

# starter

## the great escape

### AIMS

To explore our response to the theme of Climate Change by reflecting on the story of the Exodus

### INTRODUCTION

This starter gives participants an opportunity to consider where we are today as God's people when we think about our response to Climate Change.

The 1963 'Great Escape' film based on the true story of a mass escape from a German POW Camp, reached a climax with an iconic scene featuring Steve McQueen and a leap over barbed wire on a motorbike. It was the end of a journey to a land of freedom that had begun with an escape from enslavement via a self-dug tunnel (you might recall the animation remake of this film was Chicken Run).

'The Great Escape' could readily be the title of one of the defining episodes of the People of God from the Old Testament. Trapped in Egypt, enslaved and exploited by a cruel Pharaoh, the people yearned to escape. A series of increasingly calamitous events didn't budge Pharaoh, he refused to let the people go until finally the death of many first born changed his mind. Presented with a window of opportunity, Moses led the people to escape tyranny. Pharaoh changed his mind and went in pursuit of the people, but through divine intervention the waters of the Red Sea parted, enabling the people to finally escape their captors. Thus began a period of wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, before God parts the waters again, this time the River Jordan, and the people enter the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

In between crossing the two water bodies the people had both testing and formative experiences: they became hungry and found that God provided their needs; they received teaching from God through the Ten Commandments; they rebelled against God through grumbles and idolatrous worship. It must have been a struggle, and some, including their leader Moses, didn't live to step onto the Promised Land.

### STRUCTURE

Read: Exodus 14 & Joshua 3

#### Where are we?

These two 'Great Escapes' involved those who felt trapped in their struggle and who knew that without change the outlook was grim. We may identify that 'The Great Escape' of the people of Israel included the following stages:

- ➡ Suffering and trial
- ➡ Planning
- ➡ Escape (with second thoughts!)
- ➡ A time of struggle in the wilderness including rejecting God

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- Learning to rely on God
- Learning new insights from God
- The journey took a generation, most didn't experience the destination
- Finally, the people were able to cross water again and enter the Promised Land

As the spectre of global warming looms ever larger, humanity is increasingly recognising that the outlook for many communities, particularly the world's poorest and most vulnerable, is increasingly dire. In the face of this immense crisis humanity can feel trapped, but lessons from the Bible open up a way to escape. In the case of global warming, escaping a society shackled to carbon rather than a cruel regime.

### For discussion

1. Discuss the insights that you have on global warming, identifying what you know about some of the present impacts and future possibilities. How do you feel?
2. Looking at the stages of Israel's 'Great Escape' listed above, where might the following parts of the Church be today?
  - your local church;
  - the United Reformed Church or another denomination;
  - The Kiribati Protestant Church, who 150 years after the gospel reached their low-lying lands are facing total inundation by rising sea levels;
  - the church in New Orleans overwhelmed by a climate catastrophe.

### Some thoughts to ponder

- Where people are suffering?
- Who is Pharaoh
- Where we may be part of the problem and part of the solution
- What sort of Moses might we look for?
- What happens when Pharaoh doesn't listen to Moses?
- What happens when the people rebel against Moses?
- What may relying on God mean? Can it mean failing to act responsibly?

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### Some additional questions and suggestions

If you have time or want to extend this activity consider some of the following:

If the children of 2050 were to speak to us today, what might their message be to us as citizens? The Church? The Government?

If possible, gain insights from those who lived through what the national crisis of the period of appeasement prior to the Second World War and the war itself.

- ✚ Do you sense any correlation between the pre-war period of appeasement and the current response to global warming?
- ✚ Ask people to comment on the impact on happiness and well-being of the war-time rationing and travel restrictions were they a price worth paying for freedom?

Reflecting on the route taken by the People of Israel to the Promised Land, are there lessons for today? Should the Church take a prophetic lead and if so what should it do and say? Is their hope? What might the equivalent of Steve McQueen's iconic leap to freedom be?

Maybe you'd like to watch the film *The Great Escape* together, or the animation *Chicken Run*, and then consider these Bible passages or discussion questions. Sometimes a film can create a more informal atmosphere for discussion. If you do the activity this way, obviously it would take longer.

### Prayer

Creator God,

As we reflect on your promises

Help us to listen to the experiences of others.

As we commit ourselves to your future

May we be ready for the journey.

As we consider new insights

Help us to change our ways to reflect your priorities.

### 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?

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### THE NEXT STEP

If you want more starters please revisit the menu. We hope there will soon be a main course bible study on climate change on the website.

### Acknowledgements

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