



# MESSY TOGETHERNESS

BEING INTERGENERATIONAL  
IN MESSY CHURCH



**MARTYN PAYNE**

**INCLUDES 3 NEW SESSION OUTLINES**

# **MESSY TOGETHERNESS**

**BEING INTERGENERATIONAL  
IN MESSY CHURCH**



**MARTYN PAYNE**



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## FOREWORD

As the third worship song came to an end, a banner message flowed across the screen at the front: 'Children and young people should leave now.' At this, and with a fair amount of scuffling, squeezing and running down the aisles, the children and young people went. While a few of the adults left may have felt some relief at the quiet and calm that replaced the hubbub, most people could feel and sense the awkward emptiness. No longer were people squeezed together; no longer was there discussion, laughter and the buzz of creativity; instead there was a dull silence and a deep inner sense that something was missing. There was a gap...

The church community and church family are very precious, and we build up barriers between family members at our peril. To lose the joy of worshipping together regardless of age is damaging to the health of any church.

One of the many joys of Messy Church is the way that it has succeeded in crossing generational boundaries and encouraging people to worship together as individual families and as a 'church' family. This goes against the separation culture that the church has inherited, and instead shows that what we have been used to doing may not be the best thing to do.

In this book, Martyn Payne has brought together a compelling mix of thinking and resource. Based on his vast experience in both leading and observing Messy Church 'togetherness' in worship, he is able to identify the issues clearly and provide ideas, principles to work to, and session

outlines that are eminently practical and useful. He also brings in some helpful theology, particularly exploring what 'family' meant in the broad context of Old and New Testament scripture. Then he adds in much of the recent and current thinking about what all-age worship is and could be, applying it to the Messy context and challenging some of the preconceptions about children and their spiritual growth. Martyn argues with his characteristic considered passion that we can and should be able to grow, worship and learn together and from each other, and we have a duty to make it happen.

This book is a great resource for the whole church. It is an invaluable tool for all those who are committed to Messy Church or are considering it. It is essential reading for those who lead worship in any church. It is also ideal for everyone, across our denominations, who has an inner sense that, when the children and young people leave, there is a gap, and we need to bring change.

*Nick Harding*

*Children's Ministry Adviser*

*Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham*

# INTRODUCTION

*Messy Church is the child in the midst of inherited church, playing, wondering, disturbing and questioning everything.*

Since the first appearance of Messy Church over a decade ago in the UK, it seems that everything has been thrown up in the air. I mean this in a good way, because so much of what we have accepted as normal in the way we do church, go about our evangelism, make disciples and teach the faith does need to be re-examined in our day. Messy Church has allowed us to do this in a non-threatening way, since this fresh expression of church has grown up within the established structures and denominations of church, thus giving congregations the opportunity to compare and contrast what works and what needs to be reimaged when it comes to sharing and living out the gospel of Jesus Christ in the 21st century.

Discipleship, teaching and learning, children's and youth work, the sacraments and even church itself have all come under the Messy microscope, allowing us to ask playful but sometimes painful questions about the status quo. Messy Church is not, however, about throwing everything out and starting again. It's simply about taking a fresh look at what we have been doing and gently wondering whether some of our church methodology is still fit for purpose. As part of this investigation, one of the key areas in which Messy Church has pioneered a relatively new approach is the question of what it means to be church all together, all the

time—in a messy togetherness where all generations learn with and from each other.

This book focuses on the ‘all-age’ value of Messy Church. Why do more and more people advocate the idea that the generations should develop their faith together, and what does the Bible have to say about it? How does this fit with our inherited model of age-related groups for learning and discipleship? Is it really practical and possible to have an experience of church in which the youngest to the oldest share the same meeting space, service theme and time to worship? Messy Church is claiming that this can and does happen.

*Messy Togetherness* is part of a series that the BRF Messy Church team has produced, taking a good look at the five key values of Messy Church—namely, hospitality, celebration, all-age, creativity and Christ-centredness. My aim in this book is to put the intergenerational claim itself under the microscope. In Part One I explore why we do it, and in Part Two I look at how being an intergenerational church can work out in practice, focusing particularly on the Messy Church model. In addition, the book includes three outlines for Messy Church sessions that focus on the theme of sharing faith when the whole body of Christ is together, drawing on stories from the Old and New Testaments.

Throughout the chapters ahead of you, you will find many references to particular Messy Churches that I have visited. Over the last three years, I have had the privilege of being a listener on behalf of the Messy Church movement, which has involved joining in with Messy congregations up and down the UK. This means that I have heard first-hand the stories of Messy Churches who are daring to

explore what Messy togetherness means. My listening has been invaluable, enabling me to learn from some amazing Messy Church teams and leaders, and then go away and reflect more deeply on how Messy Church can better fulfil its all-age aspiration.

My visits have also, I am assured, been an encouragement to Messy Church teams. Those who work tirelessly and faithfully with children and families have often done so with little recognition, on the margins of many of our inherited churches. To be able to join with these Messy saints and both pass on ideas and go away inspired with fresh insights has been a blessing to me as much as, I hope, it has been for them.

The idea that church is not just desirable but better when all ages are together has, as you may imagine, not been received with universal enthusiasm. Of course, Messy Church proponents are not saying that this is the only way that church should ever be done. We do need like-minded groups to help our faith grow, and those groups are often age-related. However, to miss out on the significance and worth of doing faith intergenerationally does a huge disservice to a biblical understanding of how faith is passed on and how faith ‘sticks’ for each one of us. For this reason, the Messy togetherness ‘banner’ needs to be flown especially high for a time, at least in order to redress the imbalance in our approach to sharing and nurturing faith in our churches and communities.

Let me finish with a short story—not my own, but taken from a resource written by the founder of Messy Church, Lucy Moore. It comes from the 2014 Messy Month material that is still available.<sup>1</sup> It’s a parable, and, as such, it exaggerates to make its point and argue the case for Messy togetherness. I

hope it makes you smile, as it did me, but that it also opens up the question of the value of Messy togetherness, without which something is definitely missing in our experience of our Christian faith.

*Once upon a time, a person—we'll call him Malcolm—had a huge, safe, beautiful house with a lovely garden. Malcolm decided to have a family to fill the house. But he decided he would choose exactly who would go in his family.*

*Malcolm was a man, so he decided there would only be men in his family.*

*Malcolm had black hair, so he decided he would just have men with black hair in his family.*

*Malcolm liked playing ping-pong, so he decided there would only be men with black hair who liked playing ping-pong in his family.*

*Malcolm was rich, so he decided only men with black hair who liked playing ping-pong and who were rich would be in his family.*

*Malcolm was British, so he decided that only men with black hair who liked playing ping-pong and who were rich and British would be in the family.*

*Malcolm liked cauliflower-flavour crisps, so he decided that only men with black hair, who liked playing ping-pong, were rich and British, and liked cauliflower-flavoured crisps would be in the family.*

*Malcolm was 38 years old, so... well, you can guess the rest!*

*So there they were, the very special, very happy, very exclusive family of 38-year-old British rich men with black hair, a ping-pong table in the living-room and plenty of strange crisps in the kitchen. But when Malcolm looked round at his family of male, black-haired, ping-pong-playing, rich, British, strange-crisp-eating 38-year-olds, he knew instinctively that something wasn't right.*

*'Something is not right!' he said to his family. 'What are we going to do with the other packets of crisps in the multipack? How will we all fit around the ping-pong table at once? What will happen when one of our family's hair turns grey... or falls out?'*

*The black-haired ping-pong players looked at each other in horror. 'And,' continued Malcolm, 'what about all the people who would enjoy being part of this family, who would love to learn to play ping-pong and who could enjoy the things that our money can buy? What about the fun we would have if different people joined us—people who are 28 or 8 or 98? People who are women or children? People who would love being in this huge, safe, beautiful house with its lovely garden? People who might eat up the other flavours of crisps?'*

*The family looked at each other. And they talked in little groups. And they decided... well, I wonder what you think they decided. Do you think they decided to let everyone else into the family, even though those people were different from them? Or do you think they decided to stay safe and cosy as they were? I wonder how hard it was to make that decision.*

Here's to choosing Messy togetherness and the blessings of being intergenerational church.

## CHAPTER 6

# GENERATIONS TOGETHER: IT'S THE WAY FORWARD

### **Being intentionally all-age in Messy Church**

'The trouble is that what you're suggesting is simply unrealistic and unworkable!'

This is not an uncommon reaction whenever the idea of intergenerational church is proposed. Strong feelings can often be aroused within congregations that are considering running an all-age service, even if only once a month. Decades, arguably centuries, of doing things in separated groups make it very difficult for many people even to consider another way of being church. Even when it is argued that there are other times during the month when it's possible to do 'traditional church' with a like-minded group, and that the one time in the week when we can all be together should by default be intergenerational, many remain unconvinced. It's not that they are being deliberately obstructive: there is a genuine feeling that church works best when we recognise that the mysteries of our faith need to be approached in different ways and with different levels of understanding for different groups that make up the body of Christ.

One argument goes like this: children are developmentally at a different place from adults, so church needs to be shaped in a language and format that works for them. In

a similar vein, adults have particular grown-up interests and issues that cannot be tackled comfortably when children are present, so there needs to be the opportunity for sustained listening to a well-reasoned and well-presented sermon on such themes. Perhaps most importantly, due reverence towards things sacred and the biblical injunction that all things should be done 'decently and in order' confirm the truth that it is just not possible to worship with a wide range of age groups present, with their differing attention spans, interests and abilities. Those who are advocates of intergenerational worship and learning clearly shouldn't brush aside these arguments. They deserve to be addressed.

## **IT'S NOT ABOUT AGE**

Perhaps the first step when tackling these objections is to recognise that many of the frustrations identified as issues in all-age worship have nothing at all to do with age differences. Tastes, preferences and spiritual insights can be found to be equally present or absent within every generational group of a congregation. Recent work on spiritual styles by the Canadian theologian David Csinos has been very helpful in this respect. He identifies four different ways in which people of all ages respond to the presence of God in worship and in the way they wish to express their faith. These are a word-centred, an emotion-centred, a symbol-centred and an action-centred response.<sup>26</sup>

Even without these insights, it is surely obvious that a young child from a Christian family will have more experience of worshipping God than an adult who has just come to church to hear his or her banns read. To take further examples, an enquiring teenager could easily have a deeper

biblical understanding of current environmental issues than someone who has worshipped at the same church their whole life long but has never thought about such things, and a mature grandparent often finds more delight in listening to and working with young children than those of normal parenting age. We do a great injustice to any age group if we box people into stereotypical categories, suggesting that 'because they're children' they are bound to like busy, frenetic activities and can't do quiet reflection, or, equally, 'because they're old' they will only enjoy traditional hymns and won't like music to be too loud. One of the great joys of my visits around the UK has been to meet people in their 70s, 80s or even 90s who throw themselves with a passion into working with young families and children in Messy Church. Rather than being discomfited by noisy and maybe messy activities, they have expressed delight at being able to sit alongside new spiritual grandchildren in their church and to offer them welcome and friendship.

## **CHILDREN SHOWING THE WAY**

Similarly, I don't believe that all-age worship is an issue about stages of faith. There can be a deep and genuine awareness of God among the youngest in a congregation, and the insights that come 'out of the mouths of babes and infants', as the psalmist tells us (Psalm 8:2, NRSV), can have a spiritual depth and power way beyond what might be expected if we go by an age-related model of spiritual development.

In my experience of Messy Church, it is often the children who lead the way when it comes to asking the questions. I met Natalie on a training day for Messy Church not long ago. When I was explaining that Messy Church is about reaching

out in a spirit of mission to the two or three generations who have not been touched by our Christian story in the UK and is therefore largely for those who would never have been to a church before, her reaction was, 'That was me.' She had been invited to Messy Church by a friend and had brought along her family. She had had no previous experience of church at all. She loved the lively, welcoming and creative atmosphere and was delighted to see how much her children also enjoyed being there. 'I got more and more involved and offered to help,' she explained, 'but it was the children who took me to the next level. They were hearing stories about Jesus and that prompted questions from them, questions I didn't know how to answer. This led me to join a Christianity Explored group, where I came to faith myself, and so, together with the whole family, I was baptised.' Natalie has gone on to be part of another team, starting a new Messy Church.

On another occasion, I was sitting down at a Messy Church meal after we had explored a Bible story with activities and a time of celebration. On the table there were some questions to consider as we ate together. Unsurprisingly (this is Britain, after all!) the adults around me weren't particularly interested in talking about faith; it was the children who took up the questions and got us all discussing which part of the Bible story we liked best and which was the most important part for us that day.

The church in recent decades has had a serious rethink about the importance and depth of children's spirituality, and this can have a huge bearing on our understanding of the potential of intergenerational church. If we seriously begin to recognise that children are equal partners with grown-ups in our experience of the kingdom of God, it makes perfect

sense that their contributions should be received and valued when we meet together, and we need the opportunity to be truly alongside each other for that to happen. It strikes me that there is a rich possibility for spiritual cross-fertilisation here, which those who advocate separation in ministry are missing. Children often know God but cannot name him, simply because they don't have the religious language in which to express their experiences; whereas adults often know the language but don't necessarily know God. Put the two together and both grow into a richer and deeper faith.

## **CHILDREN IN THE MIDST**

Another area of disquiet concerning all-age worship centres on the fact that it is perceived as having to be child-focused, which can leave those who are single or married without children feeling that church is not really for them. This is a serious and important consideration and, of course, can be extended to many other groups who feel that the language at church, the content of the services and even sometimes the pronouncements from the pulpit make them feel like outsiders, unwelcome within the church community.

It's important to remind ourselves that those who were most marginalised by their society felt most drawn towards Jesus. He took steps to come alongside the people whom nobody else bothered with. He even reached out and touched them, or allowed them to touch him—and both of these actions brought criticism from the 'outraged' religious leaders of his day. If our all-age worship is excluding groups and making them feel uncomfortable, it is not true intergenerational church.

Having children present does *not* mean that the experi-

ence of worship and learning has to be child-focused. Children in the midst shouldn't dictate the agenda but, rather, change the atmosphere. They set the temperature for a congregation to be open to surprises, comfortable with change, ready to wonder and, most importantly, willing to learn new things in a playful way. In this sense, the presence of children reminds us of what is important about our journey of faith alongside each other. As the saying goes, 'We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing' (George Bernard Shaw). Surely this is why Jesus took a child and stood him or her in the midst of his disciples to remind them how to enter the kingdom of heaven.

## **LARGE CONGREGATIONS**

One of the more robust objections that I have met, regarding intergenerational worship, is that it's too challenging to do with a large congregation. This has also been an major issue for some Messy Churches, which have found themselves overwhelmed with 150 people or more coming along. Their cry has been that there is no time to make the friendships that are so much at the heart of Messy Church. They are unable to give newcomers proper attention and make them feel welcomed and, most importantly, remembered.

Certainly, there are challenges when numbers grow in any church setting; it becomes more difficult to create the sense of belonging and ownership that is so important for a positive experience of intergenerational worship and learning. It is natural that such large gatherings tend to default to a presentation mode from the front, however interactive they try to make it, and the congregation becomes

a group of passive spectators more than active participants in what is happening. This is a challenge for all types of services, whether intergenerational or not, but it is not an argument for dismissing the value and importance of being intergenerational. Large groups require an even greater effort than usual on the hospitality front (hospitality being one of the core values of Messy Church) and churches facing this challenge perhaps need to find a way to break their congregation down into more manageable units where the best of all-age worship can be experienced together.

The advice to many large Messy Churches has been to consider running a second Messy Church at a new time or partnering in some way ecumenically to enable numbers to be managed more sensibly. Having said that, the interactive nature of Messy Church, with its craft tables and freedom of movement, can lend itself far better than many intergenerational models to accommodating larger numbers, as it appeals to so many different learning styles, tastes and attention spans. The fact that the celebration time is kept short in Messy Church is also an advantage in this respect. Perhaps the biggest challenge that most larger Messy Churches face is with the catering, but here again I have come across some ingenious solutions, including, in one Messy Church, a second sitting for the meal.

## **NOT 'CHURCH LITE'**

Intergenerational worship and learning is possible and offers in no way a shallow or superficial experience of worship. Anyone who has worked with children for any length of time will testify that their presence means there will always be plenty of questions raised, which are far from simplistic;

in fact, they are often questions that many adults would like to voice but have never dared ask. Intergenerational worship is not 'church lite', as some would claim, but 'church right'; as I have argued in previous chapters, it captures the true biblical model of one generation coming alongside another, sharing the story of God's love.

#### FOR REFLECTION

- How open to change are you prepared to be when it comes to trying out a different way of worshipping together?
- What practical and personal difficulties do you foresee for yourself, should you decide to commit yourself to intergenerational church as your regular gathered worship?
- Who is worship for? Do you see worship primarily as a time for you to receive more of the grace of God or are you there to see others blessed?

## SESSION 1

# A SHELTER FOR ALL

### An Old Testament Messy Church session

**Bible story:** Based on the story in Nehemiah 8:1–18

**Context:** A formal gathered celebration at the end of a major church building project

**Theme:** Building up the people of God

**Key verse:** ‘The people were glad because God had given them great joy. The women and children were also very happy. The joyful sound in Jerusalem could be heard far away’ (Nehemiah 12:43, NIRV)

### HOW DOES THIS SESSION HELP PEOPLE GROW IN THEIR FAITH?

The account of how God moved Nehemiah to leave his comfortable job at the court of the Persian king, to return to his homeland and project-manage the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls, has always been a well-loved Bible story. The book that bears Nehemiah’s name is, in effect, his personal diary of how God inspired each step of the rebuilding, which, remarkably, was completed in just under two months. He was a humble man who recognised that it was by God’s help that he was able to lift the spirits of those who had returned from exile, spurring them on to work together to repair the walls of their ancient capital city. They overcame opposition

and discouragement from neighbouring tribal leaders, as well as internal disagreements.

In chapter 8 we find the story of the great celebration that took place as they all gathered—young and old—in front of the Water Gate to hear God's word read by the priest Ezra, to respond in repentant prayer, and to eat and drink together. They recreated shelters on the rooftops and in the courtyards as a reminder of how God had looked after them when they were wandering across the desert on their journey to the promised land.

All the elements of Messy Church are here—Bible story, prayer, food, creativity and, of course, the generations worshipping and working together. It must have been an occasion that even the very youngest would always remember, because they were part of a glorious messy togetherness that brought them all close to God again after many years of rebellion and exile. The celebration continued over many days, allowing the older members of the congregation to share a prayer that recalled all that God had done with his people from the very beginning (Nehemiah 9). Over the eight days of the festival, there were times for singing God's praises as well as expressing sadness for the way they had let God down; there were feasting and fasting; there was a time for listening to God's word being read, as well as opportunities for families to work together in response to what they heard.

Special occasions such as these, where all the generations come together, are important both for our own faith development and for discovering our place within the bigger picture of God's love and purposes for this world. No wonder the joy and singing coming from Jerusalem could be heard a long way off.

## **ACTIVITIES**

### **Build a den**

You will need blankets, sheets, old curtains, pegs/clips, chairs, tables, clothes rails, and anything that can be used to make a den large enough for a family group to get inside. If you have the space, there could be several dens built by the various groups at your Messy Church.

God's people built shelters to live in during the Festival of Booths while they listened to the teachings of God.

What special places are there in your life, where you feel you can come close to God?

### **Build the Water Gate**

You will need lots of old packing cases, cardboard and strong tape. You could also use some sheets of coloured wrapping paper (perhaps in blue) to decorate the Water Gate. This is a group activity, to be worked on by families over the course of the session.

Not only had the walls of Jerusalem been broken down but also the gates had been burned and needed rebuilding. Everyone gathered in front of the Water Gate to hear God's word being read by Ezra.

How welcoming is the gate/door/entrance at your Messy Church? How might it be improved?

### **Gate cakes**

Decorate plain fairy cakes with coloured icing. Top the icing with icing shapes that represent some of the different gates of the city: sheep gate, fountain gate, horse gate, rubbish gate, valley gate, fish gate and water gate.

The new walls created a safe place, but there also needed to be ways in and out of the city, and they needed to be guarded carefully to prevent enemies from getting in.

Why do you think the gates had these different names? What nicknames could you give the various doors and entrances at your Messy Church?

### **Make a brick**

You will need a paddling pool, a mixture of soil, sand and clay, washing-up bowls with soapy water, towels, takeaway trays with lids and labels for lids. Invite people to take off shoes and socks and tread down the brick mixture. Then fill a tray to make an individual brick for each family to take away. Put the lid on and let the brick dry out at home.

The people who built the walls in the story were not expert brick-makers. They had to learn how to do it.

How difficult is it to learn a new skill? What would help you?

### **Make Jerusalem safe**

Set up a corner of your Messy Church with plenty of building blocks, Lego pieces and other appropriate construction materials. On a large strong surface, mark out a perimeter for the walls, including the twelve gates. Invite family groups to build the walls along your marked outline. There were also some towers, which could be added to your walls.

It took Nehemiah and his team 52 days to complete the rebuilding of the wall. Everyone got involved, sometimes repairing the wall near to where they lived and sometimes helping out wherever else there was a need.

What different jobs might each member of the family do, depending on their age?

### **Ezra's book**

You will need long strips of paper, plenty of narrow cardboard tubes, crayons, paste, felts, paints and ribbon. The book that Ezra read from was probably in the form of a scroll. Lay out a long strip of paper and attach a cardboard tube at each end. Roll the tubes and paper in towards the centre. You might like to paste in a preprinted song of praise from the story, such as the one recorded in Nehemiah 9:5. Decorate the scroll and tie it with ribbon to hold it together.

When Ezra and the others prayed and reminded everyone of how God had kept them throughout history, there is a recurring phrase: 'But you loved them very much'. (Nehemiah 9:19–31, NIRV). God's love never gives up.

What encouraging words would you want to read out from your scroll to your friends and family?

### **A wall of prayer**

On a large piece of plain paper, draw outlines that suggest the shapes of bricks in a wall. Invite families to write, on rectangular sticky notes, special prayers for safety for those facing trouble and difficult circumstances.

Here is the prayer with which Nehemiah ends his Jerusalem diary: 'You are my God. Please remember me with kindness' (Nehemiah 13:31, NIRV).

Who needs to know that God will keep them safe today?

## **A Messy family tree**

You will need chubby wax crayons, felt-tip pens, colouring pencils, pencils, paper, paints, paintbrushes, glue sticks and the shape of a large tree. Invite families to draw, paint or write their family tree on to pieces of light green card, which they will then paste on to the large Messy Church family tree.

Nehemiah is fond of making lists in his diary. There are registers of all the families who were invited back to Jerusalem and worked on the walls together. Nehemiah is not interested just in rebuilding with bricks and mortar but in bringing together the whole family of God again after years of exile. Messy Church is about creating a new community around the story of Jesus.

I wonder just how big the family of the church is. Who do you know who is part of another church, somewhere else in the world?

## **Family groups**

You will need sets of pegs to make families of peg dolls, along with fabric for clothes, felt-tips to colour in faces, and wool for hair. In order to stand the family groups up, use some polystyrene or flower oasis. These family groups could then be placed within the walls made from construction materials, as described in the 'Make Jerusalem safe' activity.

The groups that gathered in the square before the Water Gate included all ages—anyone who could understand what was being said. It was an intergenerational occasion. Some of the priests came round to talk with the groups, to explain what they were hearing.

What has been your best experience of worshipping God together as a family?

### **Food to share**

In your publicity for this Messy Church session, invite every family to bring along one non-perishable food item that they can give away. During Messy Church, invite families to design and write greetings cards to go with their gifts. It would be good to link this activity with your church's food bank.

In the story, families celebrated not only in the square but also back in their homes, where they shared their food with those who were in need. They realised that this is also part of our worship of God (Nehemiah 8:10, 12).

In what ways can we express our worship of God, other than by singing and praying?

### **CELEBRATION**

Gather everyone for the celebration, using an appropriate song for the occasion. Here are some suggested words, sung to the tune of 'Bob the Builder'.

*Nehemiah*

*Can we fix it?*

*Nehemiah*

*Yes, we can*

*Nehemiah*

*Can we build it?*

*Nehemiah*

*Yes, we can*

*Nehemiah*

*Can God help us?*

*Nehemiah*

*Yes, God can*

*Nehemiah*

*Can we thank him?*

*Nehemiah*

*Yes, we can*

As people sing and gather, build a secure high platform in the middle of your celebration area—for example, a chair on a table on a piece of staging. This is Ezra's pulpit before the Water Gate, from which he read from God's word to all the families gathered there.

Welcome everyone and draw on the various activities to help set the scene for the story.

### **Story outline**

Open up a large version of one of the scrolls, like the ones made in the activity 'Ezra's book', and read the words below. Every time the storyteller says, 'Praise our great Lord God', everyone should shout out, 'Amen, Amen'.

*God made the heavens and the earth: praise our great Lord God!*  
**Amen, Amen**

*God chose Abraham and brought us into the promised land:  
praise our great Lord God!*  
**Amen, Amen**

*God rescued us when we were slaves in Egypt: praise our great  
Lord God!*  
**Amen, Amen**

*God showed us the way to go in the desert: praise our great Lord God!*

**Amen, Amen**

*God gave us the ten commandments: praise our great Lord God!*

**Amen, Amen**

*God looked after us by day and by night: praise our great Lord God!*

**Amen, Amen**

Say, 'But so often we forgot to remember God. We decided we knew best. We turned away from God's love.' (*Ask everyone to pull a sad face and look down to the ground with shame.*)

'But listen to what Nehemiah told everyone: this is a special day for the Lord your God. So don't be sad and don't cry, because God loves you so much. The joy of the Lord is your strength, so praise our great Lord God!'

(Everyone says) **Amen, Amen**

'Now go back to your homes; enjoy good food and drink and share with those who don't have anything.'

Encourage all the families to gather in the shelters that they have built. Then invite one member of each family to come forward with the food item they have brought to add to the local food bank. (Have spare items ready, of course.)

Now invite everyone to gather in a circle and become the living walls of your Messy Church Jerusalem. This is a safe place for families to gather.

End the story with these words from Psalm 48:12-14. You may be able to put them up on a screen for everyone to say together. (Explain that 'Zion' is another name for Jerusalem.)

*Let's walk around Zion and count its towers. We will see its strong walls and visit each fortress. Then you can say to future generations, 'Our God is like this for ever and will always guide us.'*

## **Song**

Here's a song suggestion, sung to the tune of 'The wise man built his house upon the rock'.

*God's friend Nehemiah built a wall tall and strong (x3)  
So the city would be safe.*

*The people helped to build each gate and tower (x3)  
So the wall would be complete.*

*They prayed to the Lord to help them with the work (x3)  
And he gave them joy and strength.*

*They listened and they prayed, as they gathered one and all (x3)  
'and praised their great Lord God!'*

## **Prayers**

As everyone stands in a large family circle, use the following prayer suggestions:

*Help us, Lord, to care for each other in this Messy community.  
(Invite everyone to reach out to each side, placing hands across each other's shoulders.)*

*Help us, Lord, to be strong for the week ahead. (Invite everyone to link up elbows.)*

*Help us, Lord, to welcome each other and be good friends to our neighbours. (Invite everyone to hold hands.)*

*Help us, Lord, to trust in you, each and every day. (Invite everyone to continue holding hands but lift them high.)*

*Praise our great Lord God! Amen, Amen*

End with the Messy Grace (with actions).

## **MEAL SUGGESTION**

- Fish fingers, chips, bread and butter
- Gate cakes (made in the activity session)

## **TAKE-HOME IDEA**

Place your 'takeaway' brick somewhere in your home to remind you of Nehemiah and today's story. When you listen to or watch the news and hear about cities that are caught up in war, hold the brick and say a prayer to God to help the families there.

*Why do more and more people advocate the idea that the generations should explore faith together, and what does the Bible have to say about this? How does this fit with our inherited model of age-related groups for learning and discipleship? And is it really practical and possible to have an experience of church where the youngest to the oldest share the same meeting space, service theme and time to worship? Messy Church is claiming that this can and does happen!*

In *Messy Togetherness* Martyn Payne discusses Messy Church as an intergenerational expression of church and the benefits of this to the church community. He explores current thinking about faith development and gives a biblical rationale for the all-age approach, offering practical advice and sharing stories and ideas from across the Messy Church network.

Also included are three complete outlines for Messy Church sessions, based on stories from the Old Testament, the Gospels and the Epistles.



**Martyn Payne** is part of BRF's Messy Church team, visiting Messy Churches up and down the UK, listening to the stories of how Messy Church is developing, sharing good practice and bringing encouragement. He has a background in Bible storytelling and leading all-age worship and is passionate about the blessing that comes when generations explore faith together.

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for resources, email updates and the Messy blog