

# 12 Wild life!

*By Becky May*

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**Theme:** change, growth, life, death, birth, seasons, rhythms

**Aim:** to explore life cycles in the natural world, in order to understand how Jesus' life, death and resurrection brings the hope of renewal to people and the whole earth.

**Science advisor:** Margot Hodson

*Remember to complete a risk assessment for each adventure and ensure you are fully compliant with good safeguarding procedures.*

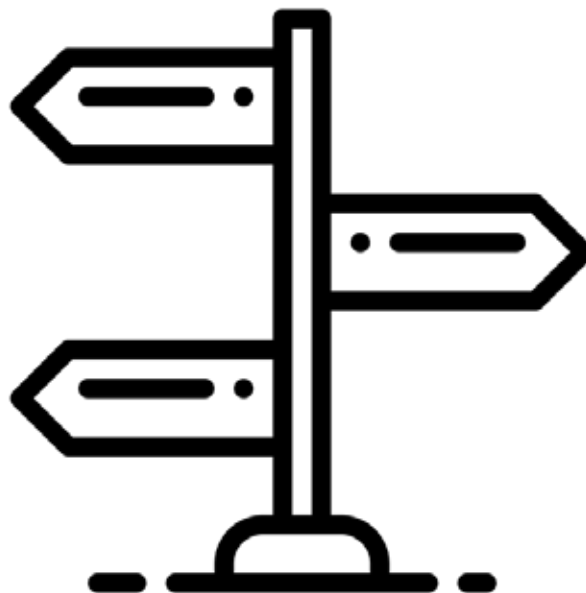
### **Messy Church values:**

- Christ-centred – discovering the key story of utter change – the resurrection of Jesus and Christ's victory of life over death and the hope of renewal they bring to people and the whole earth (any of the gospel accounts).
- Hospitality – celebrating the promise of new life through Jesus; changing our lives so that we care for the natural world.
- Celebration – the joy of life and rebirth and the necessity of death.
- Creativity – exploring themes of life and new life, creation and recreation.
- All-age – celebrating how we change and grow over time.

**Locations:** any open space

## Section 1 On the move

Pause at different stops on an adventure around your area. Issue the relevant health and safety warnings needed for your situation. These stops can be made in any order. Each stop has suggestions for local experts you could invite to add specialist knowledge and local context to the adventure.



# 1 A tree

- Pause by a tree.
- What season are we in? Can you tell by looking at this tree? Is this an evergreen tree or a deciduous tree? What changes does this tree go through in its life? (Look to see if it sheds its leaves in the autumn and grows new ones in the spring. A deciduous tree loses its leaves to save energy during the winter and to make sure that it does not lose too much water.)
- How tall is the tree? How long has it taken to grow this tall? How about the members of the group? How are you growing? Can you each find one bush or tree that is shorter than you and one that is bigger than you?
- Can you find a tree stump? How do the rings show the signs of growth for this tree? Why do you think that the tree has rings? A tree has rings because it grows faster in the summer than in the winter. What are the rings like on your tree? What might they tell you about the things it experienced? For additional activities on tree rings look in the 'tree adventures'. For more information on how tree rings tell us the story of a tree's life and the changes in the environment it has grown in, have a look at this article ([theforestacademy.com/tree-knowledge/annual-growth-rings/#.YWbF3NnMLX2](https://theforestacademy.com/tree-knowledge/annual-growth-rings/#.YWbF3NnMLX2)).
- Can you see leaves on the tree? Are there new shoots on the tree, or dead leaves fallen to the ground to be stomped in? What colours are the leaves? Do they change? What is the story of life and death for these leaves?
- Share how in Psalm 92:12–15 it says those who live well grow like a palm tree or a cedar tree with strong roots going deep and bearing as much fruit when they are old as they did when they were young. Some scientists think they have discovered that trees help one another to grow through their roots. A 'parent' tree's roots link to those of its offspring that are growing nearby. It could also be that networks of fungus also link trees into communities, sharing nutrients that help them grow healthy. Other scientists are not so sure. But that is part of the creativity of science – there is always room to discover new things!

- How can we help trees to have space to grow? What does it mean for us to grow well spiritually as well as physically?

**Ask:** what questions do you have about this?

**Suggestions for specialist input:** a tree surgeon, forester or gardener.

## 2 A pond/river/stream/lake.

- Pause besides the water. What can you see? What can you hear?
- Who lives here? Who calls the water home? Who lives beside the water? What signs of life can you see in and around the water? What season are we in? What stages of life can you see? Perhaps a nest or a bird? Tadpoles or frogs? Shoots of plants? Dead grasses? Insects? Can you think about what will happen here at other times of the year?
- What about the water itself? What is it like? Is the water level high or low? How does the water change through the year? Does it dry up in the summer? How might that change who lives here? Ponds and streams that are seasonal will have a distinct ecology of plants, animals and insects that need a time each year when there is little or no water to be able to complete their life cycles. That is why it is important to preserve 'dry' ponds rather than fill them in.
- Talk about the way that water is so essential to life. It is often used in the Bible as a symbol of salvation. Baptism is the symbol of death to sin and new life or resurrection. In a very well-known verse, Isaiah 43:19–20, God promises to do a new thing, bringing new streams of water into the desert. What does it mean for us to have 'new life'? Where might we want to ask God to bring new streams of water into desert places for us?
- Sadly, many streams, rivers and ponds are filled with rubbish that people leave behind such as plastic bags, bottles, and nets. Could you get some equipment and collect rubbish from around a stream or pond? Also, there is other rubbish you cannot easily see. Chemicals we use on our farms to grow food get washed into streams and rivers. This can cause algae to grow which uses up the oxygen in the water that other life depends upon. How can we help bring new life to the wild animals? How can we help to provide safe habitats for them to live in?

**Ask:** what questions do you have about this?

**Suggestions for specialist input:** an angler or waterways wildlife ranger.

### 3 A meadow/playing field/garden/ patch of grass/flower bed

- As you first look at the space in front of you, it may look like a solid block of green grass or a muddy bed waiting for things to grow, but look closer, how many different plant species can you see growing there? How many different creatures can you see living here?
- Use a one metre square frame to focus on one small area. Can you count all the things growing here? What do you notice?
- Plants have a life cycle of spouting from a seed, growing, flowering, growing seeds themselves and then eventually dying off. Can you find a whole life cycle? For example you might be able to find examples of dandelions at each different stage of their life cycle. If not, what can you see? What stages of life are represented? Do you know the life cycle for the thing you are looking at? What happened before? What will happen next?
- The Bible has a lot to say about different seasons or stages of life. One of the most well-known is Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 which begins, ‘There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot.’ What season are we in now? What stage of life is this plant in? How about you? What is it time for, for you right now? What do you want to say to God about this?
- How about the piece of land that you are looking at? How can we help it to flourish? Is it a good thing that there are many types of plants here? How should we look after it? Use this activity to think bigger about the whole world with all the different types of land. How can we work together across the world against the changes that are happening to plants, animals, and people due to global warming? That can seem a really big problem. But what small things can we do to make a difference?

- Think about the last book of the Bible and the hope of a renewed heaven and earth. It also speaks about this hope in terms of holy city where the tree of life has fruit every month of the year for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2)! Do you find that odd, when seasons are so important today? How does it show God cares both for nature and for humans? How might we be like the fruit of the tree of life, helping to bring healing to a world that is being hurt by global warming and the way we overuse the earth's resources?

**Ask:** what questions do you have about this?

**Suggestions for specialist input:** a gardener.



## 4 A house/street/building site

- Look at a house, street of houses or safely stand outside a building site.
- How long have these buildings been here? How do you know? What was here before? Can anyone in your group tell you what this space was like before?
- Can you see any signs of how these buildings have changed over time? Why do you think that may be? Our homes are very important to us, sometimes we make changes to our homes to make them work better for our needs. Are there signs of people changing their houses to make better room for them to grow as a family?
- Sometimes we don't have a choice over where we live. Some people may not have a home that is suitable for them. How do we feel about this? What can we do about this? What's stopping us?
- Our homes are very important to us. They provide places of shelter and security. But they are not forever, even if we live in the same house for a very long time. Looking at these houses here, were there people who lived here before. Perhaps this space was once open fields or a factory. Perhaps, even longer ago it was covered in trees or animals that seem strange to us like hippos, woolly mammoths or sabre tooth big cats roamed the area! Would it have felt a safe place then? But it would have provided shelter and security to the wild animals. Before he died, Jesus promised that he was going to prepare a home for his followers (John 14:1-3). The home that Jesus prepares goes beyond our life now and lasts forever. In Revelation 21, we find that heaven and earth will one day be made new. I wonder what our life then will be like? Will there also be nature there?

**Ask:** what questions do you have about this?

**Suggestions for specialist input:** a local historian or someone who has lived in the area for a long time.

## 5 A nursery/school/retirement home

- Pause near a local nursery, school or retirement home.
- Ask what this place means to the people in the group; did they go here? Do they live here? What connections do you have to this place?
- Is anything growing here? Has it been planted or is it wild? How might that change through the year or over several years? What plants do you like? What are you not so keen on?
- Some buildings or places are hugely important to us for one part of our lives. We may go there every single day for a number of years and then never return there again. Is there someone in the group who went to this place a long time ago? Is there someone who goes there now? What changes may have happened in that time?
- Share how in Psalm 139 it says God knew all the days of our lives before we were even born! Where have our days taken us so far? What stage of life are we in now? Where might we go next? What do we want to thank God for, from our journey so far? What would we like to ask him for at this stage? What has surprised us about our life journey so far?

**Ask:** what questions do you have about this?

**Suggestions for specialist input:** a teacher, a nursery nurse or nurse.

## 6 A church building or churchyard

- Take a moment to be still beside or inside the church building.
- Many people turn to the church at significant moments in their life journey, celebrating a dedication or baptism close to a baby's birth, and coming to say goodbye and to remember those who have died at funerals and memorials.
- Is there a place here where you can remember those who have lived here before you? Perhaps there are gravestones? There may be a garden of remembrance or a war memorial, for instance. Would you like to take a moment to pause and to remember somebody special to you?
- What signs of new life can you see here? There may be things in nature, such as buds on trees, flowers in bloom and new shoots coming through. There may be stained glass windows that point to the resurrection as well as other symbols.
- Churchyards are often special places for wildlife. Why might this be? How does this point to God's care for his creation and for the promise of new life?
- Share how Jesus came to bring new life and, how through his death and resurrection, he overcame the pain of death. Although we still grieve for those who have passed and need opportunities to say goodbye, we have hope because of the promise of Jesus' resurrection.

**Ask:** what questions do you have about this?

**Suggestions for specialist input:** A minister or vicar or a gardener.

## **Celebration**

Invite everyone to share one new thing they've learned today and one thing they're going to do this week that's different because of what you've done today. Remember to ask about how you all got on next time you meet.

## **Prayer**

What has made you think today? What would you like to pray about?

What are the things that we might need to say goodbye to? The things that may need to die. Can you find something to hold on to or to take a closer look at as we pray about these things?

What has today shown you about God's care for his creation? How can we care for it better? Ask people to share some examples such as using less plastic, eating less meat, walking and cycling more or using electricity from wind and wave power. Ask God to help you to do these things as we share in his care for the earth.

What does it mean for us to know that God has promised us new life? Can you find something to hold on to or take a closer look at as we thank God for his promise of new life?

## **As you leave**

Invite everyone to talk on your way home about the way God is with us every step of our life journey.

## Section 2 Adventure area in one spot

Meet at a playing field, parkland, or meadow. Issue the relevant health and safety warning needed for your situation.

- When you enter the park or field, invite everyone to find a space where they can sit or stand and take a moment to rest and relax. Take a really good look around you; what can you see? What can you hear? What can you feel as you run your fingers through the grass or perhaps walk barefoot? What can you smell?
- Invite people to take a printed copy of Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 and explore the area to find the best spot to read the story together. Where can they find illustrations of some of these lines in the area around you? Which ‘time’ are we in? What does it mean for us as individuals or families? What time are we in as a planet? Are any of the ‘seasons’ mentioned changed by global warming and other environmental changes. What about ‘sowing and reaping’, ‘being born and dying’ and ‘tearing down and building’? How can we build now towards a better future for people, nature and the earth?
- Use a selection of the activities in section 3 to explore change, growth, life, death, birth, seasons and rhythms.
- Explore what signs of life, death, change, growth and seasons there are in this place. What does this say to us? What can we learn or reflect upon here?
- Talk about the changing seasons of life – sometimes it is good to move on and forwards, for example moving from primary school to secondary school or starting a new job. What season are you in at the moment?
- Survey any pollution and litter and reflect on how they change the place for people and other living things.
- Talk about God’s love for his creation and our call to care for it.
- How can you change this place for the better before you leave it?

## Wonder:

- What season are we in? How can you tell? What does that mean for the nature in the world around us here? What do you enjoy about this season? Do you have a favourite season? How does our life follow 'seasons'?
- Where do you see signs of life and of death here? What stage of life are the plants and animals in here? What does a life cycle look like for this species? What about us? What things might need to 'die' in our lives? Where do we need new life? What does Jesus' promise of new life mean to us?
- What changes occur in this space every year? What changes have taken place in this space over time? What changes are being caused by humans adding greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, leading to global warming and climate change? Has damage to God's creation been put right here, or is this a place in need of care to allow nature to flourish?
- What about changes in those gathered here? How have you changed over time? How are those who are older different from those who are younger? What about the changes we cannot see? How are you changing and growing? Listen to someone older than you; listen to someone younger than you? Ask someone who is older to talk about how the weather and seasons have changed over time? How might we need to change to protect the earth and its life, working with God to care for creation?

**Suggestions for specialist input:** gardener or wildlife ranger.



**Section 3** Activities to explore change, growth, life, death, birth, seasons, rhythms



# 1 Rhythms are good

**You'll need:** sticks; pebbles; feet.

**What to do:** can you create a rhythm together, stomping feet, tapping pebbles on the ground, banging sticks together etc. On the signal, can you change rhythm together?



**Big thinking:** all of life has rhythms. There are the rhythms of being awake and asleep; the rhythms of different growth in summer and winter; heartbeats and galloping hooves. If you find a flower growing and look at it in the middle of the day and at night, you find that it opens and closes its petals. If you listen to your own heartbeat, or that of an animal such as a pet dog or cat, you can hear it beating to a steady rhythm.



**Big question:** why do rhythms matter to us? What rhythms do we experience in our lives? Days at school or work and holidays, playing and resting? Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 tells us that there is time for both, and these make up the pattern or rhythm of our life.



## 2 Watch me grow!

**You'll need:** paper; pencils.

**What to do:** take a piece of paper and place your hand on it. Draw round your hand and put your name in the middle. Once everyone has drawn their hands you will find you have all shapes and sizes. How big was your hand when you were born? How big will it be when you are grown up?



**Big thinking:** although all the hands are different sizes, as they grow, they follow the same pattern. You don't grow extra fingers as you get bigger. Lots of things follow the same pattern as they grow. Look at a fern leaf – either in its natural setting or a picture (please do not pick one!). The pattern of the whole leaf is the same as the pattern of the side shoots. And if you look at the smallest leaf, its pattern is the same as the entire

plant! It's like someone has designed it and stuck it all together following a pattern. But the pattern is built into how the fern grows, just like the pattern of our hands!


**? Big question:** the writer of Psalm 139:13 says that '[God] knit me together in my mother's womb'. Think about the way the size of your hand changes from being a baby to an adult. Even then, it changes as we get older. Hold the drawing of your hand in your open hands. Think about how you are growing? We grow physically as we grow older but how else do we grow? Luke 2:52 says, 'Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.' How are we growing in our relationship with God, as well as in size and in age? Give thanks to God for helping you to grow.




### 3 New life

**You'll need:** seeds or bulbs; compost; flowerpots; or a communal garden area!

**What to do:** plant some seeds or bulbs, depending upon the time of year, perhaps in a plant pot to be taken home and cared for as it grows or in a flowerbed where you can all observe the growth.

 **Big thinking:** you might like to think about the different conditions that are needed for seeds to germinate and grow. Some seeds germinate easily, while others need particular conditions, such as water, light or warmth. Some seeds will grow quickly and will cope with a range of conditions, while others need very specific conditions to grow. Understanding your seed will enable you to have a better chance of growing your plant.

 **Big question:** in John 12:24, Jesus said: 'What I'm about to tell you is true. Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only one seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds' (NIRV). What do you think Jesus meant when he said this? What needs to die to produce much, much more? What does it tell you about how much Jesus knew about growing things?



## 4 Signs of life

**You'll need:** magnifying glass; mobile phone; mobile phone microscope attachment (optional).

**What to do:** challenge participants to look around the space where you are gathered. What signs of new life can be found? If none at this time of year, talk about what they would see here in the spring, for instance. Look more closely with magnifying glasses to see what is going on. You can buy a microscope attachment for a mobile phone on the internet – see the Messy Church Does Science video on phone microscopes and bee houses ([youtube.com/watch?v=x7NNUR4XKnY&t=336s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7NNUR4XKnY&t=336s)). You can take photos and videos of small things using this on your phone.



**Big thinking:** this activity will be very different depending on the season. You can use the magnifying

glass or the phone microscope to look at the flowers – petals, reproductive parts, and pollen. If there are no flowers, look for buds – bud scales, how tightly closed are they? The whole of the shoot will be in miniature inside (but wait for them to open in spring – don't cut them open because this will damage the plant!). It's amazing that even very small things are full of beauty and order. And they develop and grow naturally rather than being built like human buildings and structures.



**Big question:** in John 11:25–26, Jesus said: 'I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even if they die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die.' What does it mean for us to live with the promise of new life in Jesus?



## 5 Saying goodbye

**You'll need:** small card labels; ribbons; pens; a tree.

**What to do:** set up a branch or tree which can be used as a memorial tree. Invite participants to write a message in memory of a loved one to be tied to the tree. Encourage participants to take a few moments for themselves to reflect, to remember and to give thanks.



**Big thinking:** death and decay are part of the natural cycle of life in the world. Without death there could not be new life as there would not be room. Without plants and animals decaying in the ground there would not be organic matter in the soil that enables new things to grow. So, it is natural, but it is also painful when those we love die.



**Big question:** when someone we love dies, it can leave us with many unanswered questions, and we may have many questions we want to bring to God about this now. When Jesus' friend, Lazarus, died, Jesus grieved for him. He performed a miracle, raising Lazarus from the dead as a sign that Jesus had come to overcome death and bring new life. Death is sad, but it is not the end.

Romans 8:18–25 talks about hope in the face of decay and death. It says creation is groaning and waiting for the children of God to be revealed. The passage explains that one day creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay and be brought into a glorious freedom. We can't understand how this might work and God's new creation is going to have a very different ecology and way of working! We can trust that it is real, and we can look forward to it with hope. We can live in ways that point towards that hope, working with God to help life – people, plants and animals – flourish. What could you do to help this?



## 6 A new creation

**You'll need:** card butterfly shapes; glue sticks; naturally found objects (leaves, sticks, etc.) or cut flowers.

**What to do:** provide card with butterfly outlines printed on them and invite participants to create a symmetrical butterfly, using naturally found objects or petals from cut flowers. Can you see any butterflies where you are today? Can you see any caterpillars? Talk about the life cycle of a butterfly. What other life cycles do you know?



**Big thinking:** butterflies have a very special life cycle. They start out as eggs and then emerge as caterpillars. They have mouths that enable them to eat leaves, usually of a specific plant. As they grow, they shed their skins and sometimes change colour. When they are big enough, they find a sensible place to pupate and become a chrysalis – this is like a pod with the inside full of caterpillar cells. Inside the chrysalis these cells gradually develop and form into a butterfly. When the time is right, the butterfly breaks out of the chrysalis and will fly away. They will find a mate and then lay eggs and the whole cycle will start again! Some butterflies have become very rare. This is because they must have the right conditions for each part of their life cycle. If the plant that they live on as caterpillars becomes rare then they will also struggle to survive. If pesticides are put on a plant that they eat, the caterpillars will die – even if the pesticide was meant for another plant.



**Big question:** when we look at the life cycle of a butterfly, we can see the amazing hand of God in making something so special. What can we do to help butterflies to flourish? The butterfly is often used as an illustration for new life. Some Christians use a butterfly at Easter to represent resurrection too. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, it says: 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old is gone, the new is here!' Jesus makes us new and gives us new life. What does it mean for us to have new life in Jesus? What is the old that is gone? What new things is Jesus creating in our lives? How can we demonstrate God's new creation to the world around us in the way we live our lives?



## 7 Life over death

**You'll need:** sticks; natural twine; found garden flowers and leaves or cut flowers.

**What to do:** provide some sticks or send participants off to find them. Use the twine to tie two sticks together in the form of a cross. Use garden flowers and leaves or cut flowers to weave around the cross, tying them to the sticks to decorate the cross.



**Big thinking:** be careful about what you pick! Many wildflowers are rare or protected and lots of them are in decline. The best idea is to leave wildflowers where they are to grow safely and produce more seeds. The Botanical Society for Britain and Ireland have a code of conduct

([bsbi.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm\\_uploads/Code-of-Conduct-v5-final.pdf](https://bsbi.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/Code-of-Conduct-v5-final.pdf)) for picking, collecting, photographing and enjoying wild plants.



If you want to 'collect' them, why not take photos on your mobile phone. There are apps that can help you identify them, or you could search the internet to find out what they are and lots of facts about them. For example, are they useful for cooking, or making clothes dyes or even medicines?

**? Big question:** at Easter, Christians sometimes decorate a cross shape with fresh flowers as a symbol of new life. What does Jesus' death and resurrection mean to us? Why is this so important? What other symbols can you think of that help us to understand what Jesus did?

We read in John 20:15 that when Mary met the risen Jesus at the tomb, she thought he was the gardener. This might remind us of the garden of Eden at the very start of the Bible (Genesis 2) and God's commandment to us to nurture and protect the garden. Also remembering Romans 8:18–21, how does Jesus' death and resurrection impact on nature? Does this affect the way we care for it?

## 8 Silly season

**You'll need:** dependent on activity below.

**What to do:** there are some activities which we only do in one season or which we connect to one particular season, for instance jumping in puddles in spring showers, sunbathing in the summer, apple bobbing in autumn or building a snowman in winter. Select an activity which is particularly out of season but which you can still do safely together. This could be a newspaper snowball fight or an Easter egg hunt out of season.



**Big thinking:** at the moment, our seasons are changing because of climate change. On average, winters are becoming warmer and wetter in the UK, and summers are becoming hotter and dryer. In Australia and some parts of the world, there have been terrible wildfires in the summer and autumn because the forests have become too dry. There have been terrible heatwaves in some parts of the world, including Canada. There have been flash floods and terrible droughts in other places, including South Africa. The rhythms of life are being messed up and animals and plants must move or otherwise they will die.



**Big question:** Psalm 74:17 says: 'You decided where the borders of the earth would be. You made both summer and winter' (NIRV). God has given a shape and a rhythm to time with the yearly cycle of seasons. What is your favourite season? Why do you think they have this rhythm or pattern? How is our life shaped by the seasons?

The seasons are changing because we humans have put too much carbon dioxide and other gasses into the atmosphere. This is from burning fossil fuels and other things like farming more and more cattle and sheep. What can we do to respect the seasons that God has given to the earth?

## 9 How have I changed?

**You'll need:** photos of members and leaders of the group from across time.

**What to do:** display a selection of photos of members of the group or of the leaders over time, from baby photos, childhood photos through to recent photos. Challenge participants to identify members from their photos and talk about how everyone has changed over time. Has anyone changed very little? Can you recognise anyone from their photo?



**Big thinking:** our looks are determined by three things. The first is our genes – made up of strands of a chemical, DNA, which is at the heart of all life. We inherit these from our parents and they are like a plan by which our bodies are built. Most people look a little bit like both of their parents and can look a little like other relatives. Then the next thing that changes the way we look are the things that happen to us and how we react to them. For example, some people smile all the time and their face ends up looking more smiley. Others frown a lot and the forehead above their eyebrows gets crinkly. Finally, age affects the way we look. We look different as a child compared to when we were a teenager and different as a young adult compared to when we are an older adult. We age because the plan that DNA has for how our bodies grow gets small mistakes in it as we grow older. Look at older people in your family and you might get an idea of how you will look when you are older?



**Big question:** as we age, we change in many ways and the Bible has lots to say about us growing in God as we grow older. Proverbs 16:31 says: 'Gray hair is a glorious crown. You get it by living the right way' (NIRV). Growing older is not something to be feared, it is a natural part of life and those who are older can teach much to those who are younger (and vice versa!) How are we growing in God? Where can we see that we have matured or changed in our faith in Jesus?





## 10 Changing the world

**You'll need:** chalk, paint, coloured pens or muddy water; paintbrushes or sticks; an area you can chalk on, paint on, draw on or similar (e.g. a pavement, carpark, wall, sandpit, muddy bank, large sheet of paper).

To make natural water colour paints, you will need bought flowers with petals that have strong colours, warm water, salt, lemon and bicarbonate of soda.

**What to do:** draw or paint a globe to represent the earth using the material you have chosen. If you are using flowers to make paint, make sure you use flowers purchased from a shop rather than collecting wildflowers. Before the session, soak the petals of the flowers in warm water for an hour so the colour mixes with the water. During the session, press the petals to extract the last of the colour. Strain out the liquid and add a pinch of salt. You can add either lemon juice or bicarbonate of soda to change the shade. Lemon juice will make the shade lighter, while bicarbonate of soda will make it richer. Mix and use as water colour paint.



**Big thinking:** the world is full of colour! For much of human history, paint and dyes have been extracted from plants, rocks and soil. Lemon juice is a natural acid and adding it makes the paint more acidic. A small amount changes the colour of the paint. Similarly, a small amount of bicarbonate of soda changes the colour of the paint by making it more alkaline.

Small changes can make a big difference. There is only a small amount of the gas carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, naturally only 280 molecules for every million molecules of gas. But that helps warm the planet by a massive 30 degrees centigrade. And humans have been adding more by burning coal, gas and oil. Now, in 2021, there is 400 parts per million and the earth has warmed by one degree. If we continue then by 2100, the earth will be five degrees warmer which will make a big difference to our lives and all the life on the planet.

You can discover more by reading books like A Christian guide to environmental issues (BRF, 2nd edition, 2021) by Margot and Martin Hodson. It will also help you understand more about joining with God in caring for the wonderful world he has made and given us as gift to treasure.

**?** **Big question:** in John 3:16 it says that ‘God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son’. Gather around the picture of the earth you have created. Remember that Jesus came to bring healing to the whole world – people, animals, plants, land, air and oceans.

Invite people to think of one thing they could do to work with Jesus to bring healing to the world. They could say it aloud, or draw a doodle, picture or symbol of it and place it next to the globe. For example, if you’re concerned about global warming, you might draw an iceberg or a polar bear. Talk about one small thing you could do to start to make that change happen.

What is happening to the world can seem so huge that it doesn’t seem that small things will make a difference. End by reading the story of the mustard seed in Matthew 13:31–32 – the smallest seed that grows into the biggest of trees!

## Bigger activities

- Create a photo calendar showing favourite local views throughout the year.
- Connect with a Messy Church on the other side of the world. What season are they in? How is life different there?
- Plan a special memorial event together or create a garden of remembrance.
- Connect with your local Wildlife Trust and see if you can join them on a conservation task in your local area.
- Connect with your local environmental sustainability group and see if there is something that you could do to make a difference to God's creation. It might be having a harvest collection of recyclable things that are not for kerbside collection. It might be helping with a repair café to bring things back into use. It could be having a litter pick in your area. Or it might be adopting some newly planted trees and taking responsibility for watering them.



## Section 4 Celebration

There are two options for a celebration with this session.

### Celebration 1

Gather everyone together and take a moment to celebrate the differences between the generations gathered. Explain that today we have been exploring some of the things we all experience – living, changing, growing, life in seasons, a rhythm of life and death.

Explain that this is the story that is central to our faith. God created life and created us to live in community with him. There is an order, a pattern or rhythm to our life, just as the years are ordered by the months and seasons. Death was never part of God's plan for us, which is why it always feels so wrong, it is sad and separates us from those we love. But that was not the end. Jesus came to earth to show us how to live, to die on the cross and to defeat death, rising again and giving us the way to live with him again in new life and one day to redeem and renew the whole of his creation. This is why Jesus said: 'I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even if they die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die' (John 11:25–26, NIRV).

Give a few moments for people to reflect on what this means and to pray as you close.

### Song suggestions

'I am a new creation' – Dave Billbrough

'He has risen' – Noel Richards.

### Celebration 2

#### Spring:

Imagine this...

Very early, on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, I'm on my way to the park. I'm buzzing with excitement as it's springtime.

What signs of new life will I see? (ask audience – two or three responses)

The world is being reborn. Hope returns.

Imagine this...

Mary is holding baby Jesus. His name means saviour.

She wraps him in strips of cloth and lays him in a borrowed manger.

Amazed shepherds appear at the door, they worship him and say he is the Messiah, Christ the Lord.

What does this all mean?

The baby Jesus grows up into a child and a man. He is filled with wisdom and the grace of God.

### Summer:

Imagine this...

It's hot and I'm down by the river. All I want to do is jump in and go for a swim. Summer is here. How else might I know it's summer? (ask the audience)

All around me, people are having picnics in the park.

Imagine this... Jesus is now 30. He appears by the river Jordan and is baptised by his cousin John. A voice from heaven declares: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' He goes into the desert for 40 days, preparing for his ministry. He starts by gathering an unlikely bunch of fishermen and tax collectors to be his apprentices. They call him Rabbi. Extraordinary miracles start to happen. He's able to feed crowds of more than 5,000 with just two fish and five loaves; he makes the blind see, the deaf hear and the paralysed walk. His friends say he calmed a storm!

A summer storm is brewing, there's a heaviness in the air.

### Autumn:

Imagine this...

The wind is strong – it's so strong, I can lean into it and not fall over! The branches of the trees are thrashing backwards and forwards, and I have to dodge the conkers as they fall. It's autumn!

How else would I know it's Autumn? (ask the audience – two or three suggestions).

It's harvest time and the crops are being gathered in.

Imagine this... Jesus has been preaching and healing for nearly three years now. He's famous throughout the whole region. Crowds of people show up wherever he goes. But not everyone likes this. He's outspoken – he challenges the Pharisees... he keeps unusual company: tax collectors, lepers, prostitutes. There are rumours that the Pharisees want to kill him. His friends urge him stay away from Jerusalem, but he's on a mission. Jesus says, 'I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.' What could he mean?

### Winter:

Imagine this...

I'm wearing a thick coat, hat and gloves. As I step outside, I can hear the crunch of snow under my feet. I make a snowball (mimes throwing a snowball) – splat!

How do I know it's winter? (ask the audience – two or three suggestions)

Insects and animals are hibernating, trees are like skeletons, flowers have faded. Time has slowed down – it is finished! If I didn't know that spring was coming, I might have thought nature had died!

Imagine this... it's a very sad day for Jesus' friends and family. Jesus is dying on a cross. His mother Mary, her sister, the other Mary's and John stand nearby watching, the other disciples have run away. Time slows down. Finally, Jesus declares 'It is finished'. He's dead! They wrap his body in strips of cloth and lay him in a borrowed tomb, sealing it with a large stone.

## Spring:

Imagine this:

Very early, on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, I'm on my way to the park. I'm buzzing with excitement as it's Springtime.

The world is being reborn. Hope returns.

Imagine this...

Very early, on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. The earth rumbles, and like lightning an angel moves away the stone. 'Do not be afraid, Jesus is not here; he has risen'. The burial cloth is folded. What can this mean?

Mary's crying, big heavy grieving tears.

'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you're looking for?' In her distress, she does not realise it's Jesus, until he says her name, 'Mary'.

She runs to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord!'

The world is being reborn. Hope returns!

## Section 5 Eating together

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

Ideas involving edible change include toasting marshmallows until they melt, melting chocolate in bananas still in their skins, anything involving cooking. Do make sure that you think about caring for creation when you prepare the meal. Can you make it without using anything that is plastic or disposable? Where has the food come from? Could you make a meal from food that has been grown locally or come from not too far away?

