



SESSION 1 of 4

## Ascension

### MEETING AIM

To explore why it matters that Jesus ascended to heaven.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Acts 1:1-11

### BACKGROUND

This story will be a familiar one for any young people who have grown up in church, but they may never have stopped to think closely about what is happening here. For those who are new to faith, this will stand out as a strange narrative (though maybe not so much in the context of the astounding events of Easter!). Help both sets of young people encounter the story in a fresh and deeper way.

### 5 GATHERING TIME

Welcome the young people to the session. Share out any refreshments and chat about life. If the conversation needs a bit of encouragement move quickly into 'Intro activity'.

### 10 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** coins (10p or 2p); chalk; a long table

Before the session, divide a long table into six progressively smaller zones. With the coin balanced flat on the edge of the table, the player should bang it with their palm so that it slides up the table into a zone. If the coin comes off the table it is positioned back in the zone where it came off. (If your table isn't very slippery, shake some table salt over it.)

The zones would normally denote points, but here they represent different answers to questions. Ask the following questions and see whether the young people are happy with the answer they get. Write the answers to each question in the respective zone. Zone 1 is the closest and Zone 6 is the furthest away.

#### Who is your favourite artist?

1. Stormzy
2. Sigrid
3. Calvin Harris
4. Eminem
5. Justin Bieber
6. Westlife

#### What's your worst habit?

1. Telling terrible jokes
2. Blanking people
3. Doing smelly farts
4. Always being late
5. Picking my nose
6. Biting my nails

#### Choose your forfeit

1. 20 press-ups
2. 20 sit-ups
3. Rub your tummy while patting your head
4. Gargle the national anthem without laughing
5. Bend your nose upward by taping it to your forehead, then tell everyone what you ate yesterday
6. Spin round 20 times with your eyes closed, then try to run to the end of the room

#### Why did Jesus ascend into heaven?

1. Because Jesus was an alien and was returning to God on Mars
2. Because heaven is literally up in the sky
3. Because he can fly
4. Just to confuse us
5. Because he wanted us to know he was still alive, just not on earth any longer
6. Something else (Come up with an alternative!)

### 10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

**You will need:** ask the young people to bring their headphones and music devices (phones etc) in advance, and have spares available if you can; a music streaming service (most platforms offer a month's free trial) and the means to play it

Music is massively emotive and cathartic for adolescents. It provides a powerful and articulate language to process their often tumultuous feelings. Read Acts 1:1-11 and divide the group into teams of roughly three or four, giving each one of the following: a) Jesus; b) the disciples; c) the Pharisees; d) the Romans.

Ask each group to come up with a musical soundtrack to the passage that reflects the emotions of that person or group of people. It can be one track or a progression of several tracks. Ideally they should get the tracks up on Spotify or their phones to play a clip of each track and explain their thinking, but if they are not familiar with song names they can choose genres or artists. The main aim is to get them to think through the emotions and feelings involved. They will need to refer to the passage to do this. When they are finished, get feedback, allowing each group to discuss why they chose each track and allow the conversation to broaden to a soundtrack for the whole New Testament if they are finding the conversation beneficial.

### 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use the following questions to explore the passage and the ideas surrounding it:

- Why do you think Jesus ascended into the sky?
- What do you think about the disciples asking Jesus if he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel (overthrowing the Romans in the meantime)? Jesus didn't deny it; he said that it is not for us to know the times and dates. Does that mean there are times and dates set for important things to happen?
- If so, how does that affect our faith now?
- How important was it that Jesus proved to the disciples that he was alive? How important is it to us that he proved he was alive to them?
- How do we prove that he is alive now to our friends?

### 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** large sheets of paper (lining paper is ideal); marker pens; worship music and the means to play it

Stick several large sheets of paper to a wall. Write in large letters in the middle: "Because Jesus ascended to heaven..." Then allow the young people to write and draw their responses or endings to that sentence. Play a couple of worship tracks if you think that would help them focus (there's nothing magical about 'Christian' music; choose whatever helps focus their minds and encourage an emotional response). The group might think about what they want to thank God for or which blessings we can enjoy due to the fact that Jesus died, rose again and ascended to heaven.

### 5 PRAYER

**You will need:** the covered wall from 'Creative response'

Focus the time of prayer on standing around the wall together. Have each person read out an answer as a prayer, then end with the phrase: "You proved you're alive and you sent us the Holy Spirit." The whole group can respond with: "You came back to life and returned to God in heaven."

### JOEL TOOMBS

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SESSION 2 of 4

## Pentecost

### MEETING AIM

To explore what the Holy Spirit came to do and the impact he had on Jesus' friends.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Acts 2:1-41

### BACKGROUND

Like the ascension, Pentecost might have lost some of its impact due to repeat hearing. Ask any churched young people to encounter the story as if hearing it for the first time. Encourage those with little or no church background to ask questions, highlighting the life-changing impact the events of Pentecost had on the followers of Jesus back then, and the impact on us today.

### 5 GATHERING TIME

Welcome the young people to the session. Share out any refreshments and chat generally about life.

### 15 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** the relevant resources for your chosen activities

Play some team-building games that emphasise having to rely on each other for help. For example:

- In pairs, draw a picture of a house with a tree and car where one person has use of their hands but is blindfolded. The other can describe what to draw but cannot use their hands.
- Divide into teams of four and give each team three sheets of A4 paper. Challenge them to get the whole group from one side of the room to the other without touching the floor (by standing only on the paper).

The point is to introduce the idea of working together and to find a 'sweet spot' where everybody starts singing from the same hymn sheet and the team starts to perform effectively and with great togetherness. The disciples came together after the resurrection with a renewed sense of togetherness and significance, but at that point they had no real purpose and were lacking in the power they needed to really impact the world.

Set your young people a task that is effectively impossible. For example, divide

them into teams of five and ask them to sort a small bowl of skittles into separate colours using only their lips. Then give each team a few straws and see how much easier it is (they can suck the selected colour skittle onto the straw and drop it into the appropriate pile).

### 10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

**You will need:** a Bible; film clips (see below) and the means to play them

Perform the classic team-building activity where the whole group stands in a tight circle facing left and everyone must sit down on the knees of the person behind them at the same moment in order to create a balanced seat. See if you can read the passage without falling over, taking a verse each in turn. If you fall or the circle breaks, start again! Make it harder by passing around just one Bible to read from!

Find these clips (or similar ones). They are all about groups of friends who face an impossible challenge until their togetherness and / or a special power helps them achieve it. Warn them to watch with the Pentecost passage at the backs of their minds. What's going on in the clips? What are the similarities and differences compared with Pentecost?

- *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001): when Frodo offers to take the ring and the others pledge, one by one to help him.
- *Jumanji* (2018): when the characters first crash-land in the game and discover who they are.
- *Fantastic 4* (2015): the trailer
- *Pitch Perfect 2* (2015): the trailer
- *Big Hero 6* (2014): when Fred brings the gang back to his manor house to take shelter.

### 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use the following questions to explore the passage and the ideas around it:

- In what ways do the film clips share common ground with the story of the Holy Spirit coming upon the people (and empowering them to go and share the gospel and build the early Church)?
- Why did God send the Holy Spirit this way? Why did he send the Holy Spirit at all?
- What was the task God set the disciples, and has set us, that they needed the Holy Spirit to give them the ability to do?
- What does that mean for you today?

### 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

Plan a flash mob for during the coffee time after the service. Use a worship song your group will know, one that is upbeat and fun. Play a recording of the song (loudly) to take away any self-consciousness and give it as much impact as possible. If you can have some confident voices, let them start and have others join in, as that will deepen the sense of confusion among your unsuspecting coffee-slurping congregation!

Choreograph a simple movement for the young people to follow while they sing. For example, have them spread out all over the room before it starts, then as they all start to sing they could walk backwards through the crowd until they are back to back in a huddle at the centre of the room. They could rotate as a group, then when the song ends they should all walk away in different directions as if nothing had ever happened. It might be a good idea to have a quiet word with the church leader and / or coffee team to warn them something special might happen!

Make sure someone films it so you can enjoy watching it back later!

### 5 PRAYER

Focus the prayer time not on yourselves but on your church and the mission God has empowered you for. Display a list of all the activities the church runs, and pray for each of them in turn. Pray for the leaders and those who take part that they will be effective in being "my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Pray that the church will be blessed by your flash mob!

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SESSION 3 of 4

## Meeting together

### MEETING AIM

To consider what we can learn from the earliest communities of Jesus-followers.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37

### BACKGROUND

Following the drama of the ascension and Pentecost, the growing community of believers set out on a radical way of living. Money, property and food were shared, the weakest were looked after and the message of Jesus was proclaimed. This session should inspire some interesting ideas about how we can live in a similar way in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Don't dismiss ideas that seem too big to pursue. It may be that, with a little preparation, your young people can make a huge difference to the community around them!

### 5 GATHERING TIME

Welcome the young people to the session. Share out any refreshments and chat about life. If things are a bit quiet, play 'Mallet's mallet' (for those of you who are less than 35 years old, this was from a children's TV show in the 80s!). This is a word association game where two players take turns to exchange words, each one related to the previous. If someone hesitates, repeats a word or says a word that is not connected, they are out. (On the show they used to get a bash on the head with a foam mallet, but you may not want to do that here...)

### 10 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** pens and paper

In pairs, run surveys on people's favourite things (see the ideas below). Each pair should go around the room asking everyone to vote on their chosen question: five points for their favourite, three points for second place and one point for third.

They should build up a scoreboard on a sheet of paper. If appropriate, allow them to go out and ask people in other areas of the church (perhaps after the service if they are still keen) or, if supervised, even on the street outside.

Surveys you could include: best biscuit, best chocolate in a box of Celebrations,

best breakfast cereal, best item from Greggs; best ice cream flavour; best non-chocolate packet of sweets. Feel free to come up with your own, but they should be food or drink-related, or at least something that can be shared.

Pairs should also ask their respondents: "With which of the following would you be prepared to share those with? A) Your bestie, B) A random person sitting next to you on the bus or C) A homeless guy sitting outside Tesco.

Finally, share the results of the surveys.

### 10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

**You will need:** Bibles; pens and paper

Split the group into a few smaller groups, give out the Bibles and ask your young people to make a list of things the believers did in each verse of the two passages. They should note the verse and then a couple of words to summarise what the believers did.

Challenge the small groups to choose one verse from the whole passage that best sums up the community of disciples and believers after Pentecost. Finally, they should choose one word from the passage that summarises the whole thing. Each small group should then plan a short drama that depicts the verse they chose. It must be silent, ten seconds in length, include everybody and ensure that all members of the group remain in physical contact with at least one other throughout! You may use props so long as these rules are not broken.

Each group should present their drama to the rest of the group for them to guess which verse they are depicting. The other must guess which word they think that group chose as the most important. Feed back on each other's work, discussing why each group made the decisions they did and what they were trying to show and why.

### 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use the following questions to explore the passage and the ideas around it:

- What makes a good team?
- What kind of people and resources do you need to impact a whole society in a similar way to the early Church?
- How well does your youth group do the following things: having fun, learning, working well together, putting up with each other's faults, creating a positive environment, not arguing, making the most of everybody's individual strengths and impacting the world around you. (You could score these things out of ten.)
- How much do you rely on the power of the Holy Spirit, individually and as a

group?

- How does meeting together help you in a way that you would otherwise miss out on?
- How did meeting together benefit the early disciples?
- What can we learn from this story about our own community and mission with God?

### 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** a large sheet of paper (lining paper is ideal); paint in warm colours; paint-brushes; cover-up and clean-up equipment Show the group the large sheets of paper (or paper rolls) and warm-coloured paints. Invite the young people to spend some time thinking, drawing and writing keywords about your youth community, your wider church, and the communities you live, work and play in. What do you love most about them? What do you struggle with? Come up with words and images to describe what the challenges are, and about what you would love to see change and what God can bring to those situations...You could also come up with ideas of what your community could do to serve God in the wider community.

### 5 PRAYER

Take it in turns to (literally) lift each other up while praying for one another. If you have a larger group you can squash in nice and tight and do a sort of crowd surf while you all shout out prayers for each other. If there are not so many, start with each person on the ground and support them under their knees, hips and shoulders to lift them up nice and high while taking it in turns to pray blessing and encouragement over them (Make sure you risk assess this beforehand and supervise it carefully).

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SESSION 4 of 4

## Telling others

### MEETING AIM

To challenge the young people's perceptions of who they might share the good news of Jesus with, and to listen to God and hear what he wants us to do.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Acts 10

### BACKGROUND

We all have our preconceived ideas, sometimes subconsciously, about who might make a 'suitable' follower of Jesus. Peter certainly did, and we are no different! Allow God to speak during your preparation for this session and to show you his heart for others.

### 5 GATHERING TIME

Welcome the young people to the session. Share out your refreshments and chat about life. Share in their triumphs and commiserate in their disasters. Ask the group about the last time they talked about faith at school or at a club they're part of. Was it easy?

### 5 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** a handkerchief or flannel doused in perfume

Keep the perfumed handkerchief hidden in your pocket. Announce an activity in which everyone has to shake hands with as many people as they can in two minutes, and see who manages the most. As you join in this activity yourself (aim to shake hands with about a third of the people there), keep your hand freshly dipped into your pocket. The net result at the end of the exercise is that not only will the people whose hands you shook directly smell of perfume, but so will the people whose hands they shook and so on.

Ask everyone to smell their hands and see how many can smell the perfume. Discuss the exponential spread of the perfume in this way. (Make sure you use a product that no one in your group is allergic to.)

### 10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

**You will need:** a large white sheet (big enough for everyone to sit on); a Bible  
Spread out a large white sheet. Cram everyone on it and read Acts 10 to the group. Encourage the young people to bear in mind that we are all the 'unclean', who are now called 'clean'.

Challenge the young people to summarise the message Peter gave the Roman household. Ask everyone to have a go at summarising the gospel in one minute. You could time it to make this more of a game, or if they feel unsure you could give them a couple of minutes to write something down and then read their ideas out in turn. Reassure them that there is no perfect answer, and that in one minute they will only be able to touch on a tiny bit of it! Encourage them to try to find an angle that is personal to them, as Peter did.

Without criticising anyone's effort, you could spend a couple of minutes discussing the merits of some of the ideas and explore the ways you could share the gospel. Do you always have to tell people everything? Is the gospel we would tell the same as the message that might be preached at church on a Sunday morning? Is it OK to change the way we tell the gospel? What does God want us to communicate to our friends? Is anything off-limits when it comes to leaving bits out? What would be the most creative and radical way to communicate the gospel?

Peter's verbal gospel to Cornelius was reinforced significantly by his godliness and anointing, and also by the supernatural way the two had come to meet each other.

### 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use the following questions to explore the passage and the ideas around it:

- How would you feel if God told you to go to see a group of people you didn't like and tell them about Jesus? How would that affect your attitude about sharing the gospel?
- How would you feel if this group of people you didn't like became Christians?
- Who do you think your church primarily tries to reach with the gospel?
- Who or what kinds of people are you most likely to reach with it personally?
- How does the nature of your life reinforce or undermine the gospel you might share?
- What non-verbal ways can you think of to communicate or reinforce the gospel within your networks?

### 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** long sheets of paper (lining paper is ideal); sticky tape; marker pens  
Spread out a massive piece of paper on the floor (a couple of lengths of lining paper taped together would be suitable). Invite the young people to take a pen each and spend a few minutes writing every single group, culture, subculture, society, type of person, category and variation they can think of (everything from LGBTQ to Slovaks, Hindus, sporty people, rich people, poor people, homeless people, teachers, politicians, emos, skaters, nerds, bankers and students). They should fill the paper as much as they can within five minutes. It should be easy once they get going! Ask if anyone wants to explain what they have written. There may well be groups you're not familiar with, particularly 'tribes' of young people. Your group will probably enjoy educating you!

Chat together about how 'accepted' each group is. Are there any groups the young people would want to be part of? Are there any they would naturally avoid? Why?

### 10 PRAYER

**You will need:** large sheet of paper from 'Creative response'; coloured chalk  
Stand around the paper and reflect on all the people represented there. Ask a couple of people to spread chalk across the whole thing in the colours of the rainbow as a sign of God's promise to love all people; to give them hope and a future, and to never turn his wrath and fury toward any of us.

Lead a prayer of love over these people groups. Invite the Holy Spirit to break into them, to use Christians in those contexts, and to raise up boldness and opportunities. Invite the young people to add their own prayers generally or for specific groups of people.

Say: "As Peter said, 'I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.'" End with a declaration: "All are welcome here. All are clean." Encourage everyone to repeat it back. Do this three times.

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