

Few Children Great Opportunities

12 stand-alone sessions for mixed-age
church-based groups

SUE PRICE AND
RUTH ALLISTON



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15 The Chambers, Vineyard

Abingdon OX14 3FE

United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)1865 319700

Email: enquiries@brf.org.uk

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Foreword

Some years ago, I was with Sue and Ruth on a stand showcasing children's work resources. We were unable to meet one person's request for what she wanted to occupy her group—colouring sheets. Despite our efforts to show her the value of more creative activities, she was adamant: colouring sheets were all that were needed! Now, colouring sheets have their place... somewhere. But surely our children deserve more than that!

Working with Sue and Ruth over many years has opened my eyes to the multitude of ways in which children discover Jesus and respond to his love, and thus the importance of giving them a range of experiences and learning opportunities. I have found Sue and Ruth to be the most practical of visionaries. They are passionate in promoting quality and creativity in children's ministry, with each child valued as unique and precious to God. At the same time, they understand the challenges facing children's workers and parents, and have always aimed to do all they can to make the role as fulfilling and enjoyable as possible.

This book is a treasure trove for all who struggle to provide meaningful times for small and fluctuating groups. It is an inspired concept, whereby sessions can be experienced in any order or no order and still be relevant and fun for both children and leaders. What a bonus, at a time when the importance of faith in the family is rightly being highlighted, to have ideas to follow the themes through the week in the home!

... And never again will I see a white van without shouting out 'Joy'!

Catherine Kyte
Faith Support Officer, Mothers' Union



Introduction

Few Children, Great Opportunities is designed for church groups with very small numbers and a mixed age range from 3 to 11 years. That doesn't mean the material isn't appropriate for larger groups or a single age group. It just means that there are no assumptions about the levels of physical, mental or emotional maturity that the children may have reached and there are no team games or activities that require large numbers—no more than a child and two adults (to comply with your church child protection policy).

This book doesn't ask why you only have a small number of children in your group. It may be a result of the demographic of your community, there may be another, more family-focused church in the locality, or you may have large numbers of children attending other programmes in the church. Other books, such as *Messy Church* (Barnabas, 2006) and *Not Sunday, Not School* (Barnabas, 2006), give strategies to develop alternative events for families and children but, however successful fresh expressions may become, they often do little to increase the number of families attending the traditional Sunday service. Yet there are still some families who want to come along regularly or occasionally on a Sunday morning, and the church needs to provide for them.

If this is your situation, you will probably already have tried several methods of dealing with small groups or irregular numbers of children with a wide age range, and have discovered that there is no 'one size fits all' solution. How much easier it would be if there were! A traditional teaching programme or other published resources will generally need considerable adaptation, and a leader who spends time preparing thoroughly may find that there is only one child one week, three the next, and perhaps none the next time. Any children who do come may be of disparate ages, making it even more challenging to prepare in advance. Naturally, many leaders become despondent and less willing to devote the time and energy needed to prepare well.

Sporadic attendance isn't only a problem for churches with small numbers of children. In any church, a child may attend on alternate weeks because they are visiting Dad, who now lives some distance away, on the other weeks; a family may come only occasionally, when everyone gets up and ready on time; visits to family and friends, holidays, football matches and shopping trips all result in

weeks missed. If you are using sequential material, a child can quickly lose the thread that is running through the series of sessions. When your group is small, however, sporadic attendance is magnified and leaders will be more aware of the issue. If three children don't come when you have 15 on the register, it makes little difference to the leader, but, if there are only those three on the register, it is another week when the leader has prepared pointlessly. This is a particular problem if you are following a sequence of sessions and have a rota of leaders, as holding over a prepared session can mean that it is used out of context later.

So the requirement is for a resource that is thematic rather than sequential (sessions can be used in any order, yet still build on each other, so that the programme doesn't just consist of random Bible stories that are never set in context for the children), is suitable for a small number of children with a wide age range, and can be modified at the point of delivery to be appropriate for the children who are present.

We aim to bring a fresh and encouraging look at how a small group of children and adults can learn together about God. It's also important for children to know and understand that, while they may be doing something different from the rest of the church at a given time, they are very much part of the church, both local and universal. We want to foster the sense of belonging to God and to each other, and help children come to love him and want to respond.

The person preparing the sessions doesn't need to be a Bible expert; we refer to that person as the facilitator. The material is structured to offer learning opportunities from Jesus and the stories of other people and organisations, and then to consider how the group and the individuals in it—adult facilitators, helpers and children—might want to respond. Churches obviously need to be sure that they are adhering to appropriate child protection policies, with at least two adults working with the children, and they may also choose to have facilitators who are trained in aspects of children's ministry and who regularly meet for Bible study. However, teenage helpers or older children could be invited to prepare and facilitate part or all of a session. This approach also means that the material can easily be used by children's cell groups.

Because a small number of children with a mixed age range also defines many families, the content can be adapted for home use by families who want to spend time growing in faith together. Some churches are successfully attracting new families to monthly programmes such as Messy Church, but they don't have the resources to increase the frequency of the event. Each of the twelve

sessions in this book could provide material for families to explore together at home over the course of a month. This option is covered in more detail in the section headed 'Using the material at home' (see page 24).

The sessions in this book concentrate on the character of God. Scripture tells us that 'the only one who truly knows the Father' is the Son, but that 'the Son wants to tell others about the Father, so that they can know him too' (Matthew 11:27). None of us can wholly know the unknowable God, but through his word and through his Son we can begin to know him and have the rest of our time and eternity to discover more of his wonderful character and nature. When we begin to know and appreciate who God is, we can begin to worship him and honour him with our lives. We want both adults and children together to be formed and shaped in the character of God and to explore his life in and through them.

- Each session is themed, and it doesn't matter in which order the sessions are used. In your initial preparation you may wish to discuss with your church leader the preaching programme for the coming few months and see if any of the sessions are more appropriate for particular weeks. Once prepared, however, a facilitator can hold a session over and use it at any later date if no children turn up.
- Each session is flexible and can be easily adapted to the time available, whether 20 minutes or over an hour. If you only have a short session time, the material can be shaped into two or more sessions so that you are not wasting material. See the section headed 'Adjusting the material for shorter sessions' (p. 22).
- Emphasis is given to forming and growing a relationship with God and the people around us, and learning to serve God and each other.
- Much of the preparation for the session by the facilitator will consist of reading the Bible references, thinking through their own responses and becoming familiar with the options and ideas suggested.
- The activities suggested, together with various options, can be customised to the numbers and ages of the group, even adapting at the point of delivery. It may sometimes happen that all the items prepared do not get used on a particular day. This shouldn't be regarded as a waste of time or effort, as these items can often be used or adapted on another occasion, and will save preparation time later on.

- Each session includes ideas for home follow-up that can be suggested to parents, but the whole session can also be adapted to be used at home by families who want to set aside a time to connect with God and each other. See the section headed 'Using the material at home'.
- Positive attention is given to developing an awareness of the mystery and wonder of God and finding meaningful ways together to celebrate him and express love for him.
- Everyone is encouraged to:
 - * discover God's character through the actions or teaching of Jesus.
 - * find out how people have responded to God in the past (both people in the Bible and in more recent history).
 - * discover people and organisations today who are responding to God through love and action.
 - * consider their own response.

Heads, hands and hearts

We tend to think that it is detrimental to the children if they are in a group with a wide age range because we can't tailor the Bible teaching to their developmental level. But several commentators in the area of children's ministry and spiritual development have recently challenged this belief.

In particular, in her book on children's spirituality, Rebecca Nye writes:

To improve the child-friendliness of their work with children, churches emulate the age-divided, age-appropriate approach to intellectual development that is followed by schools...

Learning information and being able to turn ideas round is often well served by this developmentally sensitive approach. But it is not inevitable that spirituality is subject to the same restrictions. There's a real danger here of making the error of over-identifying spirituality and intellectual ability. We need to take seriously the alternative—that spirituality might have less to do with age, intellect and mental life, and much more to do with being and feeling.

REBECCA NYE, *CHILDREN'S SPIRITUALITY* (CHURCH HOUSE PUBLISHING, 2009), p 84.

The Church of England report *Going for Growth: transformation for children, young people and the Church* challenges the church to try to become the good news rather than just teaching the good news. It points out:

Christianity teaches that all human beings are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). This means that all people whether they are four months, six, 15 or 90 years old, are complete human beings. Our problem, as human beings, is that we are clear from our experience that we are born as infants and then grow and develop gradually into adulthood. But this perspective, which drives so much of our education, law, social behaviour, parenting and relationships towards children and young people, distracts us from a fundamental truth about human existence, which is that God does not view us exclusively in this way and does not judge us on how old, wise or developed or ‘finished’ we are.

This material seeks to offer a balance between discovery—of something about God’s character and of stories about people through history who have striven to behave in a godly way—and engagement, through the opportunity to worship, consider a personal response and grow spiritually. Both discovery and engagement are reinforced by giving children the opportunity to be active and use as many of their senses as possible.

In the sessions, we use the following symbols:

-  growing head knowledge through storytelling
-  supporting knowledge by activity
-  developing heart knowledge

You will find choices in each of the sections that will help you tailor the material for your time and group, but we would encourage you to ensure that you have a balance of head, hand and heart elements in each session.

Story and activity

Ivy Beckwith says:

I began to think that one of the ways, if not the way, children develop faith and are spiritually formed is through having their imagination captured for the kingdom of God...

It would seem that if our faith has any credence at all then the idea of living in the kingdom of God must have some compelling pull to it. After all, the New Testament is full of stories of people literally dropping everything to follow Jesus. And the history of the church is full of the same kind of stories of people being compelled to give up wealth, careers, and life in order to work in and for the kingdom of God. So what must it take to capture our children's imaginations, and then souls, through the hope and magnificent love of God's kingdom? ...

It takes being intentional with story, ritual, and relationship at home, in the faith community, and in worship with children.

IVY BECKWITH, *FORMATIONAL CHILDREN'S MINISTRY* (BAKER BOOKS, 2010), PP. 14–15

Capturing a child's imagination has little to do with their chronological age. You will, of course, need to take account of children's ages as you choose the vocabulary you use for your stories and discussions, or as you think about the dexterity required for an activity. It is important to tell stories in a way that the youngest children present can understand (you can use questions to check that they have grasped the key points and retell parts of the story if necessary) but don't discount all activities or ideas that may seem too old or too young for the children present. Older children are often happy to participate in an activity that seems 'simple' and, if they do not have to put all their effort into concentrating on the task, you can also engage them in a conversation about the theme. Conversely, if an activity seems too complex for a younger child, it is often possible to find a simpler level for the same idea or provide assistance.

It's fine to bring toys for younger children if you have a fairly long session. The toys may be related to the theme, but not necessarily. Small children can't concentrate for as long as older children and will usually play happily for a while as older children complete an activity or do something else. Younger ones can be invited to join in again later.

Ritual

In *Few Children, Great Opportunities* we develop a story book as a focus or ritual that enables a record of Bible stories to be built up and reviewed, acts as a prayer diary and becomes a communal journal for the small group of children. Everyone can contribute to the story book and then they can look back, discovering the chronology of the Bible, recalling stories already heard and

seeing how they fit in with the current story, and praising God for answered prayers. Children can proudly show the story book to other members of the church family, and leaders can use it to keep track of the sessions taught and children's attendance.

Children, especially younger children and those with autistic spectrum disorders, are comforted by familiar routine and the church has long known that ritual can bind a faith community together. Many of you will belong to churches where the ritual of the liturgy is important and where different liturgical colours are used to mark the church seasons.

We follow the same structure for each session while varying the activity ideas, enabling you to establish a familiar, not boring, routine. We have also used colour as an additional way of recalling the twelve characteristics of God that we explore in this book. Older children who can read and understand how an index works may be able to find the story of Jesus being tested in the desert (Luke 4:1–13) in the story book, but all children can find the black pages used for the session about self-control. Then, later, when they see a blank black screen at home, they may remember that they can show self-control by not constantly asking to watch a DVD or TV programme or play a computer game.

Wondering and open-ended questions

Our aim is to bring our groups before God, learning, worshipping and playing with and alongside each other, and experiencing the awe of being in the presence of Almighty God. This is a journey of discovery for all concerned, both adults and children. We want to reclaim the art of thinking, contemplating and being gently guided to find our own answers in God. As Rebecca Nye says, 'Habitual wondering about spiritual matters, and in response to spiritual content (such as Bible stories), inspires children to value the possibility that fresh insights might be yielded each time, as opposed to things being fixed once and for all' (*Children's Spirituality*, p. 38).

The material in this book uses wondering and open-ended questions, which help to make it appropriate for a wide age range. But, as we introduce the concept of open-ended questions, we also bear in mind that children (especially younger children) may be 'concrete learners', finding it difficult to engage in abstract imagination. Those of you familiar with the techniques of Godly Play will know how it uses the precise placement of objects to encourage children

to wonder about a story. The sessions in this book are not so prescriptive but they do encourage the use of familiar objects to help children to start thinking.

You may have one or two young teens in the congregation who sometimes want to come out with the children. Or, if the material is being used in a home setting, there may be a mix of ages that includes teenagers. The open-ended questions will enable them to respond at their own level of understanding. If appropriate, remind them that the group is for the children but you'd be happy to carry on the conversation afterwards. Encourage them to sometimes take responsibility for preparing all or part of a session.

Facilitators should take time to think about their own responses as they prepare, and should be ready to provide answers to questions, to ensure that the teaching has been understood. Adults, though, can be too ready to fill a silence. Children need time to process a question and you should be prepared to leave a silence of up to a minute after making a wondering statement. Sometimes you may then give your own response, but you may choose to move on. Just because a child doesn't verbalise a response, it doesn't mean they haven't thought it through and grown spiritually as a result.



God is love

- Theme: We can spread Jesus' love
- Learn from Jesus: Matthew 5:43–48
- Bible verse: 'Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God' (1 John 4:7, NIV).
- Discover other people's stories: Jonathan; Moses' family; C.T. Studd; Thomas Barnardo; WEC
- Theme colour: Red

Way in

Spreading stickiness

Bring: Red paper or cloth; slices of bread; butter or margarine; strawberry or raspberry jam; plastic knives; plates; wipes; plastic film

Cover a table with red paper or a red cloth.

Say: I wonder why we are using the colour red today...

Put the food items on the table.

Say: I wonder what we could do with all these things...

Listen and affirm ideas without comment. Help everyone make jam sandwiches.

Say: It's good to have things that spread easily. Stickiness spreads everywhere, too!

Have everyone wipe their fingers. Cover and save sandwiches to be eaten at the end of the session.

Learn from Jesus

Matthew 5:43–48: Today's story is about when Jesus told people to love everyone. People watched Jesus doing things and spreading God's love wherever

he went. They told their friends about him, and their friends came to watch Jesus and listen to him.



Tell the story

Choose the story option most appropriate for your group.

Jesus spread God's love everywhere he went. Everyone knew about Jesus. Everyone wanted to be near him and feel God's love. They heard Jesus talk about God's love. One day, people followed Jesus all the way up into the high hills.

Jesus sat down and the people sat down too, as close as they could. Jesus said, 'You know how it is—when someone hurts you, you want to hurt them back. But God wants you to be loving, like him. Not just loving to your own family and your best friends. That's the easy bit! God wants you to be loving even when people are unkind or hurt you, or don't love you back. God wants you to be loving, like him, and spread his love, like I do.'

1. Follow my leader

Have the children follow a leader slowly around the room, down a corridor, up stairs or outside if suitable. Lead and walk as you start telling the story, then sit down together for the rest of the story.

2. Watch my face

Read the story sentence by sentence. Children can make up actions for each one. Appoint a confident reader to be Jesus, while listeners choose expressive faces as an accompaniment to Jesus' teaching. Put the whole drama together.

3. Find the story in the Bible

An adult or child may read Matthew 5:43–48 from a Bible or children's Bible storybook, such as *Barnabas Children's Bible*, No. 262.

Consider the story

- I wonder why people wanted to be near Jesus...
- I wonder what we would have thought if we had been there...
- What did we find out about Jesus in that story?
- In what ways does Jesus spread God's love? How can we do that, too?

Explore the story

Choose one or more activities, depending on your group and time.



1. Spreading red

Bring: Kitchen roll; saucers; red food colouring; water

Say: What's today's colour? Red is often used as a colour for love.

Pour a little red food colouring on to a saucer for each person. Add water. Everyone can fold a sheet of kitchen roll into four and place it in their saucer, turning it over until it has absorbed as much water as possible and is covered all over.

Say: See how love has spread all over the paper. It's spread on to our fingers, too!

Leave the paper to dry. Later, when it's dry, you may cut out a heart shape and write 'God is love' on it.



Stick a 'God is love' heart in your story book.

2. Salted!

Bring: Packets of different flavoured crisps, including one salted and one unsalted variety; bowls

Put the crisps in separate bowls without letting the children see the packets. Invite them to identify the different flavours.

Say: Which crisps are salty? Which crisps aren't? Salt mixed with food makes it tasty and enjoyable. We need a little salt each day to keep us healthy.

Point out the salted varieties.

Say: The salt is spread right through these crisps. Whoever we share these crisps with gets some salt. God wants his love to spread right through us so that we can share it with others.



Stick an empty, salt-flavoured crisp packet in your story book, writing, 'When we follow God's ways, we will be like a little salt in the cooking pot, making the whole meal taste good.'

3. Follow God's ways

Illustrate the sentence 'When we follow God's ways, we will be like a little salt in the cooking pot, making the whole meal taste good' using three pictures: footprints with a signpost showing 'God's ways'; a cooking pot over a fire; someone with a full tummy and a big smile.



Stick the pictures in your story book.



Time to praise God

Hold up a Bible. Explain that the Bible story told us that Jesus spread God's love wherever he went. Jesus shows us what God is like. God is love.

It tells us in the Bible

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. (1 John 4:7)

Bring: Envelopes or postcards; stamps (optional)

Find and read the Bible verse. Explain that this is part of a letter from John to other Christians. John was Jesus' best-loved friend. Older children can write out the verse like a letter, writing John's name at the end. You can write or print out the letter for younger children and they can decorate a border around it.



Options: Put the letter in envelopes and post them to your church leaders; display them on a church notice board; take them home to display; stick them in your story book.

Music praise

You can sing together or along with a CD or DVD. Some children may prefer to do actions, dance or jump around rather than sing. Alternatively, you can play a CD while doing the Bible verse activity. Choose songs relating to God's love (see page 19 for suggested CDs).

Activity options

1. Spread all over us

Bring: Duvet; shopping catalogue

Say: Do you have a duvet or blankets at home?

Show children the duvet section in the shopping catalogue, with the duvets in their packets.

Say: Duvets are bought all tightly wrapped in shiny plastic—impossible to sleep under. What do we need to do to sleep under a duvet?

Sit on the floor, spreading the duvet over everyone. Repeat each line with a clapping rhythm for children to copy:

God is always loving.

His love is ever the same.

Always there for us.

Spread all over us.

God wants us to spread his love

Till everyone is covered.

2. Pass it on

Bring: Red paper hearts; plastic beakers

Fix a heart to the bottom of a plastic beaker for each person. Sit in a circle or, if there are only two of you, opposite each other. Everyone holds a beaker in their right hand so that the heart is on the top. Say the sentence below slowly, moving your beaker from right hand to left hand and then on to the person on your left,

as follows: ‘I can praise God for his love...’ (move beaker from right to left hand) ‘and I can pass it on...’ (pass beaker to person on your left).

Start slowly, saying the sentence together and moving the beaker from right to left. Repeat, moving beakers in rhythm and passing them on each time, gradually getting faster until the game collapses.

Discover other people’s stories

Choose from the options below to discover people who were (or are) inspired to be loving, like God.



Tell their story and discuss how they show God’s love through their actions.

- Jonathan: a loving best friend to David. Find the story below.
- Moses’ family: risked their own lives to save the life of baby Moses. Find the story in your Bible (Exodus 1:22—2:9) or a children’s Bible storybook, such as *Barnabas Children’s Bible*, No. 42.
- Thomas Barnardo: in Victorian times he discovered children begging and sleeping rough and began a work that still continues, helping abused, neglected and vulnerable children (see www.barnardos.org.uk).
- C.T. Studd, the founder of WEC: with a vision to ‘love God, and love your neighbour’. Find the story on the WEC website or in *Ten Boys Who Used Their Talents* by Irene Howat (Christian Focus Publications, 2008).
- WEC: an organisation that seeks to bring the gospel to unevangelised peoples and demonstrate the compassion of Christ in a needy world. Their vision is still that of their founder: ‘Love God, and love your neighbour’. You can download free children’s resources from their website, www.wec-int.org.uk.
- Focus on a local person, organisation or charity exhibiting and spreading God’s love.

Find Jonathan’s story in 1 Samuel 18:1–4; 19:1–10, 20; *Barnabas Children’s Bible*, No. 122.

Find a hiding place, under a table or in a corner, to tell or read the story.

David made a hiding place in a field. I wonder why he did that...

David had been a shepherd but now he was winning lots of battles in King Saul's army. Jonathan was the king's son. Jonathan and David were best friends, but King Saul hated David. Twice King Saul tried to kill David with his spear. Jonathan told his father that David was his friend, and King Saul promised not to hurt David. But King Saul broke his promise and threw his spear angrily at David again.

David hid from King Saul in a field. Jonathan told King Saul that David was a good man and could be trusted, but King Saul even tried to kill Jonathan for being friends with David. Jonathan knew that David had to leave or be killed. Jonathan loved his father, the king, and he loved his best friend, David. Jonathan fired an arrow in the field where David was hiding, as a signal that David must run away. David and Jonathan made a promise always to be friends and always to care for each other.

Consider Jonathan's story

- What did we find out about David and Jonathan in that story?
- I wonder what makes a good best friend...
- The love and friendship that David and Jonathan had for each other came from God. All love comes from God and we can share it with each other.



Explore their story

Choose one or more activity, depending on your group and time.

1. Radio reporter

Imagine you are going to interview your chosen character. Help the children to work out some questions and answers. For example:

- Question: 'Jonathan, why did you try to persuade your father, the king, not to hurt David?'
- Answer: 'Because David was my best friend and I loved him. I wanted him to be safe, and for my father to accept him.'

Hold up your fist to your mouth as a microphone and ask the questions. Children can speak the answers into the microphone. Questions and answers can be written or pictures relating to the story can be drawn.



Stick questions and answers or pictures in your story book.

2. Magazine reporter

Draw pictures or take photos of children posing the key parts of the story. Group-write a magazine article under a heading such as ‘My best friend saved me!’

3. Playtime

Younger children can have a time of free play. If possible, include toys and puzzles that relate to families and friends, and encourage the children to show love to dolls, soft toys and each other.



Respond

You may like to play a worship CD quietly in the background during this activity.

What about me?

Say: What do you think it means to be loving? Do you know that God wants us to be loving, like him? I would like to be loving, like God, and be like *[the character in your chosen story]*. Would you like to be loving and spread God’s love around? I wonder what we could do that would be loving, that would spread God’s love around...

Listen to the children’s ideas, share your own and help them form some practical possibilities. Help each child write one idea on a red heart to take home.

Let’s pray

Help children contribute specific ideas for prayer using the following pointers. Ask them if there is anything else they would like the group to pray for.

- Let's thank God that he's so loving.
- Sometimes we're not loving like God, and we can tell him that we're sorry.
- Sometimes it's hard to be loving like God, and we need to ask him to help us.



Record particular prayer requests in your story book.

Review

Look back through your story book. Check where today's Bible stories fit in relation to others already in the book. Look at some previous prayer requests and find out if and how they have been answered. Note any answered prayers in the story book.

Way out

Eat the jam sandwiches that you made at the 'Way in' stage.

Say: Remember, God loves us. He wants us to spread his love everywhere we go. Not just when it's easy, with our families and friends, but when it's hard, with people we don't like or who are unkind to us.

Family follow-up

See www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk/extra-resources/ to download the family follow-up sheet.

Play

Stick a paper plate on to a lolly stick for each person. On one side draw a happy face and on the other side a sad face. Hold up the happy faces and, in turn, name a person who is easy to love. Hold up the sad faces and think of a person who is sometimes hard to love. Imagine sitting in the crowd on the hillside, listening to Jesus encourage us to love even those we don't want to love. How we need God's love to help us!

Add 'love' to your 'God is...' collage or patchwork.

Praise

Give each person a few words from the Bible verse to say in sequence. When the family is able to do that, fill a cup with water and slowly pour it into a bowl while the verse is being said. Can you get through the verse before the water runs out? Try again, pouring more slowly. We run out of our own love so quickly. We need more of God's love. We can praise him that he never, ever runs out of love and he will give us more when we ask him.

Write the verse, or random words from it, using magnetic letters, to remind everyone of the verse when they use the fridge. Younger children can spell out LOVE using magnetic fridge letters, alphabet bricks or letters shaped out of playdough.

The theme colour is red: making a strawberry jelly for tea or adding cherry tomatoes or red-coated small cheeses to lunchboxes can act as a reminder to behave in a loving way, as will looking out for the colour red as you are out and about—on flowers, berries, cars, postboxes and so on.

Plan

Explore one or more of the stories together.

When you're out and about, look out for people's loving actions, such as mothers shopping for the family's food, someone pushing a wheelchair, a teacher helping a child who has fallen, a child refusing to join in unkindness to someone and so on. Share these with the rest of the family.

Ask: 'What can we do as a family, or as individuals, to spread God's love to others, even to those who are unkind to us or upset us?' Draw small red hearts around the rim of your play activity paper plates, on the happy side, and write your ideas around the face. Keep the paper plates where they can be seen regularly as a reminder to check how everyone is doing.

Pray

Thank God for any specific ways in which he has shown his love to the family. Say sorry to God for particular times when we have not shown his love to others. Ask for God's help to spread his love in the ways we have identified.

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