

MHA Sunday Youth Materials

(Aimed at age 11-18 in church youth groups or schools)



Intro: Show the following video - a T Mobile advert featuring a flash mob at Heathrow Terminal 5 arrivals.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NB3NPNM4xgo>

Game: Empires

This is a great game for youth groups both in-person or on Zoom.

If in person, each player writes down the name of a famous person or character (you can even select a theme they have to stick to) on a piece of paper and folds it so no-one else can see. These names are then collected into a hat/bucket.

If playing on Zoom, get each player to send their chosen name to the leader in a private message.

The leader then reads the list of names out, you may want to read the list twice. Once the game begins the names are NOT to be read out again, the players have to remember them! (If playing on zoom it can be a good idea to get everybody to place their hands on their heads whilst you read the list out so that no-one can cheat by writing the list down!

The leader nominates a player to start. This player then asks another player if they are *insert a name from the list*. If the first player guesses correctly then the second player joins their empire. If the first play guesses wrong, the second player takes control of the game.

Once a player joins an empire, they cannot be separated from it, only the head of the empire can be guessed.

If a player has an empire (other players they have collected during the game) and another player guesses their name correctly, they then take the whole empire.

Players within an empire can confer between themselves but it is always up to the head of the empire to make the actual guess.

The aim of the game is to be the last player standing who hasn't been guessed and therefore has all the other players within their empire.

You can tie the game into the theme by talking about the power of empires – that when people work together they get more done etc.

Bible Reading: Mark 5v1-20 (I've included the text from The Passion Translation here but you can use whichever version is most appropriate for your setting.)

A Demonized Man Set Free

5 They arrived at the other side of the lake, at the region of the Gerasenes. **2** As Jesus stepped ashore, a demon-possessed madman came out of the graveyard and confronted

him. ³ The man had been living there among the tombs of the dead, and no one was able to restrain him, not even with chains. ⁴ For every time they attempted to chain his hands and feet with shackles, he would snap the chains and break the shackles in pieces. He was so strong that no one had the power to subdue him. ⁵ Day and night he could be found lurking in the cemetery or in the vicinity, shrieking and mangling himself with stones!

⁶ When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran to him and threw himself down before him, ⁷ screaming out at the top of his lungs, "Leave me alone, Jesus, Son of the Most High God! Swear in God's name that you won't torture me!" ⁸ (For Jesus had already said to him, "Come out of that man, you demon spirit!")

⁹ Jesus said to him, "What is your name?"

"Mob," he answered. "They call me Mob because there are thousands of us in his body!" ¹⁰ He begged Jesus repeatedly not to expel them out of the region.

¹¹ Nearby there was a large herd of pigs feeding on the hillside. ¹² The demons begged him, "Send us into the pigs. Let us enter them!"

¹³ So Jesus gave them permission, and the demon horde immediately came out of the man and went into the pigs! This caused the herd to rush madly down the steep slope and fall into the lake, drowning about two thousand pigs! Depending on weight, the cost of two thousand live pigs today could be as much as \$250,000. The economic cost to the community over the loss of this herd was significant.

¹⁴ Now, the herdsmen fled to the nearby villages, telling everyone what they saw as they ran through the countryside, and everyone came out to see what had happened. ¹⁵ When they found Jesus, they saw the demonized man sitting there, properly clothed and in his right mind. Seeing what had happened to the man who had thousands of demons, the people were terrified. ¹⁶ Those who had witnessed *this miracle* reported the news to the people and included what had happened to the pigs. ¹⁷ Then they asked Jesus to leave their region.

¹⁸ And as Jesus began to get into the boat to depart, the man who had been set free from demons asked him, "Could I go with you?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered, "No," but said to him, "Go back to your home and to your family and tell them what the Lord has done for you. Tell them how he had mercy on you."

²⁰ So the man left and went into the region of Jordan and parts of Syria to tell everyone he met about what Jesus had done for him, and all the people marvelled!

Message:

We have been living through some very strange times over the last year and a bit. We've been told that we must stay at home. If we do go out we must stay at least 2 metres from other people and we must cover our mouth and nose because those other people might be carrying a dangerous virus.

We've been taught to fear other people or to regard them with suspicion – when did they last wash their hands? Do they always make sure to cough into their elbow? Is the mask they are wearing clean?

God designed us to live in community – to spend time with other people. It goes right back to the very beginning in Genesis when he found that out of all the creatures on earth, none was a suitable companion for Adam, so God made Eve, another human. People generally function best when they live in community, when they share things and interact with other people.

The coronavirus pandemic turned life as we knew it on its head. No longer were we supposed to do life in community. Now we must keep our distance and only mix with those we live with or who we were allowed to form “bubbles” with. Schools, Colleges and Universities were shut. People were told to work from home wherever they could.

People became isolated. In fact they were told by the Government that they HAD to isolate if they showed any symptoms or were found to have been in contact with anyone who had had symptoms.

These measures were put in place to protect people, especially the most vulnerable people in our society, but it can't be denied that isolation is not good for us, especially prolonged isolation.

In our Bible reading today we read about a man who was cast out from his community, he was marginalised and isolated. This man caused problems wherever he went – but we later find out that it wasn't the man's fault, it was because he was possessed by demons. The local people forced him to live in the graveyard, he wasn't welcome anywhere else.

Now, we don't often come across people who are possessed by demons today, but there are many other reasons why a person might be cast out, marginalised, or isolated from community which also might not be their fault. Can you think of any people or groups of people who might be treated like this?

Help the young people come up with ideas but be aware that some of the young people might fall into these categories, or know people who do, so keep it sensitive and kind.

A 2017 report from the United Nations Development Programme lists the following groups as often being systematically excluded by political, social, and cultural barriers as well as economic ones:

“Women and girls, rural dwellers, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, migrants and refugees, and the LGBTI community.”

Other examples could include people living in poverty, people who are homeless, people who are gifted and talented, and also older people (see the section “Focus on Older People” below).

How do you think it feels to be pushed aside or isolated for something that is not your fault or something you have no control over?

Help the young people discuss this but again be aware that it might be a sensitive topic for some.

The man in our Bible reading was hated by the people in his community. They saw him as violent and dangerous, but Jesus saw something else. Jesus saw through the man's

circumstances and longed to restore him to the community he should be part of. To do that Jesus cast the demons out of the man, and we later find him sitting fully clothed and in his right mind. But that wasn't the end of the story. Jesus had dealt with the circumstances, the demons, but the man was still alone.

You see, although the circumstances had changed, the man was still worried about the people's opinion of him. And I don't think it would be much helped by the fact that he had just lost them \$250,000 worth of pigs! The people of the surrounding area were so mad that they asked Jesus to leave and the man asks Jesus if he could go along with Him too!

But Jesus tells the man to go back to his family and his friends and to tell them all about the mercy of God. It would have been much easier for the man to have just jumped into the boat with Jesus and left to start a new life somewhere but Jesus knows that the man is now in a unique position to be able to share with his family and friends about the mercy of God and also about the need for community. Jesus takes this opportunity to restore the man to his rightful community.

Ask the group: How do you think the man felt when he went back to his family and friends? How do you think the people would have reacted to him?

Challenge

Think about the video we watched at the beginning of our session, it was filled with people coming together. People returning from different places and being greeted by their loved ones at the airport.

There were songs about being back, about being welcomed home. They were filled with joy and you could see the smiles on people's faces.

Is there anyone in your world who you need to welcome home?

Is there a person, or a group of people who you see as being marginalised or isolated that you could reach out to and welcome into your community?

Perhaps you could help your young people think of appropriate and creative ways they could reach out?

Focus on older people – As this material is designed for MHA Sunday I have included the following section which focuses on older people as an isolated or marginalised group. The material will work just as well without this section, but if you are able to include this as a discussion focus all the better!

Older people are especially vulnerable to social isolation and the loneliness it can cause. According to Age UK, over 2 million people in England aged 75+ live alone, and more than a million of them can go for over a month without speaking to a friend, neighbour or family member – and that data was collected *before* the pandemic!

With older people being told to shield and stay home, even more isolation has developed.

So many of us have turned to digital technology to stay connected during lockdowns, using FaceTime, Zoom, and social media to keep in touch with loved ones. But surveys suggest that over a quarter of over 70s aren't confident with using this kind of technology so they are more isolated than ever.

Thinking about the story we have just been looking at, what kind of solutions do you think Jesus might have offered to an older person who is struggling with isolation?

Encourage the young people to think creatively.

One solution might be to teach older people how to use the technology confidently, that would certainly help to remove one barrier. But remember, Jesus didn't just cast the demons out of the man, he also restored him to his community. So being able to use the technology isn't enough – an older person with an iPad is still alone, they need the community to meet them there and to accept them.

Information can be given about MHA Digital Communities and other online resources for older people at this point if appropriate.

Challenge

How can you, as a digital native, help an older person in your community become confident in using technology? Can you identify any older people who might benefit from your help?

Thinking beyond the digital world (if and when restrictions allow), what other practical ways can you help an older person become less isolated?

Prayer

Father God,

Thank you for designing us to live in communities and to have relationships with other people. We are sorry for the times we have left other people out or made them feel isolated or marginalised. Please open our eyes to see each person the way that You see them and open our hearts to love them as You do. Help us to be Your hands and feet and to bring the lonely into our families and friendship groups.

Sometimes we feel lonely too God. In those times please remind us that You have promised to never leave us nor forsake us. You are with us always.

Help us to build a world filled with radical love and colossal community so that all may know what it is like to belong and be accepted.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen

Close Show the opening video again to end the session.