

40 DAYS OF LENT
40 REFLECTIONS
40 SIMPLE ACTS OF GENEROSITY

WEDNESDAY 13 FEBRUARY TO SATURDAY 30 MARCH

BIBLE STUDY SESSIONS FOR YOUTH GROUPS
FOR USE DURING LENT 2013.

JOIN THE 40ACTS CHALLENGE TO TAKE PART IN
FORTY DAILY GENEROUS ACTS DURING LENT 2013.

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WELCOME TO 40ACTS

What is 40acts?

40acts is a generosity challenge which invites people to do Lent a bit differently. During the forty days of Lent, 40acts participants will be invited to take part in forty simple acts of generosity which will challenge them to 'do Lent generously' in 2013.

Lent marks a pivotal point in the history of the church, when Jesus prepared to give himself up as a sacrifice. Traditionally we mark Lent by giving something up, but what if it could be more than that? What if Lent was a preparation for a lifetime of big-heartedness?

Small acts of generosity, performed by thousands of Christians across the UK and beyond, have the power to make a big change to our communities, to our churches and ultimately, to our world.

Righty-oh, so what is this resource pack?

Well friends, this resource pack gives you the power to bring 40acts to your youth group. Lent takes place over seven weeks (Wednesday 13 February to Saturday 30 March) and this delightful pack provides seven meeting guides for your weekly youth group meetings. It includes adaptable meeting guides, activity ideas, video clips and interactive Bible study resources.

→ The aim

To see life as a series of God-scripted opportunities and be prepared to respond accordingly.

→ Preparation

You will need a laptop and projector set up to show the clip from Seabiscuit (wingclips.com/movie-clips/seabiscuit/how-to-be-a-horse). Dressing up clothes (swords, armour, angel costume). You will also need some small bags (lightweight drawstring bags are best) - enough for one each. Either source them yourself or have each person bring one in from home. A large piece of paper and pens.

Activity

5 minutes

Start by showing the Seabiscuit clip. If you need to introduce it try 'this film is about a horse, trainer and jockey who all rediscover their true potential. In this clip the team discover one of the keys to making that happen.'

Talking point

5 minutes

Seabiscuit had grown confused about what he was meant to be doing. He needed to remember what it was that he was created to do. There are plenty of films that follow this theme of self-discovery and revelation of purpose - from The Hobbit to Avatar and X-Men. What other films can be added to the list? Why are these films so popular? What does it say about our own lives? If people are feeling brave, you could encourage them to think about examples from their own lives where God revealed something to them about their purpose.

Read

10 minutes

Introduce the story of Joshua's arrival in Canaan and preparation to capture the enemy city of Jericho. Explain that the passage you are about to read shows Joshua preparing to lead the army on to victory. Read Joshua 5:13-15, having volunteers dress up and act it out as you go along.

The big idea

5 minutes

Joshua was focused on the battle that was about to start, which explains why he asked whose side the swordsman was on. But his question shows that he has failed to comprehend the truth of the situation. This is God's battle that he's about to fight, not Joshua's. This isn't a case of God pitching in to help the Israelites crush the Canaanites, it's another step in the establishing of God's kingdom, another move to bring salvation to the world. The real question is whether Joshua is on God's side, whether he is fighting the Lord's battle or his own. We can all fall into this trap from time to time. We get into the habit of thinking that we are the main character in our lives, when the truth is different. We are here to learn from, to love, serve, be loved by and follow God. Like Seabiscuit, we all need to rediscover what we were made to do. From time to time we all need to rediscover our purpose.

Questions

5 Minutes

So what is it that God has called us to? Make clear that while we're all unique individuals with unique skills, talents and opportunities, there are some key things that sit on the top of every single Christian's To Do list.

What are they?

1. If people need a prompt encourage them to look at Jesus' sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:1-10). The Message translation is particularly good for this task.
2. Steer people towards the conclusion that our common responsibilities are towards people who are overwhelmed, who are grieving, who need peace, who are poor and so on. Write these ideas up.

It's over to you

5 minutes

Introduce the idea of a Generosity Kit - a bag that has a few key items in it that will allow people to be spontaneously generous. Explain that each person is going to plan what to put into their Generosity Kit, and urge them to refer back to the previous

exercise, thinking about what kind of items might be of use to those who are stressed, poor, upset and so on. These items might feature in your kits, but be as creative as possible as you add to the list...

- Chocolates
- Plasters
- Socks
- some smiley stickers

Conclusion

5 minutes

Remember what Joshua did when he realised that he'd got the story wrong? He did as he was told and took off his shoes. And after that he did exactly what God said - marching around those city walls for a week before they fell and the city became theirs. There's a lesson for us here as well - that following God's lead might take us into some unusual situations and leave us looking a little odd to others, but the adventure will be amazing. These Generosity Kits might lead us into some odd situations - helping people we might not usually spend time with - but with God in charge and us following faithfully after, we're on course for a great God-scripted adventure.

Pray

5 minutes

Father God - we are all guilty of getting the story wrong. We sometimes think that what matters most is us - how we feel and how we get on. We're sorry for this and ask you to forgive us. Help us instead to look to you for guidance and follow your directions. Wake us up to your Holy Spirit and lead us to help the people that you want to reach. Give us courage to follow your prompts. Thank you for letting us in on the action! Amen

This weeks 40acts

Wednesday 13 February: Create a generosity kit

Thursday 14 February: Love

Friday 15 February: Make a list

Saturday 16 February: Get uncomfortable

Visit 40acts.org.uk to find out more about 40acts and to sign up to daily challenges during Lent 2013.

WEEK 2

Love where you live

→ The aim

To think about the ways in which we can be used for good by God in our communities.

→ Preparation

You will need Bibles plus a stack of local newspapers plus scissors, glue, marker pens and a large sheet of paper (the bigger the better, A1 or A2 size would be best). Before the meeting have drawn a simple outline of your locality on it (just key streets and areas, but with plenty of space for any schools attended by people in your group). The idea is to make a map of your area, highlighting the need as well as your resources. You will also need enough chocolate for half the group.

Activity

5 minutes

As you recap on the previous session and explain a little about what this one will be about, hand out chocolate to one half of the group, but not the other (boys or girls, long hair or short, glasses or not - it doesn't really matter which criteria you use to divide them). Tell those who have been given the treats that they are allowed to go ahead and eat, and offer them seconds as well. Ignore any complaints about it being unfair.

Talking point

5 minutes

Introduce the map of your locality and ask people to mark the place where they live. As they are doing this, ask those who did not receive any chocolate how it felt. Introduce the term injustice (making sure everyone's clear on the meaning) and ask people to come up with other real-life examples. Start by thinking globally, but gradually bring the focus back to your local community. Get specific about where there is injustice around you.

Read

10 minutes

Have people read 1 John 3:16-20. It's one of those passages which can prompt some good discussions, so

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encourage people to talk about the specifics: what does it really mean to 'lay down our lives'? Is it literal or metaphorical? And what about 'our brothers and sisters' - who are they? How do we show more pity on people? Should we avoid talking about God entirely? And what about 'if our hearts condemn us' - what's that about? Help people pick through the trickier elements of these verses, bringing them to a clear view of both the challenge that they represent and the opportunity to 'belong to the truth'.

The big idea

10 minutes

In pairs, give them a few minutes to think of as many tangible examples as they can of material possessions that people in your neighbourhood might need (e.g. baby food for young families living in poverty, socks and shoes for those who are homeless, children at school or college who are outsiders). You can use the local newspapers for this as well - getting people to flick through and cut out any pictures, headlines or stories that show injustice, need or poverty in your area. Feed the ideas back and have people write, draw or stick these needs on the map.

Next, encourage people to think about the resources that they have - both individually and collectively. The lists might include things like pocket money, clothes they could donate, time they could use to support people etc. Have people add these resources to the map - drawing/writing them down by where they live.

Questions

5 minutes

Read out Matthew 5:13-16.

1. How can a church like yours be like a 'city on a hill'?

Think about what a city on a hill might look like: strong, full of potential, etc.

2. What about being the 'light of the world'? What does this tell us about the way that Jesus' followers ought to be?

Encourage people to think about the dark situations that need God's like shone upon.

3. What does it mean to be the 'salt of the earth'?

Talk about the idea of salt being hard to spot but easy to taste - linking that back to the idea of Jesus' followers

going out into the world and making a real difference wherever they are.

It's over to you

5 minutes

As a group, talk about what kind of group you are? Do you feel that you are strong and welcoming like a city? Are you changing the dark places by your light? Are you mixed in with the world around you, transforming it by your very lives? If a stranger was able to observe you all for a week, what conclusions would he draw about the God you're following?

Take time to reflect on this.

Conclusion

5 minutes

Encourage people to get into pairs - or threes - and think of ways in which they could use the resources and talents that they have to help challenge a bit of the injustice in the local community. It might mean offering friendship to someone at school, giving away time, money or certain possessions or maybe encouraging other people in the church to get together, tackle an even bigger need and make a bigger difference.

Have people share their ideas with the wider group - allowing you to offer guidance and wisdom as required! - and then allow time for prayer.

Pray

5 minutes

Father God - you have given us so much. We are grateful to you for the privilege of our lives. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of a church, to share the journey with others. But we're sorry for the times when we've treated church more like a club to keep us amused and occupied and less like a city on a hill, designed to attract and help others. Be with us this week as we try to make a difference. Give us patience and wisdom, bravery and compassion, and most of all, send your Holy Spirit to guide us as we try to serve others.

In your name we pray.

Amen.

This weeks 40acts

Monday 18 February: Read the local news

Tuesday 19 February: Be a mentor

Wednesday 20 February: Visit your local

Thursday 21 February: Cross a generation

Friday 22 February: Get together

Saturday 23 February: Grab a cuppa

Visit 4oacts.org.uk to find out more about 4oacts and to sign up to daily challenges during Lent 2013.

→ **The aim**

To think about the ways in which our purchases can connect us with people living in poverty - making their lives better or worse.

→ **Preparation**

Enough sharp scissors for one pair each, some Fairtrade chocolate, a large sheet of paper and pens, a laptop and projector, and pens.

Activity

5 minutes

Start by asking people what they know about Fair Trade. Chances are that they will be well informed already, but recap to make sure that everyone's clear about what it is and how it works.

Now move on to this quiz. Try getting people into groups and working out their answers together. Use the Fairtrade chocolate as the prize.

1. On average how much do we each spend on clothes each year in the UK?

Answer: £400

2. How many pairs of shoes does the average American woman own?

Answer: 30 pairs

3. What percentage of the world's garment workers are female?

Answer: 90%

4. What percentage of children between 4 and 14 in the developing world work?

Answer: 25%

5. In China you need to earn 50p per hour to maintain a basic standard of living. What do you think is the average pay for garment workers?

Answer: 15p per hour

Talking point

5 minutes

Does God care about our shopping habits? Does it matter what we buy, how it was made or what kind of conditions the people worked in? Work together to come up with as many responses as you can - for both sides of the argument - and write

them down on the sheet.

Read

5 minutes

Look at Amos 8:4-6 and fill in the context: Amos is speaking to the corrupt business men of the day and lists five business practices that God dislikes. First up there's the fact that they couldn't wait to get the trade-free Sabbath and Festival days over and done with so that they could get back to business. Then there's the line about 'skimping the measure,... and cheating with dishonest scales'. Ask people to describe the other three examples of bad business? Does anything of what Amos describes remind us of businesses today? Perhaps the idea of trading on the Sabbath reminds us of the way that so many shops today are open as much as they can. What about the other four - are there any links between what Amos criticised and what we are used to today? If people are stuck, highlight these phrases:

- 'skimping the measure,... and cheating with dishonest scales'
- 'boosting the price'
- 'buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals'
- 'selling the sweepings with the wheat'

The big idea

10 minutes

We might not know how Jesus shopped, but we do know how he treated people - especially the poor. Talk about some of those stories together and see if you can come up with a sense of how Jesus might have responded to some of the choices we face on the high street today. Have people look at Proverbs 29:7, Luke 10:7 and Proverbs 13:23 to help form a clearer picture.

Questions

5 minutes

Ask people to cut out the care labels from their clothes. Explain that they tell us a lot about how to look after our garments, but tell us nothing about the ways that the workers who made them were treated.

Help people to imagine what life is like for the Chinese garment worker on 15p an hour or the young girl who

has to miss out on their education, so that they can bring in just a little extra money to help feed the family. What must their working conditions be like? What dangers do they face? What future can they look forward to?

It's over to you

10 minutes

Encourage people to think about the following: the way that their food is produced and the story behind their clothes. Get on the laptop and look up www.ethicalconsumer.org - where together you can find out more about how ethical your favourite high street retailers are.

Encourage people to make a shopping plan for the next few days, making at least one good choice each day. It might mean buying the Fair Trade option at the cafe, persuading whoever does the weekly shop at home to buy a more sustainable alternative to a product or making a decision to buy from an alternative clothing store.

Whatever people plan to do, have them team up with others and keep accountable.

Conclusion

5 minutes

Bring people back to the idea of us having so many choices. It can sometimes feel a little overwhelming - and sometimes just plain annoying - but there's another way of looking at it: that it gives us power. Even choosing a fairly traded banana or an ethically made pair of jeans can make a difference. We might feel like we're just throwing pebbles into the ocean, but the Gospel teaches us that we are all responsible before God for the choices we make.

Finally, here are two great quotes which say it all:

'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.' *Margaret Mead*

'We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the cruel words and actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people.' *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Pray

5 minutes

Father God - we might think that we don't have enough money, enough influence or enough time, but we know that you see us differently. You see us as your children, created with a purpose and full of potential. Please help us to use our money, our time and our voice to help others, not to harm them.

Forgive us when we have closed our eyes and ears to the truth about the way that our shopping hurts others. Help us to see the many ways in which you weave our stories together with the lives of others. Open our eyes, God and use us for your glory. Amen.

This weeks 40acts

Monday 25 February: Buy Fairtrade

Tuesday 26 February: Give intelligently

Wednesday 27 February: Share the Bible

Thursday 28 February: Check the label

Friday 1 March: Celebrate cultural diversity

Saturday 2 March: Live on a fiver

Visit 40acts.org.uk to find out more about 40acts and to sign up to daily challenges during Lent 2013.

WEEK 4

Make someone's day

→ The aim

To think about other people and how we can help and encourage them.

→ Preparation

Read 1 Corinthians 12. Get some post-its and pens, a copy of the film Star Trek (2009) and a laptop and projector. You will also need a whole load of counters (anything from tic-tacs to copper coins, smarties to small pebbles) - enough so that every person can have 15.

Activity

10 minutes

Show the opening scene from Star Trek (starting at 00:53 and stopping at 11:30 at the end of the opening credits). You can introduce it by explaining that this session is all about friendship.

Talking point

5 minutes

1. Ask your group whether any of them would fancy serving on a starship.
2. Who would have responded the same way as Kirk?
3. How do you think the crew-members would have felt when they discovered that Kirk had sacrificed his life to save theirs?
4. How would the people in your group respond if they found out that someone had done the same thing for them?

Read

5 minutes

1 Corinthians 12:12-27. As you read the passage and a body part is mentioned (foot, hand, ear, eye, head) pause and allow each person to write the word on a separate post-it. When you have finished the passage have everyone turn their post-its over. You can then go around and pick one random post-it from each person, placing it on their forehead. Give them one minute - in total silence - to work out who they are and team up with one other person to create the most useful combination of body parts.

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Highlight the fact that the best pairings are the ones with the greatest difference between partners (e.g. head and hand, foot and eye). Teaming up with the identical body part just seems a bit of a waste.

The big idea

10 minutes

Bring it back to what Paul's describing in the passage: the Church as a collection of different individuals, each with their own tastes and talents. It's that difference which makes us what we are supposed to be: a family, united to serve God in the world. Give each person about fifteen of whatever counters you've chosen. Use the following prompts to help them create a map of their relationships:

1. Place a counter in the centre to represent you.
2. Next, place counters to represent each person in your family. If you feel close to them, put their counter close to your central counter. If you feel a little more distant from them, put their counter further away. Think about the ways in which they have been a good influence on your life.
3. Now do the same for your friends.
4. Think about any other people who have made a big (and positive) impact on your life - maybe people from school, your wider family or neighbourhood. If you've not already placed a counter for them, do it now.
5. Finally, pick the five people who have made the biggest - and best - impact on you. It might be that they are kind, encouraging, wise or just fun.

Now give people a few minutes get into pairs and explain their map to each other.

Obviously, for some this exercise will be easier than others. Make sure that you are sensitive in the way you present this material and offer help and support wherever needed. If people are struggling, encourage them to think about best friends, standout teachers and friendly relatives.

Questions

5 minutes

Encourage everyone to think about the five people they've selected (although you can be as flexible as you like on the number).

1. What are the first specific examples you think of when you remember how these people encouraged you?
2. Now think a little harder: what did these people do to help you that you didn't see at the time? Did they go without and make personal sacrifices? Take time to talk it through with a friend and see what you can discover.
3. What's the best example you've seen in the last week of someone being kind to one of your friends? How did it make your friend feel?
4. Can you see God at work in any of these examples?

It's over to you

10 minutes

By now, the people in your group should have lots of good ideas floating around about kindness and generosity: memories of what people have done for them, practical examples of things that have really helped, thoughts on the impact that a little bit of help can make to a person. Encourage everyone to think of things that they could do to show their appreciation of a few individuals. Get people to look back at their counters to help them think about who they want to do something for. It might be the five significant people they picked out earlier, or perhaps an entirely different set of people. Have people come up with a range of things they would like to do - including some smaller and some bigger acts, as well as some that are public and other that are entirely anonymous. Make sure that you help people make good and safe choices (particularly the younger ones).

Conclusion

5 minutes

Bring it back to the words of Paul which we started with. Remind people that we are meant to work together in spite of (and because of) our differences. Remind people of the ways in which others have helped them and the many ways in which God has helped them through others. What might God have in store for the people in your group and the communities of which they are a part? How might the kindness, generosity and sacrifice of each person in the room be used by God? Leave people feeling excited about the prospect of them joining in the great work of God by simply helping others.

Pray

5 minutes

Father God, you know this body that we call the Church, and you see all the different parts. You see who each of us are and how each of us can play a part. Thank you for making room for each of us, for giving everyone in this room a part to play.

We know that you are generous, God. You are kind and you sacrificed everything to save us. Help each of us to follow your footsteps and show kindness, generosity and sacrifice to others as well.

We are sorry for the times when we have not treated others the way that we should. Please forgive us for the things we have done wrong and the right things that we failed to do. May your Holy Spirit guide us, nudge us, prompt us and empower us to do the things that make you smile.

Amen

This weeks 40acts

Monday 4 March: Surprise someone

Tuesday 5 March: Encourage

Wednesday 6 March: Hug

Thursday 7 March: Smile

Friday 8 March: Say thank you

Saturday 9 March: Love your church

Visit 4oacts.org.uk to find out more about 4oacts and to sign up to daily challenges during Lent 2013.

→ **The aim**

To think creatively about our potential to effect change.

→ **Preparation**

Random ingredients for MasterChef challenge - the stranger the better. Various kitchen tools and utensils. An old bed sheet, ripped up into hanky-sized squares. Permanent markers.

Activity

10 minutes

Start with the MasterChef challenge. Divide into two or three groups and give them ten minutes to make something delicious and creative out of the ingredients you have provided. Adjust the challenge to work with your environment - so if you have a large kitchen they could all work in it at the same time, but if not, divide up the resources, giving one team the microwave, the other the hob, another the grill and so on.

Talking point

5 minutes

Talk about the MasterChef challenge: what went well and where did things go wrong? What did people think when they saw the ingredients? If they could have added three more ingredients what would they be? In life - like the kitchen - there are times when we all feel as though we don't quite have what it takes. And yet we are often more resourceful than we think we are. Get people remembering (and talking about it if they are comfortable doing so) a time when they surprised themselves by doing something they thought was impossible.

Read

10 minutes

Esther understood this idea of feeling a little out of her depth. Remind people of the story:

1. King Xerxes is the supreme leader who controls everything. (1:1-4)
2. He embarks on a week-long drinking binge. (1:10-12)
3. Esther is an orphan, an alien, a concubine and a woman whose true identity has had to be hidden. (2:5-7)

4. Esther's character is strong; she refuses to give in to the luxuries on offer. Instead she remains focused and aware of her place in the scheme of things. (2:13)

5. Mordecai is Esther's cousin while Haman is most likely a member of a race with a long history of hatred towards the Jews. Haman wants to exterminate all Jews on a single day and puts the plans for this genocide into law.

Read Esther chapter four.

Questions

5 minutes

What is significant about the fact that Mordecai tears his clothes and grieves in 4:1?

Why does Esther initially send her uncle new clothes to wear instead of his torn, grief-advertising outfit. Do you think she is trying to disguise his Jewishness in a hope of keeping him safe? If so, do you think she's right? Esther 4:12-14 is the most famous part of the whole book. How does Mordecai respond to Esther's plan to have him cover up?

How does Esther then respond? Do you see that by choosing three days of prayer and fasting followed by efficient, inspired and effective action, Esther knows the value of being on both her knees and her feet, of praying as well as acting.

The big idea

5 minutes

The story of Esther is a brilliant, inspiring one, especially as there are plenty of parallels between us and Esther. She's surrounded by injustice and there's a clear need that she can see. She's a little scared at first - perhaps unsure whether she really can make a difference - but with a little encouragement and wisdom she prays and acts.

But how are we like Esther, the heroine who saves the day? Isn't that a bit ambitious? We might not all be surrounded by the threat of imminent danger, but we can all make good choices within the situations we find ourselves in - just like Esther. She prayed, she stuck to her beliefs and served God faithfully right where she was - even though Xerxes was a dangerous man.

Now introduce this verse:

'For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves

as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.' 2 Corinthians 4:5-9

It's over to you

5 minutes

What choices might people face over the next 24 hours? What does it mean for us to be light shining in darkness and treasure-holding jars of clay? Surely we will all face the choice of how to talk to people who hurt us, whether to be generous with those who have less, to be the first one to forgive, to show love and joy to others, to side with those on the margins.

Remind people of Mordecai's response, hand out the ripped up squares of fabric and a permanent marker pen each. Give people time to think about the good choices they can make over the coming days and encourage them to copy out 2 Corinthians 4:5-9 onto their squares - taking them home and putting them somewhere prominent in their room.

Conclusion

5 minutes

None of us are qualified to be used by God - how could we be? We mess up so much of the time. Yet that's the point: we don't earn God's love and favour, instead it's a free gift. He's the star of the show, He's the main attraction, He's the one who brings the transformation to lives of those who so desperately need it. Our job is to make ourselves available to be used as He directs. Our job is simply to make the right choices - the ones that show His love and share His good news.

Stand in a circle and encourage people to take a look around the group and picture each person's friends, family and chance-encounters standing behind them. Think about all those lives just waiting to be touched by God. Think about all that potential for change that could flow out from

here. And all we have to do is choose to say yes when God gives us an opportunity to serve. Exciting, isn't it?

Pray

5 minutes

Father God - we get scared and we get shy. Too often we fail to say or do the things that we know we should do. We are sorry for all these times and ask you to forgive us.

Thank you that even though we might feel as though we've not got all the ingredients that we need, we're wrong! With your Holy Spirit leading us we've got all that we need. So send us out this week, God. Send us to the people that need to know you more, show us the simple acts of kindness and good choices that we can make which will be of use to you. Amen

This weeks 40acts

Monday 11 March: Clear out your wardrobe

Tuesday 12 March: Take someone new

Wednesday 13 March: Share a good joke

Thursday 14 March: Go screen-free

Friday 15 March: Make something

Saturday 16 March: Let them choose

Visit 40acts.org.uk to find out more about 40acts and to sign up to daily challenges during Lent 2013.

WEEK 6

Love your world

→ The aim

To see that all of creation has God's fingerprints on it and prepare to make changes to our lifestyle as a result.

→ Preparation

You will need a laptop and projector to show the Tearfund video 'Hope on the Horizon: Climate Change and Hunger' (search for it on You Tube - it's pretty easy to find), pens and a large sheet of paper or roll of wallpaper, Bible references written on individual cards: Matthew 10:29, Psalm 65, Psalm 139:13-15, Psalm 97:1, Psalm 98:7-8, Jeremiah 10:12-13, Colossians 1:16-17, 1 John 3:16-18 and Ezekiel 34:16.

Activity

15 minutes

Go outside and do something fun that requires no electricity or fossil fuel. Climb a tree, stare at the sky, hike at night, make and fly a kite, walk in the woods or park. Whatever you can do, just make sure that you're getting as close to nature as your neighbourhood will allow. Alternatively, have people bring in a reminder (a photo or memento) of their favourite outdoor experience.

Afterwards, get together and spend a couple of minutes with each person saying what they learn about God from being outdoors.

Talking point

5 minutes

Should Christians care about the environment? Split people into two groups and have one prepare a 1 minute 'Yes' response and the other prepare a 'No' reply. Encourage people to fill their talk with as much detail as possible, then let the debate take place. Take a vote at the end.

Watch

5 minutes

Read this before the meeting:
Since the industrial revolution began more than 150 years ago the average global surface temperature has risen by 0.76 °C, with much of that rise happening in the last 40 years. The links are obvious: the more

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coal and oil we've been burning to generate electricity and power our technologically-advanced lifestyle, the more carbon has been emitted, trapping heat in the atmosphere and causing global temperatures to rise. That's why scientists agree that man-made climate change is real - and dangerous.

If our emissions do not change then average global temperatures could rise by 2-3°C in the next 50 years.

This time next century our great grandchildren will be looking back on a 5-6°C rise and living in a world plunged into a chaos of cinematic proportions.

There is a very real danger that once temperatures rise 2°C above the average a staggering 4 billion people could be left facing water shortages. Agriculture could be a not-so-distant memory in places like the tropics, while millions more will be left hungry. In Africa the result of this rise could be that between 40 and 60 million more people will find themselves exposed to malaria. The risk of melting ice sheets in Greenland and the West Antarctic rises significantly. Floods and droughts will become more extreme and more widespread, leaving those that are the most vulnerable on the planet with even less hope of survival.

It is the poor who are worst affected by all this. Water shortages are a common result of climate change, meaning that women and girls end up facing increased hardship since fetching water is generally considered to be a female duty. And while some farmers have benefited from climate change by being able to grow new crops, those who live in the world's harshest environments have not experienced such luxuries.

Show 'Hope on the Horizon: Climate Change and Hunger'. The final section that discusses shipping taxes is slightly less relevant to this session, but the first minute and a half are a good introduction to the ways that climate change impact the poor.

Questions

5 minutes

There is a lot of debate around the subject of climate change. Politicians, journalists and even teachers seem to be talking about it a lot. But it's not just a political issue - it's a theological one. Why? Because the way we treat the environment has a lot to say about

the way that we feel about God. Hand out the cards with the Bible references written on. Have people look them up and read them out loud. Ask the following questions for the relevant verses:

1. Matthew 10:29, Psalm 65 - How does God feel about His creation?
2. Psalm 139:13-15 - What kind of care did God take in creating us?
3. Psalm 97:1, Psalm 98:7-8 - What does creation tell us about God?
4. Jeremiah 10:12-13, Colossians 1:16-17 - If we were made in God's image, what can we learn from the way God treats creation?
5. 1 John 3:16-18, Ezekiel 34:16 - Who suffers most when the climate changes? It's the poor. So does it matter that the climate is changing? What do you think these verses suggest?

It's over to you

10 minutes

Get your pens and paper out and compile a list of the things that could be done to help show a better care for God's creation. Here are a few for starters:

1. Go Veggie
Encourage your church to have a meat-free day! If everyone in the UK gave up meat once a week, the emissions savings would equal taking 5 million cars off the road.
2. Tech Fast
Have a technology fast. Try a day with no TV, no iPod, no computer, and even no mobile. Why not set aside a technology fast day each month?
3. Bottle It
Use tap water rather than more carbon-intensive bottled water when you can. Invest in a non-plastic water bottle instead and give away the money you'll save.
How many more ideas can you come up with?

Conclusion

5 minutes

God didn't just create a home for us in the same way that we might shove a bit of sawdust in an old shoebox in order to look after a hamster. God created this earth with love and care, filling it with an infinite number of amazing things which all reflect back His care and creativity. This planet of ours is not even ours - it's His, and He loves it. Shouldn't we take better care?

Pray

5 minutes

Father God - we have messed up. We have all treated this planet with less care and love that it deserves. Would you forgive us, please?

Show us what the right way is for us to live. It can be confusing at times - we are surrounded by so much technology and things to consume - but we need to learn to find our happiness first of all in you. Show us how to do that and to find the brightest, fullest, most amazing way of living there is: with you at the centre. Amen

This weeks 40acts

Monday 18 March: Have a car-free day

Tuesday 19 March: Say no to plastic

Wednesday 20 March: Listen

Thursday 21 March: Donate blood

Friday 22 March: Use your influence

Saturday 23 March: Plant a tree

Visit 40acts.org.uk to find out more about 40acts and to sign up to daily challenges during Lent 2013.

→ **The aim**

To prepare to take risks for God.

→ **Preparation**

You will need a laptop and projector, plus enough writing paper, pens and envelopes for each person in the group.

Activity

5 minutes

Search YouTube with the words Four Yorkshiremen and watch the classic Monty Python sketch that mulls over the nature of suffering and childhood hardship.

Talking point

5 minutes

What do we do when things get tough? Brainstorm the ways in which the members of your group react when life stops going according to plan. As you talk make it clear which responses are healthy and which are less so (!), and make sure that you share some of your own failings and successes.

Read

5 minutes

Remind people of the story of Job - the wealth, the status, the faith, the tragedy and incredible suffering followed by the friends who just couldn't seem to get it right. Ask people why they think that Job gets singled out for such special treatment. Take a minute to see what possible reasons you can come up with. Read Job 29:7-17. This is where we find Job musing over his past actions. Help people to see that verses 12 to 17 offer us a brilliant list of the characteristics of a true God-follower. God chose Job not because of his wealth, but because of the choices he made to live in ways that helped others.

The big idea

5 minutes

It is easy to trust God when things are going well. What's harder is to do

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it when the troubles are mounting up around us. What Job shows us is that there is a clear way of learning how to be a better follower of God - the sort who is well equipped to hang in there when life gets tough - and that's through living graciously, generously, kindly and with an eye open for those on the edges of society. Think about it for a minute - isn't that exactly what Jesus did? God's own son lived his life in view of the poor - not hidden away among the trappings of wealth. When it came time for him to face suffering, he was ready.

Questions

10 minutes

What kind of Christians do people in the group want to be? Talk about any people in your church community that you look up to. What is it about the way they live out their faith that people admire?

Have people look up and read out the following: Jeremiah 9:23-24, Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Can people think of examples of people they know today who put these verses into action?

What steps are people going to take to get there? What opportunities are at hand for your people to show God's love practically and sacrificially? Introduce the 40acts for this week: speaking about faith, praying for change, serving others, telling people our story and forgiving others. Encourage people to think about ways in which they might be able to put each of those into action. Are there people or situations which immediately spring to mind?

It's over to you

5 minutes

Encourage people to think of ways in which they would like to serve God. Hand out writing paper, envelopes and pens and have them write a letter to themselves which you will post to them in six weeks time. Explain that the letters should be an encouragement to keep going in hard times, to remember to serve and love others as Jesus showed us and to trust God to be there for them.

Conclusion

10 minutes

Take time to be still and quiet. Encourage people get into pairs or threes, to talk about what kind of Christian they would like to be and to take it in turns to pray and ask God to speak to them.

Pray

5 minutes

Father God. We have so much to learn and so little to teach. Yet you still choose to use and work with us, to allow us to be your partners even though we are so unqualified. We are sorry for the times when we have simply given up on you because things have got too hard. Please forgive us.

Help us to learn more about you with every day that passes. We would love to be the kind of Christian who knows you so well that when hard times come our faith doesn't skip a beat. Show us how to get there God - starting right now. Amen.

This weeks 40 acts

Monday 25 March: Stand up, stand out

Tuesday 26 March: Pray

Wednesday 27 March: Go beyond yourself

Thursday 28 March: Practise your testimony

Friday 29 March: Forgive

Saturday 30 March: Overcome your story

Visit 40acts.org.uk to find out more about 40acts and to sign up to daily challenges during Lent 2013.

Acknowledgements

Author

Craig Borlase is a freelance writer living in Reading. He has written numerous books and bible study series. He free-lanced for Tearfund for 10 years. Before that he was an English teacher and ghost writer.

About Stewardship

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