



# get MESSY!

Highlights from the  
**International  
Conference**

Messy  
Church  
goes  
**digital**

**Murder  
Mystery**



**Sessions in this issue September-December 2019 £4.60**

**God loves a cheerful giver**  
Malachi 3:1-10

**God's armour of light**  
Ephesians 6:10-20

**Feast of faith**  
Luke 24:13-35

**Small is mighty**  
Luke 2:4-20

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## Meet our session writers for this issue



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**Lindsey Goodyear** is a writer living in Huntington Beach, CA, with her husband and two young sons. She's on the Messy Church planning team at her local church and also a regular blog writer for Messy Church USA. In her time off, she loves adventures with her two 'wild boys', volunteering, running and quiet nights with her hubby.



**Anne Offler and Sharon Pritchard** are Messy Church Regional Coordinators in the Durham Region. Sharon is the Children's Ministry Adviser for the Diocese of Durham and Anne, now retired, is still busy working with children and young people.



**Martyn Payne** retired from the BRF Messy Church team in December 2017. Since then, he has managed to carry on being messy, particularly through the leadership of his own Messy Church in east London, taking local services of all-age worship and writing for BRF. He enjoys running and walks in the countryside, and is currently trying to learn the piano.

## Themes in this edition

We carry on exploring the next set of Holy Habits in this magazine. In **September**, we discover some challenging suggestions about gladness and generosity – what we do with our worldly goods, whether giving away is as painful as it sounds or whether it might be something liberating. Tithing is a pretty alien concept for many long-term Christians, so perhaps we all have something to learn in this session!

In **October**, we're focusing on the habit of biblical teaching through the lens of Paul's image of the armour of God. As the breastplates of righteousness are mercilessly hacked to bits by the swords of the Spirit, we may regret this choice of passage...

**November** takes us to the glorious story of the road to Emmaus as we think about the Holy Habit of eating together and the power of our shared meals (look at how a meal transformed Cleopas and his friend!) and in **December**, our Christmas focus is the idea of God doing enormous things using small people, like a baby, like a single teenager. How might that encourage those of us who feel small and insignificant? How might it challenge those of us who feel powerful? Have fun!

1. Ask God to bless and guide you as you consider what's most helpful to bring families in your community closer to him in the coming months.
2. Glance through the four sessions so that you have an overview of the months ahead, noting down resources that will take time to source.
3. Use the downloadable planning sheets to share this month's session with your core team in plenty of time to shape the ideas together to suit your own situation.
4. If you're meeting face to face with the team, talk about this month's theme, using the Messy team theme provided.
5. Tell God your worries.
6. Ensure that the whole extended team has copies of your final version of activities, together with the Bible reflection provided to give them the background they need. You could give them the link to the passage on [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com) if you're not certain they have their own Bibles.
7. Include take-home ideas on handouts, texts or a Facebook page.
8. Print copies of the mealtime question cards for the meal tables.
9. Encourage review and reflection from everyone after the session has taken place and respond to suggestions for change ready for next time.
10. Thank God for wherever you saw him at work.

**Planning suggestions**

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Go to [messychurch.org.uk/getmessysep19](http://messychurch.org.uk/getmessysep19) to download all templates at A4 size, including a session planning sheet

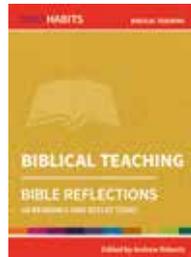
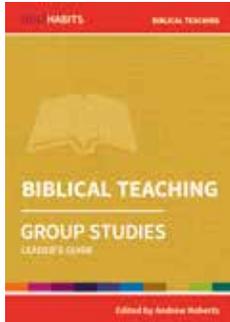
## In our next issue

- January: Faithful sheep
- February: Loving and serving
- March: Falling and breaking
- April: The biggest miracle ever

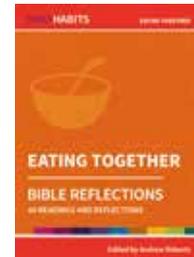
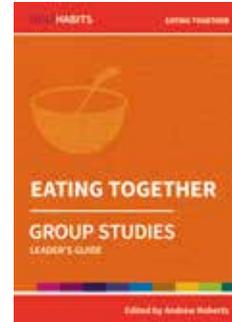
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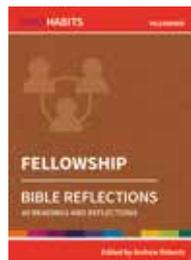
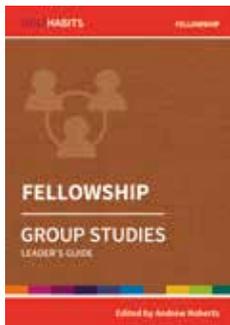
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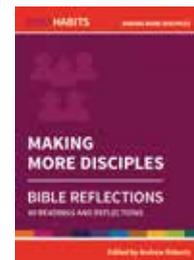
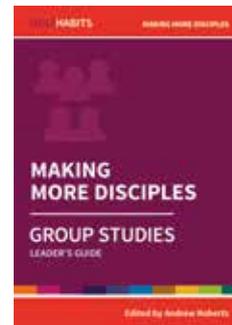
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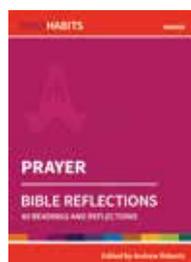
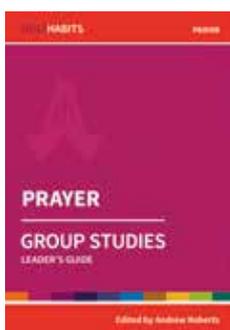
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# HOLYHABITS

MISSIONAL DISCIPLESHIP RESOURCES FOR CHURCHES

Do you ever want to speed God up or slow him down? I realise that God invented time and Jesus lived in the temporal dimension. But even so, it can feel as if God is moving either too fast or too slow for us.



So much is happening so quickly: how can we plan usefully for six months ahead when everything in Messy Church is changing so fast? When I think of the speed at which God is moving things along in this Messiness, the significant events between now and when this magazine is published – like new Messy Churches starting, older ones celebrating their birthdays, the International Conference, events run by churches over three continents, meeting new friends from different countries, books being published, projects moving forwards – it feels as if we're in a Lamborghini at Monte Carlo, without a safety belt.

But when I think of the number of church congregations getting older and less and less able to launch something like a Messy Church (not because of lack of faith, just from lack of anyone physically able to move the furniture), it feels as if we can't move fast enough. I want to change the Lamborghini up a gear before it's too late. We hear about the tired plod of churches that can see no further than 'doing things as we've always done them and hoping we get a minister who does them a bit better than the last one so more people will come without us having to change at all', and it seems as if generations of children and their families will miss out on the chance to hear about Jesus in their local church. The decline in numbers of under-16s attending Sunday services in the UK is bewildering. People can and do take a long time to make any sort of commitment, even in Messy Churches. Even in God's Messy Lamborghini, the mission of helping families find Jesus feels as slow as travelling from Christchurch UK to Christchurch New Zealand by coracle.

# Speeding up...

Lucy Moore writes...

# slowing down...

In the meantime, do we despair because God seems to have paused in a lay-by for a leisurely picnic while we're revving the engine and hooting for him to get back in the car? Do we apologise to our churches for the slow pace at which people in Messy Churches are moving on their journey towards Jesus? Do we give up and put the Lamborghini back in the garage as it hasn't got us where we wanted to go fast enough?

Or do we look to the stars, like the ancient travellers paddling across the South Pacific, navigating by the constellations? The starlight that has travelled across galaxies and over centuries to reach us is like a message from the past and hope for the future at the moment it hits our retinas. The stars remind us that the mission is God's, not ours; that the timing of how and when he acts is in his hands and has been from the beginning: 'And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years"' (Genesis 1:14, NIV).

We can simply be faithful in our time and in his time, introducing families to the wonderful world of the kingdom, helping them discover the holy habits that help shape lives for the better, patiently living out what church is meant to be for each new generation. We know where we came from and where we're going: we walk with our Messy friends and family in the double light of the wisdom of the past and the hope of the future that Jesus died and rose again to open up to us. And if we can learn the patience to go at God's speed rather than our own, whether we're walking, sailing or hurtling along in that Lamborghini, God's peace will help us enjoy the journey.

# Stories from Messy Churches far and wide

**Rob Douglas, Team Leader at Maida Vale Baptist Church, Australia**

We love our barbecues in Australia. Maybe it's the fact that we like the outdoors and have the right weather for it most of the year, or maybe we just have a strange antipodean yearning for sausages that are slightly charred and taste like charcoal.

Meals at Messy Church, at Maida Vale Baptist in Western Australia, take many forms, but during the warmer months it's quite likely you'll find someone outside cooking sausages on the barbecue.

To celebrate Christmas 2018, we invited people on a journey through the Christmas story. Let me just remind you at this point that Christmas in Australia enjoys temperatures of up to 40 degrees C (104 degrees F) so we don't do snow! Following the Christmas story in a booklet, guests of all ages learned about Joseph by doing some woodwork, sang Christmas carols with the angels, went for a donkey cart ride with Mary and Joseph, and played with the baby animals at the stable. Yes, it was a real donkey, and they were real baby animals.

Of course, as they made their way around these and many other activities that portrayed the Christmas story, they enjoyed a sausage in a bun straight off the barbecue. Really, there's nothing quite like trying to make a crown with tomato sauce dripping down your arm or licking the juice from your lips while you paint a star. It's all part of Christmas in Australia.



## Be a detective

**Diane Stevens, Epuni Baptist Church, Lower Hutt, New Zealand**

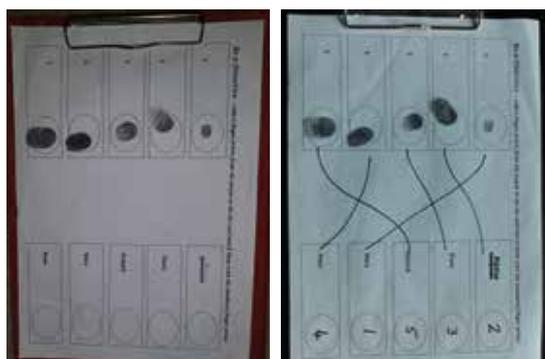
**I praise you because of the wonderful way you created me.  
Psalm 139:14 (CEV)**

Armed with a kit comprising a magnifying glass, a pen, a stamp pad and wet wipe, each person had to collect a fingerprint from each of the leaders and draw a line matching them with the numbered fingerprints.

There was great excitement over this activity, especially with the boys. It appealed to all ages and everyone was keen to participate. In many cases, a parent worked alongside a child, which was great to see. It meant that people had to talk to all our leaders to ask for their fingerprints, so connections were made there. It was messy, especially for the leaders!

When we came together for our celebration, we discussed this activity and how God has made each of us unique with different fingerprints. There is nobody who has, or will ever have, the same fingerprints as me. How amazing – I am special! I am wonderfully made by God!

One child was so excited about this activity that he brought a magnifying glass to the next Messy Church just in case he needed to be a detective again.



# Welcome to new Messy Churches across the world!

Costa Del Sol Messy Church in Marlows Fish and Chip Restaurant, Duquesa, Spain

Messy Church in Turku, Martin Parish House, Finland

Messy Church in Annapolis, Brazil

Messy Church in Santa Cruz, Bolivia

Morvant Methodist Messy Church in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Paroisse Réformée of Mulhouse Dornach, France

Toti Methodist Messy Church in Durban, South Africa



## The Giving Zone

Liz Townend (Children and Family Worker) and Des Williamson (Vicar) at St Mark's, Tattenham Corner, Surrey, UK

Giving at St Mark's Messy Church always just about covers the costs of food and crafts, but we still do give a good meal (they make their own dessert) and offer quality activities. Obviously, it is up and down – but it seems to have got lower more recently. Two mums in particular have been giving very generously but when we have around 50 people a month (20 adults and 30 children on average), the giving is often around £50 to £60.

Recently, a different member of the team stood at the door as families left and noticed what people gave. Later, she poured out her horror at what she had observed, and this caused a very dispiriting discussion among some of the team members. She saw one mum with three children all enjoy the toast and tea when they arrived, all sit down and eat jacket potatoes with fillings for dinner, plus their biscuit dessert, and all decorate a tote bag. At the end, the mum searched in her bag and put in £2. Many others on team – often elderly ladies – put in more than that and they had been volunteering. The discussion led on to how young mums clog up coffee shops in the mornings and are happy to pay for that, and so on. Those particular team members were cross and upset. They all looked at me and said, 'You don't want to charge, do you?' and I don't. We cover costs, but I recognise that the subliminal message being received by the team is 'We are not valued; we are not worth it'.

However, it is chaotic leaving at 5.45, clutching children and craft stuff! Parents often rush from school to Messy Church at 3.30 and may have left jobs as well and forgotten to get cash out. So, after thought and discussion, we decided to email the families about our new Giving Zone. I think the team appreciated that they were listened to. It remains to be seen if the giving goes up, but it may have been a little better a month later, with two mums using the contactless facility and some commenting they were pleased we had it. It is now available on Sundays as well.

Our email to Messy Church families:

**From our October Messy Church, we will be having a Giving Zone, just as we have a Prayer Zone. This is to encourage us all to remember that part of our worship and therefore part of church life is giving financially. Practically, costs have to be covered and food and craft materials paid for, plus the funding for Children and Families work generally at St Mark's. We, as Messy Church at St Mark's, also donate £20 a month to The Bible Reading Fellowship, where central Messy Church is based. You can visit their website at [brf.org.uk](http://brf.org.uk).**

We invite you to think about what you are able to give each month. Even something as small as £2 per person, or £10 per family, would help. Maybe you can afford ten times that! BUT whatever amount you give, do it as a 'thank you' to God for the good things he has provided for you and remember that when we give generously, it produces joy in us. If you are really struggling and cannot give anything, you are still very welcome at Messy Church – we would not want anyone to stop coming because of money. It has also been pointed out that many people no longer carry cash, so we will have card payment facilities, too. Please use the Giving Zone as a way of teaching your children about generosity.



Lucy Moore

# Conference highlights



Jane and I looked at each other. It was 2017, a year after the first Messy Church International Conference that had been a blast from start to finish. But now, the two of us were faced with the prospect of organising MCIC19 in two years' time, and organising it without the help of Martyn, who had just announced his retirement. There's a fair amount to do just to keep the Messy world working, without adding the creative demands of planning a conference as well, and Jane and I knew full well that if we tried to do it on our own, we would sink without trace into a morass of half-baked ideas and overwhelming tidal waves of extra work. Jane is a grafter and would cope, but I'm by nature something of an indolent character and hesitate to turn what is essentially a hugely fun day job into a weighty burden.

'Let's spread the load!' we said, and The Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) delightedly encouraged us to invite a range of people from the network to work with us on the plans and the delivery of all their good ideas. It wasn't rocket science to draw together a mixed group of leaders and it made all the difference, turning the terrifying tsunami of jobs small and large into a thoroughly enjoyable swimming hole in which to wallow together. The team was formed deliberately of old friends and new, the young and the... um... more mature, women and blokes, the bearded and the bald, people who, we felt, would grow into up-front leadership roles and those who had been there already and sported several T-shirts. And what a pay-off it was! Not only did we have extra hands and feet during the conference itself, who knew exactly what

needed doing and when, but we built a planning environment that allowed everyone to share their own creative ideas and to constructively criticise other people's. (You should have heard some of the mad ideas that the group's collective wisdom managed to quell.)

So what was MCIC19 like? Can you imagine coming on the conference feeling you're 'just' a Messy leader and being thrown into a large group of people who range from the leader of a struggling Messy Church in a tiny village through to a denominational leader who has never done Messy Church but wants to know more? Imagine how that felt, crossed with people imbued with the Messy Church values of creativity, hospitality, celebration and general jollity from different denominations, twelve different countries, people in the UK for the first time, at a conference of any sort for the first time. We had everyone from the uber-cool Netherlands team (how did they stay so effortlessly chic even in the messiness of a Messy Church session?) to the solitary Norwegian, the thrilled-to-be-here Americans, the jet-lagged but effervescent Australians, the slightly bewildered but enthusiastic Hungarian and the bilingual New Zealanders. Add people heartbroken at the struggle of running a Messy Church month in, month out (and for one person, week in, week out), people cracking under the strain of getting no word of appreciation from their own minister or church congregation but believing in their ministry nonetheless, people seeing families' lives transformed and people seeing churches transformed, people bubbling over



with joy, sorrow, weariness and hope, people with ideas they share out open-handedly to you and who think your ideas are the bee's knees and just what they've been waiting to hear... And imagine spending three days in this heady brew, where every time you sit down for a coffee or a meal, someone new asks about your ministry, encourages you and makes you feel that you're the expert.... And NOBODY demands to be told why Messy Church is worth bothering with. It wasn't just the planning team that was mission-minded and creative: it was every single person on the conference! No wonder the conversations thrived.

So what did we do? We tried to balance the time between hands-on learning, head learning and space for social learning, interweaving everything with time for God. One person claimed it would have been better if we'd 'had worship' – we think she meant a young man with tight jeans, a chiselled beard and a guitar performing love songs to us. A mean exaggeration, I know, but as a church, we MUST rediscover that worship is way more than a set of feel-good songs or we'll disappear down an experience-based blind alley. If we can't recognise story, participatory song and prayer in other, less front-led styles, as worship, we're in big trouble.

Talks from the inspirational Claire Dalpra and Andrew Roberts explored the conference theme of discipleship. These talks were filmed and are available to you on our website ([messychurch.org.uk/mcic19](http://messychurch.org.uk/mcic19)) so you too can benefit from

them. We had two Messy Church sessions in very different styles to push us out of our comfort zones. There was a Swap Shop opportunity to share your best idea with everyone else as they wandered around. (The resulting camels on Easyjet on their way home made for perhaps the classiest photo of the conference.) There were workshops and discipleship quickfire ideas, and an hour to simply relax into God's word either inside or out, alone or in a group, using words or silence seemed to be welcomed with open arms. We ended with Communion around the 'slightly sticky star' that glittered with the words the Spirit says to the angel of Messy Church. And about 60 people stayed on for an extra day to talk national strategy – and to learn Danish and Te Reo/Maori songs of praise.

MCIC22 will be on us before we know it. What do we hope for? It'll be BRF's centenary that year, so it's going to be significant. I wonder if we'll be in a position to make the third international conference truly international. Will the planning team be drawn from different countries? Will the workshop leaders and speakers be British or from overseas? Will it even be in the UK? The film we watched of a Messy Camp by the sea in Western Australia made a warmer location rather appealing. Will it be all age? Will it be bigger? What will our theme be then, and how will Messy discipleship have developed since 2019? What amazing initiatives will need sharing by then? So much fun lies in store! Will people say, as they said to us on their way home from MCIC19, 'Last time was great, but this time was even better.' Big shout-out to the God who saves the best till last!



# Conference workshops digest

Here's the lowdown on the 14 different workshops that were on offer at the Messy Church International Conference 2019.

## Pastoral care in Messy Church

What needs to be set up to create a pastoral atmosphere of trust and communication? Are we building relationships or friendships in Messy Church, and how does this impact on our teams and congregations? How can the Messy Church BRF team and Regional Coordinators support you?

## Bigger, riskier, better... probably?

We explored the bigger and riskier activities that can be done at a Messy Church and found out that nothing is too big and anything is possible. We thought outside the box to see how exploring God's word is more than glue sticks and paint – but also power tools, giant props and fire. We also thought about how to adapt when things go wrong.

## Science, faith & the DNA of Messy Church

Science within Messy Church:

- allows children and adults to share and develop a love of science
- shares the playfulness of God's creativity and creation
- demonstrates that faith and science can go hand in hand
- explores the wonder of creation and an encounter with the God of creation.

## Design a strategic team away day

Why would we take our team away for the day?

- How will we get a good balance between the 'practical' side and making time for God?
- How will we make everyone feel at home, both those at the start of a faith journey and those at a different point?
- How can we make a safe space to air problems/conflicts?
- How can we make a space in which everyone helps shape the future?

## Singing & storytelling in Messy Church

We explored helpful ways to use music in a Messy Church celebration. We drew on good practice of people using music effectively in Messy Churches around the world. We highlighted a few things on the role and power of songs within the Messy Church situation, e.g. what is happening when we sing? And we explored different engaging ways to tell Bible stories in an all-age setting.

## Messy prayer

We thought about prayer in our Messy Churches, how we pray and when we pray, who prays and why we pray. We shared our prayer ideas and worked together to create some new Messy prayers, all incorporating our five Messy values.

## Messy Vintage: creative worship with older people

Messy Vintage is an offshoot of Messy Church and brings joy and delight to older people as well as carers, relatives and the team. We looked at how Messy Vintage is creating sacred space where older people are – in a church building, a care home setting, a community hall, etc. Messy Vintage is about fabulous food and fun! See [messychurch.org.uk/messyvintage](http://messychurch.org.uk/messyvintage).

## Developing Holy Habits in Messy Church

Holy mess? Messy habits? In this workshop, we explored the positive and creative relationship between the vision, values and practices of Messy Church and Holy Habits. We looked at some practical suggestions as to how an exploration of the holy habits that Luke presents in Acts 2:42–47 can be integrated into Messy Churches, drawing on stories of Messy Churches that have done this. [holyhabs.org.uk](http://holyhabs.org.uk) & [brfonline.org.uk/holy-habits](http://brfonline.org.uk/holy-habits).





## Including teenagers in Messy Church

- Treating teenagers and their ideas with respect.
- Investing quality time in teenagers.
- Encouraging pre-teens to join the team.
- Giving teens responsibility but with a safety net in place.

## What's liturgy got to do with it? Liturgy & sacraments in Messy Church contexts

- Corporate worship is 'ritualised discipleship' – so what we include when we gather will symbolise what matters about how we live.
- Repetition and 'pattern' can help people join in.
- Baptism and Holy Communion need to be fully integrated into the Messy gathering, not tacked on the end.
- Being contextual and being connected are both important – and each helps critique the other.

## 'All one in Christ Jesus': lessons from the early church for Messy Church

As Gentile converts began to pour into the early church, this threw up issues very similar to those encountered by more recent pioneering projects such as Messy Church. We looked at the practical lessons that can be learnt from the early church to ensure that traditional forms of church and newer forms develop in a manner where they reflect the call to unity at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## #discipleship: team

It's too easy to assume we ourselves are all completely hunky-dory in our discipleship and that discipleship only applies to those who come to our Messy Churches. We're all on this journey together! We need to encourage each other to keep on renewing our own journey with Jesus.

At the conference, after a short gathered time of gentle sung worship, we invited everyone to spend the next 45 minutes coming close to God in whatever way they found most helpful. We suggested some options for encouraging space for personal discipleship, and they're equally suitable for use in your Messy team. You can download the documents free at [messychurch.org.uk/mcic19](http://messychurch.org.uk/mcic19).

## #ShareTheMess: publicising your Messy Church

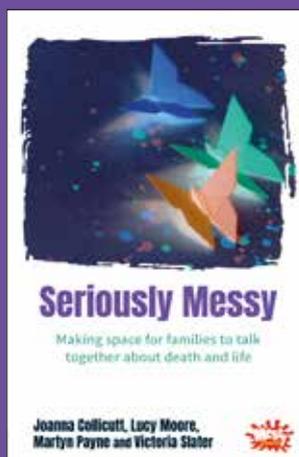
- If someone is looking for a Messy Church in your area, how are they going to find you?
- Social media
- Start with what you want to achieve through your publicity and communications, and work out what types of media would best achieve your goals.
- Have a good relationship with your local schools and toddler groups.
- There's a lot of competition out there. Stand out.

## Seriously Messy: making space for families to talk about death and life

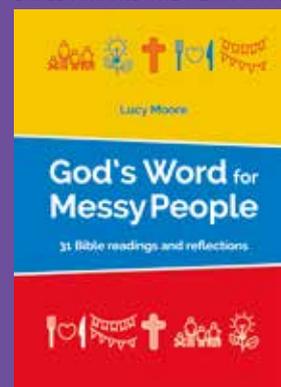
We tend to avoid talking about death to and in front of children. Yet children are not immune from bereavement and the feelings and questions that go with it. As Christians, our hope is founded on the resurrection of Jesus that we believe will be ours too. The workshop looked at ways of communicating this hope across the generations, including good practice for talking with children about this challenging topic and even having some fun along the way. *Seriously Messy* is available from [brfonline.org.uk](http://brfonline.org.uk).

## Creating Messy ways to measure the five dynamics of discipleship

The recent research into Messy Church describes five 'dynamics of discipleship'. These could be great ways of noticing how people are growing in faith. We looked at how we might set about working out where our Messy Church families and teams stand on each of those dynamics in a fun and appropriate way.



A MONTH'S WORTH OF DAILY BIBLE READINGS, BASED AROUND THE MESSY CHURCH VALUES





# A Messy Murder Mystery

If you've ever been on a conference, you'll know there's that tricky Saturday night conundrum for the organisers: do you put on another worthy Thing to fill up the time, or do you just open up the bar and let people relax together after a heavy day, running the risk of some feeling unable to join in? Being allergic to The Quiz, that all-purpose stopgap (mostly because Lucy's lack of general knowledge, TV shows, sport or pop culture is a source of deep embarrassment), we decided to open up the bar on the Saturday night of MCIC19 – but also to open up the doors and light up the firepits outside for all those who wanted to toast marshmallows and whittle their own skewer in the chilly night air. And lastly, we also opened up the realms of the imagination and invited all who could cope with the absurdity to join us for a Messy Murder Mystery!

It had a very simple setup – a brief introduction setting the scene, introducing both the victim and the suspects. Then there was a 50-minute carousel with those six suspects, who rotated in turn around the six groups of 'detectives' and poured out their guilty secrets in response to a few minutes of thorough interrogation.

The setting isn't the Orient Express or a World War II bunker: it's a Messy Church. The lethal pesticide Vole-de-Mort is involved... deadly plants... Botox... the world-famous Tangy Tomato Tart, a lot of silliness and nothing too risqué so that this can be an all-age event.

## Putting the fun back into fundraising

We realised that this Murder Mystery would also have an ongoing life outside of the conference as a resource for individual Messy Churches. So we've made everything available for you at [messychurch.org.uk/murdermystery](https://messychurch.org.uk/murdermystery): just print it off, add your best performers, one or two props, a few bottles of whatever helps people relax, sit back and enjoy. You could make it into a fundraiser for Messy £100 and charge an entrance fee, or simply put a donation bucket out.



# Messy Church International



# Conference 2019 in pictures





# Messy Church goes digital

Ben Jones, Founder and Trustee of Missional Generation

The current youth generation (Gen Z) is a generation that has been born into technology and who are more digitally savvy than any generation before. This could become a real asset to the church. We often hear negatives relating to digital technology; however, as a youth charity, we are keen to utilise relevant and innovative tools that help bring faith alive. It was this that led us to consider how digital technology could be used to connect with groups on the fringes of church and in doing so help them to explore scripture and have a fresh understanding of how the Bible is relevant to life today. We are keen to see digital innovation used for good – helping reconnect people to the good news of Jesus.

Messy Church creates a creative and interactive space for all ages to connect and we are excited that digital technology can in fact be easily woven in to the programme in a positive way that helps bring all generations together, involve them in a thought-provoking, fun and interactive activity and then bring about amazing Christ-centred discussions.

We have been excited to see how Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality resources have helped those with little to no previous understanding of the Bible understand that scripture, the stories in the Bible and Jesus are hugely relevant to us today.

Over the past couple of years, Missional Generation has focused time on what digital innovation could mean to children, youth and family ministry. This has provided us with the opportunity to develop and demonstrate possible digital resources with a range of groups. Our main focus has been Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) Christian resources. Having enjoyed many years volunteering at Messy Church sessions that my wife leads, I am confident that all generations can connect and enjoy digital technology with ease and in an accessible and affordable way.

In the run-up to Easter, we facilitated a session with young people and families from a local Messy Church. We used a child-friendly version of the resurrection that is in the style of Minecraft. It was great to see this add value to the session and complement the other activities that were on offer. The conversations across the ages were fantastic and a joy to hear.

Excitingly for us, we have been able to partner with two local Christians (a young person and his dad) to develop new VR and AR resources. Vladislav Kriukov is a young person from Leeds; he and his dad, Andrej, are both skilled in digital coding, and using this skill to share Jesus has strengthened their relationship as father and son and has also shown them how their skills can be used to be digital evangelists. We met

them through our connection with their local church and this has opened up opportunities to create new interactive family resources that bring scripture alive. This has included a David and Goliath AR game – where you open up a life-sized version of Goliath and then you try and fling stones to defeat him – a game based on the parable of the lost coin, two Easter resurrection VR experiences (one aimed at young people and adults and one that is more suitable for children) and an all-age AR Christmas resource called the ‘12 Revelations of Christmas’.

The possibilities for the use of digital technology within Messy Churches are wide ranging. We would love to encourage you to explore how it could be used within your setting. We have trialled and experienced how this technology is easy to use even for those who tend to avoid or have a fear of technology and it has been amazing to see how digital innovation captures the interest of a generation who love to have digital resources at the tips of their fingers.

Our heart is to see the local Church resourced and equipped and we would love to help Messy Churches explore how digital resources could be included within your provision. You will find more information at [missionalgen.co.uk/vr](http://missionalgen.co.uk/vr) or please do not hesitate to contact us at [admin@missionalgen.co.uk](mailto:admin@missionalgen.co.uk).



Missional Generation is a charity in the north of England that works to equip young people to live influential lives for God. At the heart of the charity is a key principle to work closely with the local church and to help the church to connect, share faith and disciple young people within their communities. We see this as central to young people growing in their personal faith in Jesus.



# £100 Appeal



## Messy Church helps people follow Jesus



Pip © Adrian Serecut

If you've been on the Messy Church grapevine for a year or more, you may remember hearing about Pip, a lovely little boy with Down's Syndrome and a regular at Messy Church.

We visited Pip and his parents, Robin and Jayne, last autumn to capture their story. They told us how the people at Messy Church 'blew them away' with their acceptance and love, and how they wouldn't have done as well in life without them. The story obviously struck a chord with many of you, as we received dozens of comments from people saying they felt blessed to be part of Messy Church and found Pip's story both moving and life-affirming.

Pip's story was distributed as part of our Messy Church £100 Appeal, which encourages churches everywhere to give £100, so that Messy Church can continue to grow and thrive. Many of you will have received the fundraising packs that we sent out last November, designed to help you talk to your church leadership team about supporting us. We want to say a huge thank you to everyone that did this or gave sacrificially out of their own pocket. We had a great response to last year's appeal and it really made a difference to what we were able to achieve – thank you!

There are so many stories out there: stories of how Messy Church is reaching people who weren't previously attending church, and of how it's growing disciples and modelling new patterns of church leadership.

Messy Church truly is living out its values of creativity, hospitality, celebration, all age and Christ-centredness. We want to celebrate that, so over the next few months we're going to be sharing more incredible stories with you. We hope they'll encourage and affirm you in your Messy Church ministry, but also inspire your church leaders to again dig deep, so that more families can hear about Jesus and grow in faith through Messy Church.

Over 10% of churches running a Messy Church donated last year. Could you help us beat this figure?

**94%** of Messy Churches feel enabled to **share the gospel**



About **half a million** people go every month  
**1 in 3** wouldn't normally go to church

**68%** of families attending go on to read the Bible, pray together or talk about God at home



**BRF** The Bible Reading Fellowship is the home of Messy Church

It costs around **£280,000** a year to support and resource the Messy Church network



The network is supported by



**3** staff and the wider resources of BRF



**150** volunteer Regional Coordinators

**81%** of Messy Churches appreciate being part of the Messy Church network



**3%** of Messy Churches donated last year to support the network



**7 in 10** Messy Churches say they'd struggle without BRF's help

## Will your church help support Messy Church?

Find out more at [messychurch.org.uk/messy100](http://messychurch.org.uk/messy100)

# Session material: September



Go to [messychurch.org.uk/getmessysep19](http://messychurch.org.uk/getmessysep19) to download all templates at A4 size, including a session planning sheet

## Holy Habit: Gladness and Generosity

## #discipleship: individual

### Messy reflection by Martyn Payne

The Lord who rules over all says, 'I will send my messenger. He will prepare my way for me. Then suddenly the Lord you are looking for will come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant will come. He is the one you long for... I am the Lord. I do not change. That is why I have not destroyed you members of Jacob's family. You have turned away from my rules. You have not obeyed them. You have lived that way ever since the days of your people of long ago. Return to me. Then I will return to you,' says the Lord who rules over all...

'You ask, "How are we robbing you?"

'By holding back your offerings. You also steal from me when you do not bring me a tenth of everything you produce... Bring the entire tenth to the storerooms in my temple. Then there will be plenty of food. Test me this way,' says the Lord. 'Then you will see that I will throw open the windows of heaven. I will pour out so many blessings that you will not have enough room to store them. I will keep bugs from eating up your crops. And your grapes will not drop from the vines before they are ripe,' says the Lord. 'Then all the nations will call you blessed. Your land will be delightful,' says the Lord who rules over all.

Malachi 3:1-12 (NIRV, abridged)

The last book of the Old Testament is full of challenging words for the people of God at the time and for us today. It contains God's own searching questions to Israel about their lack of faith, their half-hearted worship and their ungenerous lifestyle. Maybe those 70 years in exile and the ruinous state of Jerusalem on their return had undermined their belief in God and, rather than seeing their return as a renewal of God's love for them, they had allowed faith to slip to the margins of their lives.

God was disappointed with them in one area in particular. Long ago, the people of God were told that, as an expression of their worship, they should give back to God at least a tenth

of all they had – their land, money, crops and time. But where faith had weakened, so had this discipline. God knows that once we lose the habit of being generous, our baser instincts towards greed and selfishness quickly shape our attitudes.

So God calls them to 'bring the full tithes into the storehouse' (v. 10, RSV) to bless others. In the New Testament, Jesus elaborates on this further when he explains that whatever we give to others is really given to God and also that when we give, it will be given to us, a 'good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over' (Luke 6:38, RSV). We experience God's blessing only when we are prepared to bless others.

Such generosity should be a mark of Christian discipleship and this is something we need to pass on to our Messy congregations. Maybe this Messy Church session is the moment to talk more openly about giving as a mark of following Jesus. Perhaps you can come up with some creative ways to help this happen by adopting a Messy Church charity, organising a Messy fundraising event or encouraging your Messy Church to support the Messy £100 Appeal this autumn.

## #discipleship: team

### Messy health check

Take it in turns to describe the last time someone gave you something and how that made you feel. Turn the feelings into prayer, acknowledging how God feels when his people are generous.

### Messy team theme

- It can be hard to give generously when we find it hard to make ends meet or we feel we are 'time poor', but as disciples of Christ that's just what we are called to do. Why does God want us to give?
- Can you imagine a world where everyone gave a little so that others didn't need to suffer? I think that is the type of world God wants for us. 'And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them' (Acts 4:33-34, NIV). Malachi's writing is a challenge on tithing to the whole community. As a Messy Church team and community, what is the challenge to us?

### How does this session help people grow in Christ?

Learning to give gladly and generously reminds us that life is not all about us, but the family of God all around us. We are all called to give to God's storehouse.

# God loves a cheerful giver by Jocelyn Czerwonka

## #discipleship: families

### Mealtime card

- What's one new thing we could do to give to God?
- In what ways can we give time to God?
- What has challenged me at Messy Church today?

### Take-home idea

Decorate three jars at home and label them: 'Giving', 'Saving', 'Spending'. Fill with pocket money, spare change or promise notes to God. Remember the biblical principle of giving one tenth to God – this includes time, money and harvest. Read Malachi 3:10 and write this verse on a card beside your jars.

### Question to start and end the session

So... how can I give gladly to God?

## #discipleship: extra

Hold a fun family fundraising event for Messy Church at BRF, or for another good cause dear to your hearts.

### Social action

Create your own version of the supermarkets' charitable giving tokens schemes, using stampers on a big display board to cast your vote and see which local good cause your Messy Church would most like to support in the coming month. Hold an event to raise money for it or let everyone know you'll be collecting so that they can bring some change.

1



2



## Activities

### 1. Giving God our best!

**You will need: paper; felt-tip pens; circle templates; rulers; small glasses; vinegar; food colouring; baking soda**

When it comes to 'time', do we give God our best or just a little of our leftovers?

Create your own pie chart of how you spend your time. Include how much time you spend sleeping, eating, praying, working, playing, watching TV, sport and exercise, worship, gaming, serving, caring for others, caring for creation, doing devotions.

What happens if we let God be the 'centre' of our lives? Place a small glass in the centre of the pie graph. Fill 1/3 of the cup with vinegar, add a few drops of food colouring and then add a spoonful of baking soda. Stir and watch what happens.

**Talk about** how God wants to be in our life, in all we do and are. By letting God be at the centre of our lives, we can give our best to him.

### 2. Seeds for the harvest

**You will need: potting mix; seeds; pots; gloves; masks; printed and laminated instructions for plant care of your chosen seeds**

Depending on the time of the year in your part of the world, choose 'seeds for the harvest' that can be planted in pots and cared for, such as pumpkins, courgette or beans. Plant your seed ready to take home, along with the instructions for care of your plant. When it's mature, you could share with a neighbour, friend or foodbank.

**Talk about** how, in Malachi's day, food from crops was taken to the storehouse and distributed to the poor and needy.

### 3. Protecting crops: hairy caterpillar

**You will need: old knee-length pantyhose (stockings); potting mix, grass seed; stick-on googly eyes; pipe cleaners; garden gloves; facemasks (recommended when handling potting mix); cardboard boxes; soapy water to wash hands**

Mix grass seed into potting mix and fill the pantyhose. Use string to tie the ends and create segments on the caterpillar's

# Session material: September

3



body. Stick on the eyes. Thread the pipe cleaners through to make antennae. Take your hairy caterpillar home in a cardboard box, give him a good soak in water and place him on a sunny windowsill – then watch him grow!

**Talk about** how in Malachi 3:11 (NIV), God says, 'I will prevent pests from devouring your crops.' The hairy caterpillar reminds us that God will watch over our crops and all that we do and give to God.

4



## 4. Fruits from the harvest

**You will need: hand sanitiser; toothpicks; cherry tomatoes and grapes; cubes of cheese; prunes or raisins; courgette, potatoes or apples; other fruits and vegetables as required**

Note: As other activities involve handling soil, be sure to wash hands before starting this activity.

Create your very own fruit creations such as hedgehogs and caterpillars, using a courgette, potato or apple as a base. Use the toothpicks to add other fruit and vegetables, and add raisins for eyes.

**Talk about** how fruit and vegetables are a gift from God. Perhaps we can share our fruit creations with others at mealtime. How would that make you feel?

5



## 5. Gifts of hope

**You will need: charity gift catalogues (e.g. World Vision, Tearfund, Oxfam, Save the Children); a 'giving box'; card; felt-tip pens; ribbons**

Put a Post-it-sized hole in the lid of the box to post cards.

Colour and draw pictures and prayers on card to make gift cards. Choose a gift that could be suitable for Messy Church group to give and write this on your gift card. Post the card in the giving box. Money donations can be posted, too, if you like. Before the end of Messy Church, ask for a blessing on the prayers and donations. See which gift is the most popular and decide as a group how you might like to fundraise to buy this gift together. For example, as a group you might choose to buy chickens for a needy community. Individuals or families might like to choose their own gift to fundraise for and give away.

**Talk about** the fact that, when we do things together as believers of God, we can make a big change in the lives of others – 'all the believers were one in heart and mind... they shared everything they had' (Acts 4:32, NIV).

6



7



8



# God loves a cheerful giver by Jocelyn Czerwonka

## 6. 'God loves a cheerful giver'

**You will need: 750 ml plastic bottles; balloons; felt-tip pens; vinegar; baking soda; sticky tape; paper; food colouring; trays**

Tape the plastic bottle to the tray so it doesn't tip over. Pour in a cup of vinegar. Add food colouring. Create a funnel with paper and pour 2 tsp of baking soda into the balloon. Draw a happy face on the balloon. Blow up the balloon a few times to stretch it.

Carefully stretch the balloon over the bottle, being careful not to let the baking soda fall in until you are ready. Then lift the balloon so the baking soda falls into the bottle. Watch what happens.

Talk about how God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).

## 7. Giving gladly to God

**You will need: dice; cups; at least 30 board game tiles or carpet squares; clip art happy faces (laminated, cut out and attach to upside down plastic cups to use as markers)**

Print out and laminate instructions to be added randomly to your board game tiles:

God loves a cheerful giver – Go forward 3 places  
Don't be a grumpy giver – Go back 2 places  
Thank you for helping – Go forward 3 places  
God doesn't like tantrums – Go back 2 places  
Love your smile – Go forward 3 places  
Thank you for thinking of someone else – Go forward 3 places  
It's not good to be selfish – Go back 3 places  
You are generous – Go forward 3 places  
God loves you – Go forward 5 places

Play this game and see who can get to the end first.

Talk about what it feels like when you have to go backwards. How does it feel when you go forward and finally finish the game? What do we learn from this?

## 8. Glad faces

**You will need: recycled tins; decorative tape; cloth; glue; glad face templates (you could use clip art); craft sticks or cardboard strips**

Decorate your tin. Stick the glad faces to the craft sticks. Think of all the things you are glad for, and write each one on the

stick. Put your glad faces into the tin to take home, where you can pray and be thankful for these gifts.

Talk about what you are glad for. At home, let your tin of glad faces remind you to be thankful for God's blessings in your life.

## 9. Cheerful giving bags

**You will need: large brown paper bags with handles; Messy Church logos or stickers; copies of a 'cheerful giving' picture (see Google Images); copies of printed scripture 2 Corinthians 9:7; glue; scissors; crayons; alphabet stamps for naming bags (optional)**

Take a paper bag and decorate it with the Messy Church logo, cheerful images, the verse from 2 Corinthians and anything else that will remind you to give cheerfully.

Talk about how cheerful giving bags are a reminder that God delights in those who give to others out of love and not under compulsion.

## 10. Blessing box

**You will need: when advertising Messy Church, ask people to bring food, vegetables or supplies for your 'blessing box'**

Search charity or recycling shops for an old cupboard, shelves or pantry that can be painted at Messy Church. You may want to add special designs or coloured stickers. Make a sign to go with it, such as: 'Give what you can and take what you need'. Alternatively, decorate cardboard boxes or baskets to collect donations for giving away.

Talk about how we can bless others by sharing what we can.



# Session material: September

## God loves a cheerful giver by Jocelyn Czerwonka

### Celebration

**You will need: giving box (from activity 5); fresh fruit and vegetables or pickles, jams and preserves; gifts e.g. new pyjamas; a wheelbarrow, cart or basket filled with fresh fruit and vegetables**

Have you ever wondered what you could do to make the world a better place, especially for people who have struggles in life? Let me tell you about Fletcher, a five-year-old boy growing up on a farm in New Zealand. Fletcher was given some new pyjamas, just what he needed with the cold winter nights approaching. He was delighted with his pyjamas, but then stopped and thought for a while. He asked his Mum if all children have warm pyjamas to go to bed at night and was saddened to learn that even in his community there were children who had no pyjamas and struggled to keep warm. Fletcher was so concerned that he made it his mission to make a difference for at least some other children. He set to work doing chores around the house. He rang his Nana and asked if he could earn some money by working on the farm. It wasn't long before Fletcher and his little brother were loading a trolley with firewood and pulling and pushing with all their strength to get it up the hill to the house for Nana. It was a lot of hard work and effort. Fletcher also helped with cleaning and baking and, before long, he had enough money to buy some pyjamas for children who didn't have any. He rang the Public Health Nurse, who thought what Fletcher was doing was wonderful. She soon found some very glad and grateful families to give the warm pyjamas to.

Fletcher was glad to have found a way to give to others in need and was already planning his next big giving idea to give away blankets next winter. Let's have a look at our giving box. I wonder what gifts we have chosen from the catalogues that we would like to give away. (*Discuss the different ideas. Decide which gift you could fundraise for and how you might do this.*)

In the Old Testament, Malachi challenges the whole community to give generously, at least one tenth of their harvest to God's storehouse, as by not doing so they were robbing God. The storehouse provided for God's people and those in need in the community. What kind of harvest do you think would be given to the storehouse? Perhaps, like Fletcher did with the firewood, the people would take their harvest to the storehouse on a cart. Today, storehouses are still used to store fruit and vegetables and keep them fresh until they are ready to distribute to shops

and markets. We may not all live on farms or have gardens or fruit trees, but what do you think are some ways we could still be giving a tenth of our harvest to God?

What do you think of the storehouse or blessing box we have created today? How do you think we can keep this full? How can it be a blessing to others and to our community? As Christians, life isn't all about us; it is about the community and world we are part of. Malachi goes on to tell us that as we give generously and bring 'the full tithe to the storehouse', God will 'pour down an overflowing blessing... and then all nations will count you happy, for you live in the land of delight'.

(Fletcher's story was told on National News in New Zealand. You can watch it online: [tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/good-sorts-fletcher-armer](http://tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/good-sorts-fletcher-armer))

### Prayer

Hold up the giving box and take time to pray for the ideas, gifts and prayers in the box and for the people who will be blessed by these gifts. Then go on to pray: Thank you, God, for all the good gifts you share with us. Remind us that there are many who go without. Remind us, too, that by giving what we can to you, your work in the world will continue. Help us not to be greedy and store up all these treasures for ourselves, but to share what we have with others. Thank you for food and the harvest. Help us to be a community who will gladly give what we can to you and to others. Amen

### Song suggestions

'Give thanks with a grateful heart' – Don Moen

'We are the world' ([youtube.com/watch?v=HqjYoUbmAPs](http://youtube.com/watch?v=HqjYoUbmAPs))

'A gift to you' – Betsy Hernandez (*Kids in Worship*)

### Meal suggestion

Happy face potatoes:  
baked potatoes in their jackets with choice of fillings: mince, grated carrot, courgette circles, rocket salad, cherry

tomatoes, grated cheese, sour cream. Before cooking, carve a happy face into each potato. You can use an apple corer to make eyes and a sharp knife for the mouth. Sprinkle with paprika to highlight the face. For dessert, have fruit kebabs with marshmallows, reminding us of the good gifts God gives us, with ice cream. Give out chocolate money to share – these could be in bowls on the table to share with each other.



# Session material: October

## God's armour of light by Martyn Payne



Go to [messychurch.org.uk/getmessysep19](http://messychurch.org.uk/getmessysep19) to download all templates at A4 size, including a session planning sheet

### Holy Habit: Biblical Teaching

### #discipleship: individual

#### Messy reflection by Jocelyn Czerwonka

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Ephesians 6:10–20 (NIV)

The uniform of a Roman army soldier seems exotic to us today, but the early Christians would have seen it every day. The Roman army was feared and respected as the most powerful fighting force in the world, which secured Rome as a great empire for over a thousand years. Each part of the soldier's uniform or kit was designed to be effective in a particular way, either in defence or attack. The writer of Ephesians uses each part to symbolise a spiritual value or godly strength that enables the Christian to stand firm against enemy attacks.

Our weapons are truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word of God and prayer. Each of these (except prayer) matches the different parts of the soldier's kit. Each part defends a weakness or provides a means of attack. Who is our enemy, then? Not individuals, but spiritual forces; little white lies; being selfish, deceitful, unethical or immoral; behaviour which undermines right relationships. Being evasive about our faith is also an enemy, not taking a stand on what we know to be true and right. The assurance of salvation, that by the grace of God we are saved through Jesus Christ, protects us in times of doubt. The sword of the Spirit is our knowledge of God's word, without which we would be unable to spread the gospel and to defend it against opponents. Finally, the writer reminds us to keep alert and always be praying for others. By putting on the armour of God, we too can feel confident when under attack and fearlessly proclaim the gospel of Christ to the world. Let's get ready!

### #discipleship: team

#### Messy health check

Which piece of God's armour of light have you used recently?

#### Messy team theme

- Christian attitudes to Halloween vary across the world. How can this session help Messy Church families focus on the light rather than the darkness?
- How might God's armour of light help families to distinguish between what is dangerous and what is merely commercial when it comes to Halloween?
- Paul decided not to let his chains get in the way of talking about Jesus. What might this say to us today as a Messy Church team delivering this session?

#### How does this session help people grow in Christ?

Being a follower of Jesus is not limited by our personal circumstances. Paul wrote today's Bible story while he was in jail, and yet even in a prison cell he could pray for people, write letters, talk to visitors and his guards about God, and live compassionately as Jesus did. What an encouragement to each of us, wherever life has put us. And Paul's advice comes out of his own observations, too. His guard's armour and weapons, which were meant to be intimidating, became an inspiration as to how each of us can be filled with God's light and can challenge the darkness whenever we meet it.

# Session material: October

## #discipleship: families

### Mealtime card

- What's your usual reaction to being somewhere you don't want to be?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you have felt trapped, like in a prison?
- Which part of the armour in today's story do you think is most useful?
- Look around; can you see any objects that might also tell you something about having faith in God?

### Take-home idea

Why not pick up on the active prayer for this story, suggested in the celebration, which offers a lively way to put on God's armour each day? Pray this together as a family at home.

Use one of the 'all-kinds-of-prayer' prayer pots from activity 10 at home. Keep it in a prominent place and after a meal, invite one member of the family to pick out a particular object so that together you can pray a different sort of prayer each day.

### Question to start and end the session

So... have we put on God's armour of light today so we can live effectively for Jesus?

## #discipleship: extra

Find out from the internet about Prisons Sunday and Prisons Week (second week in October). Pick up on any suggestions there that you could follow up as a family and also consider saying a prayer as a family for prisoners, especially those who are detained in some cases unjustly.

### Social action

Send your families a weblink to investigate a different country where owning a Bible is illegal. (Find a suitable one by checking it first for disturbing content.)

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# God's armour of light by Martyn Payne

## Activities

### 1. 'Stone walls do not a prison make'

**You will need: plenty of cardboard packaging; sticky tape; scissors**

Paul may have been in prison, but he saw it as an opportunity. Work together to create items found in Paul's prison cell from the cardboard. Try to include a window with bars, stocks, keys, padlock and also some cardboard chains. If you have enough cardboard, you might like to turn this into an ongoing activity over the session, building a mini-prison cell.

Talk about how Paul's attitude to prison can encourage us.

### 2. Enlightenment



**You will need: highlighter or UV pens; squares of paper or sticky notes; a large cardboard box; a torch; templates of images (download online)**

Paul ended up in prison on his travels more than once and so he often observed soldiers at close quarters. The armour he saw became an encouragement to his faith. The light of Jesus can help us see things differently. Using the highlighter or UV pens, trace over the objects from the template, which can then be stuck on the back wall inside the cardboard box.

Pull out the top flaps of the box to make it as dark as possible on the inside. Now using a torch, or if possible a UV torch, invite people to peer in and spotlight the pictures. What can they see and how might they reinterpret these objects positively about faith in God? For example: keys are not just for locking things up but for unlocking treasure boxes.

Talk about how Paul saw things differently with the eyes of faith. Can we learn to do this?

### 3. Still standing

**You will need: clothes pegs; a chessboard; cardboard tube; balloon; scissors; dried chickpeas**

It is remarkable how often in this passage Paul urges his readers to 'stand firm', especially as he himself was chained and may have found it difficult to stand. Paul urges Christians to use the armour of light to stand up to all that is bad in the world. Stand up 16 clothes pegs on some of the white squares of the board. Make a peashooter by cutting a balloon across the top of the

wider section and then stretching it over the end of a cardboard tube. Drop a dried chickpea into the tube and grip it within the balloon, pull back and release to fire the chickpea.

Now challenge each other – each trying to knock as many clothes pegs down as possible in one minute. Who can knock down most in the time?

Talk about how Christians do get knocked down, but the armour of light helps them to stand up again and keep going.

### 4. Tasty armour

**You will need: paper plates; cocktail sticks; icing; large marshmallow pieces; square biscuits; a bag of mixed liquorice; mint chocolate sticks; trifle sponge; writing icing tubes**

Paul picks out six pieces of armour and gives them a new meaning for Christians. This activity turns each piece into something to eat! Stick it all together, using cocktail sticks and icing. Use marshmallows for the head and shoes, the square biscuits as a shield, liquorice for a helmet and for covering the arms and legs, mint sticks as a sword and a piece of trifle sponge as the breastplate. Add more details to your edible armed soldier with writing icing.

Talk about which part of the Christian's armour you think is the most important.

### 5. Disappearing darts

**You will need: thick gloves; some strong see-through cups; pipettes; red food colouring; water; bleach (supervised); towels for spillages; scientific goggles (optional)**

Paul writes about how the 'shield of faith' can absorb the fiery darts from the enemy. Pipette a few drops of bleach into the water in one cup and then very carefully, again using a pipette, drip some 'fiery darts' of red dye into the mixture. Now, wearing gloves, carefully pour the mixture from one cup to another and back again a few times and you will see the red colour disappear.

Talk about how faith can be like a shield for us.

### 6. Sword bookmarks



**You will need: sword template (download online); felt-tip pens**

Paul compares the soldier's sword to God's words. We can read God's words – both promises and commands – in the

# Session material: October

Bible. Make copies of the sword template, preferably on to card. Decorate this with felt-tip pens and then keep it in a family Bible to remind everyone of the power of God's words.

**Talk about** which Bible stories you enjoy most and which ones you find most encouraging when facing hard times.

## 7. Cross helmets

**You will need: red paper or card; newspapers; sticky tape**

Paul compares the helmet worn by soldiers in battle to the protection that the cross brings for all who follow Jesus, i.e. our salvation. In this activity, everyone makes a helmet for someone else. Roll up four sheets of newspaper tightly into a long tube. Make two of these and slot them together. Bend this into a circle around the circumference of someone's head, cut it to size and tape it together firmly. Now roll two shorter tubes of red paper or card and stick the two taped tubes together as a cross. Fix this across the circle of newspaper so that the cross sits over the crown of the head. Tape it all together firmly.

**Talk about** why you think Paul likens a helmet to salvation.

## 8. Healing soles

**You will need: a large collection of shoes of all shapes, styles and sizes (both adults' and children's shoes); large box**

Paul compares the good news about Jesus and the peace he brings to the shoes the soldier wears, because we are meant to step out and share the good news of peace with others. Invite family groups to decide on words they are going to spell out by choosing and arranging the shoes as the letters of those words, such as: news, peace, healing, love etc. It might be wise, depending on how old and dirty the shoes are, to have gloves available.

**Talk about** where our feet take us each day and how we might be ambassadors for Jesus in each place.

## 9. Putting on Jesus

**You will need: white bin liners; felt-tip pens; scissors**

Paul compares the bullet-proof vest of the soldier to the perfect life Jesus lived – namely, his righteousness. When we put on the breastplate, we are putting on Jesus. Cut out a hole for the head and two holes for the arms in the closed end of the pedal bin liner. Check that it will fit as a 'breastplate' jerkin.

Now write words or draw pictures on the bin liner of anything linked to the life of Jesus, such as his miracles, his stories, his sayings, his friends and the key events in his life. You might like to trace pictures from a children's Bible. Now put this on, as a way of remembering to put on Jesus as part of your special armour of light.

**Talk about** which part of the story of Jesus you like the best.

## 10. An 'all kinds of prayer' pot

**You will need: plain paper cups; coloured card; pens; heart-shaped sweets; wrapped sweets; string**

All the pieces of God's armour need to be supported by all types of prayer. Paul says the Holy Spirit will help us pray. Collect the following to represent different sorts of prayer:

- A wrapped sweet – to remind us that some prayers are about listening not talking
- A piece of card with 999 on it – to remind us about 'emergency help' prayers
- Some heart-shaped sweets with uplifting words/phrases on them – to remind us about 'thank you' prayers to God
- A knotted piece of string – to remind us about bringing our problems to God
- A piece of card cut as a teardrop – to remind us to bring sadness and sorrow to God
- A piece of card with a question mark on it – to remind us to bring our questions to God
- A cut-out heart – to remind us to express our love for God

Add other object ideas of your own that will help you pray in different ways and then put them in the cup, which you can also decorate as your prayer pot. Set yourself a challenge of picking out a different object and saying a different sort of prayer every day.

**Talk about** which kinds of prayers are most helpful for you and which kinds of prayers you tend to pray the most often.

10



# God's armour of light by Martyn Payne

## Celebration

**You will need: cardboard prison cell items (from activity 1); some makeshift armour such as a bicycle helmet, cardboard sword, tin foil, big belt, oversized sandals and a dustbin lid**

Begin by sharing people's experiences of the activities. Which ones did they enjoy? What worked and what didn't? What new experiences did they try? What did they learn? When people started telling the world about Jesus, back when the church began, it didn't all go smoothly. Not everyone wanted to listen and some people got very angry about the claim that Jesus was God. Paul was a great traveller back then, starting churches all over the place, but he very often ended up in prison. It still happens to Christians today in some parts of the world. Challenging the darkness with the light of Jesus can come at a price. So in today's messy story, Paul was once again in prison. Use the junk prison cell items to help describe what it must have been like. It was also almost certainly dirty, dark, uncomfortable, lonely, frustrating, cold and maybe even smelly. Paul was chained to a soldier who guarded him. Different guards would take it in turns in four-hour shifts. I wonder what they thought about Paul. But Paul didn't let his bad situation shut him down. Instead, he saw many opportunities to go on telling people about Jesus. He did four things: things that we too can do as Christians anywhere we might end up. Invite everyone to mime simple actions that illustrate Paul's response to prison: He prayed... (hands together)... for all his friends in the churches he had started or visited. He welcomed guests... (hands out wide ready to give a hug)... because people were allowed to visit him and he always had an encouraging word for them. He wrote letters... (hands writing, holding an imaginary quill pen)... lots of letters to church groups and individuals. Today's story is from one of his letters to Christians in a place called Ephesus.

He kept his ears and eyes open to how God might speak to him... (one hand shading eyes and one hand cupped by an ear)... because God was close and helped him to see his situation differently, and that's where Paul's big soldier picture comes in. Invite someone to come and be Paul's guard in the cell. Introduce him as a Roman soldier and start kitting him out with the makeshift armour you have prepared, namely large sandals, cardboard sword, big belt, cycle helmet, some silver foil wrapped around the middle to be the breastplate and a dustbin lid as a shield. Paul had to look at this armed soldier day in and day out! It should have got him down, but instead God spoke to him. Each piece made him think about how God

wants to equip us so we can push back the darkness like Jesus did. Point to each piece and explain how God helped Paul see: God's words (sword), God's gift of Jesus (righteousness), the power of the cross (salvation), truth (belt), faith (shield) and the good news (shoes). Paul passed this on to his visitors, in his letters and to you and me! Even a prison can become a place to learn more about God!

## Prayer

Let's turn 'putting on God's armour of light' into a prayer made up of five exercise movements. (Teach this and make it your celebration prayer.) Standing up straight, cross your left hand over to your right shoulder and then your right hand over to your left shoulder, as you put on the breastplate of righteousness (your body armour of being put right with God). Repeat this several times. Now reach across your left hand to your right hip and then your right hand to your left hip, as you fix on the belt of truth. Repeat this several times. Still standing, now bend forward slightly and put out your right leg in front of you bending the knee slightly, while the other leg should be straight. Push forward with the leading knee and crook your right arm to demonstrate holding the sword of the Spirit. Repeat this action but reversing everything, so the left arm is crooked, holding this time the shield of faith. Stand up straight again and with both hands put your imaginary helmet of salvation over your head, fixing it in position with your finger and thumb on your forehead just above your eyes. Repeat this several times. Finally, sit down and rest one ankle across one knee. Place your fingertips on to your calf muscles below the rested knee and press up and down between there and the ankle. At the same time, flex the foot of this rested leg. This is belting up the shoes of the gospel of peace. Put on your other shoe by repeating this, but sit with your other ankle rested on the other knee.

## Song suggestions

'I'm putting God's armour on' – Kidsource  
'I may never march with the infantry' – Junior Praise  
'God beside' – Fischy Music  
'Be strong (the armour)' – Dave Godfrey  
'Pray at all times' – Becky and Nick Drake  
'Full armour of God' – Kidspring Children's Ministry

## Meal suggestion

A slang word for prison is 'stir', so how about stir-fry vegetables, with or without chicken pieces, and rice accompanied by the traditional prison diet of bread and water? You could offer waffles and toppings for dessert, which look like the bars of a prison door or window.

# Session material: November



Go to [messychurch.org.uk/getmessysep19](http://messychurch.org.uk/getmessysep19) to download all templates at A4 size, including a session planning sheet

## Holy Habit: Eating Together

## #discipleship: individual

### Messy reflection by Anne Offler and Sharon Pritchard

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognising him.

He asked them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?'

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?'

'What things?' he asked.

'About Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.'

He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it

is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, 'It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Luke 24:13-35 (NIV)

Picture the scene – two friends are on a journey together, walking along the road and talking together. You can imagine the conversation between them, trying to make sense of the events of the last few days and come to terms with the news they'd just heard, and all the while Jesus himself was there with them walking alongside them. He asks them what they are talking about. You can hear the sadness in their reply, that the one whom they thought would redeem Israel had been sentenced to death and crucified. But they continued that the women had gone to the tomb and saw angels who told them that Jesus was alive.

Jesus says that they are foolish and he asks, 'Didn't the Messiah have to suffer before entering glory?' Had they forgotten what they had been taught? Sometimes it is difficult to remember the promises in scripture when we are hard pressed or dealing with something difficult. I wonder if they were in such a state that they couldn't think clearly. I wonder if they continued to mull over all that had happened and what Jesus had just said to them as they carried on.

It looked as if the stranger was going further, but the friends invited him to stay with them, and as Jesus broke bread and gave thanks their eyes were opened and they recognised him! It wasn't until they sat down to eat together that Jesus revealed who he was and their eyes were opened and they recognised him. Spending that time together eating was so incredibly important. Had they not taken the opportunity to share the meal with the stranger, they may have not seen him for who he really was. Their kindness and generosity in welcoming the stranger to come and eat with them was well rewarded.

# Feast of faith by Lindsey Goodyear

## #discipleship: team

### Messy health check

When was the last time you hung out together as a team and just had pizza or dinner or a cup of tea together?

### Messy team theme

- How can you help others realise that switching their mindset from doubt to faith can be the change they need in their life?
- What doubts have you or your team had that actually turned out to be an eye-opening religious experience?
- How can we encourage our congregation to remember to thank God when breaking bread outside of a church service?

### How does this session help people grow in Christ?

When the two disciples were on the walk to Emmaus, they were so entrenched in their depression over the death of Jesus that they didn't notice it was actually he who joined them on their walk. Despite his trying to open their eyes and their hearts to know for sure that he had indeed risen, even referencing scripture as proof, the two disciples never wavered in their lack of faith. Once invited into their home, Jesus said a blessing and broke bread. Only then were the disciples' eyes opened to who the stranger really was. The breaking of the bread was the reminder they needed to see the truth. Jesus is alive! We must use this as a guide to listen to our hearts, open our eyes and believe in our God. He's always with us and we must not get in our own way when it comes to seeking him. Don't just travel your own journey, too busy dwelling on life's let-downs to notice that he's been walking alongside you the whole time.

## #discipleship: families

### Mealtime card

- What is your dinner routine at home? Does it include prayer?
- Can you think of a time that you talked about Jesus with a stranger the way the two disciples did on the road to Emmaus?
- Do you think you could open your home to a stranger the way the disciples unknowingly opened it to Jesus in this parable?

### Take-home idea

'Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him.' Write down on a piece of paper a time where God opened your eyes and you were able to recognise him in that situation. Ask other members of your family to do the same and then share your unique experiences with each other at dinnertime.

Dear heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your eternal love. We thank you for the opportunity we have at Messy Church to understand your story, learn to pray and thrive in your word. Let us always have our 'eyes opened' so that we may recognise your glory in every one of our surroundings and share this great news with whoever we may be walking the road with. Amen

### Question to start and end the session

So... where have you seen God today?

## #discipleship: extra

Do a Messy family safari meal and eat a different course in different people's houses.

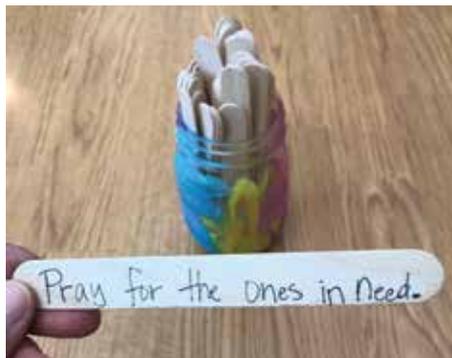
### Social action

As a Messy Church, organise a one-off simple Sunday lunch for your community.



# Session material: November

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## Activities

### 1. Food matching game

**You will need: sheets of paper printed with foreign dishes on the left-hand side; small paper rectangles with the names of countries written on them**

People all over the world sit to eat and thank the same God every day before they do. Hand each member a sheet of paper. In the centre of the table, mix together the small rectangles with the names of countries written on them. The first person to successfully match all of the dishes with the countries they come from wins a prize (possibly a popular sweet from your own country).

**Talk about** how God carefully crafted each country with their own uniquely delicious food and culture, yet we all sit and give thanks to the same loving God.

### 2. Place mats

**You will need: coloured sheets of paper; scissors; markers; glue; laminator**

Let members decorate their own place mats to use at home. Watch as their own unique personality comes out in each mat. You can also encourage them to write prayer reminders anywhere on the mat so they remember to pray before eating. Laminate to take home.

**Talk about** how God has used creativity in creating us, the same way we're using creativity in making our mats.

### 3. Prayer jar

**You will need: glass jars; wooden craft sticks; markers; paint**

Decorate glass jars and fill them with prayer ideas written on wooden craft sticks. People can bring the jar home and place it in the centre of the dining table as a reminder to themselves to thank God before they enjoy the meal he has provided them.

**Talk about** the importance of prayer as a way to connect with and acknowledge God's presence.

### 4. Small-scale table

**You will need: wooden craft sticks in different sizes; glue**

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8



# Feast of faith by Lindsey Goodyear

Place a large mound of wooden craft sticks of all sizes in the centre of the activity table. Let people go wild using their imagination to create the perfect small-scale dinner table.

**Talk about** what you would serve God if he were sitting at your table.

## 5. Ice cream printing

**You will need: styrofoam plates; scissors; pencils; paint; foam roller paint brush; markers; sheets of brown paper**

Cut four circles roughly 3 x 3 inches from a plate. Using a pencil, etch into the first circle the word 'He'. On the second circle the word 'is', the third 'risen' and the fourth should have the word 'indeed'. (Make sure you etch the letters backwards on the circles so they will show up the right way on the paper.) Using the brown sheet of paper, have people draw their own cone. With a sponge roller brush, have them roll different colours on to the styrofoam pieces and, starting at the top of the page and working down, press the paint side down, working toward the cone at the bottom. In the end, it will look like a very colourful four-scoop ice cream cone with the message 'He is risen indeed' inscribed in the treat.

**Talk about** all the ways Jesus used, on their walk, to try and get the disciples to believe he was indeed risen.

## 6. Free play dinner

**You will need: a large table adorned with play plates, food and cups**

Set up a mock dinner table with wooden or plastic play food. Allow members to sit around the table and talk while they pretend to eat. Have the activity leader go around the table and ask each member what they would ask Jesus if he was sitting at their table, then record the results and read them at Messy dinner.

**Talk about** whatever comes up organically as you play.

## 7. Empty chair junk modelling activity

**You will need: boxes and other junk to build with; scissors; sticky tape; glue**

As there was an empty chair in the Emmaus story after Jesus disappeared from it, let people recreate that same chair using boxes and other junk. Working together as a group, they will be able to help each other reinforce a chair sturdy enough

to hold a grown man. The chair will serve as a reminder that although we don't physically see him there, Jesus is with us always.

**Talk about** a time where although you didn't physically see him, you felt God's presence.

## 8. Walking disciples

**You will need: a large roll of paper; scissors; a large hole punch; markers; paint**

Roll out a large sheet of paper from a paper roll and set it on the floor. Have people work together, drawing and colouring the road and its surroundings that the disciples walked in the road to Emmaus story. Back up at the table, let them create, colour and cut out what they think the two people looked like. At the bottom of their creation, punch out two holes large enough for their first and second finger to fit through (they will look like legs on the finger puppet). Let them have fun using their fingers to walk the road they've created and listen to the conversations they come up with.

**Talk about** what the disciples might have been discussing before Jesus joined them. How must that hopelessness have felt for them in that moment?

## 9. Edible jelly bean poem



**You will need: glass jars; jellybeans; sheets of paper with the poem (below) printed on it**

Separate the jellybeans and layer them into glass jars: first red, then green, yellow, orange, black, white, purple and finally pink. Have the activity leader read the poem to help people understand the reason for the different colours. It goes:

Red is for the blood he gave,  
Green is for the grass he made.  
Yellow is for the sun so bright,  
Orange is for the edge of night.  
Black is for the sins we made,  
White is for the grace he gave.  
Purple is for his hour of sorrow,  
Pink is for a new tomorrow.

**Talk about** how Jesus eventually opened the eyes of the disciples. How full of hope they must have felt when they realised their Saviour had risen!

# Session material: November

## Feast of faith by Lindsey Goodyear

### 10. Following Jesus' footprint



**You will need: printed footprint outlines (download online); pens; crayons**

Separate your footprint into seven sections and label the sections with the days of the week. Around the edges of the paper, write down seven ways you will follow Jesus in the coming week. You can then take home your footprint and colour in the section of the day you are on ONLY if you followed Jesus the way you said you would for that day. Let it be a personal goal to colour in every day!

**Talk about** your own walk with Jesus and how he has shown himself to you along your journey.

## Celebration

When the disciples were on the road to Emmaus, they weren't able to see that Jesus was walking with them, even though he was right in front of them. Despite his attempts to 'open their eyes' with clues and scripture, they were too caught up in their own pity to recognise their great teacher. If only their eyes were open the whole time, they could have had a much more meaningful encounter with their Saviour.

Ask for eight members of the congregation to volunteer in an experiment. Have four of the volunteers sit down on chairs. Have the other four stand about ten feet in front of them. Place blindfolds on the standing four and hand each of them a bowl containing snacks (pretzels work great) and a spoon. Have seated volunteers try to direct the blindfolded volunteers towards them. Once they've reached their spot, have the seated people then give directions for feeding them. The blindfolded people must successfully feed the seated people, with a spoon, solely by relying on their clues. This activity is a riot!

When finished, explain to the seated volunteers that they are like Jesus. The blindfolded volunteers are like the disciples. Even though the seated volunteers were giving them clues, it would have been much easier to feed them if they had their blindfolds off and their eyes opened to see. The disciples would have seen the clues Jesus was given if only the blindfold of their hopelessness and lack of faith had been taken off as well.

### Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, we thank you for the love of Messy Church. We thank you for the opportunity it brings to learn what it means to have our eyes truly 'opened' when it comes to seeing you. Let us not forget the importance of saying grace before eating, as this is a reminder for us all that you are alive, indeed! Help us to always see you in everything that we do. With love and devotion we always praise you, Lord. Amen

### Song suggestions

'Just a closer walk with thee' – Bart Millard

'Be still, for the presence of the Lord' – David J. Evans

'Walking with Jesus' – The Wonder Kids

'Song of prayer' – Heather Price

### Meal suggestion

Macaroni and cheese alongside chilli (choose one with no meat as a vegetarian option). The adults tend to gravitate toward the chilli, while the children choose the macaroni and cheese. This way, they can 'eat together'. For dessert, offer warm brownies with a dollop of ice cream on top. Again, two things that can be eaten 'together'.

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# Session material: December

## Small is mighty by Anne Offler and Sharon Pritchard



Go to [messychurch.org.uk/getmessysep19](http://messychurch.org.uk/getmessysep19) to download all templates at A4 size, including a session planning sheet

## #discipleship: individual

### Messy reflection by Lindsey Goodyear

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.'

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.'

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Luke 2:4–20 (NIV)

When we think about God and the amazing force he is, we tend to view the miracles he so perfectly executes with big,

over-the-top ideas of grandeur. However, looking back at arguably one of the most incredible miracles we've come to know, we see the opposite.

The birth of Jesus can be defined as a single moment that changed the entire course of our world. A Saviour born to completely restore humanity seems like a moment for elaborate celebrations for those of royalty or high status. But God has a way of using small people to do very BIG things.

Mary, mother of Jesus, was a poor girl from an unknown city, Nazareth, to whom God sent an angel to tell her she was chosen to give birth to our Saviour. She was to marry Joseph, a common carpenter, who would become Jesus's earthly father. God chose these two as the parents of Christ despite the fact that they were ordinary people. Even the location of his birth was menial. He was not born in any lavish location, but in a stable, among animals, where he was placed in a manger.

Keeping with the trend of using small people to do big things, we have the story of the shepherds. The shepherds were working a job that no one wanted to do. Tending to flocks of sheep, they were a crew that were rarely noticed. Yet God chose them when he had angels appear, revealing the birth of our Lord Jesus. Once they made their way to Bethlehem to confirm this joyous news, it was they who spread the word to others.

So the responsibility lies within us to take notice of the ways God uses people to carry out his plans. Yes, our God is BIG and grand and incredibly powerful, but that doesn't mean that the ways in which he carries out his plans are brought to light in the same way. God changed the course of our world using small people to do big things! When looking at how God works in your own life, don't rule out the small aspects involved, or that he may use you to do big things as well.

## #discipleship: team

### Messy health check

What one thing can your team pray for each of your team members as the busy season of Advent approaches?

### Messy team theme

- How can we, small as we are, be used by God to accomplish mighty things?

# Session material: December

- Has there ever been a time in your life when you began doubting God's faithfulness? Maybe you've wondered if God had forgotten you. What helped you through this?
- Look at Mary – what do you think some of Mary's dreams were? Was God's plan for her bigger? Better? Was God faithful?
- Look at Joseph – what do you think some of his dreams were? Was God's plan for him bigger? Better? Was God faithful?

## How does this session help people grow in Christ?

This session will help your congregation grow in Christ as an example and reminder that God is faithful and that we can trust him completely. God uses the small to accomplish the mighty! He was faithful to Mary and Joseph, who put their trust in him unreservedly, and he is the same faithful God to us today. He is faithful to all his children. He is always with us.

## #discipleship: families

### Mealtime card

- Which of the characters in the nativity story are you most like?
- Will you ask God to use you to do mighty things?
- Which part of the nativity story do you like the most?

### Take-home idea

If your Messy Church is at the beginning of December, you could follow the 'Love Life Live Advent' challenge here: [liveadvent.net](http://liveadvent.net). It gives a challenge for each day of Advent. You can download resources, invitations and information about how each daily activity will challenge you to do something good for someone else. You can tweet about the challenges each day too using @liveadvent.

### Question to start and end the session

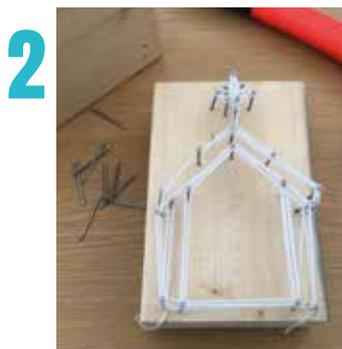
So... have you ever trusted God completely?

## #discipleship: extra

Have an Advent vigil for all ages to join in with. Pray particularly for the families in your community.

### Social action

Make sure your Messy Church joins in the Christmas giving scheme supported by other church congregations.



# Small is mighty

by Anne Offler and Sharon Pritchard

## Activities

### 1. Bethlehem prayer village

**You will need: cardboard boxes and containers; scissors; sticky tape; coloured paper; pens**

Create a village scene of houses and dwellings using boxes of different shapes and sizes. Turn them inside out (do this by undoing the seam and reversing the box, fixing it back together with sticky tape) and cut out two or three rectangles on one of the sides to be the door and windows. Write prayers for the place you live on the coloured paper and roll it up. Pop your rolled-up prayers through the windows and doors.

**Talk about** how Bethlehem was a small village but God used it to be the birth place of Jesus. God can use the places we live in today for mighty things too, if we trust him and follow his plan.

### 2. Stable string art



**You will need: wooden tiles; nails; hammer; stable template (download online); pencils; coloured embroidery threads**

Take a wooden tile and draw around the stable template on to it. Take a hammer and a nail and carefully hammer it in to the wood at the top of the stable outline. Hammer more nails into the wood around the stable outline. Wrap the thread around one of the nails and then around the next nail following the numbered pattern. At the last nail, tie a knot in the thread to finish the pattern.

**Talk about** how the stable in the Christmas story was a tiny, insignificant place where animals slept – and yet God chose it to be the place where the baby Jesus would be born. God used that lowly stable to become one of the most important places in history!

### 3. Paper chooser



**You will need: instructions to make a paper chooser (download online); square paper; pens; stickers or nativity stamps**

Take a square piece of paper and use the instructions to make a paper chooser. You will be able to pick up your chooser and put your fingers inside the folds to move it together and apart. Open the square out fully to write, draw or stamp nativity characters that you will see when you open it out.

**Talk about** how the nativity story is full of people who had to choose to trust God. If they had made different choices, maybe the story would have been different – but they chose to follow and to trust God and he used each of them to be a part of the most amazing story.

### 4. Shepherd cookies

**You will need: ready-made gingerbread people-shaped biscuits; icing in different colours; chocolate**

Take the gingerbread biscuit and decorate it with the icing. Create a face and clothes in different colours to look like a shepherd or shepherdess. Use the chocolate to make a shepherd's crook.

**Talk about** how the shepherds played a very important part in the journey to Bethlehem. They were the first to know that the baby had been born and that made them very important people! God chose to tell them first and the angels appeared to them in the fields. How amazing must they have felt to be chosen to be among the first to see the baby?

### 5. Mary and Joseph's feelings face



**You will need: Mary and Joseph laminated face cards (download online); play dough**

Take the laminated face cards of Mary and Joseph and create features for the faces using the play dough to show how you think Mary and Joseph were feeling. You may want to use different coloured play dough for the different features.

**Talk about** how, when God chose Mary and Joseph to be parents to Jesus, he knew they were perfect for the job. How do you think Mary felt when the angel told her that she would have a baby called Jesus? How do you think Joseph must have felt when God used him to look after Jesus as his own son? How do you think you would feel if God asked you to do something he knew you were perfect for?

### 6. Soothing sounds

**You will need: glass jars; water; food colouring**

Take a few glass jars and pour different amounts of water in to each of them. Put a small drop of food colouring into each jar so that you have a different colour in each jar. Dip your finger into clear water from another jar, and slowly trace your finger around the rim of the glass jars with the coloured water in them. You should be able to hear a soothing sound and make

# Session material: December

some music as the differing amounts of water will produce a different sound. Try to make a tune to sing along to with the water jars.

**Talk about** how even a small amount of water can make a beautiful soothing sound. Something so small can be used to make something special.

## 7. Journey to Bethlehem obstacle course

**You will need: brown cardboard boxes; felt-tip pens; sticky tape; lengths of ribbon or string; low-tack masking tape; lengths of wood; string or netting; chairs; small sports equipment such as cones, hoops, bean bags, etc.**

Make a donkey costume that you can wear using the cardboard box. You will only use the sides of the box. Attach ribbon or string to the sides of the box so that you can slip it over your head and wear the box around your waist. Decorate the box with eyes and features to look like a donkey.

Create an obstacle course with the resources you have. You may be able to borrow some small sports equipment from a school or use what you have in your church/community centre. Low-tack masking tape is good for creating lines on the floor if needed. Ideas for the obstacle course include:

- Follow a course around the hall/church.
- Crawl under or over a row of chairs.
- Crawl under netting or string between two chair legs.
- Jump into and out of a hoop five times.
- Walk on a balance board.
- Throw a beanbag into a basket.
- Run while balancing a beanbag on your head.

**Talk about** how the journey to Bethlehem must have been a difficult one! Was the obstacle course difficult wearing the donkey costume? Sometimes we face obstacles that can stop us from doing the things God wants us to do. How do we get over these obstacles?

## 8. Colourful wax star creations

**You will need: silicone ice cube trays of star shapes; wax crayons in different colours; microwave; fridge**

Take the wax crayons and break them up into smaller pieces. Be careful to remove any paper labels from the crayons. Fill the star ice cube-shaped moulds with the pieces of wax crayon. When you have filled a few with the colours you like,

have an adult put the moulds into the microwave. Heat on full power until all the wax has melted. Times may vary according to different microwaves, ranging from five minutes upwards. Keep checking in 30-second bursts until you know what time it takes your particular microwave to melt the wax crayons.

Once the wax is fully melted, have an adult carefully remove the trays from the microwave and put them into the fridge. Leave for at least ten minutes and then remove from the fridge and check if they have become solid. If they have, remove the stars from the mould and enjoy colouring with your colourful wax creations.

**Talk about** how the wax changed and became something special and different. It had to go through some changes before it was the required star shape, but the small pieces of wax crayon all played a part in the end result. Sometimes it's like that with us: we have to go through changes before we become the required 'shape'.

## 9. Pebble in my pocket

**You will need: smooth pebbles; sharpies or permanent felt-tip pens**

Take a smooth pebble and draw a picture of baby Jesus on it. Keep the baby Jesus pebble with you in your pocket wherever you go as a reminder that Jesus is always with us.

**Talk about** how having the pebble in your pocket is a reminder that Jesus is with you always. He goes with you wherever you go. He will never leave you.

## 10. Gifts prayer station

**You will need: small, empty boxes and different shaped containers wrapped up as Christmas gifts with Christmas paper, bow, etc.; blank gift tags; string; pens; sticky tape**

Take a Christmas gift and a tag. Think about someone specific you want to pray for – maybe someone you know who has a special talent for something – and write your prayer for that person on the gift tag, asking God to use them and their gift for your church or community. Attach the gift tag to one of the Christmas gifts as a sign that you have prayed for that person.

**Talk about** how each of the people we have thought of and prayed for is a gift to the church and community. We are all special to God and if we trust him, he will use our gifts in a very special way.

# Small is mighty

by Anne Offler and Sharon Pritchard

## Celebration

Gather everyone together and start off by playing 'Journey to Bethlehem'. Ask everyone to sit in a circle if possible and place a baby doll in the centre of the circle as baby Jesus. Give each person a character from Luke 2:4–20: sheep, shepherd, angel, Mary, Joseph, innkeeper, etc. As you read the story, get each group to stand up and walk in the same direction around the outside of the circle and do actions/sounds as directed.

On the journey to Bethlehem, there were some sheep on the hills (*all the sheep must stand and walk around the circle*). The sheep wandered around, and then they turned and went the other way (*sheep change direction*). They ate the grass, they gave a loud 'baa' and then they sat down for a rest (*sheep baa and then sit down*). Then there were the shepherds (*shepherds stand up and walk around the circle*) on the journey to Bethlehem, looking after their sheep. They looked over here... and they looked over there... they ran from the wolves, and counted their sheep... and then they sat down for a rest (*shepherds sit down*).

Then the angels appeared to the shepherds (*angels stand and walk around the circle*), flapping their wings (*angels flap wings*), zooming across the skies (*angels zoom*), singing very loudly (*angels sing*), to tell the shepherds that a baby had been born in Bethlehem... and then they sat down for a rest (*angels sit down*).

On the journey to Bethlehem were Mary and Joseph (*Mary and Joseph stand and walk around the circle*.) They'd had a long journey and were tired (*Mary and Joseph yawn, stretch and look tired*.) They met an innkeeper (*innkeeper stands and walks around the circle*), who said they could stay in his stable for the night, and have a rest (*Mary, Joseph and innkeeper sit down*.)

And there in that stable baby Jesus was born! (*Mary stands and picks up the baby from the centre of the circle*.) And the shepherds (*shepherds stand*), and their sheep (*sheep stand*), and the angels (*angels stand*), and Mary and Joseph (*Mary and Joseph stand*), and the innkeeper (*innkeeper stands*), everyone, no matter how small, people and animals, all had a part to play on the journey to Bethlehem.

### Prayer

Use the Bethlehem prayer village (activity 1) as a focal point for your prayers together. Open the prayers that have been posted into the houses in the village and invite a few people to come and read them out. Pray for the children, the adults and all in your communities, that God would use each and every one of them in a special way.

### Song suggestions

'O little town of Bethlehem' – Phillips Brooks

'Nothing is impossible' – John Hunt

'Little donkey' – Eric Boswell

'Do you hear what I hear?' – Noel Regney ([genius.com/artists/noel-regney](http://genius.com/artists/noel-regney))

### Meal suggestion

Christmas is a time when we love to share food with one another, so this is a good opportunity to have buffet-style food that can be shared and enjoyed socially with everyone. You could make Christmas-themed food, sandwiches or wraps with green, red and white fillings such as cream cheese, red pepper and spinach, or bake a pie with a turkey and stuffing filling. Desserts are lots of fun at Christmas; make individual Christmas cookies using nativity-themed cutters or decorate cupcakes with marshmallow snowmen or sheep from the nativity story. Have fun and enjoy!

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# Dear Jane

## Advice for Messy Church leaders from Jane Leadbetter

✉ Email [jane.leadbetter@brf.org.uk](mailto:jane.leadbetter@brf.org.uk) with your Messy questions and for advice.



### Robyn from Essex

After reading the Church Army's Research Unit report on Messy Church Discipleship 'Playfully Serious' ([brf.org.uk/updates/playfullyserious](http://brf.org.uk/updates/playfullyserious)), my vicar has asked me to start a Messy Church. Where do I start?

Hi Robyn

First of all, we are really chuffed with the report, which was independent and took two years. Messy Church works! It is not just a bit of fun!

My best advice before starting a Messy Church is to pray and take as long as it takes. Don't rush into something which is actually going to be a long-term, all-age Messy Church congregation and not an event or a children's group. Read *Starting Your Messy Church* ([brfonline.org.uk/9780857460509](http://brfonline.org.uk/9780857460509)), then pray for names of people through whose doors you can pop the book.

Create a small prayer group to pray for the vision of your church and how a Messy Church would fit into that vision.

Pray for the families and single people in your community who may not yet attend your church. Keep on praying throughout the process.

Talk with your church council and note any questions they may have. Seek permission to pilot a Messy Church and review.

Find your Messy Church Regional Coordinator on the Messy Church website ([messychurch.org.uk](http://messychurch.org.uk)) and discuss the questions with him/her. Visit a Messy Church. Find one on the Messy Church directory on the website.

Survey your community to find out where and when they would like a new Messy Church. The venue may not even be in the church! Popular times that communities choose are Saturday or Sunday afternoons with a hot meal; Saturday mornings with a Messy breakfast or lunch; or after school on a week day. Explore the options. Once a month is the most popular too.

Develop a Messy Church team and discuss any training, safeguarding, police checks, food hygiene, First Aid courses and so on.

Implement the Messy Church values ([messychurch.org.uk/our-values](http://messychurch.org.uk/our-values)) into your planning from the beginning.

Plan the best advertising that you can, using social media channels! Your denominational Communications Officer may advise you.

Browse the website for information and resources and read *Messy Church* and a recent copy of the *Get Messy!* magazine.

Compile a list of people (not necessarily from your church) and their gifts to share. It could be cooking, preparing activities, talking comfortably with people they don't yet know, social media, wood work and so on.

When you have a date and time to pilot your first Messy Church, pray, advertise, plan well and go for it! Have faith and the Lord will bless!

### Jean from Hertfordshire

How do we find out if we have a Regional Coordinator? We are thinking about starting a Messy Church and would like some advice to get us off to a good start.

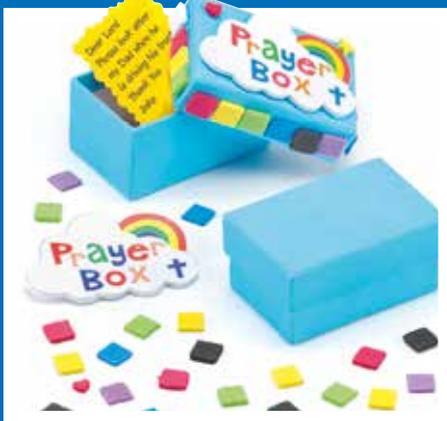
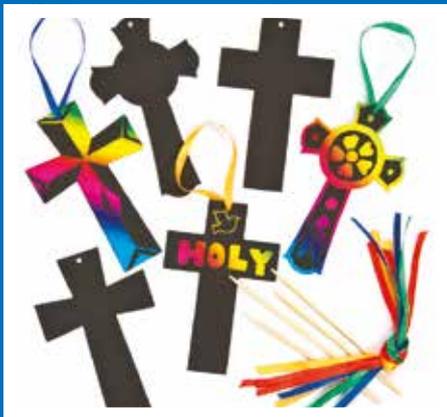
Hi Jean

We have support pages on the Messy Church website. Type in your postcode at [messychurch.org.uk/local-support](http://messychurch.org.uk/local-support) and see if a Messy Church Regional Coordinator appears. There will be a click tab to send a message. If you do not have a Regional Coordinator, an option to connect with Messy Church team member, Jane Leadbetter, will appear. You will be contacted as soon as possible. A Regional Coordinator may be able to suggest a Messy Church of good practice to visit, will pray for you and has Messy Church information to share with you. When you register your Messy Church, you are added to their list of regional Messy Churches for communications.

We are always seeking new Regional Coordinators to join our 150+ network and really value these wonderful volunteers. Please contact [jane.leadbetter@brf.org.uk](mailto:jane.leadbetter@brf.org.uk) for information.

Contact your Regional Coordinator at any time, not just when you are starting a Messy Church. Supporting you is important to us.





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