and some felt pens.

These notes assume that a group leader has some basic experience and understanding of working with groups. A good small book with over 70 drawings (many humorous) is **Once upon a group**, by Michael and Maggie Kindred, Price £9.99 plus postage (2010 edition) from

4M Publications

41 Church Street
Southwell, Nottinghamshire
NG25 0HQ

+44 (0)1636 816201

<http://www.kindredgamesandbooks.co.uk/books.htm>
{- other earlier, cheaper, editions are also available}

No assumptions are made about how much time you will need for each session. This will vary from group to group. Some of the creative activities may mean that you want to spend more than one meeting on some of the sessions in the pack, but they are well worth including because the creative activities generate further conversation and insights in an unforced way that engages the heart as well as the head.

For Group Leaders



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 18, **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 **creative activity**, giving people an opportunity to reflect on the session and any action they might want to take as a result. The creative 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.



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.



Unlock uses an approach to engaging with the Bible that is different to traditional Bible studies (see page 17). 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 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.

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If you have any queries relating to Unlock materials, please contact:

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The 2013 Update

Notes

This resource was originally produced by Roy Dorey. We are uncertain of the date. Roy died in 2010. His contribution to the work of Unlock is remembered and much appreciated.

Those who use Unlock resources continue to tell us that the old materials still have useful and relevant content but their presentation is dated.

In 2013 Karoly Haasz kindly volunteered to type up the text so that an updated version could be developed.

Much of what is included here was part of the original.

In this new version we have:-

- updated the presentation
- expanded the suggestions for creative activities
- added more up-to-date illustrations
- Included some suggested web-links
- Added our learning cycle and standard information pages at the end

We hope you find it useful.



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