

Who Counts?

Children & young people

This booklet includes stories, sketches, youth activities and creative resources to use with children and young people's groups. They engage with the theme in a variety of ways. They could be used in church on Homelessness Sunday or Poverty Action Sunday, or at any other time for activities relating to the 'Who Counts?' theme. You might also be able to use them in schools.

'Toys for all seasons' (page 1) is a story that can be used with children aged eight or under.

'Clearing up the census' (page 3) is a story which is aimed at over-eights.

'Counting people in' (page 5) is an activity that can be done by a wide range of young people but is more suited for those entering or in secondary educational level. It can be done in a number of settings including youth groups and schools.

The 'I count' crossword (page 7) is secondary school level, although younger children with a good vocabulary will do it, too. It is much simpler than its initial appearance suggests, with clues included in other clues, etc.

The spiritual exercise 'Losing your way' (page 10) is designed for teenagers and can be used in a number of settings.

'The counting tree' (page 12) is a mixed activity for all ages.

'The class sketch' (page 15) is suitable for use with young people aged 11 or over.

Toys for all seasons (a story for under-eights)

Joshua was a very lucky boy. On his sixth birthday he became old enough to look after some of his dad's old toys as well as his own. So his room was now full of animals and figures of every shape and size and he had to work out where they should all go.

Some he wanted to have on his bed because he was still young enough for it to be OK to have something to cuddle at night. Others had their place on the garage, on his car, along the scooter and by the castle on the window sill. There were some clever figures, like one of the Action Men and his Buzz Lightyear, who could sit on the bookshelves with Joshua's books, and there were two old and pretty fierce-looking ones who sat on the blanket box at the end of his bed facing the bedroom door. One had a patch over his eye and a serious scar down his cheek, and the other was a very strong man called He-Man that both dad and uncle Joe really seemed to like – they were there to guard Joshua from anything bad.

Joshua also had his toy cupboard where other figures, Lego and Playmobil folk and stuffed animals lived, along with the rest of the toys. Josh enjoyed playing with them on his own and when friends came to his house.

Everything seemed to be going very well until Mum picked Joshua up from school one day, and he asked her if having a bad dad made you bad too.

Joshua and his mum had a good chat as they walked home, and Mum told him that children can't be blamed for the things their parents do and that they should not be punished for them either.

As they walked up the garden path to their house, Joshua asked the question that was really bothering him.

"So, why does Jack Duffy have to live in such a bad place with his mum and sister, then?"



As they got into the house, Mum explained that Jack's dad had done some very bad things and had caused a lot of trouble for his family. In the end they had to leave their house. Jack's mum was hoping things would be sorted out soon, but it was sometimes very hard for grown-ups to sort out things like that. She was sorry that Jack was so unhappy but things would get better.

"But Jack's had to leave everything behind," said Joshua, "So he is living in a nasty place and he told me – in private so you mustn't tell anyone – he doesn't even have his old teddy for company."

"That must be hard for Jack – it's because they had to leave their house so suddenly. Some of us at school and in the church have been helping them."

Joshua felt that it was still very unfair.

Later, when Mum popped into Joshua's room to see how he was getting on with his homework, she saw that he had finished his work and was emptying out his toy cupboard.

"What are you doing?" Mum asked, "It's nearly bedtime, shouldn't you be tidying up?"

"I'm just getting some of my toys I don't play with very often. I was going to ask you... Can I give some of my things away... perhaps even one or two of Dad's old things?"

"Give them away? I thought you loved every one of your toys?"

"I do." said Joshua, "I don't want to let any of them go. See, I have lined them all up and tried to pick which ones I like the least but it is so hard. I want to keep them all so I don't know what to do."

"But why do you want to give some of them away, then? We have enough room..."

Joshua said, "Mum, I want to give Jack some toys because he really needs them."

Then he walked over to his bed. "But I shouldn't give him things that I don't like much, should I? I should give him ones that I think he'll need... So he needs one to hug, some so he can play at garages, something to help him do his homework and one to guard him when he sleeps."

As he spoke, Joshua walked around the room collecting the toys that would do those jobs best.

"That is very kind of you," said Mum, "and very brave of you too, because I know you will miss all of these things."

"And you don't think Dad will mind that some of them are really his?"

"Of course not! I am very proud of you, Joshua Hopkins, and I think you deserve a kiss and a hug!"

So Mum kissed Joshua and hugged him then helped him pack up the things ready for the morning.

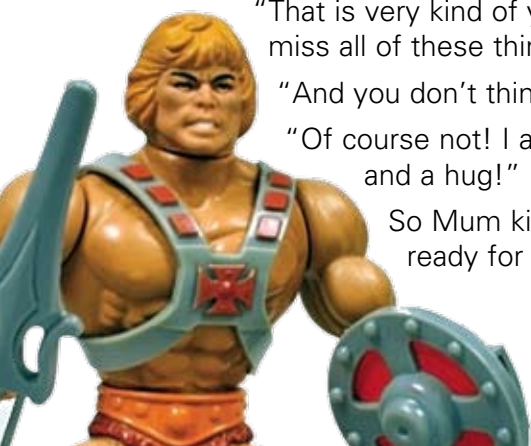
Notes for readers

The questions asked by Joshua are profound. They can be asked in a number of contexts. Joshua can see quite clearly that Jack's situation is not of his own making and realises that he can at least make some difference. Joshua understands that Jack counts!

His friend's situation is not the only sort of case where people suffer as a result of things out of their control, yet we live in a society that is constantly running the risk of becoming less forgiving and less compassionate. In a society where 'choice' is elevated to its current level, we are expected to see other people's failures as their own fault and not our responsibility. And, with the current wave of cuts in spending, even the meagre safety nets of the past are disappearing or becoming seriously threadbare.

Joshua's response is direct and truly compassionate. It is a challenge to us all.

After reading the story to the children, ask them what they think of Joshua's idea. What other things could Joshua do to help his friend? How would they describe Joshua's action – was it kind, loving, generous, etc? Why is it important to be kind and loving to others? Who does Jesus say we should love? If it is a bit difficult to like someone, should you still try? Why does God love us all so much and what does that tell us?



Clearing up the census (a story for 8–14-year-olds)

Most of the time Jan was a really good big sister to Billy. She was in Year 6 and Billy was only just seven, so sometimes Jan would get bored or fed up with having to wait for Billy or unhappy because Billy seemed to get all of the attention. Occasionally she would get into trouble because she'd go too far, and Mum or Dad would have to sort things out.

On this occasion Jan's tricks took a while to sort out.

It all began when Billy heard on TV that the census was about to happen. Soon after he seemed to become very troubled and frightened, and when his Mum asked him what was wrong at first he wouldn't tell her. Then he admitted that although he quite looked forward to the ride on the donkey, he didn't really want to live in a shed.

Mum was quite confused by this and gently asked him what he meant. Jan had been explaining what a census was and had used the story of baby Jesus to help Billy understand. Then it seemed that she had carried on with the story until she had completely frightened Billy.

He believed that, like the Holy Family, they would have to go back to their family town to be counted, so they would be going to Granny and Grandad's house in Newcastle (from London), but the law said that you had to go by donkey. He also believed that because there would not be enough room, they would all have to sleep in the garden shed, which was a bit like a stable.

Although he was glad he didn't have to live in the shed, Mum could see that he was a little bit sad to miss out on the adventure with the donkey.

Later that day, while Jan was still at school, Billy asked another strange question about the census. He said, "Why do you have to go to Egypt after the census?"

Mum had thought she had sorted everything out with regard to census things, so she was a bit upset that there were still problems.

She sat down with Billy and discovered that it was apparently very dangerous for boys to be counted on the census, but if you were brave enough to do it then you ran the risk of having to get up very early in the morning to travel all the way to Egypt 'just in case'.

It became clear that Jan had not said anything more than 'just in case', so she explained again to Billy that there was nothing frightening about doing the census. It was a simple form and Mum and Dad would fill it out for everyone in the house, including Billy and his sister. Jan was just teasing him by pretending that the census in the Bible was the same as this one.

"So we won't have to go to Egypt, then?"

"No, of course not – one day we might go on holiday there, but Egypt is not usually a place of refuge for Geordies – even if they now live in London."

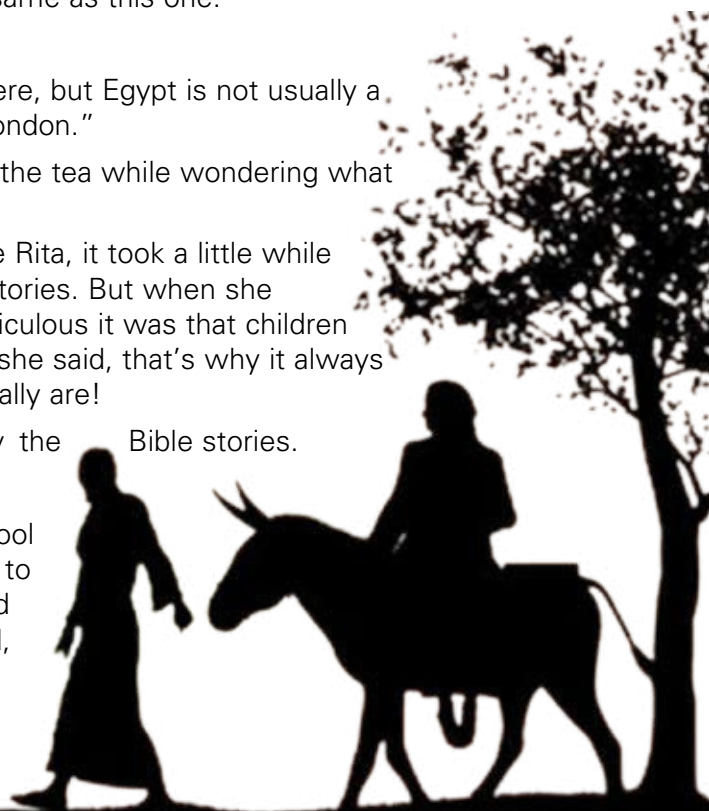
Billy went back to his toys and Mum continued to make the tea while wondering what to say to Jan.

When Jan was finally dropped off at the house by Auntie Rita, it took a little while to find a chance to talk to her quietly about her census stories. But when she mentioned the census, Jan started talking about how ridiculous it was that children of divorced families have to be counted twice. Perhaps, she said, that's why it always seems like there are more divorced people than there really are!

Mum was almost as surprised by this as she was by the Bible stories.

"Who's been telling you this?" she asked.

It turned out that there had been a discussion in the school playground about the census, and James Brice had tried to say that only people earning over a certain amount would be allowed to take part in the census. But, Jan explained, everyone knew that he was telling lies because he also said that about being allowed to vote, too and that was



definitely not true. Everyone had the right to vote as long as you were old enough. Mary B thought that it was all about counting rooms, and that people were given a score based on how many rooms each person had. Jan thought that sounded quite interesting but couldn't really work out why you would want to give people a score anyway.

Then Julia, who lives with her mother during the week and with her dad at the weekends, claimed that she would be on both her mother and her father's forms so she was going to be counted twice. Somehow that would save her mum some tax money and let Julia go to any school between her mum and her dad's homes when they had to choose a secondary school. This all didn't seem fair, somehow, and it upset Jan.

Mum made a mental note that she would have to talk to the teacher when it was her turn to do the school run, then tried to sort out the truth from the stories made up about the census. She explained that it was important for everyone to be included in the census because it was about having a complete picture of what our country was like and who lived in it on a specific day in 2011. From that information the government would try to understand the country better, identify where the problems were, and make decisions about where to spend tax-payers' money. It certainly didn't have anything to do with the things Jan's friends were talking about, and Julia's parents would be doing something wrong if they counted her in both homes.

Then Mum pointed out that making up stories about the census might be fun but

Notes for readers

Talking to children about the census is sometimes not particularly interesting, and getting them to discuss important issues such as the ones highlighted in the 'Who counts?' theme is particularly difficult. After reading this story, use the following to help you lead a discussion about the issues.

This is not simply a story about the census. While drawing parallels with the Holy Family, it emphasises the importance of the census and the misleading ideas surrounding it. As Christians we have a duty to play an active part in society, and involving ourselves in the census is an easy thing for us to do.

It also gives us the opportunity to ask the question – if the census is a detailed snapshot of Britain on one day in 2011, who might be missed out of the picture and why would that be a problem?

Jan's friend shouldn't be counted twice, but there are many people who have no real place to live – they are sleeping on sofas, floors and in spare rooms. Many of them might not be included. Other homeless people living on the streets, in sheds and other difficult places might be missed, as might those who are constantly on the move, travelling from place to place in vans, on foot and so on. Poor people, badly informed people, and those who have difficulties reading and writing may also try to avoid the census for all sorts of wrong reasons. Then there are people who are refugees; those who have escaped persecution in other countries and have fled here to be safe. Many of them are frightened of officials, some might not be here legally, others may speak little or no English. They stand a good chance of being missed too.

Many of those sorts of people are surprisingly close to the sorts of images conjured up by the story of the Nativity.

So start off by exploring basic reasons why involvement in the census is important. Ask who might not be counted in the census, and use the Holy Family as a prompt... (eg Jesus was born in a stable – do you think he would be included in today's census if he was born in a stable now?) Ask why everyone should be counted. Emphasise the importance of the census as a policy-making tool – spending and resources will be allocated with the help of census data, so getting it right is important, and those who need help most are the ones least likely to be properly recorded.

it could upset people. Jan obviously didn't like some of the stories she had been told, so perhaps she should think about the sorts of things she said to little Billy.

Jan could see now that it had not been a good idea to tease Billy, and said that she was sorry. So Mum got up to sort

out the tea things and Jan said that at least she had not mentioned the slaughtering of the first-born sons to Billy.

"Yes," said Mum, "I was glad that you stopped short of that."

"Well," said Jan, "when I saw how much it upset James Brice I thought it best not to try that bit on Billy, too!"

Counting people in (a group activity for young people)

This one-hour activity is suitable for up to four teams, each with up to six members. However, if you want more teams or have more people in the group, double up the game (print off two sets of characteristics on different coloured papers, and run as two lots of teams).

The activity

There are a number of different characteristics and forms of behaviour or appearance details on the following pages. Print them out and cut them up so that each characteristic becomes a single 'characteristic card'.

Explain to the group that they will be split into teams. Each team will be given an equal number of randomly chosen characteristics from the 'cards' lying face-down on the table, plus some paper and pens.

Each team needs to agree an overall picture of their person, based on all the given characteristics (even if they contradict or all seem negative). They then have to agree how they should present this new person to the rest of the group as a potential new member. They have to be completely honest about the full nature of this new person, but still give their best shot at selling them to the group no matter how good or bad the person's characteristics are.

Ask them to consider issues such as:

- Why should the person be welcomed by the group?
- What are the person's best and worst characteristics?
- What will they add to the group?

Materials required

- Printed out 'characteristics cards', cut up and mixed face-down on a table.
- Some flipchart or other large sheets of paper and marker pens for each team.
- A wall or large board to present from.

Timings

- Up to 10 minutes to explain, sort into teams and hand out 'cards'
- 15 minutes for teams to discuss and agree approach
- Up to five minutes per team to present (four teams will take about 20 minutes)
- Time for reflection and discussion plus reading out 1 Corinthians 1:26–31

- Who is the person like (could be a team member or a soap character, etc)?
- What benefits will the group be able to offer to the person?

Split them into teams and distribute the materials and cards. Walk around, listening to each team, and give advice whenever asked, but do not interfere unless a team is planning to be dishonest or misleading. After a suitable time (probably around 15 minutes), gather the teams together and let each team present their case for their new member.

At the end, ask them what they thought of the process. Is this how they normally choose new members of a group or new friends?

Help the discussion along with questions such as: Is this how we behave normally when dealing with relationships? Is it a good idea? What are the problems with the approach? Is this how people become members of the church or school? Would Jesus have used this approach? Do any

of these characteristics make people have more or less rights? Should they? So, should richer, better looking, better educated people with more possessions and big homes have more rights or a greater say in how our world is run? When do we make choices based on these sorts of criteria – reality shows, elections, etc? Do we make choices based on assumptions linked with these sorts of characteristics, and is that a good idea?

Encourage them to explore the idea of why people might be treated differently based on certain criteria, and how this fits with the way God treats us and expects us to treat each other.

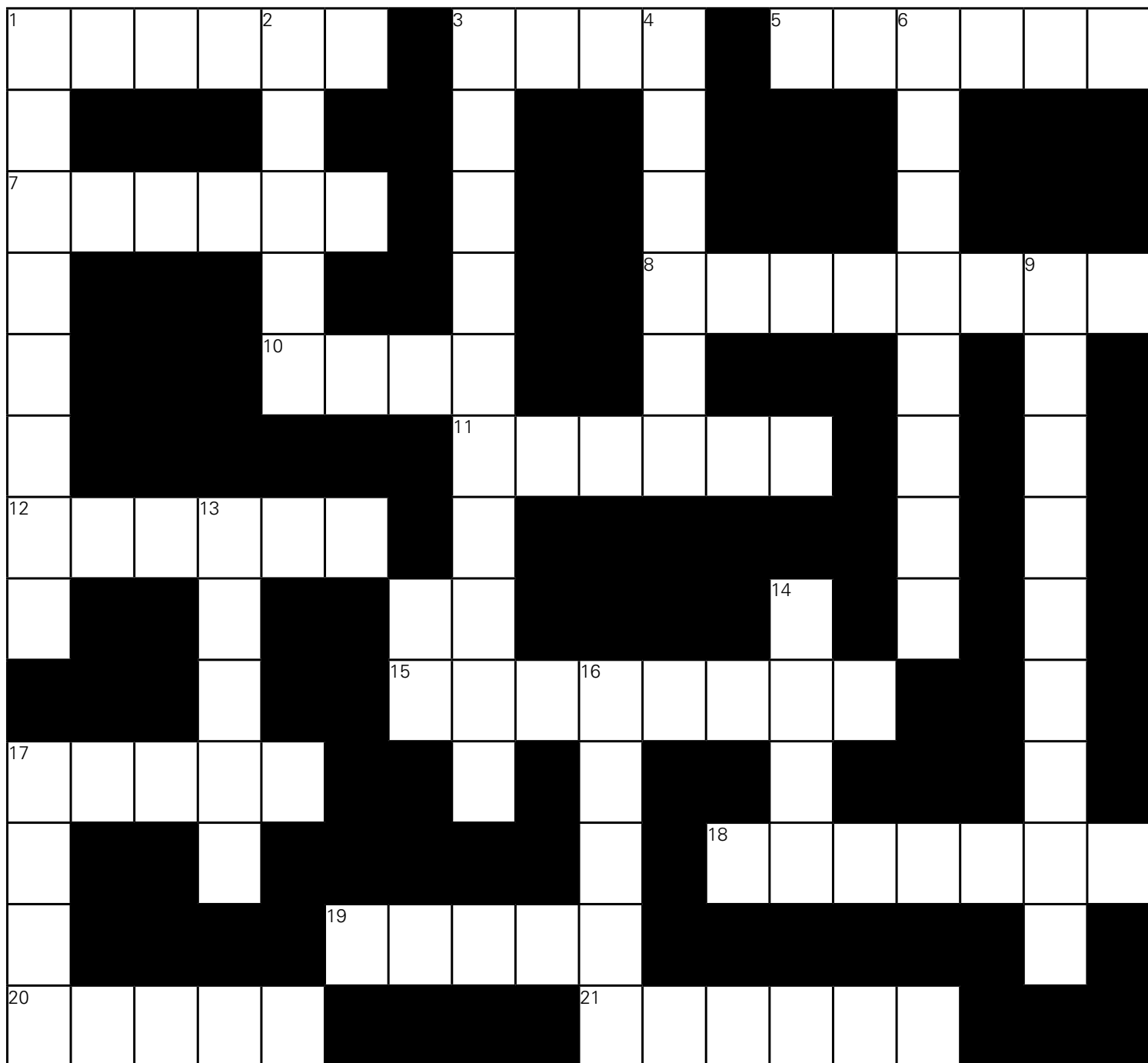
At a suitable point in the discussion, ask someone to read out the passage from Corinthians and see what they make of it in the context of this discussion

Note for group leaders: Try this out for yourself before doing it with the group, and use your findings to help you facilitate the activity.

Very attractive	Sad	Keeps secrets
Very unattractive	Happy	Hopeless gossip
Good tempered	Optimistic	Respectful
Bad tempered	Pessimistic	Disrespectful
Very fat	Artistic	Gets into fights
Very thin	Very practical	A peacemaker
Very tall	Logical	A leader
Very short	Illogical	A follower
Too loud	Over-friendly	Good in a team
Too quiet	Unfriendly	Not a team player
Pushy	Rude	Easily swayed
Timid and shy	Polite	Stubborn
Untrustworthy	Well dressed	Mature
Very reliable	Scruffy	Immature
Always late	Clean and fresh	Always sick
Always early	Dirty	Really healthy
Mean and miserly	Talks too much	Careful
Very generous	The silent type	Careless
Very kind	Slow	Extremely intelligent
Often unkind	Fast	Not clever
Thoughtful	Lazy	Local
Thoughtless	Hyperactive	Foreign
Cheerful	Cheeky	Very rich
Miserable	Polite	Very poor

The 'I count' crossword (an activity for young people)

Use the clues overleaf to find the words – but remember, the solution to this crossword lies in the 'I count' theme and especially in the Beatitudes (Luke 6:20–26 or Matthew 5:3–12). So, if you get stuck, you can use your Bible and the rest of the sheet to help you!



Crossword clues

Across

- 1 The Kingdom of God we all hope to enter. (6)
- 3 Christ tells us that 'The _ _ _ _ in Spirit' will be called the children of God. (4)
- 5 When we fill in the census form there will be one of these for everyone in the country (6).
- 7 Like a special prize – those who mourn can expect this in heaven. (6)
- 8 If you have nowhere to live you will become this. (8)
- 10 A bit like wishing or wanting with God's help – goes with faith and charity. (4)
- 11 Every 10 years the government makes a record of everyone in the country using this. (6)
- 12 Be kind, treat people with care and you will be this – and yours will be the kingdom of heaven. (6)
- 15 If you try to forgive and treat people justly and with care, you will be called this. (6)
- 17 Those who believe and place their trust in God have this. (5)
- 18 What we call a person who escapes persecution and finds safety in this country. (7)
- 19 You do this if you are sad and have suffered a loss – your reward will be great in heaven. (5)
- 20 To go into a place or to put information on a form. (5)
- 21 Those who hunger and _ _ _ _ _ for what is right will be satisfied. (6)

Down

- 1 People persecuted in the cause of right will have the earth as their _ _ _ _ _ . (8)
- 2 The world God created for us to take care of is called this. (5)
- 3 Those who are attacked and called names because of what they are or what they believe are being _ _ _ _ _ . (10)
- 4 Sort of basic entitlement to things like the vote, freedom of speech, etc. (6)
- 6 We are all the daughters and sons of God so we are God's _ _ _ _ _ . (8)
- 9 If you hunger and thirst for what is right, Christ says you will be _ _ _ _ _ . (9)
- 13 More than simply fact but something you can know in your heart too. (5)
- 14 Not made dirty or imperfect, if your heart is like this you shall see God. (4)
- 16 We all have worth, have the right to be seen and listened to. You and I _ _ _ _ . (5)
- 17 We are challenged to see Christ in the _ _ _ _ of everyone we meet. (4)

Crossword solution

H	E	A	V	E	N		P	O	O	R		R	E	C	O	R	D				
E				A			E			I				H							
R	E	W	A	R	D		R			G				I							
I				T			S			H	O	M	E	L	E	S	S				
T				H	O	P	E			T				D		A					
A							C	E	N	S	U	S		R		T					
G	E	N	T	L	E		U							E		I					
E				R			T					P		N		S					
				U			M	E	R	C	I	F	U	L			F				
F	A	I	T	H			D			O				R			I				
A				H						U				R	E	F	U	G	E	E	
C							M	O	U	R	N										D
E	N	T	E	R						T	H	I	R	S	T						

Losing your way (an activity for young people aged 14+)

This is a short spiritual exercise. As a group, you can gather together, get yourself comfortable, and one of the group can read this out. They need to take their time and read it in a steady, clear voice.

If you are doing this on your own, find a quiet comfortable place and read this slowly to yourself, taking care to think about each paragraph before going on to the next one.

Imagine this.

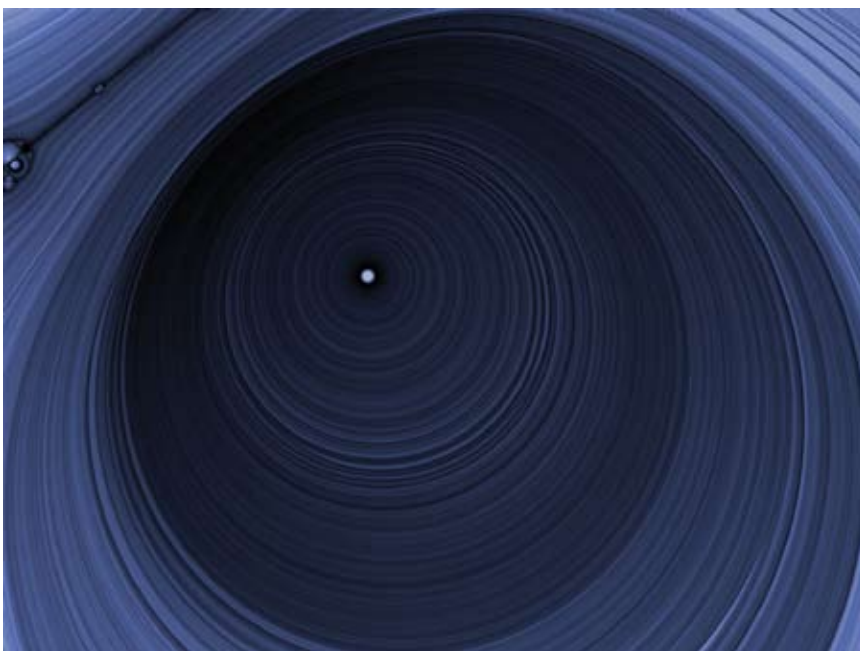
You are sitting in your room with all of your familiar things around you but you want more. Your friends all seem to be doing well but you have not found a role in life yet.

Close to you, in your room, you feel Christ's presence. He is telling you that you can achieve so much. All you have to do is let your heart lead you. But your frustration is boiling up inside you. You are jealous of those who are already enjoying success, having fun, getting the things they want.

You leave your room and turn yourself away from those who love you. You turn away from Christ and focus on money and power.

Down you go, through a dark tunnel with images flashing past you. People you have ignored, cheated on, taken advantage of, trampled underfoot. Each image brings you further through the tunnel to a large, stylish office with a huge desk and floor to ceiling windows looking out on the city below. This is all yours. You are rich and powerful. Newspapers write about your success and people envy your wealth and power. You feel that nothing can stop you. Below in the streets of the city are people who work for you, people who rent your properties, people who rival you and people who want to beat you at your own game.

You can trust no one and suspect that everyone who comes near you wants something from you. Everyone has a price and everything can be bought. Getting money is easy for



**Down you
go, through a
dark tunnel
with images
flashing past
you**

you, every property you buy doubles your profits, the more people you squeeze the more money you make.

Sitting at your desk you have everything that is familiar to you. One phone call is all it takes to get what you want. You feel Christ is there with you and it is strange. He has always been there but you have been ignoring him. You don't want him to be there. You know that this is not what you really set out to do but you are unstoppable. You have to have more and somehow, you don't want Christ to be there because you know what he is thinking.

The tunnel gets darker now. Your deals have started to go wrong. Your partners have cheated on you, your backers are wanting their money back and the harder you try, the quicker you seem to be falling. The media that once praised you are writing terrible stories about you now. Everything was great when they were all making money out of you but now they have other people to feed their greed on and you are an easy target for their hatred.

You are now sitting in a small room, much like the one you started off in. You wonder where it has all gone. It all happened so quickly and now you are wondering what to do with your life. You bumped into an old friend the other day and she didn't turn away from you. She didn't seem to judge you. Perhaps there are people you can trust. Perhaps there are people who still love you for yourself rather than what they can get from you? You sit quietly thinking that your talents and experience could be used in a different way. You will start slowly, this time. You will take your time to learn what it is you need to be doing. You will let your heart lead you and spend time valuing others.

You are beginning to see that giving is far more rewarding than just constantly trying to take. Your future is no longer looking like a dark tunnel as the world opens up to you in new and fresh ways.

And as you sit there, Christ is sitting beside you. He has been with you, waiting, knowing that it has always been up to you to discover this truth. He remains beside you and you begin to discover he is in those you meet in so many surprising ways. You begin to see the worth of those around you and you realise just how much richer you are now.

You look around and see Christ smiling back at you.

Spend a few minutes thinking about the story. Don't worry about the details so much as the journey itself and where it has taken you.

Here are some starter questions. See where the discussions lead, but also remember the question 'Who counts?'

- Were you a different person in different stages of the journey?
- In Christ's eyes were you a different person?
- Discuss what makes you count in God's eyes and in society's eyes.
- What are the differences?
- What does this tell us about how we should live our lives and treat those around us?

The counting tree (a church- or school-based activity)

Objective

To explore why we all count, and to express our conviction that everyone in our community should be included, regardless of their circumstances and status.

Activity

For children

Read this story to the children.

One day, when the sun was hidden by the clouds, the great tree standing in the middle of the forest felt a little tickle in one of its lower branches so it rustled and shook a little in the breeze ... but the tickle was still there. So it asked in its deep, old voice, "Who is tickling me down there in one of my low, low branches?"

A little voice squeaked, "It's only me." And then the tree noticed it was one of its own leaves.

"What's going on?" asked the tree, "are you not feeling well?"

"Oh, I think I am alright." said the leaf, "But I was just wondering."

"You were wondering? That's nice." said the tree.

"Yes," squeaked the leaf, "I was wondering why I am down here in the shade while some of my friends are way, way up in the top of your highest branches."

"Really? And why should you be wondering about that?" boomed the enormous tree.

"Because I am often very cold down here and I never seem to get much sun while my friends are happy and bright waving about in the sunshine. It doesn't seem very fair to me."

"But are you not comfortable down there? I mean, you are not being overworked, are you?"

"No, just a bit sad to be low down. What good am I down here?"

The old tree pondered this for a few minutes then shook all its branches gently but firmly.

"Listen up, my pretty leaves. One of your friends has asked me a very interesting question and I want you all to hear the answer."

All of the leaves became very quiet as they stopped rustling to hear what their tree had to say.

"I am the tree." It started, "and you are all my leaves. Every one of you is important to me and I need you all. Without you I might die, so you are all special. Some of you are high up and see the sun all day, and some are in the shade. The ones in the sun may fade and die early, but they will have captured all of that precious strong sunshine. Others lying lower will stay longer and capture the last warm rays of sunshine before autumn finally arrives. From the first to the last leaf you will have all done a wonderful job, so please know that I love every one of you and that you are all precious to me. Each of you has a particular job to do and you do it very well. Thank you, leaves!"

Materials required

- Either a large branch set in a deep pot of earth or sand in order to make it look like a tree, or a large board with a picture of a tree (this can be simply drawn or use a poster if you have one)
- Paper leaves (using the template overleaf) and pens
- Pins, sticky tape or blu-tak

The tree fell silent and the little leaf at the bottom rustled a little bit and then said "thank you", too. It now knew that it was just as important as the ones high up in the sunshine and that it shared a great responsibility with all of its friends on every branch of the tree.

Talk to the children about how we are all special to God, too. We are all different because God made us that way. The world we live in might have all sorts of problems and there might be people who think they are more important than anyone else, but in God's eyes we are all equally important.

Ask them why God might think that they are special. Ask them what is special about their friends and family and try to encourage them to see that everyone has something of value to offer society. Everyone counts in some way; not just in God's eyes but in our eyes too.

Now give out the leaf shapes and the pens, and ask them to write their names on their leaves and say why they count. They can draw what makes them special in God's eyes or in the eyes of their friends or family. They can draw their friends, too.

After everyone has done their leaf (or leaves) take them in procession into the main body of the church, and get them to attach their leaves to the tree.

For the rest of the community

A short reflection on the day's readings can emphasise the nature of Christ's church as described by Paul and as outlined in the Beatitudes. It is quite clear that Christ challenges us not to be complacent or timid, not to be closed and unwelcoming, but to welcome everyone into his family with unconditional love as our guiding force.

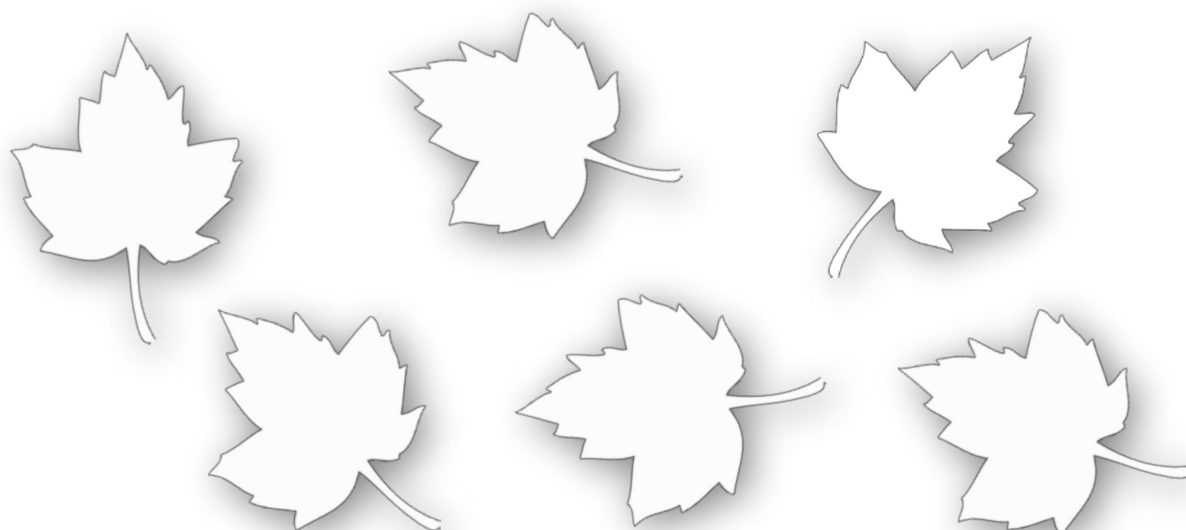
The outcome of such a reflection can lead us to the realisation that our personal worth is fully recognised and cherished by God and that this is true about everyone within our society. We are not the judges.

Get the adults to fill in leaves as well. Ask them to write down why they feel *they* count, but they should also consider writing down why *other* people within the community at large also count – the impoverished, alienated, ill and homeless, for example, and any other people they can think of that our society deems unimportant, rejects or attacks.

Explain that each 'leaf' brought up to the tree will be an offering and prayer – this is not a children's activity being acted out by adults, but a form of witness. So they should think very carefully and be courageous in what they write.

Conclusion

Once everyone who wishes to has added their leaves to the tree, the leader can offer a prayer based on the response of the community and the sentiments expressed on the tree.





I am

I count because:

The class sketch (an activity for young people aged 11+)

The group (A to D) gather together and E approaches them enthusiastically, carrying a folder.

E: Hi everyone. I've got a script for you!

E waves the folder

A: We were going to write a sketch together!

C: Yeah. We thought we could do it today.

E: I know, but you've been tied up with exams and working really hard so I thought I might put something together for you.

E starts handing out sheets of paper to the group

B: And this is it, obviously.

E: Yes. I was watching one of those 'great comedy moments' programmes last night and saw this classic sketch from the sixties.

B: The dark ages.

E: Quite, but it was a sharp comment on social class and I thought I could update it a bit and see how it worked in today's world.

A: A comedy sketch?

E: Yes.

A: On poverty and homelessness?

E: Exactly!

B: Isn't that a bit tasteless?

E: Hopefully, it *is* called satire. Look, let's just read it through and see what you think.

They all look at the sheets of paper.

A: This says that someone who is rich and powerful counts more than other people do! We are all supposed to be equal in the eyes of God, aren't we?

E: Yes and that's the point. Does our society treat everyone the same? People who are rich and powerful always seem to get the best deals, don't they?

B: Is this about snobbery? You can't keep saying people count more than others do, can you?

C: I count as much as he does (*points to A*).

D: This is terrible. How can you say that a homeless person doesn't count?

B: There's a homeless guy who sometimes sits in a doorway across the road from McDonald's. Try sitting by the window and you will see how everyone ignores him. It's as if he wasn't there!

D: I know, but he still counts.

E: That chap can expect to die younger than you or me, will not get his full benefits, will suffer more illnesses and be treated less... It's as if he doesn't count as much.



- A: OK, but what's this about being brought up to expect wealth and power?
- B: And this about becoming rich and powerful because you go to the right schools and universities?
- C: We're all doomed!
- B: But what's wrong with our school? We were all pleased when my brother got into Leeds Uni to do Geography. Doesn't any of that count?
- E: Of course it does, but consider this: in today's government 59% of the Cabinet went to public schools and 69% went to Oxford or Cambridge. You'll find even bigger biases in the top jobs in the City, the Civil Service and industry. They always point out the 'self-made millionaire' but they stand out because they really are the exceptions.
- C: But you are saying we don't count....?
- E: No, the sketch is to get people asking questions just like you are. The poorer you are, the more likely you are to leave school without qualifications, regardless of how clever you are. You are also less likely to get a job, never mind a good one!
- B: Well, that's not fair.
- A: This world is not fair, haven't you noticed?
- B: OK, but it's not right!
- E: This is all true, so can we just try the sketch? Read it through together and we can have a proper discussion about it afterwards. OK?
- All: OK.
- A: As long as people don't think this is what we believe.
- E: It's a satirical sketch. They'll understand.
- C: As long as they don't laugh!
- There's a pause while they sort themselves out into a line with A on the left running through to D on the right (as seen by the congregation/audience).*
- E: The 'class sketch' revisited...
- A: I count more than he/she does because I am wealthy and have power. *(Points to A)*
- B: I have a secure job and own my own home but I don't count as much as him/her, so I use the money I earn to do things like buy homes to let, and I invest abroad to try to live more like him/her. I count more than he/she does. *(Points to B)*
- C: I don't count as much as either of them because I am struggling to make ends meet, but I am surviving. I am deep in debt trying to live more like him/her, but I have survived so far, so I still count – I count more than he/she does. *(Points to C)*
- D: I don't count. I have no job and nowhere to live. I think that if I can win the Lottery I will be able to live like him/her. *(Points to A)*
- A: I count most because even if you won the Lottery you would not have the sort of wealth I enjoy, and you certainly wouldn't have the power. Like most in my position, I was brought up to expect what I have.
- B: I count because I have worked hard and made the right choices to get where I am today. I don't have his wealth or power but my children have gone to the right schools and universities so they will count more. We will always count more than them. *(Points to C and D)*
- C: I don't count as much because I have worked hard all my life but it has not got me anywhere. If one of my children becomes famous I'm sure they will count more, but life is even

I don't count as much, because I have worked hard all my life but it has not got me anywhere

harder for them than it was for me. We work harder, earn less, pay higher rents and live in overcrowded homes. But at least we know that we still count more than he/she does. (*Points to D*)

- D: I don't count. To get a foothold in society you need to have at least something – a job, a place to live, prospects. I have nothing and therefore do not count.
- B: We all know who counts, but how does society benefit from all of this?
- A: Because people like me control much of the wealth and power, what we do must benefit society. If we prosper, logically, so will everyone else.
- B: People like me have invested in the society we have. We have always worked for people like him/her and wanted to be like him/her. We are sure that what is good for him/her will also generally be good for us, too.
- C: People like me do all the basic jobs, we make things, move things around and we work in the shops and so on. Society needs us to do those things. It just gets harder to find decent jobs with decent wages and somewhere decent to live that we can afford.
- D: People like me don't count – so society can blame us for the problems it has, they can try to punish us because we are easy targets. I think our role is to be silent and try to survive.

Lights out and/or they turn and silently walk away.

Notes

The original sketch was obviously all male. As this will probably be done by mixed groups, we have used him/her and he/she, so even if you cannot edit the text you can score out the relevant part in the script.

Although the original had the joke about looking up/down to people, this one does not use that device – partly because you cannot manufacture such differences in a group but mainly because it is not necessary.

There are three alternative ways you could present the sketch. One is to do the sketch without the additional dialogue, and project relevant statistics behind the speakers as each says their piece. Another is to hand out a sheet of statistics after the sketch. Or you could hand out or project a set of questions for discussion after the sketch. You can find relevant facts and statistics in the Action Week *PowerPoint* presentation, prayer calendar or other resources, all available for download free at www.actionweek.org.uk.

This can be done in a church, school assembly or youth group. The leader/teacher can provide the youth group with the materials and ask them to work together to produce their own version of this (eg produce it as a video, add music to the background along with the stats, rework the dialogue).

Explore how you might end the sketch. For example, how might this compare with any of the key readings this Sunday? In particular, Matthew 5:1-12 ... in other words, the Beatitudes?

A copy of the original sketch can be found on YouTube at: <http://youtu.be/1mYY1QGK0jQ>.

An alternative approach would be to show this as well as performing the sketch, and use the contrast between the two to develop the discussion further.

Although not necessary, you could include additional data on the world of the late 1960s. It can be found on the internet at on all sorts of sites including:

- <http://everything2.com/title/Britain+In+The+1960%2527s>
- www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/rp99/rp99-111.pdf
- www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_social/Social_Trends36/Social_Trends_36.pdf
- www.guardian.co.uk/society/2009/may/08/poverty-equality-britain-incomes-poor

Using the prayer calendar with young people

For Action Week 2011, we've produced a special resource called the prayer calendar. It's an excellent way to get people reflecting on the issues of poverty and homelessness. It also includes materials that can be used in other activities.

Each day of Action Week, the prayer calendar tells the story of a person who has been excluded or left out because of a different kind of poverty or homelessness. It also gives some background information, a short prayer, some ideas for further action, and a small suggested donation.

Getting the prayer calendar

You can order printed calendars from the website or the Action Week partners. Perhaps you could give out copies to your youth group and ask them to pray at home throughout Action Week.

The prayer calendar is also available online, via Facebook, Twitter or email. Sign up at www.actionweek.org.uk/html/calendar, and each day we'll send you a link to the prayer calendar materials.

Using the materials in other activities

The prayer calendar includes the stories of real people, and how they're made to feel that they don't count because of poverty or homelessness. There are video interviews in the online version, and written stories in the print version.

The stories are a great way to bring some of the issues to life. Use them to help young people understand what it is really like to experience some of these issues.

The calendar also includes facts, figures and background information, which could be used alongside other activities to explain the issues more clearly.

You could also use the daily prayers from the calendar as part of worship or reflections.

Finally, the suggested donations on the calendar make it an excellent fundraising tool. Ask the young people in your group to follow the prayer calendar through the week, and encourage their family and friends to donate. They'll be supporting vital campaigns run by the Action Week partners to give a voice to excluded people.



Contact the Action Week partners



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