

The Year We Stayed at Home - With Gratitude



A Pick and Mix Resource pack of activities
and Bible linked materials for reflecting on
our shared experiences
of the COVID 19 Pandemic





*Material created collaboratively by Dawn Lonsdale and Carolyn Gower
With credited guest contributions*

The Year We Stayed at Home With Gratitude

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Why this? Why now?

Introduction

The COVID 19 Pandemic has been undeniably tough for everyone and particularly for those communities where our Unlock work is focussed.

We believe that ***all of us*** need, (without moaning or whingeing), to be prepared to acknowledge the energy drain and the emotional cost of COVID 19, for ourselves, for each other and in our communities.

Everyone is more or less bereaved all of the time, even if we have not lost anyone, and even if we have plenty to be grateful for. We have all lost opportunities and precious time with loved ones, we have all had to let go of hopes and dreams and plans; and that disappointment is real and painful. As well as that everyone is dealing with heightened levels of fear and anxiety, and having to manage day to day decisions that potentially have far more significant consequences than we are accustomed to. Many of us know at least some people who have lost loved ones, which is both sad to bear and adds to the fear. Plus we have all had to adjust repeatedly and fairly swiftly to new ways of doing things and to relate, usually by pretty clunky means, to everyone else who is dealing with all of that stuff as well, but probably differently! It's hard to rest and feel refreshed when we do not have access to many of the ways we would usually do that, and the end is still some way off. Self-care and care for one another are going to be really critical over the next 24 months or so at least; and creating safe environments where people can express their pain and vulnerability, without abdicating responsibility or getting sucked into unproductive self-pity, are going to be an essential part of what we need to offer out of our faith, both personally, as Unlock and as Churches.

We may feel that we just want to move on and forget all about it but ultimately that will not help us to grow and learn from these exceptional experiences. It's going to be essential that we support one another to remember and process the collective trauma of COVID 19, that includes allowing appropriate grief, acknowledging anger and remembering effectively, both the good and the bad things.

So we are offering you this resource pack as a way to start to do that work, in your own places, with your own people. We hope and pray that you will find it useful.

Dawn Lonsdale, Chief Officer



We suggest that you begin with the **timeline activities on pages 6&7**. We have noticed that, in the course of this pandemic, the details of what was happening just a few months ago become hazy memories quite quickly. It is hard to keep a clear picture of what happened when; when we last saw so and so, when we last went inside someone else's home, when we last left our home town and so on. The timeline will help us to get some perspective, a long overview of all that has happened. Those experiences will be different for everyone and it will be good to explore them together. You will be amazed at how much you have forgotten! You might return to the timeline activities as part of each of the other sections, or at the end, to see if there are any new insights to add.

We have chosen **six topics** that have formed a part of our own journey and reflections through 2020 and 2021. They are **Lament, Gratitude, Patience, Hope, Kindness and Discernment**. Each topic has its own section, which includes a reflection, some creative activities for groups or individuals, and some Bible material. These sections are not in any particular order and you can use them in any way that you like. **This pack includes the section on Gratitude only**. The full pack is also available, as are five other individual topic sections.

You are encouraged to **be selective**. You use as much or as little of the material as you like. You know your people and your place. You know what will connect for folk, and what will engage them; please feel free to **choose** from this material and use only that which seems best suited to your own context. There's no reason why you can't present your groups with some options and respond to what they would like to do.

The **topic reflection/introduction** is on pages 9-15 and is intended as *preparatory reading for group facilitators*. Facilitators can choose how much of that material to share with their groups and how. Please note that there is absolutely no need to provide printed copies of all of the material for everyone involved!

The approaches in this pack are based on the **Unlock learning cycle** which you will find on page 28. Unlock has been using this approach for nearly 50 years. It is linked to the ways in which Jesus taught; using stories and connections with people's day to day lives; and we continue to use it because it works. We recommend that in using this material you use the learning cycle to structure your approach. The most important aspect is that we engage with our *own stories* **before** we explore what the Bible has to say, not the other way around.

It is important that you take some time when you are planning to **really understand the needs of your local group**, so that you can select activities and material that are appropriate for them, and work in a way that fits your local context. You can use pages 20—27 of our facilitator training pack, '**Unlock DIY**' to help you reflect effectively on the needs of your group(s). <http://www.unlock-urban.org.uk/documents/UnlockDIY2020update.pdf>

We recommend that you give yourself and your group plenty of **time and space** to work through this material. You will all get more out of it if you don't rush it, allow yourselves to be **creative** and to break free of the notion that there are 'right' answers. This is much more about sharing our experiences, what we can discover together, and how we can support one another in doing that, than it is about getting from point A to point B.

The participants are not the only ones who will benefit from thinking about this stuff, but not everyone will come and join in with group activities. So **share what you are doing**; find creative ways to display the results of your activities so that other people can see them and have a moment to do their own reflecting too.

See page 28 & 29 for further Unlock facilitator guidance.



What follows on pages 6&7 is an activity to help us begin to recall, process and understand the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on us personally, as a group, or groups, and also as a community.

The Timeline image maps some of the key events of 2020 (you can add others in 2021) and helps us place our personal key events into this framework.

The timeline image on page 6 is only for illustration. Obviously it is far too small for people to use to work on. The Unlock office has a supply of ready printed A2 copies of the timeline so (unless you have your own facilities to print page 6 at A2 size) you need to contact the Unlock Office and request sufficient copies to have at least one per person for your group(s). There is an order form below, or you can e-mail or telephone the Unlock office providing the necessary information.

The idea is that each person has their own individual copy and can personalise it by adding anything that feels important for them to remember. The coloured squares are deliberately left blank as spaces where people can add in their own personal events, milestones and experiences. Page 7 gives suggestions for the kind of things we might think about and add into our own copy of the timeline. Items can be added using pictures, words or a combination, or using cut out images pasted on. This needn't be a one off activity. We can return to our timelines and add more to them at any stage.

Groups can work both individually and together to help each other remember what happened when.

Ultimately each person's timeline will be their own personal record of their lives during the pandemic, a kind of visual diary, which they can keep and use to recall 'The Year We Stayed at Home', and perhaps to explain what it was like to future generations!

Covid timeline order form

The Year We stayed at Home

Please mail copies of the Unlock Covid timeline to -

Name: E-mail address

.

Postal address:

Telephone number (in case we need to check anything with you)

Please send completed orders to the Unlock Office, (C/O Shiloh) 15 Station Road,
Rotherham, S60 1HN or to office@unlock/urban.org.uk Tel: 01709 380318.

We welcome (but do not require) donations to cover the cost of printing and postage.



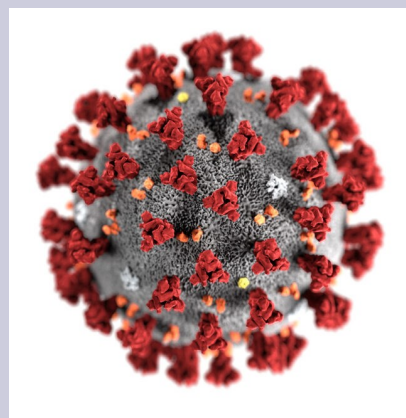
COVID-19 Pandemic Timeline Activities

You can add to the timeline anything that you want to record and remember about your personal experience of the pandemic.

You can use words, symbols, stickers, colours, drawings, pictures, or a combination; as you prefer.

You could include:-

- **Things that just were: -**
 - ◇ Family events, birthdays, etc
 - ◇ Significant moments or turning points
- **Lost or missed things: -**
 - ◇ People, activities or things you have lost or missed
 - ◇ Places you didn't go.
- **New things and things to be glad about: -**
 - ◇ Things you enjoyed
 - ◇ Things you are grateful for
 - ◇ Places you went
 - ◇ Things you made
 - ◇ Things that helped you get through
 - ◇ Things you learnt, or noticed
 - ◇ New things that you didn't do before that you want to keep
 - ◇ People you spent time with, either face to face or in other ways
- **Your responses and reactions: -**
 - ◇ What you discovered about yourself
 - ◇ What emotions did you feel?
 - ◇ When were you most afraid?
 - ◇ When were you most at peace?
 - ◇ Where was God for you; and where were God's people?



We have not included the regularly issued data on case numbers, hospitalisations and deaths. If you want to add in that kind of data you can find it here <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/>

You might find this Wikipedia timeline useful for reference, especially if you like to have precise dates and details https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_COVID-19_pandemic_in_England

You can use the months that are blank, either to continue to journal as the months go by, or to express your hopes for what is to come (or a bit of both!) The big yellow box at the bottom is for you to make a note of things you want to do when it's over that you can't do now.

Once groups can meet again safely the timeline could be used to structure a group or community reflection process.



The work of the mature person is to carry grief in one hand and gratitude in the other and to be stretched large by them. How much sorrow can I hold? That's how much gratitude I can give. If I carry only grief, I'll bend toward cynicism and despair. If I have only gratitude, I'll become saccharine and won't develop much compassion for other people's suffering. Grief keeps the heart fluid and soft, which helps make compassion possible.

~Francis Ward Weller

Photo by Magne Traeland - Unsplash

BRASSBALLS TENDER HEART Helping children Coaching for Mom

AND
LET THE PEACE
OF CHRIST RULE
IN YOUR HEARTS
TO WHICH INDEED
YOU WERE CALLED IN ONE BODY
AND *be thankful*
COLOSSIANS 3:15

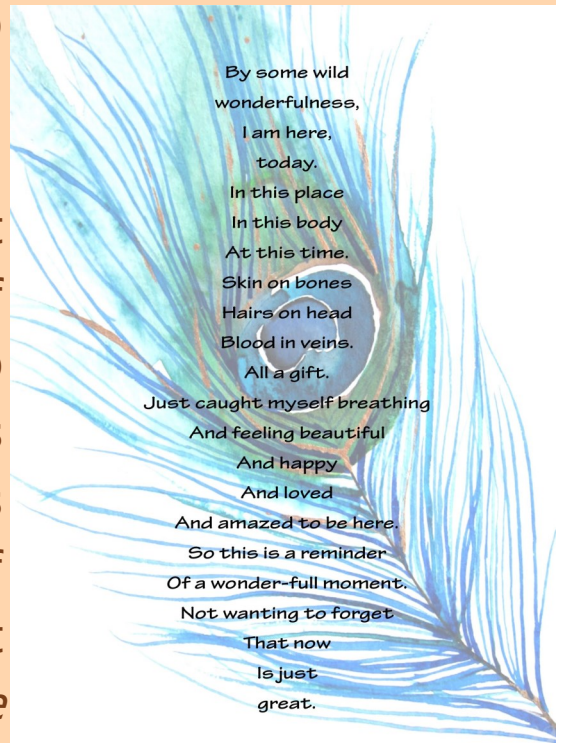


Gratitude

By Dawn Lonsdale

October 2020

As children many of us were taught to 'say 'thank you' nicely', because it is seen as polite, well behaved, good manners. And we grow up thinking that is what gratitude is all about; a way of demonstrating that you know how to behave properly. Sadly, I fear that this misses the point, and to some extent fails to motivate us. It suggests the kind of 'good behaviour' that we are somewhat inclined not to bother with when *no one is looking*. How much more motivated we would be to be grateful, if we realized how good it is for *us*. Just as we learn to brush our teeth and wash our hands for the sake of our physical health, how great would it be if we could learn to live with grateful hearts for the sake of our spiritual health and mental wellbeing.



Poem and illustration by Fiona Parker



In one way or another I think that most of us, if we were connecting with current realities at all, experienced a degree of shock, stress and even trauma

in the



spring of 2020. The world as we had known it seemed to have been turned upside down and inside out in a very short space of time. We were having to adapt rapidly to changes we had not expected or prepared for. I dare say that people reacted in different ways but for many of us there was a real sense of fear, especially in the early weeks; if only fear of the unknown, and of something that we could neither see nor contain.



So, faced with all these changes, and frankly, afraid of what this might all mean for me and the people I love, I sat down with God and went; '*Okay, so what can we do about this?*' The truth was that there was, in fact, an awful lot of it that I could do *nothing* about;

so what were the things that I *could* do? Inspired by Jesus words in Mark 14:8 I have long believed in focussing on what is *possible*; rather than dwelling on what is not. In the spring of 2020 people were dying alone in hospitals and care homes, without the comfort of having their loved ones close; people were facing

"She has done what she could and has anointed my body for burial ahead of time. I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman's deed will be remembered and discussed."
~Mark 14:8-9



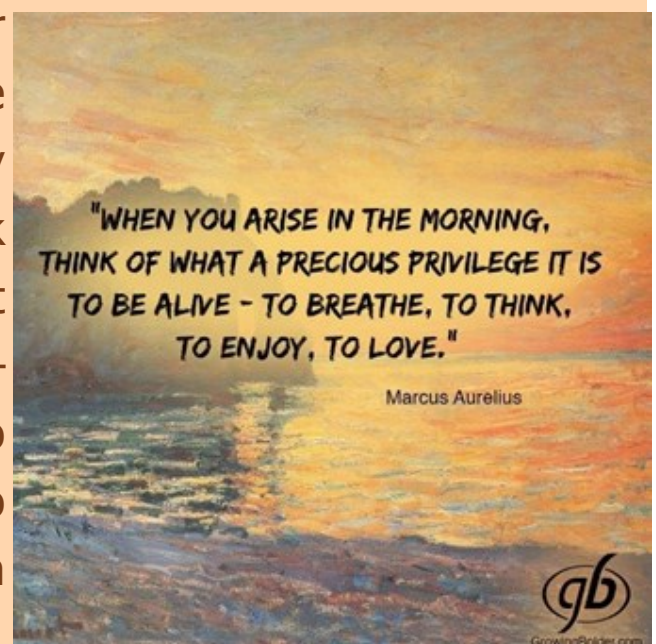
bereavement, with no opportunity for bedside goodbyes. So, having no power to change them, I accepted that those things were real possibilities and that, although there were things we could, and would, do to limit the risks; they could not altogether be eliminated.



So then, I considered, what *can I do now* that will help us to be prepared for those situations should they occur? And I realised that the thing I *could* do was to make sure that we all had as many good and lovely things to look back on as possible, if tougher times came.



What that translated into was noticing and remembering the good stuff; in other words, *practicing gratitude*. First there were the obvious things; (which I mention because we may sometimes take them for granted) a family, most of whom were able to stay reasonably safe for most of the time, a safe and comfortable home and garden in which to spend lockdown, a church and community that were looking out for each other; but there was smaller stuff too and soon it all added up to something pretty big. When you find you are onto a good thing you want to share it, so I started a trickle feed on my personal social media which I called 'stockpiling small delights'; often it was just one or two flowers in my garden, or some birdsong (in the spring and early summer there was plenty to work with) but once you start looking at things that way, it's habit forming – in a good way. The idea was to gently encourage other people to recognise things in



their lives that they could be grateful for.

In the last few weeks before the lockdown my community choir had started to learn a new song called 'Omnia sol' by an American composer who goes by the impressive name of Z(ee) Randall Stroope. I had first heard the song at my nephew's wedding, in the Autumn of 2019, and had taken it to the choir to learn because it's ever so beautiful. (If you'd like to hear how it goes you can listen here

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MZdTIy7qQE&fbclid=IwAR24qg3Ez1X7codABw1nY0mpCtgT6jybS4XYZwqQ6FRcamn28G1F7XvKUo0)

[v=0MZdTIy7qQE&fbclid=IwAR24qg3Ez1X7codABw1nY0mpCtgT6jybS4XYZwqQ6FRcamn28G1F7XvKUo0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MZdTIy7qQE&fbclid=IwAR24qg3Ez1X7codABw1nY0mpCtgT6jybS4XYZwqQ6FRcamn28G1F7XvKUo0)

On the surface it is a poignant song of farewell, but the full sense of it is something much deeper. Essentially it is saying that ***the love we have known will sustain us through all the changes and challenges of life, even when we face deep loss and despair.***

That song seemed so appropriate

for the times and it became a sort of a COVID anthem for me, constantly running through my head and lifting my spirits, and it connected with the new ways in which I was practicing gratitude.

Gratitude became an antidote to fear and loss, almost a weapon I could use against them. I now know that, whatever happens, I will not, *cannot possibly*, die



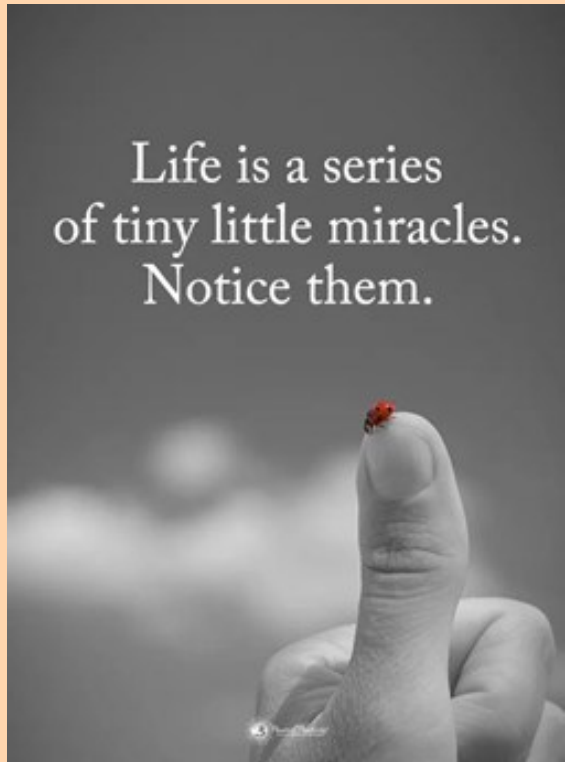
alone, neither can the people I love. Even if I, or they, are physically alone, we will be surrounded by one another's love and God's too, and we will know it!

Take a break and listen to the song 'Surrounded' - sung by Julie Costello;
composed by Phil Baggaley, Sam Hill & Ian Blythe
from the Album 'Shipwrecks and Islands'.

<https://littleroommusic.bandcamp.com/album/shipwrecks-islands>

I started to think about all of this as a kind of 'banking of joy' – storing up the goodness we experience every day as a reserve for hard times to come. And the great thing about this bank account is that you can withdraw from it again and again without ever diminishing the capital. But first you have to develop the habit of saving; you have to put things *into* the bank so that they will be there when you need to draw on them. You need to slow down enough to pay attention, and to notice the delights and blessings that God generously strews across our path; to cherish the moments, the smiles, the tiny expressions of trust, all those things that express care for each other and joy in one another's company; to notice the natural world too, the colours in a stormy sky, the patterns in a butterfly's wing, the sound of birdsong (we could hear so much more of that during lockdown); to take joy in art and music, poetry and dance.

Life is a series
of tiny little miracles.
Notice them.



The neuroscience backs this up -

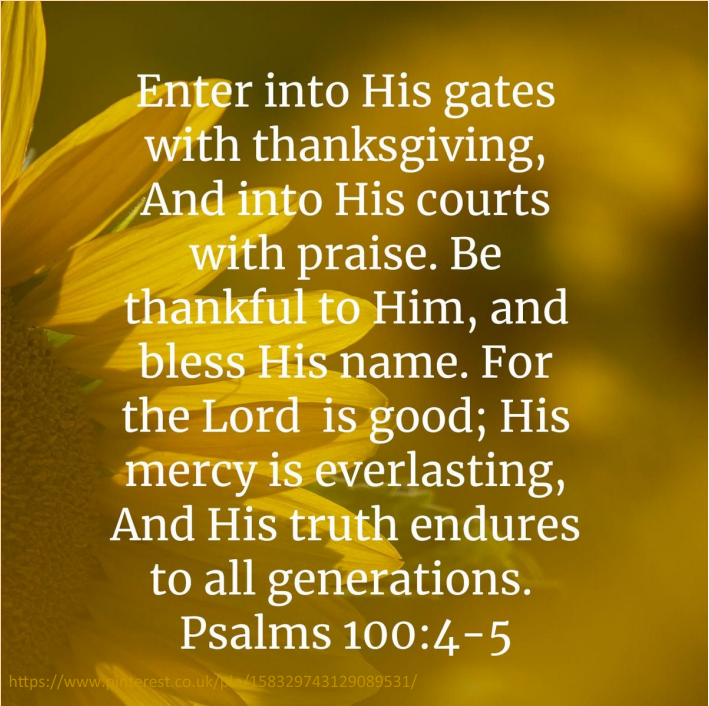
Research shows that when we express and receive gratitude, our brain releases dopamine and serotonin, the two crucial neurotransmitters responsible for our emotions, and they make us feel 'good'. They enhance our mood; immediately, making us feel happy from the inside.

Practicing gratitude is measurably addictive; it has been demonstrated to be effective in pain reduction, and better sleep, and it reduces stress, anxiety, and depression.

In times when we have little control over what is going on around us, what we can control is how we react, our own attitudes.

But we know that life is not a bed of roses all of the time, so where does this leave us when we have much less to be grateful for? I wonder how easy it is to be grateful if our home life is insecure, or our income is precarious and minimal? How then do we respond to being asked what makes us glad. I hope and pray that, even on our hardest days, we can all find something good to talk about. My instinct is that there is always something to be grateful for, once you learn how to look for it.

Now that's fairly easy to say, if you have a life of relative privilege, but the Bible seems to agree. Over and over again we are exhorted to give thanks to God **in all things.**



Enter into His gates
with thanksgiving,
And into His courts
with praise. Be
thankful to Him, and
bless His name. For
the Lord is good; His
mercy is everlasting,
And His truth endures
to all generations.
Psalms 100:4-5

<https://www.dailymedical.co.uk/?p=4158329743129089531/>



And it never says, give thanks to God - when you are lucky, or give thanks to God - when you are rich, or when you are safe, or when good things happen to you; scripture just keeps on saying, *always* give thanks to God, *all* the time, whatever! And it kind of turns the whole concept on its head because what happens is that when you learn to be thankful, as your default setting, then you find that there *are always* things to be thankful for.

There are endless Bible references to gratitude (see pages 40-43) and there are good reasons why. Many of the things that the Bible encourages us to do, not only make the world a better place, but they are beneficial for each of us as well. The world's teaching is to, 'be good', as if all that matters is how other people will benefit and how other people will see us. If only we were taught that practices like gratitude and forgiveness and compassion have benefits for *us* at least as much as they do for everyone else.

To speak of gratitude implies that there is in fact someone to be grateful to, and as Christians, we all know who that is for us. But if some of our friends are not yet ready to think in those kinds of

terms, then inviting them to 'name things they are glad about' will at least allow them to explore the benefits of gratitude for themselves for now, and the question of *who* they are grateful to will emerge, when they are ready.

Life is a series of tiny
little miracles.

Notice them.



ContemplativeMonk.com



Activities to help us reflect on Gratitude

Choose whichever of these you think your group will relate to best and use them to explore together our own COVID experiences of gratitude.

Image - tree full of blossom:-

We sometimes find it is helpful to use an image or symbol to help us think about an idea. The image of a tree full of blossom is one we have chosen to use to help us think about gratitude. Use the images on pages 9 - 15 to facilitate a discussion by encouraging general comments about different pictures. What emotions do we feel when we look at them? The emotion cards (on page 21) might help with this. Encourage people to share their own COVID stories of gratitude.



Silver Linings:-

Provide paper cut out cloud shapes with a wide silver edge (Page 20). Participants are invited to write on the 'silver lining' the positive things we have experienced in lockdown. Each group shares their silver linings' with each other and then hangs

them together as a mobile (this can be a tricky activity with the balance etc...)

What does it mean?

Discuss together what it means to be grateful, or thankful. Is there a difference between being grateful on the inside and grateful on the outside? How does being grateful make us feel? How can we become 'thankful people'?

Watch this Video on gratitude <https://movingart.com/gratitude-revealed/>

Step Outside:-

Go for a group walk in a garden, park or countryside. Intentionally 'consider' the creation around about (See Luke 12:22-34 the 'do not worry' passage where we are encouraged to consider the lilies, ravens etc). To help people to really look at things you could create a sort of scavenger hunt list, inviting people to find the tiniest beautiful thing they can find, the largest, the bluest, the greenest, the brightest, the darkest etc. 'Collect' observations of beauty/nature/surprises/fun that you see or experience. If you can't get outside, do this with pictures, stories



and memories. Share these together. Do some drawing, print out photographs. Create a thankfulness poster to display in a community space where others will be able to see it.

Listen to Reading Phoenix Choir singing 'What a Wonderful World'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?Fhs&fbclid=IwAR1GyxR0HtOzjyfUTJK1Urcqnekjz6BVMP9Kv3eBTG1KkphsiWfILt5-5nk>

Tree Full of Blossom:

Each group has the outline of a bare tree (winter) (page 22). Provide blossom shaped pieces of coloured paper to write the good things that came out of lockdown on. These are stuck on the bare tree to clothe it with spring blossom. This activity can be taken further with discussion about long-term positive outcomes from these positive things - that is the fruit that will be formed in our lives as a result - these can be written on fruit shapes - maybe a tree in full leaf could be made for these to hang on. The result can be displayed in a community space for others to see.

Creating Daily Habits:

Discuss together what daily rhythms of gratitude can we adopt in our lives?

Suggestions:-

- Three moments a day to pause for a minute and notice.
- At the end of each day, think about what were the 3 best things about the day to be thankful for. Say them out loud; or write a draw them in a thankfulness journal.
- Reminders put up around the house such as photographs or quotes that turn our attention to thankfulness.
- Rhymes or prayers to say in the bathroom or at meals.
- Declarations of Truth to counter fear, loneliness, anxiety etc...

Thanking others:-

Are there people you are grateful to who you have never thanked or told? Make them a thankyou card and give/send it to them to let them know that you appreciate them. Or is there some other way to show your gratitude?



Display & Share:-

Find ways to display your work in a community space; trees, clouds, nature display, cards, painted stones, banner, posters, scrapbooks, etc; to help other people to reflect as well.





You are holding a cup of coffee when someone comes along and bumps into you, making you spill your coffee everywhere. Why did you spill the coffee? You spilled the coffee because there was coffee in your cup. Had there been tea in the cup, you would have spilled tea. The point is whatever is inside the cup, is what will spill out. Therefore, when life comes along and shakes you (which will happen), whatever is inside you will come out. It's easy to fake it, until you get rattled. So, we have to ask ourselves, "What's in my cup?" When life gets tough, what spills out? Joy, gratefulness, peace and humility? Or does anger, bitterness, harsh words and reactions come out? You choose! Today let's work towards filling our cups with gratitude, forgiveness, joy, words of affirmation, kindness, gentleness and love for others.

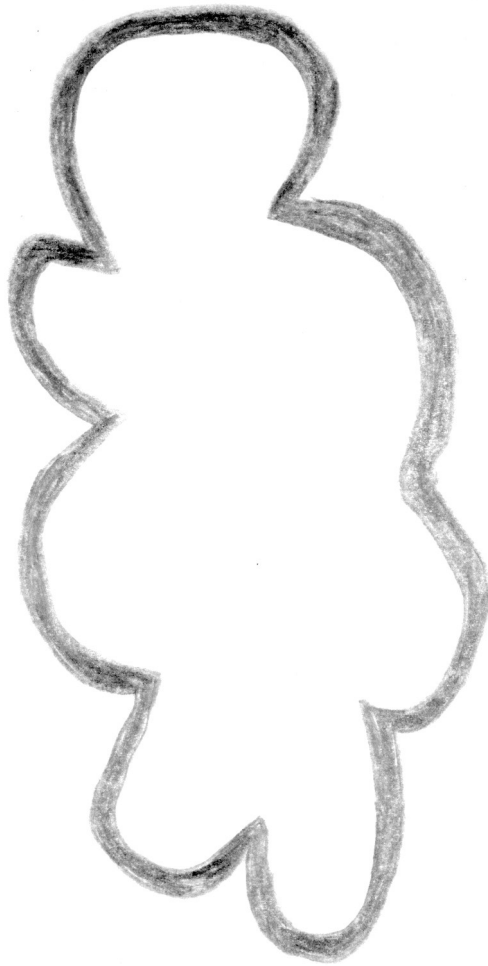
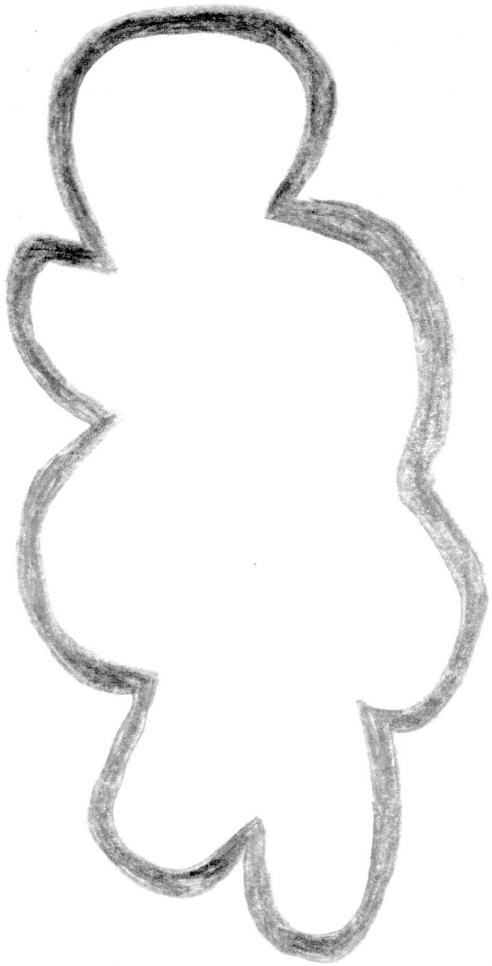
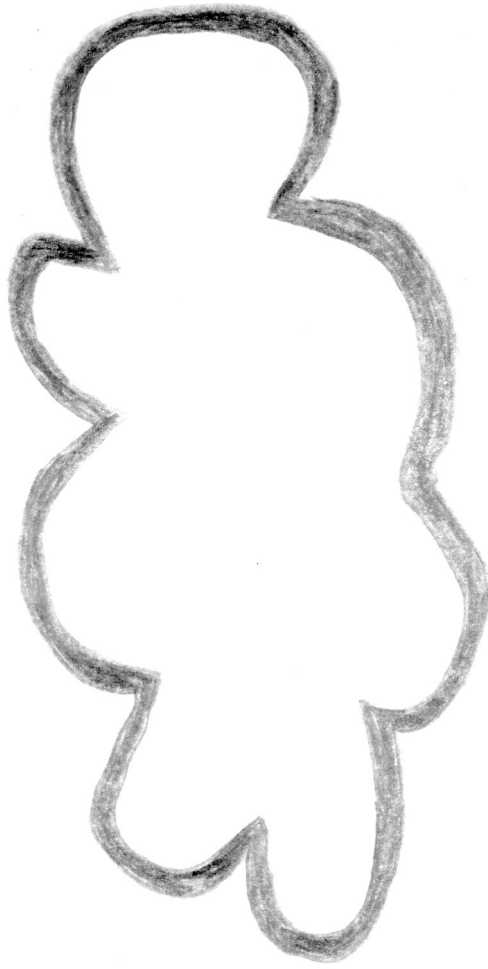
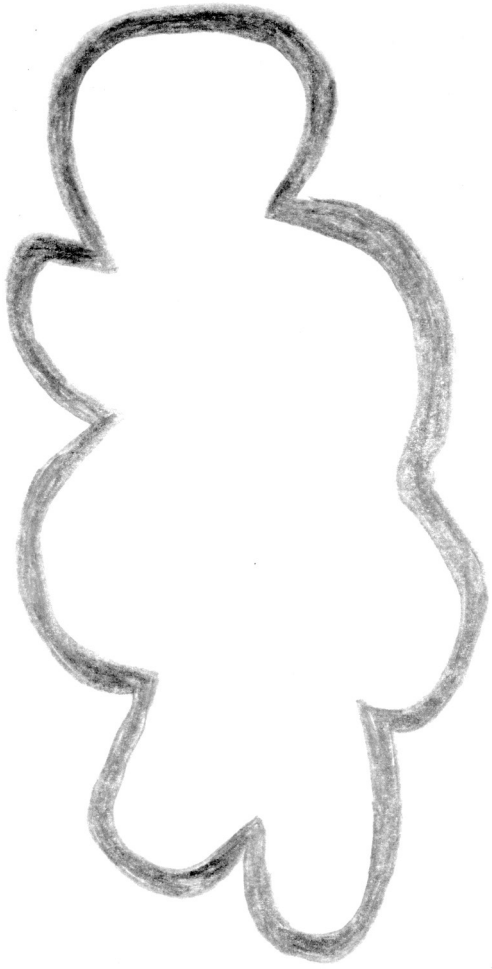
Gratitude Scavenger Hunt



1. Find something that makes you happy.
2. Something to give someone else to make them smile.
3. Find one thing that you love to smell.
4. Find one thing you enjoy looking at.
5. Find something that's your favorite color.
6. Find something you are thankful for in nature.
7. Find something that you can use to make a gift for someone.
8. Find something that is useful for you.



Cloud with silver lining templates



Emotions cards

Angry

Loved

Ashamed

Disgusted

Terrified

Humbled

Betrayed

Trusted

Rejected

Lonely

Deceived

Overwhelmed

Hopeful

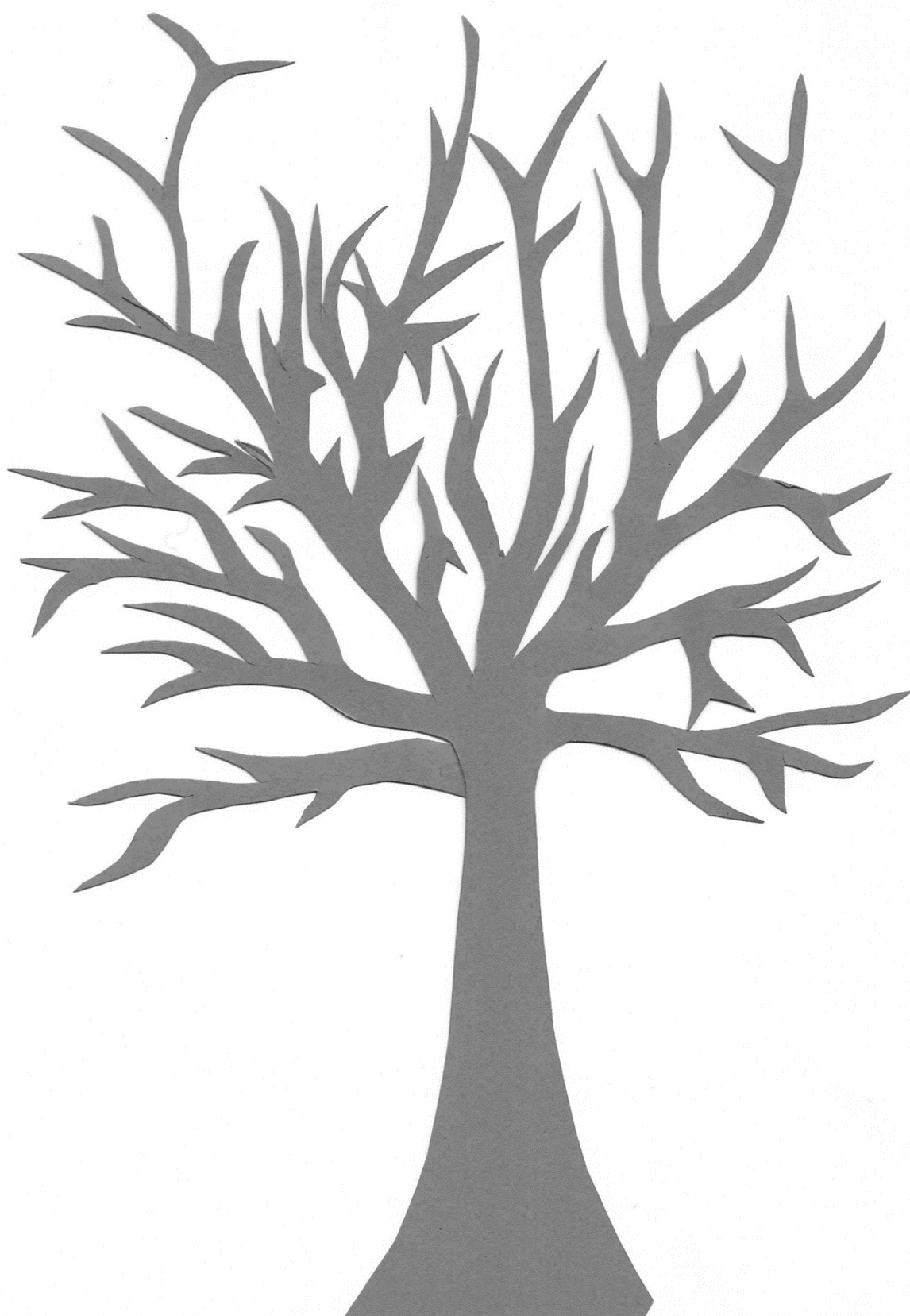
Desperate

Lost

Sad

These are just some suggestions;
you can add your own if you'd like to.





Bible Stories to help us reflect on Gratitude

Choose whichever of these you think your group will relate to best and use them to explore together how these stories connect with our COVID experiences of gratitude

Listen:-

Rend Collective - Counting Every Blessing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7X9d4ubvWH4>

Jonathan and Melissa Helser—Find me thankful, find me grateful by

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVpBKjHmJ8U>

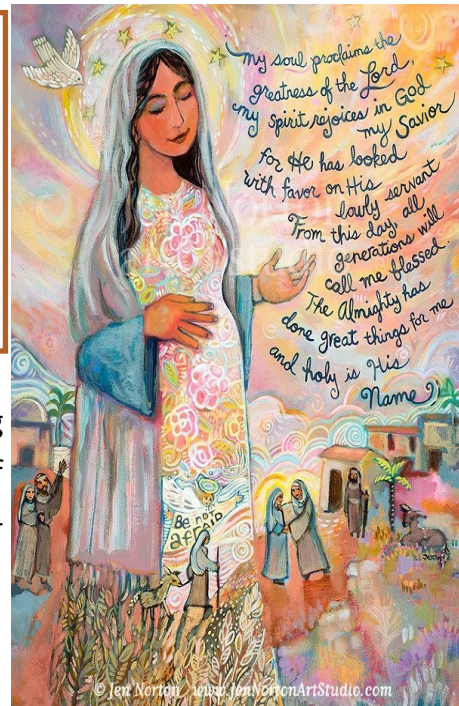
Luke 1:46-55 Mary's Song. Considering that the calling God has laid on this young women will begin on a path of shame, misunderstanding and being a social outcast - her outpouring of thanksgiving is extraordinary!

Mary said,

“My heart praises the Lord;
my soul is glad because of God my Saviour,
for he has remembered me, his lowly servant!
From now on all people will call me happy,
because of the great things the Mighty God has done for me.
His name is holy;
from one generation to another
he shows mercy to those who honour him.
He has stretched out his mighty arm
and scattered the proud with all their plans.
He has brought down mighty kings from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away with empty hands.
He has kept the promise he made to our ancestors,
and has come to the help of his servant Israel.
He has remembered to show mercy to Abraham
and to all his descendants forever!”

Luke 17:12-19 The one Samaritan leper who returned to thank Jesus for his healing. This could lead into discussions about taking ‘things’ for granted. It may link up with the group walk ‘collecting’ observations.

He was going into a village when he was met by ten men suffering from a dreaded skin disease. They stood at a distance and shouted, “Jesus! Master! Have pity on us!”



Jesus saw them and said to them, “Go and let the priests examine you.”

On the way they were made clean. When one of them saw that he was healed, he came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself to the ground at Jesus' feet and thanked him. The man was a Samaritan. Jesus spoke up, “There were ten who were healed; where are the other nine? Why is this foreigner the only one who came back to give thanks to God?” And Jesus said to him, “Get up and go; your faith has made you well.”



The Psalms are not easy to use in this context because many reflect the world view that evil or bad things are God's judgement - the book of Job deals with this argument - particularly the conclusion when God chastises Job's friends for this viewpoint. Here are some that could be used:

Psalm 75:1-3

- Intentional thanksgiving 'We give thanks to you, O God...' A decision.
- Intentional remembering 'We proclaim how great you are and tell of the wonderful things you have done...'
- God's response, 'I judge with fairness... I will keep the earth's foundations firm...' Our source of hope and security.

Psalm 97:1-7a A full on Song of Praise and declaration that God is in charge etc...

Psalm 136:1-26 An interesting psalm of thanksgiving. Each statement of a characteristic or deed is followed by the refrain, 'his love is eternal'. The group could write their own poem - after a statement of each of their 'silver lining' experiences a mutually agreed refrain could be inserted which will create a poem/song type of rhythm.



thanksgiving'

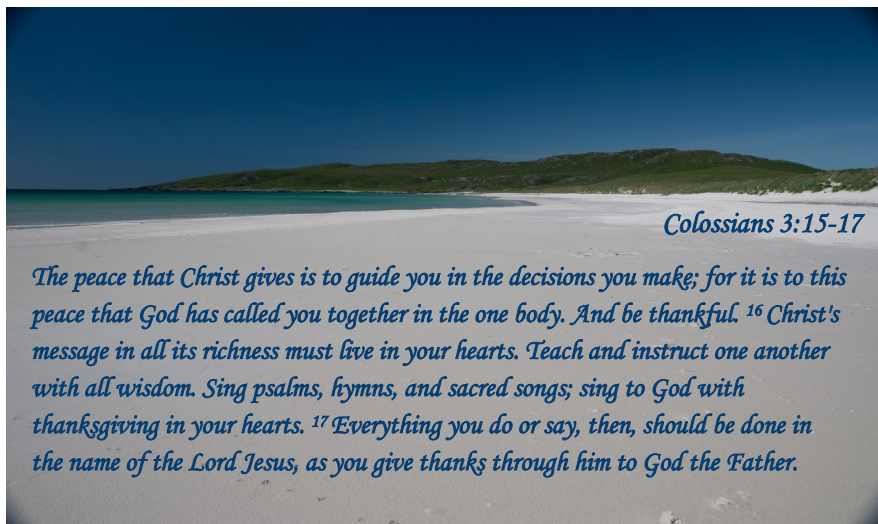
Since you have accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, live in union with him. Keep your roots deep in him, build your lives on him, and become stronger in your faith, as you were taught. And be filled with thanksgiving.

Colossians 2:6-7 'Be filled with



Colossians 3:12-17 'Be thankful' - An instruction in a list of attitudes and mind-sets to live well for Jesus.

Hebrews 12:25-29 '... Be thankful then because we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken...' Not an easy passage, but one



Be joyful always, pray at all times, be thankful in all circumstances. This is what God wants from you in your life in union with Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18



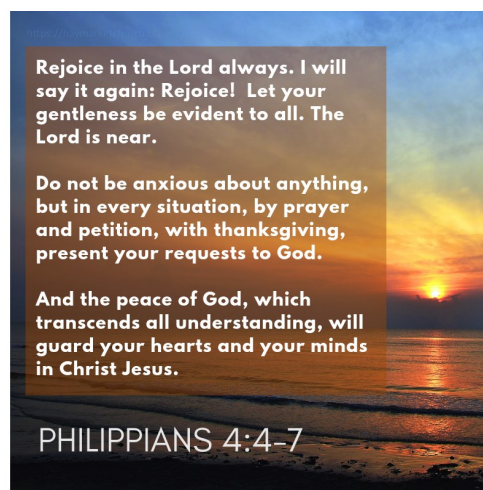
with an eternal perspective.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 'Be thankful in all circumstances'.

This phrase is set in a passage of instructions to the church.

Philippians 4:4-7. This passage can be dissected into a recipe of seven parts to deal with despair:

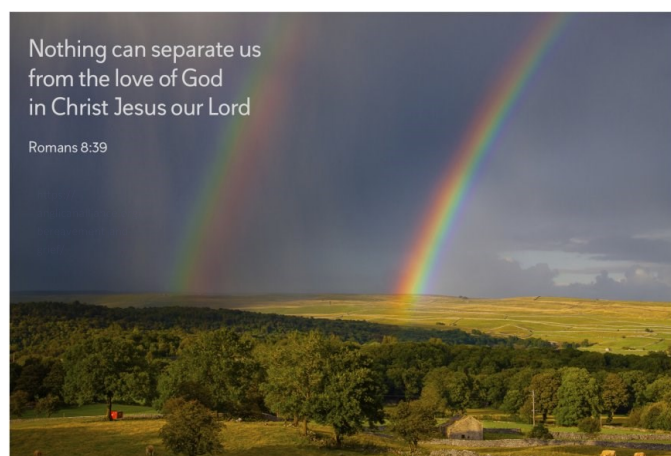
1. Rejoice x2;
2. Be yourself (gentle);
3. Recognise the Lord is with you;



4. Do not be anxious about anything;
5. Present your requests and petitions about everything to God with thanksgiving;
6. Receive the peace of God as the guardian of your heart;
7. Focus on truth, beauty, purity, admirable and praiseworthy things.

Romans 8:18, 38-39 A pandemic cannot separate us from the love of God!

Revelation 21:3-4 An eternal perspective on suffering ...



I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: "Now God's home is with people! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared."



Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! ²Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, ³who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, ⁴who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy

» Psalm 103:1-4 «

Psalm 103:1-13

Praise the LORD, my soul!
All my being, praise his holy name!
Praise the LORD, my soul,
and do not forget how kind he is.
He forgives all my sins
and heals all my diseases.
He keeps me from the grave
and blesses me with love and mercy.
He fills my life with good things,
so that I stay young and strong like an eagle.

The LORD judges in favour of the oppressed
and gives them their rights.

He revealed his plans to Moses
and let the people of Israel see his mighty deeds.

The LORD is merciful and loving,
slow to become angry and full of constant love.

He does not keep on rebuking;
he is not angry forever.

He does not punish us as we deserve
or repay us according to our sins and wrongs.

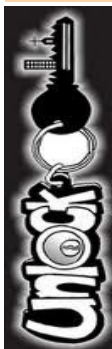
As high as the sky is above the earth,
so great is his love for those who honour him.

As far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our sins from us.

As a father is kind to his children,
so the LORD is kind to those who honour him.

TODAY, TAKE A FEW
MINUTES TO **SIT QUIETLY** AND

ALL *be thankful* FOR
THAT YOU HAVE.



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!

Unlock uses an approach to engaging with the Bible that is different to traditional Bible studies, based on a reflective learning cycle which is a tried and tested way of introducing people to the Bible in a non-threatening way (see below). We usually work 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 life. Our approach starts from the stories and experiences of group members, whereas a more traditional approach starts from the Biblical text. It has been found to work well with small groups of urban, oral learners. 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. Unlock's approach can help with that.

There are many free resources on the Unlock website www.unlock-urban.org.uk/resources designed for use with such groups. However, because each of these resources was designed for a particular

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group in a particular time and place they are unlikely be a perfect fit for your group as they stand. They are offered more as inspiration to you to design your own materials along the same lines, rather than as ready to use packages.

If you have any queries relating to Unlock materials, please contact:

Unlock, 15 Station Road, Rotherham S60 1HN

01709 380318 office@unlock-urban.org.uk

The Unlock Learning Cycle

Unlocking real life

stories of urban people

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

Releasing life changing skills and confidence

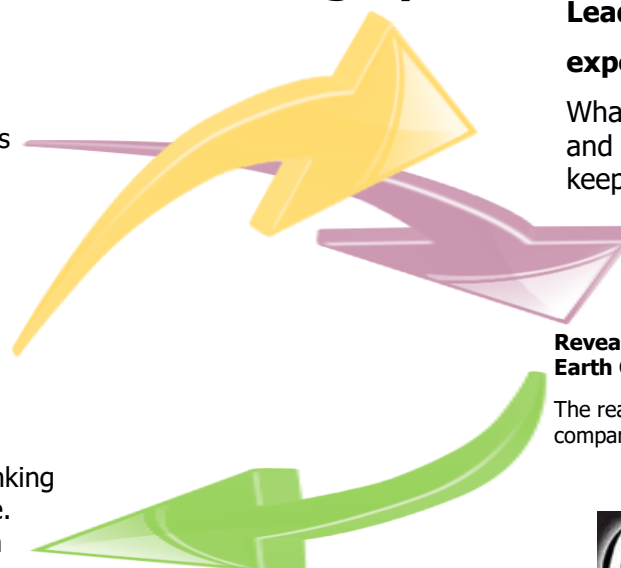
Change happens as a result of linking real life experience with the Bible. This change often leads to action among others.

Leading to more experience

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

Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

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



10 principles of Training used by Unlock in its work

1. Pay attention to the local, regional and cultural factors that influence people's lives
2. Develop the ability to help other people tell their stories.
3. Take a genuine interest and enjoyment in LISTENING to other people's stories.
4. AFFIRM and ENCOURAGE people so that they can be confident enough to formulate their own questions, and not to impose our own answers on other people's questions.
5. Be PATIENT and WAIT for people to see the gaps in their own knowledge.
6. Believe that people can make sense of the Bible and their own experience, and make the connection between the two; and that God by his spirit will lead people to truth and action.
7. Encourage working together in groups where each person's contribution is valued, and where diversity of opinion is accepted and tolerated.
8. Be aware of what is going on in and between people in such groups.
9. Work with a group so that it can come to its own conclusions and decide on its own actions.
10. Value everyone as a 'Treasure –chest of information and experience'; seeing our task as one of giving people the keys to undo their treasures.

And some Dos and Don'ts

Do: -

- Know and use each person's name
- Accept whatever is offered and encourage further contributions
- Encourage everyone to have a go
- Find non threatening questions to enable people to join in
- Build trust between group members
- Try to work with groups of between 5 and 15 people
- Create an environment where each member has confidence to contribute
- Encourage and enable people to draw on their own experience as a primary learning tool
- Help the group to work together
- Make it clear that you value each person's opinion enough to want them to say what they think
- Gather information about what is already known and shared in a group before introducing new information



- Ask questions like, 'What do you think?' 'What would you like to change?', 'How are you going to change it?', 'What's the best thing about . . .?', 'What's the worst thing about . . .?'
- Encourage participants to consider where their information has come from and how their views have been formed.
- Create experiences for the group to reflect on, you can use film, drama, pictures, paintings, or photographs, cartoons, music, creative activities, community experiences.
- Stress the vastness of the data which the group already possesses.
- Give chances for people to respond, question, discuss.
- Introduce new information (including the Bible) in manageable chunks
- Expect change
- Help the group apply the Word to the here and now. 'What has this got to do with me? With us?'
- Work at presenting in the language of the group.
- Be creative
- Adapt published material to the needs of the group
- Write or make your own material
- Create flexible programmes that can adjust to group needs as they emerge
- Seek the group's agreement for the programme, allow them to modify it as necessary
- Listen attentively

Don't: -

- Use religious language, jargon, or clichés
- Use middle class illustrations, examples, case studies
- Assume a familiarity with the bible
- Tell people what they should do, think, believe; don't say, 'This is how it is.'
- Put people on the spot, or in the spotlight
- Make assumptions about people's lifestyles and domestic arrangements
- Don't ask questions with 'right' or 'wrong' answers or that rely on knowledge, rather than experience
- Make value judgements about people who think and learn differently to you and your friends
- Assume that everyone can read – or that no one can
- Lecture, give out handouts, issue book lists.



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Gratitude

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