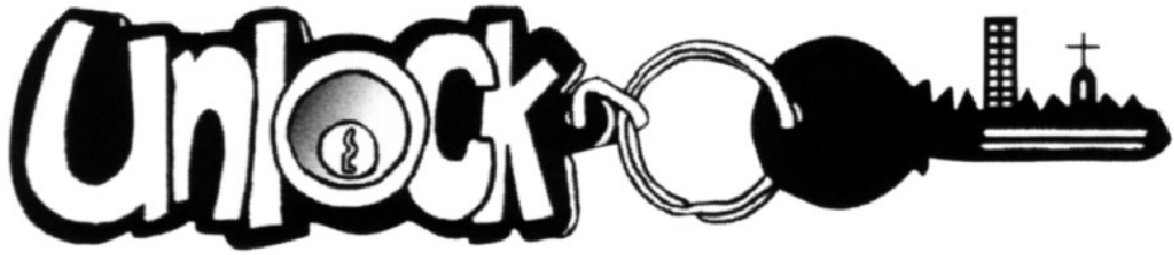


MIND Over Matter



Five stand alone small group sessions exploring contemporary social issues and connecting them with stories from the Bible





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

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

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

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



The Unlock Learning Cycle

Unlocking real life stories of urban people

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

Leading to more experience

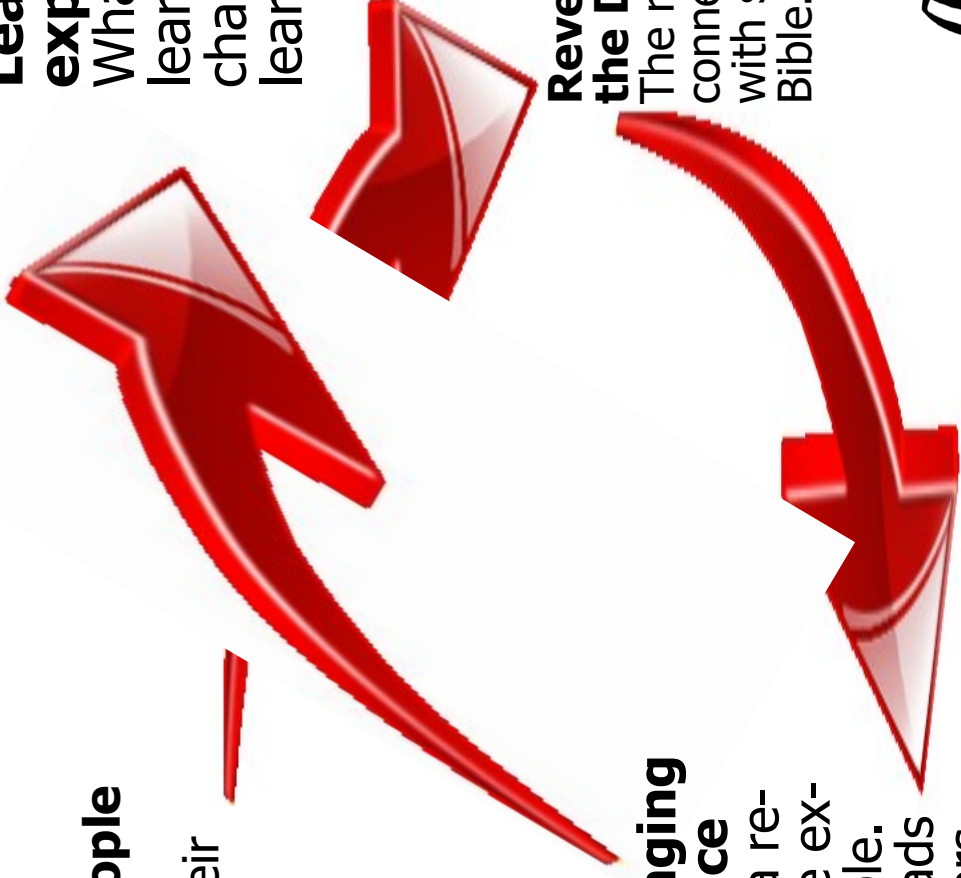
What we learn now is learnt for life and changes us. We also learn to keep reflecting!

Releasing life changing skills and confidence

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

Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

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



Introduction

Unlock uses an approach to engaging with the Bible that is different to traditional Bible studies (see page 3). Unlock's approach starts from the stories and experiences of group members, whereas a more traditional approach starts from the Biblical text. Unlock's approach has been found to work well with small groups of urban, oral learners from outside of the church. There are many free resources on the Unlock website designed for use with such groups. However, because 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 for use with a MIND group of women, in Birmingham in 2010. They were developed by an Unlock local project worker in partnership with a local church leader.

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!

Bible Text in these materials is taken from the Good News Bible (British Usage Edition), published by the Bible Societies and Collins, American Bible Society 1966, 1971, 1976; used by permission.

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Unlock Session Planning and Content Outline

Course / Event name: Workshops for Mind group, Maypole, Birmingham, 2010

Authors / Facilitators: Debbie Marsh (Unlock Birmingham 2010—2011)

Session Name: *MIND over Matter*

These sessions can be used in any order.

Aims: To enable the ladies to engage with their own stories, using contemporary and social issues which are relevant to where they are in life. To create opportunities to explore how their own story connects with Christ's story within scripture. To be able to reflect on the impacts, both positive and negative, of our attitudes and actions. To enable the ladies to have confidence in their abilities and be able to take part in activities. For them to believe in themselves, and to restore their dignity and self-worth.

Outcomes: The group will be more able to engage with each other, using a reflective theological cycle, starting from their own story or the stories of others in the group, or things that have affected them on a daily basis; without necessarily having to have to understand at an intellectual level. The group will be more able to refer to the connections made with Scripture, and intended changed approach in similar situations in the future. The group will be able to reflect on their own experiences, and topical issues which affect them, and to do this in relation to scripture. The group will be better able to engage with local church activities and in the life of the church, and to feel valued by others.

Session Content

Unlocking Real Life Experience

Media: Using contemporary issues from the internet and from local newspapers, reading material suitable for their 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 Gods 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: Luke 9: 10-17, Luke 10: 25-37, Genesis 7: 1-12, 1 Cor 13: 1-8, Romans 13: 8-12, James 3: 13-18, Romans 14: 13-23—plus any other Scriptures which come to mind in light of the stories told.

Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

By connecting God's story with our own; growing confidence, dignity, and self-worth. Valuing not only ourselves but also one another. Having the right to be heard balanced with the ability to listen.

Reflective Activities

Badge making

Making gifts of favours for others

Clay making

Sharing in food

Making and sharing recipes which are important to each person, reflecting on where they were

learnt or passed on between friend and family members.



Bullying

Introduction/prompt

Short animated video on bullying.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNZKKoy4US0&feature=related>

Discuss:-

- Why do people bully?
- Types of bullying!
- The effects of bullying!

Unlocking Real Life Stories of Urban People

Does this bring to mind any experiences you have had?

- Have you ever felt like you have been bullied?
- How did it feel?
- Have you ever felt like you were bullying someone else?

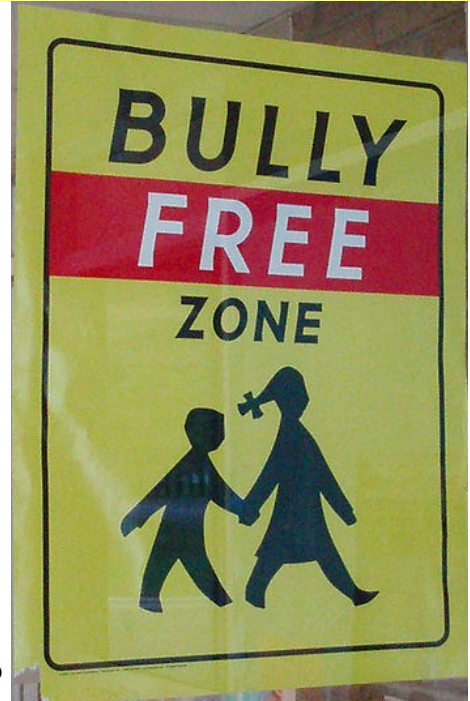
Don't feel you have to use all of these questions; the idea is simply to get people talking about their own experiences of bullying.

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 The Good Samaritan 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?



Luke 10:25-37

A Teacher of the Law came up and tried to trap Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to receive eternal life?”

Jesus answered him, “What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?”

The man answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbour as you love yourself.’”

“You are right,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

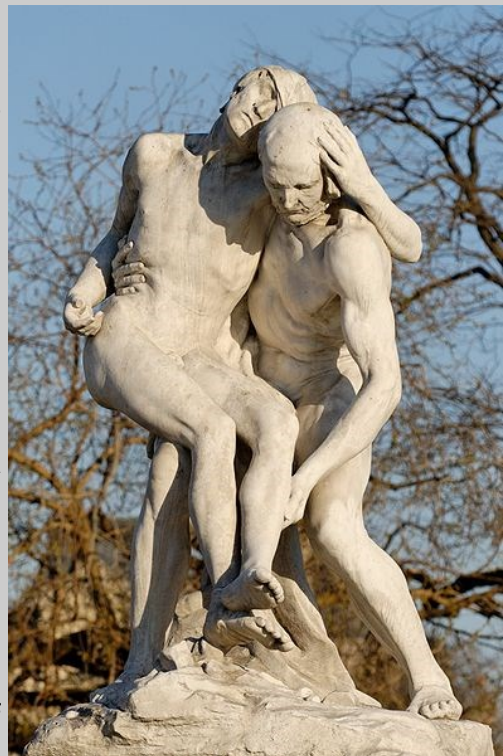
But the teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbour?”

Jesus answered, “There was once a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when robbers attacked him, stripped him and beat him up, leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked on by, on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came along, went over and looked at the man, and he then walked on by, on the other side. But a Samaritan, who was travelling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was filled with pity. He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Take care of him,’ he told the innkeeper, ‘and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him.’”

And Jesus concluded, “In your opinion, which of these three acted like a neighbour towards the man attacked by robbers?”

The teacher of the law answered, “The one who was kind to him.”

Jesus replied, “You go then, and do the same.”



Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

Reflective Activity – Make badges



Badge making machines can often be borrowed from local libraries or educational resource units, but if you are not able to borrow a machine you can purchase cardboard badges from stationery stores, and use felt tips or collage to decorate them, or even make your own from scratch using card, sticky tape and safety pins.

As you make your badges you can discuss:-

- 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 bullying session worked in practice

We talked around issues that some of the ladies had with their own kids fighting with each other and how stressful that was in the family.

This led to issues of bullying at school, which one of the ladies has to deal with in her family with her son. There were lots of feelings shared about that; things like how they feel they don't get support, first from family members and then from the school.

This led to discussions of their own experiences of growing up, and how they had felt victimised because of their situations and their backgrounds.

Although there is a mixed group of people with a range of individual experiences, most of them related to having the same issues.

This then went further talking about how they are treated by their partners or others.

I got the feeling that for most of their life they feel excluded. Among themselves they are very community minded and spirited but they all struggle to see where they fit in society.



I read the story of 'The Good Samaritan', (this group loves it when someone reads aloud to them) which nearly all of them had heard about in some way, but wasn't sure where the story came from. We then went on to talk about friendship.



DM

Fame

Introduction/prompt

Game:- who's Who in Coronation Street

(We suggest that you check beforehand and identify a soap that all or most of your group watch.)



- How many of these characters can we name?
- What do you know about these characters?
- What do think the actors and actresses are like when they are at home?



Introduction (continued)

Story

A man was exploring caves by the Seashore. In one of the caves he found a canvas bag with a bunch of hardened clay balls. It was like someone had rolled the clay balls and left them out in the sun to bake. They didn't look like much, but they intrigued the man, so he took the bag out of the cave with him.

As he strolled along the beach, he would throw the balls one at a time out into the ocean as far as he could. He thought little about it, until he dropped one and it cracked open on a rock. Inside was a beautiful, precious stone - treasure in clay!

Excited, the man started breaking open the remaining clay balls. Each contained a similar treasure. He found thousands of pounds worth of jewels in the 20 or so balls he had left. Then it struck him. He had been on the beach a long time. He had thrown maybe 50 or 60 of the balls with their hidden treasure in the clay into the ocean waves. Instead of thousands of pounds in treasure, he could have taken home tens of thousands, but he had just thrown it away!



It's like that with people. We look at someone, maybe even ourselves, and we see the outside clay ball. It doesn't look like much from the outside. It isn't always beautiful or sparkling, so we discount it.

We see that person as less important than someone more beautiful or stylish or well known or wealthy. But we have not taken the time to find the treasure in clay - hidden inside that person.

There is a treasure in each and every one of us. If we take the time to get to know that person, and if we ask God to show us that person the way He sees them, then the clay begins to peel away and the brilliant gem begins to shine.

So let's not come to the end of our lives and find out that we have thrown away a fortune in friendships because the gems were hidden in bits of clay. And let us see the people in our world as God sees them, and remember that God sees us too as precious gems.

Unlocking Real Life Stories of Urban People

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

- Have you ever felt regarded as worthless?
- Has anyone ever appreciated something about you that you had not recognised for yourself?
- Are there people you regard as worthless?
- What do you think might be the precious gem that lies hidden in your own heart?

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?

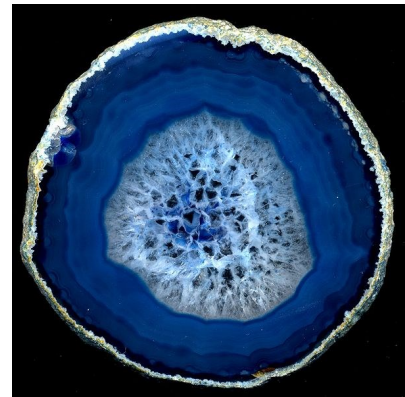
2 Corinthians 4:7 "Yet we who have this spiritual treasure inside are like common clay pots, in order to show that the supreme power belongs to God, not to us."

- What do you think about this bit of the Bible?

Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

Reflective Activity: –

If you can, borrow a sliced agate, pass it round and allow people to hold and look at it. Look at the difference between the dull outer coating and the crystals that are hidden inside.



Prepare in advance: - Get some shiny beads and hide them in balls of clay or playdough, and allow to harden.



Participants are given several balls of dry clay or playdough and asked to break them open and wash the shiny bead they find inside clean.

During the activity you can talk about how we are all special in God's eyes

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 fame session worked in practice



This was a good session which generated much discussion.

We discussed the fact that that some people might seem more crusty than others on the outside, and that we often feel crusty ourselves. That led us to consider how we see each other, and that often we, to coin a phrase 'judge a book by its cover', without really knowing what is going on inside.

We talked about the fact that the media tend to judge celebrities by appearance and their actions in a way which is often negative rather than positive. When someone famous does something for the good of others its not often portrayed in the media, and if it is, it can often be twisted.

We talked about how hard it must be to be famous and in the spot light 24/7, and that your life can never be your own. The discussion then turned to weight problems, over eating, and how we look; we talked about fad diets and our attitudes to our bodies and body image; this also lead to subjects such as self-harming and being abused.

There was talk about how some people are, 'born with silver spoons in their mouths', and how they abuse that privilege, and how others start off with absolutely nothing and then become famous, and it goes to their head.



Healthy Eating

Introduction/prompt

Adverts, adverts, adverts.....

If you have the facilities show a couple of adverts, or look at some adverts in magazines. Include an advert for luxurious food and an advert for a diet or weight loss product.



- What is your favourite advert
- Which advert do you most dislike?
- What is your favourite food

Unlocking Real Life Stories of Urban People

- When do you eat the most-
- when you are happy or when you are sad?
- Why do we need to eat the right things to stay healthy?
- How many times after Christmas do we think 'right we need to go on a diet'?



Don't feel you have to use all of these questions; the idea is simply to get people talking about their own attitudes to food, dieting and eating.



Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

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

Luke 9:10-17

The apostles came back and told Jesus everything they had done. He took them with him, and they went off by themselves to a town called Bethsaida. When the crowds heard about it, they followed him. He welcomed them, spoke to them about the Kingdom of God, and healed those who needed it.

When the sun was beginning to set, the twelve disciples came to him and said, “Send the people away so they can go to the villages and farms round here and find food and lodging, because this is a lonely place.”

But Jesus said to them, “You yourselves give them something to eat.”

They answered, “All we have are five loaves and two fish. Do you want us to go and buy food for this whole crowd?” (There were about five thousand men there.)

Jesus said to his disciples, “Make the people sit down in groups of about fifty each.” After the disciples had done so, Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up to heaven, thanked God for them, broke them and gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. They all ate and had enough, and the disciples took up twelve baskets of what was left over.



The five thousand, Eularia Clarke (1914-1970)
Methodist Collection of Modern Christian Art.



Poem: Loaves and Fishes

'Are you so anxious for your life?' The problem of hunger.

'What shall you eat?' Now listen and ponder.

Remember He took five loaves in His hands

And looking up to heaven, gave thanks,

And broke and kept on giving,

And in His hands, in the very act of breaking,

The bread multiplied

And they all ate and were satisfied.

Each of the twelve picked up a small basket

To take home, a divine token,

Of fish fragments and bread broken.

Another time He took a few small fish and seven

Loaves, and looking up to heaven,

Blessed, and kept breaking;

And the disciples taking

The food to the multitude

Wondered how it multiplied;

And again they all ate and were satisfied.

From each loaf a large basket (a total of seven) ,
Speaking of the overflowing abundance of heaven.

When questioned about the miracles, they replied

Childishly, and He dissatisfied

Said, 'Do you not yet understand? '

This is a divine illustration of supply and demand:

Twelve small baskets for each disciple's need;

And from seven loaves, the baskets broad

Display the bounteous provision of God.

© Tom Prato/Pratonix

- **What do you think about the Bible story and the poem?**
- **How do you relate to them?**

Are there any links or connections that you want to make between your stories and the Bible story?



Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

Reflective Activity – Planning a weekly menu



Breakfast



Lunch



Supper

- 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 healthy eating session worked in practice

This session went really well today and a lot of sharing with each other came out of it. I think it helped because this was something that they knew better than me, about cooking and recipes, so I had this feeling that because I was prepared to learn from them and their wisdom. It really empowered them; not that I felt I patronised them in any way, (God forbid!), but that I was willing to accept that they knew better.

We planned out meals for a week and it was lovely to see them sharing ideas together.

They really loved the picture of the feeding of the 5000, so I am trying to get hold of copies for them from Methodist Church house.

I am hoping this subject of food leads onto sharing the story book 'The Story of a Meal' (St Paul Publication ISBN 085439303x). Also I am thinking of ending our sessions with a meal together somewhere, so this I feel will lead them up to that and hopefully make it significant.

DM



It's Raining; it's Always Raining!



Introduction/prompt

Run this 10 minute Nooma* DVD, which talks about the storms in our lives; things like pain, loneliness, things that go wrong.



Unlocking Real Life Stories of Urban People

- Why does it always seem like it's raining in our lives?
- Why are things always going wrong?
- Who do we turn to when we are desperate and feeling alone?
- Where is God when we are hurting?

Don't feel you have to use all of these questions; the idea is simply to get people talking about the things that go wrong in their lives.



Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

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

Genesis 7:1-12

The LORD then said to Noah, "Go into the boat with your whole family; I have found that you are the only one in all the world who does what is right. Take with you seven pairs of each kind of ritually clean animal, but only one pair of every kind of unclean animal. Take also seven pairs of each kind of bird. Do this so that every kind of animal and bird will be kept alive to reproduce again on the earth. Seven days from now I am going to send rain on the earth that will fall for forty days and nights, in order to destroy all the living things that I have made."

And Noah did everything that the LORD commanded.

Noah was six hundred years old when the flood came on the earth. He and his wife and his sons and their wives, went into the boat to escape the flood. A male and female of every kind of animal and bird, whether ritually clean or unclean went into the boat with Noah as God had commanded. Seven days later the flood came.

When Noah was six hundred years old, on the seventeenth day of the second month all the outlets of the vast body of water beneath the earth burst open, all the floodgates of the sky were opened, and rain fell on the earth for forty days and nights.



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



Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence Reflective Activity -

Bring a tray of small seedlings from a garden centre or nursery. Chose plants that will grow easily on an ordinary windowsill. Bring a small bag of compost, trowels (or old spoons!) and some small plant pots - make sure they will fit inside the yoghurt pots below. If it is the wrong time of year for seedlings you could bring seeds instead.

Bring some 450–500g yoghurt pots that have been cut down to just a little taller than your plant pots, painted on the outside with white emulsion paint and allowed to dry. Provide some felt tip pens and clear varnish. Participants can each decorate a plant pot holder with the felt tip pens. They may want to include pictures, or words, to remind them of what you have discussed. Once the decoration is complete they can be coated in clear varnish (chose a type that dries reasonably fast!) and left to dry while the seedlings are potted up.

Pot up seedlings or plant seeds and talk about the care and watering they will need in order to thrive.



While you work you can discuss:-

- 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 raining session worked in practice

The Nooma DVD went down very well, I wasn't sure if it would be too much for them to take in but they enjoyed it.

They all took the opportunity to talk and were very open about their own struggles and what they are going through. Some of the conversation was very deep.

DM

*Some of the Nooma DVDs are set in middle class environments and would be unsuitable for the communities Unlock usually works in; but this one is set in the natural world and, while it is not urban, it is at least not obviously middle class. It obviously worked well with the group these materials were prepared for.

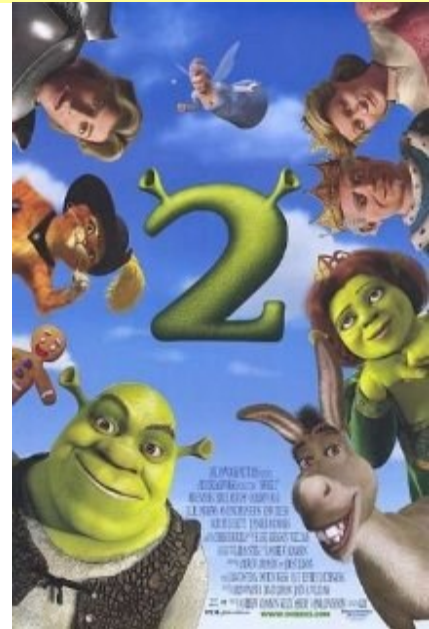


Weddings

Introduction/prompt

Watch the wedding section of Shrek 2.

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uELhASI-7r8>)



Unlocking Real Life
Stories of Urban
People
Talk about weddings:

-
- What happens at a wedding?
- Why do people get married?
 - What does it mean to be married?

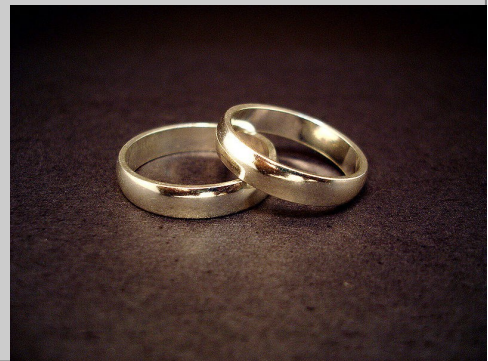


Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

Love never gives up.

Love cares more for others than for self.
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.
Love doesn't strut,
Doesn't have a swelled head,
Doesn't force itself on others,
Isn't always "me first,"
Doesn't fly off the handle,
Doesn't keep score of the wrongs of others,
Doesn't revel when others grovel,
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,
Puts up with anything,
Trusts God always,
Always looks for the best,
Never looks back,
But keeps going to the end.

1 Corinthians 13:1-8 'The Message'



- These words are from the Bible—does that surprise you?
- What do these words mean for you?



Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence
Are there any links or connections that you want to make between your stories and the Bible words?

Reflective Activity—
Make wedding favours.

See
http://www.ehow.com/how_4851144_plantable-confetti-wedding-favors.html
for ideas or
make small net
sweeties.



bags of

While you work you can discuss:-

- 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 wedding session worked in practice

Because one of the ladies was going to her brother's wedding I felt it appropriate to talk about weddings.

There was a lot of anxiety surrounding her and her family going and what that would mean to them. They were all sharing in this anxiety because the group is so close-knit. None of the ladies are married themselves but have live in partners, of which some have been long term and some not.

The main discussion was around the lack of confidence the lady was feeling about what she was going to wear. She has low self-confidence and low self-esteem, so this was a real issue.

This session is laid out here in the way that Unlock usually works, but when I ran it I actually reversed the order, and read the Bible paraphrase at the beginning. For some reason I felt this would work better for them, and it did.

They loved the reading at the beginning and we talked a lot about that.

They were very surprised it had come from the bible and they thought it was cool.

DM

