



10 Wild me!

By Lucy Moore

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We are grateful to Hymns Ancient and
Modern for a grant towards the costs of
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Theme: humans

MESSY CHURCH GOES WILD CHAPTER LINK: 6 – CARING FOR ALL GOD’S MESSY PEOPLE; 7 – AND A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM

Aim: to explore the place of human beings in God’s world and how the world is a place for all sorts of humans to thrive in peace and justice. Also, to think about the ways in which we need to be both wild and self-controlled to be fully human, as Jesus was.

Science advisor: Hannah Grey

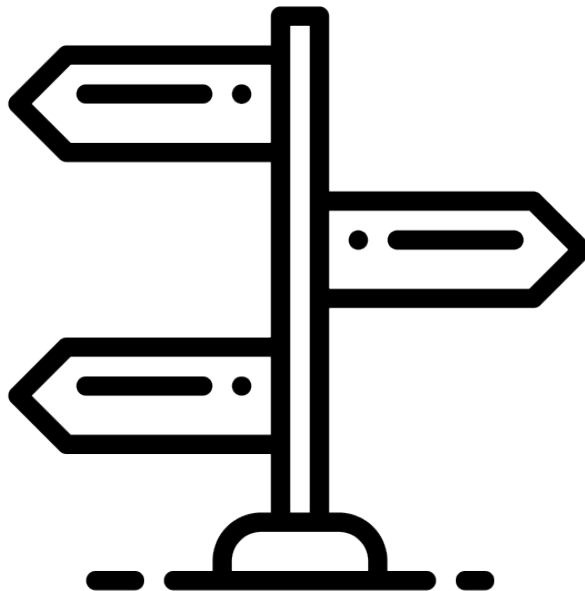
Messy Church values:

- Christ-centred – we explore how Jesus models the life of a perfect human being, including his wild side and his perfect self-control.
- Hospitality – we consider the risky side of being hospitable and receiving hospitality; we think about hospitality offered by the earth in the wilderness.
- Celebration – we have fun letting go in wild spaces; we enjoy messiness in the natural world/gardens, we celebrate both the freedom to be wild and the boundaries that keep us safe.
- Creativity – we try to see the world around us differently; we try to see the world from other people’s point of view; we look for creative ways to build a just global society.
- All-age – we think about what we can learn from each other across the age groups about letting go of the need to always be in control and about freedom from the demands to be stereotypically attractive.

Suggestions for specialist input: psychologist, rewilding expert, environmentalist, play expert.

Section 1 On the move

Pause at different stops on an adventure around your area. You could start off by watching Hannah Grey, a scientist who knows a lot about humans in this video (youtu.be/lmZv6S5Nbxo).



1 Rabbit hutch/chicken coop/ field with fences around it

- If possible, build a cage out of sticks or bamboo canes for some of your group to be shut in temporarily. Talk about why the fence/cage needs to be there: what it keeps out and what it keeps in, what it protects, what would happen if the 'walls' weren't there?
- Compare the fences for the rabbit/chicken/sheep with how wild animals/birds/ insects nearby live – why don't they need a cage? Would you rather be a tame rabbit or a wild rabbit?
- Can you think of people who are imprisoned in some way today? Jesus said, as he started out his work, 'He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners... to set the oppressed free...' (Luke 4:18). What does an organisation like Fairtrade, or an anti-modern day slavery group, try to do for people in the 'cages' of poverty and exploitation? Is anyone here involved in a group like this?

Ask: what questions do you have about this?

2 Road sign

- Rules, boundaries and restrictions can be good! Pause by a road sign and talk about what would happen if people ignored it. What rules can you think of that help people live together safely? Why do you think God gave the people the ten commandments while they were still out in the wilderness, not when they were settled in a city?
- What 'road signs' can you create with chalk on the pavement here to help protect a particular group of human beings you're concerned about or another species of animal or plant?

Ask: what questions do you have about this?



3 Wide open field/beach

- Give some responsible adults in the group slips of paper with 'wild' things to do written on them, suitable for the place you're in. (A few examples could be: tell everyone you're going to ski off this mountainside; jump in the sea with all your clothes on; swim across the pond; make mud angels in the field; put a cowpat on your head; see if your hat will work as a parachute when you jump off this ledge – you get the idea and will have much wilder ideas)
- Act out the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15) together, up to the point of the son wasting all his money on 'wild living'. Then wonder aloud if there's anyone planning on a bit of 'wild living' right now. Get each of your stooges in turn to go and act as if they're about to do their wild thing, while the rest of the group react/are encouraged to stop them or rescue them. Make the point that all these people were probably going to hurt themselves with their rather silly wild living and that them hurting themselves would hurt us in the group as well – we would all suffer.
- Finish off the story of the prodigal son and talk about the son who broke the rules (the younger one) and the son who kept the rules (the older one) and the way the father loved them both. (It would also be interesting to discuss whether the family should make life on the farm so much fun that the younger son wouldn't want to run away again.)

Ask: what questions do you have about this?

4 Beauty salon/hairdresser/ barber/fashion store or a tree

- Do some printing or stamping of the same shape in mud or sand to look at the way 'conforming' just makes everyone come out the same. Being wild is living by different rules!
- Talk about the 'rules' about how you're meant to look. Does school have rules about hair or make-up or uniform? Does your workplace? Why are those rules there? Do they make life better for the most vulnerable? What about social media? Why do some people use filters and worry about photoshopping their image before they put it online? Who sets the rules for how we look? Why? (It's usually about making money...)
- Is a tree beautiful? Does it care about how it looks? What about very young children – maybe you have some in the group who don't have a clue what you're talking about, because they don't mind what they look like or what you look like. Do you choose friends by how they look or by how kind they are? What helps someone just be happy to be themselves? In the Bible, Paul tells the Christians in Rome: 'Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind' (Romans 12:2). Think about this as you do your stamping. Can you turn the repeated pattern into something diverse and original?

Ask: what questions do you have about this?

5 Field of cows/river/bog/body of water/ play area/skatepark – somewhere with an obstacle to overcome or cross

- Invite everyone to overcome the obstacle. When you've got everyone across or having achieved the risky challenge, talk about what risks you've just taken and how it felt.
- Jesus invited people to follow him – was that risky for them, do you think? Jesus invites people today to follow him – is that risky? What about in other countries? What would be the risks of somebody mentioning they follow Jesus – at school, for example, or in the place you work, or in your family?
- In groups, take five minutes to see what risky activity you can set up in this space for the others – but you have to be prepared to do it yourselves first!

Ask: what questions do you have about this?



6 Churchyard

- In the churchyard, act out or tell the story of Legion living among the tombs and Jesus freeing him from his chains (Mark 5).
- Listen to the group talk about the church: do they think church is somewhere that sets you free or that puts restrictions on you, or perhaps both (or neither)? If Jesus set people free, like Legion, is there anything you think he'd like to change about church, inside or outside, to set people free today? What chains do people need releasing from?
- Have a wander round the churchyard and when you find a stick on the ground, break it in two as you pray for people who are stuck in modern day slavery, poverty, coercive relationships or other prisons they can't break out of on their own.

Ask: what questions do you have about this?

Celebration and prayer

Talk about the big topics you've explored today: freedom and rules, living safely and living riskily, working out whether the rules people tell you are the best ones for you and for vulnerable people around the world. What one thing sticks out most in each person's mind?

Jesus summed up the whole message of the Bible as: love God and love your neighbour as you love yourself. For your prayer today, use leaves, twigs, flowers, grass and so on to make three big interlocking circles like a Venn diagram on the ground. Put a cross on one to represent God; a house symbol on another to represent your neighbour and a single stick or blade of grass to represent 'I' for ourselves. Put piles of pebbles or other small objects within reach of everyone. As the leader mentions the ideas below and the things people have mentioned as sticking in their minds from the adventure today for being 'wild humans', decide as a group which section of your diagram it belongs to, and if you'd like God's help to do that action in the coming month, drop a pebble into that part of your diagram.

In the Bible, God's people were told: 'Be careful to obey all these regulations I am giving you, so that it may always go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is good and right in the eyes of the Lord your God' (Deuteronomy 12:28). As humans, we have the freedom to make good choices or bad ones and we have the Holy Spirit of Jesus to live in us and help us know good from bad, right from wrong. The ideas I'm about to mention aren't rules and regulations, but choices we could make. If you'd like help from God to do this in the coming month, drop a pebble in the circle where you think it should go.

- Buying something Fairtrade (to help set people free from poverty).
- Talking about God at work or school or home (to live riskily).
- Showing love to someone unlovable (to live riskily).
- Forgiving someone (to free myself and them from hate and resentment).
- Keeping a rule that keeps me and others safe (to show self-control).

- Looking in the mirror and saying, 'I am wonderfully made' (to free myself from the rules around self-image).
- Making time to listen to God before I make a decision (to be open to risk).
- Doing one thing that makes my life richer and deeper and fuller (to be free to receive God's love).

As you leave

Invite everyone to talk on your way home about where you saw God at work today.

Section 2 Adventure area in one spot

Meet at an isolated spot where you can make a lot of noise and where there are hazards – for example, a field with boggy areas/one side open to the road/an electric fence, or a hilltop with a cliff face/scree/boulder, a wood or a seashore.

- Remind people of the story of Jesus walking on the water towards his disciples in the storm (John 6:14–21). Talk briefly about Jesus as someone who broke the rules (rules like ‘human beings sink in water’; ‘human beings can’t control the weather’, ‘you shouldn’t heal people on the Sabbath’, ‘you should aim to be as rich and successful as possible’). Talk about Jesus as someone who didn’t care what people thought of him, who wouldn’t let anything or anyone distract him from what he knew he had to do with his life. Nobody could make him do what he didn’t want to do. He was unpredictable, like Aslan in the Narnia books – ‘not a tame lion’ – free from all the rules except having God’s law written in his heart. A wild man. A wild God.
- Take a copy of the story (John 6:14–21) and find a space in this area where you can read it again, look at the beauty and the danger of the wild place you’re in now and think about the question, ‘What do I admire about this wild Jesus? What do I find uncomfortable or frightening about him?’
- Together, talk about the risk run by this place and by whoever owns it, by allowing you to come into it: guests can abuse hospitality, after all. How can we be good guests of this space?
- Decide what’s the greatest hazard or danger in this area and stand where you can all see it. Talk about the worst thing that could happen to someone there. What about the worst damage that we humans could do to the natural things in this area (burn with a barbecue, let dogs loose to savage sheep, pick rare orchids, harm endangered amphibians)? Perhaps you’d need to put a fence up to keep people safe from hazards and to keep precious natural things safe from humans!
- Find sticks or use string/rope/hazard tape you’ve brought with you and fence off every hazard and thing that a human might damage. If someone prefers writing, get them to write down a list of rules to keep every single thing safe in this area. (E.g. ‘Do not tread on the daisies.’ ‘Stay five metres away from the roadside.’ ‘Do not climb the lamppost.’) Talk about how little space is left to enjoy! Would you need a rule for every danger, every person and every fragile thing in this area? Imagine how big the rule book would be! But what if you could turn things inside out and have people

who actually want to keep the rules, who don't need fences or rules because they understand from deep down inside how to treasure the world, treasure other people and treasure themselves?

- Hebrews 8:10 says, '[God] will put [his] laws in their minds and write them on their hearts.' Go round the space and remove all the fences/tape and as you do it, think about what the Holy Spirit has to do with freedom and wildness.

- The Holy Spirit of Jesus is sometimes described as a wild bird. Watch the birds flying above you and think about a rule you've found yourself obeying that isn't good for you. How can you be as free as the birds?

- The Spirit is also described as being like flowing water. If there's a spring or running water here, think about how that water is like an unstoppable (uncontrollable?) flood within a person, perhaps within you or someone you know.

- The Spirit is also described as fire. Think about this place in a lightning storm or catching fire and burning uncontrollably. Have you ever felt out of control? Have you ever willingly handed over control of anything in your life to someone? Have you ever thought of God as a wild risk-taker?

- What can you see to do in this place to symbolise our willingness to be a little more willing to take risks with God this month and to look out for God wanting to take risks with us? (E.g. cross a stream on steppingstones or jump across a ditch or try eating something you've never tried before – but let people suggest something themselves first.)

Wonder:

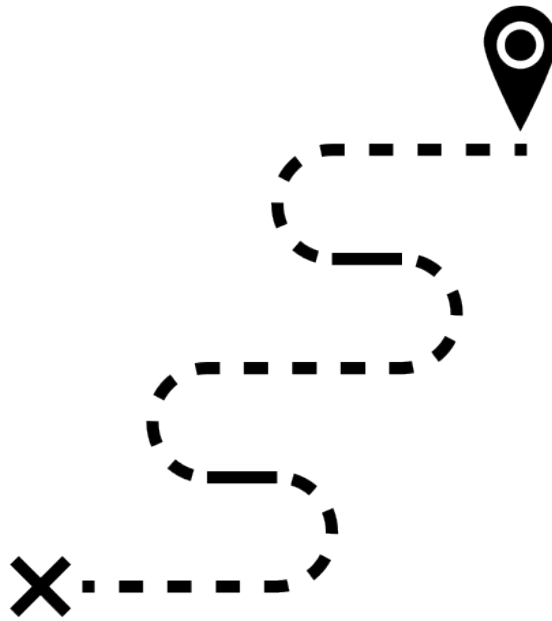
- I wonder which is better, a wild garden or a tidy garden?

- I wonder how you draw the line between living by faith in God and living by common-sense?

- I wonder what's the biggest risk you've ever taken?

- I wonder what you think was the riskiest thing Jesus did?

- I wonder if you wish you were more wild or more self-controlled than you are?
- I wonder why 'self-control' is one of the fruits of the Spirit?
- When did you last 'let go and let God'?
- I wonder how wildness/self-control happen in the way we treat our bodies? In the way we treat other people? On Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok?
- I wonder how we enslave or set free other people in our everyday lives and choices?



Section 3 Activities



1 Book of nature

You'll need: a notebook or scrapbook; paper for a cover; coloured pens.

What to do: make a nature journal to help you notice and remember the things you see and find in the natural world. Design a cover with a title and your name and the date you start it. Get into the habit of pressing plants to stick into it, drawing plants or animals you see, adding their names, recording lists of what you find in your garden in different months, making a note of anything that makes you think God is telling you something important through nature.



Big thinking: close observation of the natural world is very important in science.

By carefully observing, recording and collecting information, scientists can develop ideas about how the natural world functions and test their theories. Scientists may use their own senses for discovery, and they also use tools to help them observe in more detail. For example, an astronomer would use a telescope to see the stars and planets more clearly and a biologist would use a microscope to see the tiny details of plant and animal cells.



Big question: for centuries, people have said there are two books that describe who God is: the book of nature and the scriptures – the Bible. What can you ‘read’ about God in the nature around you right now? Maybe you’re too young to read from a printed book, but maybe you’re better at reading the book of nature than someone older! Maybe you can read things in it that they can’t see!

2 Wild worship

You'll need: space to move.

What to do: Psalm 96:12 says that things in nature praise God by being themselves: 'Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.' Go and look at everything in your space, decide how each natural thing might be praising God, then, if you want to, praise God in the way you prefer. That might be rushing around at full speed shouting (like an excited duck), or it might be just 'being' (like an ancient oak tree).



Big thinking: scientists estimate that there are 8.7 million species of plants and animals in existence on our planet at the moment! Each of these species has its own 'niche', a term ecologists use to describe the particular environmental conditions each species requires. Our human species is just one of these 8.7 million species, but there are a lot of us – currently 8 billion people in the world! And each person has their own genetic code, meaning there is no other person like you on the planet!



Big question: is it ever fair to make fun of the way somebody else praises God? The songs they prefer? The way they pray? The way they move? What might you learn from someone very different from you about how to praise God?



3 Staring statues

You'll need: a tree or pond or area of grass.

What to do: the challenge is to get comfy and spend five minutes in silence, just looking at your tree/pond/grassy area, being as still as in a game of musical statues. It might feel like a long time! Then talk about something you've noticed or a thought that has surprised you.



Big thinking: neuroscientists (people who study brains) can use machines called MRI scanners to see how our brains work. Neuroscientists have discovered that being deliberately still on a regular basis strengthens key brain networks linked to focus, memory and mood. When they compare brain scans of people who practise being still with people who don't, they find that being still helps brains to cope with stress. So being mindful keeps your brain healthy and your mood happy!



Big question: how often do you make time to be still? God says, 'Be still and know that I am God' (Psalm 46:10). What do you think being still has to do with 'knowing'?

4 Wild wonderfulness

You'll need: bits of wood; hammers; nails; wood glue; sandpaper.

What to do: make a small shelf or stand to take home and use as a 'nature table' in your room, displaying something you've found outside that you admire. What can you find out about it?



Big thinking: Dr Mae Jemison is famous for being the first African American woman astronaut in space (in 1992). She is also a chemist and a biologist and a dancer! She says, 'Don't let anyone rob you of your imagination, your creativity, or your curiosity. It's your place in the world; it's your life. Go on and do all you can with it, and make it the life you want to live.'





Big questions: Psalm 19:1 says, 'The heavens declare the glory of God'. What does your found object 'declare' to you? Does it declare it straight away or do you need to spend time listening/looking before you can tell what it's saying?

5 Go barefoot

You'll need: an area without broken glass, needles, dog poo etc.; a pile of pebbles; two labelled jars.

What to do: take off your shoes and socks and try walking around. Talk about how it feels. Take a pebble and put it in either the jar labelled 'fantastic' or the jar labelled 'horrible', depending on how you found the experience.

 **Big thinking:** being barefoot on the earth joins us to the natural world in a very direct way. There is some evidence to suggest that walking barefoot can connect our bodies to the earth's electromagnetic field. Being barefoot in a natural space helps us to feel part of the natural environment, like an animal might. It heightens our senses, making us more attentive to textures and temperatures on the ground. Walking barefoot also makes us aware of how vulnerable our soft feet are without shoes and alerts us to hazards.

 **Big question:** how did you move differently when you were barefoot? Why do you think God told Moses to take off his sandals because it was holy ground by the burning bush? (Exodus 3). What piece of ground is holy to you? How do you move when you're on that ground?



6 Letting go

You'll need: mentos; a big bottle of cola; paper rolled into a cone.

What to do: do the cola and mentos explosion – it's very well-known but if you've not done it before, do a search on YouTube to see how it works. Give it a big build-up! If you can, give everyone the challenge not to laugh or smile!



Big thinking: laughing is good for us! Research shows that laughing reduces chemicals in our bodies that make us stressed and increases chemicals in our bodies (called endorphins) which make us feel good and can even ease pain. A really good laugh also exercises your abdominal muscles (around your tummy) and gets your heart muscles pumping, which in turn burns calories. Scientists have also found that the health benefits of laughing happen in our bodies even if we are pretending to laugh and smile! It's also true that if you smile you are likely to make people around you smile, and so you can spread happiness and health wherever you go by a simple smile!



Big questions: do you think God's happy when we're happy? What makes you laugh? Do you think you laugh enough? What stops you being free to express your feelings?

7 Working with the wilderness

You'll need: protective gloves; long sleeves; nettles; a knife.

What to do: You can find videos of how to do this very easily online. Basically, strip your nettle stem of leaves and stinging spines. Split open the stalk and remove the inner fibres. Discard these. Let the outer fibres dry if you have time. Split off one thread at a time from the outer fibres and plait them together to make a cord.



Big thinking: the earth's natural resources can be divided into two categories – those that are finite and those that are not. Finite resources are those which cannot be renewed, once they are gone, they are gone. An example is coal, a fossil fuel found underground that was formed many years ago and is dug up and used for energy. In contrast, a renewable resource can be used again and again, so it is better to make energy from the wind or the sun, than from coal. We can also regrow or recycle some natural resources. For example, trees can be cut down for use and then regrown, and the products from the tree can be recycled, such as paper and card. If we use and replenish resources that are renewable, then our lives will be more sustainable, meaning the planet will be more able to support all the people and wildlife on earth, now and into the future.



Big question: you've made something useful and beautiful out of a 'weed'. Isaiah 35 describes God turning the wilderness into a place of beauty – perhaps the wild patch of nettles has become a place of beauty and usefulness to you, in a similar way? Where else can we see beauty in what other people see as ugly and useless? In nature? In other people?

8 Wildly creative

You'll need: natural materials; scissors.

What to do: mark out a frame on the ground using natural bits and bobs. Make it as big or as small as you like. Then create a piece of art – it's totally up to you what you design – using only natural objects. Don't worry about 'not being good at art' – just enjoy yourself.



Big thinking: when you are completely immersed in a creative activity, you are likely to feel more relaxed as your heart rate slows and you feel less anxious. Repetitive crafts like knitting, painting and drawing can cause your body to release a chemical called dopamine, which makes you feel good and motivates you to keep going.



Big question: when did you last allow yourself to be creative?



9 Landscape detectives

You'll need: a place with fairly open views.

What to do: ask the group to spot signs in the landscape that show evidence of human activity. Start with easy things like buildings, roads, fences – man-made objects. Next, ask them to look for natural features that show evidence of human activity. For example, fields of crops that have been planted, hedges that have been planted/laid/cut, forested areas that have been planted in rows.



Big thinking: humans have been living on the earth and changing the landscape for thousands of years. Even landscapes we think are natural (forests, moorland, wetlands) have been modified by human activity. Open moorlands have few trees because we have introduced sheep to graze there, woodlands provide clues to past uses through trees like hazel which were cut regularly (coppiced). Many natural looking lakes are man-made, dug many years ago for their gravel or peat, and now are filled in with water and used for recreation.

? Big question: which kind of landscapes do you think are best/most useful/most beautiful – those which are man-made or those which are natural? Can you think of anywhere on earth which has no human influence? Even Antarctica has microplastics that have landed there from air currents and even the moon has plenty of litter left by the moon-landers and their crews!

10 Wild home

You'll need: sticks; string/rope; possibly tarps; grass; any den building materials available.

What to do: demonstrate different sorts of dens or bivouacs (there are lots of YouTube instructions) and invite people to make their own. You might want to have your meal/snack inside.



Big thinking: humans live across a wide range of habitats around the world, using the natural resources around them in clever ways to adapt to their environments. Our big brains enable humans to live successfully in many different habitats, by developing tools and finding food. From hot and dry deserts to ice cold arctic regions, people have found ways to make a home in the most extreme conditions.



Big question: how hospitable is the natural world? Do you feel at home in it? What makes someone feel at home? Would a new person feel at home in your group? How can you be a good host?



11 Tidy the trash

You'll need: litter pickers; rubbish bags; gloves; clipboard.

What to do: ask the group to look around the area they are standing in. Can they see any litter? Most places will have something. In pairs, ask people to pick up the litter and make a tally of what types they find.



Big thinking: people don't always respect the areas they visit and drop litter. Sometimes litter arrives at a place from another source – perhaps balloons which arrive from the air or litter floating along a river. If rubbish reaches the sea, it can travel hundreds of miles in ocean currents. Litter spoils the beauty of a place, but also can endanger the animals that live there by entangling them or hurting them if they eat the rubbish.

Some of our rubbish, like plastic can hang around for hundreds, even thousands of years. When future archaeologists – people who study the past by digging up old things and buildings buried in the soil – dig down to the soil layers of this century, they will know we were here because they will find a thin layer of plastic all around the world!



Big question: how do you feel when you see litter? Were you surprised by how much litter you found? Could you do a litter pick in your local area? How can we encourage people to take their litter home with them or use a rubbish bin?

Bigger activities

- Have a family film night with a film like *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*, *Inside Out* or *Finding Nemo*, where there are questions about being safe in a house/fish tank/wilderness, or questions about being wild/controlled emotionally. (Remember the sharks battling for self-control in *Finding Nemo*!)
- Go camping for a night together or have a garden sleepover.
- Visit a rewilding project.
- Get educated together on modern day slavery, such as what to look out for at carwashes or nail bars.
- Hold a Fairtrade stall to sell goods and raise awareness.
- Do a survey of your local shop/supermarket to see what Fairtrade goods are available.



Section 4 Celebration

Start with a game of 'would you rather': gather everyone in a line and ask a question with two contrasting answers. Participants have to move either left or right depending on which answer they choose. Question suggestions – Would you rather:

- Be in a wild garden OR be in a tidy garden?
- Sunbathe on a beach OR go sky-diving?
- Scream in frustration OR keep your frustrations hidden inside?
- Be a rule keeper OR a rule breaker?
- Take a risk OR play it safe?
- Be in control OR let someone else be in control?

What did Jesus do? Was he a risk taker or did he play it safe? What can we learn from his life?

Ask everyone for Bible stories they know where they think Jesus took a risk? (E.g. Jesus walks on water in John 6:14–21.)

Was Jesus in control or did he let someone else be in control? (Can you think of examples?)

Jesus was both fully God, able to miraculously heal people and walk on water AND he was fully human, feeling pain and human emotions. There were times when he was sad. The Bible says, 'Jesus wept' (John 11:35) when he heard his friend Lazarus had died. There were times he got angry when he saw injustice (people cheating on others) in the temple (Mark 11:15-18) and turned over the tables of the moneychangers. There are many times we might consider his behaviour risky, yet he appears in control of situations, or was he? Luke 5:16 mentions that, 'Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.' He needed to find a quiet place without distraction to spend time with God and stay in tune with God's big plan.

Wonder

- How do you stay in tune with God's big plan?
- Is God prompting you to take a risk or be more self-controlled for God's kingdom ?
- Where have humans' reckless behaviour damaged God's world? Where do we need more self-control?

Prayer

Use the prayer idea from section 1.

Section 5 Eating together

Pick an idea from the Messy take-out menu or another source for outdoor meals, snacks and treats.

Ideas for the theme today could include comparing the taste of 'wild' food with 'tame' food: sampling a home-grown tomato against a mass-produced one; does an egg produced by a hen in someone's own garden taste different from a supermarket one? You could also compare how Fairtrade products taste against similar non-Fairtrade ones.

