

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



# GOD'S PRODIGAL SON(S).

CROOKS AND CRIMINALS  
IN THE BIBLE



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## What is Unlock Glasgow?

Unlock Glasgow is an initiative of the Scottish Bible Society in partnership with Unlock UK and the Church of Scotland Priority Areas Group. We are here to support the work of any church or community group in Glasgow's Urban Priority Areas. We can provide resources, or help to lead a Bible study group, or training for group leaders.

Unlock is about meeting in small groups to explore the Bible together - but taking as a starting point experiences of everyday life. As people think about the stories in the Bible in the light of what happens in our own homes, in tower blocks, on our city streets, in our lives each day, the pages come to life for us, and we can imagine much better how Jesus' disciples felt, what the situations facing the old testament characters were really like.

Find out more on: **[www.unlockglasgow.org.uk](http://www.unlockglasgow.org.uk)**

## This material aims to:

-Let people discuss what constitutes a crime, and the factors behind how people tend to rate crimes (from a human, not a legal perspective). It is particularly suited for youth groups and groups who are not in a traditional church setting.

## This material will not:

- use Bible stories with the purpose to come up with any kind of "answer", or act as traditional Bible Studies where we mainly learn from facts or theological statements. Some questions are quite "tongue-in-cheek" and it's important to stress to groups with a more traditional approach to Bible studies that we are discussing options and opinions, and not trying to re-interpret the Bible stories.

## How to use the material:

The material suggests 3 sessions, but the exercises can be done in another order and be adapted to fewer or shorter sessions.

## Ground rules for participants:

The first session should set out some "ground rules" for the discussions, to let people know what will happen in the discussions, and how they are expected to contribute.

***\* Everyone will contribute as much or as little of their personal stories that they are comfortable with. O.***

***\* Everything said during these evenings will stay within the group and be treated as confidential, whether it's someone's personal story or opinion.***

***\* People can opt out of exercises, without having to give a reason for it.***

***\* Most discussions will be "unfinished" and be interrupted after short periods of time. This is as it should be, since the aim is to start discussions, not finish them.***

***\* There are no "right" or "wrong" answers or opinions, and those who perhaps have more in-depth knowledge of the Bible should feel free to contribute to the discussions with "facts" provided they know that those comments are not more valid than other opinions expressed in the group.***

## Leader's notes:

Despite (or because of) the serious topic discussed, try to make the conversations fun and accept beforehand that people won't agree. Tell the participants to expect disagreements and that few discussions will come to any final conclusion!

**FEEDBACK FROM GROUPS USING THIS MATERIAL IS GREATLY APPRECIATED!**

# SESSION 1:

## CRIME OR CREATIVITY?

### **Materials needed:**

*Pens, copies of the handouts, flipchart (optional).*

### **WELCOME** (10-15 mins)

Welcome people, ask them to briefly introduce themselves to the people they're sitting next to.

Then use one of the following **ICE BREAKERS**:

**CHAT:** Talk briefly in pairs about the last time you broke a rule (whether it was an actual "law" or a personal rule someone made up – like a partner, parent, flatmate...)

OR

**GAME:** Sit in pairs – preferably with someone you don't know - and ask 3 questions of each other. It should be simple and not too personal questions only the person asked knows the answer to, like: "What colour is your kitchen" or "What is your postcode?" It has to be questions that have to be answered with a statement instead of just a "yes" or "no". The task is for each person to lie to one of the questions, and afterwards you will guess which lie each person told. Could you spot it? What did you base your guess on?

### **GROUP EXERCISE 1:** (10-15 mins)

All of us cheat at some point, or break rules. Discuss in the group which of these relatively minor crimes you think SOCIETY finds it easiest to accept.

Rank the least offensive one 1, and the most offensive one 7.

Remember not to state your personal opinions, think about what you think the majority of people would say. Use copies of Handout 2 for the groups to write on.

- **Withholding a £500 one-off income on your tax return.**
- **Spraying graffiti on a wall of an abandoned warehouse.**
- **Not picking up after your dog in the local park.**
- **Parking in a handicap zone without a permit.**
- **Stealing some pens and other stationery from your workplace or school.**
- **Allowing a young adult to have sex with someone who is 15, if they are in a long-term and committed relationship.**
- **Finding a wallet on the street with £50 cash in it (with no identification or cards) and keeping it.**

If you can't agree on the exact order in the list, try and at least agree on the highest and lowest numbers, and don't spend too long debating!

Share the results briefly in the big group.



## GROUP EXERCISE 2: (20-30 mins)

Even if our society's rules are written down in the form of laws, we have seen that it's still easy to disagree about what is acceptable or not.

Now use Handout 1 and look at some quotes about Jesus from the gospels.

Try and find arguments why Jesus **did or didn't** do what is suggested, even though it seems so from the text.

Split each small group in two, and let half the group argue for why Jesus must have done what is suggested, and the other group why he couldn't have...

Share your thoughts in the big group, and decide whether the next discussion can take place in the big group or in the smaller groups:

Was it easy to make excuses for Jesus? Why / why not? Have these exercise taught us anything about what makes people rate a crime as serious or not too serious?

Have an open discussion or use the questions below.

Do you think people tend to rate the severity of a crime because of:

- **How it relates to the person's moral and/or religious beliefs ?**
- **How it affects an individual as opposed to a large group of people?**
- **The personal circumstances surrounding the crime?**
- **The amount of people committing similar actions?**
- **The amount of actual physical or financial damage, as opposed to only a potential risk?** (I.e running a red light and actually hitting someone, compared to doing it when no people are around)

Jesus did seem to break certain rules sometimes, and look at an individual situation before making a judgement. The Pharisees always tried to accuse Jesus of various crimes by quoting the "law" (the Jewish scriptures). Jesus often stressed that people should abide to the rules of society, but the most well-known "rule" that Jesus taught us is however what is known as **"The Golden Rule"**:

## **IN EVERYTHING DO TO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD HAVE THEM DO TO YOU.**

(Matthew 7:12)

This is the rule that Jesus meant would teach us to forgive, and treat others with the respect we want from them.

End by letting people meditate over that phrase in silence, and then to bearing it in mind until the next session, and try and use it in every situation where they come across a need to make a decision regarding a course of action.



# SESSION 2:

## BEING GOOD OR BEING GODLY?

### **Materials needed:**

*Flipchart (prepared beforehand), pens, copies of handouts.*

*Optional: Print off the photographs on proper photo paper.*

### **WELCOME** (10-15 mins)

Welcome people, ask them to briefly introduce themselves to the people they're sitting next to. Then use one of the following **ICE BREAKERS**:

**CHAT:** Ask the person next to you if they watch any crime or legal dramas on TV? What do they like (or don't like) about them?

OR

**GAME:** Sit in a circle.

The leader is the "Emperor" who states: **"The emperor likes coffee but not tea"**. The Emperor then invites the next person in the circle to guess what the Emperor likes. The person might say: "The Emperor likes bananas but not grapes?" Wrong, says the emperor. I like grapes!

The next person says "The emperor likes carrots but not turnips?"

Correct, says the emperor, I don't like turnips!

The trick is of course to not use words with a "T" ("tea") in it.

Continue until everyone has figured out the rule and gives correct answers, or you grow tired of the game. (If people might have played this game before, it's good to tell them not to spoil it by letting others know the answer. Gradually, when more people use the rule, the answer will become obvious to the rest).

### **INTRODUCTION:** (10 mins)

Look back at the last session, and briefly remind people of the **"Did Jesus really...?"** exercise and what thoughts it gave us about how it's possible to justify our actions (rightly or wrongly).

Ask if anyone has had a chance to think about the Golden Rule in an actual situation since last time? Or have a general discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of having such a "simple" rule to live by. It is really simple, or hard?

### **GROUP EXERCISE 1:** (15-20 mins)

Give each group a set of the 12 pictures included in this material.

Discuss which ones of the men people in general might think are **most / least likely** to have committed a crime? Don't be afraid to be "prejudice" initially, since you are talking about the kind of general, rash opinions people easily make, but also discuss why people might make these judgements? Do we think some people are better than others or less prone to mistakes?

Brief feedback in the big group.



## GROUP EXERCISE 2: (25-35 mins)

Now look at one of the most famous men from the Bible: **Moses**.

What do we know about him? (Recall the story briefly, like that he was rescued from certain death as a child, adopted by the powerful Pharaoh, chosen by God to lead the people of Israel out of the slavery in Egypt...)

But how many people today remember that Moses also was a **murderer**?

Read the following verse:

### **Exodus 2:11**

One day after Moses had grown up he went out to his people and saw their forced labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk.

He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand...

Have the following options on a flip chart (written up beforehand) so everyone can see them.

- He had been provoked.
- He had a just cause.
- He had friends in high places.
- He belonged to a rich and powerful household.
- He wasn't caught because he hid the body.
- God protected him since he had a task to fulfil in the future.

...and let the groups discuss:

**a) WHY you think Moses got away with the crime?**

**Any of the options on the flipchart, or another?**

**b) WHY the author of Exodus (and God) let this fact remain in the story, rather than just not mention it, or make the event sound less severe?**

Feedback in the big group.

End by letting the groups look at their pictures again, and try and decide which of the men could represent "Moses".  
The "angry" Moses or the "hero" Moses.

Let the groups hold up their chosen picture(s), and then say a prayer about how God has created us humans with so much potential for both good and evil... and how it's only God who really knows both our pain and potential...



# SESSION 3:

## FORGIVING AND FORGETTING

**Materials needed:** *Optional: flipchart with the questions and the Bible verse from Hebrews written up beforehand. A tray of sand for the closing prayer.*

### **WELCOME** (10-15 mins)

Welcome people, ask them to briefly introduce themselves to the people they're sitting next to. Then use one of the following **ICE BREAKERS**:

**CHAT:** If you could choose to be famous, what would you like to be famous for?

OR

**GAME:** Give everyone a small, folded piece of paper. All should be blank except one which says "murderer". No-one is to tell anyone else what they've got. Invite everyone to slowly walk around the room in silence and look each other in the eyes. The murderer is supposed to try and "wink" at people as discreetly as possible. If you're winked at, you're "dead" and immediately have to go and sit down. The task for the murderer is to wink so strategically that people won't see who the murderer is until everyone is "dead".

But if anyone suspects who the murderer is they can simply stop the game and make a guess. The suspected murderer must be honest, and if the guess is correct, the murderer has lost. If the guess is wrong, the person who made the wrong guess is "dead" and the game continues.

### **INTRODUCTION:** (10 mins)

Look back at the last session, and briefly remind people of the thoughts you had about Moses, and what you thought about his crime. Regardless of your thoughts on the exercise, conclude that Moses DID kill a man, and yet went on to lead a full life, entrusted with an important task from God.

### **GROUP EXERCISE 1:** (25-35 mins)

Let people sit in groups while you briefly retell the rest of the story about Moses. I.e how he led the people of Israel through the desert, and at one point was asked to go up on Mount Sinai and receive the Ten Commandments from God – one of which is "**You shall not murder**".

**Ask the groups to discuss how they think Moses felt about being the one to present those rules to the people of Israel?**

**The fact that he was the one asked by God – and also agreed to do it – what does that tell us about Moses?**

**About God?**

Brief feedback in the big group.





## **SUMMARY:** (5 mins)

These exercises haven't been about justifying crime, but rather about looking at all the human factors surrounding the actions we choose, and the interpretations of them. And how God throughout history chooses to use people who are far from perfect. The theme "forgiveness" is very common in the Bible. Stern warnings about leading a just life and how God won't forget those who act unjustly are mixed with reassuring comments about God's endless mercy and love. And perhaps the story about Moses has helped us reflect on how a person should not be judged on one single action, but rather on what a person makes of the rest of their life.

God says:

**FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TOWARDS THEIR INIQUITIES  
AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.**

(Hebrews 8: 12)

## **GROUP EXERCISE 2:** (15-20 mins or longer)

Ask the groups to discuss what they think is harder:

**Forgiving yourself for making a wrong decision which affects others ,  
or forgiving someone who has made a mistake affecting you?**

**Is it possible to forget any mistake you or someone else makes?**

Brief feedback in the big group, and have a concluding discussion summarizing what you have been talking about during the last 3 sessions.

Have a **closing prayer** involving some silence. Invite people to do a simple symbolic action. Have a tray of sand in the middle of the room, and during a chant or some music in the background, people can go up and write something they want to forgive or be forgiven for in the sand. If people don't want to write a word they can write a symbol, or trust that God knows what their action means whatever they scribble in the sand. After writing something, people will just smooth the sand over immediately, acknowledging that is the way that God treats our mistakes, if we really regret them.

In case this session has stirred up difficult emotions in people, it might be good to have the "worship space" at the end laid out so people can stay behind for a few minutes in silence, and the leader or others being available to linger behind for a brief chat as well.







## Did Jesus really....

**...steal?** *Matthew 21:2-3 (Jesus speaking to his disciples)*

'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me.

If anyone says anything to you, just say this: "The Lord needs them".

**...cause a public disturbance?** *Matthew 21: 12 (in the temple)*

[Jesus] drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves.

**....threaten and abuse people?** *Matthew 23:29-33*

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! ...

You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell?

**...destroy someone else's property?** *Luke 8:32-33*

Jesus commanded the unclean spirits to come out of the man....

The demons begged Jesus to let them enter [a herd of swine on the hillside].

So Jesus gave them permission. Then the demons entered the swine and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

**...disregard health & safety practise?** *Luke 11:37-38*

A Pharisee invited [Jesus] to dine with him, so he went in and took his place at the table. The Pharisee was amazed to see that he did not first wash before dinner.

**...blackmail people?** *Luke 14:33 (Jesus speaking to a crowd)*

So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

**...supply people with drugs?** *John 2: (At the wedding in Cana)*

When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him: They have no wine...

Jesus said to [the stewards] 'Fill the jars with water' And they filled them to the

brim. [Then] the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it had come from.

**...lie?** *John 11:1-13*

Lazarus was ill, so [his] sisters sent a message to Jesus. He told [the disciples]

'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him'.

Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought he was referring merely to sleep.

**...break into a house?** *John 20:26*

A week later Jesus' disciples were again in the house... Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said 'Peace be with you'.



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**Which of these relatively minor crimes  
do you think our society finds most offensive?**

(Rank the least offensive one 1, and the most offensive one 7)

- ..... Withholding a £500 one-off income on your tax return.
- ..... Spraying graffiti on a wall of an abandoned warehouse.
- ..... Not picking up after your dog in the local park.
- ..... Parking in a handicap zone without a permit.
- ..... Stealing some pens and other stationery from your workplace or school.
- ..... Allowing a young adult to have sex with someone who is 15, if they are in a long-term and committed relationship.
- ..... Finding a wallet on the street with £50 cash in it (but no identification or cards) and keeping it.



