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**UNLOCK**

**REAL LIFE**

**STORIES**

**BIRMINGHAM**

**THE GLASGOW**

**THE LIVERPOOL**

**BRISTOL BURNLEY**

**SHEFFIELD**

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**SUNDERLAND**

## It's Not My Fault **Liverpool**



The group told stories about situations when they had been blamed for something someone else did, we then watched a video of the crucifixion (have a look: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGXlOL0ula0>). As it finished two group members were sat teary eyed and deeply moved. At which point someone else said, 'The bread smells \*\*\*\*\* great, I'm gettin it out!' Despite this seemingly divided reaction, the time eating what we have cooked actually provides a space for reflective discussion and eating the food means that more dominant chatty participants make room for others to talk! So as we chewed it over (sorry!) it became clear it was the first time that any of the group had made the connection that Jesus was taking the blame for them.

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## Square Peg in a Round Hole **Hull**

It was during one of the early EUTP Festivals (Unlock used to be known as EUTP) when Stuart Robinson (then curate of St Martin's) led a Bible Study as part of his postordination training that I had a kind of **Damascus experience**.

He gave us a passage and asked us "What do you feel?" It was the first time someone had related a Bible passage to our lives and it had a huge impact on me. Some time later Andy Dorton had a meeting at his house where Bill Bullen came to speak with Jim Hart. As Bill spoke everything he said made complete sense. All the things I've felt instinctively had a grounding.

I'd struggled at theological college and often twagged off. I felt a square peg in a round hole. When Jenny Richardson came to do some training with us much later on, she made me feel much better about myself. All the things I did instinctively Jenny explained. She put the meat on the bones if you like.

Unlock did for me what, the theory is, we do for others. It helped my theological development. And what was the most exciting thing, above all, was watching people blossom and seeing them express themselves. It's a levelling thing. It's not the one with the degree who leads but the one with the story.



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## Finding God's story within your own **Birmingham**



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Through short stories and video clips, and talking through issues such as bullying, weddings, and normal day to day life struggles, such as depression, I have been able to help the ladies engage with stories in the Bible that relate to them as people, and hopefully giving them a sense that they are valued and loved. The biggest learning curve for me through working with Unlock's approach is that taking the Good News to people is not complicated and doesn't have to be. It's about allowing

yourself to be incarnate in each context you find yourself in and being relevant. For me also it's about allowing and enabling each person to find God's story within their own narrative.

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## From the MIND group **Birmingham**

Over the last few months we have met in various places and had conversations about different churches and denominations in a very un-threatening way. I explained that you should be able to go into any church and hopefully be made welcome.

I found out this last week that one of the most vulnerable ladies, decided while she was in Kings Heath high street with her young son over the Christmas holiday, to go into the Baptist Church, because it was having a coffee morning. She said she was so nervous but just wanted to go and look and said to me 'you said we could go in any church right'. Thankfully she got talking to the right person and is now going every week to help with the coffee morning. If you met her you would realise how amazing this is.

She has told me that they have invited her and her son to go on a Sunday morning and that there's a Sunday school. She lives on her own with her son who doesn't seem to have a lot of friends I'm guessing because of the situation at home and where they live. So she's thinking about it, and my prayer is that she finds the right support if she decides to go for both of them. But hey 'God is Good'.



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## Even The Smallest Things **Hull**



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"One special memory was the Good Samaritan which we did as a small group. For me it encapsulated the Unlock technique. It started with questions like: Have you ever been mugged? Have you ever gone out of your way to help anyone? Have you ever turned a blind eye?

This led to some amazing discussions and we ended up making puppets that were like walls with heads, arms and hands. One was the "stick yer neck" out wall and the other was the "keep yer head down" wall. Characters came knocking at the walls to ask for help. The keep-yer-head down wall wouldn't get involved but the

stick-yer-neck-out would and characters came out from behind it with things that could help (eg: time, money, practical help etc). In the end these characters (made of elastic) got stretched and stretched until they became exhausted. The session finished with Jesus coming into the scene as the door which could be opened or shut according to His wisdom

Unlock has a way of thinking that can't be packaged. You just have to learn it by doing. The most powerful stuff in practice is the small intimate Bible study situations where your story comes first and then how it relates to the Bible. I found I got more from the Bible looking at it this way round. The stories become yours and there's lots of WOW moments. It's a magical thing really. It has affected my way of thinking. Stories are validated, even the smallest things."

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## Use of Film **Sheffield**

Unlock workers in Sheffield focussed on the use of contemporary film and have produced resources based on Billy Elliot and The Full Monty. There are all kinds of clips from films, or television programmes, which can be used to open up theological discussions of contemporary issues.



Photo by Otterbein University Theatre and Dance <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>

## Not Afraid to Ask **Liverpool**



Members of the Wednesday Staying for Lunch group were asked if they had anything they would want to say about the group. One replied, 'Our group, I think, has brought us all closer together, has made me think more clearly, understand more and not be afraid to ask.'

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## It's Good Enough For Anyone **Liverpool**

Our first session looked at the theme, 'Even Good Parents Make Mistakes'. Starting from a picture of a very lonely looking girl we shared stories, of course we all had plenty of personal experience to draw on! I then 'told' the story of Mary and Joseph losing Jesus on the way back from Jerusalem. At our following meeting one of the girls was really animated when I asked, 'Has anything from the last session made a difference to you over the last fortnight?' 'Yes, yes! It was amazing, right, we was in town and me mate lost her kid, only for a few minutes like but while he was lost we bumped into her mam and her mam was furious, yelling at her and that. And I thought, that's a bit harsh, she's only made a mistake. Then we found the kid but her mam were still going on and I remembered what had happened to Mary so I told her if it was good enough for Jesus to have a human mam that made mistakes then surely it's good enough for anyone!'



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## Can we Join in? **Birmingham**



For a while we met in Cotteridge church. We arrived early one week and it was evident that a short service had been held before we arrived. The group asked questions and were open to the answers about the nature of the service, as it had been a communion service. The ladies had a discussion amongst themselves about if they should ask if they could go to a communion service, if they were actually allowed. So I was delighted and we agreed to meet earlier in order to join in the communion service the following week.

What struck me was that this was something they had approached me about themselves, and not something that I had instigated, or asked them to think about. I now plan to share a storybook with them about what communion is all about.

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## Snowy story **Birmingham**

One of the ladies had fallen in the snow and been really hurt, in fact showed me the bruising which I felt was done with trust. She then went on to talk about what I had read to them, about the 'Good Samaritan', and that no one had helped her and had just walked by. We talked about the fact that she had fallen near to where she lived, and people who knew her didn't stop to help, and how that made her feel, and related that to the story.



## Level of Discomfort **Liverpool**



During a training day for Lay Readers, participants were given an outline of the day at the beginning and one spoke to the Unlock worker to express her misgivings, 'I don't like doing activities and discussions, I'm not comfortable with that!' At the end of the day the same participant had another quiet word, 'I get it now, without experiencing the

way Unlock does things I would not have learnt so much, it's not the kind of thing you can learn by being told. And of course, how I felt about doing these activities is about the same level of discomfort that many feel when faced with books and liturgy. Thank you!

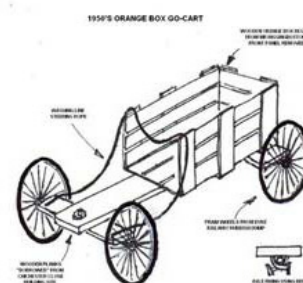
## **Hull**

Unlock Hull ran a series of 'Unforgotten' events in Hull following the widespread flooding of summer 2007, reminding the people of Hull that they were not forgotten by God, even if they felt forgotten by the media and the rest of the UK.



## Active Experiences **Hull**

In Hull Unlock has specialised in the use of creative visual arts and hands on activities. One of the keys in Hull seems to have been their way of thinking in very concrete terms, which fits well into traditional tabloid culture. In Hull they have – made bricks with no straw – literally; they have conducted an 'exodus' from the safety of the church, into the 'new territory' of the estate, on go-carts that they had all worked together to build, and they have 'entered the promised land' by placing a big thick curtain across the sanctuary and then pulling it down to reveal a feast of fish and chips, ready to share on the other side. Afterwards people have reflected in small groups on their shared experiences, and made connections between them and the stories in the bible and with their own life experiences, so they have identified and explored their own times of 'slavery', 'exile' and their own 'promised land' experiences.



## Tears at School **Glasgow**



The schools closures are a big issue in the Wyndford and that was explored at an Unlock event. Over Easter the local churches decided to re-route their annual Walk with the Cross to pass the schools. Both Church of Scotland minister and Catholic priest said a few words and joined in prayer in front of the schools. Because of this support many of the local community joined the Walk and went together to the Good Friday service afterwards. Some of the parents who were “sitting in” at the schools were in tears, they were so moved that the churches were acting together to support them.

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## Doing What we Want **Liverpool**

Cooking the Book is great fun and we are learning lots from each other. The process of cooking during each session is creating a rhythm of doing, talking, reflecting and celebrating as we eat what we've made. Each session the recipe connects with our theme which leads us into our Biblical connection. So, having done mainly healthy cooking we made bread & butter pudding in session 3 to connect with the theme of 'doing what we want' and the story of the flood - one of the women turns out not to like bread and butter pudding so the link with lavish decadence was lost! However bread and butter pudding is her brother's favourite which actually led us into a very interesting conversation about how sometimes we 'do what we want' for apparently good motives - like doing something that will please someone we love.



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## God Thinks I'm Alright **Liverpool**



After preparing the veg together and putting the soup on to simmer, I asked, 'Have you ever made something that you are proud of?' Given the nature of the group, the responses were quite amazing, including re-upholstering a 3 piece suite and carving book ends that are still used some 20 years on. 'How did you feel?' was the next question, to which someone responded 'Kinda too big on the inside, like there wasn't enough room for how pleased I was and I might burst.' We shared a few more experiences and then went through a pictorial account of the creation story,

finishing by saying that when God made all those things and when he made each of us, He thought it was good, He probably had the same feelings you did when you were pleased with what you made'... there was a moments silence, one of those holy feeling pauses, then, reverently, 'That's boss, that is. God thinks I'm alright.'



## Coming out of the Kitchen Hull

"I remember an event about the Exodus and I didn't want to be involved. I wanted to stay in the kitchen instead cos I thought that was my place. Andy dragged me out though and told me it was time for me to get out of the kitchen! He asked me if I'd ever had an experience of moving or escaping from somewhere. I told my story of how I moved from Hessle Road to Preston Road when I was 7 and how it felt like entering the Promised Land.

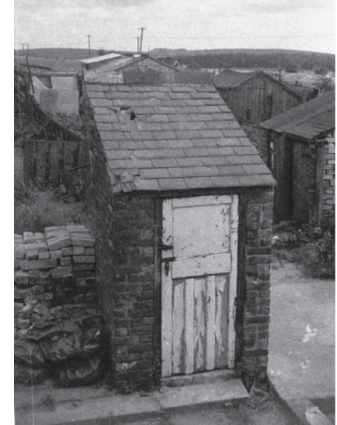


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I'd never seen hot running water before or so much green space, or had an indoor loo! One memory of my sister is very clear; of her perched on a lorry with tea cosy on her knee and a kitten sitting in it. She was only little and she had a big beam on her face. We ended up keeping the kitten. It felt good and bad to tell this part of my story. It was something I hadn't thought of much.

A forgotten memory. There was happiness in it but also some pain. It was the first time I realised that the Bible had anything to do with my life. Another woman talked about the time she left her husband. It was a healing thing for both of us."

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## Being Flexible (from an Unlock Worker)



I have learnt from others that have been involved in urban non-book Bible group learning the importance of listening to the group's stories and adapting sessions to their experiences rather than sticking rigidly to planned outlines; that was true with the pre Christmas Staying for Lunch session. The planned session was around the theme 'Celebration' but in response to the opening questions the Mum's told stories about expense, debt and trying to make ends meet. The Bible story I had prepared, the Wedding at Cana, didn't resonate so well so we talked about the widow's lost coin instead.

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## From Joanne Morris, Liverpool (quoted in the Liverpool Echo June 2010)

'I normally hate standing in front of people and speaking, but leading a (Unlock) session myself was a much more laid back experience. We are just a group of people talking about our own lives and experiences and exploring this book (the Bible) together. It is really enjoyable to hear other people's experiences and how they relate to the (Bible) stories. I remember one session in particular where we explored the story of Jesus in the temple. As a mother; I found the story really interesting, as it shows that we can't all be perfect parents all of the time!'



## From Unlock **Birmingham**

A representative of the West Midlands Regional Training Partnership (RTP) Education For Discipleship (EFD) Committee - After looking at the Unlock resource, 'Something from Nothing' - 'That *really* is *very* good.' ... said in a surprised fashion, as though expecting Unlock to be useless!



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## It Was Like, Perfect **Birmingham**



Rev Peter Little, from Nechells, Birmingham. 'I had been talking to people and saying we needed something that used peoples stories and then I saw Unlock in the Birmingham Ecumenical News it was like perfect!'

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## From Unlock **Birmingham**

A participant - 'Its good, you know; you come here and wrapped up in your own problems and its good to stop and think about other things. Kind of takes you out of yourself.'



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## Before the Bench **Birmingham**



A participant - 'Thank you for what you said about God helping us whatever we are doing today. I'm going to court this afternoon!'

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## From Major Paul McNally, The Salvation Army **Halifax**

'I've been using your "Experience The Bible" series with a small group of people who attend our free 'community meal' for people on low income.

Today has been the 4th week, and I just wanted to let you know how helpful I find the format and the introductory questions.

It really is an excellent resource, and I'm very grateful to you for compiling it, and making it available free through the internet.

The people who attend do not have a church background, so I spent some time looking for just the right material to use in this new group;

"Experience The Bible" has proved very quickly to be exactly the right material!

Praise God and thank you!





## Going to church at Christmas **Birmingham**

An extract from an e-mail an Unlock worker received from one of the un-churched group she was working with.

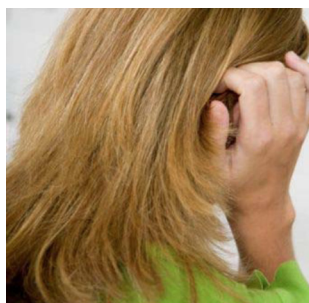
*"We are thinking of going (to church) on Xmas Day. Janet told us about the service that is held at the church when we were talking with her on soup Wed(nesday) & it feels like it would be a nice thing to do on Xmas day".*

Janet is the Deacon who will be working with this group once the Unlock worker moves on.



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## Phone Call Answers Prayer **Bristol**



A little while ago I hung around with a few of the guys from the drop-in; we talked about family and I shared a little bit about family from the Bible. One of the men there has been in care all his life and had never met most members of his family. A few weeks ago he told me that he had prayed about meeting his family and half an hour after he prayed his sister had phoned him out of the blue for the first time ever! God is really amazing.

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## Grace in **Birmingham**

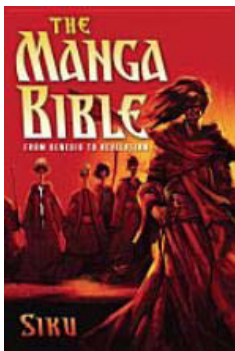
Debbie Marsh, Unlock Birmingham worker says this.

'I think the fact that this group are now looking at ways in which they can be involved in the life of the church by going to established groups, is amazing and shows how far they have come from a year ago, when they were made to leave the church. It shows to me the grace that these ladies give, leaves the church standing.

I am so proud of them and humbled that they have accepted me and worked so hard to engage with Unlock without realising it. Although we are now not planning any more session type meetings they are full of ideas themselves of how we can engage with each other; this shows that they are not dependent on me which is what I wanted.'



## An Arrest and a Bible

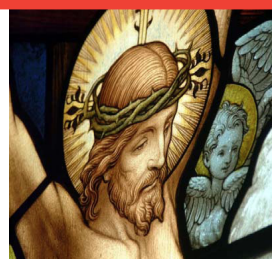


One of the women who had been coming along to the Unlock group has recently been arrested for a number of offences (mainly breaking and entering a few different places) and is due in court at the beginning of August. I've met with her a few times since her arrest – she's really having a tough time (lots of issues behind what she has done), but we had some really good chats about a couple of different things. Eventually she asked me if she could have a Bible to take home with her – I managed to get hold of a picture/comic book style Bible for her to have. Really interested to see where this is going – it'll be a very difficult few months for her, but I am excited that I have been able to give her a Bible.

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## First Prayer to Jesus

I've met Bill a few times on an individual basis – he believes in God, but is not sure what he thinks about Jesus. He prayed to Jesus for the first time last week.



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## 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.

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## 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.



## Engaging Our Neighbours

Our Pakistani neighbours decided to come to Unlock drop-in with me one Sunday; they really enjoyed themselves and we have since met up several times to talk about issues of faith and religion. They are keen to come again to Unlock drop-in.



## Denny and the Drug Dealers

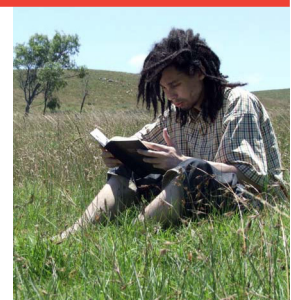


Denny has grown up in a series of foster homes. He has been engaging with the Bible in an informal Unlock group for some time, including being involved in a session on conflict. While the Unlock worker is visiting Denny at his home, Denny receives a visit from his drug dealers. Denny is a pretty small 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.

## Rediscovering the Bible

A local church youth leader has had an Unlock worker working alongside him for some weeks, facilitating bible engagement with his youth group. The youth leader says that he has never really engaged with scripture in this way before but has now started reading his own bible more regularly.



## 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

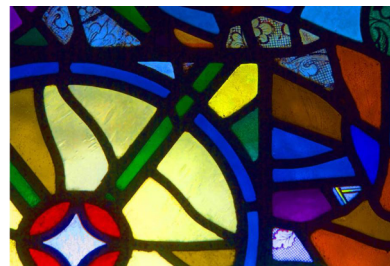


Photograph by Jacek Becela. Wikimedia Commons

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.

## Five out of Six

Out of six MIND people who our Birmingham worker worked with, five are actively engaged in church activities one year after our worker left the group to continue without her input. When she first met them the group felt rejected by the church, where they had been told they could no longer hold their meetings.



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## Feedback on Unlocking the Prodigal

I chatted to the people who came and got overwhelmingly positive feedback. The gist of it was that it had taken a story they were very familiar with and helped them see it with fresh eyes - that it had helped it move from something they knew with their heads, to something that touched their hearts, and that it had provoked some deep and helpful conversations, arising out of the themes of the parable and the way it connected with their own lives and experiences. They said it had been a lot of fun as well, and that the lunch was good!



I was asked some really good questions by church members, such as, "How can we do more of this, for ourselves?" and "How could we draw in those on the edges of the church, who don't already know the stories in the Bible, for something a bit like this?" I look forward to exploring what the answers to those questions might look like, in the months to come!

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## Humble and Grateful Vicar

Our Lent course has had a very strong Unlock influence and it's been such a great experience. We are a church full of very practical, down to earth people who tend to be quite private about what goes on inside them and not have huge amounts of confidence. Unlock has enabled us to share our experiences of prayer and God in a much more open way. That, in turn has led to a new courage and willingness to pray for and with one another, which makes me a very humble, grateful, happy Vicar indeed.



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## God's love turns our shame to honour



At the Unlock session on celebration we looked at Zephaniah 3:14-20. It was great to hear celebratory stories of how long people had been drug and alcohol free, some for days, others months, and one for over 21 years. One lady who is coming through the Narcotics Anonymous programme said how it is God enabling her. She also said that in the end it all comes down to people needing to know that God loves them. Another who is just starting the road to recovery picked out the verse about God turning our shame to honour. One man couldn't read yet he still engaged with the session. Another lady who recently

spent time in a women's refuge was in tears afterwards as she told us how much people in the women's refuge need to hear this message.

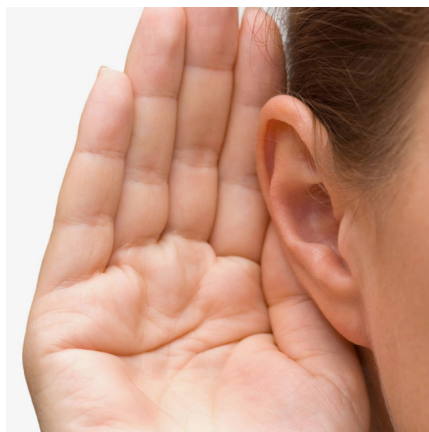
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## Going deeper, making connections

One of our Unlock Local Partnership workers reported this week that as a result of their Unlock training and work they were 'Listening deeper to the undercurrents of the cultural influences. Understanding that the Gospel has to connect differently than to my own cultural upbringing and influence. Learning to look/listen for the connections and hooks to the Gospel in the language, values and assumptions of those I am working with.

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## Called to Ministry



In its early days Unlock was called EUTP (Evangelical Urban Training Project). I was introduced to the organisation by Canon Neville Black when he challenged our rural parish in the south (Hampshire), to link with inner city Liverpool at the time the north / south divide was first recognised in the 1980s. Three of us travelled north to Liverpool and experienced the welcome and hospitality of the folk in the churches there. Neville's wife Val had written a "Pastoral Care and Listening" course which we were given, along with a couple of others, so we could see what EUTP was producing at that time particularly to help people in the cities. When we returned home and read this course we decided it was a gift we should use, and found a very experienced lady to lead a dozen of us through it. At

the end of this, some of us worked together to form a visiting group in our church, whilst I was so challenged by what God was saying to me by the end of the course, that I sought help as to a way forward. The same leader was able to guide me to the Diaconate, where after selection, training and Ordination, I have been serving in the Church of England for the last 24 years. My husband and I still support Unlock and I pray for you daily and admire the work you all do. Chris Peel; Deacon, Yorkshire.

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## Jesus on Stoops Estate

In the 'Christmas' cooking the book session one mum said that if Jesus was born in Burnley it would have been on Stoops estate! It also led onto politics and how politicians are not in touch with everyday life but Jesus was and connected with the poorest people.



## Special People



In Burnley we looked at creation. A couple were there with a very young baby who was born with Down's syndrome. As we discussed good things we have made and how everything God has made is good they shared how someone has told them that they must be very special to have been given this special baby who will need special care that only they can give her.

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## Count Your Blessings

The first session I ran with 'The Buzz' was called 'Count Your Blessings' and I provided the group with treasure chests for them to decorate that they could keep their 'blessings' in and use as a reminder if they were feeling like everything was a bit grim. At the end of the session, it was great to hear one of the ladies really reflecting positively on her children and all the joy they bring to her life and their uniqueness and gifts.



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## An Extra Audience



Unlock works primarily with adults, but sometimes children really help us to do that - 'During the Bible story telling the children were great they sat and listened so well. When I came to the end of the story I looked out and the parents/carers were sat just the same, listening, but the best thing was all the helpers doing the lunch in the kitchen, standing buttering bread, knives aloft, listening so intently!'

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## Sparkling Treasure

On Town End Farm (TEF), a large housing estate in Sunderland, Unlock work is based in a decommissioned church that is leased to the local Community Association. Jacqueline, our Unlock Town End Farm worker sent us the following:- At the Unlock Gathering we talked about where your treasure is, and it got me thinking more about TEF and the people who live there and what a treasure they are.

The people are beginning to sparkle; the parents/carers in the toddler group are beginning to engage with each other more. The craft and chat group are doing more

wonderful things. The Friday bingo & chat are wanting to do something different. The Chapel is beginning to sparkle; people are coming in to light candles for their loved ones or just sit in the peace and quiet. They tell their stories when they come in; one lady came to light a candle for her Mother's memory, and told me that when the Church was being built in TEF her Mam went round the doors selling bricks to raise funds for the build. When her Dad died they had a prayer desk made in his memory; she didn't know where it went when they closed the Church. In the Church there is a corner full of 'stuff'. I went over and there right at the front was her Dad's prayer desk. We polished it and placed in the Chapel. That lady sparkled as she left!



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## Resisting temptation

Working with people who were trying to give up smoking. Talking about temptation. We looked at the story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness. It was fascinating to see how people reacted when I suggested they put themselves into the story. We talked about temptation and how and why the temptations come. Just at the end I asked them what it would mean to them to be able to resist temptation always. One person immediately said it would be life changing. Then they stopped, and said "I just felt something" pointing to their chest. "I don't know what, but when I just said it would be 'life changing' it felt like electricity". They were buzzing with excitement!



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## Carrying God in my pocket

In the ceramics group we did, there was some left over clay and I asked what would happen to it; the leader said it would be thrown away. I asked if I could have it and I sat and moulded it into small stones and made the shape of the cross in each one. When they had been fired, the people in craft and chat asked what I was going to do with them and I said I'm going to get them blessed then anyone who would like one can have one, they're small enough to fit in your purse or a pocket and it's just a reminder that God is with you wherever you are. I had them blessed then forgot they were in my bag; one of the young mums who comes to the group came in late, and she said, I've come for my stone, have you brought them? Everyone took a stone (some took more for family members) I know it's only a small thing, but my heart soars to know that several people are walking around the estate knowing that God is with them.

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## Changes



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There has been a noticeable change in the relationships of some the Estate Residents Association. They will think more about what they are doing and why they are doing it. They are more open to suggestions and definitely more willing to listen to others. The vicar said that members of the residents association are much more open to conversations with her and there has been a positive change in the relationships within the community.

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## Hearing about Jesus

I wasn't going to do The Ark Holiday club this past half term as there was a lot going on at the local Bunny Hill Centre for families. However one of the residents asked if we would do it.

I explained there was other stuff going on and maybe no one would turn up. She said she would tell people The Ark was on and we should do it anyway. 25 children came with parents/carers/grandparents; we had a total of about 40 people! I was overwhelmed, why? Because one of the young Mums asked for the ark to be on and then she asked others to come. The children and the families chose to come knowing there was other more 'secular' stuff going on. They came knowing they would hear about Jesus!



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## I am learning



How I think things can be done is not always how others think it can be done, but can work out just as well if not better!! An example of this was the craft & chat, I thought it would be good if it was a little structured, e.g. a theme for the afternoon, chat about it then do some crafting. However the ladies suggested we just put everything out, chose something to do and chatted while we did it. It has been amazing the conversations we have had about faith, life, the universe!! and when the Vicar popped in she said it had the most lovely warm atmosphere.

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## Unlock Estate Journey

I have been reflecting on where my Unlock journey on the estate began and where we are now. It's just so great to hear things like 'I wish Jam Club could be on every day!' from Harry. People stopping me on the way to get milk from the shops, to pray for someone saying 'oh you're the lady from church you'll be able to help,' To Jason age 5 asking 'why did Jesus die and the nails in his hands must have really, really hurt!' It is a wonderful road to travel, it's got a few twists and turns and a couple of steep hills, the odd blind bend, it can be challenging, but it is exciting and a privilege to journey along it with all the amazing people I have met on the way.





## Christingle on an un-churched Estate



The Christingle service was all set up in the Community Chapel, the 'Community Choir' had been practicing and sounded like angels!! The candles were lit, there was a true sense of God in and at the Centre. The 30 Christingles were ready (a group of us had put them together on the afternoon), the chapel could seat 30 so I thought we would have more than enough room.....well that star must have been shining over our estate, people started coming in, we led them to the chapel, then one of the residents came running in saying, 'you'll never fit them all in the chapel, there are lots of people coming.' Sure enough everything had to be moved into the community hall, there was over 60 Adults and Children came, Amazing!! The choir led the carols, one of the residents read prayers (she had never done anything like that before), one of the residents children sang the first verse of Away in a Manger, and when we dimmed the lights and everyone joined in with the singing, it was beautiful! I am sure the Angels were singing with us.

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## But what about the faith bit?

I feel really encouraged by the meetings with the local residents and how they are engaging with what my work with Unlock is about. That was evident when in one of the meetings when someone was getting quite enthusiastic about what we could do in the Craft & Chat group and someone else said, 'yes, that all sounds great, but what about the faith bit!'



## Bouquet of prayer

Some of the locals are 'into' spiritualist mediums and have on occasions invited people to come to 'sessions' in each other's homes. At the Friday Drop In one of the young Mums mentioned this (she had hosted one of the medium sessions) to me; she asked my opinion about it, which led to an interesting conversation. I was about to go into the Chapel to do the reflection and I asked her if she would like to come. She came along and joined in with all the responses, the reflection was a bouquet of prayer; each person was asked to take a flower, think of a person, place, situation that may need prayer, then as you name them, place the flower in the oasis. A beautiful bouquet of prayer was created. The young Mum was so moved by this and said she would never be able to put flowers in a vase again without thinking/praying for someone. There was such a blanket of peace came over us.

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## Appreciated

The work we do with Unlock can be a little isolated and you can sometimes feel you're 'out there on your own' and I have to say I was feeling a little bit 'am I doing this right?' Then I got a text message from one of the locals asking if I would be at craft and chat on Wednesday, then I got another asking what time, then another asking was I there yet! I didn't think anything of this. I was with the craft & chat ladies having a lovely conversation about babies names and how it's the first gift you give your child, when a couple of the community came in with a beautiful bouquet of flowers (I thought it was someone's birthday!). So what a huge surprise when they gave them to me... 'they are beautiful' I said, 'but what are they for?' 'Read the card', they said... This is what it said..... To a special lady who we are glad to have in our lives, this is just to say thank you for being there for us all.



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## Lent & Easter



It has been great doing the lent reflections; it has raised some interesting questions for example, what is Lent? What is Palm Sunday? The hope was to lead people on a journey. We had a gentle Good Friday meditation in the Chapel that went well. But I was concerned that I was 'leaving them' on Good Friday at the cross, and not taking them to the Resurrection, (we did hand out personal invitations to everyone to join the churches in the Parish) so on Saturday night one of the residents, myself and a friend 'flowerbombed' the cross outside of the community centre so on Easter Sunday morning the estate woke up to a beautiful cross covered in flowers and ribbon and a sign on it saying 'Jesus is Alive'

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## Easter Drawings

The Easter Ark was really encouraging; we showed a 20 min film of the Easter story and I did a very simple talk about going from the darkness of Good Friday to the amazing light of Easter day, The craft we did was – I gave them a black piece of card (to represent darkness) that if you scraped it with a pencil it had bright colours underneath (representing light).

I asked them to think about what they saw and heard on the film and draw something, It was amazing! Some drew a cross, some did hearts and messages of love, some did family names. Some images are the property of Unlock, others are from Freefoto.com, and Wikimedia Commons. All are subject to restrictions on reproduction outside the context of this document. We have attempted to get permissions and accredit them all appropriately. If we have failed in any respect please contact us and we will seek to remedy the situation.



## Learning to Pray

One lady came in to a session and immediately asked us to pray for a relative of hers who has secondary cancer which had been diagnosed as terminal that morning. It was great to see that she approached us to pray rather than us asking for requests. This led to me asking the whole group for prayer requests which included one mother's baby who is in hospital again, someone's partner in court the following day, a lady going through a difficult time who couldn't give details, another mother whose son was at the police station that morning after smashing a window at school. It was great to pray over these real life situations that were very current in their lives. Only update at present is the man in prison has another hearing on the 11th November but I did do a session with interactive prayers at the start of November which went really well. If I'd done the same 12 months ago I don't think they would have engaged with it the same.



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## Seeing Jesus - from an Unlock worker



When I drive to the estate every Friday I pray in the car on the way, I ask Jesus that all who I meet that day will see something or hear something of Him in me. Yet every week I see something and hear something of Him in them. Thank you Jesus.

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## The Christmas Story

The Christmas Story was very popular and is still being talked about. People using the church building have taken photos of it, and someone brought their youngster in to see it. Every time I go to coffee, someone wants to know if it will be made into a booklet. A few people have said they would like to give it to others to read. The Christmas banner also went well. It was coloured in within days, and got a lot of people talking because of the way I'd portrayed Jesus. That led to a few comments around whether Jesus as a baby would have behaved like a 'normal' baby. The men took ownership of the banner, putting in a few 'in' jokes, and two of the Wise Men ended up wearing the colours of the two local football teams. I thought this was all absolutely fabulous. It was all done without my being there too, so there was something about this banner that had people hooked.



Sally is a 64-year-old mother, grandmother and great grandmother. She is permanently looking after her 14-year-old grandson, 17-year-old granddaughter and a 6-month old great granddaughter. Her own adult children have had their children taken away from them, and the choice was between the children going into foster care or Sally fostering them. Sally has been looking after her very elderly parents in addition to this. In fact, her mother has just died. Although Sally has 4 brothers and sisters, she carries most of the weight on her shoulders. These are difficult times for Sally and her family. In her own words 'The UNLOCK group is a lifeline to me, and a place to talk and mix with other adults.' She enjoys the peace and space in a small group and finds it a supportive safe environment; whether doing creative work, hearing stories from the Bible or sharing her own story. Sally needs a space to be herself, as well as a daughter, a mum, a grandma and a carer.



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## Temptation



Working with people who were trying to give up smoking. Talking about temptation. We looked at the temptation part of Luke's Gospel. It was fascinating to see how people reacted when I suggested they put themselves into the story. We talked about temptation and how and why the temptations come. Just at the end I asked them what it would mean to them to be able to resist temptation always. One person immediately said it would be life changing. Then they stopped, and said "I just felt something" pointing to their

chest. "I don't know what, but when I just said it would be 'life changing' it felt like electricity". They were buzzing. So was I!

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## Twelve days of Testing

Someone brought up that they were having difficulty with food, having previously been anorexic. We read Daniel 1 where Daniel and his friends asked for different foods to the other captives. They had shared that they were trying to make themselves eat three meals a day and although this was hard it was important to them. They noticed in the story that the diet the boys had was made enough by God and they said they were encouraged to think that they could eat for God and trust Him for their health. The diet was tried by Daniel and his friends for 12 days before the king's official would let them keep it. The person I was listening to had a holiday coming up that was for 12 days when they would be with other people so their meals would be in public. They took encouragement that 12 days of testing for them was coming up but God looked after Daniel and could look after them.



## Blessings Pebbles

Throughout Lent I had pebbles on display at Church, asking people to decorate them or write something uplifting on them, with a view to handing them out to adults around the community during Holy Week. Soon other local churches got involved. One encouraged the children to decorate the stones, which, I'm told, generated quite a discussion about Easter and what it meant. On Good Friday people were encouraged to hand out the pebbles on the Walk of Witness. After the Walk, I took pebbles to all the businesses open that day and gave one to each person who was working, telling them it was a thank-you from local churches for working on a Bank Holiday. At the supermarket the woman on the till was overjoyed. It was her birthday and she'd been trying to cadge the stone her colleague had been given; so she was really pleased to be given one of her own. Likewise, at one of the greasy spoons, when I introduced myself, the woman behind the counter was quite snappy – tired and harassed, it was a busy café – but when I quickly gave her and her co-workers a pebble each, her tone changed straightaway, and her face and attitude melted somewhat. Even the local tattoo parlour was happy to accept a pebble. This was a really good way of witnessing, and no-one objected. People seemed pleased they had been remembered, and their sacrifice acknowledged. Some of the pebbles had overtly Christian messages, but still there were no objections.



## Feeding & Being Fed

Donna; a struggling young mum attended an Unlock session about food: two days later, she rushed into lunch club, shouting, still really excited about what she had learned; 'five loaves & fishes & 12 baskets... 12 BASKETS leftover!!!!' Donna tells daughter that she wants a bible; there was a child like wonder in her response to the session; it connects to her own experience of feeding & being fed. She likes to have her freezer and cupboards full and feed her children on demand. Her sister is there too; they were giving each-other permission. They are filled with wonder at a super-abundant God.

## STOP!

Using the 'say it how it is' 2 Kings session (Mess & Mistakes & Muddling through): Jane's boyfriend bought a van, she's lent him some money; she is uncomfortable, feels trapped. In the session she came across the stop sign. She heard about God saying that he was not happy with the way people were behaving. It was an entirely new concept. It had never occurred to her before that she had both the right and the power to simply say 'no'. On the Friday she came in and said to Vic, 'I've done it. Got the money back and never saw him again'. It became new a feature of her life; she's since made other choices on that basis.



## Family



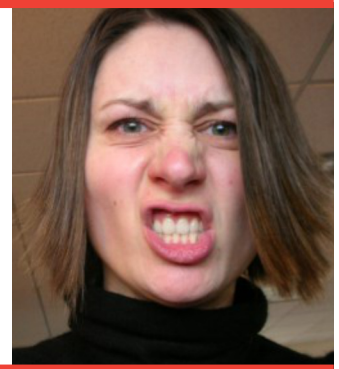
A mum and 3 grown up daughters; very local; attended toddlers and messy church. First they all joined in with Unlock - Surviving Xmas, then 'New Year; New You'. One can't read & write. Now they are making commitments to action, supporting and holding each other to account. They started doing exercise (walking etc) as a result of the priorities session, one of them acting as a local leader. Now there is a family exercise group. Then the Minister takes the group and continues it as a

nurture course; all four are now members of the church, full on; plus one of their male partners. Family reinforcement really helps.

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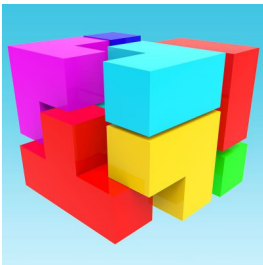
## Anger Management

There are two occasions where we have had arguments in the Unlock group and I have felt disheartened. When it happened again recently, I found that I approached it differently. I thought, well if this is something that keeps coming up for the women lets find a way of empowering them and helping them to manage difference better. I am now not seeing it as a threat but as a chance to help the women to grow and learn new skills.



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## Making Connections



We started by looking at pictures like tapestries, looms and unfinished mosaics, talking around feeling small but part of a bigger picture. Then we shared 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. I had purchased a blank puzzle. We talked a bit about being connected and how to feel connected as we took a section of the puzzle and decorated the pieces. Then once everyone had finished, we put the pieces together to make one large, jointly decorated puzzle. The women praised it and felt a sense of accomplishment. They each took a blank puzzle to work on at home. One of the women who I was

hoping would start to relax and open up a bit more seemed a bit more talkative and open that night so that felt like an answer to prayer.

## We are so privileged to do the work we do!

This was sent to me in the middle of the Covid lockdowns by one of the volunteers who supports our local work. (Context – F recently lost her mum to cancer and she has anger issues – she could end up back in prison if she puts another foot wrong.) “I just want to send a little accolade.



Throughout and despite the pandemic Anne (Unlock worker) has continued connecting with the women we work with. She has provided them with regular contact, activities, reflections, care packages and motivational readings... I met with F (one of the women) yesterday. She was very tearful and quite angry about her situation. I gave her the activities from Anne, she spent a good 15 mins reading them. The atmosphere in the car changed to one of peace, with a lovely presence. F became chilled and restful. Said the Bible we bought her (some years ago) was at her Auntie's and she was

going to get it. I'm so grateful Anne for your love and care. The material I caught sight of was beautiful, so well presented. F read about being adopted in God's family, she read it all! Also said she was going to put one of the cards on the notice board for other residents to see. It made such a difference and was preparation for another event that happened shortly after, that if F was still in the frame of mind I first met her in, could have been very difficult. Thanks again Anne and to God, who knows all!

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## Using Unlock Resources in Worship

Thanks to Lisa, a local vicar, for this feedback - As we start to cautiously emerge from COVID lockdowns it seemed appropriate to the leadership team that we offer the opportunity for the congregation to reflect and begin to process the experience of this past 18 months. We have used a resource from the Christian Charity UNLOCK called The Year We Stayed At Home. It is a very flexible resource that allows for easy adaptation to different congregations and contexts. We have chosen to spend a month Lamenting and then moved on to Give thanks and to consider what we have learnt from this time of COVID



### Week 1

We thought together about the place of Lament in the Bible and the Christian tradition of Lament creating space for people to do some Personally focused Lament.

### Week 2

We lamented together the Social Injustice COVID has highlighted

### Week 3

We lamented the cost of COVID to the church, the changes thrust upon us, what we have lost and where we have felt let down by the Church.

#### **Week 4**

We considered God's response to our lament.

#### **Week 5**

We considered What Biblical Gratitude looks like - that it focusses praise on the Giver rather than focusing on the gift.

#### **Week 6**

We gave thanks for the things that have been positive in the time of COVID.

#### **Week 7**

We started to look at some of the threads of learning we want to carry with us into the rest of our lives, highlighted by the time of COVID, First considering Patience.

#### **Week 8**

Kindness, thinking about those whose kindness has helped us in this time and thanking God for them, thinking about how we might live more kindly going forward.

#### **Week 9**

Hope - hope is not simply optimism but the courage to keep taking the next step and the next breath even when we can't see what will come next.

#### **Week 10**

Discernment - How do we discern the way forward?

I am excited by how the congregation has grown in confidence to express their thoughts and feelings and how much we have learnt from each other. Over time the conversation has deepened and there have been signs of growing maturity and respectful listening and sharing with each other.

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## **Peace and Support**

There was a lovely atmosphere at the Unlock group. My volunteer said there was a great sense of peace and a sense of God there. All the women got on well together and one woman opened up a lot and shared about her struggles. The other women came around her and tried to support her. This lady then wrote down all her worries and fears and finished her writing by putting down that she knows God is there for her. The lady left feeling better. My volunteer said there was just a lovely atmosphere with the women – it was a special night. The women posted on Facebook afterwards that they had a lovely evening and all the feedback was very positive.





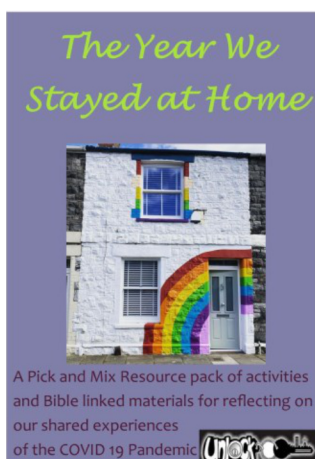
## New Start

Using the Unlock New beginnings session with a very mixed group, we learn that 'anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person'. Three different people who had all gone through separation and divorce; had never realised before that they could have a new start.



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## Encouraging and Amazing



Responses to one Unlock worker during lockdown after she developed and circulated a local Unlock Resource pack based on 'The Year we Stayed at Home.' -

\*Sheila texted to say she was finding the Resource Pack "really good and encouraging" and that she feels like "going to the side of the river to read it from there where it's so quiet."

\*Sharon responded saying that she thought it was amazing. She is hoping to go through it with her husband who does not normally attend the church.

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## Colour and Stick

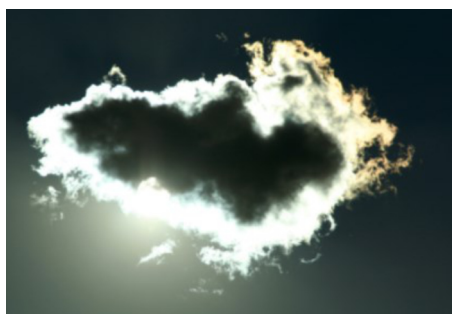
At the group two of the women showed me all the colouring they had done in their colouring books and how they had used them. I was encouraged at how they had been engaging with the pictures and positive statements around their identity in Christ. One of them had engaged with the written activities about gratitude too. This is the same lady who has been sticking up the prayers and positive affirmations from the reflection packs we posted out during lockdown on her wall.



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## Touches the Spot

We've had some lovely feedback on our new resource from Wooden Baptistery. Ruth says 'Have just had a look at the pack. And tears are in my eyes. It touches the spot'



We would like to commend this resource pack from the wonderful Unlock whose aim is to unlock the untold stories of ordinary people here and now and unlock the Gospel stories for us here and now.

This Pandemic resource pack gently reaches the raw and hurting places in us all and helps us to work with it by the grace of God. It is a 'pick and mix resource' pack so pick it up and have a go!

