



All about church

MEETING AIM

To explore the idea that Jesus is divine and can forgive our sins.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 5:17-26

BACKGROUND

The details of this story stick in the memory – the crowded house, the determined friends, the hole in the roof – but this story is about much more than that. It's even about much more than the healing of a man who couldn't walk. Here, Jesus reveals that he has the power to forgive sins. The shocked Pharisees exclaim: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (v21). Yet in their anger they speak the truth. Jesus is much more than a miracle worker, prophet or talented teacher; he is God.

SIGNING IN

5 MINS

As people join your service, welcome them and ask them about their week.

WELCOME

5 MINS

OPTION ONE: Surprising stories

You will need: volunteers to share their stories

Before the service, invite two or three people to share the story of something surprising that happened to them. It could be something miraculous (perhaps they were rescued at the last minute from a difficult situation) or funny (maybe they spent ages chatting to a celebrity without realising who they were). Invite them to share their stories with the congregation.

OPTION TWO: Power

You will need: pictures of superheroes

Before the service, put together lots of pictures of superheroes in pairs. Show the pictures to the congregation and ask them who is the most powerful of the two. Who would win in a fight? You could do a tournament to decide which one is the most powerful of all. Then ask: "How does this superhero's power compare to Jesus'?"

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: animated retelling of Luke 5:17-26; pens and paper

Show the animated retelling of Luke 5:17-26 to the congregation and then read the Bible passage (or ask someone else to do so).

Make sure everyone has some paper and pens (felt-tip pens or marker pens would be best). Ask the congregation to think about what stands out to them most in this story. They could do this in households or on their own. They should write that down on the paper and hold it up so that everyone can see what they've written. Choose a few people to ask about why they wrote what they did.

Much of what you might want to say about this story might well have come up through the thoughts of the congregation. If not, make these points:

- Jesus forgives the man's sins first. He doesn't heal the man until challenged by the Pharisees.
- He reveals that he has the power to forgive sins, and in the long run, this is more important than physical healing.
- Jesus claims the same power as God, and can perceive what the scribes and Pharisees are saying (and other indication of his divine nature).
- The healing is a physical symbol that can be seen as evidence, to back up the forgiveness of sins (which can't really be seen).

SMALL GROUPS

10 MINS

If your software allows, send everyone off into different breakout rooms made up of a few households. Put these questions into each group's chat box:

- What would you have thought if you were in that house?
- What does this story tell you about Jesus?
- What might you want to say Jesus in response to Jesus?
- What impact does this story have on your own faith?

Give the groups time to chat about these questions, referring to the Bible passage if they need to.

If you can't put people into breakout rooms, ask individual households to discuss them, and link up those who live on their own using another messaging or video calling app.

REVIEW

5 MINS

Get some feedback from 'Small groups', encouraging everyone to take part who wants to.

RESPONSE ACTIVITIES

10 MINS

Invite people to do one of these activities in response:

OPTION ONE: Discussion

Ask a couple of people lead a discussion about the story today and people's response to it. You could review the questions from 'Small groups' as well as any questions that the people in the group may have.

OPTION TWO: Get to know Jesus

If people haven't yet met Jesus, then invite them to join a discussion to hear more about him and the forgiveness he brings. Ask a couple of people to lead this discussion; you might want to invite a couple of people to tell their stories about how and why they became a Christian. Try to make it a place where people feel they can ask any questions they have.

OPTION THREE: Creative response

You will need: art materials

Invite people to create a piece of artwork that represents their response to today's story. (If people don't have access to art materials, you might think of delivering some before the service.) Encourage them to chat as they create, to facilitate more reflection on what God is saying to them.

CLOSING

5 MINS

Bring everyone back together and ask if anyone would like to share anything from the response time. Thank everyone for taking part and say an appropriate blessing to close the service.

Blessing and the bottomless baked beans

"Three baked potatoes – two with beans, one with chilli."

"One tomato soup, two baked potatoes with beans."

"Four baked potatoes – three with beans, one with coleslaw."

"One cup of coffee for the mayor...oh, and a baked potato with beans!"

It seemed that every waiter that came through the kitchen doors wanted baked potatoes with beans. Blessing fought to keep up with the orders. As she split potatoes and scooped I Can't Believe It's Not Butter into each one, she regretted ever volunteering for the charity fun day...

"We need people to help in the pop-up cafe," Blessing's form tutor, Mrs de Silva, had announced three weeks ago. No one moved, or even caught Mrs de Silva's eye in case she picked on them.

"Blessing," she said, "you like cooking. Can you be part of the team?"

All eyes turned to Blessing. She shrank down in her seat and tried to pretend she was invisible.

"I...er..."

"It's for charity, Blessing. I'm sure you can spare some time."

Mrs de Silva laid it on thick about the money going to the local food bank.

Before long, Blessing was worn down. And now here she was, elbow deep in baked beans and imitation butter.

Betsy rushed through the kitchen doors. "All of table seven want baked potato with beans! They've been waiting for ages and I can't keep them happy for much longer."

Blessing whimpered as she tried to wipe non-dairy spread off her apron: "But I've used up all five tins of beans that were in the cupboard!"

"We've run out of beans?" asked Betsy. She stuck her head back out of the door and yelled: "Mrs de Silva!"

Their tutor bustled into the kitchen, brushing melted cheese off her sari: "The Mayor of Manchesterford just dropped his plate and threw the remains of his toastie all over me. Anyway, what's going on?"

"We're out of beans!" said Blessing.

Mrs de Silva opened the cupboard. "Nonsense!" she said. "There are plenty more beans in here! Keep going, Blessing, you're doing a great job!" With that she swept out of the kitchen.

At the end of her shift, Blessing was tired, hot and the smell of melted butter was making her feel sick. She had kept pulling tins of beans from the cupboard, and they hadn't run out. She opened the door to take a look, and saw that there were still twelve tins left.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chat about the story, what everyone liked and didn't like. You could use some of these questions in your discussion:

- Have you ever regretted volunteering for something? Why?
- Have you ever thought you were running out of something, only for it to be more than enough?
- What might you learn from Blessing's story?

This story is based on Luke 9:10-17. If you'd like to add a more explicit faith element to your discussion, then read this passage together. Think about the similarities and differences between the Bible story and this one. Encourage your family to think about this Bible story in a new way.

The large crowd

The story of Jesus feeding a large crowd shows Jesus' power, and helps us see how Jesus is something more than just a good teacher and a kind man. Use these craft ideas to chat about what this story tells you about him.

PLAYDOUGH MAT

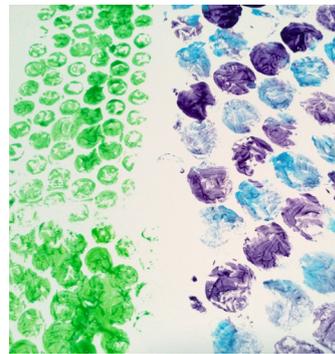


You will need: copies of the playdough mat; playdough; a laminator and laminating pouches (optional)

Print out a copy of the playdough mat (see next page) and laminate it if you think you'd like to use it more than once. Use playdough to explore the 'being fed' theme of the story. Make models of favourite foods

and use the time to think about those who don't have enough to eat, especially those who are struggling in the current pandemic situation because of job losses. Give space for children to express their responses to the story and how it relates to them and their experiences.

BUBBLE WRAP CROWD PRINTS



You will need: bubble wrap; paint; paintbrushes; paper (lining paper is ideal)

This craft helps everyone to visualise the great number of people who followed Jesus and ended up being fed by the miracle. There's plenty of flexibility in how this is done, so let your imagination go!

Give everyone a piece of bubble wrap and colour in groups of 50 bubbles with some paint. Use the painted bubble wrap to print onto paper the 'heads' of people gathered in the crowds around Jesus. You will need 100 prints of 50 to make 5,000 and that only counts for the men in the group! If you decide to do this as a group project, a roll of lining paper should give you enough space for all of the prints to be part of one piece. Use the creative time to chat about what types of people might have been part of the crowds and what they might have felt when they were fed by Jesus.

AMAZING EXPANDING HONEYCOMB



You will need: 200g caster or granulated sugar; five table-spoons syrup; two teaspoons bicarbonate of soda; a large saucepan; a 20cm square baking tin; greaseproof paper; a wooden spoon; a sugar thermometer (optional)

This is a great food craft to illustrate something growing dramatically, just as the bread

and fish multiplied in such a miraculous way.

Line the tin with greaseproof paper. Put the syrup and sugar into a pan and heat over a medium flame until the sugar has dissolved. Stir constantly with a wooden spoon. The mixture will start to bubble and will eventually turn a dark amber colour. When this happens (or, if you are using a sugar thermometer, when the temperature of the mixture reaches 120-130°C), take the pan off the heat and quickly add the bicarbonate of soda. Stir to disperse it and the mixture will start to bubble immediately. Pour the mixture into the tin and leave for about 30 minutes to set before breaking up and eating. Talk about what it was like to see the honeycomb expanding. How would you have felt if you saw the loaves and fish miraculously feeding more and more people?

TORN PAPER PICTURES



You will need: paper of different colours, patterns and textures; glue

After Jesus gave thanks to God, he broke the bread and fish apart and, somehow, something miraculous happened. This craft uses this act of breaking apart to respond to the story.

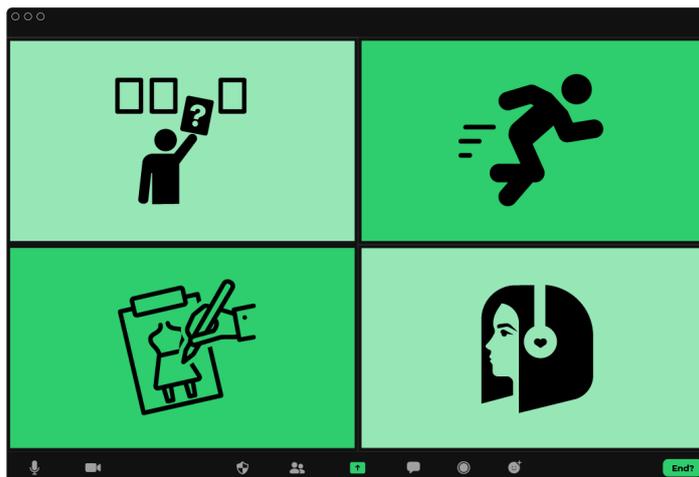
Tear strips and pieces of paper and glue them to a larger piece of paper to make pictures about the story. Pictures might show a particular event from the story or something more abstract about someone's response to what they have heard. Leave time for children to share what they have done if they would like to. Talk about the breaking up of the food in the story and about how many people you might have expected to feed by breaking up five loaves and two fish. The number of leftover scraps of broken food is also interesting to chat about!

Feeding The 500

Use play dough to make loaves, fish or your favourite kind of food.

Put the food into the hands and pray for people who are hungry and don't have enough food.





More online games

The pandemic grinds on. Vaccines are rolling out, but it will be a while before everyone gets a shot and it's not completely without the realms of possibility that we'll have another lockdown. So we need to be ready to hold our groups in whatever format is most appropriate – to that end, here are some games that can be played on platforms such as Zoom, where you can share your screen.

PICTURE REVEAL

You will need: a PowerPoint presentation of pictures (see below)
Create your own version of the bonus catchphrase round from the TV game show *Catchphrase*. Put a picture on a PowerPoint slide and then cover it completely with nine coloured boxes. Set up the PowerPoint to remove a box after five seconds, and to keep doing that until all the boxes have been removed. Do the same with ten more pictures (once you have set up the first one, copy and paste the slide and simply change the background picture).

Share your screen and ask the players to guess what the pictures are as the boxes disappear. They could shout out or, if you have a large group, they could put their guesses in the group chat. Ask a leader to keep an eye on the chat to see who the first person was to get the answer.

SCAVENGER HUNT

You will need: a list of items likely to be common in your young people's homes

This game has become a standard in online groups, but if you haven't yet tried it out, here's how to play. Before the session, create a list of items that the young people are likely to have in their houses. These could include a toilet roll, some white socks, a ladle or a leaf.

Shout out each item in turn. The young people have to go and find that item in their house and bring it back to their screen. The first one to return with the correct item wins a point. You may need to ask another leader to adjudicate on who is first! Keep score and deliver a small prize to the winner (if you can).

OBSERVATION

You will need: a clip of a film with an appropriate certificate; paper and pens

Before your session, choose a clip from a film that has an appropriate certificate for the young people in your group. It doesn't have to be anything up to date; you could choose a film that would have been popular with your group when they were children. Watch the clip and come up with a list of ten questions, the answers to which can be found by watching the clip carefully. These could be questions about the colour of a front door, the number of people in a shop or how much one character eats.

Play the clip, asking the group to watch carefully. Ask the questions and encourage the players to write down their answers. Mark the answer and declare the winner!

You could use a few different clips if the group enjoy the game.

GUESS THE TRACK

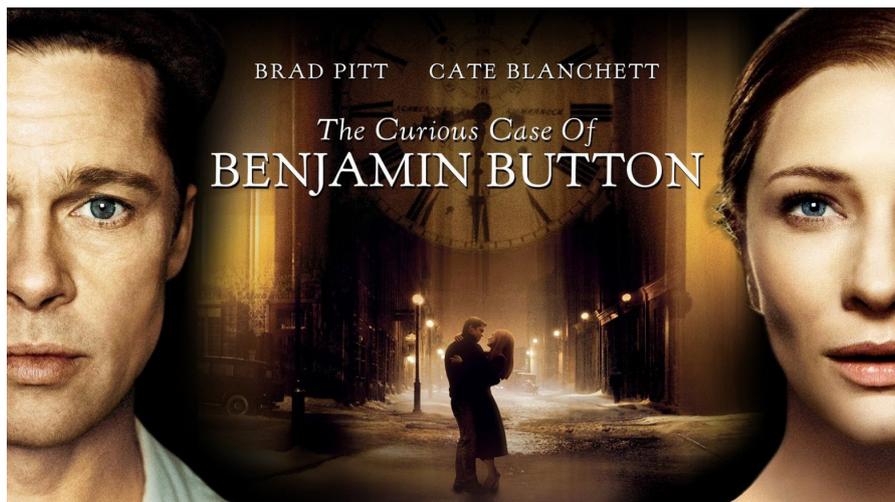
You will need: clips of music

Before the session, create a playlist of music on a streaming service of some of the most popular songs of the last few months. Play an extract – perhaps the start of the song, or the end – and ask the group to guess the artist and song. Award points for getting each one, and award a small prize to the winner.

You could play a similar game with clips or stills from films.

ALEX TAYLOR

is resources editor for *Premier Youth and Children's Work*.



The Curious Case of Benjamin Button (12)

Watch the whole film together or concentrate on the clip: 01:52:25 to 01:56:05

SYNOPSIS

Benjamin Button, a baby that was born looking like an old man, is taken in by a nurse at an old people's home. Over the years as Benjamin gets 'older', he appears to get younger. As he lives at the care home, he meets Daisy, a beautiful young girl of the same age. He falls in love with her, knowing the relationship will always look strange. Will his condition get in the way of true love? Or will it set him free?

The Curious Case of Benjamin Button's tagline is "Life isn't measured in minutes but in moments". It is this sentiment that carries the film throughout its long running time that it just about justifies (it does, after all, cover a whole lifetime). Due to its length, I may not recommend showing the whole thing to your young people, but the selected clip for this session will be perfect.

DISCUSS

To get your young people settled into the session, ask the following questions as a starting point:

- What moment in their life do they wish they could relive again?
- What advice would they give to themselves one year ago today?

In this clip, we discover that Daisy, a ballerina, has ended up in the hospital after a car accident. Through the narration of Brad Pitt, we then see the entire morning leading up to the events of the car accident and all the people involved. Whether it is someone who forgot to set their alarm or a shop assistant who didn't wrap a package, we explore several intersecting events that led to Daisy's accident. At the end Pitt reminds us that if only one thing had happened differently, Daisy would have been fine. It's quite a tricky concept to wrap your head around, but it should lead to some interesting discussions afterwards.

After showing the clip as a stimulus, break into smaller discussion groups or discuss together the following questions:

- How did you feel after watching the whole clip play out?
- Do you often consider the impact that your actions have on other people's lives?
- Does this clip imply that we are controlled by fate? Do we have free will?
- Have you had a moment in your life that would be radically different if only one tiny thing had not happened?

Provide copies of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. You should ideally add some context to the passage beforehand (it is quite existential) and then read through the different moments mentioned in the passage. Once you have done this discuss the following questions:

What do you think is the overall message of this passage?

- Did any of the statements stand out to you at all? Why?
- What does this passage imply about our interaction with other people?
- How could this passage help motivate our mindsets for the new year?

Finally, ask the group: as we start a new year, how can we practically be the positive interaction that other people experience?

The Curious Case of Benjamin Button is available on Netflix.

TOM WADE

is head of humanities at Haileybury School.



Paradise

ARTIST: Meduza (featuring Dermot Kennedy)

SUITABLE FOR: over 13s

INTRODUCTION

This song echoes with the cry of human hearts, a cry for paradise. As followers of Jesus, we live in the place of the now, and not yet. God's kingdom is come, and we see glimpses of the world God intended, but it is not yet fully realised. There are times when it seems so far away.

Begin the session by asking the young people to think about where or when they may feel close to God. When do they feel far away?

Explain to the group that during this session, you will be exploring something that followers of Jesus have battled with for so long – since the time Jesus walked on earth. Since that day, we have experienced glimpses of what God intended the world to be, but we also struggle when things don't fully show us this, and we long for something different.

LISTEN AND DISCUSS

Play the track, distributing lyrics for the young people to follow if appropriate, and as a group, discuss:

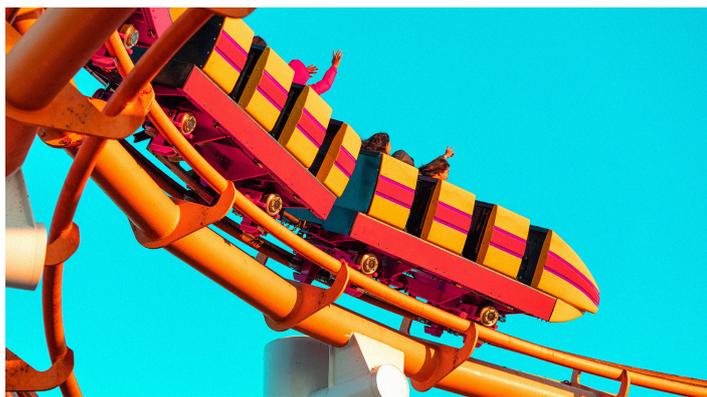
- How do you feel about this song?
- Which lyrics stood out to you?
- In what different ways do we long for paradise?
- What does it mean for paradise to feel so far away?

Make sure everyone can see a Bible and look together at Romans 8:18-25. Explain that when Jesus came to earth, he proclaimed that the kingdom was near. Since that day, followers of Jesus have been longing for the life that he promised – eternity reunited with God: paradise. In all of us human beings, we long for this, because we know that without this, we are incomplete. Talk about what it means to us, as a group.

As you draw the session to a close, pray for the young people, as appropriate, for issues raised in this session.

BECKY MAY

is a freelance writer and experienced children's and youth leader. She can be found at theresourcupboard.co.uk.



Annual rollercoaster

A group-mentoring exercise I do each January with my youth groups is to give each person some space to think, and an envelope to seal their thoughts in. I ask them to write their address on the envelope and I then send these back to them in the post several months later. It's nice to receive something in the mail, and what I found was that around three to five months was sufficient time for the new-year optimism and clarity to have faded, and this reminder and fresh impetus to be welcome. It creates a great agenda for some mentoring in the spring.

The value of mentoring in this? To create a place where they can:

- Celebrate their joys
- Mourn their losses
- Grow from their experiences
- Shake their head at the wonder of it all

THE EXERCISE

We often talk about 'emotional rollercoasters'; we all recognise the image of twists and turns and excitement and fear from speeding round a track. Ask your mentees what their favourite theme park ride is. Use that (either an imaginary rollercoaster or their favourite real ride, if they know it well enough) as a template for understanding the past year and looking forward and getting prepared for 2021. With younger mentees use fewer questions; they could jot down their thoughts on a winding track drawn on a sheet of paper.

THE QUESTIONS

- What have been the tough 'uphill' struggles this year? Say three words to describe this past year.
- How did you cope with these?
- What five positives can you come up with from these?
- What advice do you have for yourself for your mental health for the coming year?
- What have been the exhilarating 'downhill' sections? Things you haven't done before, achievements, and events that have created happy memories?
- How have they changed you?
- Imagine you are a parent yourself in the future – how would you make a year like this positive, healthy and fun for your children?
- What sudden 'turns' or changes happened this year that you weren't expecting?
- What strategies do you need to cope with change?
- Name three things you can do when you feel down.
- Name three things that stayed the same even though other things changed.
- What conclusion will you come away from 2020 feeling like you've learned?
- Finish this sentence: "Two ways I've changed in 2020..."

Imagine you are standing in the queue for a rollercoaster called 2021. You are imagining all the turns and dips that will make it exciting:

- What are the most important things that you are going to do this year? How do you need to prepare, emotionally and practically?
- It's normal to be a bit scared: what else are you feeling about the coming year? When you've already been on a rollercoaster, is it more or less scary the next time you queue up?
- What tips and strengths can you now take into 2021 that will help you smash this year?
- What 'rollercoasters' do you want to ride this year? What big things do you want to achieve? For example exams, sports, relationships, read the whole Bible, run 10km...

If you are printing something off for them, it's good to include some fun questions too so it's not too intense (they may well be more interested in these when they receive it back!). Here are some ideas to include:

- Your favourite movie or box set of the year was...
- The track you listened to the most was...
- In what ways did you grow spiritually / in your faith?
- The Bible verse that has meant most to you this year was...
- Which app was your biggest timewaster this year?
- Your funniest memory with mates was...
- The worst joke you heard was...
- Where was the most beautiful place you visited?
- What was the longest walk you completed?
- Your new 2020 friends are...

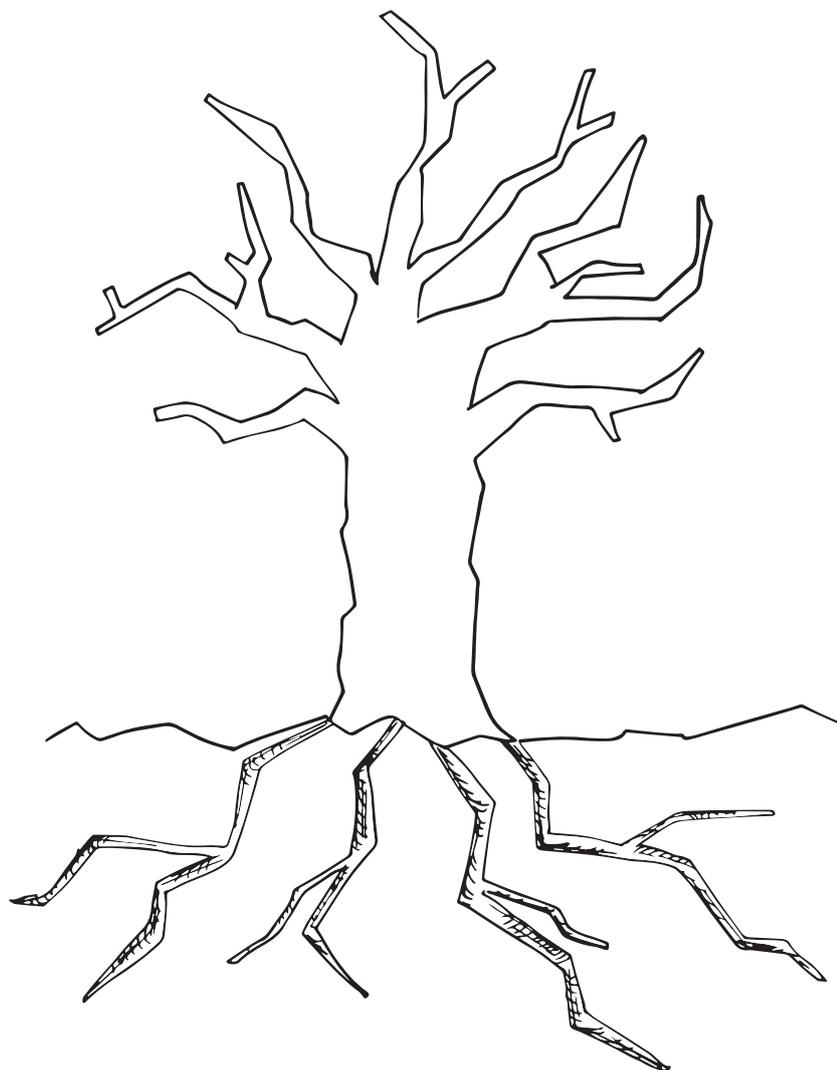
JOEL TOOMBS

has an MA in Christian mentoring and wrote the *Mentoring and Young People Grove* booklet. He is a volunteer youth worker.

WINTER TREES

*In the winter, the trees have dropped their leaves and look dead and lifeless.
But they actually continue to live and grow underground.*

*Sometimes our lives feel like winter too, and we struggle to experience hope and joy.
Doodle around the wintry branches things that feel cold and lifeless in you right now.*



At those times, we need to dig deeper, and not focus our energy on our wintry circumstances. We need to reach our roots deep into God, getting into habits like praying, worshiping, being with church family and reading the Bible.

Doodle, write or draw around the roots how you can go deeper with God. You might want to think of some habits that you want to get into this year, or perhaps you want to write out some Bible verses that give you hope.

End by holding your sheet out to God as a prayer, thank him for the roots you already have and ask him to help you grow.

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” Colossians 2:6-7