



Count on it

Living in the certainty of God's Word



OLDER YOUTH PROGRAMME

These resources provide a main meeting that can be used on a large or small scale and adapted to fit your group. The aim is to show how God's Word to us through the Scriptures can be trusted in every season of life.

COUNT ON IT – Isaiah 55.1–11

Background preparation: read Isaiah 55.1–11. Look through *Bible Foundations* document for in-depth background.

Prepare games and agony print outs for each group or project on screen.

Resources you may need:

- Paper and pens for group and individual work
- DVD player and TV or laptop
- *Slumdog Millionaire* film*
- Exclusive Bible Sunday *Trust* film

* This film from Pathé Studios is covered by the Church Video Licence available from CCLI (http://www.ccli.co.uk/licences/churches_showing-films.cfm). This means that clips can be shown within the licence conditions on church premises. Without this licence, the film can only be shown in a private home.

Start by reading out Isaiah 55.1 and explain that God is speaking through his prophet Isaiah to his people, the Israelites.

Explain that God starts with this strange question about being hungry and thirsty. Ask: What does it mean to be hungry and thirsty? Can you remember being so hungry or thirsty that you desperately needed a drink or some food? Do you remember being so desperate for something that you had to have it? How far would you have gone?

Link to the film clip which shows someone who would go to any lengths to reach his goal.

1. Film CLIP 1: *Slumdog Millionaire*

Watch the clip that starts at approximately 11.01 and ends at 12.47. It starts just after they lose the client at the toilet. It ends just after Jamal celebrates his autograph victory.

In this clip Jamal's hero, Amitabh Bachchan, has come to the slum to meet the people. Jamal hears the chopper whilst being 'otherwise engaged' and then trapped by his brother. Jamal is so focused on getting Amitabh's autograph that there is only one other way out. Jamal is hungry enough for this moment to take the other way.

OPTIONAL OPENING PRAYER TIME

Following from this, explain that as you look at the Scriptures together, you are going to look at what it means to trust in God, to trust his Word to us and to live for that. God starts by asking a question of all of us: are you thirsty, are you hungry, are you really desperate to hear my words and to trust in something that will never fail? Are you hungry for God or filling life with things that only satisfy for a short time and lead to you being hungry and thirsty again?

Lead a time of prayer which could include confession. Confess any lack of faith and trust in God and ask that right now the same spirit of hunger seen in Jamal would begin in each one of us. Not a hunger for an autograph/a girlfriend/job/pay bracket/car or a star's life, but for things that will not fail and still leave us unsatisfied. Ask that God will teach you what it means to be hungry and to have that hunger met in him and his words alone.

You could lead this up front or in small groups where the young people mull over what they are really hungry for, and then ask God to show them today that he is bigger than all of that stuff.

2. COUNT ON IT – TRUST GAMES

In small groups, invite the young people to come up with some of the things we put our trust in, e.g. boyfriends or girlfriends, parents, electricity, the sun, Tesco's. Get them to think about the things they rely on and automatically assume or hope will stay trustworthy.

Lead in to a light-hearted activity to test how much do you they trust you? Ask them and then say, 'Let's see how much'.

There are a number of game ideas below that can happen on a small or large scale. You have probably experienced a number of others that you could use if you prefer them. The idea is to see how far the young people are ready to trust someone and act on their words.

Game 1 – The plunge

Aim: To see how much an individual will trust you and persevere knowing, whatever they go through, it will be worth it in the end.

Prepare three large, see-through containers and place something valuable in the last one. Depending on your budget, this could be a pound coin, an iPod shuffle (very carefully sealed in an airtight container or similar), or anything in-between! Then fill each of the three with something thick you can't see through. Dark jelly

could be one, cornflour another, custard another, etc. Place something of little value (a sprouting potato? a piece of chewing gum?) in the first two, and leave the precious item in the last box, ensuring it is not visible from outside.

Invite one volunteer to search each tub by hand. After the first one or two, will they trust you enough to find the third tub has something worth their sticky trouble?

Game 2 – Dog food

Aim: To again see if they trust your words that this will be a great tasting treat.

In advance, buy some dog food and open it from the bottom of the can. Clean out the dog food and thoroughly wash (and disinfect) the inside of the can. A good way to do this is to carefully remove the label from the tin, put the can through the dishwasher and then carefully re-attach the label to the outside.

Then make a concoction that looks like dog food – my recommendation is blancmange or jelly and finely chopped Mars bars, but use whatever you think looks more the part. Fill the dog food tin with the mixture – pack it all the way in, replace the tin base and leave overnight to set.

Then produce the tin at the meeting and ask if anyone's ever eaten dog food – I hope the answer will be no but you can never tell! Open the top of the can in front of them and show them the contents. Then ask: would anyone eat some now in front of everyone? Depending on their response, ask, well what if I eat some first? Take a huge mouthful of the jelly-type mess and tell them how delicious it is. It's so good you can already feel a healthy shininess in your hair! See if any of the group will taste it – there's usually someone that will. Try not to let them smell it but just take a mouthful.

Game 3 – Walk this way

Aim: To see how much they can trust the words of their best friends.

Prepare an assault course full of various fun things, e.g. jelly, baked beans, angel delight, feathers, cornflakes, stickle bricks, books, etc! Let the group see all the different things that are around the room – I would suggest some that are messy for people to step in, etc. Select your competitors: a pair of girls and a pair of boys, ensuring the pairs are close friends. Blindfold one of each of the pairs and explain that their partner will have to lead them through the course by shouting instructions to them. How far can they rely on their friend?

Game 4 – Trust lean

Aim: To see how well they trust each other in a small group.

This is a very simple game that does need to be monitored carefully. A group of around eight form a circle with one person in the middle. That person does a trust lean into one of the sides of the circle and the members of the circle pass them around as they keep leaning – trusting that no-one will let them fall. For health and safety, it is important to have a leader on every team to oversee this. It is also vital to start the circle *tightly* before you move apart slightly and increase the distance between the leaner and the circle.

3. COUNT ON IT – DEAR FRANNIE

In this exercise, you will need to print out a copy for each group of the four 'agony aunt' situations below. You could project this if you have the facilities. Group members pretend to be Frannie and say what advice they would give and why they would answer in this way. There may be some pastoral situations in the group that make one or more of these unwise to use for you. If so, please substitute your own.

Dear Frannie . . . My best friend and I have been friends for years but she has just made friends with a new group of people who think I'm sad. She will hardly talk to me anymore and I just feel so alone and let down. I have other friends but no-one as close as her. Please help, Gemma.

Dear Frannie . . . My dog seems to love my brother more than me and I don't know why. I'm the one who takes him for walks all the time and gives him baths. It's so not fair. Please help, Craig.

Dear Frannie . . . I've been going out with my boyfriend for 6 months and I thought we were really serious. I found out that he was at a party at the weekend and got together with someone else from my school. He says he's sorry and that he had a bit too much to drink. He says he loves me and won't do it again but I don't know if I can trust him. Every time he gets a text message I'm scared it's from another girl. I don't know what to do. Please help, Carly.

Dear Frannie . . . My dad has just left us. He and mum have been arguing loads recently and he just up and left today. I don't get it; what about my sister and me? Don't we matter? I don't know what to think or how to react. Please help, Zac.

Get the group to feed back some of their advice.

All these stories are to do with trust in some way. Trust is a big issue that affects all of us and it's really hard to trust if you think someone has let you down. It's not only hard to trust them again but also to trust anyone else like that. When we trust it leaves us very open to be hurt if it goes wrong. Trust has the power to build us strong or take us apart piece by piece. It hugely affects who we are.

4. COUNT ON IT – TALK: ISAIAH 55.1–11

You can either deliver the talk yourself or use the Bible study in the *Trust* film and the discussion questions in the next section.

Reading – Get one of the group to read Isaiah 55.1–5

Background: In this passage, God is calling his people – the Israelites – to come to him alone for fulfilment, for food and drink, and to stop striving after things that don't fill us up and satisfy. Why is God making this case?

We need to understand how the people who first heard these words understood them in order to figure out what they mean to us.

This prophecy from Isaiah spoke to the people approximately 50 years after the Babylonian empire had conquered Judah and Jerusalem, deported the people to Babylon, and had badly damaged the temple where the Israelites worshipped God. These words speak to the Israelites now living in exile in Babylon. The stories of the 'Holy God of Israel' being with Israel and acting in their lives were something that only the older generations would remember.

Although they had heard stories of the great God of Israel who led his people out of Egypt and gave them a golden age of peace and prosperity under King David and King Solomon, that seemed like ancient history. The majority of people would have felt let down and betrayed. They couldn't miss the fact that now they were a long way from home, in a nation that seemed simply more powerful than them or their God. They thought God had let them down and this was the way it would be from now on.

Yes, some of the Israelites would have remained faithful and believed that God knew what he was doing and that this was all part of God drawing his people back to him. But they would be few and, as time passed, that commitment would be continually challenged.

So God says, 'I remember the promise I gave to David, and I promise you that same promise will be fulfilled.' But why should they trust him?

They didn't realise, at this point, the bigger picture where God was preparing the Persians to conquer the Babylonians and in turn set his people free. All they could see was Babylon. All they could see was where they were now and how far away and how weak their God seemed.

So how is your trust in God? Do you feel that he has let you down? That he's not big enough to stand in this modern age? Do you feel that you are more like a character from *Skins* than a disciple of Jesus? Until we work out if we can truly trust God, we can't walk in the fullness of what it means to follow him.

God knows the bigger picture. God sees beyond today and tomorrow, beyond exams, beyond wars, beyond time. God sees it all. He is bigger than us – he is bigger than our fears and our trust in his perfect love for us can drive out our fear.

Testimony: This could be an opportunity to share a story of your own where God seemed remote or to have let you down, but after time you saw how he was working through the situation to bring you out the other side.

Reading – Get one of the group to read Isaiah 55.10–11

These verses are the focus of this piece of prophecy.

God says that every word he says is important and will do everything he wants it to. Why does God focus on this? What if in a book as huge as the Bible a few

things didn't come true – a few promises weren't fulfilled – would it really matter? Surely we could cut him some slack?

God is saying EVERY single word he speaks in Scripture fulfils all he sent it to do. God is saying, 'You can trust me – you can back anything that has my name on it because my reputation is perfect!'

People can often let you down and promise to do things but never deliver. Here, God is saying that he is different. EVERY word he speaks will be fulfilled – if it wasn't, his name and reputation would be damaged. Explain that God cares about his reputation and wants people to know they can trust him. That's why the Bible can be trusted to give us an accurate understanding of what God is like, what he thinks of us, what he is doing in his world, and is essential for us to follow him. So we can trust his promises – that through Jesus we are forgiven, we are a new creation, and we can run the Christian race with confidence.

To understand God we must hear him speak in the Scriptures. This way we will see our place in the story of a God constantly building ways for us to live in friendship with him and the final of these bridges is Jesus. To stop being hungry and thirsty and unfulfilled we need to eat up the words of God. We need to 'eat the book'!

And what makes it different to every other book? Every word is a dead cert. Every promise has been or will be fulfilled. Every word comes from a God who can be trusted because his reputation is perfect – the reputation of his people may not be – but his is.

Testimony: You could share a brief testimony about how you have got into the Bible and have found God's words trustworthy in your life.

Close with an exhortation: This is our God, this is our story, and this Bible is our bread. It's time to get up and trust that God is in control and his promises will be fulfilled – every single one.

5. BIBLE STUDY: TRUST FILM

Watch the short film *Trust: Isaiah 55* and then use the questions in this section to start discussions in your group. *Either* watch the video in one go, or in three sections and ask questions as you go if this would work better for your group. The three recommended sections are:

0-3.35 Trust and promises; **3.36-6.06** The people who stopped trusting; **6.07-9.30** Starting again with the God who can be trusted.

Trust and promises

1. What do you trust in?
2. Have you ever had a situation where a close friend or maybe a parent said they don't know if they can trust you anymore? How did that feel? Was it a fair response?

3. 'The amount we feel we can trust God directly impacts the amount we begin to look like Jesus.' As a disciple of Jesus, do you think there are areas that you don't know if you can trust God with? Do you think that is holding you back from fully following Jesus?
4. What promises has God made to you? Either through the Bible or through other ways? Are there any that you feel he hasn't delivered on?

The people who stopped trusting

5. How would you have felt had you heard these words from Isaiah for the first time? Would you have been giving up on God or would you have been able to faithfully trust?
6. Have you ever been so let down by someone that you find it hard to trust other people in that kind of situation again? What might help you to get up after that situation and trust again?

Starting again with the God who can be trusted

7. Do you ever wish that God would do everything your way? Why do you think God says he sees the bigger picture and you need to trust him? What does that mean?
8. Verses 10–11 read: Rain and snow fall from the sky. But they don't return without watering the earth that produces seeds to plant and grain to eat. That's how it is with my words. They don't return to me without doing everything I send them to do.
The claim is: Every word God has spoken goes out like rain and creates life. It doesn't return until it has achieved its full purpose. Is this your view of God and the Bible?
9. What does it mean to have a good or bad reputation? Have you heard of the saying your word is only as good as your name? This is what is going on here – God is saying my words – all of them – are trustworthy as they are as good as his name, or his reputation.
10. What would it take for you to trust God more fully today?

6. RESPONSE

There are a number of ways you can use to respond to this message. You will know your group best and how to run this section. Below are a few ideas to use or adapt.

Songwriting – included with these resources is a specially written song, *My thoughts are not your thoughts*. There are three versions: a full recording, a backing track and one with only the verses. Use this as a basic template for your group to write a song about trusting God's word. They could write their own rap or lyrics for all or part of it, adding these to the backing tracks and/or verses. If the group is bursting with musical talent, they could write a complete song.

- The Psalms are a good model for honest songwriting – frequently moving from a 'Where are you God?' moment, then hinging on an 'I remember all

you've done for me' turning point – and finishing with an 'I will praise you and trust you because you are faithful' declaration. Psalm 73 is a good example and would fit well with the mood of Isaiah's hearers.

- Packet of seeds – Remind the group of verse 10. Give each group a packet of tiny seeds and let them take away one or a few seeds each. Invite them to nurture the seed at home and notice how it grows. Remind them: it will need to watering everyday and constant attention to grow and flourish. At the same time, challenge them to think about the seeds they are planting in their own lives. What promise of God do they want to trust in? As they care for their seedling each day, invite them to read that promise from God in the Scriptures on a daily basis and see what will grow in their lives. (This could feed into a future session on the fruit of the Spirit where they bring their plants back and think about other things that need to be planted to produce still more of the fruit God wants in their lives.)
- Source some Bible reading notes such as *Mettle* from CWR. These could be a great way for the young people to begin to get God's words into their lifecycle daily and to see God's bigger picture and trust in that.

Close in prayer or worship.

These materials are written by Jamie Hill. Jamie is Bible Society's youth development officer, a speaker, songwriter and worship leader. Song *My thoughts are not your thoughts* written exclusively for Bible Sunday. Words and music by Ems Hancock and Jamie Hill. Recorded and arranged by Jamie Hill. Vocals by Lucy Johnson.