

Youth groups

Exploring being a Christian disciple in today's world using teachers as an example

There are three youth group sessions in this Toolkit:

- ◆ **Session one: Vocation**
- ◆ **Session two: Faith and work**
- ◆ **Session three: Being a Christian in a multicultural society**

Session one: Vocation

Aim: to explore the topic of vocation, introducing the ideas of primary and secondary callings.

This session uses the example of teaching when talking about vocation, because it's easier to talk about a specific example rather than just in general terms. The principles and ideas covered apply to any vocation however, and so will be valuable to everyone in the group – whether they want to be teachers or not!

You'll need:

- flipchart and pens
- Bibles
- a jigsaw for each person and an envelope (see [page 2](#)). Cut up each jigsaw and put it inside the envelope.
- pens for each person
- *Transforming Lives* DVD clip *Christian Teachers Transform Lives* and equipment to show it, including loud speakers

Shoe swap shuffle

Arrange the group to sit in a big circle. Invite them to take off their shoes and put them gently into the centre. Get everyone to close their eyes and ask a couple of volunteers to jumble up the shoes as well as they can. The shoes need to no longer be in pairs or opposite the people that they belong to. While people have their eyes closed, explain the rest of the game. Keeping their eyes closed, people have to grab one random shoe from the pile. They will then open their eyes and find the matching shoe to the one in their hand. Once they have a pair, they need to put them on their feet if the shoes are big enough, or on their hands if they are too small. Stress that no one should squeeze their feet into shoes that are too small for them or they will damage the shoes. Then they walk around in the shoes until they see someone with their own shoes. They swap their pair for their own shoes and go and sit down. The game continues until the last person has got their shoes back.



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Vocation vacation

Get a couple of people to act out or read the *Vocation vacation* sketch included in this Toolkit. It will have most impact if they are able to rehearse it in advance, and, even better, if they can learn their lines but this is not essential.

Discuss the word 'vocation'. Where have people heard that word before? What does it mean? Who has a vocation? Introduce this definition: Your vocation is your calling – your purpose in life, what you were put on this earth to be and to do. So we all have a vocation in life. The challenge for each of us is to find out what that calling is.

Bible study

Split the group into three. Give each group one of these passages and the set of questions. Invite them to discuss the questions and record their answers.

Genesis 1:26-28

Mark 1:16-20

Matthew 22:34-40

- From this passage, what does God want people to do with their lives?
- Who does the passage apply to?

Invite the groups to feedback what they discovered and write their ideas up on a flipchart. From these answers, draw out the fact that our primary calling in life is to be in a relationship with God – to love God. That's what we were put on this earth to be and to do. That's the most important thing for us to get right.

Secondary callings

But there's more to vocation than that. Introduce the idea of secondary callings – the places and roles in which we are called to love God and to serve him in the world. God wants us to work alongside him to bring about his plans for the world. He invites us to do that in lots of different ways. Talk about some of your secondary

callings – perhaps a relationship that is important as a spouse, son or daughter or sibling; the work that you do; being a student; the way you serve at your church, perhaps helping with the youth group.

Draw the outline of a person on the flipchart. Ask people to brainstorm what are the secondary callings that God might give us – the places and roles in which we are called to love God and to serve him in the world. Encourage the group to think widely, particularly in the area of work. You want to emphasise that they might be called to work in lots of different areas, not just in 'Christian work'. Include artist, builder, architect, chef, surgeon, wind-turbine engineer, development worker, fashion designer and teacher as well as worship leader and youth worker. Ask people what their secondary callings are at the moment. They will be the schools they go to, their friends and family, and may include the interests that they have.

Transforming Lives DVD clip:

Christian Teachers Transform Lives

Ask people, as they watch the clip, to listen out for any mention of vocation or calling. Play clip one from the DVD, *Christian Teachers Transform Lives*. Discuss with the group:

- What did people say about vocation or calling on the clip?
- What was Ben's experience of being called to be a teacher? Was Ben given good advice? (He was encouraged to think about different roles he had enjoyed and look for a job that included that.)
- How did Dave's experience of being called to teaching differ?
- Angharad talks about the challenge of following God's calling – of being stretched in places where she didn't feel stretchy. If God is calling you to something, why isn't it always easy?
- How should we expect to hear God's call today? Have you felt God calling you to be involved in anything?



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Fit and fulfilment

Explain that one of the most important secondary callings that people are interested in is discovering what work they should be doing. This can be quite difficult to decide, as they may have already found out when choosing their options. Although we might wish that God would flash a neon light in the sky saying 'Be a teacher' or whatever, our sense of vocation doesn't come from 'out there', it comes from 'in here' – a growing sense that this is what you are meant to be doing. It's usually a journey of praying, trying things out, seeking advice from people who know us well and learning from our mistakes. It is about discovering and developing the gifts God has given us, about becoming the person God has given us the potential to be.



Talk about the importance of 'fit and fulfilment'. We'll find fulfilment in our work – we'll enjoy it and be excited about it – if the things we have to do in the job fit with our skills and talents. In the game at the start, you had to walk around in someone else's shoes which was not very comfortable. It was probably a relief when you got your own shoes back again. That's what you're looking for in a job – the sense that 'this fits me. I love doing this. I belong here. This is what God made me for.'

So for example, what kind of person will fit the job of being a Christian teacher – What skills will they have? What abilities? What personal qualities? Think back to what you saw on the DVD as well as your own experience of teachers

to help you answer. You might like to play the quiz *Is Teaching for Me?* at this point, which is part of the Toolkit.

Vocational jigsaws

Hand out the envelopes so that each person has a set of blank jigsaw pieces. Explain that discovering the work or occupation that you are called to in life is a bit like putting together the pieces of a jigsaw. Like Ben on the DVD it's a good idea to start by thinking about what things you are good at. When have you enjoyed using your gifts? What have you done that has brought you life and energy? When have you felt most alive? Encourage people to take some time on their own and write on their jigsaw pieces some of their responses to those questions. It may help if you write the questions up on the flipchart for them to think about.

Pray together as a group. You may want to encourage them to pray in twos, or give them some space to reflect and close in prayer on their behalf. Encourage people to take their jigsaws away and to add to them over the coming weeks and months as they think about the subject more. Invite them to pray about the issue, expecting God to show them what's on all the pieces of the jigsaw and to eventually bring them together into a beautiful whole.

To follow up

- Encourage people to explore the *Transforming Lives* website, whether they are interested in teaching or not. In particular, there is an excellent quiz called '*Is Teaching For Me?*' www.transforminglives.org.uk/quiz_start.php

You can also read the stories of lots of Christian teachers, how they got into teaching, the challenges that they face and what makes it all worthwhile. www.transforminglives.org.uk/people.php



Session two: Faith and work

Aim: to think about how Christians can be distinctive at work and at school.

You'll need:

- *Transforming Lives* clip [Christian Teachers Transform Teaching](#) and the equipment to show it, including loud speakers
- Simpsons or other TV series on DVD (optional)
- Bibles
- large sheet of paper
- old magazines – Saturday or Sunday supplements work well
- glue, scissors, pens
- gold paint, old toothbrush and spoon, paintbrushes
- plenty of newspaper to protect the floor

A well known story

Most young people are intimately acquainted with the Simpsons or soap operas, so start with one of these two activities.

Option one:

Read out these phrases one by one and ask which character said it:

- 1) No, don't make me take a vacation, Mr Burns! Without you, I'd wither and die!
- 2) Please do not offer my god a peanut.
- 3) You may remember me from such self-help tapes as 'Smoke yourself thin' and 'Get some confidence, Stupid!'
- 4) There's nary an animal alive that can outrun a greased Scotsman!
- 5) If Moe's tavern didn't close, I'd never leave.
- 6) Yo, little dude!
- 7) Do we have any food that wasn't brutally slaughtered?
- 8) One dollar for eternal happiness? I'd be happier with the dollar.
- 9) Kids, you tried your best and you

failed miserably. The lesson is, never try.

10) Hi dilly, ho dilly neighbourenos.

11) Well, if it isn't my arch-nemesis Bart Simpson. And his sister Lisa to whom I'm fairly indifferent.

12) I'm afraid your husband is dead – just kidding! Hee, hee hee.

(Answers can be found at the end of these notes)

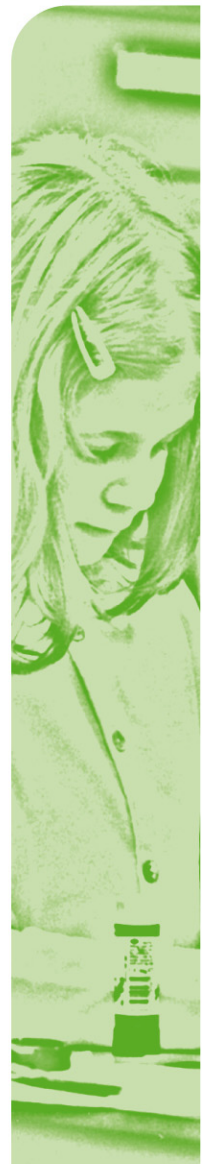
When you know characters well, you know what type of thing they are likely to say. Invite everyone to assume a Simpson's character of their choice, and then in role answer this question, 'What is the meaning of life?' Whose answer is most true to their character?

Option two: Show five minutes from the beginning of a popular soap opera or series. Choose something that you know all your group will watch. Then get everyone into groups the same size as the number of characters you've just seen in the clip, and act out an ending to the episode. They need to use their knowledge of the characters and the style of the series to create something that is typical of the show – they can't go off at wild tangents or introduce new characters. Watch each other's endings and vote for the one that you think is most true to the series.

Odd one out

Another quiz! Which is the odd one out?

- 1) Morecambe, Stevenage, Kidderminster, Manchester, Woking (clue: think football)
- 2) Margaret, Bill, Tony, John, Gordon (clue: think prime ministers)
- 3) Avocado, lavender, plum, violet, aubergine (clue: nothing to do with fruit or veg.)
- 4) Phoenix, Brooklyn, Lila, Bluebell, Cruz (clue: think of their mums)



5) Nahum, Haggai, Zephaniah, Amos, Azariah (clue: Bible books)

(Answers at the end of these notes)

What were you building?

Get a couple of people to act out or read the *'What were you building?'* sketch included in this Toolkit. It will have most impact if they are able to rehearse it in advance, and, even better, if they can learn their lines but this is not essential.

Discuss with the group:

- Graham stood out among the builders, not because he was odd, but because he acted differently as a Christian. What did he do that was different to everyone else?
- There seemed to be one area that he hadn't thought about – what was that? Do you think a Christian should be building this camp in Pakistan? Why or why not?
- Our faith needs to transform not just the way we act at work or at school, but the actual work that we do. How might a Christian do these jobs differently to someone who wasn't a Christian?
 - Running a clothes shop
 - Running a bank
 - Being a teacher

Link back to the soap opera activity at the start if you did it. Script writers can't just make their characters do absolutely anything. New plotlines need to suit personalities, the history of the soap and the place it's happening. Likewise all our actions need to fit with our Christian faith if we are to tell a consistent story with our lives.

Transforming Lives clip: Christian Teachers Transform Teaching

Watch the clip from the *Transforming Lives* DVD called *Christian Teachers Transform Teaching*. Discuss as a group:

- What examples of teachers being distinctively Christian did you see on the DVD clip?
- Anthea Tulloch Bisgrove says, on the DVD, that Christians should teach differently because they are Christians. Do you agree?
- Are there Christian teachers at your school who let their faith affect their teaching? How are they different to everyone else?
- How do you think a Christian teacher should be different? (Having seen the clip they may have more to add to this question than in the last activity.)

Stress that Christians are not called simply to be extra nice at work or at school. They are called to transform work and school by enabling it to be a place where God's rule is seen, for it to be like God originally intended.

Bible study

Read Colossians 1:15-23.

- Who is this passage about?
- Read the passage again and note how many times it says 'all' or 'everything'. What strikes you about the use of these words?
- What role did Jesus play in the creation of the world?
- What relationship does Jesus have to the world now?
- What work is Jesus doing in the world now?
- How can we be involved in that?

Jesus was involved in the creation of all things. Everything that God created was spoilt in the fall, but Jesus has won the redemption of all things through his death and resurrection – he's going to put everything right! We won't see that fully happen until Jesus returns, but our job is to work with God to bring every area of life under God's rule. Whatever we are involved



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in, we need to ask ourselves what does God want this to be like? We can get clues from the Bible – looking at the way that Jesus related to people and the things that he did when he was on earth. It's a bit like the Simpsons' exercise at the beginning – the more we get to know Jesus, the more we will be able to act like he would have acted.



Prayer

Get people to find images in the magazines of the things that they are interested in or good at – this follows on from the jigsaw activity at the end of the last session. Grouping similar things together, stick these in a collage on the large sheet of paper. Then invite people to pray that they would be able to work to bring in the Kingdom of God in each of these areas, not just be being nice, but by transforming those areas to be as God originally intended. As they pray, invite them to spatter gold paint onto the image that represents the area of life that they are praying for, using the toothbrush and the end of the spoon. This can get rather messy, but it produces a great effect of areas of life transformed by touches of God's kingdom. This collage could be stuck on the wall to remind people of what they have prayed about.

To follow up

- Encourage people to explore some of these themes further on the *Transforming Lives* website. There is some excellent information about Tom Wright's fifth-act analogy that the older members will enjoy. Start on the page about being a fifth act Christian, and explore the links.
www.transforminglives.org.uk/vocation.php

Answers to Simpsons' quiz

- 1) Smithers
- 2) Apu
- 3) Troy McClure
- 4) Groundskeeper Willie
- 5) Barney Gumble
- 6) Otto Mann, the bus driver
- 7) Lisa Simpson
- 8) Montgomery Burns
- 9) Homer
- 10) Ned Flanders
- 11) Sideshow Bob
- 12) Dr Julius Hibbert

Answers to Odd one out

- 1) Manchester has two teams in the Premiership; the others are in the Conference League
- 2) Bill (Clinton) was the President of the United States; the others were all recent prime ministers – Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair, John Major and Gordon Brown
- 3) Avocado is a shade of green; the others are shades of purple
- 4) Lila is the daughter of Kate Moss; the others are all children of the former Spice Girls
- 5) Azariah is not a book in the Bible; the others are.



Session three: Being a Christian in a multicultural society

Aim: to consider how we can be true to our own Christian faith and respectful of other people's faith at work and at school or college when many of them are not Christians.

You'll need:

- copies of HSBC adverts – see below
- coloured sweets such as Smarties, M&Ms or Skittles
- Bibles
- *Transforming Lives* DVD clip [Christian Teachers Transform Learning](#) and equipment to show it, including loud speakers

A generous offer?

This activity will illustrate Daniel's response to being offered food and wine from the king's table. Splash the sweets with water and let them dry out a bit – aim to leave them a bit sticky. At the start of the session, offer them round to everyone, explaining that they are fine but had just got a bit wet. Hopefully a few people will eat them!

Different points of view

Download some of the HSBC airport adverts that invite you to consider different perspectives on topics, and print copies. You will find them at: www.yourpointofview.com/hsbcads_report.aspx. Themes relevant to young people include:

- Trendy/traditional – is henna body art trendy and ink tattoos traditional, or vice versa?
- Unbearable/enjoyable – is electric guitar unbearable and sitar enjoyable, or the other way round?
- Love/loathe – are cats loveable and dogs to be loathed, or the opposite?

- Tedious/riveting – is cricket tedious and ballet riveting, or vice versa?

Choose ones that your group will connect with. Show the advert and get people's opinion. You could set up a values continuum for each one. Draw or imagine a line on the floor. If discussing the tattoos, label one end traditional and the other end trendy, and ask people to stand at a point on the line that represents their view of first ink tattoos, and then henna body art. Is there any consensus in your group?!

Discuss with the group:

- Thinking about your friends and family, who has different views to you? Maybe on issues like vegetarianism, which football team they support, political views or faith perspectives?
- How do you cope with those differences? Do some matter more than others?
- Do those differences add to your friendship, or spoil it, or not affect it?

Bible study

Just before the Bible study, give an 'explanation' for the sweets being wet – along the lines of a child having tried them but they didn't like them so they spat them out. Hopefully this will produce howls of disgust. The point you want to make is that the king's food and wine would have been offensive to Daniel because it wouldn't have been prepared according to the Jewish food laws and it might have been sacrificed to idols. If Daniel had eaten it, he wouldn't have been true to his faith. You can either explain now that you're only kidding – it was just water – or leave it until the relevant question in the study.



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Set the context for the Bible study. Around 600BC, Daniel and his friends were among the Jews who were taken into captivity in Babylon. Read Daniel 1:1-21. Discuss together:

- What differences in culture and lifestyle did Daniel and his friends have to cope with?
- Daniel didn't reject everything about Babylonian culture. What was he happy to go along with?
- Why did he take a stand over the food and wine?
- What was the outcome of Daniel's stand? Why?
- Can you see any parallels between the situation Daniel was in and the society we live in?

Daniel had to live in a culture that didn't share his beliefs at all. He needed to work out when he could learn from that culture and be open to new things, and when he needed to take a stand. He rejected the king's food and drink – not because he was fussy about his food, but because if he had eaten it, he would have compromised his faith. We need to make the same decisions about our culture. When should we listen and learn over differences of opinion – a bit like talking about the adverts at the start? When should we try to transform things, as we explored in the last session? And when should we stand up for our faith in Jesus and be different to everyone else?

Sharing your opinion

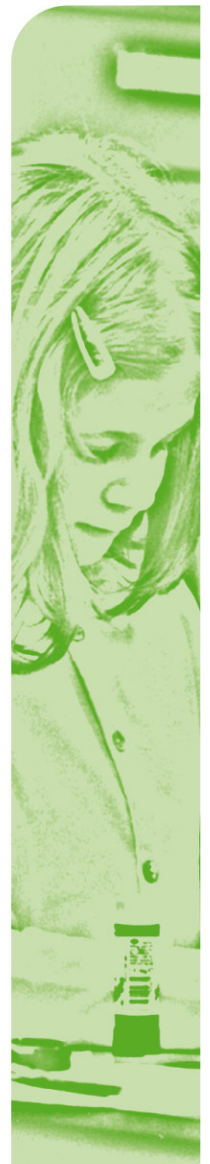
Like Daniel, we live in a culture that doesn't share our Christian beliefs. People around us belong to different faiths, or don't believe in God at all. Our culture is secular – which means that God is left out of the picture. Some people think that faith should be a private thing and that people shouldn't talk about what they believe. But others think that people should be clear about their opinions and beliefs so that everyone knows where they stand. For example, medicine is often a controversial area where experts

disagree about the best way to treat illnesses. How much should a doctor tell her patients if she has a strong opinion about the best way to treat an illness?

Choose some good readers to read out the three 'Doctor, Doctor' scenarios on page 11. Discuss with the group:

- What did the doctor do in each scenario? First one, just gave her own opinion; second, gave the options and left the patient to decide; third, explained the options and gave her opinion.
- Which of those is most fair to the patient? (You could ask which the group would prefer, although young people may prefer to be told what to do by an expert)

Be clear that this is a made-up disease. The first option is not very respectful of the patient – they are just being told what to do. The second implies that all the treatments are the same, and the doctor hides what she really thinks. The third option is the best one because the doctor is being open about all the different options, gives her view but still leaves the choice up to the patient.



Transforming Lives DVD clip: Christian Teachers Transform Learning

Explain that Christian teachers face similar challenges – should they be open about their faith, or keep it to themselves? Watch clip three from the DVD called *Christian Teachers Transform Learning*.

- In what ways are Christian teachers in a similar situation to Daniel?
- What is Dave Bennett's approach to dealing with that challenge?
- What has enabled Dave and his colleagues to have such a good friendship even though they think very differently on some issues?

Being open about their different beliefs, but listening to and learning from each other, makes for a better friendship than just avoiding differences in opinion.



Teaching RE

If an RE teacher has a strong faith of their own, they can take three different approaches to talking about their faith in lessons, similar to the approaches that the doctor took in explaining the treatment to her patient.

- What are they? (To only talk about their faith; to imply that all faiths are the same and it's up to you to make up your mind; to talk about what they believe but in a way that respects other people's beliefs and allows them to make up their own mind.)
- Which do you think is the best approach?

Make space to listen to different people's opinions. Point out that Dave Bennett takes the third approach at his school.

Reflection and prayer

Invite young people to make themselves comfortable and to spend a few moments reflecting on what they have thought about this session. Invite them to think about the three responses to living in a culture that doesn't share their Christian faith.

- When do they need to listen and learn?
- When do they need to transform the culture around them?
- When do they need to stand up for their faith and be clear about what they believe?

Close with a prayer that God will give them wisdom and discernment and that they will know God's presence with them.



DOCTOR, DOCTOR

Scenario one

Hello, Mr Jones, do sit down. I'm afraid I've got bad news for you. You have an illness called Pinkerton's Disease which is causing these itchy red spots all over your feet. The good news is that it can be treated.

You need to smear this pink cream on your feet three times a day. You mustn't cover your feet with socks or shoes so you will need to stay off work for about three weeks. Here's a prescription.

Scenario two

Hello, Mr Jones, do sit down. You have an illness called Pinkerton's Disease which is causing these itchy red spots all over your feet. The good news is that it can be treated, and you have a choice of three different treatments.

The first is to cut all wheat, dairy, meat and alcohol out of your diet for three months.

The second is to smear this pink cream on your feet three times a day. You mustn't cover your feet with socks or shoes so you will need to stay off work for about three weeks.

The third is to bathe your feet every day for six weeks in a solution of vinegar and seaweed extract. It's up to you what you do – you decide.

Scenario three

Hello, Mr Jones, do sit down. You have an illness called Pinkerton's Disease which is causing these itchy red spots all over your feet. The good news is that it can be treated and I want to explain the treatments to you.

The first is to cut all wheat, dairy, meat and alcohol out of your diet for three months.

The second is to smear this pink cream on your feet three times a day. You mustn't cover your feet with socks or shoes so you will need to stay off work for about three weeks.

The third is to bathe your feet every day for six weeks in a solution of vinegar and seaweed extract.

Now the treatment of this illness is quite controversial. Experts disagree about which treatment is the best.

One study showed that the diet was very successful where people stuck to it, but that you need to be very strict about it – one bacon sandwich and all your hard work will be undone.

Another study seemed to show that soaking in seaweed and vinegar was very effective.

I have treated a number of people with the cream and it has always worked very well.

It's up to you which treatment you follow. My professional opinion, knowing you as my patient, is that you should use the cream. But it's up to you.

