

PREPARATION

Leaders should familiarise themselves with the Bible Study and Country Background in the Order of Service and read the full programme to plan accordingly. Also, please note that some of the activities may require preparation.

These activities have been laid out in a cohesive manner for a reflective youth session. Through the various activities, the theme is: *I Know the Plans I Have for You*, based on Jeremiah 29:1-14, which emphasizes that God is with them through the good and the bad, in times of change, disappointment and loss, at times of joy and celebration, with a hope-filled purpose and vision for their life.

PASTORAL GUIDELINES FOR LEADERS

In order to create a safe space for sharing, please follow these guidelines:

1. Everything shared in this group should be kept confidential – the exception to this is if a person is at risk of harm or of harming themselves or others.
2. Seek to accept and not judge what is said – a safe space respects everyone.
3. Work within your own safeguarding and good practice guidelines.
4. Take care of yourself too – if something is difficult, please make sure that you have someone to talk to.

INTRODUCTORY GAME: True or False? (10 minutes)

Aim: To introduce some of our cultural objects from England, Wales & Northern Ireland.

You will need: Copies of the photos (see *Resource Sheet A*)

Show the photos to the young people and share the two explanations. Ask them to identify the correct answer by voting. To make it even more fun, get two leaders to read an explanation each and try to convince the young people that their version is correct. The correct answer is in bold.

A: This is a wooden spoon decorated with symbols of love and made by a man presented as a gift to his sweetheart. The tradition dates back to the 1600s in Wales and was intended to show the skill of the carver.



Wales B: This is a small raft designed in the shape of a spoon. The aim was to sail the raft across a puddle in Wales to your true love without it sinking to show your boating abilities.

A: This is a bardog – an early wooden instrument for children in Northern Ireland. A child would sit in it and use a wooden spoon to create music on the ridges.



B: This is a bardog (a large basket) which was hung off the side of a donkey or small pony, used for carrying turf, or more usually manure such as animal dung, for spreading on land as fertiliser in Northern Ireland.



A: This is an object which holds a small gift or toy inside and is usually pulled apart by two people at Christmas across the UK.

B: This is a material used by people in England to make fire at Christmas.

Explain: Every object has a purpose. And God has a purpose for each one of us. What are your dreams for the future?

ACTIVITY: Everything has a purpose and that includes you. What is God's purpose for my life? (20 minutes)

Aim: To help young people think about why God created them in a simple yet creative way.

You will need: A print out of *Resource Sheet B* (the template of a gingerbread person), and pens.

God made each of us with a special purpose. But I wonder – do you understand why God created you? I know that this sounds like a big scary question – but God created you with skills, passions, and a unique way of looking at the world. This can help you understand God's vision for your life. Let me explain more:

- **EYES – Draw a pair of eyes on your person and write the question – what are the needs that I see around me?**
 - The world around us is broken and unjust; it is not how God intended it to be. What is the injustice that you see that needs to be transformed? Homelessness? Poverty? Gender violence? Conflict?
 - God gives us different spiritual eyes to see different injustices and invites us to be part of God's mission of restoration.
- **HEART – Draw a heart on your person and write the question – what do I love doing?**
 - God created us with passion in our hearts. What are the things that you love doing? The things that give you joy? For example; running, music, or serving others.
 - What sets your heart on fire?
- **HANDS AND FEET – On the hands and feet, write the question – what are the skills and talents that God has given me?**
 - We may live in a world or culture that makes us feel ashamed or modest about our abilities – but God created you with gifts and talents. For example; you may be good at writing, playing an instrument, public speaking, organising, or even making people smile and feel comfortable.
 - What are the skills and talents that God has given you? How can they benefit other people?

Explain: This activity was a simple and creative way to think about your God-given purpose. Although you may doubt it, each of us has a specific purpose, a calling that only we are qualified to fulfil.

GAME: Overcoming Obstacles

(20 minutes)

Aim: To introduce the concept of obstacles in a fun way and help stimulate conversations about how God helps us overcome obstacles to our own hopes and plans.

You will need: A packet of A4 paper and a box of paper clips per team, a photo of The Shard (see *Resource Sheet C*), a small prize for the winning team.

Divide the group into teams no bigger than 4 people. Explain that you have a very special challenge for them. Show a photo of The Shard building, a 95-story supertall skyscraper in London. Explain that standing 309.7 metres (1,016 ft) high, the Shard is the tallest building in the United Kingdom, the fifth-tallest building in Europe, and the 96th-tallest building in the world. Your team challenge tonight is to make your own version of The Shard – but it isn't going to be easy.



Here are the rules:

- You can only use the materials that are given to you – sheets of paper and paper clips.
- Your tower must be free standing (i.e. not held up against a wall).
- You will have 5 mins to talk to your team members and plan your strategy (but you must stand in a circle facing outwards so you can't see their faces).
- You will have 10 mins to build your tower but once you start building it, you cannot communicate verbally with your other team members.

After the activity and announcing the winner, have a time of discussion:

1. What are some of the obstacles that you faced in this task? How did you work together to overcome them?
2. God has a purpose and a plan for our lives but what kind of obstacles do we often encounter to fulfilling it?
3. What kind of things can we do when times get tough?
How can we experience God in suffering?

REFLECTION

(15 minutes)

Please share this reflection on Jeremiah 29:1–14 with the youth group. After sharing, use the question dice in *Resource Sheet D* to prompt the group to discuss some key questions.

*I know the plans I have for you.
I have it all planned out – plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for.*

Jeremiah 29:11 The Message

Aim: To encourage thinking about how a Bible verse may help us in our lives today.

You will need: The assembled question dice from *Resource Sheet D*.

This verse shows us how much we are loved and accepted by God. It tells us that God is with us no matter what is happening in our lives. That we are not alone, even if we feel like we are.

It sort of feels like we don't need to do anything for all this to happen – that God has got it all sorted and whatever it is that you have is all part of God's plan for you.

How does that feel if you are unhappy though? Does it mean that it's God's will for us to suffer sometimes?

I don't think it does, because the very last part of the verse asks us to get involved with telling God about our hopes, 'Plans to give you the future you hope for'.

Your hopes matter a great deal to God.

What is really special about this is that God created you to be you. You are the only you on the entire planet. God is interested in *your* hopes and dreams – whatever is happening in your life.

We do this through talking to God about our lives, our hopes and dreams, our sadness and disappointments. It is sometimes harder to reach out to God when we are suffering because God can feel far away. We are assured in this verse that God does want to hear how you feel, even when you are not feeling good about the situations going on around you.

God wants to participate in your life – in your hopes, your suffering, your joy, your sadness.

God wants to know everything. We just need to remember to tell God.

WHAT'S YOUR #WDPHOPE?

(10 minutes)

Aim: Expanding the reflection about God's purpose for oneself to God's purpose in the community. This activity encourages young people to think of the injustices in the world around them and commit to transforming them.

You will need: Pieces of paper, markers, phone/camera with access to the internet. Share Grace's photo and story, See *Resource Sheet E*.

Explain: The world around us is broken and full of hopelessness; this is not how God created the world to be. God created you with passions and gifts to make a real difference. Young people across England, Wales and Northern Ireland are hope-bringers and culture transformers. God is using them to shine light in hopeless places. Just like Grace, from Essex in England.

Grace's #WDP**hope** is for refugees. What's your WDP hope? We want to create a movement of passionate hope-bringers across the world. Share an issue that you're passionate about by writing it on a piece of paper, sharing it with the group, and then uploading it on social media using #WDP**hope**.

Grace was passionate about restoring worth to refugees and her passion led her to serve in a practical way. What steps can you take this week (or month or year) which will help transform an injustice?



CLOSING PRAYER (15 minutes)

God of our whole lives,

We thank you that you are there with us when we are suffering, just as much as you are when we feel joy. Even though at times we may feel alone, we know that you are always with us, waiting to be invited into our lives. Waiting to be with us, no matter what.

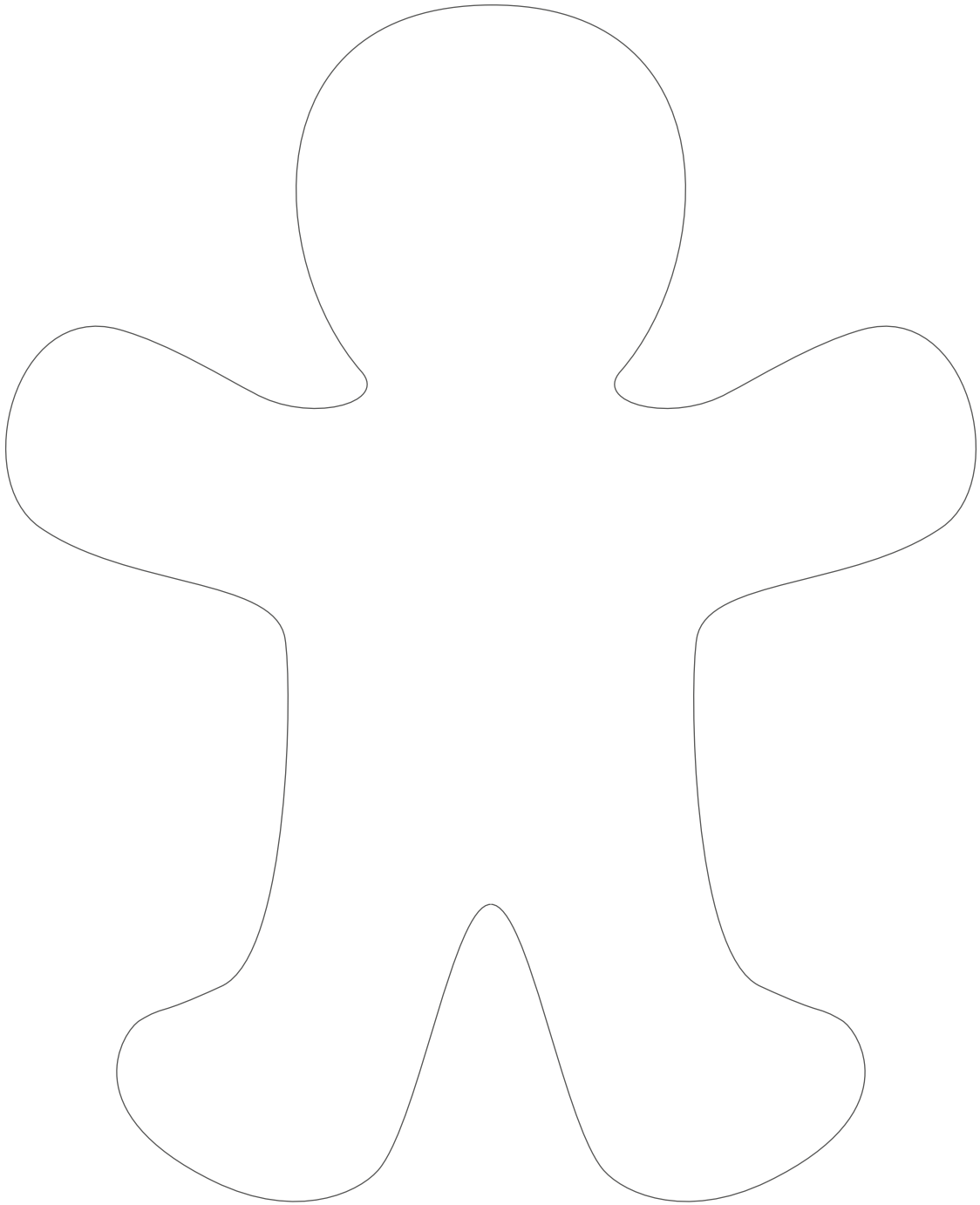
When we feel alone, scared and hopeless, we ask you to come closer to us. We know that Jesus suffered too, and what seemed to be the end for his hopes and dreams on the cross, it was just the beginning of his resurrection.

Give us voices to share our hopes with others. Give us words to share when we suffer.

We thank you that we can bring both of these to you and to just be ourselves.

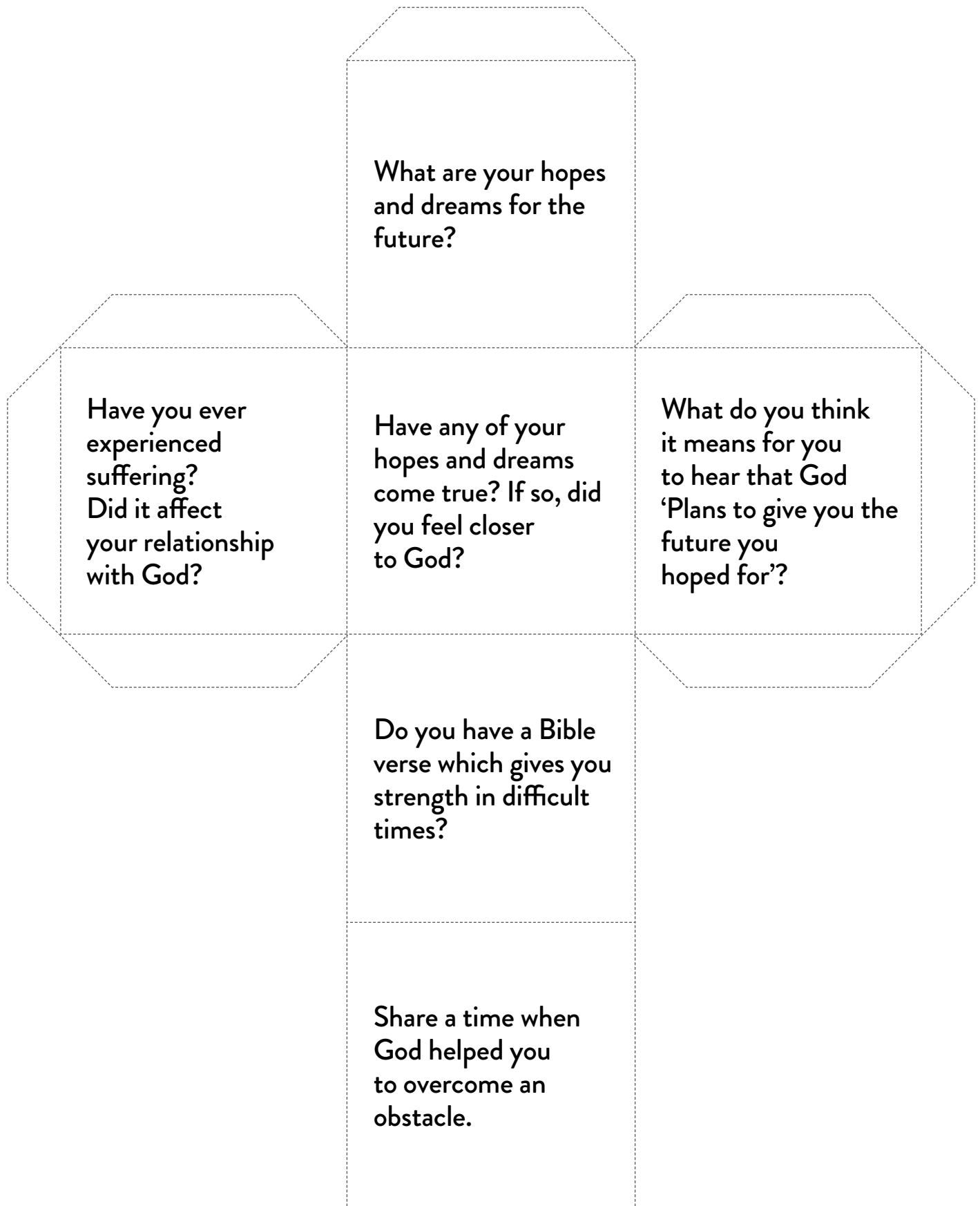
Amen.







Use scissors and glue to make the paper dice. Invite each person to roll the dice and answer a question.





Grace's Story

'My name is Grace and I'm 24. My hope is...that all those who seek safety in the UK are welcomed, embraced, and given the support they need. When the news in the UK began to fill with stories of people crossing the Mediterranean in dinghies and risking their lives to reach Europe, I couldn't ignore it. My heart broke that people had been forced to flee their homes and were risking their lives to reach our continent. My sadness turned to anger when I saw how European countries, including the UK, reacted to it.

The political hostility and physical oppression made me feel sick. I couldn't understand how we could deny safety to those who so desperately needed it. My God is a God of justice and this was a serious and harmful injustice that was happening on my doorstep. In September 2017, I moved to Calais to volunteer with the Refugee Community Kitchen. I ended up staying for 6 months, working as a driver and distribution lead. I learnt so much about humanity during my time in Calais, seeing the very best and the very, very worst of it. Some of our days and weeks in Calais were quite traumatic. We got caught up in tear gas, in fights, we witnessed the police beating people and pulling them out of the back of trucks. Our friends would tell us stories of their experiences in Libya, in the Sahara Desert, on boats across the Mediterranean, in prison, and often they were quite harrowing. I couldn't bear to think of my friends going through such awful things. God gave me an amazing support network – both in Calais and from home. I think people found hope in friendship. Sure, providing two hot meals a day was vital, but it was by building relationships, checking in on people and treating people as individuals, that we were able to remind people that this was only temporary, that people cared about them and wanted to know their story. That soon, hopefully, they would be safe.'