

Welcome to the Faith and a Future kids and youth resource!

Who's it for?

This resource contains three sessions aimed at children aged 7-11 and one-lesson plan and talk that can be delivered to youth (12-17). But you'll find you can adapt many of the activities to work with other ages.

How to use this resource

Pick and choose the activities from each session plan to suit your needs. We've also provided a take home sheet for you to photocopy and give to the children at the end of the session.

Aims

- Teach children about bible characters who faced persecution for their faith.
- Open children's eyes to injustice in the world, particularly of children missing out on a fair education because of their faith.
- Provide simple ways we can respond in prayer and action.

Who is facing persecution?

Three quarters of the world's population lives with severe restrictions on their religious freedom: in fact, it's one of the most widely violated human rights in the world. Notice that we didn't say 'Christians', either: though our resource focuses on Christian children, many children from other faiths suffer in the same way (for example, Ahmadi Muslim, Sikh and Hindu children in Pakistan and Jehovah's Witness children in Mexico). Our vision is of a world in which every child is free to learn, whatever their religion.

Hold a School Uniform Sunday!

It's great to teach young people about God's heart for justice and, by holding a School Uniform Sunday, you can also give them an easy way to speak out – and be part of leading a Sunday service.

The idea is simple: in the UK we can have both faith and a future (we can go to church and go to school, and we aren't punished in school because of our faith). So wear your school uniform to church one Sunday to raise awareness and lead your church in action. It can take any form you like but you might want to try one of the following:

- The children and young people share a story of one of the children from this resource or at faithandafuture.com/stories, then lead everyone in prayer
- Show the campaign film (it's two minutes long)
- Children ask the adults to sign the petition
- Invite a CSW speaker
- Share that you're taking part on your church's Twitter feed or Facebook page (remember not to post photos of children or young people unless you have the child/young person and parent/carer's express permission).

We know that children and young people are the church of today, as well as tomorrow, but sometimes it's hard to think of ways to involve them in our services. School Uniform Sunday is a great opportunity for them to take a lead!

Session 1

Country of focus: Pakistan

Theme: Standing up for what you believe

Objectives:

- Standing strong in your faith when it's easier to follow the majority
- Pray for Jacob and others like him

Game/warm up: Divide the children into two groups depending on their choice of something e.g. those who like watching football and those who don't, or those who like pizza and who don't. Play a game of True or False as teams. Each team shouts out the answer, but award all the points to one team, regardless of whether they're right. Ask the losing team:

- How did it make you feel to be treated unfairly?
- Would you give up that thing about yourself, and switch teams so you can be a winner?

Today we'll learn about someone who chose to stand strong in what they believe, even though it meant suffering and being treated badly by teachers and classmates.

Intro (with video): Show the film 'Through the eyes of a child'. (You can download the film from faithandafuture.com/sundayschool). Explain that these children are actors in the UK, but these things happen for real in Pakistan. Then read Jacob's story (below).

Intro (without video): Read Jacob's story (below).

Story: Jacob Bhatti

My name is Jacob Bhatti. I'm 17 years old and Christian.

When I was at school I was teased by the boys in my class: "You're not supposed to use the same glass as us, play with us, and sit beside us at the same desk – because you're kafir [an unbeliever]. I used my own glass and even my own soap.

The teachers pressured me to change my religion. They said I would be sent abroad to study, given financial support and government jobs, and would become part of a higher social class.

The constant bullying made me really troubled and worried and I wanted to give up on my studies. But then I thought 'No, I must speak out for my country and for myself.'

Ask:

- What do you want to be when you grow up? (Let some of the children share their answers.)
- In Pakistan some people look down on Christians and also on cleaners. Jacob was told that because he's a Christian he would only get a job as a cleaner. Being a cleaner is a really useful job, but how would you feel if someone told you that because you're a Christian you could only work as a cleaner? Would that make you sad, why would you feel sad? (Because he felt he had no choice this made him feel less worthy).

- How would you feel if the things that happened to Jacob happened to you? (Maybe some of the children have been bullied in the past or seen someone else bullied and they may want to share how that felt.)
- What if a teacher was bullying you? (Make sure you avoid the children confusing a teacher bullying a child with a teacher disciplining them.)
- How is that different from another child bullying you? (A teacher is there to protect them and give them the best chance of learning).

Bible story: Daniel stands strong in God

For this object lesson, you'll need something sturdy to stand on (like table) and something you can easily fall off (like a small plastic container).

Daniel was living in a foreign land, where most people didn't share his beliefs. Daniel worked for the king, but some of the king's advisers were out to get Daniel. They tricked the king into making a new law that said anyone who prays to God and not the king, must be killed.

When Daniel heard this, he didn't hide his faith. He stood strong in God. He knew that God is a firm foundation and doing what others say is a wobbly foundation.

He went home and prayed with his windows open, so that everyone could see. When the king heard about this, he had no choice but to throw Daniel to the lions.

Daniel stood strong. He knew he could stand firmly if he followed God.

This little container is the things other people say you should do that you know aren't God's will. If you do what others tell you that you know is wrong – like lying or bullying others – you're on wobbly ground. (Ask one child to try and unbalance you.)

This big container is the things God says you should do. (Ask the same child to try and unbalance you.) If we stand on what God says, we're in a really firm position. We know that even though troubles come, we can still stand. Things looked really bad but Daniel was right to stand strong.

Prayer activity

1. Take a big piece of paper and write down all the things Daniel had: courage, perseverance, integrity (standing up for what you know is right, etc. that you would want to pray for Jacob to have).
2. Split into groups to pray for Jacob and the other children like him in Pakistan.
3. Response/craft activity
4. You will need: Paper disposable cup, pens, glue, coloured paper, etc.
5. Decorate a paper cup with the words "GULP! Remember to pray". Add bright colours and decorations to make the cup look special. Go wild! The point is to be eye catching.
6. Take the cup away and keep it somewhere you'll see every day. Remember that, just like you need to drink every day, you need to remember to pray every day – especially when a GULP situation comes along.
7. When you see it, pray for Jacob to stand strong.

Standing up for what you believe

Today we learnt about Daniel, who stood strong in God and didn't give in to what others wanted.

We've also been learning about children in Pakistan who are treated unfairly at school because of their faith, many of them dropping out of school as a result.

To discuss:

- How do we do the right thing when others are telling us to do something else?
- If someone is bullying someone else, what can you do?
- Let's pray for Jacob and children like him to stand strong, just like Daniel.

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Session 2

Country of focus: Jiamei, China

Theme: Keep praying, keep hoping

Objectives:

- To see how God doesn't always do things as quickly as we like and we have to persevere and pray
- To pray for children in China who miss out on school and whose parents are imprisoned for their faith

Activity: Wait for it! We're going to play a game now to show us how hard it can be to wait. This is a quiet game for the children to play as a big group. It's very simple: they have to sit still with their eyes closed and gauge how long they think a minute is (time them with your phone or a stopwatch). When they think a minute has passed, they have to stand up. The kids who get closest to the actual time win!

Discuss: What did it feel like to wait, even for only a minute? Did the time feel longer or shorter?

Activity: Who can keep looking longest?

1. Put the kids into pairs facing each other.
2. They must look their partner in the eye. They cannot move except to blink and breathe. They cannot crack up.
3. The first person to move something other than their eyes or their chests or to crack a smile loses.
4. Who lasted longer? In prayer, sometimes you have to last a long time.

Bananarama

1. Get the kids into two or more teams of 4 or more
2. They must see how fast they can pass a banana up and down the line. Here is the catch: they can't use their hands. They must pass the banana, chin to chin, up and down the line. If someone drops the banana, your team must start over.
3. At the end, ask: Was this game easy or difficult for you? How did you feel when someone dropped the banana? Why?
4. It's easy to feel impatient when things don't go as we want them. Today we're learning about persevering in prayer.

Story: Jiamei

Play the film, 'I want to rescue my dad!' (you can download the file from faithandafuture.com/sundayschool). **Or** hold up picture of Jiamei and tell her story.

Jiamei is a little girl in China. Her dad was put in prison for standing up for people of all different religions. As well as putting her dad in prison, Jiamei wasn't allowed to go to school. She missed out on learning and seeing her friends each day. Jiamei is very brave and said that when she's older, she wants to be a knight so that she can rescue her dad.

Thankfully, lots of people prayed and wrote letters demanding that Jiamei's dad be freed and after 15 months, he was released. Jiamei, her mum and dad now live together again as a family. Even though at times it seemed hopeless, people kept praying and hoping and God answered those prayers.

Ask

Maybe some of you know what it's like to wait for something. Can you think of something you asked God for and had to wait a long time before he answered your prayer? Jiamei had to wait for over a year for her dad to come home. She didn't know when or if he was coming back: she just had to wait and keep praying and hoping.

Bible story: Simeon and Anna wait for Jesus

The Bible is full of stories of people who had to wait patiently just like Jiamei. Can anyone give me any examples? (Answers could be the Israelites waiting to be rescued from slavery in Egypt, Abraham waiting for a baby son), Read Luke 2:25-38, where we meet two people who had been waiting for Jesus a very, very long time.

Give each child a piece of paper and ask them to write on it something that you're asking God for and haven't received yet – it could be anything – a toy you'd like, to see healing for someone who's unwell.

v25: Simeon had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he wouldn't die before he saw Jesus. We don't know exactly how long he'd been waiting, but we get the sense it was a long time. V36: We also meet Anna. Now we know that she was waiting for Jesus for a really long time! God told her she'd see God's son Jesus, just seven years after she married (people got married young in those days) and by then she was 84.

How would you feel if you'd been waiting and praying for something for that long? How would you feel when you finally saw your prayers answered? Anna and Simeon had to wait patiently, just like Jiamei. Like her, they didn't know when their waiting would end, they just had to have faith that it would.

Now fold up the thing you're asking God for and put it in a big envelope. When everyone who wants to place their folded paper in the envelope has done so, seal up the envelope and pray: Jesus help us to keep hoping and praying patiently for these things and not give up. Amen.

Prayer response: Noisy prayer!

Take another minute and encourage the children to speak out loud about what they would say to Jiamei and her family, all together. At the end of the minute of talking, say Amen! That was your prayer to God for Jiamei and all the families like hers in China.

Craft

Each person will need: a paper/ plastic cup, string (an adult arm's length), a ball (ping pong ball or similar), sellotape, felt tip pens to decorate the cup with.

How to make it: Make a small hole in the bottom of the cup and thread some string through. Tie a knot at the end of the string just inside the cup. Tape a ball to the other end of the string. Decorate the cup!

To play: hold the cup upright and toss the ball into the air and try to catch the ball in the cup! This game requires patience because it may take several attempts to catch the ball. It also requires patience when making the game to thread string, tie knots and keep tape on the balls.

Keep praying, keep hoping

Today we learnt about praying patiently when what we want doesn't come. We learnt about the story of Simeon and Anna who had to wait a long time to see Jesus come to earth.

We also learnt about Jiamei – she and her family are Christians in China. Her dad was imprisoned for speaking up for others with religious beliefs. Plus she wasn't allowed to go to school. She had to wait a long time but finally God answered her prayers. Her dad is now home and she's able to go to school.

To discuss:

- How do we keep praying and hoping when things look hopeless?

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Session 3

Theme: God is always with us

Country of focus: Mexico

Objectives:

- To know that even when we have nothing else, God will never leave us
- Learn about the situation in Mexico and pray and write to children who have had to flee and now can't go to school because of their faith

Game – Hide and Seek

Play this game by having children take turns hiding and have the rest of the children find them. Once found ask, "Did God know where you were?" or "Could you hide from God there?" to reinforce the idea that, wherever they go, God's presence is with them.

Game – 3-legged race

To introduce the theme of God always with us, get the kids to have a three-legged race. Could you get away from your partner without untying your legs? They went wherever you went (even if you went off course!). That's how close God is to us.

Story: José Gabriel

Play the film, 'We worry for our children' (you can download the file at faithandafuture.com/sundayschool). **Or** show the picture of José Gabriel and tell his story.

José Gabriel and his family were forced to flee their village in Chiapas, Mexico. Village leaders tried to force them to renounce their beliefs, but they refused.

Everything they owned was destroyed and they had to run away from their village with only a few things they could carry. Now they live, along with several other families, in a temporary shelter.

But José can't get into a local school in his new neighbourhood. Instead, his parents are forced to watch him spend all day in the shelter, with nothing to do and no one able to teach him.

Ask:

- How would you feel if you were José?
- What would you miss if you couldn't go to school?
- Do you think it's fair that he had to leave his home? Why?
- How long could you camp? Maybe for a few days is fun, but after a while you miss having a nice shower and warmth. Emphasise how dirty, nasty and cold you might feel. How it'd be strange not being able to turn on a light at night. Designate the four corners of the room to 1 day, 1 week, 1 month, 1 year and get the children to stand next to the length of time they 'vote' for.

Bible Story: The Israelites in the wilderness

Read Exodus 13v21-22

A pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire led God's people all the time. It must have been easy to know God was always there. How do we know God is with us?

Take a ping pong ball and give the children a straw each. Put them into two teams, facing each other, and they have to compete to blow the ball over to the other's side.

We can't see air but we know it's there from the way the ball was moving.

It's the same with God's presence, we know he is with us because the Bible tells us so in Deuteronomy 31:6 "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

What can't you live without?

Give the kids a pile of cards or pieces of paper with different everyday essentials on them, one of which is God's presence. Examples could be School, Friends, Toys, The Internet, Showers/Hygiene, etc.

Get them to choose four things they absolutely can't live without, then three, then two, then one. Explain that José's family didn't get to choose what they have to give up. But what no one can take away from them is God's presence with them.

Response: Craft/prayer

Craft: Write a message of hope

You will need: cards, envelopes, pens, Connect & Encourage booklet (available at csw.org.uk/connectencourage.htm)

Use the attached info: print out addresses or photocopy them and pass them around. Explain that these people are experiencing the same kind of situation as José and would appreciate your messages of hope and support so much.

Prayer: Feely box

Get a cardboard box and fill it with household things that speak to you about his situation (below are examples). Sit in a circle and choose a child to put their hand in the box and then think about how this links to José and how you could pray:

- A brick/hammer/model house: Give José a house to live in with his family in safety.
- Something soft: Lord, please keep his heart soft towards you.
- A shoe: Please help José as he walks this hard path.
- Battery/charger: Help these children to be filled with your power and Holy Spirit to endure their ordeal.

God is always with us

Today we learnt that God is always with us and learnt about the story of the Israelites in the desert being shown God's presence with a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire.

We also learnt about José Gabriel and his family were forced to flee their village in Chiapas, Mexico because they're Protestant Christians – a religious minority. Now they live in a temporary shelter but José can't get into a local school in his new neighbourhood.

To discuss:

- How do we know God is with us when we can't see him?
- Please pray for José Gabriel

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Youth (12-17)

School can be a tough place when you stand out – whether it's for having the wrong hair, wrong phone or supporting the wrong football team. Needless to say, standing out because of your faith can make school life more challenging.

This may be something you talk about a lot with young people. Here's a fresh approach you may want to try – inviting them to think about the situation in countries like Iran and Pakistan, where students suffer in ways we find hard to imagine.

In Pakistan, religious minority students face discrimination not only from classmates but also teachers. Even their textbooks teach that minorities are inferior and don't belong. Jacob* was taught that because he's a Christian, all he can ever be is a cleaner. He was forced to give up on his dreams.

Gurinder,* a Sikh boy, was beaten by his teacher twice a week from age four to age six. Then, as he got older, the abuse took a different form, as the constant pressure to convert became more than he could endure. He dropped out of school with no qualifications.

José Gabriel missed out on vital years of school because his family were thrown out of their village in Chiapas, Mexico, and not permitted to register him at a local school. Across the world, children are denied a fair education because of their religion or belief.

Faith and a Future is a campaign from CSW tackling the discrimination and abuse that's seen in schools from Mexico to Burma. Together we want to ensure that no child is punished for their faith. That's why we want to mobilise the church to pray and campaign for change.

So what can we do?

One simple place to start is to invite young people to share their experience. Have they been treated differently, or have they treated others differently, because of their faith?

Secondly, watch and discuss the short films available at faithandafuture.com/stories. *Through a child's eyes* imagines the abuse that goes on in Pakistan as if it were happening in the UK. Or watch the story of José Gabriel, or Jacob and Rajesh. These could lead to a discussion about both the similarities and differences with our experiences in the UK.

Pray for young people like Jacob, José Gabriel and Rajesh. Pray that no child would suffer for their faith. Pray that our campaign, to see textbooks rewritten and discrimination in school admission to be removed, would gather momentum and make a real change in the lives of young people in Pakistan.

Take action. Go to faithandafuture.com/getinvolved to see all the ways that you can help, from getting petition signatures, to writing messages of encouragement to young students in Pakistan. Simply being aware of the situation in other countries is a big step. But you may also find you have budding campaigners and intercessors in your midst who will take up the biblical call to fight injustice. And that's exciting!

*Name changed to protect identity.