

A lush green forest scene with a wooden table and a log pile. The image shows a dense forest of tall trees with vibrant green foliage. In the foreground, there is a pile of cut logs and a simple wooden table with a flat top and a single leg. The ground is covered in dirt and some green plants. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

All Seasons...

Exploring Outdoors

ideas to use with children and young people

From The Go Team



DIOCESE OF
Bath & Wells

Living the story. Telling the story.

All Seasons: Exploring Outdoors

Introduction

This booklet provides you with four Bible-based activity/worship outlines to use outside with children and young people or family groups—one for each season of the year. We have collated some favourite ideas and ways to help children and young people explore the natural world and connect with God outdoors. You will find ideas for Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter that you can adapt for your own context.

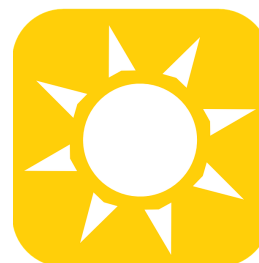
As we seek to live and tell the story of Jesus, we hope and pray that these ideas will help you and provide you with some inspiration for your work with children, young people and their families. Many of these ideas have been trialled and tested by ourselves and others and we have included some web links for further information.

For further practical ideas and guidance do also check out our short guide 'How to go outdoors with your group'. You can find all of our resource booklets, 'How to' guides and our newsletter Inform at www.bathandwells.org.uk/ministry/children-young-people/

For further help and support contact one of the Go Team Advisers. We would love to hear your stories and experiences of using this resource. Please share them with us through sending us an email or sharing your photos with us on Twitter (@GoTeamAdvisers) and Instagram (goteamadvisers).

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Spring



Gathering: What's new?

Allow space to share with one another something new that has happened this week or since the last time you met.

A short prayer: from a leader or perhaps invite a child or a family to lead this.

Briefly explain what's going to happen in the rest of the session.

Story: Parable of the Growing Seed

Read or tell the story from Mark 4:26-29

Reflection: here are a few thoughts you could use to reflect on Jesus' parable...

Ever thought about a seed when it's in the ground? Jesus' parable reminds us that when we scatter or plant seeds we must leave them, even if it looks like nothing is happening. The truth is they are growing in secret, even when we are asleep!

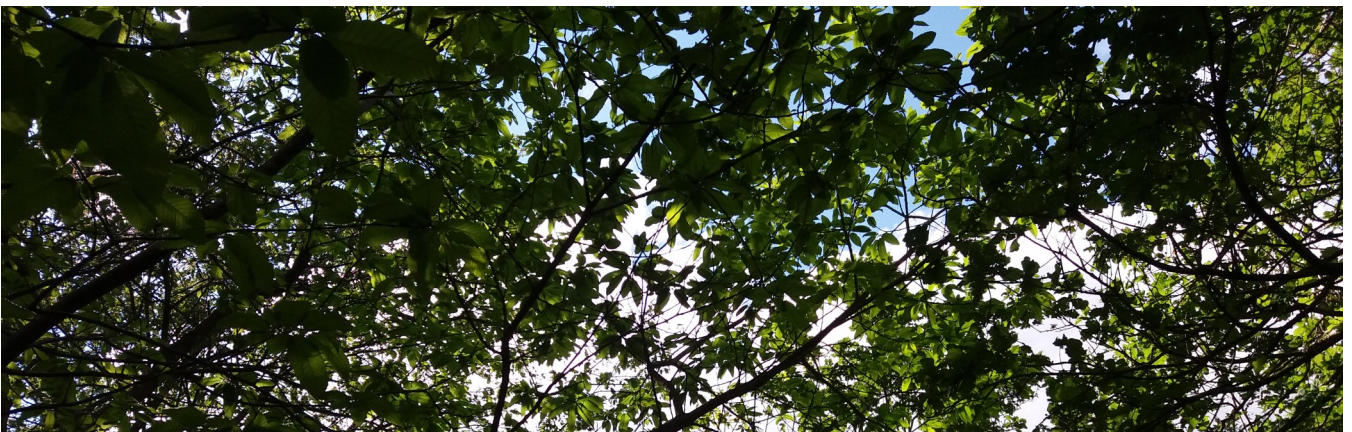
This is a hopeful message. For many of us there are dark times in our lives and we can feel hopeless, but in the midst of the dark, seeds of hope planted deep down, begin to sprout shoots of new faith and new life.

We too can be part of 'sowing' in others, through acts of kindness, love, friendship, prayers, even a simple smile; all of which can give birth to fresh hope, faith and life in our families and communities.

Exploring: Spring time

Spring time is an amazing time of year. Encourage the group to explore the place you have gathered, in twos and threes, searching for signs of spring:

- Look for any new flowers or plants that have appeared.
- Think about what might be underground and yet to appear.
- Stop and listen for any birds – can you recognise any of the calls you can hear?
- If you were a bird gathering things to build a nest, what might you use?
- As you come back together bring any items you think would make good nest material and have a go at making it into a bird's nest.



Creating: Seed Bombs

A seed bomb is a small ball of compost mixed with flour and water and then rolled in seeds – preferably native wild flower seeds, which are readily available from garden centres.

You will need: A mixing bowl or bucket, soil or compost, flour, water, wildflower seeds. Plus handwashing facilities once the seed bombs are created.

For a really simple guide from the National Trust on making effective seed bombs check out:

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/how-to-make-wildflower-seed-balls>



Celebrating: How great You are!

If possible light a fire and gather around it for the celebration part of the session (ensure the fire is contained in a fire pit and that the group are aware of the dangers).

Use this simple outline to conclude your time together:

Read aloud selected verses from Psalm 104

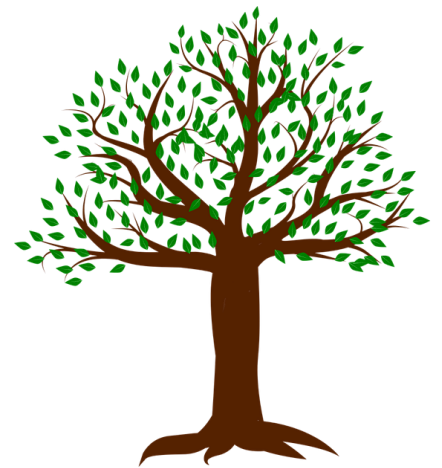
Song – God of Wonders (Marc Byrd & Steve Hindalong, 2000)

Leave space to bring prayers for our world and for ourselves

Song – My Lighthouse (Rend Collective, 2013)

Closing prayer/blessing

Conclude the session by toasting marshmallows around the fire. Wooden kebab sticks work well for this.



Summer



Gathering: When did you last have a big surprise?

Allow space for the group to share with one another stories of things that have surprised them.

A short prayer: from a leader or perhaps invite a child or a family to lead this.

Briefly explain what's going to happen in the rest of the session.

Story: Jesus appears to his disciples on the beach

Read or tell the story from John 21:1-14.

Telling this story on an actual beach, beside a lake or river could work well if you have the opportunity. If not then perhaps create a beach scene with a big blue sheet for the sea and maybe even some pebbles and sand!

Introduce the story by re-capping the events of the Easter story: that Jesus died on the cross, was laid in a tomb and then came back to life again. You could pretend to be in the boat with the disciples as they realise that it's actually Jesus on the beach.

Jesus had already appeared to his disciples, several times, and now they had gone fishing – perhaps getting back to normality.

How do you think they were feeling...

- as they went out fishing?
- when they didn't catch anything all night?
- when they heard a man on the beach telling them to try the other side of the boat!
- when they realised it was Jesus!

How does this story encourage us to trust in Jesus?

Exploring: New life

Encourage the group to explore the place you have gathered, in twos and threes, searching for signs of new life. What surprises can you find?

- If you are at the beach explore any rock pools or look under rocks at the water's edge. Visit <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/no-37-explore-the-wonders-of-a-rock-pool> for a simple guide to the wonders of a rock pool.
- How about trying crabbing from a harbour wall or tidal pool? You'll need a crabbing line, bucket and some bait (bacon works well). You could have a team competition to see who catches the most crabs in a set time. If you are beside a stream or pond try using a fishing net to see what you can catch?
- Alternatively search for mini-beasts wherever you are – under stones, logs or other places that might provide cover for small creatures.
- Stop and listen – what signs of life can you hear?
- Look for interesting items to bring back to the group: pebbles or stones of different colours, driftwood or twigs and branches of interesting shapes, a variety of leaves, seaweed or fir cones.

Creating:

Challenge the group to make a big picture on the floor using materials found from around the space where you have gathered. A good way to do this could be to 'frame' your picture by drawing in the sand or laying down a rope or a sheet that things can be placed on top of. It could be the beach scene from the story, a reminder that Jesus is alive or simply a collage of all the amazing life we see around us.

When collecting items for the big picture make sure to only collect things that have already fallen. Don't pick, break off or take from trees, plants or bushes. If you find litter on the beach or in the countryside collect that too and dispose of it properly.



Celebrating:

If possible cook some fish on an open fire to tie in with the story. Fish finger sandwiches cooked on a barbecue may be the easiest and most popular way to do this.

Use this simple outline to conclude your time together:

Read aloud selected verses from Ephesians 2:4-10

Song – God's love is big (Simon Parry, Vineyard UK 2005)

Leave space to bring prayers for our world and for ourselves

Song – Great things (Phil Wickham & Jonas Myrin, 2018)

Closing prayer/blessing



Autumn



Gathering: What do you treasure?

Allow space for the group to share with one another what they treasure most in life.

A short prayer: from a leader or perhaps invite a child or a family to lead this.

Briefly explain what's going to happen in the rest of the session.

Story: Parable of the Hidden Treasure

Read or tell the story from Matthew 13:44 (just one verse!). You could use Bob Hartman's re-telling found in the Lion Storyteller Book of Parables.

Reflection: here are a few thoughts you could use to reflect on Jesus' parable.

There's a great picture here of the excitement and joy of finding something so special.

- Can you remember a moment when you found something special?
- What did it feel like?

In Matthew 6:21, Jesus says: 'For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'

It is all too easy to let other 'treasures' fill our lives but wouldn't it be amazing to wake up every day with the wow factor of discovering who God is and how much he loves us, as if for the first time?

When we start to live our lives in that way we point to God's 'Kingdom' that Jesus is talking about. A world where God is king, where he is in charge, where he fills our hearts with joy and peace, where we stop trying to do things our way and do things his way; because he made us after all.

That's when we start to change the world!



Exploring & Creating: Treasures in creation

Set up some activities themed around 'treasure' and encourage the group to explore the outdoor space and the theme through them:

- Treasure hunt: in small groups see if you can find 5 different leaves, flowers, mini-beasts, birds and trees. Visit www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/categories/children-and-families/ for some great worksheets and other resources.
- Treasure pictures: provide squares of sticky back card (A5 or A6 works well – you could make your own using cereal packets & double-sided sticky tape) and encourage each person to make a picture from things they find as they walk around.
- Treasure the moment: encourage the group to find some space to sit or walk, enjoying the treasures of autumn or to ponder the idea of the Kingdom of Heaven.



Celebrating: Shout for joy to the Lord!

Gather back together use this simple outline to conclude your time together:

Read aloud some verses from Psalm 100

Song – Creator God (Nick & Becky Drake, 2008)

Leave space to bring prayers of thanks for our world and the treasures we've found.

Song – Build My Life (sixsteps music, 2016)

Closing prayer/blessing

Conclude the session with a family picnic, or if the weather is colder hot drinks & muffins.



Winter



Gathering: Are you afraid of the dark?

Allow space for the group to share with one another places or times that it has been really dark. How did you feel? Did having a light help?

A short prayer: from a leader or perhaps invite a child or a family to lead this.

Briefly explain what's going to happen in the rest of the session.

Story: Shepherds and angels on the hillside

Read or tell the story from Luke 2:8-20.

Reflection: What stands out to you about this story?

It is a familiar one to many of us and often kept to nativity plays and carol services but even if it is not Christmas now it is an important story.

Here are 3 things we could reflect on:

- When the shepherds were visited on the hillside by the angels (what must that have been like?) and told the good news about Jesus, they go and check it out for themselves.
- When the shepherds met Jesus they told everyone they met about him. They didn't keep it to themselves or only talk about it at Christmas!
- When they returned to their sheep on the hillside they went back 'glorifying and praising God' for all they had seen and heard.

Exploring: The night sky

The night sky is something that we perhaps don't take the time to look at, but on a clear night it can be an awesome thing to explore.

- Encourage your group to stand still and look up at the night sky. This will work best if the sky and surrounding area is dark, but can still be achieved from a small back garden after dark once your eyes have acclimatised.
- You could put down a ground sheet allowing people to lie down as they study the sky.
- Gather some information about the stars and planets that might be visible in the night sky at different times of the year. Also find out about the moon and its cycle.
- Try <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/top-tips-for-stargazing> for a good introduction.
- Can you count the number of lights you can see in the sky? Are they all stars? What else might they be? Are any of the lights moving? What's the brightest light you can see?



Creating: Twig Star

Encourage the group to work together to make simple stars from twigs, one for each household or more if time and resources allow.

If you are outside without artificial light you may want to do this activity before it gets dark. You could either collect twigs as a group activity or have them ready to use. You will need 5 twigs of equal length for each star plus some string or wire to tie them together (see Pinterest for more ideas). Your rustic star could be hung up as a decoration at home or have other things hung from it like a mobile.

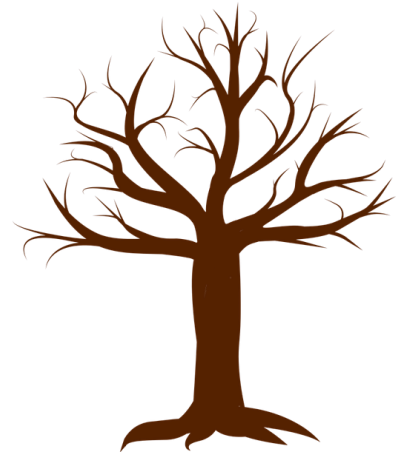


Celebrating: Light in the darkness

If possible, light a fire and gather around it for the celebration part of the session (ensure the fire is contained in a fire pit and that the group are aware of the dangers). Use this simple outline to conclude your time together.

Ask different members of the group to read aloud the following verses (all Bible quotations NLT):

- The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. John 1:5
- The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. John 1:9
- Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life." John 8:12
- Jesus shouted to the crowds, "I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark." John 12:46
- Jesus also said: "You are the light of the world – like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house." Matthew 6:14-15



Song – Light of the World (Tim Hughes, 2000)

Leave space to bring prayers for our world and for ourselves, thanking Jesus that He is the light of the world that the darkness cannot overcome. You could use this prayer from 'The Blessing of the Light' (Common Worship):

Blessed are you, Lord God, creator of day and night:
to you be praise and glory for ever.

As darkness falls you renew your promise
to reveal among us the light of your presence.

By the light of Christ, your living Word,
dispel the darkness of our hearts
that we may walk as children of light
and sing your praise throughout the world.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:
Blessed be God for ever.

Song – Not Afraid (Rend Co Kids, 2019)

Closing prayer/blessing

Conclude the session with some sparklers around the fire, bearing in mind the necessary safety precautions.



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