



Count on it

Living in the certainty of God's Word



YOUTH PROGRAMME

Use this flexible programme with optional activities to create your own group session lasting 35–50mins.

BACKGROUND FOR LEADERS

Passage

Isaiah 55:1–11

People

God's people, the Jews, have been conquered by the superpower of Babylon (in 587 BC) and carried off to work there as cheap labour. They have little status and live on the edges of society. At first, they long for their homeland, but after 70 years of exile, their children and grandchildren have almost forgotten it and their God.

Place

The writer is addressing those people who remain in Babylon (now Iraq) 70 years after they were defeated.

Purpose

The writer speaks to a people tempted to give up on the one true God and follow the beliefs of the Babylonians. He brings a message of hope and promise, reminding them that God and his Word can be counted on forever.

Key verse

'That's how it is with my words. They don't return to me without doing everything I send them to do.' (Isaiah 55.11, CEV)

Learning outcome

We can count on the Bible as God's message to us. We can trust that what God says is the truth.

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OPENING ACTIVITY

Pick one or two activities from this section.

Don't Change the Whisper

Get the young people to sit in a circle (this can be done in small groups or as one large group). Get one of the leaders to think of a sentence and whisper it to the person sitting beside them. (Start with a leader so that the young people can hear an example of what could be said). Pass this sentence the whole way around the circle, whispering from one person to the next. When it reaches the last person they can shout it out. The aim is to see if the sentence can get the whole way around the circle without changing. Let some of the young people make up the sentences to be whispered, however get them to whisper it to a leader first so that they can check if it is suitable!

POINT: Sometimes the words get changed in this game because it is hard to hear them. God's Word never changes, we can trust that what we hear or read is true.

Racing whispers

This is a more active form of 'Don't Change the Whisper', done in a relay race style. Split the young people up into teams of 8-10 (depending on your numbers), and get them to line up at the starting line. It is preferable to do this game in a large hall or outside, but make use of the space you have. Have instructions written down on pieces of paper – do multiple copies so that each team can see them. Different examples are, *run to the end of the hall and sing a nursery rhyme; go and stand beside the tallest person in the room; walk around the hall pretending to be a chicken*. Show an instruction to the people standing at the back of the lines. When you shout GO the teams have to whisper the instruction from person to person, in the style of 'Don't change the Whisper', until it reaches the person at the front. This person then has to carry out the instruction. First team to complete it gets a point.

POINT: Sometimes the words get changed in this game because it is hard to hear them. God's Word never changes, we can trust that what we hear or read is true.

Advertisements

Have a variety of different magazines for the young people, and direct them to look at the advertisements; alternatively have the advertisements already cut out of the magazines. Discuss what the adverts are trying to say, and determine whether the words on them are opinions or truth. Are the adverts convincing? Are the words attractive? Talk about how the words are very important. Ask the young people whether they've ever been tempted to buy something from seeing it advertised. Did the product match up to the advert?

POINT: the words on advertisements are very important, but we can't always be 100% sure whether they are telling the truth. The words we read in the Bible are so much more important and we always know that they are true as they are God's Words.



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BIBLE STUDY

Take time as a large group or in separate small groups to look at the Bible passage and discuss it. Here are some points to think and talk about.

- Ask the young people to think about a time when they felt they didn't fit in or felt like an outsider (e.g. when you moved house or school).
- Explain that the people reading this weren't living in a lovely home. They were in a foreign land where they had been carted off and forced to work in labour camps. They were outsiders and far away from Jerusalem and Israel, the place their parents or grandparents remembered as home. They had lost their sense of who they were and didn't know how to handle this. The people of God felt far from home and far from God.
- As Isaiah the prophet speaks these words of God, how does he encourage them?
- What does it tell the people about God?
- What do you think God want his words to do (e.g. to show what he is like and help us trust him, to bring life and growth, to tell us the plans he has for us, to change the way we think and live, to bring about good things in our world)?

Look at the key verse and remind the young people that the Bible is God's Word and that we can trust everything that it says. God's Word tells us many things and we can trust that everything in the Bible has been or will be accomplished. God's Word speaks into our lives in lots of different situations; just as it encouraged the Jews, it can encourage us. We need to remember to read the Bible in all situations and to trust that God speaks to us through his words.

RESPONSE/PRAAYER TIME

Take this time to get the young people to think about their own lives. How can they relate to the Jews? How can they apply God's Word to their lives? What is happening in their lives at the minute and what part of the Bible is God directing them to?

For the response time the young people could look at pictures of plants and trees, go for a walk outside, or sow their own plants (cress is a good one for this as it grows quite quickly, and can then be used in future meetings).

Remind the group that the image of the rain and snow falling and crops growing in v10 reminds us that God's words can be counted on and speak powerfully into all the situations we go through.

Why? Because they are the words of the living God (i.e. not the promises of advertisers or people you can't always rely on, or ideas that have their day and then are only fit for history). Get the group to pray that God will allow them to grow as he waters them with his Word.

Programme adapted from material designed by Ems and Jon Hancock.

