



Mess, Mistakes & Muddling Through

Six sessions looking at our experience as parents and comparing it to messes and mistakes of parents in the Bible using Unlock's reflective cycle:

Unlocking real life stories of urban people
Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ
Releasing life changing skills and confidence



developed by Sonya Doragh, for Unlock Liverpool, in 2008-9

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Introduction

In the first year of my post with Unlock in Liverpool I was asked to work with 'unchurched' groups that were connected with, but not members of, local churches. One such group was the 'Parents and Toddlers' group. After a number of weeks going along to get to know the parents, I asked if any would be interested in staying after the toddlers session for 'some chatty sessions that would help us think about how God connects with our lives'.

These were the first few sessions with the group. Between 4 and 6 mums came on a regular basis. We stayed after the toddlers session and ate packed lunches during our sessions. Most of the children had after lunch naps, however some weeks the sessions were very chaotic! What took us an hour with the children and food might only take 20 minutes without interruptions!

As the group were keen to continue they have been a testing ground for some of the materials in a Baptism Preparation Tool Kit that will be available from Unlock in the autumn of 2009.

Whilst the materials are written as a guide for each session it is essential that you adapt the materials to your context and group members. As these sessions are based on the reflective learning cycle that Unlock uses it may be useful to familiarise yourself with Unlock's methodology overleaf or for more look at www.unlock-urban.org.uk/pdf/unlock_theory.pdf. Using an approach that starts with other people's experiences means that you have to be flexible, that might mean that you don't stick to the outline at all!

What's in this pack?

There are outlines for six sessions based on themes that connect with parenting. The sessions could be run in any order. Some sessions have got visual aids or other materials included. These are not the kind of materials you can just roll out, there are choices to be made and parts of the sessions may need adapting or changing to work for your group. Each session has suggestions for materials such as music, film clips that you will need to find and assess for your group in advance.

Bible text in these materials is taken from the Good News Bible

(British Usage edition),
published by the Bible Societies and Collins,
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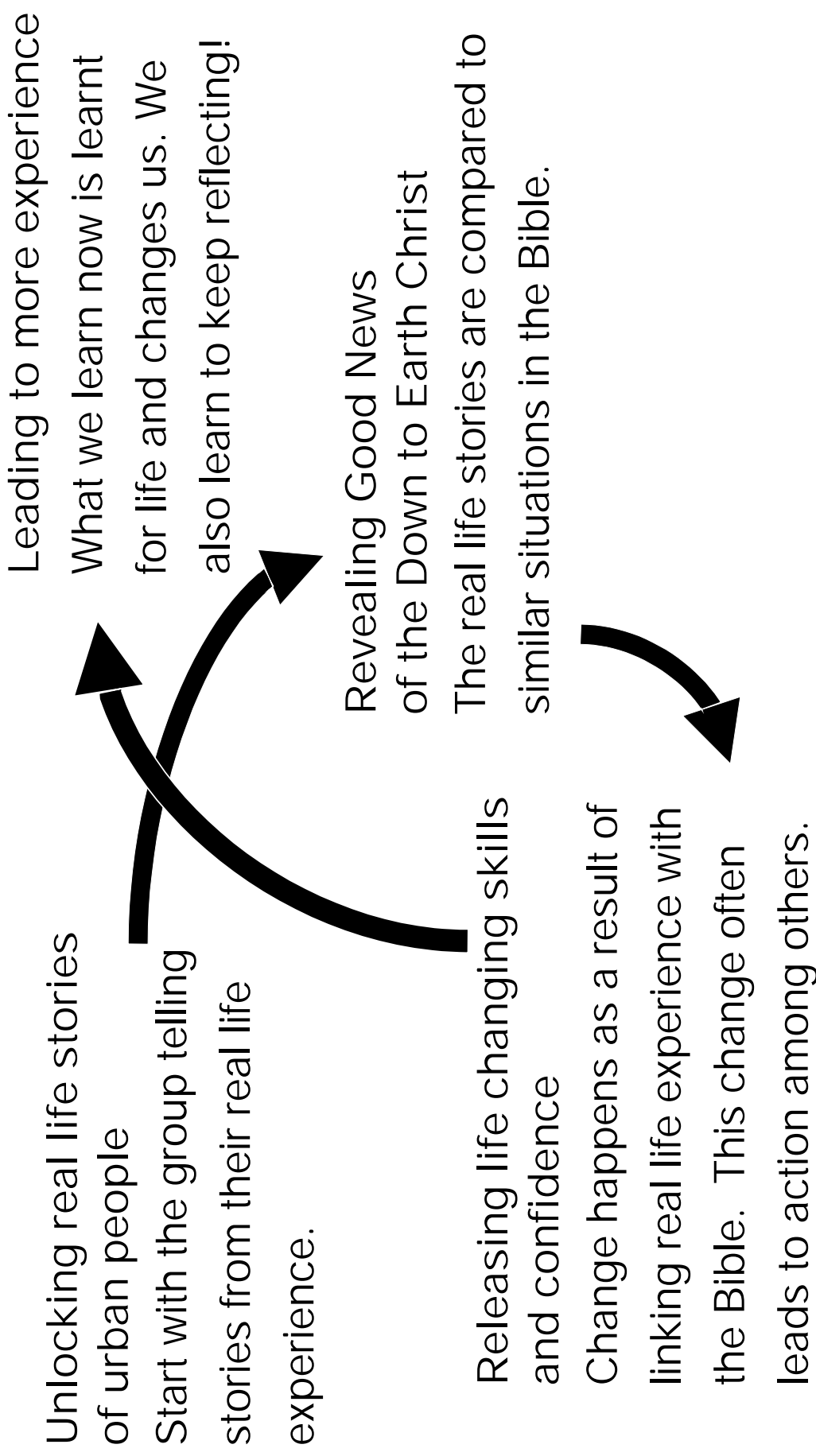
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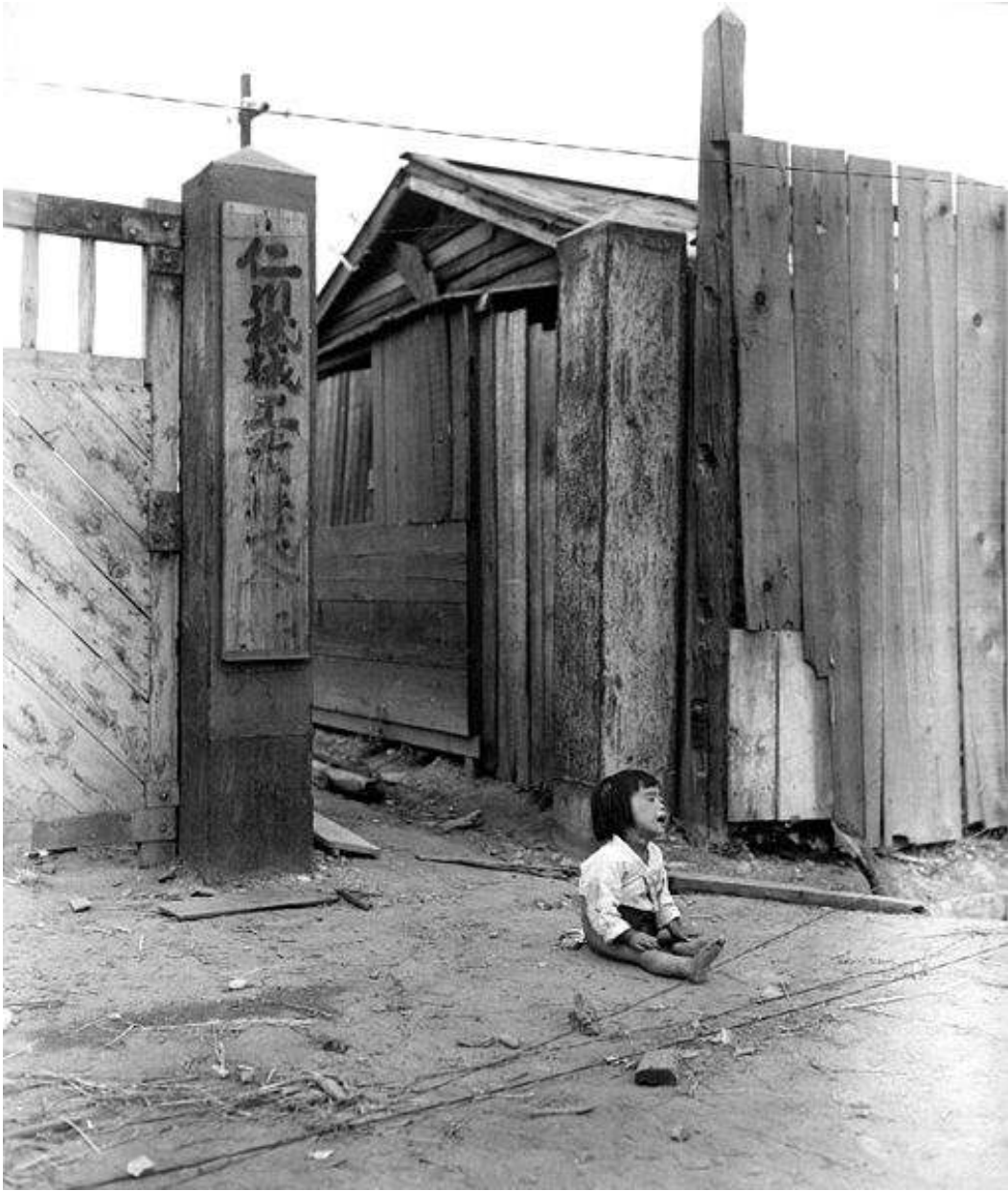
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The Unlock Method





Even good parents
make mistakes!





Session 1: Even good parents make mistakes

Bible Focus: God doesn't forget us

Visual: lost child

Soundtrack: A Woman's Care from the CD Heaven Shall Not Wait - Wild Goose Publications 1991

<http://www.ionabooks.com/Song-Audio/1901557456-Heaven-Shall-Not-Wait-CD.html?keyword=heaven+shall+not+wait>

Icebreaker: I didn't use icebreakers as the group had spent a couple of hours together before the session but you could play a game of hide and seek or hide some sweets or treats around the room before the group arrive and play hunt the treat.

Mother Nature:

Unlocking Real Life Stories . . .

(You may only need one of these questions or one of your own to draw out life stories from participants that bring out their experience)

- Tell us a story this picture makes you think of?
- What's the worst parenting mistake you've made?
- Can you tell us about a time you've lost one of your children?
- Any experience you can share with us of forgetting a child?

Mums the Word:

Revealing the Good News of the Down to Earth Christ . . .

(you will need to choose which you think is most relevant or another passage)

And when Jesus was twelve years old, they all went there as usual for the celebration. After Passover his parents left, but they did not know that Jesus had stayed on in the city. They thought he was travelling with some other people, and they went a whole day before they started looking for him. When they could not find him with their relatives and friends, they went back to Jerusalem and started looking for him there.

Three days later they found Jesus sitting in the temple, listening to the teachers and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was surprised at how much he knew and at the answers he gave. When his parents found him, they were amazed. His mother said, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been very worried, and we have been searching for you!"

Jesus answered, "Why did you have to look for me? Didn't you know that I would be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he meant. Jesus went back to Nazareth with his parents and obeyed them. His mother kept on thinking about all that had happened.

Jesus became wise, and he grew strong. God was pleased with him and so were the people. Luke 2:42-52

The Lord answered,

"Could a mother forget a child

who nurses at her breast?

Could she fail to love an infant

who came from her own body?

Even if a mother could forget,

I will never forget you. Isaiah 49:15

Maternal Instinct:

Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence . . .

- What do you want to remember from this session?
- Anything you want to change in your life because of what we've learnt?
- Something you intend to do after the things we have thought about?
- It all worked out for the best... in the stories we shared and the Bible story the lost or forgotten child was found or remembered in the end. We heard the bit from the Bible that said God will never forget us - look out for ways in which He is remembering and looking after you this week.



What's in a name?





Session 2: What's in a Name?

Bible Focus: Names of God and what they tell us about Him.

Visual: Blank birth certificate

Sound: Names of God from Laurell Hubick's album Into Your Love 2003

<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=T5-6gwssX0Y>

I'll be there from the Jackson 5 album 'Third Album' 1970

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ILPBS4Qgqo

Icebreaker / Game: Match the name with the meaning. Ask each member of the group to write the meaning of their name on a small piece of paper. Put the meanings in a pile and shuffle. The first person to play should read the meanings and try to give them to the right person. If someone is given the right meaning they keep it, everyone else hands their to the next person to take a turn. Continue until all are matched. (Not everyone in the group knew what their name meant - so you could take a 'baby names' type book or do middle names instead of meanings - but not everyone has a middle name either!)

Mother Nature:

Unlocking Real Life Stories . . .

(You may only need one of these questions or one of your own to draw out life stories from participants that bring out their experience of good things or their creativity)

- What have you called your children and why?
- What are the reasons behind the name you have been given?
- How do you feel about your name?
- Has your name ever been a problem to you?

Mums the Word:

Revealing the Good News of the Down to Earth Christ . . .

(you will need to choose which you think is most relevant or another passage)

But the gatekeeper opens the gate for the shepherd, and he goes in through it. The sheep know their shepherd's voice. He calls each of them by name and leads them out. John 10:2-3

Everyone who honours your name can trust you, because you are faithful to all who depend on you. Psalm 9:10

Some Names of God

El Shaddai - Lord God Almighty

El Elyon - Most high God

Adonai - Master

Yahweh - Lord

Jehovah Nissi - The Lord my banner

Jehovah Raah - The Lord my Shepherd

Jehovah Rapha - The Lord that Heals

Jehovah Shammah - The Lord is There

Jehovah Tsidkenu - The Lord our Righteousness

El Olam - The Everlasting God

Elohim - Powerful Strength

Qanna - Jealous

Jehovah Jireh - The Lord Will Provide

Jehovah Shalom - The Lord is Peace

Comforter

Abba - Father

Son of God

Lamb of God

Christ = 'Anointed One'

Saviour

Rabbi = Teacher

Author of life

Lion of Judah

King of Kings/Lord of Lords

Bright Morning Star

Holy and Righteous

Immanuel = God with us

Prince of Peace

Wonderful Advisor

Mighty God

You could print the names of God / Jesus on pieces of card and ask group members to pick one that they connect with and then, if they can, to tell the group why - then they can keep that name

Maternal Instinct:

Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence . . .

- *What do you want to remember from this session?*
- *Anything you want to change in your life because of what we've learnt?*
- *What name of God makes sense for you at the moment?*



Celebration



Session 3: Celebration

Bible Focus: Glimpses of glory

Visual: Party icon

(source Wikimedia Commons, Author: Wilfredor Used under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Text_of_the_GNU_Free_Documentation_License)

Sound: Celebration by KC & the Sunshine band from the album The Best of Kool & the Gang 1979-1987 <http://listen.grooveshark.com/#/song/Celebration/1028023>

Everybody Dance Now by Snap from their album the Best of Snap 2004

<http://www.bomb-mp3.com/index.php?search=snap+everybody+dance+now>



Mother Nature:

Unlocking Real Life Stories . . .

(You may only need one of these questions or one of your own to draw out life stories from participants that bring out their experience of good things or their creativity)

- When did you last have something to celebrate?
- Have you ever had a party go wrong?
- Have you noticed or glimpsed something new about God recently?
- Have you ever witnessed a miracle?
- Has anything good come out of a bad situation that you've been in?
- What does the image make you think of?

Mums the Word:

Revealing the Good News of the Down to Earth Christ . . .

Three days later Mary, the mother of Jesus, was at a wedding feast in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited and were there.

When the wine was all gone, Mary said to Jesus, "They don't have any more wine."

Jesus replied, "Mother, my time hasn't yet come!

You must not tell me what to do."

Mary then said to the servants, "Do whatever Jesus tells you to do."

At the feast there were six stone water jars that were used by the people for washing themselves in the way that their religion said they must. Each jar held about twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus told the servants to fill them to the top with water. Then after the jars had been filled, he said, "Now take some water and give it to the man in charge of the feast."

The servants did as Jesus told them, and the man in charge drank some of the water that had now turned into wine. He did not know where the wine had come from, but the servants did. He called the bridegroom over and said, "The best wine is always served first. Then after the guests have had plenty, the other wine is served. But you have kept the best until last!" This was Jesus' first miracle, and he did it in the village of Cana in Galilee. There Jesus showed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.*

After this, he went with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples to the town of Capernaum, where they stayed for a few days.

From John chapter 2

*other translations use the phrase 'this was the first glimpse of his glory'

Maternal Instinct:

Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence . . .

- What do you want to remember from this session?
- Anything you want to change in your life because of what we've learnt?
- Something you intend to do after the things we have thought about?
- Is there any 'water' you could change to 'wine' (a bad situation you could make good)?

Reflective Activity:

Give each participant a paper cup - they can write or draw something on the cup to represent the bad situation they have thought of. Then write or draw on bits of card / paper to put into the cup good things that could come out of the situation or positive action they can take to change the situation. If they want to take it home and pull out one of the good things daily to inspire their prayers (if they pray) or as reminders of what they are going to change. Encourage members to help one another to think of how to fill their cups with suggestions of how God's love might be expressed in that situation.



New Beginnings





Session 4: New Beginnings

Bible Focus: Transformation & rebirth

Visual: painting of horizon

Sound: We are a beginning by Sarah Masen from her album The Dream Life of Angels 2001 (it is available to listen to on Spotify - to create a free account go to <http://www.spotify.com/en/>)

New Beginning by Tracy Chapman from her album New Beginning 1995

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7fNYEQYNjtg>

Mother Nature:

Unlocking Real Life Stories . . .

For a New Beginning - by John O'Donohue

In places of the heart,
Where your thoughts never think to wander,
This beginning has been quietly forming,
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time it has watched your desire,
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,
Noticing how you willed yourself on,
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

It watched you play with the seduction of safety
And the grey promises that sameness whispered,
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,
Wondered would you always live like this

Then the delight, when your courage kindled,
And out you stepped onto new ground,
Your eyes young again with energy and dream,
A pale of plenitude opening before you.

Though your destination is not yet clear
You can trust the promise of this opening;
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
That is at one with your life's desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm
For you soul senses the world that awaits you.

If you print pages 14 & 15 of these materials back to back you can give participants the picture and poem. We read the poem whilst looking at the picture and then paused in silence for a moment. Then the group made collages to represent new beginnings they have made or want to make from a range of gathered resources. Then each participant tells other group members about their collage. You will need scissors, magazines, paper, pens and glue for making the collages.

Mums the Word:

Revealing the Good News of the Down to Earth Christ . . .

What in the things people have shared sounds as though it has come from a good or Godly inspiration?

Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new. God has done it all! He sent Christ to make peace between himself and us, and he has given us the work of making peace between himself and others. 2 Cor 5:17&18

There was a man named Nicodemus who was a Pharisee and a Jewish leader. One night he went to Jesus and said, "Sir, we know that God has sent you to teach us. You could not work these miracles, unless God were with you."

*Jesus replied, "I tell you for certain that you must be born from above before you can see God's kingdom!"
Nicodemus asked, "How can a grown man ever be born a second time?"*

Jesus answered: I tell you for certain that before you can get into God's kingdom, you must be born not only by water, but by the Spirit. Humans give life to their children. Yet only God's Spirit can change you into a child of God. Don't be surprised when I say that you must be born from above. Only God's Spirit gives new life. The Spirit is like the wind that blows wherever it wants to. You can hear the wind, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. John 3:1-8

Maternal Instinct:

Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence . . .

- What do you want to remember from this session?
- Anything you want to change in your life because of what we've learnt?
- Something you intend to do after the things we have thought about?

On back of collage draw an image or write a prayer about what you would like God to help you start doing differently.

The following text could be used in place of the poem, or as a conclusion to the session...

Starting Out

Often, the small steps taken by others prompt us to make the jump ourselves.

Sometimes, even the smallest things in life seem improbable, impossible, unthinkable even. That is, until we see someone else go before us and do just that which we had first considered unthinkable. For us, their actions make the seemingly impossible slightly less daunting and, dare I say it, slightly more possible.

We stand in awe, secretly wishing we could do the same, but never quite have the courage to do so. We recoil in fear, preferring instead to think we never could. Perhaps worst of all, we brush it aside. We think we might just do that, but not now, not yet, not today. Someday.

Eventually though that someday gets closer, spurred on by others who have shown more bravery, or by those that have more faith in us than we have in ourselves. The voices get louder. It seems the whole world knows something about us that we don't and it won't let up. Everywhere we turn, someone or something is reminding us of the thing we haven't quite yet got around to doing. Urging us on, calling us forward, pushing us to act. We resist for a while, but then, if we're smart, we stop a while. If everyone in the world is trying to tell us the same thing, surely they can't all be wrong?

And so it is that we start pushing doors. So many people have pointed us in this direction, yet we are still shocked when one of those doors starts to creak open. Now what? Still we question, still we doubt. We look over our shoulder to see where we have been. We know this place. It's familiar to us. We know how it works. We know what we like about it. We know what we don't like about it. We know how to deal with it. Even if we know ultimately where this door leads, we still wonder if we have what it takes to make it to the final destination and perhaps more importantly, if after all this effort, we will like it once we get there.

The door to the land 'What Could Be' is there, ajar, just waiting for us. The problem is, even if the door opens, we still have to step over the threshold. There is still a decision to be made and we are the only ones who can make it. Those who have led us this far cannot make us go on. Neither can they walk through on our behalf. They are there, behind us, cheering us on with everything they have in them, but still, we are the ones that must take the steps.

So we turn back to the door and give it a little tap with our littlest finger. It opens a little more. Again we are shocked. Almost in disbelief, we tap it again. Another inch. How many of those behind us are getting impatient now, wondering what we are waiting for? We turn around, and a friendly face smiles at us and nods, his eyes imploring us to keep going. Buoyed up by this affirmation, we get a little more confident, and this time push the door with our whole hand. As it swings open, we wonder if we've gone too far. Looking back for one last time, we steel ourselves, and hear the sound of the footstep we have just taken echoing in the very core of our being. This is it. We have metaphorically hit 'send' now. We have crossed the threshold.

The corridor stretches ahead of us, but its darkness prevents us from seeing what is ahead. Do we turn back? Or do we press on, do we wait and see what happens, do we keep going, and trust the friends who have brought us this far, ourselves for the steps we have already taken, and the one who made us who we are and who undoubtedly had this whole thing worked out long before we had even declared it unthinkable?

You see, that one little step has just caused significant change. Your feet, in their new location, have just obscured the letters I and M. Where once it said 'IMPOSSIBLE', it now says 'POSSIBLE'.

Keep walking.

by Helen Manley used with permission





New Beginnings



New Beginnings



New Beginnings



New Beginnings

For a New Beginning – by John O' Donohue

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Where your thoughts never think to wander,
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Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time it has watched your desire,
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Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

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Saying it how it is!



Session 5: Saying it how it is...

Bible Focus: pointing the right way - prophesy / parenting!

Visual: Stop sign

Sound: Say by John Mayer from his album Continuum 2008

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZ0z86LmXBM>

Tell you Something by Alicia Keys from her album As I Am 2007

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6pRjqwp08A>

Mother Nature:

Unlocking Real Life Stories . . .

(You may only need one of these questions or one of your own to draw out life stories from participants that bring out their experience of good things or their creativity)

- Tell us a story this picture makes you think of? (show the group the stop sign from p16)
- Ever had to tell someone they'd got it really wrong?
- Has someone asked you for advice and you've told them even though it wasn't what they wanted to hear?
- Has anyone ever taken your advice? - How did it work out?

Mums the Word:

Revealing the Good News of the Down to Earth Christ . . .

The five men left right away and went to talk with Huldah the prophet. Her husband was Shallum, who was in charge of the king's clothes. Huldah lived in the northern part of Jerusalem, and when they met in her home, she said:

You were sent here by King Josiah, and this is what the Lord God of Israel says to him: "Josiah, I am the Lord! And I will see to it that this country and everyone living in it will be destroyed. It will happen just as this book says. The people of Judah have rejected me. They have offered sacrifices to foreign gods and have worshiped their own idols. I cannot stand it any longer. I am furious. Josiah, listen to what I am going to do. I noticed how sad you were when you read that this country and its people would be completely wiped out. You even tore your clothes in sorrow, and I heard you cry. So I will let you die in peace, before I destroy this place."

The men left and took Huldah's answer back to Josiah. From 2 Kings chapter 22

Maternal Instinct:

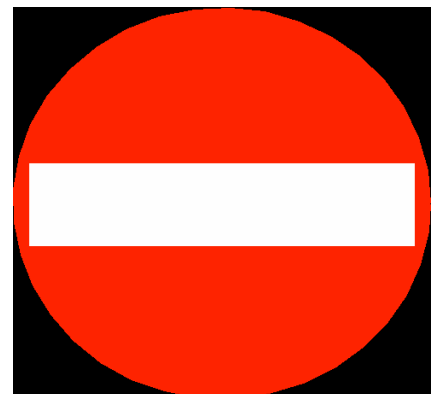
Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence . . .

- What do you want to remember from this session?
- Anything you want to change in your life because of what we've learnt?
- Something you intend to do after the things we have thought about?
- If God gave you a message for our generation what do think it would be?

Reflective Action:

Road signs. Before the session print out page 18 of these materials and cut into individual signs. Participants can choose a road sign that represents a message they would like to give to someone, to their generation or that God might want to give to them. They could write or draw something on it to represent the message they are thinking about. Is there anything they can do to get the message across? They can take the sign they have chosen home to remind them to be part of taking the message where it needs to go.







Family Likeness





Session 5: Family Likeness

Bible Focus: Fruit of the Spirit

Visual: Strawberry

Sound: We Are Family by Sister Sledge from their album We Are Family 1979

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSDh94eQTAK&feature=Playlist&p=0C6E4FA7F3E99EAA&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=12

We Are the World by USA for Africa from their album USA for Africa 1985

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dtZtHB61Gs&feature=related>

Game: Fruit cards

Mother Nature:

[Unlocking Real Life Stories . . .](#)

(You may only need one of these questions or one of your own to draw out life stories from participants that bring out their experience of good things or their creativity)

- Which of your qualities do you hope your children will develop?
- Which of your faults do you hope they will avoid?
- Are there any particular character traits that run in your family?

Use the Fruit cards from pages 21 & 22 as story prompts. Have the 9 strawberry cards face down in a pile on the table. Take it in turns to take a card then try and think of the last time you showed that quality, or saw it in someone else or who that quality makes you think of.

Mums the Word:

[Revealing the Good News of the Down to Earth Christ . . .](#)

If you are guided by the Spirit, you won't obey your selfish desires. The Spirit and your desires are enemies of each other. They are always fighting each other and keeping you from doing what you feel you should. But if you obey the Spirit, the Law of Moses has no control over you.

People's desires make them give in to immoral ways, filthy thoughts, and shameful deeds. They worship idols, practice witchcraft, hate others, and are hard to get along with. People become jealous, angry, and selfish. They not only argue and cause trouble, but they are envious. They get drunk, carry on at wild parties, and do other evil things as well. I told you before, and I am telling you again: No one who does these things will share in the blessings of God's kingdom.

God's Spirit makes us loving, happy, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled. There is no law against behaving in any of these ways. And because we belong to Christ Jesus, we have killed our selfish feelings and desires. God's Spirit has given us life, and so we should follow the Spirit. But don't be conceited or make others jealous by claiming to be better than they are. Galatians 5:16-25

Maternal Instinct:

[Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence . . .](#)

- How do the qualities described here compare with the character traits in your family?
- How can you make more stories happen in your life that show these qualities?
- Are there any activities or people that help bring out these traits in you?

Reflective Action:

Place the fruit cards word side up and ask the group to choose the one they would most like to see more of in their life. Ask them for a reason and perhaps a plan for steps towards its increase!



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love

joy

peace

patience

kindness

goodness

faithfulness

gentleness

self-control

How it Really Went!

These are just a couple of key moments from when we ran the course in Anfield:

Session 1 - Even Good Parents Make Mistakes

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!'

Session 3 - Celebration

I have learnt from others that have been involved in urban non-book Bible engagement, 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 coins instead.

I hope that these materials are useful and inspiring to you. You know your group it may be better to use these ideas as a spring board into designing your own materials that fit their needs. Look at the Unlock website for further ideas.