



transforming church
for all ages

Discipleship

Sermon Outline

Discipleship: Matthew 4: 18-21

Do you wonder if it is really possible to nurture, equip and help children and young people to grow as followers of Jesus?

When it comes to following Jesus, has the church moved too far in the direction of it all being about that moment, the decision, that choice – sometimes forgetting the fact that it is also very much about how we live out our lives following that ‘step’ of living for God? Is the real question not whether it is possible, but to what extent we’re committed to playing a part in discipling our children and young people?

It is not good enough to simply wait till they are ‘older’ before we take seriously the responsibility to disciple children and young people. As Margeret Withers suggests in her book *Mission-shaped Children*, is the church in danger of ‘subconsciously treating children [and young people] like fish: goods to be used to fill the gaps in the pews so the Church is safe for the future.’?

The challenge for the church is how we genuinely work amongst our children and young people, helping them develop and grow as followers of Jesus. We need to recognise that they are going to be at different stages of faith development, have different points of view on issues and varying degrees of ability in terms of understanding.

The notes below are offered as suggestions to prompt your own thinking rather than as a ready-made sermon structure.

Background

The account in the passage is one found in all four of the gospels. In Matthew’s account it follows straight after Jesus’ tempting by the devil and the beginning of his preaching ministry. It is quite possible that the passage in Luke 5, where Jesus asks Peter to put out his boat a little from the shore so Jesus could preach to the gathering crowd, was an event that occurred prior to the passage in Matthew. If this were the case, then this would not have been the first time Jesus would have met Peter or, quite likely, his brother.

As Jesus calls the first disciples they don’t go looking for him, he seeks them out. It is unlikely that by choosing to follow Jesus they would have completely abandoned their lives, families etc, but rather that they were entering into a new way of living.



The sermon – questions and suggestions

- » Jesus' early followers were known as the 'followers of the way' (Acts 22:4). This title emphasises how it was not just about a choice, but that choice was outworked and lived.
- » The statement Jesus makes in the second part of verse 19 clearly displays his intent that his disciples will be learning and growing as they follow him.
- » As we see in the gospel accounts, Jesus was constantly guiding, instructing and discipling his followers. With initiatives such as, 'Getting Your Kids through Church without them Ending Up Hating God', (from Care for the Family) in the spotlight at present, could a serious commitment as a church, to shoulder the responsibility to disciple our children and young people, make an impact in this area?
- » In his book *Don't Tell Cute Stories - Change Lives!* Martin Griffiths poses a real challenge in terms of the depth of ministry churches deliver amongst children (and young people). Have we deviated from the model Jesus offers as what it means to disciple others?
- » Jesus called his disciples to follow him and owned the responsibility that followed. Are we in danger of wanting children and young people to commit to following Jesus, without us owning the responsibility that follows?
- » This passage is a 'beginnings' story. We know what follows, but the disciples didn't. What are the opportunities before us in how we can disciple the children and young people within our churches?

What are some of the traits of discipling children and young people?

- » Firstly, it requires acceptance. However much the impression may be that adults have all the answers, we don't. We need to be accepting of where children and young people are at, taking them seriously - their questions and their ideas. As we seek to help them grow as disciples we need to create space that is safe and secure for them to dialogue with others, to enquire about things they don't understand and to challenge us as to why we do or don't do certain things as disciples ourselves.
- » Secondly, it involves a choice. In the same way that we cannot decide on someone else's behalf to follow Jesus, we cannot coerce anyone into living as a disciple of Jesus. Discipleship is about the choice, not simply giving or stating rules and restrictions, but helping them question what they believe and what it means to live it out. Every disciple's experience is different and unique to them; there are many similarities, but it is essential we enable children and young people to respond for themselves and grow as disciples personally.
- » Thirdly, it is about offering direction. The balance to giving children and young people space and choices as they grow as disciples is ensuring there is enough direction and guidance. Jesus taught his disciples and we must do the same where our children and young people are concerned. This involves getting to know the children and young people we are working amongst, finding out where they are in terms of their understanding and faith development, and helping them move forward. This takes time and may be a great opportunity to involve others from within the life of our church community to speak into and to learn from the children and young people as fellow disciples.



Questions for further thought and discussion

- » How have we 'told cute stories' and failed to disciple our children and young people appropriately and effectively?
- » What would we describe as key elements of discipling – non age specific?
- » How are we purposefully helping children and young people to grow as disciples?

Notes and illustrations

You might like to have a selection of plants around the room, some that have been looked after better than others – a visual aid as to the importance of nurturing young lives.

Give people seeds to take away, as a practical reminder of the part they need to play in helping children and young people grow and develop.

In Luke 8: 5-8, Jesus tells the parable of the sower. He details four different places the seed falls. How are we helping the lives of the children and young people within our church community to be like the good soil?

Invite individuals to share a testimony of how they have grown as a disciple, detailing what has helped this to happen.

Further Reading

Mission-shaped children, Margaret Withers

Getting Your Kids through Church: without them Ending Up Hating God,
Rob Parsons

Don't Tell Cute Stories - Change Lives! Martin Griffiths



Children's Session

Discipleship: Matthew 4: 18-21

How can we grow as followers of Jesus?

Introduction

These sessions are designed to complement the sermon outlines that are part of this resource. These sessions use the same passages to explore the same themes in a way that is relevant to children, and to enable to cross-over in terms of discussion between children and their parents.

Each session is divided up into eight sections: Welcome, Game, Quick Quiz, Bible Story, Thought, Activity, Prayer response and Finish. Apart from the activity, about five minutes should be allowed for each section. The activity is likely to take longer, nearer ten minutes.

The session outlines are not intended to be rigid programmes you must stick to. If there are regular elements to the times when you meet with the children in your group, include these, and do not be afraid to add in extra games or activities that you think would further enhance the session.

It is a good idea to plan ahead in order to ensure you have the resources needed for the session. If there is a rota of people who teach the children's groups at your church, it would be a good idea to get together ahead of the sessions so you can ensure as much continuity, and an overall sense of unified direction in terms of what you will be communicating.

Please note that these sessions are written to be used with children aged 5-11, however some elements may need to be adapted to suit younger children.

Welcome

As the children gather have the banner/poster from the previous sessions for them to decorate together. With the words 'Today...not tomorrow - Transforming the church for all ages' written on it, provide colouring pens or pencils for the children to use, remembering that this does not have to be completed in one session, but is designed to take the six weeks.

As the children gather and start to colour, begin by asking how they are doing that day. Once they've had a chance to briefly share, ask them the following two questions:

- » What colour would you use to describe the week you've just had?
- » What was one really amazing thing that happened this week?

Share with the children how, over the next few weeks when you meet, you will be looking at different topics that will help everyone think about the phrase on the banner and what it means.



Game

Depending on the size of the room you are meeting in, there are two options to this game:

- a) Set up a series of obstacles in the room - tables, chairs, toddler toys - ensuring they are safe and will not cause the children any harm (for example, chair legs sticking up in the air). Ask for a volunteer who is happy to be blindfolded and guided by another child across the room. Repeat the exercise with other children who would like to have a go, but being aware of timings and not allowing the game to dominate the session.
- b) Set out on a table a bowl, packet of cereal, milk bottle and spoon. Ask for a volunteer who would like to have breakfast (ensuring that they are not allergic to the cereal you have brought). Explain that, before they can eat, you are going to blindfold them, and one of their friends will help them eat the breakfast. If they are happy with this, have them choose a friend, or put yourself forward if they would prefer. Provide an apron for them to wear, then blindfold them and sit them down. The other child chosen then needs to explain to them where the items are and how they can go about eating the breakfast. Ensure you have items to clean up if mess is made.

Share with the children how, to get across the room or eat the breakfast cereal, there needed to be guidance from someone else and that guidance needed to be followed. This is in part what growing as a disciple is all about, as we follow Jesus, his teachings and direction as to how we can best live our lives.

Quick quiz

The following three questions are designed to help the children thinking. You may simply want to ask them for their response, you could get them to write them on post-its and stick them up, maybe talk with the person next to them or something else.

- 1 What do you think it means to be a disciple of Jesus?
- 2 Do you think anyone can decide to follow Jesus and be his disciple?
- 3 Do you think following Jesus, being his friend, is just about coming to church or is there more to it?

Bible Story

Using the passage from Matthew 4:18-21, depending on the size of your group, have them split into smaller sub groups. Ensure that each group has a bible to read the story from (or if you are working with a young group that there is also a leader to read it for them).

Explain with the groups that they are going to have to create three frozen pictures of the story. Give all the groups a couple of minutes to decide on their pictures before reading through the story having them make their poses as you go through.

Thought

The thoughts are split into three subsections; the 'Grab' serves as an introduction and something to 'grab' their attention. The 'What does it say?', refers to the bible passage and brings out something of the teaching from the bible directly. The 'What should we do?' then applies the teaching to their lives, helping them think through what difference this should all make in their lives.



Grab

Bring along a selection of different plants. See if the children can guess what they are. If you have any wilting or dead ones in pots that will also be a good illustration.

What does it say?

Explain to the children how when Jesus asked people to 'follow me', it was about practically following him, going wherever he went, but also learning from him and following the things he would teach them. Point out to the children that in the passage we see that those whom Jesus called to follow him did so straight away. Go on to share how there was obviously something very special about Jesus to go with him right away. Share with the children that the bigger question is, having followed him, did they listen to him, learn from him, do the things they saw him do and the things he said make a difference in their lives?

What should we do?

Refer back to the plants that you brought in, asking the children which they think is the healthiest plant? Ask a question about what they think a plant needs to be healthy and to grow. Explain that, in the same way, if we have decided to follow Jesus and to be one of his disciples, then we should be growing or changing, not in terms of our ability to play sport, or hair length, for example (that should happen anyway), but growing and changing in terms of how we live our lives. Share with the children these two questions and see what they say:

- 1 In what ways could you grow more as a follower of Jesus? See what the children come up with. If need be you can offer them some examples, such as talking with certain people, going to certain groups or doing things on our own such as reading the bible?
- 2 What are some of the things you have learnt since you started to follow Jesus, and what difference do they make in terms of how you live your life?

Activity

To help the children develop the idea of growing as a disciple, explain how they are going to have the chance to decorate a plant pot and plant a seed in it.

Each child will need a plant pot of their own and a piece of paper that can be wrapped around it. Explain how they first need to decorate the piece of paper using colouring pens and any art and craft materials you may have. Remind them that anything stuck on the paper will have to be securely fixed as it will be vertical once it is on the pot.

The children need to secure the paper around the edge of the pot before they then fill it with soil, leaving a gap of about 1cm at the top. They then need to plant a seed, seeds such as Morning Glory, Nasturtium or Sunflowers would work well.

Explain to the children that they will need to water the seed, but not too much.



Prayer

As you draw the session to a close, ask the children if there is anything they would like to talk to Jesus about, to pray about. It could be about something from the session today or something else. Make sure the children are given a chance to share and do not belittle any of their requests, however trivial we might think them to be.

Having given them all a chance to share, explain how you will now have a time talking to Jesus and any of them who would like to talk out loud can do so, although they can also talk to him quietly in their heads. You might like to pass a bible round at this point so the child holding the bible prays, although ensure they know that they can pass it on without saying anything. It is a good idea to start and end the time of prayer by praying yourself.

Finish

As the children go, leave them with the challenge:

- » What one thing will they do over the coming week to grow in their understanding and experience of Jesus?



Youth Session

Discipleship

Introduction

These sessions are designed to complement the sermon outlines that are part of this resource. Because youth groups may meet during the week and may also hear the sermons, these sessions use different passages to explore the same themes in a way that is more relevant to young people.

Each session is divided into four sections: Welcome, Worship, Word, and Witness. This approach has been used to provide a simple structure which lends itself to involving young people in leading. With support, young people (especially older ones) can be encouraged to lead a section of the session; or the whole session could even be shared out amongst them. For this to happen it is worth planning ahead to think who can be asked and how they can be best supported to do their bit. It may be appropriate to meet with them in advance, or communicate in some way about what is required.

Another reason to plan ahead is in order to ensure you have the resources needed for the session. For example, this session requires a large sheet of paper. You will also need a way to play video clips from the internet.

At the end of the session are a number of additional resources. There is a song suggestion (with YouTube link) and an optional movie clip for each session should these be appropriate. There are also some suggestions for making the sessions more active – particularly for younger groups or those who just enjoy more physicality. There are also books listed which may be helpful to young people interested in exploring further and who like to read.

Welcome

Play a variation of Follow the Leader where a volunteer is first sent out of the room. Someone is chosen to be the leader and starts an action which everyone else must follow. When this has started, invite the volunteer to return. They have to try and identify who the leader is. Give them three opportunities to guess.

Ask:

- » What does it mean to follow someone?
- » Who/what do you follow?

Say: Today we are going to be thinking about 'discipleship'. A good way of understanding what this means is to think of it as simply following Jesus.

Worship

Show the video of the song I Will Follow Him from the film *Sister Act*: <http://youtu.be/VPpd-6X3tEo>
Then give out copies of the words and encourage everyone to sing along as an act of worship to God!



Word

Read Luke 9:23-26

Ask:

- » When you hear/read these words how does it make you feel?
- » What do they make you think about?
- » Why?

Use a large piece of paper and brainstorm what the group has been taught about what it means to follow Jesus.

Ask how this compares with Jesus' words in Luke 9? Following this, ask them to imagine they had never been taught anything, never read the Bible, etc, then invite them to brainstorm what they have learnt about what it means to be a Christian through observing others (these might not be positive traits!).

Ask:

- » What are the similarities / differences?
- » Why?

Divide into smaller groups and encourage them to list any practical ways in which they can 'deny themselves', 'take up their cross daily' and 'follow me'. After a few minutes get each group to feed back their ideas.

Ask:

- » Do you like the sound of this?
- » Is following Jesus safe?
- » Does this put you off being a Christian or does the challenge excite you?
- » For those of you who have become Christians, how aware were you that this is part of the deal?
- » If someone had pointed out these words to you, would you have made the same decision?

Read the following quote: "I submit to you that if a man hasn't discovered something he will die for, he isn't fit to live." Martin Luther King Jr, Speech in Detroit, 23 June, 1963.

It has been said that we need to live for something bigger than ourselves.

Ask:

- » How do Jesus' words encourage us with this?
- » What is it we should be living for?

Witness

In the adults' teaching about discipleship of children and young people they have been exploring the idea that the thoughts and questions of young people should be taken seriously, and that there is a role for the wider church community in helping them discover what following Jesus means. Here's a chance for some dialogue to take place...



Give out sheets of paper to each person, and encourage them to write answers to the following questions:

- 1 What are you passionate about that you think God might like the whole church to be passionate about?
- 2 As you seek to follow Jesus, what is the biggest question you need an answer to?
- 3 What do you see that needs to be challenged in the way the church does/doesn't follow Jesus?

Collect the pieces of paper and read out the answers. Try and identify two or three answers to each question to which the group would like responses. The answers for question 1 could then be passed on to the minister/deacons/elders for consideration and response, and the answers to questions 2 and 3 could be distributed to the church generally (on a Sunday or via an email list) with a request for responses to be made in time for the sixth session on Resourcing. These responses should include personal experience – not just theological theory!

When the group has identified the answers to which they would like responses, pray together about these. Spend some time in quiet and ask God whether these are the right things or whether they should focus on different things. After this, give an opportunity for anyone to share what they feel God has been saying, and respond in an appropriate way with further discussion and prayer or simply bringing the meeting to a close.

Other resources

Song: May the Words of My Mouth by Tim Hughes: <http://youtu.be/F6EkmvRxfHo>

Movie Clip: 62 is a fictional tale, set in America in the future, of the persecution of Christians. It's very powerful, so use carefully! www.worshiphousemedia.com/index.cfm?event=products.detail&type=mini-movies&id=5360&name=62

Teaching Clip: www.recycleyourfaith.com/2009/10/26/follow-me

For younger (or more active) groups

Welcome: You could play a game like 'Simon Says' and make it as vigorous as you like!

Worship: Make this a song and dance number!

Witness: After the young people have come up with their comments/questions write them up on pieces of paper and stick them on the walls around the room – each person is given a pen and must put a tick on the three they feel most strongly about.

Books: *Freestyle* by Andy Frost (Authentic, 2005) looks at various aspects of discipleship and is written in a way which is accessible to young people. *The Soul Survivor Youth Bible* includes lots of useful articles/reading plans on various areas of discipleship (Hodder & Stoughton, 2012).

