

Good News

Based on
Some offers of Good News in the New Testament
by Jim Hart

Edited by Jenny Richardson



These four Bible studies help a group look at how the Good News of the Kingdom of God was offered in the New Testament, and compare this with how they offer it:

- 1: The offer of Jesus— **“Follow me”**
- 2: The offer of Jesus— **“Repent of your sins”**
- 3: The offer of Jesus— **“Life more abundantly”**
- 4: **The works of the kingdom**

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Session 1: Follow me

Unlock stories



Ask each person to offer:-

“How did you learn about Jesus before you accepted him as Lord and Saviour?”

OR

“Who was the person who helped you most to become a Christian.”

(You can copy page 5 of the pack for group members)

Then ask

“What were the qualities of the people from whom you learned about Jesus?”

List the qualities on a large sheet of paper.

You can use pictures as well as words

e.g.

love/care



listened



Reveal Good News



Read **Follow me** (page 6) - this can be copied for the group.

Jesus was not at that stage known as the Messiah, nor was the Holy Spirit poured out.

What was there about Him, do you think, that made these men leave their jobs and follow him?

How do the qualities of the people involved in your Christian stories compare to those of Jesus?

Then ask

When did the disciples become Christians?

Note that the term ‘disciples’ refers to the 12 in most places, but to a much larger number in Luke 10 v1-12.

Unlock stories



Ask “**How long did the process of making a Christian commitment take?**”

“**What happened to you on the way?**”

(You may like to use “The New Life game”, available from Unlock, as part of this process—a discussion starter, a bit like snakes and ladders)

Reveal Good News



Read together “**Key stages in the disciples’ Christian journeys**” (pages 7&8)

What were the key stages in the disciples Christian journeys?
Are there any others that you feel were important that are not included here?

Summary: the disciples’ Christian journeys were quite long (2-3 years), and were spent in constant association with Jesus Himself. He selected a small number out of thousands.

We can expect that people we know will take some time on their Christian journeys.

How do we decide who to persevere with and who not?

NB. No part of the disciples’ journeys resemble what we understand to be conversions.



Unlock stories



Ask

“When did you not understand or let Jesus down.?”

“Who appears to be letting him down now?”

How did other Christians treat you when you seemed to be letting Jesus down?

How are you treating the person you know who seems to be letting Jesus down?

Reveal Good News



Read together **“The disciples get it wrong”** (page 9)

What might have been the effect of these incidents on the disciples?

Something to think about before we meet again:

“How can I enable another person to follow Jesus?”



Who helped you learn
about Jesus before you
accepted him as Lord and
Saviour?



Who helped
you to
become a
Christian?



How long did the
process take?

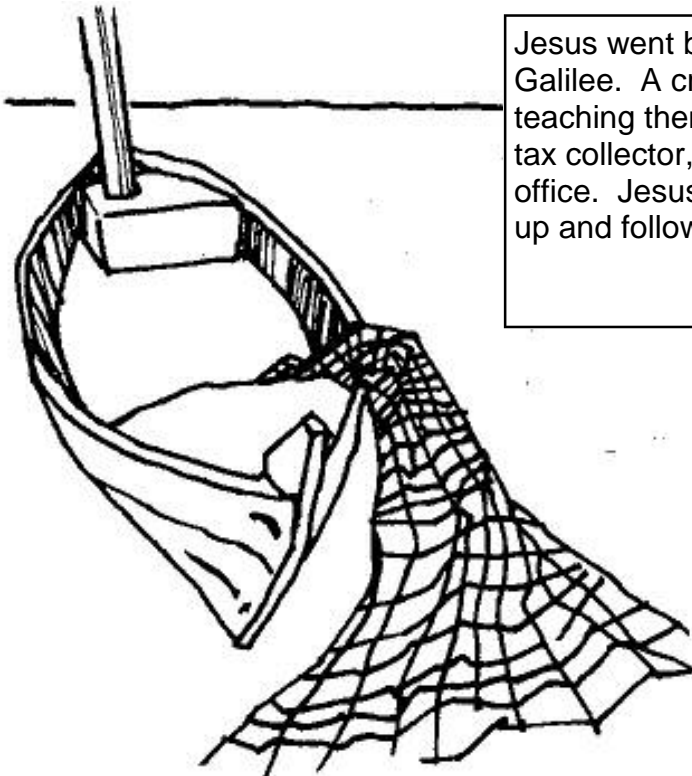


Follow Me

After John had been put in prison, Jesus went to Galilee, and preached the Good News from God. "The right time has come," he said, "and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe in the Good News!"

As Jesus walked along the shore of Lake Galilee, he saw two fishermen, Simon and his brother Andrew, catching fish with a net. Jesus said to them, "Come with me, and I will teach you to catch people". At once they left their nets and went with him. He went a little farther on and saw two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in their boat getting their nets ready. As soon as Jesus saw them, he called them; they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and went with Jesus.

Mark 1 v 14-20



Jesus went back again to the shore of Lake Galilee. A crowd came to him, and he started teaching them. As he walked along, he saw a tax collector, Levi son of Alphaeus, sitting in his office. Jesus said to him, "Follow me". Levi got up and followed him.

Mark 2 v13-14

What was there about Jesus that made these men leave their jobs and follow him?

Key Stages in the disciples' Christians Journeys

Their call

See Follow me (page 6)

Mark 1 v14-20 and Mark 2 v13-14



Peter's discovery

Then Jesus and his disciples went away to the villages near Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Tell me, who do people say I am?"

"Some say that you are John the Baptist," they answered; "others say that you are Elijah, while others say that you are one of the prophets."

"What about you?" he asked them. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

Then Jesus ordered them, "Do not tell anyone about me."

Mark 8v27-30

Transfiguration

Six days later Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain, where they were alone. As they looked on, a change came over Jesus, and his clothes became shining white—whiter than anyone in the world could wash them. Then the three disciples saw Elijah and Moses talking with Jesus. Peter spoke up and said to Jesus, "Teacher, how good it is that we are here! We will make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He and the others were so frightened that he did not know what to say. Then a cloud appeared and covered them with its shadow, and a voice came from the cloud, "This is my own dear Son—listen to him! They took a quick look round but did not see anyone else; only Jesus was with them.

Mark 9v2-8

Key stages in the disciples Christian journeys (continued)



The Resurrection

After the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices to go and anoint the body of Jesus. Very early on Sunday morning, at sunrise, they went to the tomb. On the way they said to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" (It was a very large stone.) Then they looked up and saw that the stone had already been rolled back. So they entered the tomb, where they saw a young man sitting on the right, wearing a white robe—and they were alarmed.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is not here—he has been raised! Look, here is the place where they put him. Now go and give this message to his disciples, including Peter: 'He is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see him, just as he told you.'"

So they went out and ran from the tomb, distressed and terrified. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

After Jesus rose from death early on Sunday, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had driven out seven demons. She went and told his companions. They were mourning and crying; and when they heard her say that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe her.

Mark 16 v 1-8 and Mark 16 v9-11 (alternative ending)

Ascension

After the Lord Jesus had talked with them, he was taken up to heaven and sat at the right side of God. The disciples went and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and proved that their preaching was true by the miracles that were performed.

Mark 16 v19

Pentecost

When the day of Pentecost came, all the believers were gathered together in one place. Suddenly there was a noise from the sky which sounded like a strong wind blowing, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire which spread out and touched each person there.

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

Acts 2 v1-4

The disciples Christian journeys were quite long. We can expect that people we know will take some time on their Christian journeys. How do we decide who we will persevere with?



The disciples get it wrong!



Some people brought children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples scolded the people. When Jesus noticed this, he was angry and said to his disciples, "let the children come to me, and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I assure you that whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." Then he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on each of them, and blessed them.

Mark 10 v13-16

Then he returned and found three disciples asleep. He said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Weren't you able to stay awake even for one hour? And he said to them, "Keep watch, and pray that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." He went away once more and prayed, saying the same words. Then he came back to the disciples and found them asleep; they could not keep their eyes open. And they did not know what to say to him. When he came back the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come! Look, the Son of Man is now being handed over to the power of sinners. Get up, let us go. Look, here is the man who is betraying me!

Mark 14 v37-42



Then all the disciples left him and ran away.

Mark 14 v50

What might have been the effect of these incidents on the disciples?

Peter was still down in the courtyard when one of the High Priest's servant-women came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked straight at him and said, "You, too, were with Jesus of Nazareth." But he denied it. "I don't know.....I don't understand what you are talking about," he answered, and went out into the passage. Just then a cock crowed.

The servant girl saw him there and began to repeat to the bystanders, "He is one of them! But Peter denied it again. A little while later the bystanders accused Peter again, "You can't deny that you are one of them, because you, too, are from Galilee."

Then Peter said, "I swear that I am telling the truth! May God punish me if I am not! I do not know the man you are talking about."

Just then a cock crowed a second time, and Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will say three times that you do not know me." And he broke down and cried.

Mark 14v66-72

Session 2: Repent of your sins

Unlock stories



Sharing thoughts since last time:
“How can I enable another person to follow Jesus?”

Write words and pictures on a large sheet of paper to help remember key points.

Then ask: **How have you helped someone to follow Jesus?**
and encourage people to share their experiences.

Reveal Good News



“Asking sinners to repent is the traditional evangelical offer of the Good News, but Jesus only rarely asked people to do this in a generalised sense. He often dealt with particular sins—like the rich young man’s love of his wealth, Nicodemus materialistic rather than spiritual understanding of his faith, or the promiscuous sexual behaviour of the Samaritan woman.”

Read **Repent** (page 13)

What do you think ‘repentance’ is?



Unlock stories



What do you think 'sin' is?

For this you'll need a pile of small pieces of paper or card, and a pen for each person.

In 2's or 3's, take some of the cards, and write (or draw?!) on each one something that the group thinks is a sin. Encourage people to think of as many sins as possible!!

Put all the cards / papers into a hat or box in the middle of the group.

Take it in turns to take a paper out of the hat, and place them in a ranking order in the middle of the group (on a table or on the floor). The whole group can join in the debate about what order to put things in.

Then ask

Can we say one sin is worse than another? What does God think?

Christians have often narrowed sins in practice to individual moral sins, like drinking, smoking, sex outside marriage. In this discussion, aim to broaden the understanding of what are sins (including structural sins—unjust social systems)

Reveal Good News



Read **Sin or need** (page 14)

What is the connection between sin and need?

What is the difference?

Jesus saw how much faith they had and said to the man, "Your sins are forgiven". **Could you tell stories of people who became Christians through prayer or actions of others?**

How might our church prevent people from getting to Jesus? (as the crowd stopped the four men from bringing the paralysed man.)

Read **Turn from sin** (page 15)

Background note:-Like the Jews of Jesus' time, many Christians regard misfortune as the judgement of God on someone's sins. It is easy to reverse this and regard our material prosperity as a sign of God's blessing. Jesus

denies this, and goes on to address the hearers with their need for continuous repentance. "Unless you turn from your sins you will all die."

Repentance and forgiveness are the two central Christian processes:-

Repentance is how we heal the things we do wrong (or wrong attitudes, beliefs.)

Forgiveness is how we heal the wrong things done to us.

**Does the need to turn from sins end when we become Christians?
Are Christians better than non-Christians? In what ways?**



Read **Throwing Stones** (page 16)

How do Christians throw stones at sinners?

In what ways do we blame the 'people round here' for not 'coming to church'.

What are the sins of our church?

The idea is to get the group to look at its church's corporate life and reflect on the ways in which it falls short of the example of Jesus and his disciples.

Summary at the end (in your own words!)

We have seen that repentance from sins is a continuous process and together with forgiveness, is how human beings relate to God and in love and harmony with each other.

It is a process through which we receive the Good News of Jesus, not the Good News itself. Only in certain cases is the offer of the Good News made in terms of repentance from sins.

Something to think about before we meet again:

"How I came to know Jesus."

Repent

So John appeared in the desert, baptizing and preaching. "Turn away from your sins and be baptized," he told the people, "and God will forgive your sins."

Many people from the province of Judea and the city of Jerusalem went out to hear John. They confessed their sins, and he baptized them in the river Jordan.

Mark 1 v45



What do you think repentance is?

What do you think sin is?

How many sins can you think of?!

Sin: A system of prohibition connected with things considered holy or unclean. Any recognised restraint, ban or exclusion. (Chambers 20th Century Dictionary).

Repent: To regret, to sorrow for, or wish to have been otherwise, that one has done or left undone. To change from past evil. (Chambers 20th Century Dictionary)

Sin or Need?

A few days later Jesus went back to Capernaum, and the news spread that he was at home. So many people came together that there was no room left, not even out in front of the door.

Jesus was preaching the message to them when four men arrived, carrying a paralysed man to Jesus. Because of the crowd, however, they could not get the man to him. So they made a hole in the roof right above the place where Jesus was. When they had made an opening, they let the man down, lying on his mat.

Seeing how much faith they had, Jesus said to the paralysed man, "My son, your sins are forgiven."

Some teachers of the Law who were sitting there thought to themselves, "How does he dare talk like this? This is blasphemy! God is the only one who can forgive sins!"

At once Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he said to them, "Why do you think such things? Is it easier to say to this paralysed man, 'Your sins are forgiven', or to say, 'Get up, pick up your mat, and walk'? I will prove to you, then, that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralysed man, "I tell you, get up, pick up your mat, and go home! While they all watched, the man got up, picked up his mat, and hurried away. They were all completely amazed and praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Mark 2 v1-12



What is the connection between sin and need?

What is the difference?

Jesus saw how much faith they had and said to the man, "Your sins are forgiven".

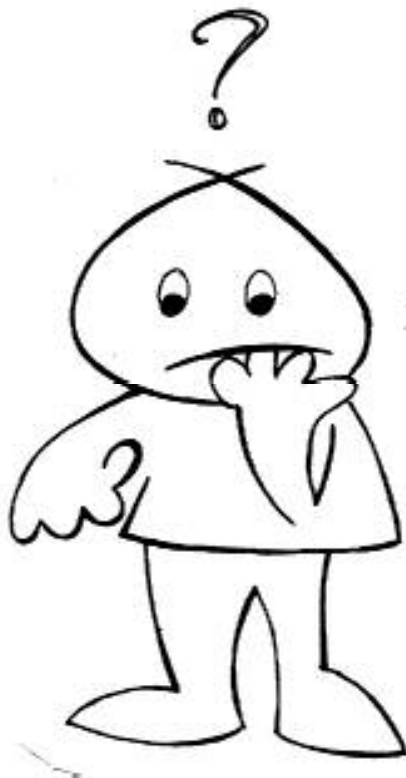
Do you know of people who became Christians through prayer or actions of others?

How might our church prevent people from getting to Jesus? (as the crowd stopped the four men from bringing the paralysed man.)

Turn from sin

At that time some people were there who told Jesus about the Galileans whom Pilate had killed while they were offering sacrifices to God. Jesus answered them, "Because those Galileans were killed in that way, do you think it proves that they were worse sinners than all the other Galileans? No indeed! And I tell you that if you do not turn from your sins, you will all die as they did. What about those eighteen people in Siloam who were killed when the tower fell on them? Do you suppose this proves that they were worse than all the other people living in Jerusalem? No indeed! And I tell you that if you do not turn from your sins, you will die as they did."

Luke 13 v1-5



Does the need to turn from our sins end when we become Christians?

Are Christians better than non-Christians?
In what ways?

Throwing stones

The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees brought in a woman who had been caught committing adultery, and they made her stand before them all. "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. In our Law Moses commanded that such a woman must be stoned to death. Now, what do you say?" They said this to trap Jesus, so that they could accuse him. But he bent over and wrote on the ground with his finger.

As they stood there asking him questions, he straightened himself up and said to them, "Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her." Then he bent over again and wrote on the ground. When they heard this, they all left, one by one, the older ones first. Jesus was left alone, with the woman still standing there. He straightened himself up and said to her, "Where are they? Is there no one left to condemn you?" "No one, sir," she answered. "Well, then," Jesus said, "I do not condemn you either. Go, but do not sin again."

John 8 v3-11



How do Christians throw stones at sinners?

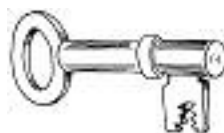
What are the sins of our church?



Session 3:

Life more abundantly

Unlock stories



What we've been thinking about since last time:
"How did you come to know Jesus?"

Ask each person in turn to share their story.
Note words (or pictures) on a large sheet of paper to help remember key points.

Then try to decide together which offer of the Good News each story represents:

- following Jesus (through the examples of a Christian or a group of Christians)
- repentance
- life more abundantly

N.B. Journeys into faith are very varied and over different time periods, so we must make our offers to others as varied, and sensitively attuned to their personalities and needs.

Reveal Good News



Read **Water of Life!** (page 20)

What is the connection between Jesus' offer of life-giving water and the woman's marital circumstances?

Read **Bread of Life!** (page 21)

One of the themes of John's gospel is the contrast of the physical requirements of life with the spiritual. He uses the same language for each—water, bread, light. Many people in our neighbourhoods are unaware of any needs beyond the physical.

**What are the physical needs that you have?
How do you go about meeting them?**



Read **Gate to Life!** (page 22)

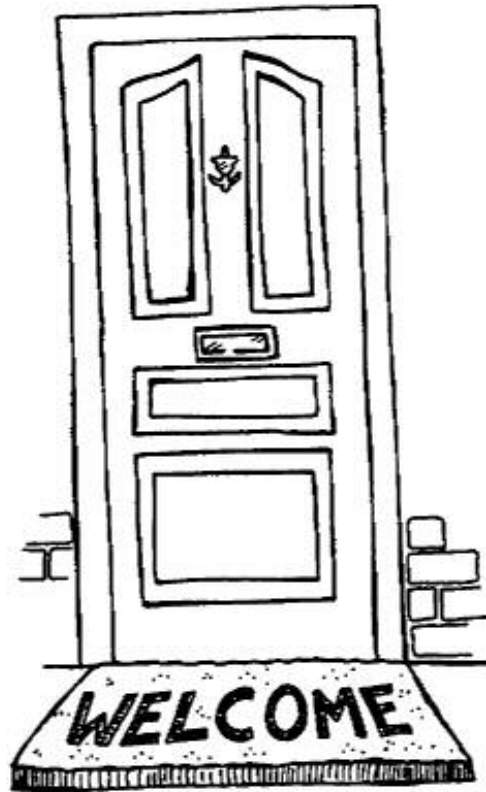
Sharing in pairs

Ask the people in the group to work in a pair with some one they trust.

Each person has 5 minutes to talk to the other person about:

'A good thing that happened to me after I believed in Jesus'.

- The job of the group leader during this is to time 5 minutes for each person in the pair, and let people know when swap talking and listening roles. Let the group know you're doing this.
- You might like to write the statement up on a large sheet of paper, for people to refer back to.
- You may like to give a few minutes first for people to be quiet and think about what they want to share. NB Some people prefer to reflect quietly for themselves first, others prefer to think as they talk! Try to offer what will suit your group best (don't assume they are like you!) or you may like to ask them to decide which they prefer.



Discussion

Explain the rules of confidentiality. Anyone may give his/her own information but may not quote from the information he/she was given.

First ask people

How did you find the experience of sharing in pairs.? (NB There are no right answers!!)

How does our church display this 'life in all its fullness' to the community?

Write whatever is offered on the paper

How do you display it to the people who know you?

Invite people to share their stories and experiences.

Release life changing skills and confidence

How could our church display life in all its fullness more effectively to the community?

Write up suggestions on the paper

This is an important part of the discussion—try to make sure you have enough time for it at the end of the session.

Are there any of these we want to make happen?!



Something to think about before we meet again:

**Someone I know around here
who is in need.**

(The person might be lonely, in ill-health, have marriage or family difficulties, have a drink or drugs problem etc.)

Water of Life!

Jesus answered, "All those who drink this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring which will provide him with life-giving water and give him eternal life."

"Sir," the woman said, "give me that water! Then I will never be thirsty again, nor will I have to come here to draw water."

"Go and call your husband." Jesus told her, "and come back."

"I haven't got a husband." she answered.

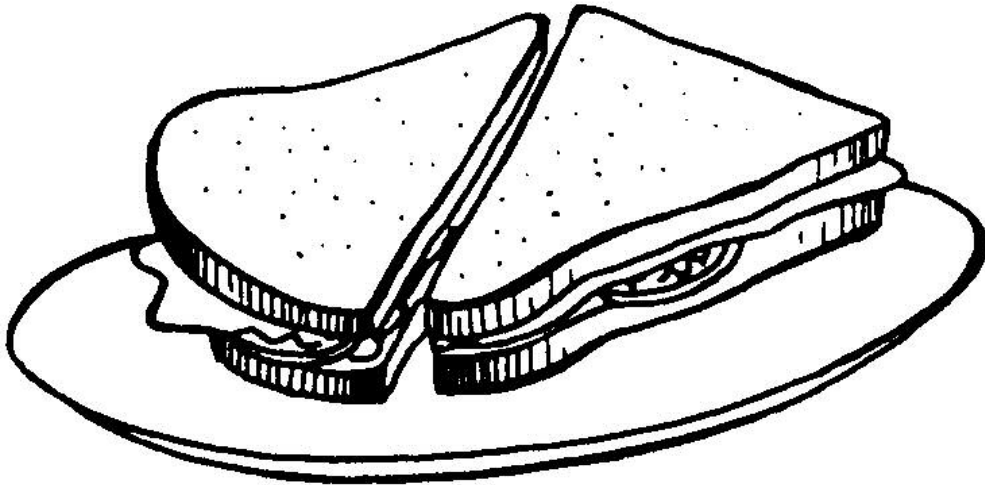
Jesus replied, "You are right when you say you haven't got a husband. You have been married to five men, and the man you live with now is not really your husband. You have told me the truth."

John 4 v13-18



What is the connection between Jesus' offer of life-giving water and the woman's marital circumstances?

Bread of Life!



I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate manna in the desert, but they died. But the bread that comes down from heaven is of such a kind that whoever eats it will not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. The bread that I will give him is my flesh, which I give so that the world may live.”

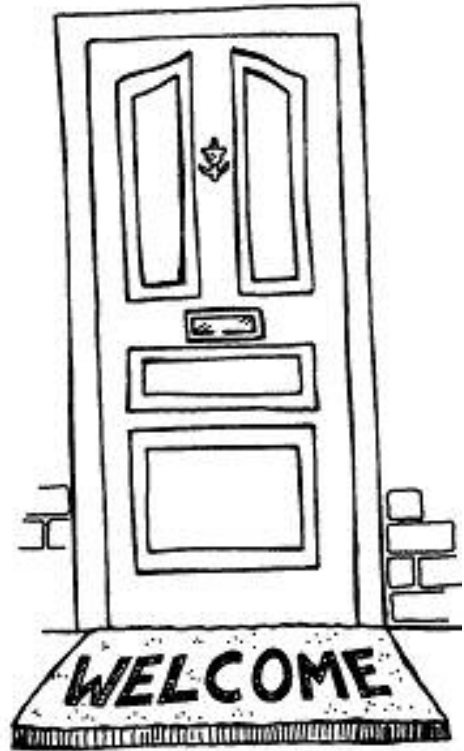
John 6 v48-51

*What are the physical needs you have?
How do you go about meeting them?*

Gate to Life!

So Jesus said again, “I am telling you the truth: I am the gate for the sheep. All others who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever comes in by me will be saved; they will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only in order to steal, kill and destroy. I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness.

John 10 v7-10



What is a good thing that has happened to you after you believed in Jesus?

Did you know?
*Thieves are sly
Robbers are violent*

Session 4: The works of the kingdom

Unlock stories



What we've been thinking about since last time:

Ask the group to share about those in need in the locality whom they know (as far as confidentiality allows)

Write the main points of these stories on a large sheet of paper.

Then ask

How could a Christian help this person?

How could the church help this person?

How could the church help the Christian member who is helping the person?

Reveal Good News



Read **The works of the kingdom** (page 25)

Note how closely Jesus follows Isaiah.

What are all the categories of need noted?

List on your paper whatever is offered: for example



Matthew

Hungry

Thirsty

Stranger

Naked

Sick

Isaiah

Oppressed

Hungry

Homeless

Naked

Relatives

In prison

Releasing life changing skills and confidence

Take each need in turn and discuss (you don't need to do those in both passages twice!)

:

Who are there around here with this need?

How do we minister to them as individuals?

How do we minister to them as a church?

Try to list some practical ways to obey these Bible verses.

Make notes of the main points and ideas on your paper.

Conclusion

Obedience and service are part of mission and God's favour.

Read **Living Good News!** (page 26)

Isaiah 58 v8-9 continues from the previous discussion.

Acts 2 v43-47 shows that the demonstration of the Kingdom life led to people being added to the group daily by the Lord.

The page is designed for you to copy, and for people to take home.

Suggest to people that they might like to stick the page to their fridge, and continue to live with the question ...

How can I be the Good News of Jesus today?



The works of the kingdom



Then the King will say to the people on his right, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father! Come and possess the kingdom which has been prepared for you ever since the creation of the world. I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me.'

'The righteous will then answer him, 'When Lord, did we ever see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we ever see you a stranger and welcome you in our homes, or naked and clothe you? When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you? The King will reply, 'I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these members of my family, you did it for me!'

Matthew 25 v34-40

The kind of fasting I want is this: remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free. Share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear, and do not refuse to help your own relatives.

Isaiah 58 v6-7



What are the needs of the people listed here?

Living Good News!

Then my favour will shine on you like the morning sun, and your wounds will be quickly healed. I will always be with you to save you; my presence will protect you on every side. When you pray, I will answer you. When you call to me, I will respond.

Isaiah 58 v 8,9



How can I
be the
Good News
of Jesus
today?

Many miracles and wonders were being done through the apostles, and everyone was filled with awe. All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed. Day after day they met as a group in the Temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts, praising God and enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.

Acts 2 v 43-47

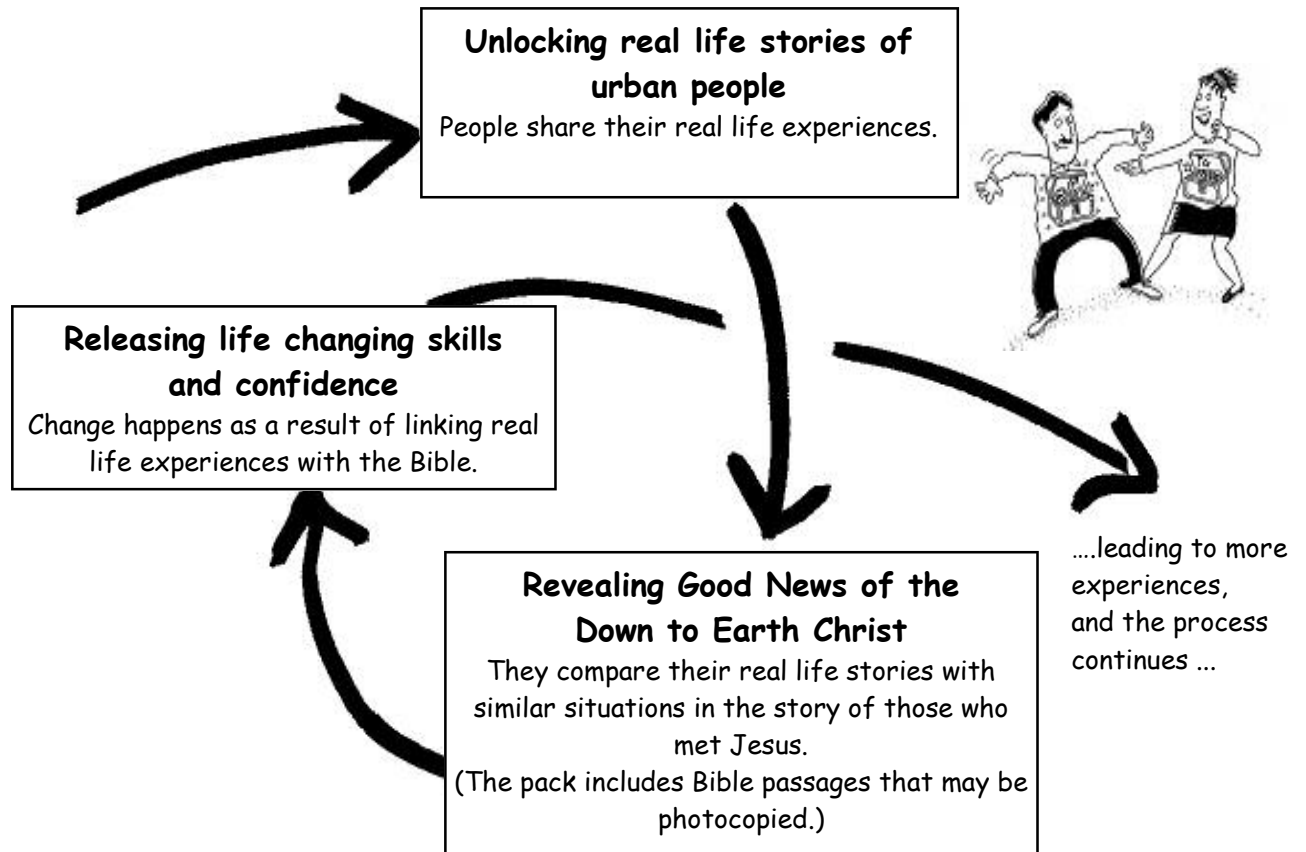
Unlock's method

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 £5 plus £1 P&P, from 4M Publications, 20 Dover Street, Southwell, Notts NG25 0EZ

This pack is based on stories—peoples own stories and the story of the people meeting 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 of times before, as the Biblical story engages with peoples' experiences.

The usual method of Bible study

Most Bible studies begin with text, moving on to analysis of the text, and deduction of general principles. This provides a logical framework, and the person stores the information (in his/her mind, in note form or on disc) for use when needed. It requires a way of thinking and communicating which is based on book and lecture (linear) methods of learning. This is not appropriate for a growing number of people.



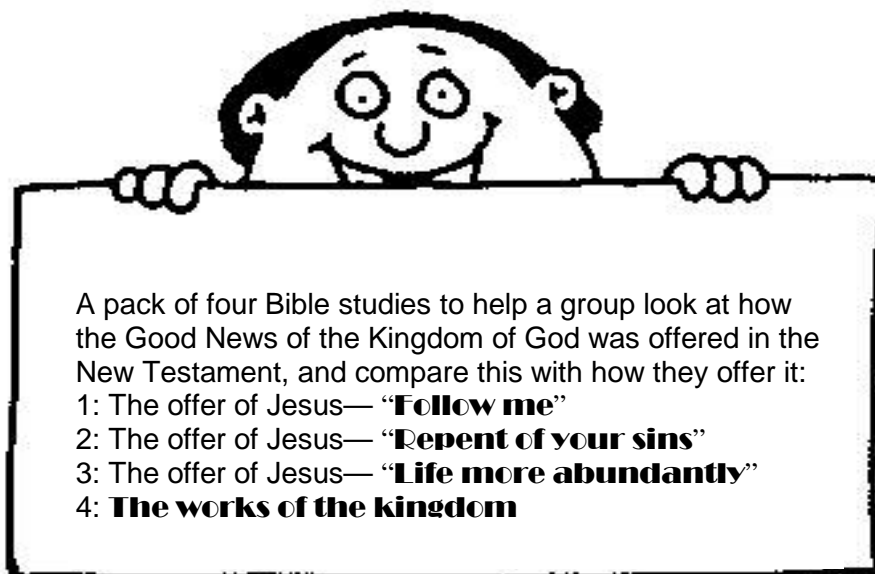
Note

In this pack, the sessions don't always move neatly through each of the 3 stages—but they start with unlocking stories, move backwards and forwards between the stories of Jesus in the Bible, and the stories of those in the group. They focus on life changing action at the end—particularly in the last session.



Good News

A new resource pack from



Based on

Some offers of Good News in the New Testament by Jim Hart

Edited by Jenny Richardson

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to cover printing and postage costs

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