

cell outlines

SUPPORTING CHARACTER

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INTRODUCTION

This session explores WITNESS with ourselves using the ideas of ‘supporting characters’ to unpack different character traits important in our Christian walk. A supporting character is someone who plays an important role in the life of the main character of a story. The purpose of the supporting character is to help us understand the main character. As Christians we are supporting characters in the ongoing story of Jesus Christ. Although it’s not quite Christmas yet, these sessions explore the importance of character through the lens of the Christmas story.

Session One: The Maverick – John the Baptist

In films and books there is often a character who doesn’t play by the rules. They are confident in their views, independent-minded and willing to stand out from the crowd. John the Baptist, our supporting character for this session, was just like that. He was a maverick. We’ll look at the character traits God developed in John to enable him to prepare the way for Jesus.

Session Two: The Girl Next Door – Mary

Many films have a character known as ‘the girl next door’. She’s often natural, friendly and well respected, making sure she doesn’t get herself in with the wrong crowd. Today’s session focuses on Mary, the ‘girl next door’, due to marry the boy next door, Joseph. Mary’s life changed for ever when her ‘girl next door’ status was called into question due to a supernatural event.

Session Three: The Reluctant Hero – Joseph

The reluctant hero is an average person trying to live their ordinary life. In the world of film, these characters are thrown into a situation where they have to step up and rise to an unexpected challenge. They display integrity in challenging circumstances and defy the odds to save the day. Today’s session focuses on Joseph, the reluctant hero who became involved in a story much bigger than he expected.

Session Four: The Baddie – Herod the Great

Our final character in these sessions looks at ‘the baddie’. These supporting characters usually cause problems, want to steal the limelight from the main character and try to make the story about them. They struggle with the same character flaws we all do, but at some point these were left to take root and grow in their heart. Today’s session focuses on Herod, the insecure king who pursued Jesus and his family.

If lockdown restrictions are still in place, and you choose to run a physical meeting, you will need to complete a risk assessment form. We also recommend you read the guidance document provided by Safe Mission. Please consult your corps officer or DHQ for further info.

SUPPORTING CHARACTER: THE MAVERICK – JOHN THE BAPTIST

In films and books there is often a character who doesn't play by the rules. They are confident in their views, independent-minded and willing to stand out from the crowd. John the Baptist, our supporting character for this session, was just like that. He was a maverick. Today we'll look at the character traits God developed in John to enable him to prepare the way for Jesus.

WELCOME

Show the Supporting Characters worksheet below and get the group to name the supporting characters from these well-known films. You can give bonus points if they can name the film.

1. Haymitch Abernathy – *The Hunger Games*
 2. Lucius Best aka Frozone – *The Incredibles*
 3. Nebula – *Guardians of the Galaxy*
 4. Neville Longbottom – *Harry Potter* series
 5. Knuckles McGinty – *Paddington 2*
 6. Violet Beauregarde – *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*
 7. Eliza Schuyler – *Hamilton*
 8. Russell – *Up*
 9. Michelle Jones (MJ) – *Spider-Man: Homecoming*
 10. Dr Emmett Brown (Doc Brown) – *Back to the Future* series (one for the group leaders perhaps!)
- 🗨️ Which supporting character do you think deserves a film of their own?

Additional activity

- 🗨️ Who are the supporting characters in your life?
- 🗨️ Who would you cast to play them in a film of your life?

WORD

Open in prayer with the group.

Throughout each session there will be an opportunity to collect information about the supporting character. Encourage the group to jot down what they have discovered about John the Baptist on their 'Maverick' handout.

We first find out about today's supporting character before he is born. It's the ultimate origin story and is found in the Gospel of Luke.

Read Luke 1:5-7

- 🗨️ What do we discover about John's parents in these verses?

Elizabeth and Zechariah were both from well-respected Jewish families. They loved God and kept all his commandments. It was no coincidence that Zechariah was on priestly duty when the next part of John's origin story happened.

Read Luke 1:8-17

The announcement of John's birth was delivered via an angel to a startled Zechariah.

- 🗨️ What do we discover about God's plans for John in these verses?

SESSION ONE

What gives us a clue that John is going to be a bit of a maverick?

Think of an elderly couple that you know well.

How do you think they would react if God sent an angel to let them know, in a middle of a worship service, that they were going to have a baby?

Read Luke 1:18-23 to find out how Zechariah reacted.

What was God's response to Zechariah's lack of faith?

From now on Elizabeth, John's mum, does all the talking. In another break from the norm, she is the one who chooses his name.

Read Luke 1:57-66.

What is unusual about the way John's name was chosen?

From that point onwards John's life does not take the normal pathway for a Jewish boy born to a priest and descendent of Aaron.

Watch this clip about John the Baptist and jot down what you discover about our supporting character.

Who was John the Baptist? Drive Thru History
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBrdBnHLY-8> (stop the clip at 2:17 min.)

What did you discover about John from the clip?

What kind of confidence do you think it gave John that he knew, with 100 per cent certainty, he was chosen by God to prepare the way for Jesus?

Bible Project - The Baptism of Jesus
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0k4GbvZUPuo> (stop the clip at 1:31min)

What crucial role did John play as a supporting character in the story of Jesus?

What characteristics did God give John that enabled him to prepare the way for Jesus?

How does Jesus describe John the Baptist in Matthew 11:11?

Unfortunately, John's story came to a grisly end when the less than supportive character Herodias plotted to have him killed (find out more in Matthew 14:1-12). Despite things not turning out how he might have expected, John embraced who he was, lived his life for God and spent his days pointing to the main character of the story, Jesus Christ.

Have a look at the Character Traits handout (found at the end of this document).

What character traits does John demonstrate during his life? Add them to your 'Maverick' handout.

Additional activity

So far we have discovered that John the Baptist was a maverick, an independent man willing to stand out from the crowd. He was confident in his character and the way God created him to be, but his life always pointed to the main character of the story, Jesus Christ.

Read Matthew 3:13-16.

What additional character traits do we discover about John in these verses?

John has a strong character, clear purpose and knows the role he must play in the story of Jesus. Despite his confident personality, he knows that Jesus is the main character of the story and shows humility when Jesus comes to be baptised.

What do we learn from John the Baptist about the importance of character?

WORSHIP

- Have you ever felt like God pressed the pause button on your life to give you time to think or reflect about your character? If so, what were the circumstances and what did it feel like?

Zechariah, John's Dad, struggled to believe that he and his elderly wife could conceive a child. As a result, God silenced him until John was born. This may seem like a punishment, but it gave Zechariah the time to reflect on his role as a supporting character in the story of Jesus.

Read Zechariah's song from *The Message* paraphrase (where he's called 'Zachariah'), and discover what he had to say once he got his voice back.

Then Zachariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied,

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;
 he came and set his people free.
 He set the power of salvation in the centre of our lives,
 and in the very house of David his servant,
 Just as he promised long ago
 through the preaching of his holy prophets:
 Deliverance from our enemies
 and every hateful hand;
 Mercy to our fathers,
 as he remembers to do what he said he'd do,
 What he swore to our father Abraham—
 a clean rescue from the enemy camp,
 So we can worship him without a care in the world,
 made holy before him as long as we live.

And you, my child, 'Prophet of the Highest,'
 will go ahead of the Master to prepare his ways,
 Present the offer of salvation to his people,
 the forgiveness of their sins.
 Through the heartfelt mercies of our God,
 God's Sunrise will break in upon us,
 Shining on those in the darkness,
 those sitting in the shadow of death,
 Then showing us the way, one foot at a time,
 down the path of peace.

— Luke 1:67-79 (*The Message* paraphrase)

Read the first line of the Scripture again.

- What source did God use to change Zechariah's character?
- What does this teach us about the way God grows and develops us as believers?

Additional activity

Spend time reflecting on all we have discovered today as you listen to a musical version of Zechariah's Song.

- 'Zechariah's Song' - James Beauregard & Keri Taylor
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U85vZEH7lrM>

WITNESS

Sometimes we lack the confidence to be like John, fearlessly pointing everyone to Jesus and not caring what anyone thinks. We may feel like we don't have the same sense of purpose that he did, but we do!

'Now wherever you go, make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And teach them to faithfully follow all that I have commanded you. And never forget that I am with you every day, even to the completion of this age.'

— Matthew 28:19-20 (TPT)

- 💬 What is the clear purpose that God has given us?
- 💬 What stands in the way of us having the strength of character to live out our purpose in the story of Jesus?
- 📺 Watch Francis Chan – How NOT to Make Disciples
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KIA-DGx_3Y
- 💬 What is your response to the Francis Chan clip?

John listened to his purpose and acted on it. We don't all have to be mavericks like John, but as followers of Jesus we all have the same purpose. We are the supporting characters in the amazing story of Jesus Christ and every aspect of our story should point to him.

Additional activity

We all have people who have a supporting role in our lives, and we in turn support others as they grow in character and point to Jesus.

- * In what ways do you point to Jesus as a supporting character in his story?
- * Is there anyone that you could encourage or prepare the way for as they try to be a supporting character in the story of Jesus?

Supporting characters worksheet



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PIXAR



THEO WARGO GETTY IMAGES



SONY PICTURES



WIKIPEDIA

The Maverick - John the Baptist

*A voice of one calling:
'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'
Isaiah 40:3*

SUPPORTING CHARACTER: THE GIRL NEXT DOOR – MARY

Many films have a character known as ‘the girl next door’. She’s often natural, friendly and well respected, making sure she doesn’t get herself in with the wrong crowd. Today’s session focuses on Mary, the ‘girl next door’, due to marry the boy next door, Joseph. Mary’s life changed for ever when her ‘girl next door’ status was called into question due to a supernatural event.

WELCOME

Name the female character and film title for each of these quotes.

(You may need to give a clue for some of them!)

1. ‘There’s no place like home.’ Dorothy – *The Wizard of Oz*
2. ‘Books! And cleverness! There are more important things – friendship and bravery.’ Hermione Granger – *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*
3. ‘Just keep swimming, swimming, swimming.’ Dory – *Finding Nemo*
4. ‘Only love can save this world. So I stay, I fight, and I give. This is my mission now. Forever.’ Diana Prince / Wonder Woman – *Wonder Woman*
5. ‘I have to tell you a secret that will see you through all the trials that life can offer. Have courage and be kind.’ Cinderella’s mother – *Cinderella*
6. ‘I’ve been fighting with one arm tied behind my back.’ Carol Danvers – *Captain Marvel*

Additional activity

- Who is your favourite female character in a film?
- What is it about their character that you like so much?

WORD

Open in prayer with the group.

Throughout each session there will be an opportunity to collect information about the supporting character. Encourage the group to jot down all they have discovered about Mary on ‘The Girl Next Door’ handout.

- When you picture Mary in your mind, what do you see? *It’s OK if the group goes with the stereotypical depiction of Mary.*

Mary is depicted in many different ways across the globe (show some examples using the links below – these could be added as a separate handout or could be made into a short video using Keynote.)

- * Mary – Australia, Italy, Maronite church, America – Selection of Pinterest images
<https://maryhelpofchristains.weebly.com/blog/images-of-mary-from-different-cultures>

- What do the pictures of Mary have in common?

Mary is often shown with a serene look on her face, the picture of perfection and morally untouchable. Despite this image, Mary went through a phase in her life where she was misrepresented, misunderstood and was seen as far from perfect.

Read Luke 1:26-38.

- What was Mary’s immediate response to the news that she was chosen to be the mother of Jesus?
- What does Mary’s response tell us about her faith?

Mary was obviously deeply in love with God, and her song of praise in Luke 1:46-55 shows that she had a good understanding of Scripture. Despite all this, her ‘girl next door’ image was about to take a significant hit.

Nichole Nordeman writes the following about Mary's experience:

“ With my hypersensitivity to the opinions of others, and my determination to maintain a certain image among those who know me, might know me, used to know me, or by chance happened to pass me once on the sidewalk, it’s not a surprise that I have a particular admiration for Mary, the mother of Jesus, and an appreciation for what it must have cost her teenage heart to bear the weight of the whispers.’

Love Story: The Hand That Holds Us from the Garden to the Gates – Nichole Nordeman

- What is your response to Nichole Nordeman’s take on Mary’s story?
- If you were Mary, then how would you have wanted to react?
- What do you think Mary would have had to deal with if this had happened in the world of social media?

Mary had to remain focused on God’s understanding of her character rather than the world’s understanding. He was the only one who knew every detail of the part she would play in the story of Jesus. He was the only one who needed to understand her plot line.

- How do you cope with being misunderstood?
- Is there anything we can learn from Mary when we face situations where others make judgements about us without knowing (or believing) the truth?

The supporting characters in the story of Jesus are often simplified, but there is so much more to the role they play.

Mary the Mother Jesus – Messages of Christ (11mins 52secs)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMEysJ_hyFw

- What have you discovered about Mary that you didn’t know before?

Have a look at the Character Traits handout.

- What character traits does Mary demonstrate during her story? Add them to your ‘Girl Next Door’ Handout.

Additional activity

Read Luke 1:5-7 and Luke 1:39-45.

- Why do you think Mary chose Elizabeth to turn to for support and advice?
- What similar emotions do you think Elizabeth was experiencing to Mary?
- In what way did Elizabeth understand what it felt like to deal with the whispers of others?
- What was Elizabeth’s response to Mary’s news?

WORSHIP

Mary composed a powerful worship song found in Luke 1:46-55. Watch the clip, read the Scripture and discuss how they add to our understanding of Mary’s character.

The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) – Mary’s Song of Praise and Justice: Christian Aid
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvrJsy7xaXY> (1min 14secs)

Read Luke 1:46-55

- What do we discover about Mary in these verses?
- What can we learn from her about the way we worship God?

Additional activity

- ▶ Spend time reflecting on Mary's experience as you listen to 'Be Born in Me', sung by Francesca Battistelli. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7CIXvC1HVM>

Be Born In Me

Everything inside me cries for order
 Everything inside me wants to hide
 Is this shadow an angel or a warrior?
 If God is pleased with me, why am I so terrified?
 Someone tell me I am only dreaming
 Somehow help me see with Heaven's eyes
 And before my head agrees, my heart is on its knees
 Holy is he; blessed am I

Be born in me, be born in me
 Trembling heart, somehow I believe that you chose me
 I'll hold you in the beginning, you will hold me in the end
 Every moment in the middle, make my heart your Bethlehem
 Be born in me

All this time we've waited for the promise
 All this time you've waited for my arms
 Did you wrap yourself inside the unexpected
 So we might know that Love would go that far?

Be born in me, be born in me
 Trembling heart, somehow I believe that you chose me
 I'll hold you in the beginning, you will hold me in the end
 Every moment in the middle, make my heart your Bethlehem
 Be born in me

I am not brave
 I'll never be
 The only thing my heart can offer is a vacancy
 I'm just a girl
 Nothing more
 But I am willing, I am yours

Be born in me, be born in me
 I'll hold you in the beginning, you will hold me in the end
 Every moment in the middle, make my heart your Bethlehem
 Be born in me

— Artist - Francesca Battistelli
 — Songwriter - Bernie Herms/Nichole Nordeman

WITNESS

Despite the whispers of those around her, Mary was able to focus on her role as a supporting character in the story of Jesus. God wants to develop our character when others misunderstand us, and fill us with grace to help us resist the temptation to misunderstand others.

Read through the following Bible verses.

The full verses are listed below for reference and taken from *The Passion* translation. You could give each group member a verse to look up and share.

And never let ugly or hateful words come from your mouth, but instead let your words become beautiful gifts that encourage others; do this by speaking words of grace to help them.

— (Ephesians 4:29)

If someone believes they have a relationship with God but fails to guard his words then his heart is drifting away and his religion is shallow and empty.

— (James 1:26)

The one who hides his hatred while pretending to be your friend is nothing but a liar.

But the one who slanders you behind your back proves that he's a fool, never to be trusted.

— (Proverbs 10:18)

God, give me grace to guard my lips from speaking what is wrong.

— (Psalm 141:3)

An honest witness will never lie, but a deceitful witness lies with every breath.

— (Proverbs 14:5)

Dear friends, as part of God's family, never speak against another family member, for when you slander a brother or sister you violate God's law of love. And your duty is not to make yourself a judge of the law of love by saying that it doesn't apply to you, but your duty is to obey it!

— (James 4:11)

You can't trust gossippers with a secret; they'll just go blab it all.

Put your confidence instead in a trusted friend, for he will be faithful to keep it in confidence.

— (Proverbs 11:13)

- 🗨️ What do these verses teach us about when we are being whispered about, and when we whisper about others?
- 🗨️ How can you improve your supporting character role in the lives of those who are misunderstood?

Additional activity

In many films and books, older people often tend to take a lesser role in the plot line. In today's story we saw the way that Elizabeth's wisdom and experience enabled her to understand what Mary was going through.

- 🗨️ Do you have an Elizabeth in your life? If so, who are they and how do they show you love and support?
- 🗨️ Is there anyone in your family or church who, if you took the time to sit with them and chat, may be a source of wisdom for you?

Maybe you could catch up with them for a cuppa. Their back story may surprise you.

The Girl Next Door - Mary

*'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered.
'May your word to me be fulfilled.'*

Luke 1:38

SUPPORTING CHARACTER: THE RELUCTANT HERO – JOSEPH

The reluctant hero is an average person trying to live their ordinary life. In the world of film, these characters are thrown into a situation where they have to step up and rise to an unexpected challenge. They display integrity in challenging circumstances and defy the odds to save the day.

Today's session focuses on Joseph, the reluctant hero who became involved in a story much bigger than he expected. For today's session the Worship and Witness sections are reversed.

WELCOME

Reluctant or not?

Factoring in the age of your group, choose a selection of the movie heroes below and discuss whether they are classed as reluctant heroes or were up for the challenge from the start.

Ask the group to give their reasons.

| | | | |
|------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Shrek | Bruce Banner | Captain America | James Bond |
| Newt Scamander | Black Panther | Peter Parker | Harry Potter |
| Emmet Brickowski | Marty McFly | Mr Incredible | Frodo Baggins |

Additional activity



See who can guess the most DC heroes in this emoji quiz.

-  Guess the DC Hero by Emoji (8mins 16secs)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZXRuCiziy4>

WORD

Open in prayer with the group.

Throughout each session there will be an opportunity to collect information about the supporting character. Encourage the group to jot down all they have discovered about Joseph on the 'Reluctant Hero' handout.

-  How would you describe the character of Joseph from the story of the birth of Jesus?
-  How is Joseph usually depicted in Nativity plays and films?

In his book *A Walk One Winter Night*, Al Andrews stands before a Nativity scene and reflects on each character. Here is what he has to say about Joseph:

'Joseph wore brown. Joseph always wears brown.

Brown is a fitting colour for a character relegated to the background, for someone who never gets top billing. His eyes appeared vacant and his beard was neatly trimmed. He was there as he always is, on the edges. He can't seem to find his place. Everyone else has something distinctive – wings, crowns, gifts, halos, a shepherd's crook.

But all he has is – brown.'

– A Walk One Winter Night by Al Andrews

-  Do you agree with Al Andrews's description of Joseph? Is that how you see him?

Joseph is a character who is often overlooked, but hopefully today's session will help you to look at him differently.

Read Matthew 1:18-25.

SESSION THREE

What do we discover about Joseph's character in verse 19?

Before the angel came to him, Joseph had already decided not to go public with Mary's pregnancy even though he would have been well within his rights to do so according to Jewish law. He was even legally permitted to claim the wedding dowry, as their betrothal was a legally binding contract.

What was Joseph's response to the words of the angel?

How was it similar to Mary's response to Gabriel's message?

At that point, the trajectory of Joseph's story changed for ever.

Watch the clip and jot down anything new that you discover about Joseph. Share it with the group once the clip is over.

The Remarkable Story of Joseph the Carpenter - Messages of Christ (7mins 47secs)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ISArwNfBNg>

Joseph's integrity and willingness to obey God played an essential role in the story of Jesus.

How would you define integrity?

“ Integrity – Choosing courage over comfort; choosing what is right over what is fun, fast, or easy; and choosing to practise our values rather than simply professing them. ”

Brene Brown

How does Joseph display integrity in the way that he deals with the situation with Mary?

Read Matthew 2:13-23.

What role does Joseph play in protecting Mary and Jesus as they are pursued by Herod?

At the end of his book, Al Andrews's perspective of Joseph changes, and he writes:

‘I am not the quiet, simple character you make me out to be. My eyes are not vacant ... I am a man with a purpose – to travel where I was told to go, and to lead my family safely there. And we made it! Now that we are here, I am still on guard for we are in danger ...

Yes, I wear brown, but it is for stealth. I blend in with my surroundings, and from my vantage point my eyes scan every opening in this place for anyone who is out to do us harm.’

Extracts from *A Walk One Winter Night* – Al Andrews

Have a look at the Character Traits handout.

What character traits does Joseph demonstrate throughout his story? Add them to your 'Reluctant Hero' handout.

Additional activity

Discuss the following quotes about character and integrity.

What do you think they are trying to say?

“ Character is what a man is in the dark. ”

– Dwight L Moody

“ We choose what attitudes we have right now. And it's a continuing choice. ”

– John C Maxwell

“ Integrity is built by defeating the temptation to be dishonest; humility grows when we refuse to be prideful; and endurance develops every time you reject the temptation to give up. ”

– Rick Warren

“ ‘You cannot tailor-make the situation in life but you can tailor-make the attitudes to fit those situations.’

– Zig Ziglar

WITNESS

It's difficult to put ourselves in the place of Joseph due to the different cultural setting and extraordinary circumstances he faced. However, we can relate to the difficult choices he had to make between what was right and what was easy. From reading Joseph's story, we get the sense that he was a person of integrity who lived a life that matched his values.

🗣️ As Christians today, what are some of the circumstances where living with integrity is a challenge?

📺 Watch the clip What is Integrity? Ask Pastor Rick.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUB4fsaG_4c

🗣️ What do you find challenging about Rick Warren's description of integrity?

If the group feels comfortable, then ask them to share an area of their life where they struggle to live with integrity.

Have a look at the Positive Characteristics handout.

🗣️ What kind of character traits do we need to ask God to grow in us to live a life of integrity?

Additional activity

As we aim to live a life of integrity, God gives us opportunities to grow and develop in character, but we don't have to do it on our own.

Read 2 Peter 1:5-7.

🗣️ When it comes to growing in character, what advice does Peter give us in these verses?

‘So don't lose a minute in building on what you've been given, complementing your basic faith with good character, spiritual understanding, alert discipline, passionate patience, reverent wonder, warm friendliness, and generous love, each dimension fitting into and developing the others. With these qualities active and growing in your lives, no grass will grow under your feet, no day will pass without its reward as you mature in your experience of our Master Jesus. Without these qualities you can't see what's right before you, oblivious that your old sinful life has been wiped off the books.’

— 2 Peter 1:5-7 (*The Message* paraphrase)

🗣️ What one action will you take from Peter's advice to help you grow in character over the coming weeks?

WORSHIP

Joseph was able to live a life of integrity because his character and values centred around God. Throughout all the challenges he faced, he remained focused on his part in the story and the author of that story.

Reflect on everything you have discovered about Joseph's character and your own struggles to live a life of integrity. Rick Warren reminded us that living with integrity isn't the same as pursuing perfection and we certainly don't need to do any character building in our own strength.

Spend time in prayer and reflection as you remind yourself that God is with you in the everyday story of your life.

📺 God with us – All Sons and Daughters
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udjT-LMnIs>

Additional activity

Who are the people in your life who model integrity and reflect the character of God?

Spend time thanking God for them or, if you're feeling really brave, drop them a message of encouragement and thanks.

NOTE: Remind the group to bring all their character handouts to the next session.

The Reluctant Hero - Joseph

'When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.'

Matthew 1:24

SUPPORTING CHARACTER: THE BADDIE – HEROD

Our final character in this series is 'the baddie'. These supporting characters usually cause problems, want to steal the limelight from the main character and try to make the story about them. They struggle with the same character flaws we all do, but at some point these were left to take root and grow in their heart. Today's session focuses on Herod, the insecure king who pursued Jesus and his family.

WELCOME

Can you match each of these silhouettes to the Disney villains they represent?

<https://www.sporcle.com/games/Perspektive/silhouettes-disney-villains?t=movievillains>

Extra starter

There are a few options for this starter. You could print out a copy of the images and ask the group to guess the baddies.

Working along the rows from left to right the answers are as follows:

Ursula, Yzma, Cruella de Vil, Jafar, Dr Facilier, Hades, Lady Tremain,

Shere Khan, Scar,

Governor Ratcliffe, Queen of Hearts, Maleficent, Shan You, Captain Hook, Gaston

Alternatively you could ask the group to follow the link, complete the challenge and see who gets the highest score in the quickest time.

Additional activity

🗣️ Who is your favourite film baddie? Explain your reasons.

WORD

Open in prayer with the group.

Throughout each session there will be an opportunity to collect information about the supporting character. Encourage the group to jot down all they have discovered about Herod on 'The Baddie' handout.

Herod the Great True or False

Read out each statement and ask the group to decide whether they are TRUE or FALSE. These statements are also on 'The Baddie' handout.

When they are completed, then go through the answers and give them the additional information about Herod the Great.

1. Herod was named the King of the Jews but wasn't actually Jewish.

TRUE – His Father was an Arab diplomat who converted to Judaism. This was one of the reasons Herod was never accepted as the leader of the Jews as he didn't descend from King David.

2. Herod was big mates with Mark Antony (the one who had a fling with Cleopatra) until he switched allegiance to the winning team when he spotted his friend was losing power.

TRUE – He originally sided with Antony but backed Octavian at the last minute during the Battle of Actium. This allegiance switch bagged him a position as the King of Israel.

3. After the Roman senate made Herod King of Judea, he divorced his first wife Doris, sent her and their son away from court, and married a Jewish princess instead.

TRUE – Herod married Princess Mariamne who descended from the family that used to rule Judea before the Romans got

SESSION FOUR

their hands on it. This was mainly a political move but he is said to have been deeply in love with her, almost to the point of obsession.

- 4. Herod built an artificial mountain and then placed a huge palace on top of it. He named the palace Herodium (see what he did there)!

TRUE – Herod embarked on a lot of lavish building projects as a new way to show his might and power including a fortress, a port and a complete rebuild of the Jewish Temple.

- 5. Herod tried to have Jesus killed as a baby but failed in his attempt. He eventually succeeded when he played a role in the crucifixion of Jesus.

FALSE – These two Herods often get mixed up, but it was Herod Antipas, not Herod the Great, who played a role in the trial and subsequent death of Jesus. He was also responsible for the beheading of John the Baptist.

In Session One we discovered that a supporting character gives us a better understanding of the main character. Although Herod's involvement in the story of Jesus is a destructive one, he still gives us an idea of the importance of Jesus.

- ▶ Read Matthew 2:1-12 or watch the clip from the *King James Translation*.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rK8_hoDBJlg

- 💬 The Magi referred to Jesus as the 'King of the Jews'. Why was this a problem for Herod?
- 💬 How did Herod's family line threaten his security as King?
- 💬 Why do you think Herod felt so worried by the thought of a Messiah?
- 💬 How did King Herod try to manipulate the Magi?

Having spent his entire life trying to win the approval of the Jews, Herod was presented with an opportunity to meet the Messiah. He had an opportunity to make a different choice and bow his head in humble worship.

Read Matthew 2:13-18.

- 💬 What choice did Herod make?

Have a look at the Character Traits handout.

- 💬 What character traits does Herod demonstrate throughout his story? Add them to your 'Baddie' handout.
- 💬 How can these negative character traits influence the choices that we make?

Additional activity

There is absolutely no excuse for many of the actions Herod the Great took during his reign but, like every baddie, he does have an origin story.

- 💬 Considering all that you have discovered about Herod, what life experiences may have contributed to his poor character?
- 💬 Is there any hope for a 'baddie' like Herod?
- 💬 What happens when we let negative characteristics take a hold in our hearts like Herod did?
- 💬 How might Herod's role in the story of Jesus have been different if he had let God, rather than his life experience, develop his character?

WORSHIP

To some degree we all place people into neatly packaged character roles, assigning their character traits and making assumptions about who they are. We also get frustrated when people do that to us. We are all supporting characters in the story of Jesus, but God writes his subplot in our lives.

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▶ Listen to Write Your Story - Francesca Battistelli
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKclmiTxqKg>

and reflect on the following question:

💬 If God is the author of your life, and you want to play a supporting character in the story of Jesus, then what character development needs to take place?

Share the words from the song as a prayer together.

**I'm an empty page
 I'm an open book
 Write your story on my heart
 Come on and make your mark
 Author of my hope
 Maker of the stars
 Let me be your work of art
 Won't you write your story on my heart
 Write your story, write your story
 Come on and write your story, write your story
 Won't you write your story on my heart?**

— Ben Glover / David Arthur Garcia / Battistelli Francesca

Additional activity

At Christmas we sing songs of worship specific to the season. Now that you have discovered more about the story of Jesus, which carols might you tweak, celebrate or skip?

Use The Salvation Army's *Christmas Collection* book or nos 98-133 in *The Song Book of the Salvation Army* to look through the carols.

If song writing is your thing, then have a go at writing your own Christmas worship song based on what you have discovered.

WITNESS

Gather together your character handouts for the four sessions.

Reflect on the four supporting characters.

- 💬 What unexpected things did you discover about these well-known characters?
- 💬 What supporting role did they each play in the story of Jesus?
- 💬 Have any of these characters helped you to discover something new about yourself or your part in the story of Jesus? If so, how?

Whether we're making a positive contribution like John or a negative contribution like Herod, we're all supporting characters in God's amazing story. As we play our part in the story of Jesus, we follow his example, asking God to develop our character as the plot line continues. We are not extras, filling a place in the back story; we are supporting characters helping people understand more about Jesus, the main character of the story.

Just for fun ...

- 💬 If you were making a film of the Christmas story, then what actor would you cast for John the Baptist, Mary, Joseph and Herod? Explain your choices.

Additional activity

In these sessions we have looked at the maverick, the girl next door, the reluctant hero and the baddie. These are all stereotypes within the world of film. We've hopefully discovered that there is a lot more to these well-known Bible characters than meets the eye.

▶ Character in Biblical Narrative – Bible Project (4mins 58secs)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0EQDGax19xk>

'These stories are anything but simplistic. They offer us realistic portraits of compromised people like ourselves. The real surprise is that God keeps working with them despite their failures.' –

The Bible Project

💬 What other Bible characters would you like to take a fresh look at?

We make decisions and assumptions based on what we think we know about characters in the Bible. We also do this with complete strangers and people within our churches. As we move into this Christmas season let's look at the Christmas story in a new way, and help it to teach us to look at the supporting characters around us differently. We're all part of the same story.

The Baddie - Herod

1. Herod the Great was named the King of the Jews but wasn't actually Jewish.
2. Herod was big mates with Mark Antony (the one who had a fling with Cleopatra) until he switched allegiance to the winning team when he spotted his friend was losing power.
3. After the Roman Senate made Herod King of Judea, he divorced his first wife Doris, sent her and their son away from court, and married a Jewish princess instead.
4. Herod built an artificial mountain and then placed a huge palace on top of it. He named the palace Herodium (see what he did there)!
5. Herod tried to have Jesus killed as a baby but failed in his attempt. He eventually succeeded when he played a role in the crucifixion of Jesus.

'He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

Matthew 2:8