

# Ascension and Pentecost

## Prospects for Ascension

### AIM

Here are three items for use with people of all ages and abilities based around the bible story of the man lowered through the roof: some 'let me tell you' stories, a bible study and some suggestions for prayer.

### INTRODUCTION: Let me tell you

#### Lesley's story

Lesley lives in a house managed by Christian provider Prospects. She is passionate about churches being inclusive.

Lesley took part in a sponsored walk last year to raise awareness of the needs of people with learning disabilities. She said *"It will be difficult for me, but I will do it for Jesus. I really, really want churches to welcome everybody in God's house."* And her motivation? *"People with needs have a right to know about Jesus!"*



#### Aman's story

Aman from Scotland has autism – he does not use his voice to speak. Supported by a facilitator he trains social workers in autism. With the help of technology he was the keynote speaker at Prospects Annual Conference in 2008. This is an extract from his talk:

*"The kindness of people who see us as 'poor souls' only isolates us from each other, tearing apart the heart of God and dampening creativity.*

*I don't think the church realises that sitting in its pews is a work force of prayer and an expression of the unbelievable uniqueness of God.*

*The world opens its doors to our questions, thoughts and comments and we are able to have influence in the political and academic arenas and are even respected for our contributions. We in the church have much to learn."*

### GROUP BIBLE STUDY

Do this bible study in three groups if numbers permit, each group discussing one question, then all together, feeding back their answers for wider response.

Start with Luke 5: 17-27 – Healing of the man lowered through the roof.

You could read this out loud from a contemporary version, you could retell it using pictures, symbols or puppets or you could remember it together. For more ideas about how to share Bible passages in these ways see John Campbell's series of Markan Encounters on the vision4life website [put link in here].

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### Getting started

Let's start with the obvious. People fall into one of two categories: those who want to be close to Jesus and those who don't. Everyone mentioned in these verses- and let's hope, everyone starting out on this study – is in the former category. That's a good start. It should be a uniting factor.

### Opening discussion question

In your group, imagine you are 1) The man on the stretcher 2) one of his helpers 3) someone inside the house listening to Jesus, and discuss these questions:

1. Why are you there?
2. How did you react to breaking open the roof/ the intrusion?
3. How did you react to Jesus healing?

During the feedback session, try to identify any tensions or prejudices this has revealed.

### Back to the bible

Now return to the scripture and ask these questions

'Why did this man's friends need to take such a drastic action?'

'Why didn't a way open up in front of them so this needy man could get straight through?'

Do we now find that among that former category there are three types of people:

- Those who want to be close to Jesus but cannot get there unaided
- Those who recognise their own need to be close to Jesus but put the needs of others first
- Those who want to be close to Jesus for what they can get out of it for themselves

Invite the group to spend 3-4 minutes in silence, each person to pray over these statements.

Then as one group (or in the original three groups as appropriate) discuss these questions and pray into the answers.

The help a person needs to get close to Jesus may be a physical matter – they can't get to church without a lift. But there are dozens of other possibilities. A blind person may need Braille or audio material for their devotions. A person with learning disabilities may not be able to read or follow the sermon. Someone with Aspergers Syndrome may not be able to face coming to a building crowded with people. For these and many other people there is a gulf that needs bridging.

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### Prayer

Think of people you know. Who needs help to get close to Jesus? Pray for these people.

What sort of help could be given? Pray about that. What could your fellowship do to make its worship and activities more accessible to people who are restricted in the ways you've been discussing?

Ask the Holy Spirit to give guidance to you as a fellowship, commitment to building the bridges needed, and revelation of God's love to all in need.

Your prayer might begin like this....

Loving God, you want us to be close to you.

We thank you for sending Jesus to be our friend.

We pray for our friends who want to be closer to Jesus....

We pray for our churches that they will help everyone to get close to Jesus.

### PRAYER FUEL

#### Learning Disability – what's the problem?

In praying for people with learning disabilities we must start by praying for our churches. Churches are intended to be a place of welcome for all where everyone is included and their contribution to church life recognised and valued (see 1 Corinthians 12 – or maybe the Welcome to Corinth bible study from the Bible Year material [[link here](#)])

Often people with learning disabilities struggle in church because the way things happen makes it difficult for people to understand or join in. Complex language, metaphor and simile, the 40 minute sermon, the need to read well – these conspire to trip up even the most able.

Pray for church and service leaders to think creatively about how they can be more inclusive in language and style.

The Alpha course has helped thousands of people to find faith and set out on their journey following Jesus. Its style and language however makes it difficult for people with learning disabilities. An accessible version is being piloted at present. Here's an example of the kind of language being used:

*We can think of the Holy Spirit as God at work on the earth. The Holy Spirit is a person, the third person of what we call the Trinity. We've talked about God the Father, and we've talked about God the Son – Jesus. This is God the Holy Spirit. The word Trinity means 3 of something, so when we say the Trinity we mean God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*

*Is it confusing to have one God but 3 people? Look at it like this: it's three ways of thinking about God. Father God stays in heaven. Jesus the Son came to live on earth, and we read about that in the Bible. The Holy Spirit is God at work on earth. The Holy Spirit can be everywhere and do everything God wants him to do.*

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Pray that this pilot will indeed result in a course that will reach many more people with learning disabilities with the good news of Jesus.

Scripture Union publishes daily Bible reading notes designed for people with learning disabilities. This extract is from the booklet 'Come Holy Spirit'.

### **Day 3 - The teacher**

**The Helper will teach you everything and cause you to remember all that I told you. This Helper is the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name. John 14:26**

Jesus spent years telling his followers about his Father God, and about the Kingdom of heaven. Even so, there was more to learn. Jesus told his followers that the Holy Spirit would teach them, and help them to remember what Jesus said.

The Holy Spirit's job is to teach people about Jesus. The Holy Spirit's job is to help people to love Jesus. These are things that everybody needs.

**Dear God, please help me to learn more about Jesus, and to love Jesus more. Amen**

Let's pray for people with learning disabilities that as they read and hear about Jesus the Holy Spirit will create understanding of mind and response of heart.

We'd do well to pray that for ourselves too!

### **EVALUATION**

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

### **THE NEXT STEP**

If you want more seasonal materials please revisit the website.

You will also find more material by Tony Phelps Jones and the Prospect Team on their website: [www.prospects.org.uk](http://www.prospects.org.uk)

### **Acknowledgements**

This material has been contributed by Tony Phelps Jones and the Prospect Team, to whom copyright belongs. We are grateful for permission to use this in churches engaged in Vision4life. Any other enquires about use to [admin@vision4life.org.uk](mailto:admin@vision4life.org.uk) please.

### **HOW TO FEEDBACK TO VISION4LIFE?**

If you wish to offer any feedback – brickbats and bouquets are equally welcome! – you can do so in various ways.

You can email the Vision4Life steering group about general or website V4L issues via the website or at [admin@vision4life.org.uk](mailto:admin@vision4life.org.uk)

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If you have comments and particularly contributions to the prayer year, you can email the V4L prayer year coordinator via [prayer@vision4life.org.uk](mailto:prayer@vision4life.org.uk)

If you want to make contributions or ask questions about other V4L years you can email:

Year 3 – Transformed for Evangelism: [evangelism@vision4life.org.uk](mailto:evangelism@vision4life.org.uk)