

# MESSY ADVENTURES

TWELVE OUTDOOR SESSIONS  
FOR MESSY CHURCHES

*with lots of science*



Edited by Lucy Moore,  
Dave Gregory, Cate Williams  
and Jane Butler



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# Praise for Messy Adventures

'I am delighted that the Diocese of Gloucester has played a key role in piloting these Messy Adventures with local Messy Churches, and it was wonderful to get hands-on with the Adventures at a recent Roadshow. Families, children and young people engaged with environmental issues as they explored how to better care for creation. My hope is that these Messy Adventures will be shared widely and will transform people's understanding of creation through hands-on activities, scientific discovery and far-ranging questions of science.'

**Rt Revd Rachel Treweek, Bishop of Gloucester and Anglican Bishop for HM Prisons**

'Messy Adventures is an awe-inspiring, thought-provoking, senses-awakened, God-inspired, creative resource. The extensive outdoor activities, prayer and worship ideas increase awareness of God's presence, enabling all ages to discover and meet God in the natural world. An exciting, empowering, engaging, eco-aware addition to the Messy Church collection of books.'

**Karen Dunstan and Christine Withers, Messy Church in Hornchurch, UK**

## Dedication

This book is dedicated to Lucy Moore, who set us off on this Messy Adventure, before passing the baton over to Jane Butler. We're enormously grateful that Lucy gathered such a great crew around us, cheering us along the journey she trailblazed.

This is our first book project as the new Messy Church team, so we've relied heavily on the support and advice of our colleagues at BRF. This was already a complicated project with the material being so different to previous Messy Church resources, and we probably didn't make things any easier with our inexperience, so a huge shout-out to all our friends in Content Creation, particularly Ben who had to wrangle all the content into this book and Becca who had to proofread it all!

Thank you to our team of brilliantly creative writers who brought to life the events of Jesus' life and the stories that he told through the fresh lens of God's creation, and to Dr Dave and his scientist friends for adding the wonder and 'wow' factor to this material.

We'd also like to thank Cate Williams for walking alongside us throughout the project, for her passion for the church to address the climate crises and for her encouragements to be more eco-aware in all we do.

And finally, but most importantly, thank you to the pioneer Messy Adventurers: the Messy Church teams who signed up to pilot these new resources for us. Their experiences and feedback have been invaluable to us throughout and have served as a huge encouragement for us to get these Adventures out into the wild to see where and how God will use them.

Aike, Jane & Sally

# Acknowledgements

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# How to use the Messy Adventures

Messy Church Goes Wild is the movement within Messy Church which aims to encourage Messy Churches to meet God outdoors, love the natural world, experience a sense of awe and wonder there and to be more eco-aware in all we do, both inside and out, as gathered and dispersed church, for the good of the planet.

The Messy Adventures are twelve units of materials to give both the most unconfident or experienced leader the tools and confidence to take their Messy Church outdoors. There is a strong scientific focus and encouragement to experience worship, awe, wonder and questioning in an all-age, hospitable, creative, celebratory and Christ-centred framework.

## Themes

1. Wild and wilderness! (wild places): Jesus tempted in the wilderness (Luke 4:1–13)
2. Wet and wild! (water): Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan (Mark 1:9–11)
3. Wild and rocky! (soil and rock, sand and mud): Jesus' parable of the two builders (Matthew 7:24–25)
4. Wild and weedy! (plants and moss): Jesus' parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1–13)
5. Wild woods! (trees): Jesus' parable of the mustard seed (Luke 13:18–19)
6. Wild weather! (sky, weather, sun, moon, planets and stars): Jesus calms the storm (Mark 4:35–41)
7. Wild on the wing! (birds): Jesus teaches about faith by pointing out the birds (Luke 12:23–25)

8. Wild and wiggly! (insects and other minibeasts): little things, little people, little details matter to Jesus; Jesus meets Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10)

9. Wild safari! (animals and fish): Jesus' teaching on the good shepherd (John 10)

10. Wild me! (human beings): Jesus turns over the tables in the temple (Mark 11:15–18)

11. Wild on the move! (movement and energy; stillness and space): Jesus walks on the water (Matthew 14:22–32)

12. Wild life! (change, growth, life, death, birth, seasons, rhythms): Jesus' death and resurrection (any of the gospel accounts)

### Three different approaches

The Adventures look very different to the familiar Messy Church sessions in *Get Messy!* magazine and at first glance the amount of information may look a little overwhelming!

Within each unit there are materials for:

**Section 1: On the move** – a walk with stations

**Section 2: Adventure area in one spot** – a session at a fixed site away from your usual meeting place

**Section 3: Activities** – ideas for exploring the theme in a churchyard, garden or car park.

Pick an approach that suits your context or 'pick and mix' suggestions from each section to build your own session. The pilot churches have all used the materials slightly differently. Some have taken their 'inside' Messy Church outdoors every month and either adventured in one spot or on the move, and sometimes a combination of the two! Some have introduced Messy Church Goes Wild as an 'extra' to their regular Messy Church, putting on sessions in the school holidays. Others have retained their 'inside' Messy Church and planted a new Messy Church Goes Wild which has attracted a different group of people. We hope that however you choose to use this material, it will attract new members to your Messy Church who share a passion for the natural world.

Whichever approach you choose, please don't feel the need to cover everything listed! The feedback from the Messy Churches who have been field testing the Adventures is that you need far fewer activities outdoors than you might in an indoor setting so you could revisit a particular Adventure in a different season with a completely different set of activities.

## Videos

The consultant scientists who helped us with the ‘big thinking’ around each theme have recorded a short introductory film. You may wish to share this with your team as you meet to plan the session or use it in your Messy Church Goes Wild session itself. You could provide a QR code link to the video to enable people to watch it on their phones before you set off or when you arrive at the place you’re using, as an introduction to the theme. They are available online at [messychurch.org.uk/messyadventures](https://messychurch.org.uk/messyadventures).

## On the move (Section 1 in each Adventure)

This approach invites you to go on a trek around your area, pausing at different points on your Adventure to play/talk/think/question/wonder together about the ideas that the spot inspires. There are suggestions in the material for activities and conversation-starters about science and about God. You’ll need to adapt, of course, as every group’s setting is different. You might plan slightly more ‘stops’ in the summer than you do in the winter. Use the ideas in any order. Feel free to swap in ideas from the section 3 activities if any appeal. You might want to plan to finish up in a space where you can have a short celebration and have food comfortably, with space for those who want to, to run around.

Your Adventure could look something like this:

- 3.00 pm – gather in the (e.g.) station forecourt/welcome/introductions/health and safety notices/watch film
- 3.10 pm – walk together from point to point for 40–60 m
- 4.00 pm – finish in suitable space for celebration
- 4.10 pm – food
- 4.45 pm – leave

## In one spot (Section 2 in each Adventure)

This is a very straightforward approach and perhaps simpler to organise than an ‘On the move’ trek. Basically, you walk to or meet at the venue and stay there for the whole time. The material is deliberately unstructured and tries to make space for the group to explore freely but with purpose. There’s less up-front direction in this approach. Again, you could draw in ideas from the other two sections of the units to suit your circumstances and your group.

Your Adventure could look something like this:

- 10.00 am – if you are walking together to the venue, meet to distribute equipment among everyone’s rucksacks. Welcome/introductions/health and safety notices.

- 10.15 am – arrive/watch film/remind everyone of the theme and offer suggestions for what to do next
- 10.20 am – all ages use the space to explore/do the challenge/complete the activity...
- 10.40 am – regroup to talk about what you've discovered, leading into the celebration
- 10.50 am – food
- 11.15 am – set off back home together

### Activities (Section 3 in each Adventure)

If you simply want to do a 'normal' Messy Church outdoors, you could use these activities as suggestions to get your own creative ideas flowing. You could also pick and mix ideas from sections 1 and 2 along with these activities to support the session theme.

For each approach, make sure all your safeguarding is in place, create a risk assessment and issue the health and safety warnings needed for that day's Adventure. If you're 'on the move', you may need to do this in every place you stop.

In advance, you may wish to send a reminder to participants to wear weather appropriate clothing and check weather reports for any severe weather warnings. Leaders should take a charged mobile phone and first aid kit in case of emergencies when 'on the move'.

### Celebrations

Some celebration ideas are embedded in the material itself for each unit. Or you could use the same shape for every Celebration, as below. Please check out the separate '**Celebration**' suggestions, which have many more details and prayers to use for the shape here.

- Gather
- Pause
- Opening prayer
- Sing (or not)
- Story
- Response
- Prayer
- Send out

Each Adventure features a particular Bible story in the celebration section which fits with the theme, but this is not intended to be prescriptive. Indeed, many of the Adventures include multiple Bible references for you to draw examples from or to choose as the main focus of your session.

## Food

You'll want to keep up the Messy Church tradition of hospitality. There are lots of suggestions for snacks, meals, drinks and portable food in the '**Messy Take-out menu**'.

Suggestions came in from a whole range of outdoor food experts, including meat dishes and alcoholic drinks. Whilst there are a range of opinions in this area, we have decided to include all the suggestions, leaving you to discern what's best for your group. As we seek a more sustainable approach to care for our planet, please consider sourcing food locally and think about animal and human welfare for these Adventures. This includes working out what to do with any waste food and rubbish disposal. Don't forget to provide handwashing facilities when you're 'on the move'.

Our hope is that these Adventures will give you a greater appreciation of the interplay between science and faith, as well as giving you a greater confidence in the practicalities of taking an all-age group outside to worship and explore. We pray for a flourishing of attitudes that grow respect for the planet and all its inhabitants, which also permeate into 'inside' Messy Churches and lead to changed behaviour towards the use of craft materials and food preparation.

More than anything, please have FUN!



# 1 Wild and wilderness!

*By Aaron Jenkyn*

**Theme:** wilderness and wildness

MESSY CHURCH GOES WILD CHAPTER LINK: 7 – AND A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM...

**Aim:** to explore different ways to enter into the wilderness to encounter God and explore the ways in which a time of wilderness helps us cultivate the wildness within.

**Science advisors:** Lucy Brierley and Dave Gregory

**Messy Church values:**

- Christ-centred – following in Jesus’ footsteps we enter into the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13) to draw closer to God, to find a sense of courage and resilience for the journey ahead.
- Hospitality – in the wilderness God provides what we need, both spiritually and physically. Our time together is an invitation to experience that sense of love and care, trusting that God will provide in the simplicity and beauty of the wilderness.
- Celebration – we celebrate the diversity of our experiences in the wilderness and our encounters with God. Hearing the wilderness stories of those who came before us and sharing stories of our own wilderness journeys.
- Creativity – the wilderness has inspired artists, writers and creative types since the beginning of time. These activities will inspire and challenge people physically and spiritually, opening doors to creativity and seeing things in new ways.
- All-age – being in the wilderness across generations is an incredibly rich experience, with each person able to contribute something unique and wonderful. These activities will bring people together to challenge people of all ages and to celebrate and encourage each other on the journey.



## Section 1 On the move

### 1 Wilderness pilgrimage – a very simple walk to one place

#### **In an indoor and familiar space:**

(You might start at your church or in a home.) Introduce the idea of the wilderness with your own version of these thoughts: being in the wilderness gives us the opportunity to see things in a new way; it can help us find closure for major events in our lives or help us build courage to enter into the next big thing; a time in the wilderness can create space – space to wonder and ponder and pray, without the baggage of everyday life weighing us down.

Being in the wilderness is a bit different from just being outside in nature. There is an intentionality to being in the wilderness – being in the wilderness means stepping away from our everyday lives for a time, it could be for just ten minutes or an hour, a day or a week or longer. When you enter the wilderness, you leave everything behind, the distractions of daily life, the responsibilities for the people and animals and buildings and things you care for every day, your own thoughts and doubts and ideas of how things are supposed to be stay behind too.

By taking nothing, we create a space where we can encounter the Holy Spirit and find a sense of courage and resilience for the journey ahead. We're going to explore that idea today.

As you spend time in nature, whether on a local hiking trail, in the woods, along a community path or a walk around your neighbourhood, these activities and discussion questions will help you draw closer to God. If you think that you don't have any wilderness around you, then think again. Are there bits of grass sneaking up through the pavement? Are there birds nesting on the rooftops? Or a park bench on a quiet street? The wilderness is a place in which plants and animals and beings grow and survive on their own, completely dependent on God and nature.

#### **Pack your bag:**

To begin – provide bags, stash of soup cans, rocks or wooden blocks (objects should be heavy, but manageable in size – something you can write on or adhere masking tape to) and a supply of masking tape. Have participants tag the objects with the things that they are carrying with them – they're going to represent the burdens we carry every day, the messages we receive from ourselves, the world around us and the things that are getting in the way of connecting with God more deeply. For example: worries, heartaches, responsibilities, appointments, lessons and classes, jobs, school, budget and money concerns, wants, needs,

pop culture messages, being different from everyone else, bossy parents, naughty siblings, nosy neighbours, bullies, school's too hard, etc.

Let people be honest and let them be private if they want to be; it is their burden. You can pre-tag some items to help people get started. Everybody should have a minimum of three to five items, more if they get into it. Give everybody a bag or box to carry the items on, it's okay (good even) if the bags are heavy, burdensome, or unruly. You can laugh about it, people can even share their burdens with others, but make sure everybody takes all their burdens with them as you set out on your wilderness pilgrimage.

### **An obvious threshold place:**

Walk together to a starting point, preferably the start of a hiking trail, park entrance, garden, woods, or other natural setting. Enjoy each other's company, notice the world around you as much as you can, but continue to carry the bags.

Once you arrive, pause at the threshold and talk about the ways that Jesus found time to connect with God the Father through spending time in the wilderness. Ask people if they remember any stories of Jesus out in the wilderness, on land or on the water. Jesus' encounters with nature often preceded or followed times in his ministry that were really challenging – healings, miracles, intense periods of teaching – as he waits for his death on the cross. At some of the most intense moments of Jesus' story we see him retreat to the wilderness again and again. Jesus is modelling for us how we need to restore, rejuvenate and refresh our bodies and minds from time to time, especially when we find ourselves facing hard challenges or significant losses.

### **Into the wilderness:**

You might have a line, sign, arch or hula-hoop to represent entering into a time and place of wilderness. Just before participants cross the threshold, have participants lay down their burdens, literally leaving them on the ground or a table, as they take nothing and set off to explore the wilderness area alone. Describe the boundaries, if you need to. Let them know how long they have and invite them simply to explore and notice.

It might be that participants need a piece of paper and/or pen to draw or write down what they experience, or they might just wonder and pray, or explore this new area. Trust that whatever they are doing is what they need to be doing in that moment. Encourage people to enter into this exploration solo or in small groupings. There may be people who complain of being bored, or who might finish before the rest of the group; you might suggest they focus smaller, look down, closer to the ground to see what mysterious and wonderful things lie at their feet.

If your group is less comfortable outdoors, you could offer a scavenger hunt of noticing:

- How many colours can you see in the sky?
- How many colours can you see on the ground?

- What is the smallest living thing you see?

- What is the largest living thing you see?

- Can you hear the wind? What are three words that describe what it sounds like?

- Can you find:
  - Something soft
  - Something that feels rough
  - Something with stripes
  - Something strange/curious
  - Something old
  - Something new
  - Something that gives you hope

After a set amount of time, or when you feel the group is ready, call everyone back together using a bell or call.

## Celebration

Talk about the experience – you might use the prompts below:

- What was it like to put down your burdens?

- What was it like to step into the wilderness alone?

- Is there anything from your scavenger hunt that you want to share?

- What were some of the things you did to help you notice the wilderness around you?

- As you return, are there burdens, objects that you can leave behind?

- Are there objects that don't carry the same weight as they did when you first started?

You might set goals for yourself to find ways to set down your burdens and visit the wilderness more often. You might check in with Messy Church families between sessions to see how they are doing with this challenge or begin your next session by checking in with each other.

## Prayer

In chapter one of Mark's gospel, Mark writes that straight after Jesus was baptised, the Holy Spirit sent him out into the wilderness. Jesus went to listen to God without any burdens. Let's name the ways we've heard or seen God today in our wilderness. Whoever has this (stick... flower... stone or other object) gets to speak – either silently or out loud. Then pass it on to the next person. So... how have we seen or heard God today in our wilderness?



*Enabling all ages to grow in faith*



Anna Chaplaincy  
Living Faith  
Messy Church  
Parenting for Faith

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# MESSY ADVENTURES

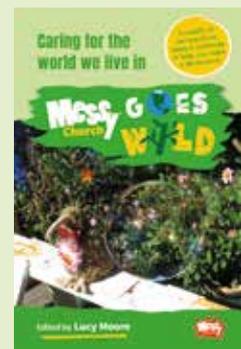
Twelve sessions for Messy Churches to do outdoors, created by a Messy Church Goes Wild writer team, enhanced by additions from scientists, and piloted in urban and rural Messy Churches.

**Session titles:** Wild and wilderness!, Wet and wild!, Wild and rocky!, Wild and weedy!, Wild woods!, Wild weather!, Wild on the wing!, Wild and wiggly!, Wild safari!, Wild me!, Wild on the move!, Wild life!

Find out more at [messychurch.org.uk/goeswild](https://messychurch.org.uk/goeswild)

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**MESSY CHURCH GOES WILD** is the movement within Messy Church which aims to encourage Messy Churches to meet God outdoors, love the natural world, experience a sense of awe and wonder there and to be more eco-aware in all we do, both inside and out, as gathered and dispersed church, for the good of the planet.



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