

Shining in the darkness

Ideas for a church Halloween party



Like it or not, kids are fascinated by darkness: monsters, baddies, death and destruction are all talked about with wonder, even slight admiration, and feature regularly in their play. Traditionally, Christians have avoided celebrating Halloween and presented light parties as an alternative. But are we missing a trick? As Christians, we shouldn't be afraid to acknowledge darkness and evil. At Halloween (31 October) or 'All Hallows' Eve', the night before All Hallows Day when Christians remember saints who have died, we have a unique opportunity to explore fear and death from a Christian perspective.

Christians can be wary of making light of dark matter – feeling it somehow gives Satan a foothold. But what if the opposite is true? Could laughing at what is meant to scare us be the best way to strip it of its power? By putting on

an event at Halloween that acknowledges darkness and the reality of death, we allow children to face their fears and find reassurance that God is greater, and that darkness will never extinguish God's light.

Why not organise a Halloween party at your church? Choose from the following ideas on the themes of facing fears, life and death, and light in the darkness, to suit the ages of your children and young people, and the time available. Decorate your venue with black and white fabric, bunting or streamers, and create some atmosphere with lanterns or tealights in jam jars and eerie music. If your church has a graveyard, you could run some activities outside, but ensure careful supervision of children. The message is that we don't have to avoid darkness or death but, through the light and life that God brings in Jesus, we can face it head on with confidence.

Getting the party started



Encourage the children to come in fancy dress. Make sure the fun is underway as they arrive with activities that they can easily join in, e.g. apple-bobbing, pumpkin-carving, mask-making. If carving pumpkins, keep a whole one aside to use to make pumpkin muffins (recipe on [WEB](#)). Make the muffin batter beforehand and let the children add the pumpkin flesh to it before adding the dry ingredients and spooning into muffin cases. The muffins can be baked while the children are doing other activities so that they're ready to take home at the end of the session.

Sweet and sour

5 mins **E**

Accept the good with the bad

You will need: Bean Boozled™ jelly beans, or similar sweets, some coated in sugar and others in salt, bowls, tissues, cups of water.

- Invite the children to take turns to pick out a sweet, not knowing whether their choice will taste nice or nasty. Have bowls, tissues and cups of water ready in case anyone needs to spit their sweet out! Make the connection that, just like everyone else, Christians experience good and bad things in life. The difference is that God guides us through both.

Bare bones

10 mins **W E**



Recognise that some fear makes no sense

You will need: two sets of skeleton bones (template on [WEB](#)).

- Skeleton costumes are popular at Halloween. Ask the children if they think they are scary. In fact our bones are pretty amazing – we are born with 270 and without them we'd all be piles of goo! Divide the group into two teams and set them the challenge of arranging the bones to make a complete skeleton. You could teach them the skeleton song [WEB](#) with actions.

Games and activities

Facing fears

Hidden fears

10 mins **E**

Discover that things seem scarier in the dark

You will need: blindfolds, bowls hidden from view containing items of different textures, e.g. jelly, ice cubes, a hairbrush, cold porridge, etc, wet wipes.

- Things seem scarier when you can't see them. Blindfold some volunteers and guide them to touch the contents of each bowl in turn. Afterwards, ask each person how they felt, then let them see the objects they've been touching. Explain that just as light lets us see the contents of the bowls and takes away our fear, so when we let God's light shine into our lives, and on our fears, things seem less scary.



Fear collage

15 mins **W E S**

Face our fears together

You will need: newspapers, magazines, paper, a large sheet of card, scissors, pencils, felt tips, glue sticks.

- Encourage the children to cut out or draw images that scare them, e.g. spiders, snakes, fire, roller-coasters, guns, ghosts, daleks, etc. Stick these onto the card to create a fear collage. Say that it's OK to be scared of some things. You could discuss the healthy role that fear plays in our lives, preventing us from hurting ourselves, e.g. touching a knife, or getting into a dangerous situation, e.g. climbing a high wall. Display the collage as a reminder that it is all right to be afraid and that we can help each other to face our fears.

Key to Spiritual styles: **W** Word **E** Emotion **S** Symbol **A** Action



Life and death

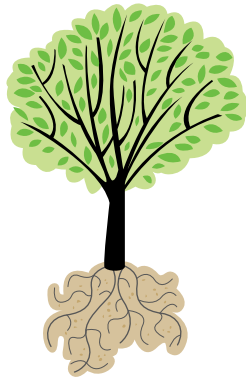
Tree of life

10 mins **W E S**

Connect life and death

You will need: a painted tree with roots and branches, cut-out leaves, felt tips, glue sticks, tealights.

- Explain that the word Halloween comes from 'All Hallow's Eve', the night before All Hallows Day, when Christians remember saints or holy people who have died. On your pre-painted tree, invite the children to write on the roots the names of people they know or have heard of, perhaps locally or in the news, who have died recently. They can write their own names on the leaves and stick them on the branches. Talk about the interconnectedness of the living and the dead. We all have an impact on the lives of others, and even when people die, we continue to remember and love them. What kind of a mark will we leave behind?
- Afterwards, you could light tealights and pray for family members and friends of people who have died, asking God to bless those who are grieving and help us to make a positive impact on others.



Hidden memory verse

10 mins **W S A**

Remember that Jesus is the light of the world

You will need: sheets of white paper, one per child, a white wax crayon or candle, black poster paint, paintbrushes.

- Beforehand, write 'I am the light of the world' (John 8.12) in white crayon/candle wax on the sheets of paper so that the words are invisible. Invite the children to paint black poster paint onto the paper to reveal the hidden words. Explain that Jesus' words need to be surrounded by darkness in order to be seen. As Christians we can follow Jesus' example and bring light into a dark world. Talk together about practical ways in which we as individuals can shine in the coming week.

I am the light of the world

Drawing the party to a close

Finally, gather everyone together to sing some songs. You could give the children glowsticks to wave in the dark.

Song suggestions

Be bold, be strong,
Longing for light, we wait in darkness
Lord, the light of your love is shining
The light of Christ has come into the world
The Lord is my light (Taizé)
This little light of mine
We are marching in the light of God



Light in the darkness

Let your light shine

10 mins **W S**

Illustrate how light extinguishes darkness

You will need: a Bible (use an accessible version, e.g. *Good News*, *New Living Translation*), tealights, matches and tapers/lighters or torches, one per child.

- Switch all the lights off and sit together in the dark. Either recite by heart the verses **Matthew 5.14-16** and **Ephesians 5.8-11**, or use a torch to slowly read them. As you say them, have helpers light tealights, or give the children torches to switch on, one by one. By the end of the readings, the room should be filled with light. Point out how the lights have chased away the darkness, and draw a parallel with how our own lives can shine. Close with a prayer:
Dear God, help us all to shine with your light, so that together, we can illuminate the dark places in this world. **Amen.**

Glimmers of light

15 mins **W S A**See the light in the darkness (*more suitable for young people*)

You will need: newspapers, a large sheet of card, scissors, glue sticks, highlighters.

- Look together at some newspaper stories about war, natural disasters, refugees – the news can make our world seem a very dark place. However, in the midst of the darkness, light is shining. There are organisations like Tearfund and Christian Aid **(WEB)** helping people in crisis, and individuals like Hilde Schramm, the daughter of a Nazi, who invited Syrian refugees into her home **(WEB)**. Have some stories available to read. Invite the young people to make a poster with the dark headlines and articles as a background, overlaid with pictures, headlines and stories of people and organisations showing God's light and love. They could use highlighters to make them stand out.

Prayer

Response line: Shine your light through me.

Lord Jesus,
In the darkness of sadness and bad news;
Shine your light through me.
In the clouds of confusion and worry...
In the greyness of doubt and arguments...
In the blackness of sickness and pain...
In the lives of those in need,
and everyone I meet...
Amen.

Going home

Give the children a party bag to take home, filled with Halloween-themed goodies: a pumpkin muffin and their memory verse; and their mask and pumpkin lantern, if they made them.



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