



# Introduction by Bishop Rachel Treweek

It is stating the obvious to say that every person born into the world is unique. As followers of Jesus Christ, we want to declare the wonderful truth that every person is created in the image of God and is 'fearfully and wonderfully made' (Psalm 139:14). It is therefore not surprising that we should long for every child and adult to know they are infinitely precious, known and loved by God.

We know from research and the spoken experience of children and young people that they are bombarded by messages around them which convey that their value lies in their physical appearance. Magazines, advertising and social media perpetuate this perspective, and I know from my own visits to schools that these messages are strong even for primary-age children. Most heroes and heroines in children's books and films are presented with features that are considered aesthetically beautiful and perfect. Princesses have waspish waists, huge eyes and flowing hair, while princes have a muscular physique and a strong jaw line. The celebrity culture seems only to emphasise these messages and peddle the myth that one's physical appearance is everything if you desire to be intimately loved.

Like many others, I am speaking out against these damaging messages and want to help refocus the lens through which young people see themselves in the world around them. I am therefore delighted that Messy Church have created this session to enable adults and children to reflect on who they are as children of God and to discover where their true value comes from.

In our Western world where the issue of identity is seemingly all about the individual, it is also important to emphasise the truth that we are created to live in relationship with our fellow human beings who are equally precious. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to go on discovering what it means to be members together of the body of Christ. Therefore, in this session we want children and adults not only to be excited about their own worth as a child of God, but also to recognise

the value of all people which is not found in their physical appearance. It may be particularly important to acknowledge this with regards to those with a disability or who have physical features which are sometimes seen as abnormal. Every person is equally precious, wonderfully unique, and is known and loved by God.

Throughout history, artists and illustrators have attempted to portray Jesus' physical appearance, but the reality is that the Gospels have nothing to tell us about what Jesus looked like on earth. However, the Bible does have a lot to tell us about Jesus' character and how in his earthly ministry, death and resurrection he revealed to us the heart of God, who is love.

In being made in God's image, we have been created to live in right relationship: with God, our fellow human beings and the world around us. It is therefore important that we give children positive messages about attributes of character which are good for the flourishing of others and the world around them. Sadly, sometimes in our desire to affirm and encourage children we inadvertently collude with a message about value being related to physical appearance. It is far more important to affirm a child for their care of others than the shoes they're wearing; and far more meaningful to notice a child's compassion or humour than their hairstyle.

However, this is not about deterring children's enjoyment of clothes and fashion – there is no suggestion that one should never comment on the flashing shoes or the sparkling hair band – but we might want to think more carefully about how our messages emphasise that outward appearance is about expressing something of who we are, knowing that the 'who' begins deep within us. And it is in that inner place that we want every child and adult to discover their value and potential, and to enter ever deeper into a personal relationship with their creator God through the life-giving generosity of Jesus Christ, ever present with them through the work of the Holy Spirit.

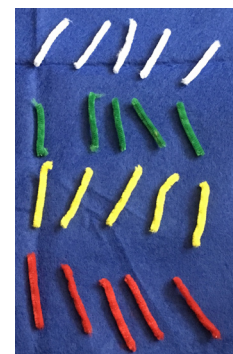
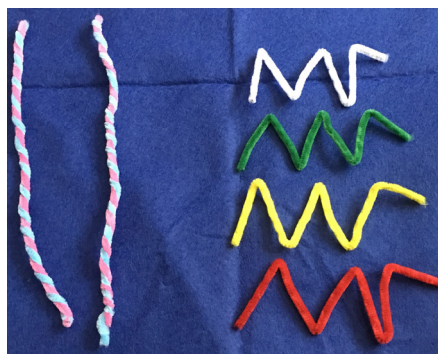
## Messy reflection

‘You is kind, you is smart, you is important.’

This is a quotation from the character Aibileen talking to a toddler, from *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett. It sums up how important it is to understand how valuable another person is because of their inner self, not because of how they look. Also, of course, to understand how valuable we ourselves are from the inside out. In the context of the book, the words say as much about the woman speaking them as about the child: Aibileen loves the child unconditionally and is trying to give her a resilience to cope with the judgemental world she has entered. We too are precious because we are loved. Jesus’ mission is beautifully described in the words of Samuel Crossman’s hymn: ‘Love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be.’

This Messy Church session is part of the Bishop of Gloucester’s campaign to help people change their mindset from one which values only outward appearances to one which values what God sees: ‘the heart’ or inner character.

The activities are built around various Bible passages and in the ‘Talk about’ suggestions, we try to offer habits to start, which families might continue at home.



## Activities

### 1. Fingerprint fun

**You will need: ink pads or painty sponges, an OHP, acetates, a large sheet of paper stuck securely on to a wall, felt-tip pens**

A good one for adults and older children. Invite people to make a thumbprint on to a small square of acetate. Place this on the OHP surface and project it on to the sheet of paper. Invite people in twos to draw their projected thumbprint in black lines on to the paper as accurately as they can. Then, in coloured pen, put their name next to it and fill in between the whorls and lines several things they can do or that they are like (for example, swimming, football, Xbox, smiling, brave, friendly). Leave space for other people to write other things about you as well – supervision may be necessary and making it clear that this is all to be positive. If you have the facilities, you could change this activity to simply enlarging a fingerprint on a photocopier, rather than using an OHP.

(Younger children can enjoy making thumbprints and looking at them closely to see how theirs is different from someone else’s. They can add scribbles to turn them into works of art.)

#### Talk about

The wonderful way every single person is different and unique. Some magazine, programmes or people writing on websites seem to want us all to wear the same, like the same music, look the same, but God made us to be different and to enjoy being who he made us to be. Invite adults to tell their children at home, ‘I love the way you are so...’

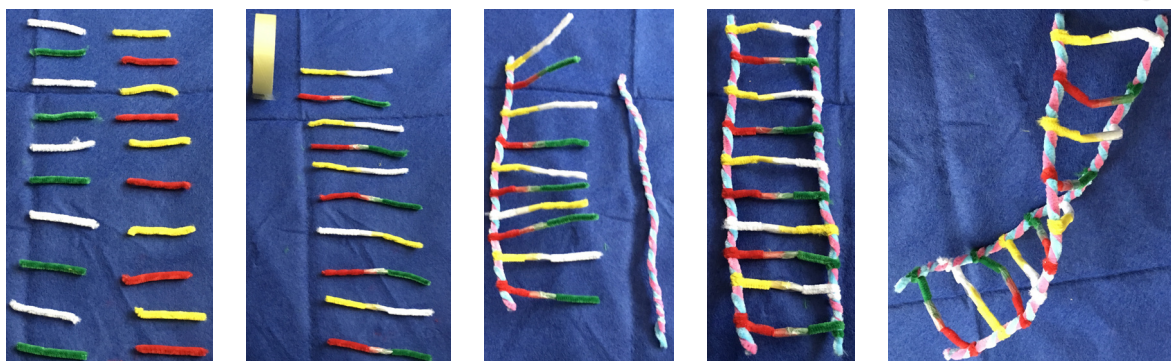
### 2. DNA

**You will need: eight pipe cleaners per person, also known as chenille wires or fuzzy sticks (two each of two colours, and the other four of different colours); scissors; sticky tape**

# Real me



## 2 continued



Make a model of a double helix DNA – that is, a molecule which contains all the genetic information that makes you different from everyone else. The different colours of pipe cleaners on the ‘rungs’ of the helix represent the four bases of DNA: adenine, cytosine, guanine and thymine.

For the down strands of the helix, plait together the first two different colours so that the two sides match. Cut each of the remaining four coloured pipe cleaners into five pieces. Arrange them with alternate colours down one side and then do the same with the remaining two colours for the other side to become the ‘rungs’ of the DNA helix. Tape or plait these ten sets of two together. Now attach them firmly to the down strands of the helix. Finally, twist the resulting model slightly to get the spiral.

Alternatively, use a downloadable origami pattern by searching for ‘origami DNA’ online.

### Talk about

The way that every person is different and marvel at how complex human beings are. Not only is our genetic make-up different, but our experiences and people around us shape us differently too: we are amazing. Nobody is quite like you. God has taken care of something even as tiny as your DNA. Remind people of the line from the psalm: ‘I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made’ (Psalm 139:14). Invite adults to tell their child something special about what their child used to do in the womb, or about their birth, or perhaps how the adult felt when the child was born, adopted or fostered: something that affirms them and gives them an identity.

## 3



## 3. ‘I can, God can’ cans

**You will need: two cans per person (such as cocoa tins or cans which have safe edges when opened), tissue paper to decorate, glue, print-offs of the strips as below in two colours, sticky labels, pens, scissors**

Decorate two cans each and label one ‘God can can’... and one ‘I can can’.

Invite people to choose up to ten strips of paper for each can that they think are true or that they think might be true. (There aren’t any trick ones!)

Older people might turn each strip into a simple 3D paper star (look online for ‘Lucky Paper Star’), while younger people might simply fold it up or concertina it or roll it up into a coil. The strips go into the appropriate can along with some blank strips.

### Talk about

Encourage people to pull out one strip from one of the cans each day and talk about it together and turn it into a prayer. As they do this, they might think of other ‘God can...’ or ‘I can...’ statements, so write these on the blank strips.

### God can

- God can make ill people better
- God can make whole new worlds
- God can give my life meaning
- God can never let me go
- God can move mountains
- God can make seas split down the middle
- God can walk on water
- God can change people’s heart
- God can bring peace
- God can make people see
- God can make people hear
- God can turn water into wine
- God can do anything
- God can turn tears into laughter
- God can love anybody



God can forgive anybody  
 God can speak to young people and older ones  
 God can feel your pain  
 God can lead me by still waters  
 God can give me living water  
 God can provide everything I need  
 God can answer my prayers  
 God can give me more than you expect  
 God can guide me the way you should go  
 God can build his kingdom on earth through me

## I can

I can make things  
 I can be strong  
 I can tell people how much God loves them  
 I can look after people who are ill  
 I can look after lonely people  
 I can notice sad people  
 I can give people some of my time  
 I can be filled with power from God  
 I can love God with all my heart  
 I can love my neighbour as myself  
 I can forgive people who hurt me  
 I can love my enemies  
 I can do good to people around me  
 I can say kind things about people  
 I can build people up instead of breaking them down  
 I can serve God in my whole life  
 I can keep my body healthy  
 I can be beautiful on the inside  
 I can look for good things in the people around me  
 I can be patient with other people  
 I can be gentle with other people  
 I can fill my time with helpful things  
 I can be happy with what I have  
 I can be happy that other people are good at things  
 I can put God first

## 4. So much beauty

**You will need: good quality art resources, a display board with a title: God has made everything beautiful in its time (Ecclesiastes 3:11), some quiet music**

Take some art materials and create the most beautiful picture or design you possibly can in the space you have. (Some people have a special 'thing' that they are particularly good at drawing, such as trees, owls, dinosaurs or cars.) You should aim to make it your very best. As you create it, keep thinking about the way that, when God made you, he made you the best he possibly could: he didn't take any short cuts, and he didn't look for

a half-price way of making any part of you: he made you as wonderfully as he could.

Display the things of beauty on the board.

### Talk about

Say something about a friend or family member that you think is beautiful. Are you brave enough to tell that person what you think is beautiful about them, maybe when you get home?

## 5. Shining inside

**You will need: value drinking glasses (currently available from Wilko for 25p each), mud or clay, glitter, glue, narrow masking tape, nightlight, matches**

Use the masking tape to 'write' your name on the outside of the glass, all the way round.

On one (outer) side of the glass, smear on mud or clay and let it dry. Cover the other (outer) side with glue and roll it in glitter. When the glue and mud dry, peel off the masking tape so your name is clear. Light a nightlight inside.

(An alternative version of this idea is to write a name on a large sheet of paper, then tape masking tape over it. Do this for several names, then have fun flicking paint or mud over the top, letting it dry, then peeling back the tape.)

### Talk about

In life, sometimes people say hurtful things about us, which can feel like having mud thrown at us, and sometimes people say lovely thing about us, which is more like the glitter side. But as followers of Jesus we know that it's what's inside that matters: that clear flame burning bright. What does that flame represent to you?

At bedtime tonight, light the candle and tell your child what you love about them.





impatient, gloomy, vengeful, cruel, fearful, proud, disobedient, arrogant, selfish, unfair, argumentative, cowardly, greedy, rude, thoughtless, hard-hearted

### Talk about

Discuss the words and check everyone knows what the words mean. Who do you know who is like that? Is Jesus like this? Which ones apply to the people in your team? Why aren't there any words like 'pretty' or 'handsome' in these lists?

## 8. Moulding

**You will need: playdough or clay, tools (especially moulds)**

Have fun pressing playdough into the moulds and seeing what shapes come out. If you don't have any moulds, you can just have fun making different shapes out of the playdough.

### Talk about

Point out the way our lives are moulded by people around us, the books we read, the programmes we watch, the adverts we see... and the way we can mould other people either into a good shape or into a shape that isn't helpful by the things we say to them and the way we treat them. In Jeremiah 18:6, God says: "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the Lord. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel." And Paul writes: 'Don't be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind' (Romans 12:2). Are we happy to let God mould us or are we happy for people on TV to shape us? Can we spot times when we're being moulded over the next week when we watch a film or read a book?

## 9. Patterns

**You will need: lots of big paper, marker pens**

On one side of the paper, start off some patterns (for example, zigzags, spirals, dots, stripes) and invite people to carry on the pattern across the paper. Once they've got the hang of it, read them Romans 12:2: 'Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.' In other words, don't just mindlessly take on the patterns that people tell you, but think about them for yourself and decide how you think things ought to work out. Can they carry on the pattern but in a new and different and exciting way, not conforming but being transformed? Give them some examples. Enjoy the unpredictable excitement of the way people change the patterns.

## 6. Junk people

**You will need: newspapers, sticky tape, other junk**

Make a life-sized (or even larger!) person out of the junk.

### Talk about

Point out the way you stick the person together with sticky tape, and the phrase from Psalm 139: 'You knit me together in my mother's womb.' Do you see yourself as a miracle, made by God personally? How do you see other people?

## 7. Inside-out game

**You will need: a bucket, ping pong balls or foam balls with words written on as below, a six-hole egg box per team (or, if you can only afford a few balls, make it a three-hole egg box)**

A team relay game. Two or more teams of six or under line up ready for the relay. On the whistle, the first person in the team sprints up, takes a ball from the bucket (held at head height by the leader) and runs back to their team. The team read the word on the ball: if it's a positive one, keep it and the next person runs up to get another. If it's negative, the second person takes it back up to the leader's bin and tosses it back in, then chooses another ball. The first team to fill their eggbox with Christian character balls is the winner.

On the positive balls: kind, friendly, gentle, loving, faithful, trustworthy, patient, self-controlled, truthful, peaceful, joyful, forgiving, humble, fair, honest, dependable, content, generous, pure, holy, confident, attentive, wise, compassionate, enthusiastic, thoughtful, obedient, grateful, brave

On the negative balls: lazy, mean, unfriendly, vicious, nasty, back-biting, untruthful, unkind, aggressive,

### Talk about

Discuss the patterns we're sometimes expected to conform to, especially what to wear and look like: how happy are you to break away from the unhelpful things people expect of you? How can you help people around you be the people they're meant to be instead of what the people on TV say we should be like? How can you help your children?

## 10. Paint a stone

**You will need: smooth stones with some ready-painted in a single background colour, acrylic paints and brushes, Sharpies, print-offs from the web**

Have some examples of pictures of painted stones from the web to inspire adults and boys especially. Invite everyone to write 'God has made you amazing' in Sharpie on the stone and then to decorate it. They could either keep the stone to remind themselves of this truth or give it to someone else to remind them.

### Talk about

What it is that makes people amazing? Focus on their character and what they can do and challenge any mentions of 'good looks' by asking if it really matters what people look like?

Invite people to put the stone somewhere visible at home, and every now and then to tell each other what is amazing about the people in their family.

### Extra idea

Decorate a mirror frame with pictures of what you're good at, so that when you look in the mirror, you're reminded that you are far more than what you look like.



## Celebration

You might find this very simple reflective story from Ephesians 1 appropriate, which affirms our identity as adopted and loved children of God: [www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk/being-a-child-of-god-ephesians-1](http://www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk/being-a-child-of-god-ephesians-1)

Or try retelling the story of God choosing David, from 1 Samuel 16.

Remember Samuel, the little boy in the temple who listened to God? He grew up and kept on listening to God and so God kept speaking to him. And God wanted the country to have a new king.

'Go to Bethlehem,' God said to Samuel, 'and choose the new king I will point out to you.'

So Samuel went off to Bethlehem where Jesse and his family of fine young men lived.

Jesse, the father, called out, 'Bring out Eliab!' (Have 'servants' calling 'Bring out Eliab! Bring out Eliab!' in turn) and Eliab arrived in front of Samuel.

He was tall! He was good-looking! He was hunky!

'This must be him!' thought Samuel.

But God said, 'Don't think about what he looks like or how tall he is. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'

So Jesse called for his next son, Abinadab. 'Bring out Abinadab!' 'Bring out Abinadab!' and so on.

# Real me



And Abinadab arrived in front of Samuel.

He was tall! He was good-looking! He was hunky!

'This must be him!' thought Samuel.

But God said, 'Don't think about what he looks like or how tall he is. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'

So Jesse called for his next son, Shammah. 'Bring out Shammah!' (and so on) and Shammah arrived in front of Samuel.

He was tall! He was good-looking! He was hunky!

'This must be him!' thought Samuel.

But God said, 'Don't think about what he looks like or how tall he is. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'

And so it went on. For seven more sons! But every time, God said to Samuel, 'Don't think about what he looks like or how tall he is. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'

In the end, Samuel said, 'Jesse, is that the lot? Haven't you got any more sons?'

Jesse said, 'Well, there's young David, but he's out looking after the sheep.... Bring out David!' (and so on).

And when Samuel saw David, God said, 'Yes! That's the new king!' and David turned out to be the best king the country had, until hundreds of years later a new king arrived, riding on a donkey and not looking like a king at all.

God knows what each person is really like behind the way they look. He doesn't even notice the way we look. He loves each person because he is love and chooses only to love each person he has made. So, whether we are a small wrinkly baby or an older wrinkly great-great-granny, whatever we see when we look in the mirror, God knows us and loves us just as we are.

## Prayer

God, help us to value ourselves and each other for what we are like on the inside, not on the outside.

## Song suggestions

'You are a star' – Fischy Music

'I'm the only I' – Fischy Music



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|---|---|
| God can make ill people better                | I can make things                                   |
| God can make whole new worlds                 | I can be strong                                     |
| God can give my life meaning                  | I can tell people how much God loves them           |
| God can never let me go                       | I can look after people who are ill                 |
| God can move mountains                        | I can look after lonely people                      |
| God can make seas split down the middle       | I can notice sad people                             |
| God can walk on water                         | I can give people some of my time                   |
| God can change people's heart                 | I can be filled with power from God                 |
| God can bring peace                           | I can love God with all my heart                    |
| God can make people see                       | I can love my neighbour as myself                   |
| God can make people hear                      | I can forgive people who hurt me                    |
| God can turn water into wine                  | I can love my enemies                               |
| God can do anything                           | I can do good to people around me                   |
| God can turn tears into laughter              | I can say kind things about people                  |
| God can love anybody                          | I can build people up instead of breaking them down |
| God can forgive anybody                       | I can serve God in my whole life                    |
| God can speak to young people and older ones  | I can keep my body healthy                          |
| God can feel your pain                        | I can be beautiful on the inside                    |
| God can lead me by still waters               | I can look for good things in the people around me  |
| God can give me living water                  | I can be patient with other people                  |
| God can provide everything I need             | I can be gentle with other people                   |
| God can answer my prayers                     | I can fill my time with helpful things              |
| God can give me more than you expect          | I can be happy with what I have                     |
| God can guide me the way you should go        | I can be happy that other people are good at things |
| God can build his kingdom on earth through me | I can put God first                                 |