

Crossing the river

MEETING AIM

To reflect on God's faithfulness and consider how we can rely on him.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Joshua 3-4

BACKGROUND

God tells Joshua to build a monument from stones brought up from the Jordan as a memorial of what he has done in stopping the river for them. In this service we invite people to create their own memorials of what God has done for them to serve as reminders that we can rely on him in the future.

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WELCOME ACTIVITIES

OPTION ONE: Junk modelling

You will need: junk, such as boxes, cardboard tubes, yogurt pots and kitchen foil; sticky tape; scissors; glue sticks

Encourage the congregation to form small groups around piles of junk. Challenge everyone to work together to create a statue or memorial. Set a time limit, then get each group to show off their creation and explain what it's about. (You could do this as an activity for people to join in with as they arrive.)

OPTION TWO: Quiz

You will need: photos of famous monuments (local, national and international)

Before the service, collect together ten or so photos of famous monuments and put them into a PowerPoint presentation. Make sure you include some that children and young people will recognise. Have a quiz to see how many people recognise. Can they identify what the monuments commemorate?

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BIBLE STORY

You will need: a large box; two long garden canes or broom handles; twelve shoeboxes (or similar-sized boxes); blue fabric

Before the service, stick the two canes or handles onto the large box, one on each side. Leave an equal length extending at both ends so that it can be carried by volunteers at the front and back. Spread the blue material out across the front of your meeting space to represent the River Jordan, positioning the shoeboxes in and around the 'water'. Then tell the following story:

God had rescued the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, and had promised to take them into a new land that they could make their home. However, the Israelites had turned their back on him time and again, so they had to wander around the desert for 40 years before they were able to come to their new home. But finally they were there, standing on the banks of the River Jordan and looking across the water at the Promised Land. *Stand next to your river and point across to the other side.*

Their leader Joshua spent time with God, and God told him what the people needed to do. They had to make themselves acceptable to God and be ready to cross into the new land. Joshua told the priests to pick up the Ark of the Covenant – the sacred box that symbolised God's presence with his people – and walk to the edge of the river. *Ask for some volunteers to pick up your box using the handles and stand at the edge of the blue material.*

As soon as their feet touched the water the river stopped flowing. It backed up further upstream, and dry land appeared in front of them. *Roll back the blue material to reveal dry land and some of the shoeboxes.*

The priests walked into the centre of the river. *Ask them to do so.* The people of God could cross the River Jordan without even getting their feet wet! *Ask for some volunteers to be the people of God and cross the river with you.*

Joshua told one person from each of the twelve tribes of Israel to collect a stone from the riverbed and bring it across with them. *Ask your 'people of God' volunteers to collect the shoeboxes and bring them across.* He told them to use the stones to build a monument as a way of remembering what God had done. *They do so.* Finally, the priests carrying the ark walked up the bank and the waters flowed again. *They do so. Roll out the blue material once more.*

Joshua told the people: "When your children ask you what these stones mean, tell them what God did for you today!"

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SMALL GROUPS

You will need: copies of the questions below; Bibles

Break into small groups made up of one or two families, or different mixed-age groups. Give each group a copy of these questions and a Bible:

- What did you like about the story?
- What surprised you?
- Why did the people build a monument?
- What does this story tell you about God?
- What could you build a monument for in your life? What has God done for you?

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

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REVIEW

You will need: a roving mic (if needed)

Ask for feedback on questions two and three from 'Small groups', using a microphone to hear people's contributions if your meeting space is large.

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RESPONSE ACTIVITIES

Set these three activities up in different parts of your meeting space. Explain what each one is and encourage people to go to the one that will help them process what they have discovered most effectively.

OPTION 1: Stone decorating

You will need: smooth, flat pebbles; art materials

Invite those who choose this option to use the art materials to decorate a stone. Encourage them to think about what God has done for them that they can create a memorial for.

OPTION 2: Discussion

You will need: volunteers to facilitate discussion; paper and pens

Gather people together in small groups, each with a facilitator, and challenge them to think about the difference everything they have discovered today will make in their lives.

OPTION 3: Psalm writing

You will need: Bibles; pens and paper

Ask people to write a song or poem to God that celebrates what he has done for them, using the book of Psalms as their inspiration. If people are struggling for ideas they could use the format of Psalm 136 as a starting point.

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CLOSING

Bring everyone back together and ask if anyone would like to share what they did, thought about or discussed during the response time. Thank everyone for taking part and say an appropriate blessing to close the service.

ALEX TAYLOR

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

Mr Clifford and the caretakers of calamity

Cliff Clifford was in a quandary. His job would take him to Berlin for a few months, but he didn't want the youth group he ran to close. After all, there weren't many places young people could go to hang out in Manchesterford.

His regular volunteer helpers couldn't take it on as they all had full-time jobs. *What about churches?* Cliff wondered. His vicar had already told him she couldn't take it on, but there was another parish just on his doorstep. He had met the vicar there, Rev Pat Harisee, a few times, and he seemed OK. Clive quickly fired off an email.

It wasn't long before a reply landed in his inbox. "Cliff! Lovely to hear from you. Yes, I'd love to take on the youth group. Let's meet to chat more about it."

Cliff punched the air. Success!

Over the next few weeks, meetings were had, safeguarding checks were made, volunteers were introduced and trial sessions were run. Pat Harisee appeared to be the perfect fit for the job. He seemed to get on well with the young people and their parents. By the time Cliff boarded the plane to Germany he was more than satisfied that the youth club was in safe hands.

Things seemed fine for a week or so, but then Cliff started to get worrying tweets and texts about the club. He'd muted the volunteers' WhatsApp group when he left, but he reopened it to see what people were saying. Most of the messages started with: "Did you see what Pat did this evening?"

Cliff couldn't believe it. He decided to ask whether his own vicar could pay Pat a visit to find out what was happening. A couple of days later his vicar sent him an email, and one particular section gave him a shock: "I tried to talk to Pat about the club, but he got angry and threw me out of his vicarage! I got stuck in his porch for 20 minutes. I couldn't open the front door!"

Cliff had a son, Riff, who was 23. He decided to ask Riff to go and see Pat. Cliff sent him a message: "Go and see P.Harisee. Worried about youth club. What's going on?"

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you think Pat Harisee will do when Riff visits him?
- Should Cliff have left the youth club in Pat's hands?
- Why do you think Pat isn't looking after the youth club well? What do you think of his actions?
- If you were part of the youth club, how would you have felt about what was going on?

This story is based on Matthew 21:33-46. Read this passage to the group and compare Jesus' story and words with this one. Discuss what Jesus might have been saying through his parable, encouraging the group to think about it in a new way.

ALEX TAYLOR

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

The mint theft

On every journey we take, my son pesters me to have one of the mints I keep in the car. The other day I said he could have one and he secretly took several, but I noticed...and totally blew my top with him. Whoops!

In my mind this anger was about his bad behaviour. What it is more likely, however, is that it was really about several things: my annoyance that he hadn't cleaned out the chicken coop last Saturday...and, in fact, resentment about *all* the times he hasn't done what he was told. So it was about unresolved issues and a harbouring of unforgiveness. Yikes.

It was also my own impatience issues and perhaps a bit of greed about having my own stash of mints! There was probably some short temper from being overtired from my busy life with work and four kids; perhaps a little anger at my own sins and shortcomings; maybe a touch of stress from pressures at work; and perhaps a few deep Freudian issues stemming from my relationship with my dad! I think you get the picture. There are always more reasons than the obvious ones.

It has been said that anger (or unforgiveness and resentment) is like drinking poison and hoping the other person will die. What does anger do for us? I suppose it motivates us to challenge or change things that make us unhappy or uncomfortable. Perhaps it raises bravery within us, which we might need to defend ourselves. Of course, we can have righteous anger about things that are not right in the world. However, I struggle to find many situations where anger does much more than heighten our own selfishness and entitlement. We get angry when things don't go our way or when people don't do what we want or expect them to.

What can we learn about ourselves each time we get angry? It is important to understand when anger is positive and helping us, and when it is negative and damaging to us.

Draw a line as below. At one end write 'About me' and at the other 'About others'. Ask your mentee to list a few times when they remember getting angry or annoyed this week. Choose one to write above the line. Below each heading, ask them to list as many things as possible they have learned from that anger. When the list is exhausted, put a line through the answers and add five more! The crossed-out answers will be the overly obvious ones, so wait in silence until they can add two more, then one more. This bit can be awkward, but push it as far as you can. Sometimes a bit of awkwardness is the only way to get to the real answers below the surface; to get your mentee to think beyond what they feel they should say and reflect more deeply about what is really going on.

MINT-THEFT EPISODE

About myself

About others



- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I need to talk to him about our relationship and clean the slate. • I need to forgive him. • My short temper is more about deep unresolved issues in me. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He likes mints. • He'll take liberties given the chance. |
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JOEL TOOMBS

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

Bonfire games



If you're having a Bonfire Night party, here are some games to go alongside your fireworks and hotdogs. In fact, these games would be suitable for whenever you have a campfire as they are all designed to be played outside. You might need to risk-assess them, but then you'll need to risk-assess your whole Bonfire Party, so another line on the assessment isn't going to create much hassle.

POCKET ROCKET

You will need: camera film cannisters (available online); antacid tablets (fizzing ones such as Alka-Seltzer); water; safety goggles

Take the top off the cannisters and put a teaspoon of water in the bottom. Give everyone half an antacid tablet. With everyone wearing safety goggles, each person should drop the half-tablet into the cannister in turn and snap the lid on very quickly. Turn the cannister upside-down (so that the lid is on the floor) and retreat to a safe distance. After around ten seconds the cannister will fly into the air. (If the rocket doesn't pop, wait about 30 seconds before going back to it.) Once everyone has taken a turn, decide whose rocket went the highest.

TARGET ROCKET EXPLOSIONS

You will need: squeeze bottles (such as washing-up-liquid bottles); watered-down poster paint; a target drawn on a large sheet of paper; chalk

Stick the target to a wall and mark out a line that is a few metres away from the target. Give each person (or small team of people if you have a large group) a squeeze bottle filled with a different coloured poster paint. Standing behind the line, they should take turns to 'fire' their paint at the target.

Award points for the person who gets closest to the centre of the target, but also for the most attractive 'starburst' and the most flamboyant firing style!

CATHERINE WHEEL FRISBEE

You will need: a light-up frisbee (available online); torches or smartphones (optional); chalk or cones

Mark out a court in your outside space using the chalk or cones. Create a large central section with a 'touch-down' zone at either end.

Divide your players into two teams and position them in the large central part of the court. Assign a touch-down zone to each team. The players have to pass the light-up frisbee between them and try to get it into their touch-down zone. One of their players has to catch it in the zone to score a point. If they drop the frisbee it doesn't count! Set a time limit; the team with most points at the end of the game is the winner.

If you don't have quite enough light to play outside, give each player a torch or encourage them to use the one on their phones.

HOT POTATO

You will need: a large baking potato (or tennis ball); a stopwatch, smartphone or kitchen timer

Stand everyone in a circle and give one person the potato (or ball). Set a random time on the stopwatch or phone (anything between ten and 30 seconds) and press start. The players should pass the potato around the circle by throwing it to the person next to them. The person left holding the potato when the timer goes off is out and should sit down. Keep playing until you have a winner.

CAMPFIRE STORYTELLING

Sit the group around the campfire and challenge them to tell a story. You could tell it with each player saying a word or sentence in turn. The story will probably lose any sense quite quickly, but that's all part of the fun. For an extra challenge, give each player a word they have to insert into the story, such as trombone, flamingo, porridge or jitterbug.

Alternatively, give out pens and slips of paper and ask the players to write down the name of a person, a place and an object on separate pieces of paper. Collect them in and ask everyone to choose one of each. The aim is to create a story that features these three suggestions.

HOTDOG-EATING CONTEST

You will need: hotdog sausages; hotdog rolls; ketchup; mustard; fried onions; alternatives for those with different dietary requirements; a stopwatch or smartphone

Work with your group to create a champion hotdog using the various elements you have available. Make three or four, then invite some volunteers to come forward and attempt to be the quickest at eating the champion hotdog. Line your volunteers up at the front and get the others to cheer for all the competitors. On the signal to begin, start the timer. The volunteers have to eat the hotdog as quickly as they can.

If you have more volunteers, make up more hotdogs and hold another contest. Declare the person with the quickest time the winner.

HUMAN FIREWORKS

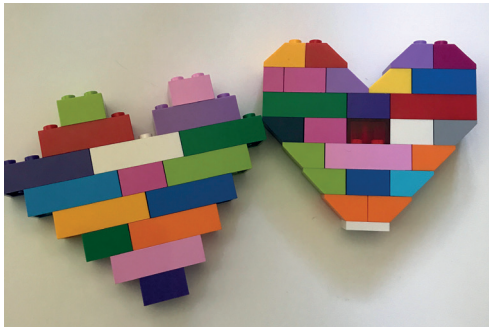
Divide your group into smaller teams. Challenge each team to create a mime or dance that represents a firework going off using their bodies. They can create their own sound effects to add to their performances. Once everyone is ready, get each team to perform their 'fireworks' and ask a couple of leaders to decide which is the best.

ALEX TAYLOR

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

Rahab

Rahab is recognised by the writer of Hebrews as a woman of faith, and her story in the book of Joshua has a number of threads for us to explore creatively. The following craft ideas will help children look at the themes of strength, bravery, friendship, hiddenness and identity.



STRONG HEARTS

You will need: Lego blocks; pictures of Lego hearts to help children with building (see above)

Rahab is brave, strong and clever. She helps the spies, but also makes sure that she and her family will receive protection from them in return. This craft builds a strong construction that is very securely put together. It can also be used as a starting point to discuss what it means to be brave, to protect and to be kind.

Use Lego blocks to build hearts. There are many ways this can be done. The photo shows two different examples, but children will no doubt find their own ways as well! Use the construction time to talk about strength and bravery.



RELATIONSHIP CORDS

You will need: ribbons in at least three colours (roughly 20cm long)

Rahab shows her friendship to the spies in hiding them, but she is also concerned about her family when they return. This story is all about relationships with different people and with God. This craft helps to explore that intertwining of people.

Ask the children to choose lengths of ribbon to correspond with the characters in the story. Plait them together and use the time to discuss the relationships in the story, the relationships children have with others and what it means to have a relationship with God.



WINDOW SIGNS

You will need: sticky-backed plastic; plain and patterned paper; paper shapes; feathers; sequins; pens; scissors; glue

When the spies leave Rahab they tell her to put a scarlet cord in her window as a sign to keep her and everyone in her house safe. This craft lets children create a sign to go in their own windows that will tell other people something about who they are.

Cut pieces of paper to A6 size and get the children to decorate them as an expression of their personalities. Cut out A5-sized pieces of sticky-backed plastic. Take the cover off the plastic and place the decorated paper, face up, on top of the sticky side. You will now have the decorated paper facing you, surrounded by a sticky margin. Use the margin to stick the creation face-to-window so that people outside can discover something about the identity of those living in the house.



HIDDEN SURPRISE BISCUITS

You will need: 100g plain flour; 50g butter; 20g sugar; pinch of salt; eight small squares of chocolate; a mixing bowl; a wooden spoon or electric mixer; a baking tray; an oven

Rahab reveals her friendship and bravery by hiding the spies in her house. These biscuits are a hands-on way to explore this theme of hiding.

Preheat the oven to 180°C. Cream together the butter and sugar until light and fluffy, then mix in the flour and salt until a dough is formed. Split the dough into eight pieces and flatten each piece out. Put a square of chocolate in the centre of each piece of dough, then close the dough around the chocolate until it is completely covered. Make sure there are no gaps or the melted chocolate will seep out and spoil the surprise! Place them on a greased baking tray and bake for 10-12 minutes. Allow to cool. Bite the biscuits open to reveal the hidden chocolate.

MINA MUNNS

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Stranger than Fiction (12)

CLIP ONE: 00:00:00 – 00:06:40

CLIP TWO: 00:20:33 – 00:21:46

SYNOPSIS

The life of Harold Crick (Will Ferrell) – a taxman with obsessive compulsive disorder – is turned upside-down when he hears a voice in his head that narrates all aspects of his average and boring existence. As the film develops we discover that the voice in his head is an author (Emma Thompson) with writer's block who just so happens to be planning on killing off Harold's character in her latest book.

Following the revelation that he is going to die, Harold must find the author of the story (and ultimately his life) to convince her to change the ending before it's too late.

The first clip for this session sets the scene for the film and introduces us to the character of Harold Crick. Through the narration and on-screen graphics we learn that Harold lives a very ordered life consisting of unbreakable routines and actions. Following this routine every day has led to him becoming rather solitary, as he lives alone and doesn't engage with the outside world.

Harold's life is turned upside-down, however, when we discover that he can hear the narration of his life. This leads to him becoming confused and trying to investigate the source of the voice. In the second short clip we see Harold at a bus stop. As he waits for the bus, the narrator alerts him to the fact that his recently stopped watch has sparked a series of events that will lead to his impending death.

DISCUSS

After showing the clips as a stimulus, break into small discussion groups (you may wish to have a designated discussion leader in each group) and discuss the following questions:

- How would you describe the life of Harold Crick? (Try to think positively and negatively.)
- What would the narrator of your life say about your weekly routines and habits?
- Is it good to know or anticipate a future outcome before it happens? How does that impact on our actions?
- How do you think Harold will respond to the suggestion that his death may be imminent?

Many themes could be explored from this film, from existentialism to prophecy to control versus fate. To explore further, read Jeremiah 29:10-14 together, then return to your smaller groups and discuss the following questions:

- Verse 11 is a popular one for Christians. Does it imply that we have no free will?
- Is it wrong to use verse 11 in other areas of our lives?
- Is this an encouraging verse to hear?
- What are the requirements God has of his people in the passage?

Stranger than Fiction is now available to stream on Netflix.

TOM WADE

is the head of philosophy and theology at Haileybury and Imperial Service College.



Higher Love

ARTIST: Kygo and Whitney Houston

SUITABLE FOR: 10s to 13s

INTRODUCTION

At a time when many high-profile Christian leaders have been publicly struggling with their faith, this song, and the session, provides an opportunity to explore what it means to wrestle with the big questions while walking with God.

As you begin the session, set up a graffiti wall with marker pens and lining paper, then invite your young people to add their own 'big life questions' to the board. Explain that many songs point to this soul searching and can help us articulate exactly what we are wondering about. We are not alone in asking these questions; people have searched for meaning in life throughout history. But this group is a safe place for us to discuss some of them.

LISTEN AND DISCUSS

Play the track, distributing copies of the lyrics if you think it would be helpful and inviting the young people to sing along if they so wish. After listening to the track, discuss the following questions:

- Which of these lyrics can you most easily relate to?
- Have you heard other people ask questions like this?
- How would you answer this singer?

Help the young people to share their ideas. Explain that when we hear searching like this we may desperately want to point to Jesus as the source of the highest love. But even when we know that to be true we can still be left with unanswered questions. There will still be things in life that we cannot fully understand. And that's OK. It doesn't diminish who Jesus is; it just recognises the complexity of life.

Distribute Bibles and invite the young people to look at the book of Ecclesiastes. Depending on your young people, you may find it helpful to summarise this book, encouraging them to flick through as you do so and point out the rhythm of the writing: "Life is meaningless...but God..." Share a few extracts.

Ask the young people how the passages you shared relate to the song and to the questions they wrote at the start of the session. Ecclesiastes reminds us of the complexity we have explored during this session. We can have total trust in Jesus and believe that he is the 'higher love' this singer is searching for, while still wrestling with our big questions. The reality is that we live in a broken world, and because of that things do not always make sense in the way they will one day, when God's kingdom reigns.

As you draw the session to a close, gather the young people together around the question board. Encourage them to see your group as a safe place where they can always bring their questions and struggles as you collectively make sense of what it means to follow God, despite any struggles people may be facing.

BECKY MAY

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JESUS, BE THE CENTRE

HEBREWS 12:2 (THE MESSAGE) SAYS:

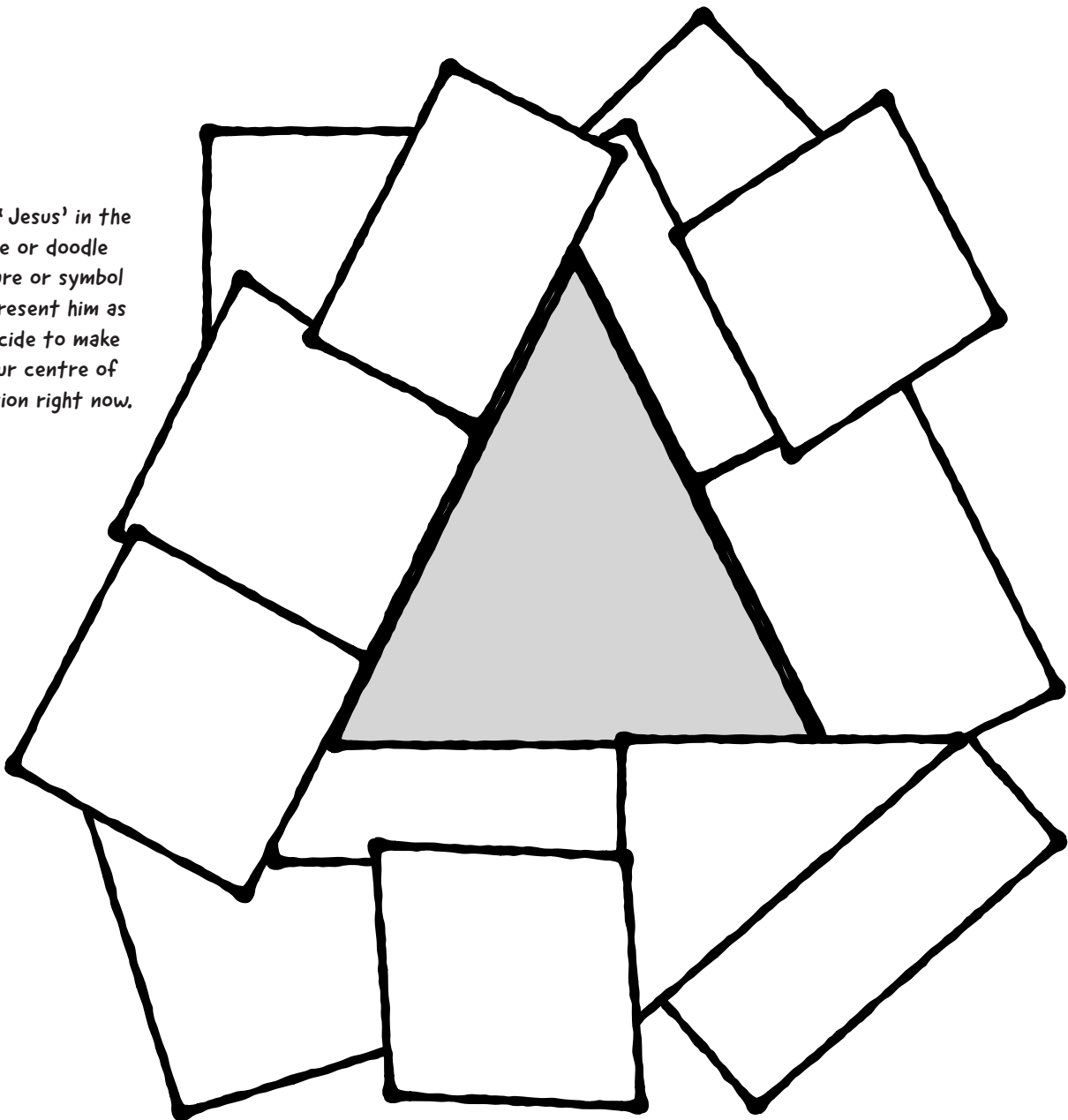
"KEEP YOUR EYES ON JESUS, WHO BOTH BEGAN AND FINISHED THIS RACE WE'RE IN."

It can be hard to keep Jesus in focus at the centre of our lives, as there is so much else to distract us.

The good news is that Jesus is interested in all those distracting things.

Use this sheet to focus on Jesus and to bring to him anything that distracts or bothers you.

Write 'Jesus' in the triangle or doodle a picture or symbol to represent him as you decide to make him your centre of attention right now.



In the shapes around the central triangle, think about what things threaten to crowd Jesus out of your centre. Write, doodle or colour those things one after another as you bring them to Jesus. Say 'sorry' for the times when you've focused on unhealthy things, and ask him for help with the things that worry you. Jesus is interested in all these things and cares about every aspect of your life, so you can entrust them to him.