

## **Christmas Session - III**

Yep, a thoroughly unique and well-considered name for the latest myfishbites session on Christmas!!

### **Presents**

It's a great idea to get some present boxes for your group. These can be a bit tricky to get hold of cheaply, but after some investigating I looked on ebay under 'small boxes' and cardboard ones came up (around 50 for £10), and some much nicer gift boxes for 'wedding and table decorations / gift boxes' at 10 for £2.99 inc delivery. I'm sure there are similar little gift boxes in the US and across all other nations on ebay!

The point of these little boxes is that there is one for everyone, but leave them empty. At a time in the session, hand out these Christmas boxes to everyone there and tell them to be extremely careful with the boxes, to open them very carefully and then not throw them away. The young people will open the boxes and find nothing there.

(Don't worry - get a load of small presents and chocolate for them, which they can fill their boxes with later!)

### **Movie Clip Ideas**

You could always show something festive - a clip from Love Actually which is set at Christmas (check the language first, it's rated 15). Then there are Christmas classics like Miracle on 34th Street / Santa Claus the movie / It's a wonderful life. For example in 'It's a wonderful life', George finds that his life makes a difference to people. It's not stuff that matters, but the people and the difference one life can make.

### **Jigsaw**

One of the purposes of Christmas is to remember that God gave us a free gift - Jesus, his Son. This gift means that we can be restored to God and changed inside to get rid of all the rubbish and things that hold us back and drag us down. Then as God changes us inside, we are called by him to be salt and light to the world around us. But to do this, we have to get involved and to give...

Get a jigsaw of the world from a parent / charity shop / ebay. Give everyone at least one piece of the jigsaw (wrapped up if you want) - or enough to complete the jigsaw. Then encourage the group to do their part and 'fit the world back together again'.

If you want to, keep the middle few bits of the jigsaw (or maybe even the parts of the geographical location you're in - the UK, US, Canada, Australia, India etc). Then you could make a point that you can be part of working to bring God's kingdom in the UK.

## **Filming idea**

Why not go out into your local area or city centre and film the Christmas decorations. If you can't make that or it's on private property, film around people's houses in the youth group and get a little flavour of what Christmas looks like in different homes. Put them together and show the whole group as part of this session.

You can say that it's exciting to have the Christmas tree go up and do the decorations, but again these things don't last. There comes a time after Christmas when the tree dies, or is taken down and all the presents are gone. It doesn't mean we don't enjoy Christmas at all - we should! But it's just about getting priorities straight!

## **Little boxes**

The truth is that when we get to Christmas, the presents we get are often meaningless, or don't last for long. When you get to the January sales, there are all kinds of items that people don't want. Your local newspaper, ebay and amazon are full of unwanted gifts. Even when people get what they want, the dumping sites are a reminder that things don't last forever. Technology moves on with products out of date by the time they hit the shops. So while it's great and exciting to get presents and God wants you to enjoy things, don't let them become the main thing in your life!

*In Matthew 6, Jesus was teaching his disciples (and us) about many things. In verses 19-20, he said: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

What was Jesus saying? He's not suggesting you go into the burglary business - or that you shouldn't have, give and enjoy presents! But he's letting us know that our hearts should be focused on heaven and on what we do for God, not on just having loads of stuff. You see, whatever we have on earth can be broken, can go wrong or can be stolen. But every little thing we do for God is recorded and God will never forget. Even the smallest thing or act of love is seen by God and he remembers, even if no-one else does. Jesus is reminding us that whatever we give the most time, energy and money to is where our priorities are. So if all we do is buy PS3 games, it's clear that's where our heart is. If we love sport so much that we stop going to church or reading the Bible, it's clear that sport has replaced God.

Whatever is stored up in heaven is permanent - it won't break, go wrong or get nicked.

And remember, God makes it clear in lots of places in the Bible that when we put him first, other things fall into place (*see Psalm 37.4, Matthew 6.33*). A friend of mine told me that when he was married, his wife got pregnant and they needed money for the baby on the way. As he prayed to God, God asked him to give money into God's work regularly. My friend said that he always got back double what he gave. You see, my friend put God first and then God looked after my friend, his wife and baby. And he'll do exactly the same for you.

*Proverbs 3.5 - "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight (direct your paths)."*

This is the pattern we need to follow. We trust in God (that means we believe his Word and that he knows best for our lives). We do this with all our heart and don't think that we know it all, or follow our own way of thinking. Nor do we flow with the world's way of doing things. Instead, we commit everything we do to God - that means praying about stuff we do before and as we're doing it. So before we do anything, we offer it up to God - "God, I'm going out tonight. Please use me and protect me... Father I can't decide what college to go to, please show me... Lord, I need a parking space..." etc.

If we commit what we do to God, then it's like saying, 'God I want you to be in charge of this.' And he promises that he will direct you and lead you, and that your path will be straight. It may not feel like a straight path, but when you arrive at the other end and look back, you'll see it was. This is a lifestyle that thanks God for what he does, gives God the credit and knows that whatever's been given and committed to him means that God will take responsibility for it.

## **George Muller**

There was a famous man of God called George Muller from Bristol in England. God had turned his life around and he'd seen the example of people depend entirely on God to finance work for God, and who'd received complete provision by God. He and his wife started taking in 30 girls in 1836 and gradually the work increased. By 1870, more than 2,000 children were being accommodated in five homes. Not once did Muller ask for financial support, nor did he get into debt. This was despite the fact that even back then, the homes cost £100,000 to build. Muller fed the children, there were times of Bible reading and prayer, he dressed them well and got them apprenticeships and scholarships. Day after day, as Muller sought God and committed his way to God, God provided for the orphanages in incredible and miraculous ways.

Wikipedia reports that, *"In 1871 an article in The Times stated that since 1836, 23,000 children had been educated in the schools and very many thousands had been educated in other schools at the expense of the orphanage. The article also states that since its origin, 64,000 Bibles, 85,000 Testaments and 29,000,000 religious books had been issued and distributed. Other expenses included the support of 150 missionaries.."*

## **The Promises**

Your call may be different to Muller - but Hebrews 13.8 says, *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."*

In Acts 10.34-35 it says, *"And Peter opened his mouth and said: Most certainly and thoroughly I now perceive and understand that God shows no partiality and is no respecter of persons, But in every nation he who venerates and has a reverential fear for God, treating Him with worshipful obedience and living uprightly, is acceptable to Him and sure of being received and welcomed [by Him]."* (Amplified Bible).

God is faithful and true, and his promises are true. *"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God."* (2 Corinthians 1.20).

## **Presents**

Encourage everyone to open up their boxes and then fill the boxes with goodies you've bought earlier :)

## **Prayer and Response**

Is God asking you to change your priorities? Is there something you can do to help others or to give? Where can you make a difference? What is God calling you to do with your life?

Get people to pray for each other, or offer to pray for people - as appropriate for your group.