

cell outlines
JULY 2019

These Cell Outlines are written by Youth and Children's Ministries. They are available every month from our web site. For more information and other Cell resources, visit salvationarmy.org.uk/children-and-youth-resources

OVERVIEW

UNPACKING SAUL'S CONVERSION

This month we will be looking at the conversion of Saul. Saul found himself dramatically changed by a powerful encounter with Jesus that literally turned his life around. His life is an inspiring illustration of God's grace as we see how this self-proclaimed 'worst of sinners' was called and accepted by Jesus, and we read about how he lived the rest of his life as an expression of gratitude for this amazing gift.

In Session Three we will focus on the spiritual discipline of meditation, something that can often be misunderstood in this day and age. You will need plenty of options for reflective music, and it would be ideal to hold this session in a place where group members can safely go off by themselves for 10 minutes to find a quiet private space to meditate.

Session Four is a practical week in which you should aim to do something tangible to show God's love and grace in your community. There are several ideas included on the session outline, so please do read through these at the start of the month as you may need to start chatting to your group members about this and make any preparations in advance. You may also want to give group members the July 'Acts of Kindness' handout that is included in the Session Four outline at the start of the month.

And don't forget about the 'Remind' app. By signing up to this, young people (and anyone else) will receive daily discipleship questions, thoughts and challenges directly to their phones on the theme of the month's cell notes. Please encourage your young people to sign up to this by going to www.remind.com/join/followsa and downloading the 'Remind' app to their mobiles.

UNPACKING SAUL'S CONVERSION

WELCOME

Try the quiz about the life of Paul, attached at the end. Or use an online quiz – you can find loads more quizzes, of varying levels of difficulty, based on individual characters or stories from Acts at www.funtrivia.com/quizzes/religion/new_testament/acts.html

OR

Discussion starter: If you could call yourself by a different name, what name would you choose and why?!

WORD

a. Read Acts 9:1-31

b. There are a few fun video clips on YouTube illustrating Saul/Paul's conversion in Lego. Watch one of these to help your group understand the Bible passage.

Here are two examples:

▶ Lego Bible Story: Saul's Conversion – www.youtube.com/watch?v=UH6-irEGSB8

▶ VBS 2014 Saul's Conversion – www.youtube.com/watch?v=1M_1i1s3uUE

c. Group Discussion

Saul was a devout Jew, an expert in Jewish Law who at the time of his conversion was doing everything he could to wipe out this new movement of Christianity. The Bible says that he went everywhere, dragging Christian men and women out of their homes and throwing them into prison (Acts 8:3). His conversion took place as he was on his way to Damascus (in what is now Syria) to continue his persecution of the Christians. As he approached the city, a bright light from heaven suddenly shone down around him, striking him blind. As he fell to the ground, he heard a voice from heaven say, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?' (Acts 9:4). Jesus told Saul that it was him he had been persecuting, then instructed him to get up and go to Damascus where he was to meet with a believer named Ananias. The rest, as they say, is history!

Saul found himself dramatically changed by a powerful encounter with Jesus. He went from being a man who was very 'religious', upholding all the Jewish laws and serving God rigorously and devoutly, to a man full of life in the Holy Spirit. He changed from someone who passionately and murderously hated Christians, to someone who accepted Jesus into his own life and then tells others all about him. He even started using a different name – from Saul to Paul. This encounter turned his life around. His empty religious rituals became life-giving acts of devotion. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and became a powerful messenger for God – one of the most well-known and successful early missionaries in the Bible. Some people say that had there been no Paul, there would be no Christianity.

An interesting point to note: The narrative in Acts reads as if Paul jumped right into ministry with the Gentiles as soon as he got his sight back. However, in Galatians 1 Paul wrote that he first spent three years in Arabia. Then he returned to Jerusalem, spoke with Peter and James, but had no other contact with any Jewish Christians for several more years. During these years Paul preached to the Gentiles the message that God had given him. Many scholars feel that Paul took these three years out as a spiritual retreat, a time to get to know Jesus and learn about the calling on his life.

Use any of the following questions as you find helpful to discuss this Bible passage.

- 🗨️ What do we already know of Saul before Acts 9?
- 🗨️ Why do you think Saul was so passionately against the followers of Jesus?
- 🗨️ What do you think was the most influential thing that Jesus said to Saul in the vision?
- 🗨️ What job had God got for Saul?

SESSION ONE

- 🗨️ Why do you think that Paul was willing to carry on telling people about Jesus even though it meant he had to suffer persecution?
- 🗨️ What does Saul's conversion show us about God's grace?
- 🗨️ How do you think Ananias felt when he realised that SAUL was coming to his house? What would you have done if someone who hated Christians dropped by?!
- 🗨️ Saul was a very religious person, upholding all the Jewish laws and serving God rigorously and devoutly. But somewhere along the line he had missed out on the reality and truth about Jesus. He didn't have any personal experience of Jesus in his life. How can our own lives with God and in The Salvation Army be similar to this?
- 🗨️ Can you think of any celebrities / famous people who have become Christians? How easy/difficult do you think it is for them to 'shake off' their past image and to live their new lives as Christians in the public spotlight? Who do you know who does this well?

d. Before and After

Create some 'before' and 'after' pictures of Saul/Paul – before he met with Jesus and after his Damascus road experience. Here are two ways you could do this:

- * Split into smaller groups and ask each group to create two 'still' scenes using themselves, one illustrating a moment in Saul's life 'before', and the second illustrating a moment in Paul's life 'after'. You could also include a third – the moment of change. (You could provide props if you wish.) Take some photos on your phone/tablet/camera of the scene.
- * Do the same thing as above, but create the scene out of Lego or Playmobil instead of people.

The group members should describe the scenes they have created and the transformation in Paul's life that they depict.

e. Tell the world

These days if something exciting, dramatic or unexpected happens, we reach for our phones and quickly tell the whole world about it via social media.

What do you think Paul would have posted about his meeting with Jesus?

Write an imaginary social media post from Paul to the world, for your favourite social media platform, using as many hashtags as you can to describe the moment Paul met with Jesus!

f. Statues

A younger group may enjoy the following activity

(adapted from www.energize.uk.net/meeting-plans/1388)

Divide the group into pairs. One is the statue, one is the sculptor. As you tell the story, the sculptors 'mould' their statue into an appropriate pose to show how Paul was feeling (they should tell their partner how to move their faces.) If they want, they can alternate between sculptor and sculpture so that they take it in turns to mould one another. If you like, you could stop and let them look at the statues before carrying on with the story.

Saul was a Jew – he was a Pharisee, a very important young man who knew the Law and was keen to keep it. (statue)

Saul hated the new Christians, the people who said that Jesus was the Son of God. Saul was very angry when he heard them talking. (statue)

When Stephen talked to the crowds about Jesus, Saul was so angry that he encouraged the crowd to throw stones at Stephen until he was dead. Saul looked after the cloaks of those who were throwing stones. (statue)

Saul decided to go to Damascus because he had heard there were Christians there as well. He got a letter of permission from the Chief Priest and set off, breathing out threats! (statue)

Suddenly, a bright light shone on Saul, blinding him! (statue)

SESSION
ONE

A voice spoke to him. 'Saul, why are you persecuting me?'

'Who are you, Lord?' asked Saul.

'I am Jesus, who you are persecuting. Stop, Saul, and follow me. You know it is hard for you to keep denying me like this!' (statue)

Saul got up and carried on... but he could not see anything and his friends had to help him get to Damascus. (statue)

In Damascus, Saul sat and prayed. He fasted, too. He spoke to Jesus and waited for someone to come and heal him. (statue)

And someone came! A man called Ananias came to the house where Saul was staying. God had sent him, and even though Ananias was afraid that Saul would have him killed, he obeyed God. He prayed for Saul and Saul was healed! He could see again! (statue)

Saul lost no time... immediately he went out, joined the Church, and started preaching about Jesus and how he was the Son of God! Everyone was amazed at the change in him! (statue)

The Jewish leaders were furious that Saul had become a Christian and planned to kill him... Saul had to escape... he was put in a basket and lowered out of a window and over the city wall by his new Christian friends. (statue)

But that was only the beginning of Saul's adventures as a follower of Jesus! For the rest of his life he would risk danger and death countless times... but he was glad to do so, because he loved Jesus so very, very much. (statue)

WITNESS

a. Toy Story 4 trailer (just watch the first 50 seconds)

 www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmilUN-7qhE

The new 'toy' Forkie is having trouble accepting his new identity and his new purpose in life. He has been created for a reason and is very much loved by his creator! At the time of writing we don't yet know the full story of the new film or how Forkie's life will turn out, but we can tell that he has had a dramatic conversion from a dull existence of being a spork, to being a valued and precious part of a family! Forkie didn't do anything to deserve this turn around in his life – he was simply picked out and chosen – now all he's got to do is accept himself and his new calling in life.

Saul transformed from being someone who persecuted and killed Christians to one of the most dynamic and passionate early missionaries. We see that becoming a Christian is a life-changing event – a real change of direction. It was obvious in Paul because his life had been so very opposed to Jesus; but it should be discernible in us!

Give each person a plastic/wooden spoon or fork (or spork!) and a marker pen. Ask them to think of one word to describe their life before they met Jesus, and one word after. Have them write the words on opposite sides of the spoon/fork. (You could add some self-adhesive googly eyes for good measure!)

Share together if appropriate.

b. Reassure the group that our conversion experience does not have to be as dramatic as Paul's. Sometimes God does break into a person's life in a spectacular manner, and sometimes (perhaps more often) conversion is a quiet experience or something that grows within us over time. What we do need, though, is a personal encounter with Jesus.

Continue your discussion and ask group members to share about their own conversion experiences and/or to write or draw about the difference that they feel Jesus has made in their lives. What transformation in them took place instantly? What is the more gradual transformation that has taken place?

c. When was the last time you posted on your social media accounts about the difference that Jesus has made in your life? Write a post and share it now!

d. When Saul became a Christian everything changed for him – even his name! Ask the group to think about their own lives: are there things they think they need to change in order to follow Jesus more wholeheartedly?

WORSHIP

There is an old hymn called 'Since Jesus came into my heart', written by Rufus H. McDaniel in 1914. The lyrics are written in an old-fashioned style, but the heart behind the song is all about what a wonderful difference Jesus had made in our lives, that we can still relate to today.

Ask the group to rewrite some or all of these lyrics using more modern-day words and ideas. They don't have to fit the original tune. Perhaps you could create a rap instead!

Use your words in a time of prayer to thank Jesus for the transformation that he has brought about in your lives.

1. What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought,
Since Jesus came into my heart.
I have light in my soul for which long I had sought,
Since Jesus came into my heart.

Refrain:

Since Jesus came into my heart,
Since Jesus came into my heart;
Floods of joy o'er my soul like the sea billows roll,
Since Jesus came into my heart.

2. I have ceased from my wandering and going astray,
Since Jesus came into my heart.
And my sins which were many are all washed away,
Since Jesus came into my heart.
3. I'm possessed of a hope that is steadfast and sure,
Since Jesus came into my heart.
And no dark clouds of doubt now my pathway obscure,
Since Jesus came into my heart.
4. I shall go there to dwell in that city I know,
Since Jesus came into my heart.
And I'm happy, so happy, as onward I go,
Since Jesus came into my heart. (SASB 907)

b. Saul was an unlikely Christian – probably the Church prayed that God would protect them from him; it is unlikely that they prayed for him to become a Christian... but he did!

Think of someone you know that you think is unlikely to become a Christian. Spend some time now praying that Jesus will speak to that person and turn their life around, like he did with Saul.

c. The song 'Love Takes Over' by Beth Croft would be a good one to end this session.

SESSION
ONE

ACTS QUIZ

1. **Paul was born in Tarsus, but which modern-day country is this city in?**
 - a. Greece
 - b. Turkey
 - c. Israel
 - d. Syria
2. **In what city were Paul and Silas when they were put into jail?**
 - a. Rome
 - b. Troas
 - c. Philippi
 - d. Antioch
3. **Who looked after the coats of the men who stoned Stephen?**
 - a. Peter
 - b. Saul
 - c. Gamaliel
 - d. Joseph
4. **In which city did Silas and Timothy meet up with Paul?**
 - a. Corinth
 - b. Antioch
 - c. Athens
 - d. Rome
5. **Where in Philippi did Paul meet Lydia of Thyatira?**
 - a. Outside the city gates
 - b. At a wedding feast
 - c. On her estate
 - d. In the synagogue
6. **What was Paul's profession?**
 - a. Tentmaker
 - b. Carpenter
 - c. Fisherman
 - d. Soldier
7. **What was the name of the young man who fell out of the window during one of Paul's speeches?**
 - a. Philemon
 - b. Tychicus
 - c. Eutyclus
 - d. Onesimus
8. **What misfortune did Paul encounter on the way to Rome?**
 - a. Tornado
 - b. Whirlpool
 - c. Illness
 - d. Shipwreck
9. **Towards which city was Saul travelling when he encountered a light from heaven?**
 - a. Jerusalem
 - b. Damascus
 - c. Tarsus
 - d. Antioch
10. **What natural calamity happened when Paul and Silas were in prison?**
 - a. A volcano eruption
 - b. A violent earthquake
 - c. A severe typhoon lashed the area
 - d. A freak snowstorm paralysed the area
11. **In which city is it generally believed that Paul died?**
 - a. Antioch
 - b. Jerusalem
 - c. Athens
 - d. Rome

Answers 1=b; 2=c; 3=b; 4=a; 5=a; 6=a; 7=c; 8=d; 9=b; 10=b; 11=d

WHAT SAUL'S CONVERSION MEANS FOR US TODAY: AN INVITATION TO NEW LIFE – GRACE AS A GIFT

WELCOME

Make the room as dark as possible. (Remove any hazards first.)

Ask the group members to move carefully around the room, making sure they don't bump into anyone or anything. The leader, after a few seconds, switches on the torch. Anyone caught in the beam must fall to the floor and then make their way to a designated safe area where they can wait without getting in the way of the game. The game continues until all but one has been caught in the beam of light. (It's a tentative link to Saul's encounter with Jesus with the blinding light!)

(Adapted from www.energize.uk.net/meeting-plans/1391)

OR

Choose two or three nearly impossible tasks, such as reciting the books of the Bible backwards or blowing up a balloon with your nose. Set an unreasonable time limit for accomplishing the task and promise the group a fantastic prize if they can accomplish the task within the time limit. Afterwards, as the group start complaining that 'it's not fair', that there is no way they can win the prize, give them the prize anyway (now or later in the session), even though they haven't done anything to earn or deserve it. (If you do this you may not need to do the wordsearch activity below as well.)

WORD

a. Hand out copies of the animal wordsearch puzzle and pens and explain that this is a speed contest. You will allow them two minutes to find as many words as possible – whoever has the most at the end of two minutes wins the prize. (NB: The wordsearch puzzle provided is literally impossible – none of the words listed can be found. The point of the activity is to provide a demonstration of an undeserved reward – the principle of grace.)

Time the two minutes and then pick a person from the group and ask them to shout out how many words they have found. When they reply 'None', you should say 'Brilliant! Well done! Here's your prize!' The rest of the group will no doubt be confused! You can then explain that you wanted to show them what God's grace is – an undeserved gift – one which can't be earned, however hard we try! (Like the impossible puzzle which can't be solved however hard they try.)


Hand out the rest of the chocolate so that everyone can enjoy it together. You could invite them to think about and/or share with the group other examples of grace they have experienced as they eat their chocolate.

(Adapted from www.energize.uk.net/meeting-plans/376)

b. Galatians 1:11-16; 1 Corinthians 15:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:12-14

Print out the following Scriptures and hand out to volunteers to read aloud. Explain that these are all written by Paul in his letters to the early Christians.

Sit in a circle and read/listen to one Scripture at a time. The first time the word 'grace' is read out, all stand up; the next time you hear it, all sit down again – and so on until all the Scriptures have been read aloud!

 Brothers and sisters, I want you to know that the Good News I preached to you was not made up by human beings. I did not get it from humans, nor did anyone teach it to me, but Jesus Christ showed it to me.

You have heard about my past life in the Jewish religion. I attacked the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was becoming a leader in the Jewish religion, doing better than most other Jews of my age. I tried harder than anyone else to follow the teachings handed down by our ancestors.

But God had special plans for me and set me apart for his work even before I was born. He called me through his grace and showed his son to me so that I might tell the Good News about him to those who are not Jewish.

Galatians 1:11-16 NCV

SESSION TWO

☞ All the other apostles are greater than I am. I am not even good enough to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But God’s grace has made me what I am, and his grace to me was not wasted. I worked harder than all the other apostles. (But it was not I really; it was God’s grace that was with me.)

1 Corinthians 15:9-10 NCV

☞ I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who gave me strength, because he trusted me and gave me this work of serving him. In the past I spoke against Christ and persecuted him and did all kinds of things to hurt him. But God showed me mercy, because I did not know what I was doing. I did not believe. But the grace of our Lord was fully given to me, and with that grace came the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 1:12-14 NCV

☞ Here’s a word you can take to heart and depend on: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. I’m proof – Public Sinner Number One – of someone who could never have made it apart from sheer mercy.

1 Timothy 1:15 MSG

c. Paul has much to say about grace. 87 out of the 129 occurrences of the word in Scripture are found in his letters. Paul’s emphasis on grace is hardly surprising, given the nature of his conversion experience. Of all the apostles, he was the one who had perhaps experienced grace most dramatically, having been called and accepted by Jesus despite his intense persecution and hatred of the Early Church.

“ ‘The apostle Paul understood God’s grace in a way most of us never will. This man who persecuted and killed Jesus’ followers received his lavish grace in abundance. Paul, the self-proclaimed ‘worst of sinners’ (1 Timothy 1:15), experienced the overflowing richness of God’s grace. And he was never the same... Not only did Paul live his life as an expression of gratitude for God’s unbounded grace, but a river of grace flows through his writings as well. In his letters, Paul shows how God’s grace washes through and over every party of a believers’ life. His grace is not “just enough” for us, it’s far more than “sufficient”. It is freely given. Abundantly poured out. Without boundaries or limits.’

Kathy Howard, Lavish Grace

Ask the group – what is grace?

Write the word GRACE on a large sheet of paper and, as you discuss with the group, write/draw around the word what you feel grace is. Any of the soundbites below may help you in your discussion and you could write some of these on your poster as you chat.

When you have finished the discussion, ask the group why they feel that Paul wrote so much about grace.

Grace is God’s unmerited favour.

It is kindness from God we don’t deserve.

Generous kindness even when undeserved.

There is nothing we have done, nor can we ever do, to earn this favour/kindness. It is a gift from God.

It is through grace that we were all able to become Christians in the first place. (Ephesians 2:8)

Some people use the following acronym:

God’s

Riches

At

Christ’s

Expense

Grace is the love of God shown to the unlovely; the peace of God given to the restless; the unmerited favour of God.

Grace is the opposite of karma, which is all about getting what you deserve. Grace is getting what you don't deserve, and not getting what you do deserve.

More than we deserve and greater than we imagine.

“ ‘When a person works an eight-hour day and receives a fair day’s pay for his time, that is a wage. When a person competes with an opponent and receives a trophy for his performance, that is a prize. When a person receives appropriate recognition for his long service or high achievements, that is an award. But when a person is not capable of earning a wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award – yet receives such a gift anyway – that is a good picture of God’s unmerited favour. This is what we mean when we talk about the grace of God.’

(G.W. Knight)

To finish your discussion watch the following video clip.

📺 GRACE by Max Lucado – www.youtube.com/watch?v=dT2rAo293HQ (2mins)

d. Ask each group member to think of an experience of God’s grace that they have had in their own lives. Or an instance when someone else extended grace to them even if they had maybe mistreated the other person or not done anything to deserve it. Share together if appropriate.

WITNESS

a. Discuss:

- 🗣️ God was working in Paul’s life even whilst he was breathing out murderous threats against the believers. How do you expect to see God working in the lives of those around you who are not Christians?
- 🗣️ Who around you is the most antagonistic to Christianity? How might God use you to bring them to Christ?
- 🗣️ Saul transformed from being someone who actively persecuted and killed Christians to one of the most dynamic and passionate early missionaries. What does this tell us about our past mistakes and feelings that God can never use us when we’ve messed up in some way? (Look up 2 Corinthians 5:17.)
- 🗣️ In what ways do we limit God’s grace?
- 🗣️ How should we demonstrate God’s grace to others?

b. Paul said:

📖 ‘But because God was so gracious, so very generous, here I am. And I’m not about to let his grace go to waste.’

1 Corinthians 15: 10 MSG

Paul also tells us that with this gift of grace comes a responsibility – to show grace to others, just as it has been shown to us. (2 Corinthians 4:15)

Give each group member a plain piece of paper and ask them to draw a line down the middle. On one side of the line they should write ‘ME’, and on the other side of the line they should write ‘OTHERS’. Ask them to think about how they can ensure that they do not let God’s gift of grace go to waste in their life. On the ME side they should jot down thoughts about embracing God’s grace personally, such as receiving God’s forgiveness, not holding on to guilt, not believing negative thoughts about themselves, remembering to spend time with Jesus. On the OTHERS side they should jot down thoughts on how they should extend God’s grace, love and kindness to others, which can include practical actions as well as forgiving others etc. Share together if appropriate.

Brainstorm together some practical ways that you could extend and demonstrate God’s grace to others; you could use this time to start chatting about Session Four.

SESSION
TWO

WORSHIP

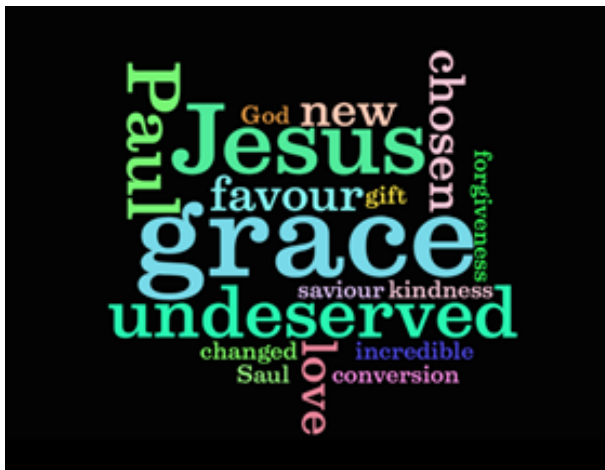
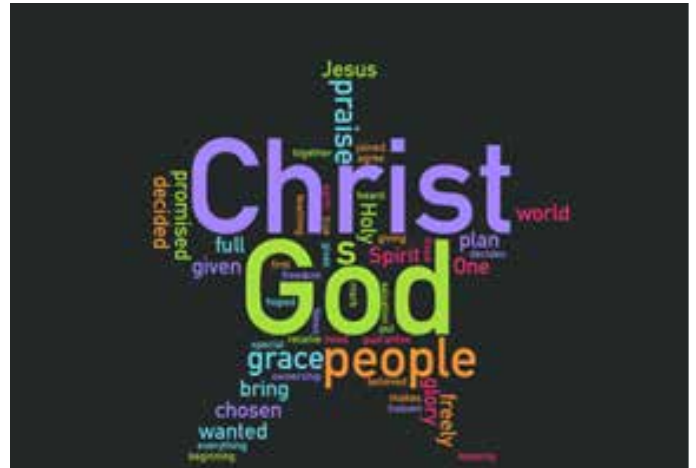
Use any of the Scriptures that you have read during this session and put the text into a word cloud generator. You could use an online website such as www.wordle.net, or an app such as Word Clouds by ABCYa. (You can also find this programme online at www.abcya.com/word_clouds.htm.) The easiest way to do this is to copy the words from Bible Gateway and paste them into the word cloud generator.

Here's one using the text from Ephesians 1:3-14, where Paul is bursting with excitement and joy over what God has done in his life!

(Created using the app Word Clouds by ABCYa)

Or you could simply type in a list of words that summarise all you have been talking about during the last two sessions and see what the word cloud generator creates. The more often you type a word, the bigger it will appear. You could do this as one group – type words as group members shout them out – don't worry about repeating words several times! Print or email a copy for each group member, or get them to take a photo with their phone. Or you could encourage each group member to generate their own word cloud and show them to each other.

Here's two examples:



(If it would be easier, you could generate and print several different word clouds beforehand and hand them out to be used in your time of prayer as below.)

Play some reflective music and send some time quietly reflecting on the word clouds you have generated. Try 'Grace' by Martin Smith on the album *God's Great Dance Floor Step 02*.

Then ask each group member to pray a simple prayer using the same words, thanking Jesus for all he has done for us, thanking him for his grace and kindness, and asking him to use us to reach out to others with his love and grace.

Animal wordsearch

d	e	g	u	I	p	j	r	s	c	f	e	d	c
f	k	c	o	l	p	j	u	g	r	w	a	r	c
s	l	t	t	a	r	s	r	a	g	n	a	k	d
d	s	n	s	k	e	n	d	p	e	n	g	u	s
e	h	o	e	l	e	a	r	a	s	f	g	I	u
r	a	n	t	s	e	I	e	d	f	e	n	w	h
t	d	l	I	r	o	g	k	k	m	n	h	b	c
y	l	a	m	a	d	f	n	o	p	u	s	s	a
u	q	u	a	k	e	c	o	c	v	a	u	q	k
a	b	a	r	c	o	g	m	t	v	t	y	s	a
I	m	n	p	o	f	y	h	o	d	s	a	I	p
m	d	f	y	j	I	o	p	s	a	c	v	c	e

Animals to find:

armadillo	fish	llama	quail
bear	gorilla	monkey	rattlesnake
cat	horse	octopus	seal
dog	iguana	rabbit	turtle
elephant	kangaroo	penquin	walrus

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE: MEDITATION

WELCOME

Try some breathing exercises with the group. For example:

Focused belly breath

- * Take a few normal breaths to begin with.
- * Then, take a full inhale through your nose – see if you can make your belly rise with the air you breathe in.
- * Hold the breath for a brief moment and then exhale slowly through your nose.
- * Breathe in, hold for a second, breathe out.
- * Try and make the inhale and exhale an equal length.
- * If it's hard to make your belly rise with the inhale, don't worry. Just focus on the 'breath in, hold, breath out' pattern. It's enough just to do this.
- * Once you get the hang of it, you might want to add some counting to it. You could count up to ten, thinking the number in your head on the exhale.

(www.otrbristol.org.uk/the-resilience-lab/tips-tricks/mindfulness-tip-2)

A quick internet/YouTube search will give you loads of other relaxing breathing techniques.

OR

Word Connections

Sit the group in a circle.

The group leader starts this game by saying a word – for example, 'ice-cream'. The next person in the circle must quickly say a word that is associated with this word, eg, 'sunshine'. The next person says something associated with the word 'sunshine', eg, 'sunburn'. This carries on around the circle until one person hesitates for too long or someone says something that can in no way be deemed to be associated with the word! Total up how many word connections you were able to make as a group. Then begin again!

WORD

1. Introduce the Spiritual Discipline for this session: meditation.

Ask the group what they think meditation is. Have they ever tried meditation?

Share any experiences of meditation that they may have had.

2. Explain to the group about Christian meditation using any of the following information.

There is a handout attached at the end that you can print out for your group.

Refer to Saul travelling on his way to Damascus. We know that he was a deeply devout Jew, for whom prayer and meditation would have been a daily routine, along with studying the Scriptures. Some scholars have suggested that Saul was meditating on the Scriptures on this long journey, and that it was as he was in this place of openness to God, in the depth of his meditation, that Jesus broke into his life in such a dramatic way.


“ ‘What happens in meditation is that we create the emotional and spiritual space which allows Christ to construct an inner sanctuary in the heart.’

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

“ It’s not about daydreaming, it’s about dwelling on God’s word.”¹

Christian meditation is a way of allowing God and Scripture to fill our mind, of hearing God speak to us, especially through the Bible. It is not some dodgy practice associated with eastern mysticism or the New Age movement. Neither is it simply a focus on ourselves and what is going on inside our bodies as many mindfulness techniques encourage. Meditation demands discipline, as our minds are apt to wander off the topic!

Christian meditation is rooted in the Bible. In fact, the Bible commands us to meditate. In Joshua 1:8, God says to meditate on his word day and night so we will obey it. The psalmist says, ‘His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night’ (Psalm 1:2 RSV). Actually, the Bible mentions ‘meditate’ or ‘meditation’ at least 20 times. (See also Genesis 24:63; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 48:9; and Psalm 119: 97,148.)

 I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done.

Psalm 143:5 (NIV)

“ Christian meditation is active. We do not empty our minds; we fill them thoroughly with God’s truth. We do not lose our attention, but focus and concentrate it on Jesus. We do not seek relaxation, we seek attentiveness to the Word of God. We do not let ideas float around with no fixed direction, we fix our thoughts on the Word, the promises, the commandments, the self-revelation of God.”²

When you are meditating on a passage of the Bible, you can also use your imagination to get beyond the words. Imagine you are there in the scene, as a bystander or one of the principal characters. What can you hear, see and smell? How do you feel? What are you thinking about? How would you respond to the situation going on around you? What do you learn about yourself, about others and about God or Jesus?

This is a good article that you may find useful as you chat to your group about meditation:
www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/10-things-you-should-know-about-christian-meditation.html

WORSHIP

Do some meditation together.

First talk your group through the following steps, then choose from any of the meditation activities below. After each activity bring the group back together to share how they found the meditation and anything that Jesus said to them. You can use these thoughts in a time of prayer together.

Step-by-step instructions on how to meditate on Scripture.

- * Relax – it’s very easy, so don’t get uptight or anxious about it.
- * Look up the suggested Scripture.
- * Read it slowly.
- * Pray and ask God to speak to you through it.
- * Read it again several times.
- * Spend time thinking about what the verse says.
- * Perhaps dwell on a phrase or section of the verse, or even just one word.
- * Allow yourself to follow a train of thought, until you see something in the verse you have never seen before.
- * Write down your thoughts.
- * If your mind begins to wander totally off the subject, then start again.³

¹ <https://fervr.net/bible/christian-meditation>

² <https://fervr.net/bible/christian-meditation>

³ Nancy Goudie, *Spiritual Health Workout*

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- a. Try the above steps with a simple Scripture – for example, Psalm 23 or Psalm 1:1–3.
- b. Meditate on Mark 10:46–52, the healing of blind Bartimaeus. Read the Scripture together and ask the group members to find a quiet spot to think over the story, using the following text as a guide. Encourage them to really use their imaginations to immerse themselves in the story:

Take some time and imagine yourself in the crowd that day in Jericho. It's hot, dry and dusty (it almost always is there). You're excited, you're with Jesus; you're going up to Jerusalem. And here is someone shouting from the roadside. It's a nuisance. It's possibly even dangerous. (If enough people call him Son of David, someone in authority is going to get alarmed.) Examine your own feelings. Try to remember other times when you've felt like that. Then watch as Jesus, never put out by what annoys his followers, turns to speak to the blind man. How do you feel about that? Do you want this beggar in the party? How about when Jesus speaks warm and welcoming words to him? Has he ever spoken to you like that? How do you feel as you set off together up the hill to Jerusalem?

Now imagine yourself as the blind man. We all have something, by no means a physical ailment, that we know is getting in the way of our being the person we believe God wants us and made us to be. Sit by the roadside and listen to the crowd. Examine your own feelings when you discover it's Jesus coming by. Call out to him, and when he summons you, put everything aside and go to him. And when he asks you what you want him to do, go for it. Don't look back at the small, selfish comforts of victimhood. Ask for freedom, for salvation. And when you get it, be prepared to follow Jesus wherever he goes next.⁴

- c. Send the group off on their own to find a quiet place in which they can meditate quietly for 10 minutes. Select a Scripture for them, such as: Psalm 1:1–3; John 3:16; 1 John 1:9; Isaiah 41:9–10; Luke 4:18–19; Psalm 23; Psalm 139: 13–16; Ephesians 1:4–6; Psalm 145: 3–9; Ephesians 3:14–21.
- d. Give each group member a printout of a Scripture that has words that can be coloured in. (Four examples are included below – all sourced from an internet image search.) Provide some coloured pens/pencils and ask each person to quietly meditate on the words as they colour them in.
- e. Explore the *Presence* app/website.

Using music, film, poetry and photography, the *Presence App* (URL below) provides a collection of chapters created to lead us in reflection and prayer. The music on its own would be fantastic to use with any of the meditations above. However, each chapter is based on a Scripture, which has inspired the music, poetry, photography and film that go with it. The aim is to encourage us to take time out of our busy lives to just 'be' in God's presence – no agenda, no lists, just us and God.

There is loads of material available on this app/website, so allow yourself some time to explore before this session and select something that would work well for your group. You could also encourage each group member to download the app (it's free) and use some of the content as meditation throughout this month. You can find all the info on the website here: www.presenceproject.com

Here's an idea to get started using 'New Creation', based on 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV):

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;

old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Give each group member a copy of the Bible text with a pen and ask them to get into a comfortable position. Play the track for a few minutes whilst they meditate on the Scripture. You can play the track with or without showing the associated film. When you have finished you can ask group members to feed back their thoughts and feelings on the meditation, and anything they have heard God saying to them. You could also look at the images and read the poetry inspired by this Scripture. Perhaps group members could write their own poems or prayers too.

f. Put on some quiet reflective music and ask each group member to get into a comfortable position with their eyes closed. Read them the attached meditation 'It Should Have Been Me' and ask them to try to imagine the scenes and feel the emotions. Afterwards allow a few minutes of quiet, and then ask people to share what they felt and thought. Use these thoughts in a time of prayer, expressing thanks for all that Jesus has done for us.

⁴ N.T. Wright, *Mark For Everyone*. pp 144–145

It Should Have Been Me

(Nancy Goudie, 2002, *Journey to the Cross* Meditation CD. www.nancygoudie.com)

In this meditation I want you to imagine you are a Jew living 2,000 years ago when Israel was conquered by Romans.

Close your eyes and use your imagination to see yourself in a dungeon. You are a prisoner and you only have a few hours left to live before the authorities are going to crucify you. All sorts of regrets fill your mind: Why did I fight? Why did I murder that man? You try to put your thoughts aside, but the anticipation of death ahead seems to cloud and darken your mind. Nothing seems to take away the agony and utter devastation you feel. You joke with others in your cell that today is your big day, but everything within you is screaming for a way out. You wonder how you are going to face your family and friends. You begin to pray for a brave heart but end up screaming inwardly for God to forgive you and get you out of this mess. Heaven seems to be closed to you and you decide if there really is a God then either he is sleeping or he doesn't hear prayers from a waster like you. You feel as though your head is going to explode with the heaviness of your thoughts – but at that precise moment the door is opened and your jailer tells you it's time for you to leave. You get up to walk out of your cell, but your legs give way from under you. You stumble across the room, knowing that this will be the last walk you will ever take.

As you reach the entrance to the cell you are told you are to be taken to see the governor. You don't understand why, but think this may be one of their 'procedures' before your ultimate journey's end – dying on a rough tree they call a 'cross'.

Your heart is beating wildly as you walk into the governor's room. He takes one look at you and says, 'You are free to go!'

'Free to go? What do you mean? How can this be? I am due to be crucified today!'

The governor's reply seems to echo throughout the prison: 'You are free because someone else took your place. He was crucified instead of you.'

You can hardly take the words in! Your heart is thumping in your chest – so many questions fill your mind: Why did someone else die in my place? Why I am being given the right to live? Relief floods through your whole being. You are alive, you are no longer condemned to die, all your guilt has been cancelled out, you are free.

You quickly leave the prison and run into the fresh air. You look at the grass, the trees, the leaves, the sky. Thankfulness and joy floods your being as you fill your lungs with fresh pure air. On the horizon across the sky you suddenly see three crosses. You run out of the city to the hill called Golgotha and there in the middle of two thieves is the man who took your place. Above his torn and bruised body is the inscription 'Jesus – the King of the Jews'. You look at his bloodied feet and hands where crude metal has brutally nailed them to the tree. You see his back where it looks as though he's been whipped dozens of times until his back is like a ploughed field. You look at his head – pierced with thorns until the blood is constantly running down his face. You look into his eyes, and inwardly you gasp because you are surprised at what you see. Instead of fear and anger you see love and forgiveness. He looks straight at you and seems to know who you are. In the depth of his pain he seems to smile and say, 'It's OK. It's OK.' You turn away, and with tears in your eyes you shout to the skies, 'God, it should have been me! It should have been me! This man has done nothing. It should have been me!'

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WITNESS

Ask each person to try one of the challenges below this coming month, or come up with their own ideas to experience the spiritual discipline of meditation:

- * Meditate on Psalm 23. Write down what you feel, think, hear God say to you.
- * Meditate on Psalm 139:13-16. Write down what you feel, think, hear God say to you.
- * Go out and spend some time in a place of particular beauty or with a spectacular view. Meditate on God's creation and his gifts to you.
- * Pick one of your favourite music tracks and practise some relaxing breathing techniques. As you do so, consciously open yourself up to God and connect with him. What does he want to say to you?
- * Print out a Scripture text colouring sheet. Meditate on the Scripture as you colour in the words. (Image search 'Bible text colouring' and you will find lots of options!)
- * Every morning:

 'This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.' (Psalm 118:24 *NKJV*)

Read the above meditation three times aloud.

Each time you read it, place emphasis on a different word.

Take a deep breath in... exhale. Repeat.

Close your eyes and silently repeat the meditation three times in alignment with your breathing.

Take in another deep cleansing breath and exhale.

Spend a few more moments enjoying the silence.

Open your eyes.

Ask God to make these words alive in you today.

Ponder the meditation throughout the day.

Thank God for his love, guidance and protection and have a great day!

- * Explore the Presence App and make some time to use the music, film, poetry and photography to help you meditate and just be with God.

⁵ <https://thechristianmeditator.com/daily-christian-meditations>

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE: MEDITATION


“What happens in meditation is that we create the emotional and spiritual space which allows Christ to construct an inner sanctuary in the heart.’

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

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Christian meditation is a way of allowing God and Scripture to fill our mind, of hearing God speak to us, especially through the Bible. It is not some dodgy practice associated with eastern mysticism or the New Age movement! Meditation demands discipline as our minds are apt to wander off the topic!

Christian meditation is rooted in the Bible. In fact, the Bible commands us to meditate. In Joshua 1:8, God says to meditate on his word day and night so we will obey it. The psalmist says 'his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law he meditates day and night' (Psalm 1:2). Actually, the Bible mentions meditate or meditation at least 20 times. (See also Genesis 24:63; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 48:9; and Psalm 119: 97,148.)

 I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done.

Psalm 143:5 (NIV)


“Christian meditation is active. We do not empty our minds; we fill them thoroughly with God's truth. We do not lose our attention, but focus and concentrate it on Jesus. We do not seek relaxation, we seek attentiveness to the Word of God. We do not let ideas float around with no fixed direction, we fix our thoughts on the Word, the promises, the commandments, the self-revelation of God.”⁷

Read these step-by-step instructions on how to meditate on Scripture.

- * Relax – it's very easy, so don't get uptight or anxious about it.
- * Look up the suggested Scripture.
- * Read it slowly.
- * Pray and ask God to speak to you through it.
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- * Spend time thinking about what the verse says.
- * Perhaps dwell on a phrase or section of the verse, or even just one word.

- * Allow yourself to follow a train of thought, until you see something in the verse you have never seen before.
- * Write down your thoughts.
- * If your mind begins to wander totally off the subject, then start again.⁸

Developing Meditation

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 -  'This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.' (Psalm 118:24 NKJV)
 - Read the above meditation three times aloud.
 - Each time you read it, place emphasis on a different word.
 - Take a deep breath in... exhale. Repeat.
 - Close your eyes and silently repeat the meditation three times in alignment with your breathing.
 - Take in another deep cleansing breath and exhale.
 - Spend a few more moments enjoying the silence.
 - Open your eyes.
 - Ask God to make these words alive in you today.
 - Ponder the meditation throughout the day.
 - Thank God for his love, guidance and protection and have a great day!⁹
- * Explore the *Presence* App and make some time to use the music, film, poetry and photography to help you meditate and just be with God.

⁶ fervr.net/bible/christian-meditation

⁷ fervr.net/bible/christian-meditation

⁸ Nancy Goudie, *Spiritual Health Workout*

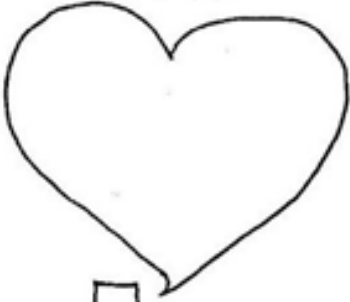
⁹ thechristianmeditator.com/daily-christian-meditations

I am
THE WAY

the TRUTH,
and the
LIFE.

No one comes to
the FATHER
except through
ME.

JOHN 14:6

Trust in the
LORD with
all your 
heart and
do not lean on
your own
understanding

Proverbs 3:5



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

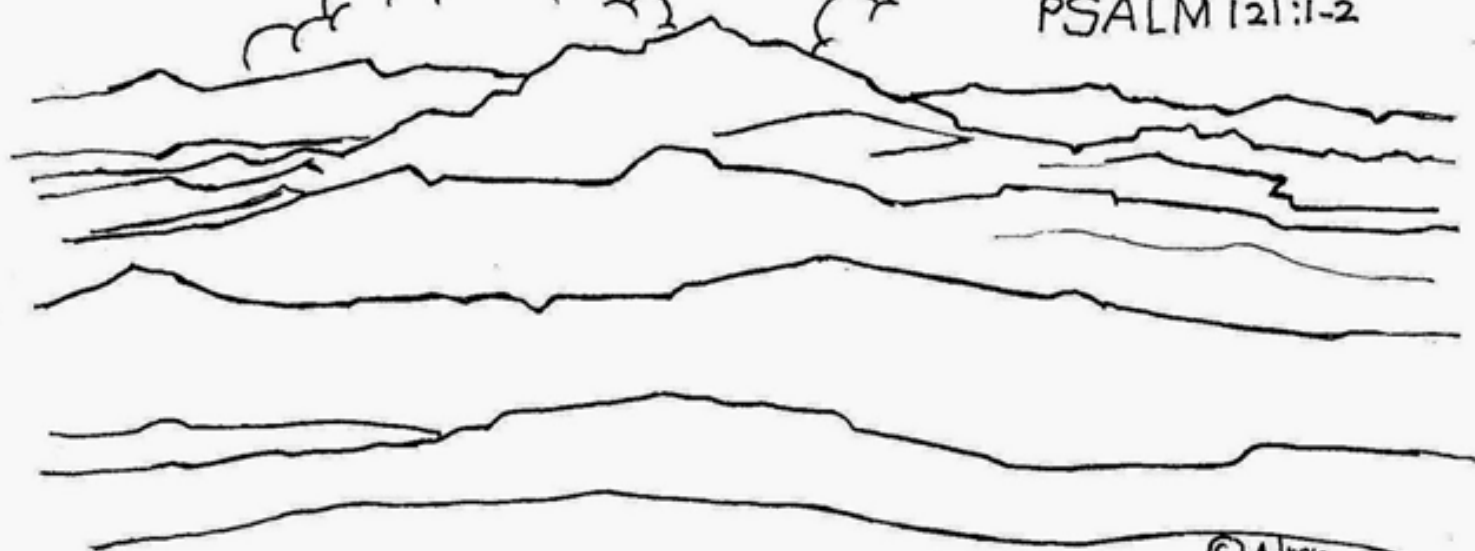
neighbour as

you love yourself

LUKE 10:27

I LIFT UP MY EYES
TO THE MOUNTAINS-
WHERE DOES MY HELP
COME FROM?
MY HELP COMES
FROM THE LORD,
THE MAKER OF
HEAVEN AND EARTH.

PSALM 121:1-2



ACTS INTO ACTION: WHERE CAN YOU LIVE OUT GOD'S GRACE?

This is a practical week in which you should aim to do something tangible to 'live out God's grace' both with individuals around you and in your community.

Use the following thoughts by way of introduction to this session, and to set the scene for the practical actions that you will do.

You could use this session to plan your 'acts of kindness', which you then carry out on an alternative date.

Or use this session to get out into the community and get started. In this case you may need to make time during the preceding three sessions to make your arrangements. Don't forget any necessary risk assessments and to obtain parental permission (or any other permissions) where needed.

Finally, at the end of this session outline is a calendar month of July filled with acts of kindness – one for every day. This is from Random Acts of Kindness, so it does have some American terminology. Give out one of these to each of your young people and challenge them to complete all the kindness acts this month! Or you could encourage group members to prepare their own calendar. If you would like a different month, go to www.randomactsofkindness.org.

Read these words of Paul, who is bursting with excitement and joy over what God has done in his life! In this Bible translation the word kindness is used, whereas in other translations the word grace is used. Clearly kindness and grace have something in common!

“ Before the world was created, God had Christ choose us to live with him and to be his holy and innocent and loving people. God was kind and decided that Christ would choose us to be God's own adopted children. God was very kind to us because of the Son he dearly loves, and so we should praise God.

Christ sacrificed his life's blood to set us free, which means that our sins are now forgiven. Christ did this because God was so kind to us. God has great wisdom and understanding, and by what Christ has done, God has shown us his own mysterious ways. Then when the time is right, God will do all that he has planned, and Christ will bring together everything in heaven and on earth.

Ephesians 1:4-10 CEV

“ All of this has been done for you, so that more and more people will know how kind God is and will praise and honour him.

2 Corinthians 4:15 CEV

Paul lists kindness as one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). It's one of the ways that we can demonstrate that we are followers of Jesus.

True kindness is Spirit-produced. It's a supernaturally generous orientation of our hearts toward other people, even when they don't deserve it and don't love us in return. God himself is kind in this way. His kindness is meant to lead people to repentance (Romans 2:4).¹⁰

By definition grace means being kind to those who don't deserve it. To give and do without any expectation that the other person will reciprocate. To show kindness to those that have hurt us and meet the needs of those who will never be able to help us in return.

Are we ever stingy or choosy with the kindness God has freely given us? As believers we have an abundant supply of his grace. God has given us more than we need; yet sometimes we hoard it. We withhold it from those who desperately need it. We give expecting to receive something in return. But what about those people who have no

¹⁰ www.desiringgod.org/articles/kindness-changes-everything



ability to invite, to give, help or offer? How quick are we to extend grace to the orphan, the widow, the homeless, the invalid, the dying? Many of us find it easy to give money or goods, but what about our time and attention?¹¹

“ **The task of the Church is simply to reflect God and in doing so demonstrate a faith that works. I believe that it is through our actions that our faith speaks and we reflect God faithfully. Rather than primarily talking about God we, the Church, should be demonstrating God... When we love people we (as God’s representatives) are showing them that God loves them, and in faithfully fulfilling our role we are showing God that we love him.**”

Steve Chalke, 100 Proven Ways to Transform Your Community

Jesus talks about this kind of ministry in Matthew 10:42, when he instructs: ‘This is a large work I’ve called you into, but don’t be overwhelmed by it. It’s best to start small. Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice. You won’t lose out on a thing’ (MSG).

Simple gestures of day-to-day kindness, grace and service speak volumes and show that we genuinely care and love others. Kindness is no small thing. It yields marvellous fruit both in our lives and the lives of those around us.

There are lots of different kindness campaigns out there. For example: **Random Acts of Kindness** (www.randomactsofkindness.org), **GoodGym** (www.goodgym.org), **KindnessUK** (kindnessuk.com) and **40acts** (40acts.org.uk/about). **The Noise** in Bristol is also all about showing God’s love in practical ways: see bristolnoise.org.uk. Have a browse around these websites if you need some inspiration.

The Salvation Army ‘I’ll Fight Day’ has also been based on the premise of showing kindness and grace to individuals and the community. (See more at illfightday.com.) Here are a few stories of what some groups have done as part of I’ll Fight Day in past years.

Chatham Youff (Youthful Outgoing Understanding Faith-filled Followers) picked up sponges, spray bottles and squeegees and cleaned 50+ car windscreens/windows in less than two hours. The group left a card on each windscreen explaining why they had chosen to serve God by serving others that day. The response from drivers was positive if bemused by the offer of a no-strings-attached window wash. One person, when told there was no charge, responded that ‘it lifts your faith in humanity’. The group finished, tired and ever so slightly damp, but proud that they too could make a difference if they tried.

The young people from Romford Salvation Army headed out in force armed with cakes, cookies and friendly faces for the I’ll Fight Day 2014. Our first mission was to visit the neighbouring shops and say thank you for being such great neighbours. We then headed to Romford’s busy market place to hand out more treats to the general public, spreading smiles to so many we came into contact with. Hundreds of cakes were given out, as well as hundreds of invitations to a free community lunch. We met up with our local MP, the local police and plenty of friendly locals. The response from the public was incredible, with one market stall owner tweeting: ‘So much love in Romford today... I never knew people in Romford could be so nice.’

Blackpool Citadel youth started the day helping at a fundraising coffee morning at the Citadel before nipping out to do a litter pick. We then went out into the town centre to hand out gifts of sweet treats. The treats were attached to gift tags which featured words of Scripture and inspiration. We also left a few about for people to find and brighten up their day! It was great meeting people and sharing God’s gift of love with the people and holidaymakers in Blackpool.

So, how can your group get out into the community with a practical demonstration of God’s love, grace and kindness? Think about your local community. Are there any areas of need that really touch your heart? Where/when could you make the biggest impact, reach the greatest number of people?

What you do during the day is totally up to you and your group – depending on what you’re able to do and what you think is needed in the community! The most important thing is that you do something in your community for FREE. The goal is to show God’s love to others in practical ways with no strings attached, to share the gospel through practical acts of kindness in whatever way you can. These small acts of kindness can help others receive a touch of

¹¹ Kathy Howard. *Lavish Grace*



SESSION
FOUR

God's love and can nudge a person closer towards God, often in profound ways. And if anyone asks? You're doing it because God is love and you want to demonstrate that love!

Make a plan together and do it!

Here are few ideas:

- * Offer to help people pack their bags at the supermarket (you could even offer to help transport bags to their cars, pushing their trolleys or carrying the plastic bags).
- * Free car wash.
- * Return shopping trolleys to where they belong.
- * Give out free drinks (hot tea / coffee / hot chocolate – or cold drinks if the weather is warm) to members of the public.
- * Make cakes for people and attach a Bible verse or a note explaining why they've been given it, and hand them out to people in your community.
- * Pick up litter.
- * Repaint/clean a community space or children's play park (you will probably need permission from the local council).
- * Visit a local nursing/residential home and spend time chatting to the residents.
- * Help out at a local soup kitchen, homeless centre, women's refuge.
- * Do some fundraising for a local charity.
- * Join in and help out an already established community project or event.
- * Plan and run a summer community event.
- * Offer to help at a local food bank.
- * Collect donations of sleeping bags / warm clothing etc and give them out to homeless people
- * Buy food from takeaways for the homeless.