

FREE to GO

The Bible – God's love liberating lives

This varied programme includes Bible storytelling, games, prayers, craft activities, talk and think, and a story parable. You won't have time to use them all. We recommend you use or adapt the first activity, 'Act out the story', which covers the biblical material. Apart from this, feel free to pick and mix the other ingredients that will work best for your group and the time available.

Act out the story [15 mins]

This would work as three scenes, combining improvised action with a script.

Storyteller Jesus was travelling in Galilee, telling stories and healing people. One day he decided to go back to his home town of Nazareth ...

1. Back in town – a short improvised scene

Jesus and friends walking through his old home town. Who might he meet? How do you feel about your home after you've been away for a while? How do you think Jesus might have felt?

Storyteller It was the Sabbath, so Jesus and his friends went to the meeting place to read the Scriptures ...

2. The meeting place

A group sits in a circle. One of them, 'A', is holding a large open book. Jesus and a few friends enter. 'A' passes the book to Jesus.

Jesus 'The Lord's Spirit has come to me, because he has chosen me to tell the good news to the poor.

The Lord has sent me to announce freedom for prisoners, to give sight to the blind, to free everyone who suffers, and to say, "This is the year the Lord has chosen."

(Jesus shuts the book and hands it back. Everyone looks at him.)

'Those things you heard me read – that prophecy from Isaiah – well, today it has come true.'

A What does he mean?

B Does he think he's God's chosen one?

3. No way!

Improvise a scene where the people of Nazareth talk amongst themselves about what Jesus has said. They don't believe he's the promised one. Why not? They get offended – why? You could use a 'grab-a-line' bag* here.

Storyteller So Jesus left Nazareth.

Jesus (Sighing) It's sad, but it's true, no prophets are liked by the people of their own hometown.

Storyteller Those people in Nazareth just didn't get it. They thought God's chosen one would start a revolution and send the Romans back to Rome. But Jesus came to set the whole world free – not from Romans – but from all the things that make people prisoners. If we live our lives the Jesus way and care for other people, we will help

to make the world a fairer place. Everyone needs to know that God loves them and wants them to be free. Everyone needs the freedom stories of the Bible.

*Make a grab-a-line box. Any open cardboard box will do for this, but a brightly coloured one would be good. Print out phrases, e.g.

- Who does he think he is?
- He's only the carpenter's son
- I know his brothers
- He's James's brother, isn't he?
- He's no better than us
- Listen to him – he thinks he's God's gift
- He's just like us – look, his sisters are over there
- He's got a nerve
- I know his brothers – they don't pretend to be special

Put the printouts in the box.

Before working out the scene the players take lines from the bag and then use them in the action.

Split into two groups: Jesus and friends, and Nazareth people. Then you can rehearse scene 1 and scene 3 at the same time before coming together to rehearse scene 2.

Discuss [5-10 mins]

How 'free' can a person be if they spend hours every day carrying water from a well that is miles from their home? Can you think of other unfair things that stop people being free? Jesus helped strangers and outsiders all the time. He taught us that there isn't anyone who is 'nothing to do with us'. How can we help set people free?

Pray [10-15 mins depending on how much art work you do]

Prepare a 'prayer picture' – a collage of images of freedom, e.g. a leaping dolphin, a flying bird, a running child, skateboarding teenager, dancing, skating, kites, etc. Use magazine photos, or ask the group to draw their own images. Then stick them all on one sheet. Look at the picture together and ask the group to think of what might stop these free things from happening, e.g. dancer might be stopped by being ill/injured; skater might be stopped by being too poor to go to the rink; birds, etc. stopped by climate change/pollution.

Write/draw symbols for each of these bars to freedom on separate sheets of paper. (You need large sheets of sugar paper the same size as the collage, but they should be dull colours like grey and brown). Place the prayer picture on the floor and then cover it with the stack of grey/brown papers. Then pray the prayer:

Loving Lord, you came to set us free.
Help us now to do your work in our world.
Help people who are ...

(Use words from the grey/brown sheets, then lift the ones relating to people off the collage and lay them to one side.)

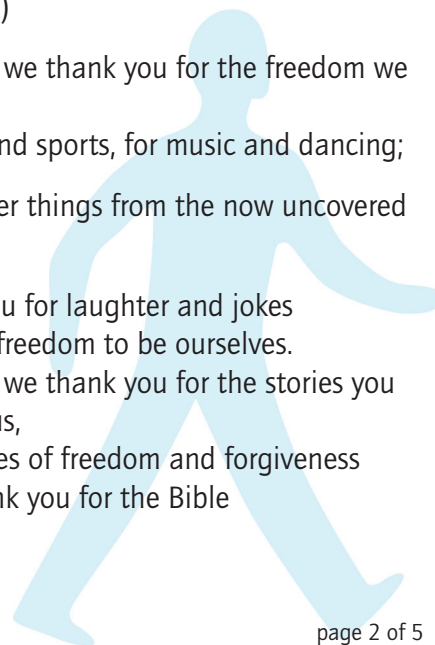
Loving Lord, you have filled our world with good things,
Help us to take care of all your creation.

(Lift off sheets relating to climate change/animals, etc.)

Loving Lord, we thank you for the freedom we enjoy;
For games and sports, for music and dancing;

(Include other things from the now uncovered collage.)

We thank you for laughter and jokes
And for the freedom to be ourselves.
Loving Lord, we thank you for the stories you have given us,
For the stories of freedom and forgiveness
And we thank you for the Bible



Which teaches us your way of love and freedom.

Amen.

Freedom stories [10-15mins]

There are lots of freedom stories in the Bible. Jesus set people free from their illness and God used Moses to free the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. St Paul was set free from prison by angels.

Cut out large key shapes from card. On the keys write the names of freedom stories/people. E.g. Moses led God's people to freedom; Jesus freed Bartimaeus from blindness; Jesus freed Lazarus from death; God freed Daniel from the lion's den; Angels freed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fiery furnace; Jesus freed Zacchaeus from his greed; God freed Joseph from being a slave and he became a governor; Jesus freed Jairus' daughter from death; Jesus freed people from leprosy; Jesus freed people from being paralysed; God set St Paul free from prison.

Play 'pick a key' [5-10 mins]

Ask the children to choose a key and imagine being a prisoner. Then ask what it was like in their 'prison'. How did they feel? What was their life like? Then go on to explore how it felt to be released. If you've used the ten lepers - some were obviously so thrilled to be free that they forgot to say thank you!

Freedom book [15 mins]

The Bible is full of freedom stories, so make a book-box (like the sort of false books you might see in a detective story where something can be hidden inside) that you can fill with freedom keys. Take an empty cereal box and tape up the open end. With the box flat on the table, carefully cut along the two short edges and one long edge (on the surface plane) to make an opening lid. The two narrow edges of the box and the long edge where you have cut will be the 'pages' of the book. Use a glue stick and fix a narrow strip of white paper over these three edges. Use a felt tip to draw

stripes representing pages. Now take a piece of sugar paper cut to the size of the front, back and spine. Decorate it. Write 'Freedom Stories'/'Freedom Book'/'Bible' on it. Glue it in place. Put the keys in the box/arrange a display with the keys spilling from the box. If you prefer, you could make a collage/picture of a book and have the keys coming out of the book and 'escaping' into the rest of the picture.

Free to move [10 mins]

Try a three-legged race. See how much trickier it is to move when you're restricted by another person's movement.

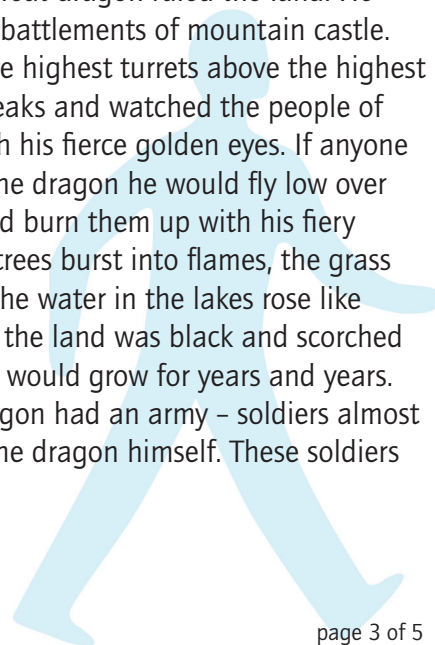
Also try part B of 'Free to Move' described in the Age 4-6 section.

Talk about the experience. Make connections with Bible stories where people's lives were made difficult by their physical problems. The Jesus stories in the Bible make it clear that Jesus saw the person, not the illness that trapped them. Today people are still trapped by illness, but if we treat them as *people* rather than as 'disabled' we might be part of setting them free from their illness.

Free! [10-15mins]

This is a story of dragons and castles. A story of a cruel dragon and the prisoners he kept in his dungeon. This is a story of freedom and escape; a story of friendship and loyalty and heroes.

Once there was a land where everyone lived in terror. A great dragon ruled the land. He lived on the battlements of mountain castle. He sat on the highest turrets above the highest mountain peaks and watched the people of the land with his fierce golden eyes. If anyone displeased the dragon he would fly low over the fields and burn them up with his fiery breath. The trees burst into flames, the grass sizzled and the water in the lakes rose like steam. Then the land was black and scorched and nothing would grow for years and years. And this dragon had an army - soldiers almost as cruel as the dragon himself. These soldiers



had turned against their own people to work for him.

Everyone was afraid of the dragon. When he was hungry, he flew over the villages and pointed a scaly claw at that house or this, and then the army came and took the poor people away and threw them into the dungeons.

'Welcome to the dragon's larder!' they laughed. And then the poor people knew that they would be in prison until it was time for that fearsome dragon to eat them! Oh, how they trembled in terror. Oh, how they shook with dread. Oh, how they begged to be set free, but the soldiers just laughed.

'Do you think we're stupid? Do you think we're fools? If we let you go, the dragon will eat us! So stop your crying and your moaning and your wailing. You're nothing but a dragon's dinner – get used to it!'

Now, one day the captain of the guard came through the dungeons and peered through the bars at all the people inside. He stared at a girl in the corner.

'You,' he said. 'You in the corner. Come here.'

Slowly the girl came towards him. Suddenly the dungeon door was opened and soldiers grabbed the girl and dragged her out. The other prisoners made a rush for the door, but 'CLANG!' it was slammed shut before they had a chance to escape. The captain of the guard went through all the cells in the same way. Soon he had grabbed seven prisoners.

'Are we the dragon's dinner?' one of them asked.

The captain laughed. 'No. Look at you. You're too thin. There's no meat on you at all. If we feed you to the dragon he'll be furious. He'll rant and rave and scream at us. He'll want to know why we've given him dry skin and bones instead of meaty muscles. So you seven are the lucky ones. You are free to go.'

Well, they could hardly believe their luck. The soldiers opened the heavy iron door that led to

the world outside and the prisoners ran through it as quickly as they could. All but one of them.

The thin girl stood and stared at the soldiers. Then she sighed and sat down on the stone floor.

'What's the matter with you?' the captain shouted. 'Come on, get up. Get out!'

But the girl didn't move. She took a fat book from her pocket and began to read.

'Are you mad?' yelled the captain. 'Are you crazy? What are you doing?'

'I'm staying with my friends,' she said.

'But you're FREE,' said the captain. 'So shut your book and stand up and RUN, before I close the door.'

'If the only thing I can do is to run, then I'm not free,' the girl said. 'Being free is about being able to choose. And I choose to stay.'

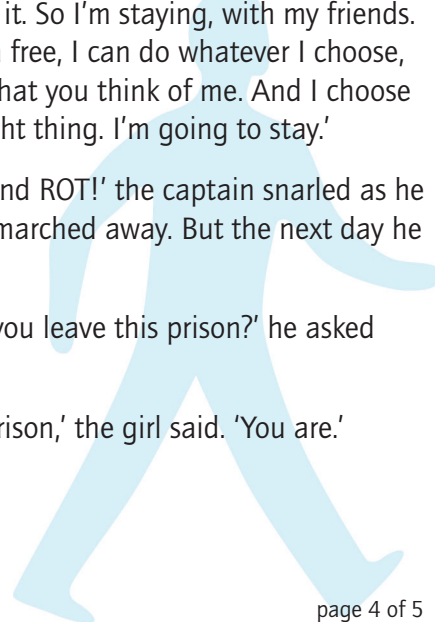
The soldiers stared and stared. They didn't understand. Then the girl held up her book.

'This is my Bible,' she said. 'It's full of stories and messages from God. This is what I've learned from reading it: God loves us all and wants us to look after each other. We are free to choose to do whatever we want, but the choices that make us happy are the choices that make God happy. And I think God wants all people to stand together against bad stuff. That dragon is bad stuff. And the more we run away, the more scared we are, the better that dragon likes it. So I'm staying, with my friends. If I really am free, I can do whatever I choose, no matter what you think of me. And I choose to do the right thing. I'm going to stay.'

'Stay then, and ROT!' the captain snarled as he turned and marched away. But the next day he came back.

'Why won't you leave this prison?' he asked again.

'I'm not in prison,' the girl said. 'You are.'



'Why, that's the stupidest thing I ever heard,' the captain said. 'I'm the one with the key to this dungeon. I can come and go as I please.'

'But you can't do as you please,' said the girl. 'You can only do what the dragon wants you to do. I'm the one who's FREE. And this,' she said, holding up her Bible, 'is my freedom key. I read this and I understand that freedom isn't about just *one* person doing as they like, it's about people looking out for each other so that no one, no one, is a prisoner or a victim.'

And the captain saw that she was right. He *was* the dragon's prisoner. So he took the key to the dungeon and unlocked all the cells. And while the dragon slept, high on the castle battlements, the prisoners crept quietly down the mountainside and went back to their homes. And the captain dismissed the dragon's army, so that when the dragon awoke he was alone on his mountaintop.

Now this story is not over. For the dragon was still there, and the people were still afraid. But now everyone was fighting against the dragon, and the dragon had no army, so things were better. And people are clever and God is good, so eventually that dragon would be defeated. Eventually everyone would be truly free. THE END.

Talk about 'freedom'. Does freedom mean doing as you like, no matter how it affects other people? Does being free mean living without rules? The dragon ruled, even though it was obviously bad for people. What things in our lives trap us the way the dragon trapped the prisoners and the soldiers? Are there things that stop us from being free? Is there a difference between these things and 'rules'? What can we do to set others free as this girl did?

Escape together! [5-10 mins depending on size of teams]

You need two mats/hula hoops per team. (Teams of four to six work well. If you have a small group you can do it against the clock instead of against another team.)

Aim: to get the whole group across the room without stepping off the mats/out of the hoops. Pairs stand on mat 1/in hoop 1, then move mat 2 in front and step from 1 to 2. Continue until you have crossed the room. Then one person returns using the same method to collect another team member until all are across. No one is free until everyone is free!

Talk about how Jesus sets us free by giving us a new start when we make mistakes and this freedom is for everyone. Knowing that God loves us and cares for us makes us feel safe. God wants everyone to know he loves them – God doesn't leave anyone out. Jesus wants us to help set others free. How can we do that? Standing up for people who are bullied ... not leaving people out ... etc.

These activities are written by **Jan Dean**. Jan is a widely published children's poet, fiction writer, festival performer and frequent writer-in-schools.

