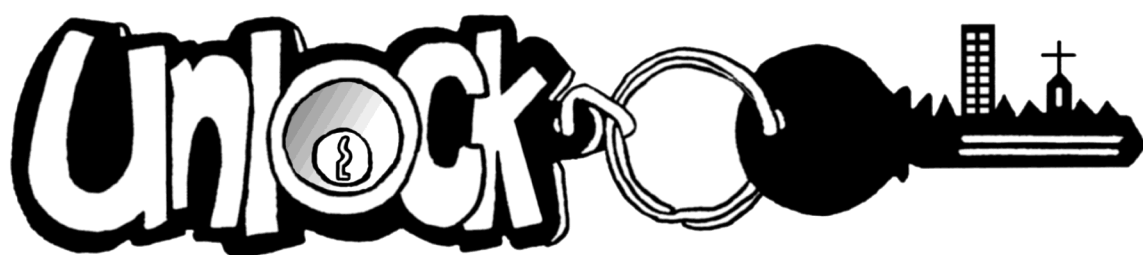


Easter in St Jude's



Three or four small group sessions
linked to Lent and Holy week themes

Andy Pears, Unlock Bristol





Unlock, by various names, has been around since 1972, trying to help (mainly) urban Christians to understand and share their faith appropriately. Our life experience matters; our stories; our joys and sorrows. The Bible has plenty to say, more than we'll ever know, about our lives, if we know how to read it and apply it - if we know how to **UNLOCK** it!

The sessions outlined in this pack apply the learning cycle on page 3, **starting by using a 'prompt'** to draw out group member's stories. It is up to you which prompt you use (from those suggested in the sessions) or to find one of your own to connect with your group. Give everyone time to tell their story and listen carefully as they do. What are the themes and issues arising in the stories? Try to remember so that you can remind people later if necessary.

The next stage is to **find part of the Bible** that comes to mind having listened to the stories. These sessions were designed for use with a group that had little or no Bible knowledge. If you are using these sessions with a non-church group you will need to be ready to provide some Bible links if they are unable to do so, but it is always worth giving them a chance to come up with a Bible link for themselves first; they may surprise you! Then ask the group to explore **connections**, similarities or differences.

Finally there is a **reflective activity**, giving people an opportunity to reflect on the session and any action they might want to take as a result. The reflective activity creates space in which discussion and reflection can continue in an unforced way.

How well the group know and trust one another will affect the type of story that they share, often the newer the group, the more light hearted the stories are likely to be.



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The Unlock Learning Cycle

Unlocking real life stories of urban people

Start with the group telling stories from their real life experience.

Leading to more experience

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

Releasing life changing skills and confidence

Change happens as a result of linking real life experience with the Bible. This change often leads to action among others.

Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

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



Introduction

Unlock uses an approach to engaging with the Bible that is different to traditional Bible studies (see page 3). Unlock's approach starts from the stories and experiences of group members, whereas a more traditional approach starts from the Biblical text. Unlock's approach has been found to work well with small groups of urban, oral learners from outside of the church. There are many free resources on the Unlock website designed for use with such groups. However, because this material was designed for a particular group in a particular time and place it may not be a perfect fit for your group as it stands. It is offered more as inspiration to you to design your own materials along the same lines, rather than as a ready to use package.

Unlock usually works with people outside of church who may be interested in finding out a bit more about faith but perhaps are not attracted to the formal methods of learning often associated with church. Our work is based on a reflective learning cycle and is a tried and tested way of introducing people to the Bible in a non-threatening way. Many churches have activities that draw in members of their surrounding community but then struggle with how to move on from those relationships into exploring faith, especially in urban environments where anything formal might be treated with suspicion.

These sessions were developed in 2011 for a small group who meet weekly in the inner city of Bristol. The group was quite varied in terms of the input and encouragement they had received over the course of their Christian lives. The sessions were designed by an Unlock local project worker, and then made a lot better by the group as they worked through them!

These short sessions were designed to be used with a group of people who are not familiar with the Bible. Other similar resources are available to download free from www.unlock-urban.org or from the Unlock office based in Sheffield.

However it is our experience that each group's circumstances are so unique, that it may be best to develop your own materials using themes that you know your group will connect with, and reflective activities that are inspired by their own interests.

May God inspire you!

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Unlock Session Planning and Content Outline

Course / Event name: Lent series, Bristol 2011

Authors / Facilitators: Andy Pears (Unlock Bristol)

Pack Name: Easter in St Jude's

These sessions can be used in any order.

Aims: To help the group to explore some aspects of lent and discover afresh the story and significance of Easter. To encourage the group to reflect on the significance and the impact of the Easter story on their own lives, as well as hopefully building some confidence within individuals to continue a process of reflection and engagement with the Bible and the Easter story. These sessions aim to facilitate this through engaging with the group's own experiences and exploring how they might connect with the Easter story.

Outcomes: The group will be more able to engage with each other, using a reflective theological cycle, starting from their own story or the stories of others in the group, or things that have affected them on a daily basis. The group will be more able to consider the way that the Bible might impact on their own situations or experiences, both now and in the future. The group will be able to reflect on topical issues which affect them, and to do this in relation to scripture. The group will feel more confident in approaching and exploring for themselves the story of the Bible and the meaning behind the Christian year.

Session Content

Unlocking Real Life Experience

Media: Using contemporary issues from the internet and from local newspapers, reading material appropriate to the participants' level of understanding, story or poetry are all ways of connecting with what is happening in reality for people.

Own story: Within our own narratives and situations are threads that can be woven into scripture and understood, helping us recognise our connections with God's story. The content of these sessions, and the unplanned sessions undertaken with this group, were for a specific group of people with particular needs. Other groups will have different needs.

Questions: See individual sessions for questions and challenges.

Revealing the Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

Bible: Passages used: Matthew 4.1-11, Mark 15.25-37, John 3.16, John 20.1-16, John 20.19-22—plus a number of other passages which came to mind (suggested by the group and myself) in light of the stories told.

Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

Through connecting God's story with our own we engage more deeply with the Holy Spirit and the work of God within our lives, as well as increasing our understanding of God's story and our own place within it. We grow in confidence to reflect with one another on our own experiences, on our journey with God and on wider issues within the community. We learn more about valuing one another; how to listen and understand what others are saying and feeling.

Reflective Activities

- 'Lent boxes'
- Baking hot-cross buns
- Decorating Easter eggs
- Making wooden crowns



Lent

Introduction/prompt

This session was not strictly about discovering the Bible, as Lent is a later Christian tradition – but the group was keen to talk about Lent and what it meant.

We spent the first half an hour with tea, coffee and cakes; talking about what people had given up for Lent this year, why they had done it and how it was going.

The introduction led naturally into some discussion questions.

Unlocking Real Life Stories of Urban People

Does this bring to mind any experiences you have had?

- Is there a time you have had to give something up that you love or enjoy?
- Why did you give it up?
- How did it feel?
- What happened?

Don't feel you have to use all of these questions; the idea is simply to get people talking about their own experiences.

Many of the people in the group had, at some point, given up particular types of food for medical or health reasons; most agreed that this had caused them to spend time reflecting more widely on their habits and lifestyles, as well as making them really appreciate particular foods that had been taken for granted previously.

Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

Do these stories you have shared bring to mind any passage of scripture?

Read aloud the story of Jesus in the desert – Matthew 4.1-11 from page 7

- What do you think of this story?
- Who do you relate to in the story?
- Are there any links or connections that you want to make between your own stories and this story?



Matthew 4.1-11

1 Then the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the Devil.

2 After spending 40 days and nights without food, Jesus was hungry. 3 Then the Devil came to him and said, "If you are God's Son, order these stones to turn into bread."



4 But Jesus answered, "The scripture says, 'Human beings cannot live on bread alone, but need every word that God speaks.' "

5 Then the Devil took Jesus to Jerusalem, the Holy City, set him on the highest point of the Temple, 6 and said to him, "If you are God's Son, throw yourself down, for the scripture says: 'God will give orders to his angels about you; they will hold you up with their hands, so that not even your feet will be hurt on the stones.' "

7 Jesus answered, "But the scripture also says, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

8 Then the Devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in all their greatness. 9 "All this I will give you," the Devil said, "if you kneel down and worship me."

10 Then Jesus answered, "Go away, Satan! The scripture says, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him!' "



11 Then the Devil left Jesus; and angels came and helped him.



Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

Reflective Activity – Lent boxes

Using a selection of scrap materials (from the amazing Scrap Store – a big warehouse full of all kinds of stuff that you can purchase by the trolley-load) we all made a ‘Lent box’.



The idea of the boxes was that we all took one home and each day put in a little token. Putting in the token would hopefully act as a reminder and give some focus for people to spend a little time reflecting every day in Lent, it was also a way of counting down to (and preparing ourselves for)

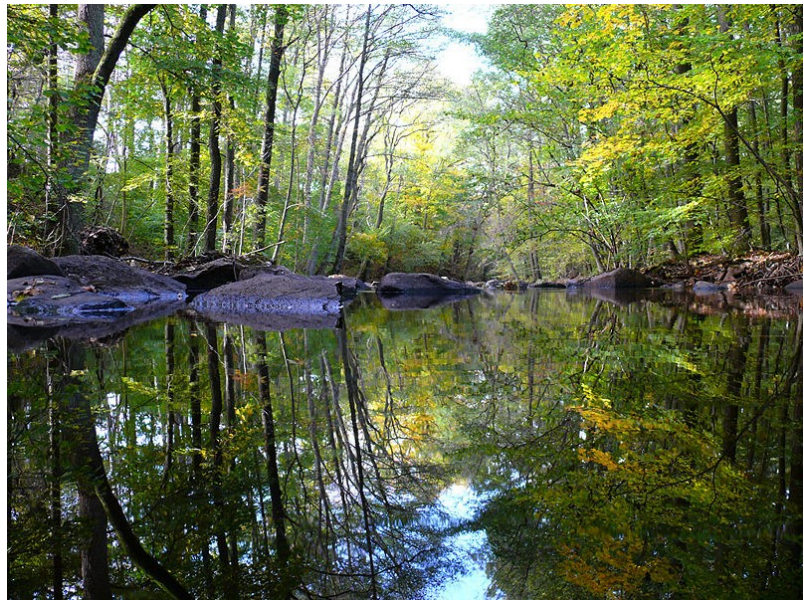
Easter. Someone in the group also suggested that people could put a little bit of money into the box each day and then give it away on Easter day, or put in a little prayer (written, drawn, made with plasticine, or just spoken as they put in the counter) every day.



Notes on how the Lent session worked in practice

Having read the passage we had a brief conversation as a group. Several people talked about how they often don't take time in their days or weeks to really think and reflect about themselves or

their spiritual lives. We all thought about how Lent could be used as a specific time for us to reflect and



prepare ourselves for Easter. Someone suggested that as Jesus fasted, we could try and think about different ways of helping ourselves to focus.

AP



Good Friday

Introduction/prompt

As usual with this group, the first half an hour was spent with tea and cake (yum...)

Read out-loud the story of the Fukushima 50 from the Sun (see below) - or a similar story from whatever newspaper the group are most familiar with.

Story

Fukushima 50 'deaths imminent'



Risking their lives ... two of the Fukushima 50 in the nuclear plant

THE hero nuclear workers dubbed the Fukushima 50 believe they could be dead within weeks, a relative has revealed.

The men, who have been desperately battling to stop deadly radiation leaking from the plant - in meltdown since the Japanese earthquake and tsunami, are resigned to paying for their bravery with their lives.

The mother of one of the workers said he had accepted that he may die within weeks — but if not radiation would probably claim all of their lives in the longer term.

Continued on page 11



Introduction (continued)

Story

Meltdown ... the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant



She said: "My son and his colleagues have discussed it at length and they have committed themselves to die if necessary to save the nation".

"He told me they have accepted they will all probably die from radiation sickness in the short term or cancer in the long term".

"They have concluded between themselves that it is inevitable some of them may die within weeks or months. They know it is impossible for them not to have been exposed to lethal doses of radiation."

Around 300 workers — known as the Fukushima 50 because of the number working during any one shift — have risked suffering from massive radiation poisoning as they struggle to contain the crisis.

Relatives are preparing themselves for the worst when the men — who have been fighting to reinstate cooling systems in the crippled reactors — finally finish their mission.

From:

<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/3504160/Fukushima-50-deaths-imminent.html#ixzz1Rjofbkv6>



Unlocking Real Life Stories of Urban People

Does this story bring to mind any experiences you have had?

Talk about people's reaction to hearing the story, and ask them about their own experiences of sacrifice:

- Have you ever given up or sacrificed something for someone you love?
- Has someone ever sacrificed something for you?
- What happened?
- Was it difficult? How did it make you feel?

Don't feel you have to use all of these questions; the idea is simply to get people talking about the value of themselves and others.

Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

Do these stories you have shared bring to mind any Bible stories?

Mark 15.25-37

25 It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The notice of the accusation against him said: "The King of the Jews". 27 They also crucified two bandits with Jesus, one on his right and the other on his left.

29 People passing by shook their heads and hurled insults at Jesus: "Aha! You were going to tear down the Temple and build it up again in three days! 30 Now come down from the cross and save yourself!"

31 In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the Law jeered at Jesus, saying to each other, "He saved others, but he cannot save himself! 32 Let us see the Messiah, the king of Israel, come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him!"

And the two who were crucified with Jesus insulted him also.

33 At noon the whole country was covered with darkness, which lasted for three hours. 34 At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud shout, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?"

35 Some of the people there heard him and said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah!" 36 One of them ran up with a sponge, soaked it in cheap wine, and put it on the end of a stick. Then he held it up to Jesus' lips and said, "Wait! Let us see if Elijah is coming to bring him down from the cross!"

37 With a loud cry Jesus died.



For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
John 3:16



*I used a printed picture of Jesus on the cross for people to look at while I read the passages. You could dim the lights and use some candles to create a reflective atmosphere, perhaps project a picture onto the wall, or use music in the background. I considered using some scenes from the film *Passion of the Christ*; they are brilliant, but quite graphic – you would have to know that the people in your group would be ok with them (although I guess the shocking nature of what is happening is part of the point). AP*

Questions for discussion:-

- What do you think about these bits of the Bible?
- What do you think about these stories?
- What do you think they say about God?
- What do you think they say about you?
- How do they make you feel?
- Will they change the way that you think about anything?

Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

Reflective Activity: –

Making home-made hot cross buns. These are great for stimulating continued discussion and can be taken home. Requires a bit of planning – some recipes need more preparation and are more time consuming than others. I did the initial preparation at home as the dough needed time to sit, but you could weave the cooking and preparation throughout the session. Good recipes can be found at bbc.co.uk/food or bbcgoodfood.com.

During the activity you can talk about what it means when someone gives up their life for you and discuss these questions:-

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



Notes on how the Good Friday session worked in practice

This session stimulated considerable discussion within the group; in hindsight it would have perhaps been better to have run it over the course of two days, or arranged a special Good Friday gathering that ran for an extra hour or two.

The story and the questions particularly provoked conversation around family stories and issues –about sacrifices that had been made by family members and close friends for our benefit, as well as sacrifices that we had made for others.

After the story of the crucifixion had been read out loud, several people commented that they had really felt a connection with it. We talked about how amazing the sacrifices of God were, and how much he must love us to have given so much. We also talked about how it was easy for those of us who know the story already to become familiar with it and forget how significant it really was.

I know that people from the group continued to reflect during the week; if I had planned in enough time it would have been great to have had an extra gathering together to talk about people's reflections on this session (perhaps on Saturday – with more hot cross bun making...).

AP



Easter Sunday - Jesus is missing!

Introduction/prompt

Start with tea, coffee, cake and a game. For the game the group split into teams. The teams were given a series of cards with symbols on them (see pages 16 & 17) which they had to identify (pub quiz style...)

Unlocking Real Life Stories of Urban People

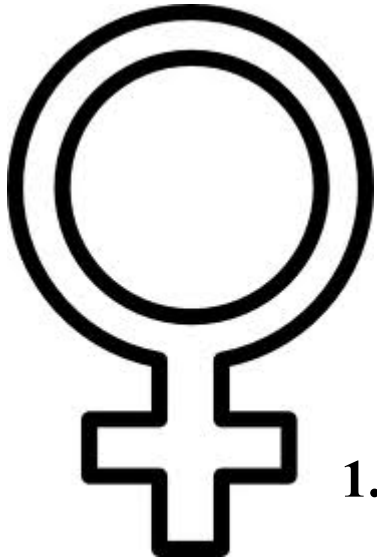
- What symbols spring to mind when we talk about Easter
- What do they make you think about?
- What do your family and friends think about at Easter?

Don't feel you have to use all of these questions; the idea is simply to get people talking about what Easter means to them.



Game for Easter Sunday session

I have used this game on a few different occasions. Some groups will find this too easy, others won't know what any of the symbols mean; so it is best to create your own set of symbols appropriate for the group you are working with.



1.



2.

3.



5.



6.



4.





7.



8.



9.



10.

Answers: 1. Female symbol 2. Recyclable 3. Mars 4. Euro 5. People at work 6. American flag 7. Islam 8. Warning explosive 9. Bisto 10. Anarchist

Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

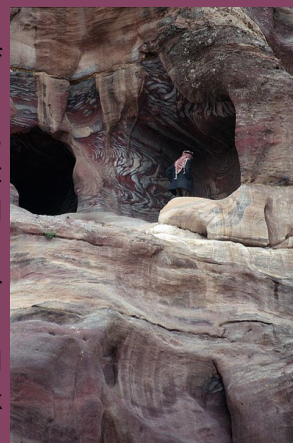
Do these stories you have shared bring to mind any Bible stories?

Get the group to act out John 20.1-16 as a short skit – Jesus is missing and the people don't understand...!!

John 20.1-16

1 Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the entrance. 2 She went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

3 Then Peter and the other disciple went to the tomb. 4 The two of them were running, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and saw the linen wrappings, but he did not go in. 6 Behind him came Simon Peter, and he went straight into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there 7 and the cloth which had been round Jesus' head. It was not lying with the linen wrappings but was rolled up by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in; he saw and believed. 9 (They still did not understand the scripture which said that he must rise from death.) 10 Then the disciples went back home.



11 Mary stood crying outside the tomb. While she was still crying, she bent over and looked in the tomb 12 and saw two angels there dressed in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13 "Woman, why are you crying?" they asked her.

11 Mary stood crying outside the tomb. While she was still crying, she bent over and looked in the tomb 12 and saw two angels there dressed in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13 "Woman, why are you crying?" they asked her.

She answered, "They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put him!"

14 Then she turned round and saw Jesus standing there; but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 "Woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who is it that you are looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener, so she said to him, "If you took him away, sir, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned towards him and said in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (This means "Teacher".)



Discussion questions:-

- What do you think this story has to say about what we have been talking about?
- How does it affect the way that you think about Easter Sunday?
- How does it change the way you think about any of the Easter symbols you see in shops?
- How do you think it might change anything about what you do at Easter?

Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

Reflective Activity: –

Decorating our own Easter eggs; provide sufficient undecorated chocolate Easter eggs for everyone, icing, sweets, cake decorations etc. Each person decorates their own egg



with their own symbols to show what they think about Easter Day. Encourage the group to show their eggs and talk about the symbols they have created.



Notes on how the Easter Sunday session worked in practice

The group talked about Easter symbols of bunnies, eggs, chicks and (of course) chocolate. For many the symbols did not mean anything, others said the symbols reminded them of family times together and of holidays.



After acting out the story we had a discussion together - one lady commented that she felt like Mary in the story; Easter day is a celebration about the resurrection of Jesus, but with all of the other things happening she ended up not being able to see him!

AP



New hope—New life

Unlocking Real Life Stories of Urban People

- Have you ever been in a situation that has seemed hopeless or where you have felt trapped?
- Have you ever wanted everything to change, or to have the chance to start something all over again?



Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

Do these stories you have shared bring to mind any Bible stories?

John 20:19-22

19 It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. Then Jesus came and stood among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. 20 After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.” 22 Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

Questions for discussion:-

- How does this story make you react?
- How does it link to the stories you have just told?



Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

Reflective Activity: –

Decorate little wooden crowns that the group can hang around their necks to remind themselves that Jesus is alive. Could also cut out cardboard crowns (or any other relevant shape).



During the activity you can talk about what it means when new hope comes from something unexpected and discuss these questions:-

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

Notes on how the New Hope—New Life session worked in practice

This was done with a small group – we had all been talking together for a while and I didn't feel that an introductory activity or ice-breaker was appropriate. I've tried to capture the essence of the session with this outline, but after the initial discussion questions and the reading of the Bible passage we had a very long conversation which is extremely difficult to indicate in the follow-up questions. The group talked about the story showing Jesus bringing new hope and life to them and their situations when it seems everything has gone wrong. The resurrection was the proof that Jesus could bring hope and life into any situation, no matter how bad – even death cannot stop him.

In the end we didn't get round to the activity!

AP

