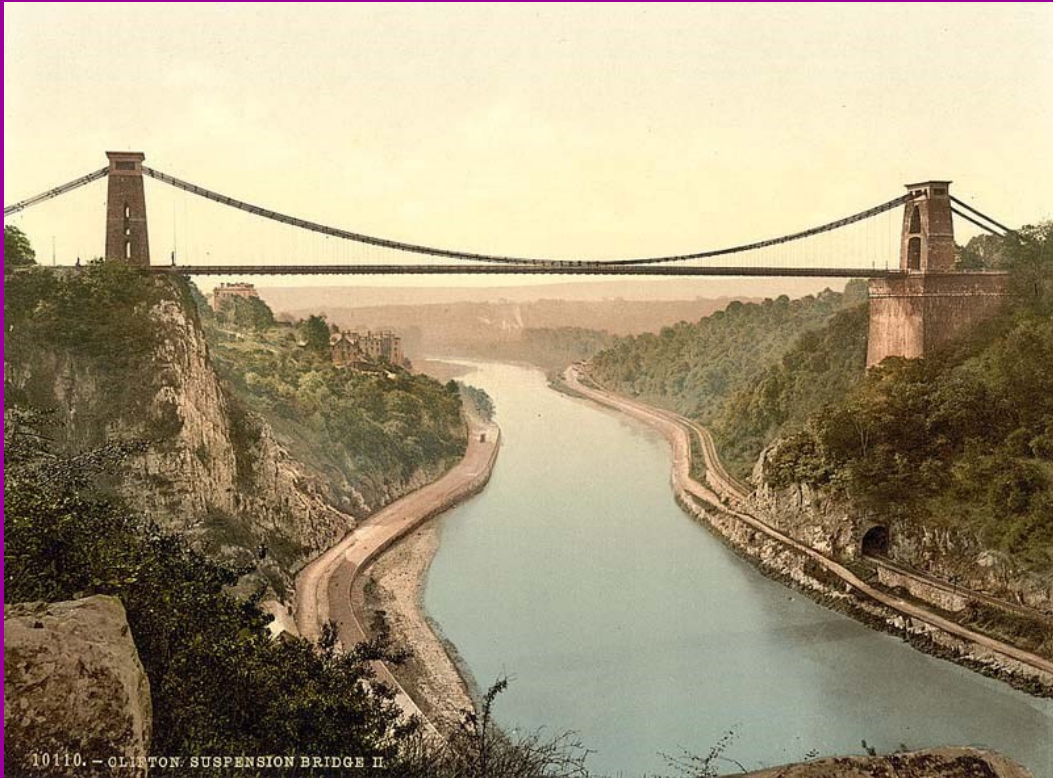


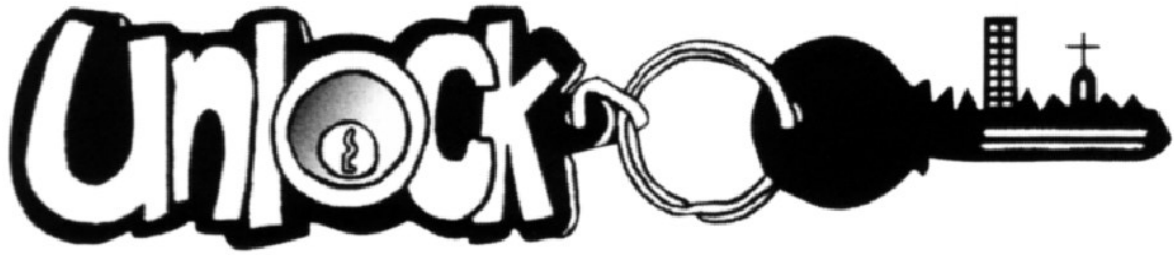
Unlock Stretched Out



The story of a group of men
who met for breakfast and discovered
discipleship for themselves.

Andy Pears.





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 if they are unable to do so, but 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.



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

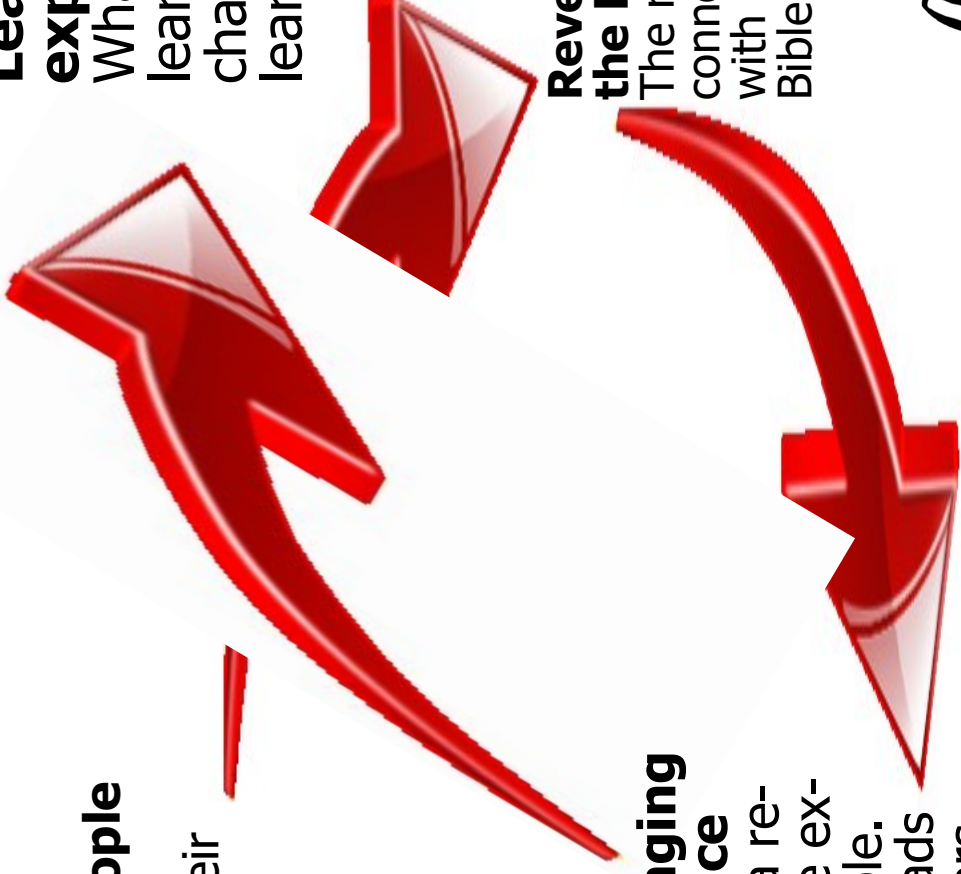
What we learn now is learnt for life and changes us. We also learn to keep reflecting!

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.

Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

The real life stories are connected to and compared with similar situations in the Bible.



Introduction

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 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.

Unlock's approach to Bible engagement was used in a flexible and extended way with a group of men in Bristol by an Unlock local project worker. This resource is an account of that experience.

This approach is designed to be used with groups of people who are not familiar with the Bible. Other similar resources are available to download free from www.unlock-urban.org or from the Unlock office based in Sheffield. However it is our experience that each group's circumstances are so unique,

that it may be best to develop your own materials using themes that you know your group will connect with, and reflective activities that are inspired by their own interests.

May God inspire you!

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Unlock Session Planning and Content Outline

Course / Event name: *Thursday Breakfasts*

Authors / Facilitators: Andy Pears (Unlock Bristol from 2010)

Session Name: N/A

This is not a series of Unlock sessions but an account of work with one particular group of men in Bristol.

Aims: To enable the men to engage with their own stories, using contemporary and social issues which are relevant to where they are in life. To create opportunities to explore how their own story connects with Christ's story within scripture. To be able to reflect on the impacts, both positive and negative, of our attitudes and actions. To enable the men to reflect theologically on situations in their lives and make reflective and informed choices about how they respond to challenging experiences.

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: starting from the tensions and issues within the lives of the participants, links are made with contemporary media, e.g. TV and film, news stories etc.

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 content of these sessions, and the unplanned sessions undertaken with this group, were for a specific group of people with particular needs. Other groups will have different needs.

Questions: See individual sessions for questions and challenges.

Revealing the Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

Bible: Passages used:

Matthew 5:38-48 Matthew 6.5 – 14

Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

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

Reflective Activities

Plasticine modeling

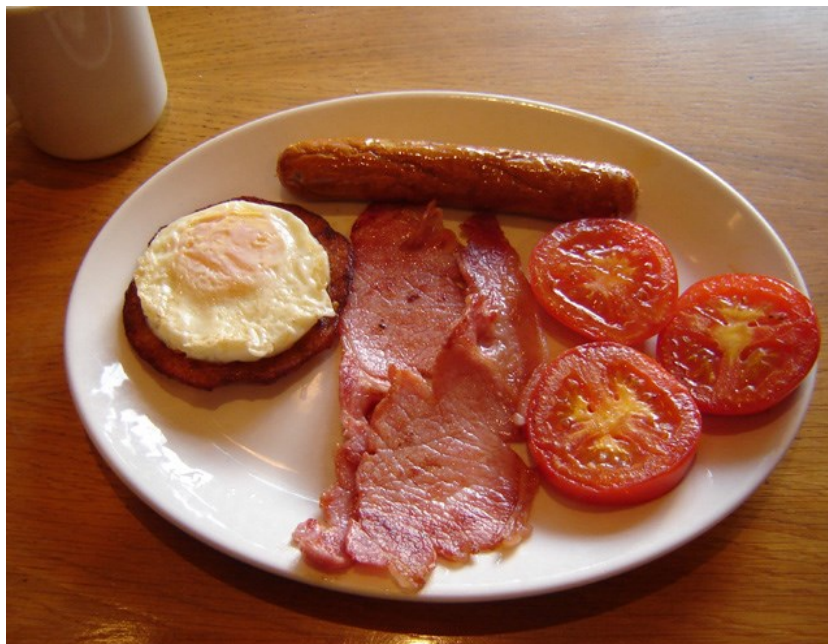


In The Beginning. .

... there was breakfast

Breakfast group began very simply - a few men who I had become friends with from the local community decided to meet up and have breakfast together. We had a great time and decided to meet again, this continued until breakfast together became a regular routine. It was particularly significant for the group that it was based on friendship and that we initially had plenty of time together to get to know one another, develop relationships and build trust. As a result we were able to share and reflect together on a deep level – it was an incredible journey of discipleship for us all.

Although what we did at Breakfast group was based firmly on the Unlock learning cycle, the focus was on a longer process of moving through the cycle, rather than a series of individual sessions. Having known the guys who came along for a good few months, it seemed that there were some significant subjects for us to talk about which would require a fair amount of time and reflection - both for me and the group.



Breakfast at Joseph's Café, Stoke Newington High Street, Hackney, London. 4 November 2005.
Photographer: Fin Fahey. Creative Commons.

Unlocking Real Life Stories of Urban People

Initially we spent several weeks meeting, eating and talking together. In this way I got to know each individual quite well, discovering their specific stories and situations. I made sure to take note of recurring topics in conversation; ideas, people, challenges, problems etc. I also spent some time with each person individually asking if there were any issues or situations they wanted to talk about. As the weeks went by it became clear that there were several key issues that our discussions over breakfast often revolved around.



Photograph by Jacek Becela. Creative Commons.

For example, on-going conflicts and violence seemed to feature significantly in the lives of most of the men in the group, who did not feel able to deal with it – except through further conflict and violence. This was a theme which occurred most weeks in conversation.

Having started to get to know each of the people who came to the breakfast quite well and the issues that were currently on their minds, I was able to spend time at home reflecting, praying and thinking about where and how the Bible spoke into or related to these stories and situations. In this way I was equipped with a number of stories and passages that I felt were significant and could be used for reflection.

I also thought about particular activities or exercises that we could do together which might help us to engage with and think about the stories from the Bible as well as the themes we had been thinking about.



Adriaen Brouwer - Brawling Peasants. Creative Commons.



Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

Having prayed and reflected over recurring themes and issues I was equipped and able to engage with them as they arose in subsequent weeks; able to draw on one or more stories or passages that seemed most appropriate for that day. As a group we would then discuss and reflect on the Bible stories as well as our own stories and situations.

Reflection and discussion did not happen every week; there were times when it did not feel right to engage together in such a way. I think this degree of flexibility and informality was particularly important for the group as it allowed relationships to grow naturally within a safe and unpressured environment, which in turn helped to maintain a momentum of meeting together between men who would not normally do so.



On a practical level it seemed that the best way to hear stories from the Bible in our context was by using either a laptop with audio or video clips of the stories, the Manga Bible - which proved to be very popular – or through using still pictures and photos to tell the story. Sometimes a few of us would learn the story together over the preceding week and re-tell it to the others. Interestingly, the more time we spent thinking about the Bible, the more that the guys in the group developed a desire to try and read it for themselves (the Manga Bible (<http://www.theartofsiku.com>) was very useful in this situation).



Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

The discussions on the days that we did focus on particular themes or issues were often long and extremely interesting; generally the group felt happy to trust one another and over time many were pleased to speak up and get involved. From my time previously spent in reflection I would often have a few questions and comments in my mind that I could use to prompt discussion and occasionally change it's direction, which were very helpful in a few instances.

These elements of Thursday Breakfasts I think were incredibly valuable. The very act of opening up to talk about things that were happening in our lives and how we felt about them was a significant thing for most of the men in the group, and for some the first time that they had done it. I know that for several of the group it was the first time that they had felt that people were really listening to them. As time went past confidence grew to be honest and to talk more readily about their lives.

Also as we began to talk through and reflect upon our stories we found that the stories from the Bible were allowed to speak into and directly influence aspects of our lives and specific situations we were engaged with. We began to think and to see things in a completely different way, often just through the act of talking things through.

In some cases planning (or making up on the spot) activities proved to be very helpful in prompting reflection – particularly in helping us to explore the relationship between the Bible and life. For example, when considering the issue of conflict we had heard stories from Matthew about turning the other cheek and walking the extra mile and had thought about them together in terms of creative ways of dealing with situations of aggression and conflict. We then used plasticine to model some creative ways of dealing with current conflicts in the light of the passage.



Leading to More Experience

The group would often come back the next week having reflected on what we had been talking about the previous week and resume the discussion that we had been having. I would also bump into them during the week and they would talk to about what they had been thinking about.

It was great to reflect continually on the same theme several times – to think about a story for a week and come back and do the whole thing again. The group often came to different conclusions than they had before, which in turn caused them to go back and reflect on the themes and Bible passages some more.

This step in the process for the group I believe was very significant, as we slowly moved towards seeing that life with Jesus is not about just meeting a set of moral or practical standards but as a journey towards a life lived for and shaped by Jesus. Several of the group had previously felt pressured, discouraged and excluded from church as they believed they did not match the standards of Christianity.

This step in the process also encouraged a habit of reflection within the group over our own lives as well as a growing desire to challenge each other in the light of the Bible. So we all began to grow and develop together as a community of friends.

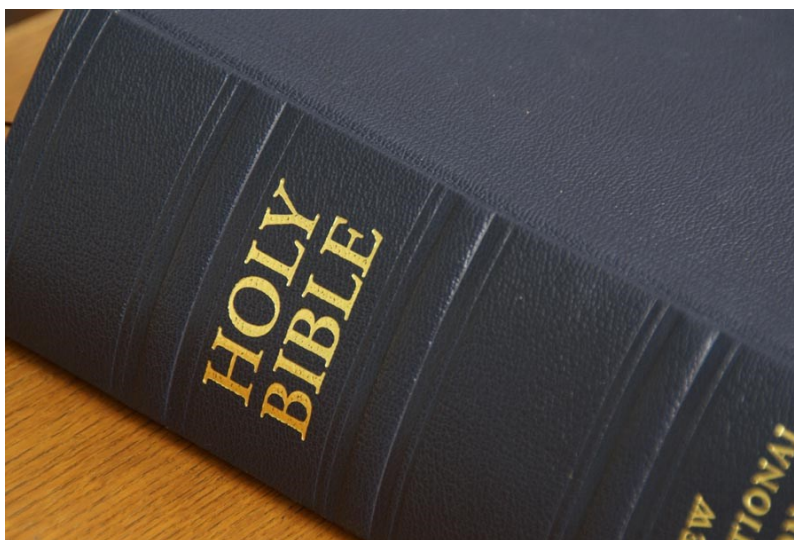
I think it is worth noting that this was a long process with many ups and downs. It was hard work to build relationships to the point where members of the group felt they could trust one another enough to begin sharing together, and it continues to be hard work for as long as we meet together.



Conclusion

I think it was significant that we all lived and spent most time in the same local area – seeing each other often, were able to build friendships very well and as time went on grow into a group in which we could support, challenge and look after each other. We often had time to meet and talk during the week.

For me, the most valuable part of the process was spending a long period of time listening to the stories of the people from the group. Because of it we were able to talk about some really important and personal situations; I think most were struck by the way that the Bible would speak into some of the deep and significant areas of their lives. It also meant that we could continually come back to and reflect on particular issues that I knew were important for the group in a way that we could not have done had I not spent that time with them initially.



As time went by in the group I found that several people in the group were naturally very good at facilitating discussion as well as being pastoral, I stayed as part of the group but no longer took much part in facilitating reflections that occurred except to help with theological issues etc.

In the end the breakfast group came to a natural conclusion, although most of us see each other and still meet on a fairly regular basis. The sense of close friendship remains and we still reflect and spend time together – through different forums. Some of the people left the area, but most moved on to become part of, or spend more time with, local churches. The time spent in the breakfast group was important in having confidence, tools and desire to engage with the churches.

Although everything is based on the Unlock learning cycle it is extremely difficult to write the issues or the meetings that we had into an Unlock session; the length of time and repeated reflection that we spent on each issue/situation made for some fairly complex discussion that cannot easily be summed up.

Rough outlines of two topics that we covered are included on pages 12-14.

Andy Pears (Unlock Bristol worker from 2010)



Conflict

Stealing and conflict.

One of the issues to arise was related to a series of incidents of stolen property and conflict that had arisen from those.

The group spent some time talking about how to respond to these things, as well as what to do about an ongoing conflict that was associated including reprisals and increasing tension.

We spent some time talking through how the members of the group felt about the situation, what they thought they should do about it, what other people had/ were thinking of doing about it.

Matthew 5:38-48

Teaching about Revenge

³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ And if someone takes you to court to sue you for your shirt, let him have your coat as well. ⁴¹ And if one of the occupation troops forces you to carry his pack one mile, carry it two miles. ⁴² When someone asks you for something, give it to him; when someone wants to borrow something, lend it to him.

Love for Enemies

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your friends, hate your enemies.’ ⁴⁴ But now I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may become the children of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun to shine on bad and good people alike, and gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil. ⁴⁶ Why should God reward you if you love only the people who love you? Even the tax collectors do that! ⁴⁷ And if you speak only to your friends, have you done anything out of the ordinary? Even the pagans do that! ⁴⁸ You must be perfect—just as your Father in heaven is perfect.



Long discussions took place over several sessions about the passage and their situations and even though they said they didn't understand all the theology they recognised it as a challenge to the way that they reacted to situations and to people. They began to question whether their initial impulses were the right thing to follow. Was it right to react in anger and get their own back? Or was it actually better to be calm and try and be different?

I had questions to prompt them to think about why is it important to be different in the way you react to stuff? Will it change anything or make a difference? How do you put any of these things into practice? What are you going to do about it in the next week?

Being different – trying to respect other, praying and loving the people you are in conflict with could change the whole situation – break the cycle of conflict and bad feeling – change the relationship with the other party for good.

There were big questions over how this worked out practically – how to love the people. We started by talking about prayer; pray for the people and pray for inspiration on how to do that.



Prayer

Having talked about prayer when thinking about conflict raised further questions for the group.

How do we pray? What do we say to God?

We talked about telling people that we are praying for them, whether or not that was the best way forward – it might be good for them to know, if it's about loving them, or might not be – could be seen as weird.

Read Matt 6.5 – 14

I asked the questions back to them that I had heard them talking about earlier: How do you think you should pray? What do you think you should pray? What do you think are the important things about praying to God?

Matthew 6.5 – 14

Teaching about Prayer

⁵ “When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites! They love to stand up and pray in the houses of worship and on the street corners, so that everyone will see them. I assure you, they have already been paid in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go to your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you.

⁷ “When you pray, do not use a lot of meaningless words, as the pagans do, who think that their gods will hear them because their prayers are long. ⁸ Do not be like them. Your Father already knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ This, then, is how you should pray:

Our Father in heaven:

May your holy name be honoured;
¹⁰ may your Kingdom come;
may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today the food we need.

¹² Forgive us the wrongs we have done,
as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us.

¹³ Do not bring us to hard testing,
but keep us safe from the Evil One.’

¹⁴ “If you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you.

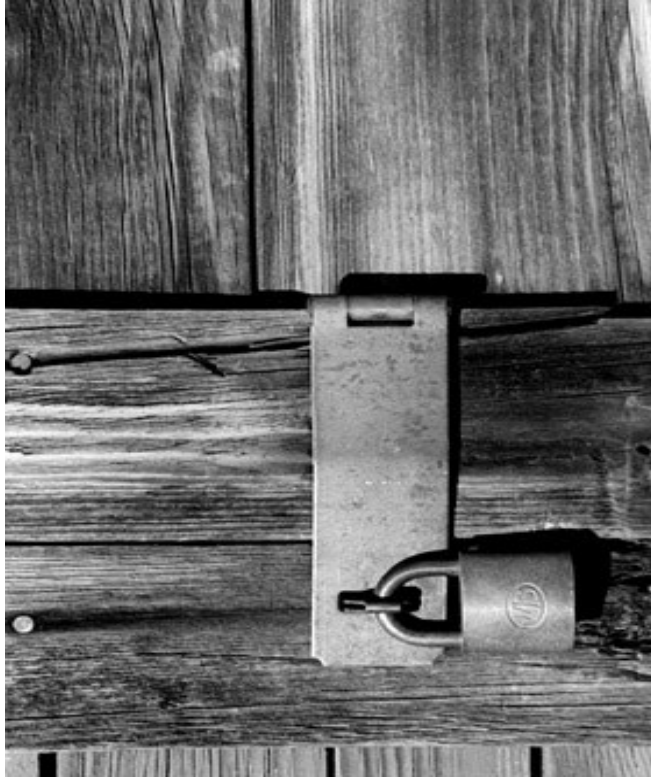




Freedom from Oppression

Mike came to Unlock group last week, he is an (on and off) alcoholic. He used to go to church, but he struggled with the congregation and eventually left. Since then he has always associated Christianity and Jesus with being judged for his failings (his addiction to alcohol) – it was wonderful to be able to talk to him about how Jesus loves everybody, no matter how they have lived their lives. Mike struggled with

this idea, but wants to talk more. As time goes on I want to think about how Jesus came to give freedom from oppression (including addiction) as well as having some conversations about grace and forgiveness when the time feels right. This is very exciting, but I think it is going to take a long time to journey through all this stuff.



Unlock short stories linked to meeting for breakfast



Denny and the Drug Dealers

Denny has grown up in a series of foster homes. He has been engaging with the Bible in an informal Unlock group for some time, including being involved in a session on conflict. While the Unlock worker is visiting Denny at his home, Denny receives a visit from his drug dealers. Denny is a pretty small guy; his drug dealers are two big strong guys. The Unlock worker quietly melts into the background and the drug dealers start talking about how they are going round to beat up Ray who owes them money. Denny tells them that the Bible says they are to 'turn the other cheek'. He rushes from the room and returns with a Bible (he has stolen from a church!) Denny then goes through the Bible, showing the drug dealers all the different parts which explain the Biblical approaches to violence and conflict.





Bicycle (Relationship) Repair Man

A few weeks ago we had a number of people come along to the community garden for the morning – we did a little bike repair workshop (with much drinking of tea and eating of cake) and then talked a little bit about forgiveness and repairing our relationships. One of the guys talked about how his relationship with his mother had recently broken down – we ended up praying for him together which was fantastic. He isn't a

Christian, but he called me yesterday and asked if I could get him a Bible to have, saying that he has never felt so peaceful in his life and wants to find out more about Jesus.

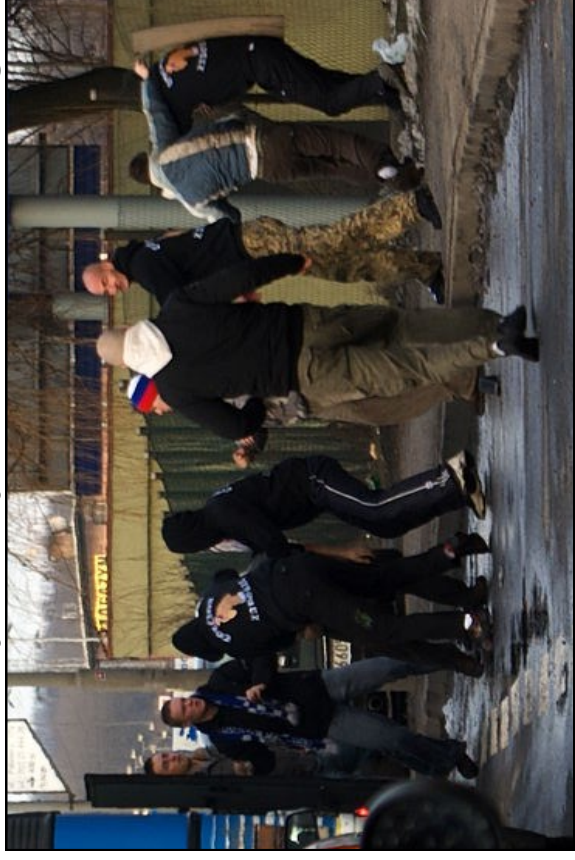




History of Violence.

A story from an Unlock worker. Trev has spent most of his life wrestling with drug addiction. He receives benefits once every two weeks and has usually spent most of the money by the evening of the day he receives it. Recently Trev was at a friend's house with a few people and a dealer – late in the evening Trev and another person fell out over money, Trev was beaten up and thrown out of the house. I heard from someone else in the area that Trev – who has a long history of violence - had gone back to the house late at night apologised for his actions and told the other party that they were forgiven. Needless to say, this took everyone by surprise! Speaking to

Trev later that week I discovered that he remembered a similar incident over six months ago which we had spent some time together reflecting on using the Unlock cycle – this had prompted him to think about, and ultimately change – his response to this incident.



Photograph by Jacek Becela. Wikimedia Commons