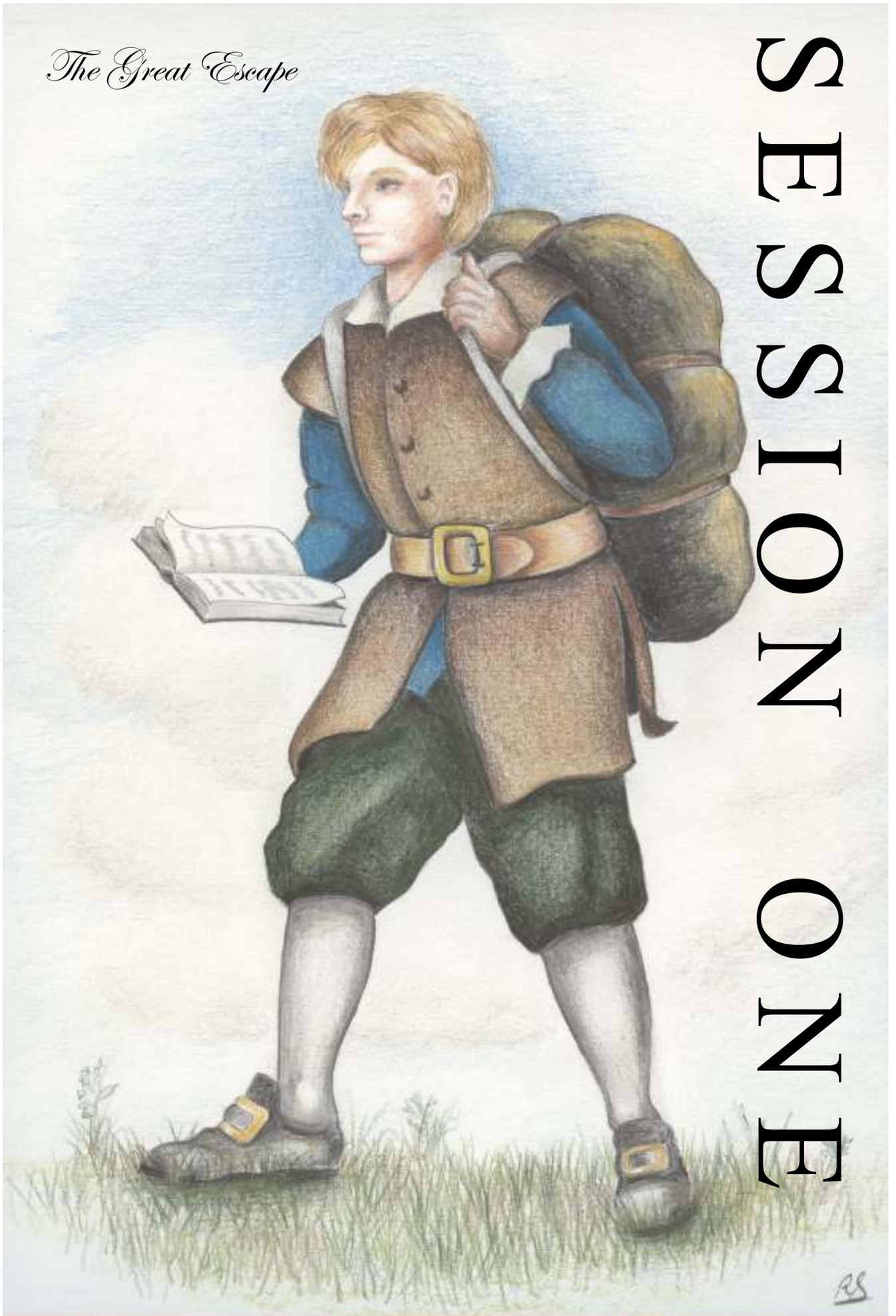


The Great Escape



SESSION ONE

SESSION ONE

Outline: The Great Escape

INTRODUCTION: Leader

QUESTIONS

JOHN BUNYAN:

The man, the tinker, the preacher, the prisoner, the dreamer

ABOUT THE BOOK:

The Pilgrim's Progress: an allegory, a pilgrim, a journey

MAPPING THE JOURNEY: Knowing and planning a route

SIGNIFICANT SYMBOLS: The Knapsack, the Book, the Scroll, the Key

INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN AND DRAMA: 'THE GREAT ESCAPE'

QUESTIONS:

Be prepared to change them to something relevant that the Seniors may bring up in their discussion

THE MOST IMPORTANT TRUTH TO REMEMBER:

Christian's destination – the City of Gold is the most certain and reliable truth

CLOSING PRAYER

TAKE HOME: Programme and Travel Guide

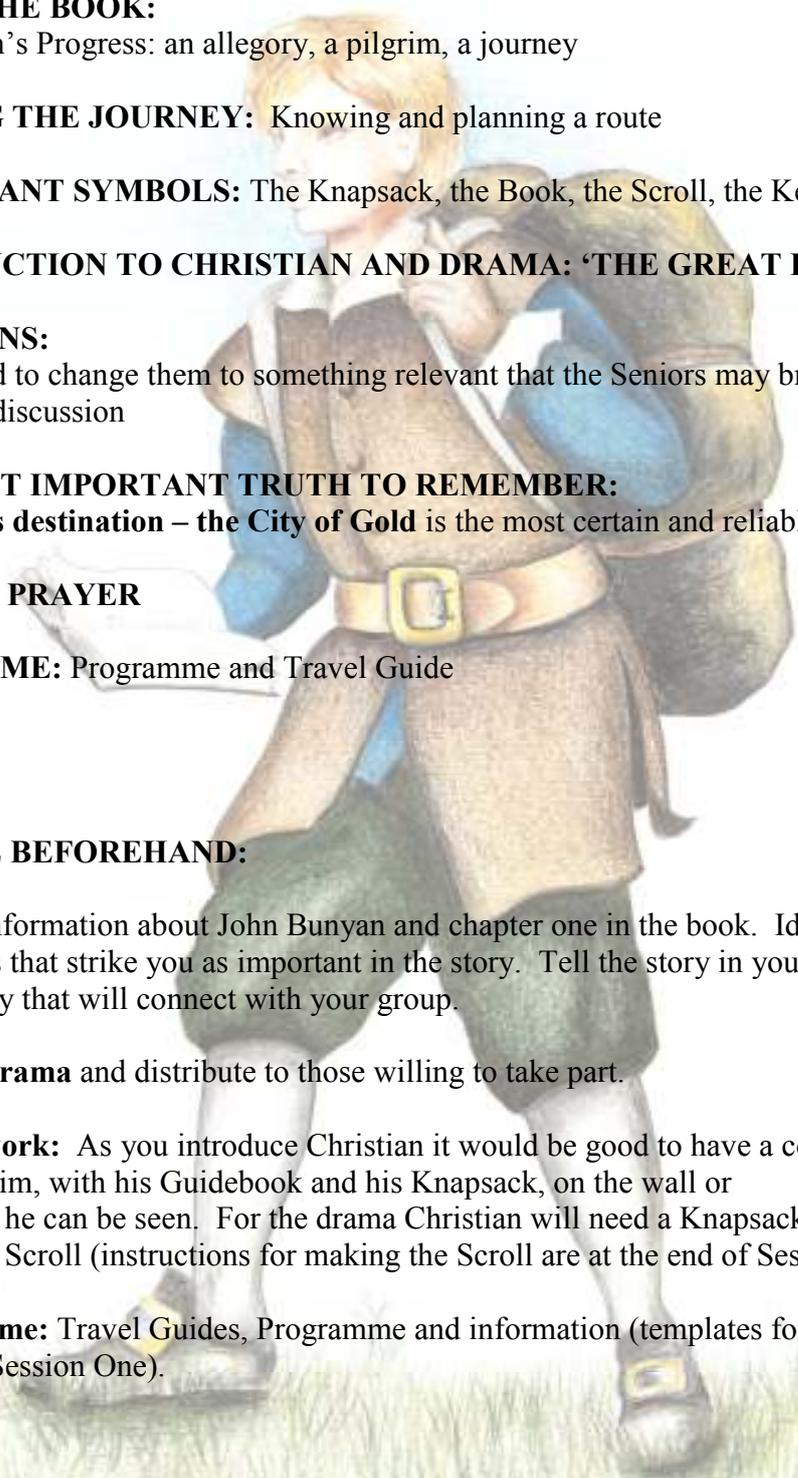
PREPARE BEFOREHAND:

Read the information about John Bunyan and chapter one in the book. Identify the main points that strike you as important in the story. Tell the story in your own words and in a way that will connect with your group.

Print off Drama and distribute to those willing to take part.

Print Artwork: As you introduce Christian it would be good to have a copy of the picture of him, with his Guidebook and his Knapsack, on the wall or somewhere he can be seen. For the drama Christian will need a Knapsack, a large Bible and a Scroll (instructions for making the Scroll are at the end of Session One).

To take home: Travel Guides, Programme and information (templates for these are at the end of Session One).



Session One: The Great Escape

LEADER: The title of this session is ‘**The Great Escape**’, but before we go into the story let me tell you something about **John Bunyan** which will help us to understand the story a little better.

(It would be good to start off the session with some questions to establish the informality of the group and to get them used to taking part)

QUESTIONS:

How many of you have read The Pilgrim’s Progress?

What do you remember most about the story?

JOHN BUNYAN: THE MAN

John was born in 1628 in the village of Elstow (near Bedford). He was a naughty child, being prone to all kinds of mischief that caused his parents many anxious moments. They spent much of their hard-earned money to send him to Grammar School, which was of great benefit to him later in life. When he left school, he made friends with some of the coarser lads in the village and, like them, became a nuisance. Many times he intended to turn over a new leaf, but his companions soon dragged him down again and got him into trouble.

In his teens he fell in love with a sweet and gentle girl who made John promise to try to live a better life. A year or so later they married, but all his promises to his dear wife were broken and he soon found his delights in his old companions again.

THE TINKER:

John was a poor man living in the village where he was born in. He earned his living as a Tinker and was well known in the villages of Bedfordshire pushing his old barrow, mending pots and pans and grinding knives.

During one of his frequent visits to Bedford, John overheard an interesting conversation between two ladies who were looking into a big book. “What a wonderful book this is”, said one to the other. “It gives instruction in the ways of God and shows how we can live a good and honest life.” The other remarked how the book had given her help, encouragement and guidance in her life here on earth. She also spoke of the book as a guide to eternal life.

At this point John interrupted them, telling them he was deeply interested to hear more about the book they were speaking about. “The book is the Holy Bible and we know it to be the Word of God”, they told John. “There are many passages that are hard to understand, but the Gospel story and the numerous precious promises found within its pages are proof that the Creator has inspired them.”

The Tinker pondered these words and promised to do some serious study. He quickly got a Bible and began to read with great interest. Some stories he found difficult to understand, but he began to read about Jesus and His love and the effect this had on his life was amazing. He became a Christian, found new friends and went about the villages telling everyone about this wonderful book.

THE PREACHER:

John began to preach to large numbers of people on the village green and because his life had so greatly changed, people listened to him. He persuaded many of the villagers to put their trust in Jesus Christ and become Christians too.

In Bunyan's day, many people were uneducated. Schools were expensive so few attended and few were able to read. Most of those who came to hear John preach were ordinary villagers who were listening to the 'Good News' (God's Word) for the first time.

It was not long before he was asked to preach in towns and villages further away. This aroused the 'jealousy' of certain religious leaders, who felt that John was the reason some of their churches were less full.

THE PRISONER:

It was a serious offence to cause discontent among the parishioners and, although John was not guilty, he was falsely accused of this act and sent before the magistrates. He was tried and found guilty and sentenced to a term of twelve years imprisonment in Bedford Jail. Many of his friends tried to procure his release, but they were unsuccessful.

The jail was over the river Ouse. His cell was uncomfortably damp and contained a hard couch, a rickety table and a chair. He was able to earn a small income by tagging boot laces in order to provide for his wife and four small children.

When the day's work was done, Bunyan would settle himself in his cell and study the Bible, often falling asleep and dreaming of a beautiful land where there were no prisons but many mansions.

THE DREAMER:

One night he lay on his bed, thinking about the unhappy condition of his many friends. Just before he fell asleep, he was considering their poverty and the many burdens they were carrying.

As he slept, he dreamt about a man dressed in rags who was carrying a heavy load on his back; a load he was unable to free himself from even though he tried very hard. A Book was in his hand and, as he read it, he cried out, "What must I do to be saved?" John, in his dream, followed this man whose name was Christian, through many strange and wonderful adventures. When he awoke John recorded these stories and later formed them into the book that was to make him famous, a book called '**The Pilgrim's Progress.**'

ABOUT THE BOOK:

John Bunyan wrote the book sometime between 1660 and 1670 and it was first published in 1678.

Since the first edition, many millions of copies have been sold and have been translated into numerous languages. The original edition is in 'old English' and is quite difficult to follow. I have taken one of the more recent translations which quite simply tells the story of Christian and his journey to the Celestial City, the City of Gold. The text is based on Bible truths which John Bunyan had read.

Bunyan also wrote a well known hymn, one which we still sing today.

Do you have any ideas? *To be a Pilgrim.*

(Words are printed at the end of this session in case you would like to use them)

WHAT IS AN ALLEGORY?

The book is a Christian allegory, a story in which people, things and happenings have a hidden moral or spiritual meaning. In this case the story is about the Christian faith journey. As with all allegories it is full of symbols that have particular meanings and we will be looking at some of these in just a moment.

A PILGRIM:

The main character in this story is a Pilgrim called Christian.

A Pilgrim is a traveller, someone on a journey through life and, as with most Journeys, there is a beginning and an end.

Think of your own lives as a journey – all our beginnings will be fairly similar, but the way we travel may be very different. Although we have many things in common, we have experienced a different range of events that have shaped us. Some of these events we think of with pleasure, but some may have challenged us to the limit. The people we know will have influenced us, some for the better, some for the worst. We all have memories, some that were happy and others that we wished had never happened. Our life's journey will have had its ups and downs.

A JOURNEY:

The Christian faith is often referred to as a journey and, as on any journey, we all have to follow signposts. We will be looking at some of these signposts as we travel with Christian on his great adventure. Perhaps this group could be a sort of signpost to each other as we discuss various issues and try to understand the Christian faith a little better.

MAPPING THE JOURNEY:

When we travel on a journey it helps to use a map and have an idea of where we are going. We also need to plan the route.

The Pilgrim's Progress is about Christian's journey from the City of Destruction (earth) to the City of Gold (heaven). We are going to travel with him using the same Guidebook (Bible) and symbols as he did.

SIGNIFICANT SYMBOLS:

(A flipchart with a list of the highlighted words below would be helpful)

A great burden – *Use a Knapsack weighed down with some heavy objects*

The Guidebook – *Use a large Bible for Christian to carry under his arm*

A Scroll – *Enlarge page 33, 'Run for your Life' to A3 and follow the instructions given.*

A GREAT BURDEN:

Christian finds himself weighed down by a great burden/Knapsack that he gets from reading a **book (Bible)**. This burden, which would cause Christian to be separated from God, is such a concern that he is driven to seek what he must do to save himself from being destroyed.

A helpful man crosses his path. His name is **Evangelist** and he tells Christian about the City of Gold and how to get there. He gives Christian a **Scroll** and points the way to a wicket gate, lit by a light, somewhere in the distance. The troubled Christian tries to persuade his family to journey with him but they refuse, so he leaves his home and family and begins what you might describe as an adventure of a lifetime.

(Enlarge and photocopy the picture of Christian at the end of this session and put it where it can be seen)

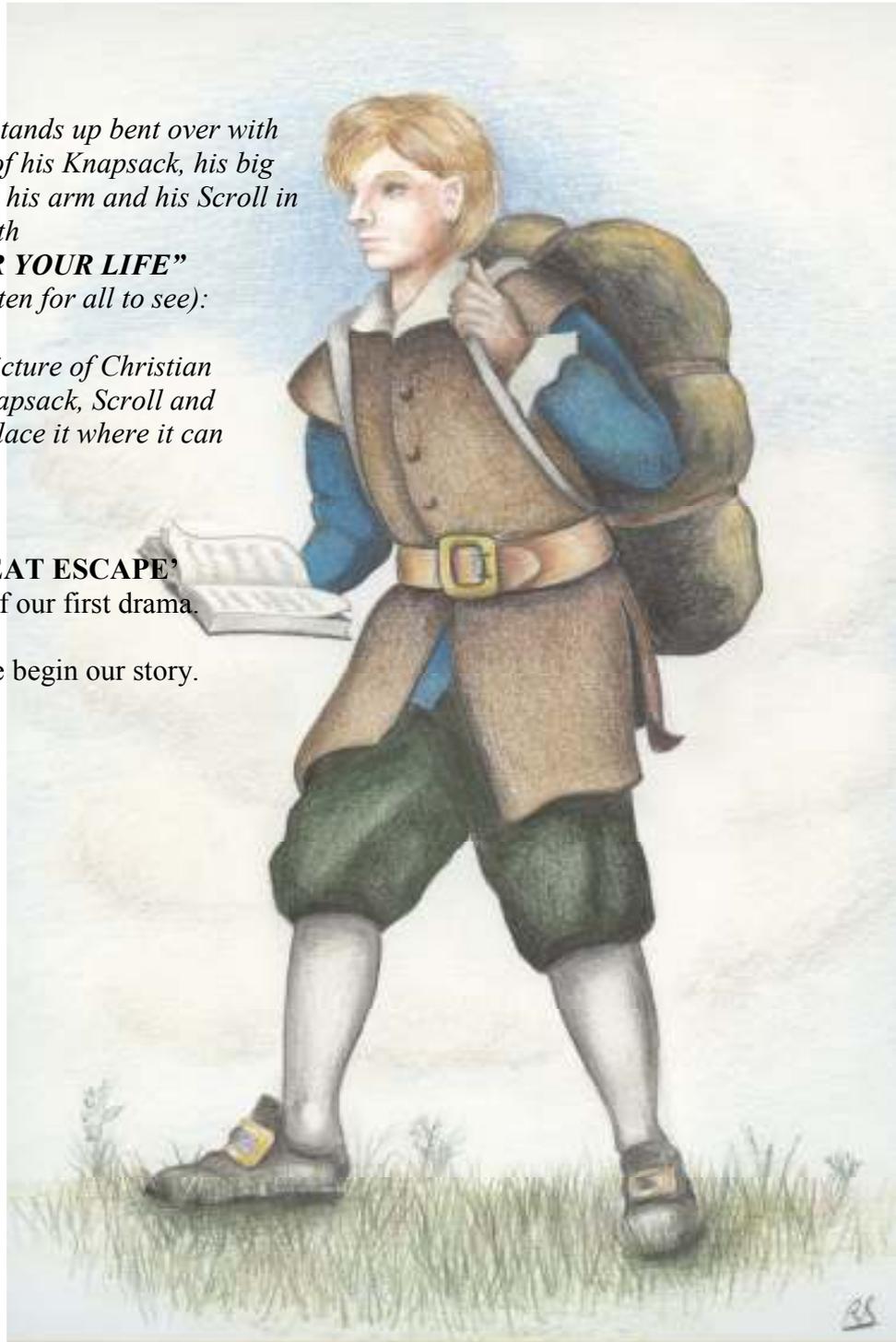
LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO CHRISTIAN, THE MAN WHO HAD THE DREAM:

(Christian stands up bent over with the weight of his Knapsack, his big Bible under his arm and his Scroll in his hand with
“RUN FOR YOUR LIFE”
clearly written for all to see):

Show the Picture of Christian with his Knapsack, Scroll and Bible and place it where it can be seen.

‘THE GREAT ESCAPE’ is the title of our first drama.

It is here we begin our story.



DRAMA: THE GREAT ESCAPE

Cast: Narrator, Christian, Mother, Father, Stranger (The Preacher), Mr Bendy and Mr Ob Stinate

Narrator:

There was a man called Christian who had a dream. He dreamt he was standing at the garden gate, bent under the weight of a great Knapsack, and in his hand was a Guidebook. As he read the book the colour drained from him and he began to weep quite inconsolably. In his agitation he rushed indoors, seized hold of his mother and shouted....

Christian:

We must get out of here; we must; we must!

Mother:

Whatever is the matter son and why are you wearing that great sack on your back? Here, let me help you take it off....calm down!

Narrator:

Calm down he didn't and later when his father looked in his room to see if he was asleep he found a tossing, moaning heap of a man.

Father:

For goodness sake, no wonder you can't sleep. Take that great sack off your back.

Narrator:

Unable to hold his feelings and thoughts back any longer Christian blurted out to his bewildered parents that they had to leave home – get away because their city was going to be destroyed. His father looked even more bewildered and his mother tried to give him medication for a fever but nothing would console Christian.

One day as he wandered in a nearby field, still carrying the great sack, a stranger approached him and asked what the matter was.

Christian:

I've read this book Sir, and in this book it says I'm going to die.

Stranger:

Yes? That's not so remarkable....we all are.

Christian:

But you don't understand. It says here that I shall have to account for my life, the kind of man I am and the state of my soul – I'm not ready for that yet.

Stranger:

Well, in that case run. Run for your life! Here, take this.

Narrator:

The stranger handed Christian a Scroll, which simply read – Run for your life!

Christian:

Where? Run where?

Stranger:

To the City of Gold of course – haven't you read about it in your Guidebook?

Narrator:

Christian admitted rather sheepishly he hadn't, because he'd only read the first chapter, and that had told him about the destruction.

The stranger encouraged him to read on and find out more, telling Christian that pilgrims were setting off every day for the City of Gold, a place of happiness, bliss and everlasting life.

But there was a cautionary note in his voice as he reminded Christian that he wasn't setting out on an easy stroll. There would be difficulties and challenges ahead, but the one thing he could be certain of was that the City of Gold would always be there.

The troubled Christian tries to persuade his family to journey with him but they refuse, so he leaves his home and family and begins what you might describe as an adventure of a lifetime.

(Hold the Scroll up at this point) With a warning not to lose the Scroll and a pointer in the right direction, Christian set off running, much to the amazement of various neighbours who were out in their gardens.

Two others actually took to their heels and ran alongside him, asking where he was going and who was chasing him. He found Mr Ob Stinate puffing along on his right and Mr Bendy on his left, both plying him with questions.

Christian panted out the dreadful news about the destruction of the city and how he knew where to head. He felt honour-bound to urge them to come with him.

Mr Ob Stinate: *(snorting)*

What? And leave our homes and families and everything dear to us?

Christian:

What good is any of that to a dead man?

Mr Ob Stinate:

Have you got anything better to offer?

Christian:

Yes! PERPETUAL BLISS....SUBLIME HAPPINESS....EVERLASTING LIFE!

Narrator:

Mr Ob Stinate could not keep up the pace; he would have to slow down.

Mr Bendy:

Sounds good to me, tell me more.

Narrator:

So Christian showed Mr Bendy the Guidebook and the Scroll, wildly excited now about the good things in store, rather than dwelling on the fear he had left behind. His excitement was infectious; Mr Bendy's eyes began to shine with the same eagerness. But Mr Ob Stinate was not so quick to change the thinking of a life time.

Mr Ob Stinate:

He doesn't know what he is talking about!

I mean to say – has he ever been to this 'Golden City'?

What does he know?

And how far is he going to get with that pack upon his back?

He's pipe-dreaming - it's nonsense!

Me....give up everything I know and love for some hare-brained scheme?

No fear! You take my word, Bendy, Christian is leading you astray. Don't listen to him.

Narrator:

Mr Ob Stinate slowed suddenly and stopped, retracing his footsteps towards the City of Destruction. But Mr Bendy was content to go on jogging alongside Christian.

After days of being shunned and lonely, having company lifted Christian's spirits enormously. And if he squinted up his eyes and peered, he could almost persuade himself that he saw the little white wicket gate.

Everything ahead was green and looked good. Christian and Bendy were running at such a pace that they didn't realise, until it was too late, that they were knee deep and staggering in mud from a bog they hadn't noticed.

As they struggled to free themselves, the bog sucked them in, dragging them deeper and down....

(End of drama)

Leader: *(following on from the Drama)*

So, we leave Christian at the beginning of his life journey already caught unawares in the bog. Remember, any images or symbols used in the story are there to illustrate something about the Christian faith.

(Use flipchart, prepared beforehand with four headings as follows)

Images Symbols Signposts People we met

QUESTIONS:

What images come to mind from the story today?

What symbols can you remember?

The Knapsack, the Guidebook and the Scroll

Any ideas about what they could represent?

The Knapsack – all the bad things we have done - our burden of sin – things in life that weigh us down

The Book/Guidebook – the Bible

The Scroll – is the Passport into the Celestial City and must not be lost

Any signposts you may recall?

*Christian is asked if he can see **the white wicket gate** – he’s not very sure that he can. He is then asked if he can see **the light** and he thinks he can. He is told to go towards it and by and by he will reach the gate, where someone would point out the way for him to go.*

What are the names of the people we met today and what do their names suggest about their character?

The Preacher – the Evangelist who brings good news

Mr Ob Stinate – someone stuck in his/her way

Mr Benny – someone who is happy to go along with everything when the going is easy

In the story a KEY is mentioned. Any ideas why?

(Page 11 in the book) The Preacher then tucked his hand into the front of Christian’s dishevelled coat; Christian thought he must be trying to get some money from him, but instead he was putting a key in his inside pocket, and saying, ‘You may need it.’

We are not sure what the key represents at this stage. Christian is told it may be useful. Don’t let us forget it, for it may be very significant and useful later on.

There are certainly lots of bits and pieces to this story and a lot of detail to take in, but what do you think might be the most important truth to remember from today?

THE MOST IMPORTANT TRUTH TO REMEMBER: Especially when circumstances and people are changing by the minute, the most important truth is that **Christian’s destination – the City of Gold** is the most certain and reliable truth, the one thing that will not change and will never fail.

Over the coming weeks as we travel with Christian we’ll look at the encouragements and challenges that he faced, and that we face, on the Christian faith journey.

CLOSING PRAYER

TO TAKE HOME: Programme and Travel Guide

TO MAKE TRAVEL GUIDES:

Take an A4 card and fold in half.

Print off the Travel Guide front covers on page 25.

*Cut and paste these onto the centre of your Travel Guide front cover.
(You can use white or coloured card for this – I used black card)*

Take two sheets of A4 white paper and fold in half and place inside the card and staple together in the centre.

This completes the Travel Guide.

TO MAKE PROGRAMMES:

Use an A4 piece of white or coloured card and cut in half.

Fold in half again.

Print off the front covers of the Programme on page 27.

Cut and paste onto the centre front of the folded card.

Copy the prepared Programme on page 29. Cut in two, fold and place inside the programme card and staple together. You may prefer to print your own details using the suggested format as a guide.

*Make enough **Travel Guides** and **Programmes** for each person attending your group and write their names clearly on the front.*

Pilgrim's Progress



Travel Guide

Name:

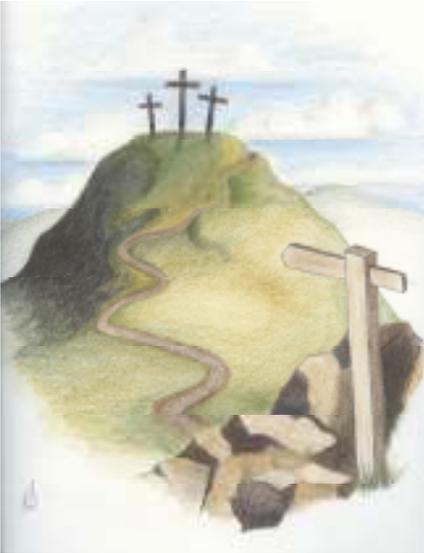
Pilgrim's Progress



Travel Guide

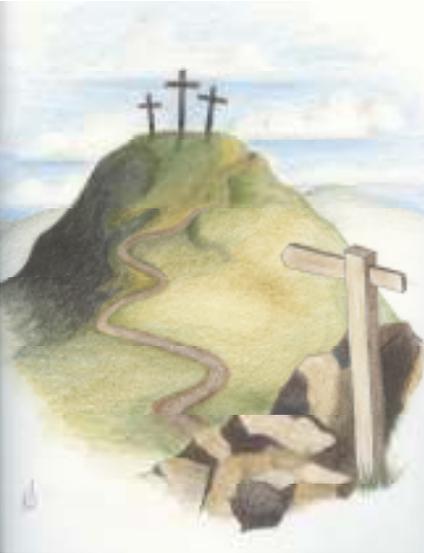
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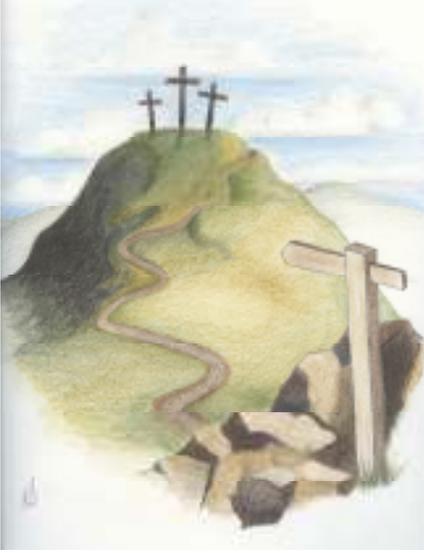
Programme

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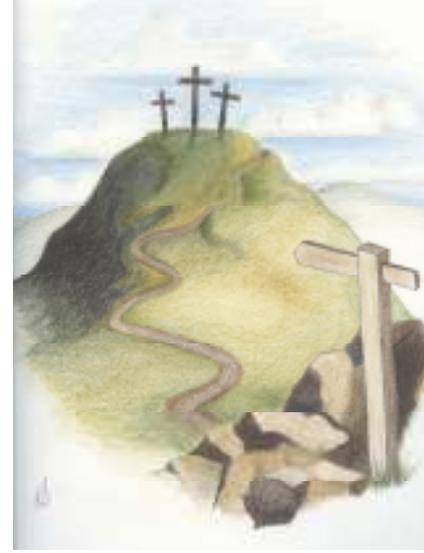
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Pilgrim's Progress



Programme

Pilgrim's Progress



Programme

Pilgrim's Progress

A chance to explore together some aspects of the Christian Faith

Journey with Christian from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, and join him in his different adventures:

- The Great Escape
- The Great Bog Misery
- The Museum of Wonders
- The Hill & Sleeping Lions
- Apollyon & Vanity Fayre
- Filthy Lucre
- Doubting Castle & Giant Despair
- The Door in the Hillside
- Ambush & the Valley of the Shadow
- One more River to the City of Gold

Each Session starts at
and is followed by tea and biscuits

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John Bunyan's famous allegory,

The Pilgrims Progress

was first written in 1678 when John was in Bedford Jail for 12 years for preaching in the street. It is considered to be one of the most extraordinary major works of English literature.

Dates for your Diary:

1. The Great Escape
2. The Great Bog Misery
3. The Hill
4. Sleeping Lions
5. Apollyon
6. Vanity Fayre
7. Doubting Castle
8. The Door in the Hillside
9. The City of Gold

The studies and discussion will be lead by

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'RUN FOR YOUR LIFE!' SCROLL

Photocopy and enlarge this sheet
from A4 to A3.
Roll it lengthwise
making sure
'RUN FOR YOUR LIFE'
is visible.

Secure with an
elastic band and
tie with ribbon.

Run for your life!

To Be A Pilgrim

Who would true valour see,
Let him come hither;
One here will constant be,
Come wind, come weather.
There's no discouragement
shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent
to be a pilgrim.

Whoso beset him round
with dismal stories,
Do but themselves confound;
His strength the more is.
No lion can him fright,
He'll with a giant fight,
But he will have a right
to be a pilgrim.

Hobgoblin nor foul fiend
can daunt his spirit:
He knows he at the end
shall life inherit.
Then fancies fly away,
He'll fear not what men say,
He'll labour night and day
to be a pilgrim.

Bunyan wrote this hymn in 1684 as part of The Pilgrim's Progress



