

WHAT'S → YOUR PART ← in GOD'S STORY?

SESSION GUIDE

Youth Resource

written by Tom Clark & Jess Masters-Carrer

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What's your part in God's Story: Youth Session Guide
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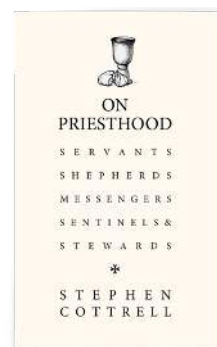
INTRODUCTION

This resource was inspired, with permission, by *On Priesthood* by Archbishop Cottrell and the chapters of *Servants, Shepherds, Messengers, Sentinels and Stewards* which are based on the *Ordinal* and translates them into an engaging, accessible journey for all young people to explore vocation and, more importantly, to explore their place in God's story. Designed for church youth groups, schools, small groups, and one-to-one catch ups. Each session combines theology, scripture, activity, reflection, response and prayer – helping young people connect calling with everyday life.

A bit of an explainer:

When Tom was studying for his master's degree, using the books 'Widening Circle' by Bishop Graham Tomlin and 'On Priesthood, Servants, Shepherds, Messengers, Sentinels & Stewards' by Archbishop Stephen Cottrell, Tom wrote a personal reflection on the priestly role of those ministering amongst young people. And so, we have used thoughts from that dissertation and Archbishop Stephen's book for this session guide. The book, 'On Priesthood', is based on addresses Bishop Stephen had given to ordinands on the night before their ordination. Since then, Stephen went on to become the 98th Archbishop of York.

'For more exploration on the themes of this session guide, please read *On Priesthood*, published by Hodder and authored by Stephen Cottrell'.



How to use these guides:

These guides exist to help young people explore their vocation and calling. We want to help young people answer the age-old question, “what’s my part in God’s story?” A question that can seem huge, daunting, and overwhelming. A question that every person, young, old, and everywhere in between, has asked and will ponder over the course of their life. We hope that these guides can help facilitate open and honest discussions, in a safe and pressure-free environment.

Feel free to read these guides and run them word for word or read them and take out/add/change bits to better suit your context. Here are some ways that we think you could use them:

1. On five concurrent Sundays throughout the year
2. During midweek spaces with young people, such as youth groups or lunchtime clubs
3. As a guide in conversations with young people during one-to-one catch-ups whilst completing the alongside journal together.

Use these session guides in any way that will help you best. But do make sure that you read them fully before you’re face-to-face with a young person! Some of the content is there just for you leaders. In each session, we’ve suggested three game options you could use, in the hope that one of them will work well in your setting. You’ll also realise that, during small group segments, there may be more questions than you need. You don’t need to use them all! Use as many as you have time for, pick and choose the best ones for your context, and don’t worry if conversation strays away from them.

SESSION 1

SERVANTS – “Who am I here for?”

Leader introduction:

When young people hear the word ‘calling’, they might immediately think about jobs, careers or trying to discover one big plan for their lives. Throughout this series, we’ll gently reshape that understanding. God’s calling isn’t simply about what we do one day – it begins with who we are becoming today. This session we’ll explore the vocation of being a servant.

The word ‘servant’ doesn’t always have positive connotations. We often think of serving as being overlooked, doing jobs nobody wants, or putting ourselves last all the time. Yet throughout the Gospels, Jesus completely transforms what servant-heartedness looks like. He shows that serving isn’t weakness – it’s love in action.

Young people don’t need to wait until they’re adults to serve or live lives of purpose. Every day presents opportunities to notice people, show kindness and choose humility.

Note to leaders:

Some young people may naturally love helping others, whilst others may admit they find it difficult. Try not to celebrate one personality type over another. The aim isn’t to make everyone into identical people, but to help them see that serving is something Jesus invites all of us into.

Encourage honest conversation rather than ‘church answers’.

Game option one: ‘Serving up breakfast’

You’ll need (the below are optional and can be adapted for your context!):

- *A bowl*
- *Water*
- *Cups*
- *Fruit*
- *Cereal*
- *Flannel*

Ask young people to get into pairs and choose a few pairs to come to the front. In their pairs, ask them to stand one in front of the other. The person in front puts their hands behind their back. The person behind puts their arms underneath their partner's underarms. The person behind becomes the arms for the person in front!

Prepare some activities for them to complete. For example:

- *Drinking a glass of water*
- *Eating a breakfast item*
- *Washing their face in a bowl of water*

The pair to complete all the tasks fastest (and cleanest!) wins.

Game option two: 'Serving Charades'

You'll need:

- *Pre-prepared slips (ideas below)*
- *A bowl/basket*

Before the session, prepare some slips of paper. On each slip, write down some examples of serving. For example:

- *Cooking someone a meal*
- *Cleaning*
- *Cheering up a friend*

Put these slips in a bowl, and have young people take it in turns to act them out for each other to guess. This game can be played in teams as a relay race. The fastest team to get them all wins!

Game option three: 'Secret servant'

You'll need:

- ***Nothing!***

As everyone arrives, secretly assign one young person to be the 'secret servant'. Throughout the session, their task is to quietly and secretly serve the others in the group whilst going undetected! They might:

- ***Get people a drink***
- ***Save people a seat***
- ***Help tidy something***
- ***Encourage others***
- ***Include people in conversation***

At the end, reveal the game to the others, and have everyone guess who the 'secret servant' was!

Link

After the game, you may want to transition into the next section by saying something like this:

"These games are all about serving. Serving doesn't come in one size! You can serve people in all sorts of ways, both big and small. In today's passage we'll read about a form of service, completed by someone totally unexpected!"

Exploring the passage: John 13:1-17

After you've read the Bible passage together, you may want to summarise by saying something like this:

"The disciples had gathered to celebrate the Passover meal. In those days, roads were dusty and people mostly wore sandals, so washing someone's feet was a normal act of hospitality. Usually, this job belonged to the lowest servant in the household.

Instead, Jesus – the teacher, the leader, the Son of God – knelt down and washed his disciples' feet. Peter was shocked. Surely Jesus shouldn't be doing this! But Jesus explained that his kingdom works differently. Greatness isn't about status or power. It's about loving people enough to serve them. Jesus finishes by saying, 'I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.'

Following Jesus doesn't mean we should go around literally washing people's feet (although you might do from time to time!), it means becoming people who look for opportunities to serve others in all situations."

Key ideas to share with young people

1. There are lots of ways we can serve.
2. Sometimes serving looks big, like volunteering, leading a group, or giving up lots of our time.
3. More often, serving looks wonderfully ordinary. It might mean:

- *Helping at home without being asked*
- *Including someone who's on their own*
- *Encouraging a friend*
- *Listening well*
- *Being patient with a sibling*
- *Choosing kindness when nobody notices*

These things may not seem particularly impressive. But in God's kingdom, faithfulness in small acts of love matters deeply.

Discussion

Take some time to read through the questions before the session and pick the ones that feel most appropriate for your group. Don't feel pressure to ask every question. Sometimes one really good conversation is far more valuable than rushing through them all.

- *Who has served you recently?*
- *Why do you think Jesus chose to wash feet?*
- *Is there a difference between serving because you have to and serving because you want to?*
- *Can serving someone ever cost us something?*
- *Do you think serving those around us points people towards Jesus? Why/why not?*

Prayer

Invite everyone to spend a few quiet moments thinking about one person they could intentionally serve this week. This doesn't need to be dramatic. Encourage them to write or draw their commitment on a piece of paper, before holding it quietly before God.

You could finish by praying something like:

"Heavenly Father, thank you for serving us first. Help us to notice the people around us this week, especially those that we often forget to see, and give us hearts that are willing to love through simple acts of kindness. Amen."

Leader encouragement

Remember that young people learn as much from what they see as what they hear. The way you welcome people, listen carefully, clear chairs away or make time for someone who's struggling all model servant-hearted leadership. Don't underestimate how powerful that example can be.

SESSION 2

SHEPHERDS – “Who’s in my care?”

Leader introduction:

When young people hear the word ‘shepherd’, they might immediately picture fields full of sheep! It feels like an old-fashioned job that has little to do with everyday life. Yet throughout the Bible, shepherding becomes one of God’s most common pictures for showing what love looks like.

This session explores the vocation of being a shepherd. A shepherd notices, protects, guides and cares for others. Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd because he never abandons people when life becomes difficult. He knows every person by name, searches for those who are lost and stays close to those who need him.

Every day we all have opportunities to notice people, encourage friends, include those who feel left out and gently care for those God has placed around them.

Note to leaders:

Some young people naturally look after others, whilst others may feel awkward or unsure of how to help. Encourage them to remember that caring doesn’t mean solving everyone’s problems or carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders. The aim isn’t to become everyone’s rescuer. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. We simply reflect his love by noticing and caring for the people around us.

Game option one: ‘Blindfolded shepherds’

You’ll need:

- *Blindfolds (scarfs work well)*
- *Obstacles (have some fun with it, think buckets of water & soft play tunnels!)*

Set up an obstacle course. Have young people partner up and choose one in the pair to be blindfolded. The blindfolded young person becomes ‘the sheep’, whilst their partner becomes ‘the shepherd’. The role of ‘the shepherd’ is to guide ‘the sheep’ through the obstacle course safely, by only using their voice. If you have time, they can swap roles at the end.

Game option two: 'Smell the sheep!'

You'll need:

- *Blindfolds*
- *Cotton Wool Balls*
- *Some recognisable smells**

Blindfold everyone! Prepare the cotton wool balls by smothering them in different recognisable smells (**for example lavender, perfume, orange, Marmite, coffee, mint*) before the session.

Invite the blindfolded young people to smell each one and try to identify it.

This game can be used as a fun reminder that shepherds spent so much time with their sheep that they often began to smell like them! Care happens when we get proximate with others and spend time with them.

Game option three: 'Guess the shepherd's voice'

You'll need:

- *Blindfolds (if you don't have blindfolds, you could go on trust!)*

One young person stands blindfolded in the middle and becomes 'the sheep'. The rest of the group take turns saying their name or a short phrase while disguising their voice. Can the blindfolded player recognise 'the shepherd' AKA the other young people?

Link

After the game, you may want to transition into the next section by saying something like this:

"A shepherd doesn't simply tell sheep where to go – they stay with them. God doesn't care for us from a distance. He walks alongside us, knows us personally and never gives up on us. As followers of Jesus, we're invited to reflect that same kind of care towards others."

Exploring the passage: Luke 15:1–7

After you've read the Bible passage together, you may want to summarise by saying something like this:

"This story is a parable. Parables are stories that have a meaning beyond the words that are being said. Some people describe them as earthly stories with a heavenly meaning' or 'stories that make us'.

Jesus told this story because the religious leaders were criticising him for spending time with people they believed didn't belong. Instead of defending himself, Jesus told the story of a shepherd with one hundred sheep. When one went missing, the shepherd left the ninety-nine and searched until he found the lost one.

To many people, this sounds like a strange decision. Why leave ninety-nine safe sheep for just one? Well, because that's what God's love is like! God notices people who are overlooked, left out or have 'gone astray'. He pays attention when someone wanders away, feels lonely or left out. Nobody is forgotten.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who comes looking for us, and he invites us to notice and care for the people around us in the same way."

Key ideas to share with young people

1. Shepherds know the people they care for.
2. Shepherds don't simply give instructions – they walk alongside people.
3. Caring doesn't have to be big gestures. It might look like:

- *Noticing when someone seems lonely*
- *Sitting with someone who's by themselves*
- *Checking in on a friend*
- *Praying for someone*
- *Encouraging someone who's struggling*
- *Standing up for someone who's being left out*
- *Listening well instead of trying to fix everything*

These moments may seem small, but they reflect the heart of Jesus.

Discussion

Take some time to read through the questions before the session and pick the ones that feel most appropriate for your group. Don't feel pressure to ask every question. Sometimes one really good conversation is far more valuable than rushing through them all.

- *Why do you think the shepherd in the story went after the one sheep?*
- *What does this story teach us about God's character?*
- *Have you ever experienced someone caring for you like a shepherd?*
- *Who often gets overlooked at school, church or online?*
- *What's the difference between caring for someone and trying to control them?*
- *How does knowing Jesus is our Good Shepherd help us care for others?*

Prayer

Invite everyone to spend a few quiet moments asking God to bring one person to mind who needs encouragement this week.

Give each young person a slip of paper and ask them to write the name (or initials) of someone they feel God is placing on their heart. If they've never done this before, encourage them to ask God for a name and trust that it's from him. Whoever pops into their head, however random it may feel, invite them to write it down.

Encourage them to:

- *Hold the paper whilst praying.*
- *Place it in a basket after they've prayed as a symbol that God is in control, or print a photo of a shepherd's crook to place the paper onto.*
- *Ask God to help them care for this person during the coming week.*

You could finish by praying something like this:

"Good Shepherd Jesus, thank you for loving us, guiding us, and never giving up on us. Thank you that you walk with us through both good times and bad. Show us who is in our care. Help us to notice those who feel forgotten, protect those who are vulnerable, encourage those who are struggling, and reflect your love in all we do. Amen."

Leader encouragement

Remember that young people will learn as much from the way you care for them as from what you teach. Taking time to remember someone's name, noticing when someone is quiet, welcoming a newcomer or checking in with someone who's struggling all demonstrate the heart of a shepherd. Don't underestimate how powerfully those everyday moments reflect Jesus!

SESSION 3

MESSENGERS – “What’s my message?”

Leader introduction:

When young people hear the word ‘messenger’ in the context of church, they might think of evangelism. The word ‘evangelism’ may conjure up pictures of standing on street corners, debating people about faith or having to have all the right answers. That can feel intimidating to say the least! This session explores the vocation of being a messenger.

A messenger simply delivers good news. Christians aren’t called to convince everyone or have every answer. We are invited to tell the story of God’s love through our words and our lives.

Every day we receive hundreds of messages about who we should be, what success looks like and where our value comes from. Jesus gives us a different message – one of hope, forgiveness and new life. As his followers, we have the privilege of sharing that good news with others.

Note to leaders:

Some young people will feel excited about talking about their faith, whilst others may feel nervous or worry about saying the wrong thing.

Remind them that sharing Jesus isn’t about winning arguments or putting people under pressure. It’s the Holy Spirit who changes hearts. Our role is to simply point people towards Jesus through both our words and the way we live.

Just like the other two sessions, encourage honest conversation rather than ‘church answers’.

Game option one: ‘Crossed wires’

You’ll need:

- *Nothing!*

Have young people sit in a circle. Think of a sentence and whisper it to the first young person. That message then travels around the circle by young people whispering it to the person next to them. Once the message reaches the final young person, have them share the message aloud to the group. Finish by comparing it with the original. Can the message say the same?!

If you want to make the game a tad trickier, implement the 'no repetition' rule. Young people only have one chance to share the message to the person next to them, no repeating themselves!

Here are some sentences you could start with:

- *"I love pineapple on pizza"*
- *"Messi is better than Ronaldo"*
- *"We have the best youth leader in the world!"*
- *"God loves every person and invites us to follow Jesus."*

Game option two: 'Bible Charades'

You'll need:

- *Pre-prepared slips (ideas below)*
- *A bowl/basket*

Take some time to write several well-known (or not so well-known!) Bible stories down on slips of paper. Set a timer for 1 minute (or however long you think they'll need!). Young people take it in turns to act out the stories, either solo or in teams, for the other young people/team to guess.

Here are some examples of stories you could use:

- *David and Goliath*
- *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego*
- *The woman at the well*
- *Noah's ark*
- *Jonah and the whale*
- *Mary being visited by the angel Gabriel*

Game option three: 'Just a minute'

You'll need:

- *A way of keeping time*

Nominate one young person at a time to speak about a certain subject for one minute. If you want an extra challenge, have the other young people pick the topic for them! Let them know that if they stop or use any filler words (such as 'ummm', 'errr') then they're out, or have to start the timer again!

Link

After the game, you may want to transition into the next section by saying something like this:

"In our game, we can see that messages can easily become confused or distorted! But Jesus gives us a message that never changes: God loves people, forgives them and invites them to follow him. We don't need to invent a new message – we simply get to share the good news that we've received."

Exploring the passage: Matthew 28:16–20

After you've read the Bible passage together, you may want to summarise by saying something like this:

"These are some of Jesus' final recorded words before returning to heaven. Jesus sends his followers to make disciples and share the good news with the whole world!

What's surprising here is who he sends. The disciples weren't perfect. Matthew even tells us that some still doubted. Yet Jesus trusted them with his mission.

This reminds us that the message has never depended on perfect messengers. It depends on a faithful God.

*As Archbishop Stephen writes: 'The vocation is to be a storyteller, a witness to God's story... a living signpost whose own life directs others to the way of Christ.'*¹

We don't change people's hearts. God does that. We simply get to point people towards Jesus.

Key ideas to share with young people

1. Every Christian is a messenger.
2. The good news is about Jesus, not about us.
3. Sharing our faith can be incredibly simple! It might look like:

- *Telling someone what Jesus has done in your life*
- *Inviting a friend to church/youth group/Christian Union at school*
- *Offering to pray for someone*
- *Encouraging someone with God's promises*
- *Living in a way that reflects Jesus' love*

Sometimes the clearest message we share is the way we treat people.

Discussion

Take some time to read through the questions before the session and pick the ones that feel most appropriate for your group. Don't feel pressure to ask every question. Sometimes one really good conversation is far more valuable than rushing through them all.

- *Why do you think Jesus chose ordinary people to continue his mission?*
- *What promise does Jesus make at the end of this passage?*
- *What messages does our culture tell us about success or happiness?*
- *What difference has knowing Jesus made in your life?*
- *If a friend asked you why your faith matters, what might you say?*
- *How can our actions sometimes speak louder than our words?*

¹ Archbishop Stephen Cottrell, *On Priesthood* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2020), p. 70

Prayer

Invite everyone to spend a few quiet moments thinking about one person they would love to know the hope of Jesus.

Give each young person a small piece of paper and ask them to write that person's name or initials.

Encourage them to pray silently, asking God to give them opportunities to encourage, invite or simply show the love of Jesus to that person during the coming week. Once they've done so, invite them to put their paper in a basket/bowl, as a symbol of entrusting God with those loved ones.

If you're looking for a more interactive time of prayer, why not plant cress seeds in small pots, using cotton wool instead of soil, as a visual representation that we're invited to plant the seeds of faith by sharing the good news, but that it's God who takes over and transforms their hearts, AKA, grows the seed!

You could finish by praying something like:

"Lord Jesus, thank you for the good news of your love. Help us to be faithful messengers this week. Give us courage to share our faith, wisdom to know when to speak, and lives that point people towards you. Amen."

Leader encouragement

Remember that young people are far more likely to talk about Jesus if they've seen someone do it naturally. The way you speak about your own faith, share stories of what God is doing, and welcome people who are exploring Christianity all model what it means to be a faithful messenger. Don't underestimate how powerful those everyday conversations can be!

SESSION 4

SENTINELS – “What do I stand for?”

Leader introduction

By session four, young people will hopefully have begun to realise that vocation isn't simply about choosing a future career, it's about discovering the kind of people God is shaping us to become.

This session focuses on the image of a sentinel. Young people may have never heard this word before (I know I hadn't before reading Archbishop Stephen's book!). The Cambridge dictionary describes a sentinel as, 'a person employed to guard something'. In other words, a watchman. A sentinel keeps watch. They notice things others might miss. They warn people of danger and help protect the community.

Spiritually, God calls his people to live with open eyes – to notice injustice, recognise truth, and have the courage to stand up for what is right, and to call out what is not. That can feel difficult for everyone, but especially for teenagers. It can be tempting in those teen years to do everything to fit in, and everything in your power to not stand out!

Whether it's standing up against bullying, speaking honestly, including someone who's left out or refusing to join in with gossip, following Jesus often requires courage.

Note to leaders

Some young people might immediately think about political issues or global injustices. Those conversations are helpful and incredibly important, but they can also make 'standing up' feel like a daunting, somewhat impossible task. So, in this session, we'd encourage you to try to keep bringing the discussion back to everyday opportunities to notice and respond.

God's calling often begins in the ordinary, mundane moments, before the extraordinary ones. Create an environment where young people feel safe to disagree respectfully.

If you haven't already, do check out The Difference Course for youth groups and schools. This is an amazing course that help young people explore what it looks like to cross the divide and disagree well. For more information, head to www.difference.rln.global.

Game option one: 'Spot the change'

You'll need:

- *Nothing!*

Nominate one young person to leave the room for 30 seconds. Whilst they're outside, ask everyone else to make one small change. For example:

- *Swap jumpers*
- *Move chairs*
- *Put a hood up*
- *Roll up sleeves*
- *Move someone's bag*
- *Swap places*

Invite the young person back in and give them one minute to identify as many changes as they can. Play as many rounds as time allows with different volunteers. If you're in a bigger group, you may want to set a maximum number of changes instead of asking everyone to make a change – that could take a while!

Game option two: 'What's missing?'

You'll need:

- *10-15 everyday objects (such as keys, spoon, tennis ball, pen, Bible, toy car, mug)*
- *A tea towel or cloth*

Place all the objects on a table (or floor) and give everyone 30 seconds to memorise them. Cover the objects with the cloth and secretly remove one item. Take the cloth away and see who can identify what's missing first. Repeat a few times, gradually removing more than one object if you want to make it trickier!

Game option three: 'Sliding scale'

You'll need:

- *Around 10 pre-prepared statements (ideas below)*

Gather young people in the middle of the room and explain that you'll be reading out some statements. Make one end of the room the 'agree' side, and the opposite end the 'disagree' side. It's down to the young people to place themselves on the scale, depending on how much they agree/disagree with what's being said.

Let young people know that this game isn't there to catch them out! This is a judgement free zone. If you're leading the game, try your best to keep your opinions to yourself with this one! Allow young people the space to place themselves on the scale without comment from the leaders in the room. Here are some examples of statements you could read:

- *I find it easy to stand up for friends*
- *I'm good at spotting when someone is sad, but I struggle to know how to help*
- *I've experienced someone standing up for me before*
- *When I see problems occur, I think it's safer to not get involved*
- *Most of the time I'm in my own world, and so struggle to notice things in the world around me*

Link

After the game, you may want to transition into the next section by saying something like this:

"A sentinel's job wasn't to fight every battle. Their job was to stay alert, to notice what others missed, and to respond when action was needed. God invites us to live in the same way! To pay attention to the people around us, to notice where He is at work, and to have the courage to act when he calls us to."

Exploring the passage: Ezekiel 33.1-9

After you've read the Bible passage together, you may want to summarise by saying something like this:

"God gives Ezekiel the picture of a watchman standing on the city walls. The watchman's job wasn't to fight every battle. Instead, they watched carefully and warned people whenever danger approached. If they stayed alert, they had done what God had asked of them.

The image reminds us that God calls his people to pay attention, both to the world around us, and to what he might be saying.

As followers of Jesus, we're invited to notice where hope is needed, and to respond with wisdom and courage."

Key ideas to share with young people

1. Sometimes courage looks loud.
2. Sometimes courage looks quiet.
3. Standing up for what is right might mean:

- *Speaking up when someone is being treated unfairly.*
- *Refusing to laugh at hurtful jokes.*
- *Being honest when lying would be easier.*
- *Including someone who's left out.*
- *Saying sorry when we've got something wrong.*
- *Choosing integrity even if nobody else notices.*

Following Jesus doesn't mean always having the perfect answer. It means asking God to help us notice, discern and respond faithfully.

Discussion

Take some time to read through the questions before the session and pick the ones that feel most appropriate for your group. Don't feel pressure to ask every question. Sometimes one really good conversation is far more valuable than rushing through them all.

- *What can make speaking up difficult?*
- *Can you think of someone who stood up for what was right?*
- *How do we know the difference between reacting quickly and responding wisely?*
- *How can prayer help us become more aware of what's happening around us?*
- *Where do you think God might be inviting you to be courageous?*

Remember to allow space for silence if needed. Not every young person processes aloud!

Prayer

Give each young person a small piece of paper or post-it-note. Invite everyone to sit quietly for a minute. As they do so, ask them to imagine God gently leading them to one situation, one person, or one area of life that needs his love, justice, or peace.

After a minute of silence, encourage them to write one word or draw a symbol on their paper/post-it that represents what they sensed. If your space allows, invite them to stick their paper/post-it to the wall, as a reminder for them in the future.

You could finish by praying something like:

"Lord, help us to notice what you notice. Give us wisdom to know what is right, courage to act when it's difficult, and love to reflect you wherever we go. Amen."

Leader encouragement

Remember that courage isn't measured by confidence! Some of the bravest moments happen quietly. In conversations, friendships, and everyday choices that nobody else sees. As leaders, we're helping young people become people who notice the world through God's eyes and respond with compassion, wisdom and hope. Let's challenge ourselves to set them that example during our time with them, both inside and outside of the sessions.

SESSION 5

STEWARDS – “What’s been entrusted to me?”

Leader introduction:

When young people hear the word ‘steward’, they might think of someone serving drinks on a plane or looking after a football stadium. In the Bible, a steward is someone who looks after something that belongs to someone else. This session explores the vocation of being a steward.

Everything we have, our gifts, time, opportunities, relationships and even God’s creation, is ultimately a gift from God. He invites us to care for these things wisely and use them to bless others.

We know that young people don’t need to wait until they’re older before God can use them. They already have gifts and opportunities that can make a difference wherever God has placed them!

Note to leaders

Some young people might struggle to recognise their own gifts, whilst others might compare themselves to friends they think are more talented. Remind them that stewardship isn’t about having the most gifts, it’s about faithfully using whatever God has entrusted to us!

As we’ve said before, encourage honest conversation rather than ‘church answers’.

Game option one: ‘The Apprentice’

You’ll need:

- *Pre-prepared scenarios (example below)*

As the name suggests, this game is inspired by the show, ‘The Apprentice’! Split young people into teams, and give each team a fictional scenario, along with fictional resources. Give them some time to come up with a plan on how they would use the resources given to help as many people as they can. After the time, invite them to present their ideas to the ‘board’!

Here's an example of a scenario you could use:

Your church wants to bless the local community. You have:

- *£500*
- *20 volunteers*
- *Social media*
- *One weekend*

Game option two: 'Marshmallow towers'

You'll need:

- *Spaghetti*
- *Masking tape*
- *String*
- *One marshmallow per team*

Working in small groups, have young people build the tallest tower possible that can support the marshmallow on top.

Game option three: 'Silent talent show'

You'll need:

- *Pre-prepared slips (ideas below)*
- *A bowl/basket*

Invite young people to come up and pick a 'talent' out of the hat. Have them silently act out the talent, whilst the rest of the group guesses what the gift is.

Here are some examples you could use:

- | | |
|---|------------------------------|
| • <i>Juggling</i> | • <i>Speed stacking cups</i> |
| • <i>Balancing a book on their head</i> | • <i>Gymnast</i> |
| • <i>Making a paper aeroplane</i> | • <i>Solving a riddle</i> |

Link

After the game, you may want to transition into the next section by saying something like this:

"We all have different gifts, opportunities, and resources! Stewardship isn't about having everything we want. It's about using what God has already entrusted to us wisely and faithfully, to do his will and to bless those around us."

Exploring the passage: Matthew 25.14–30

After you've read the Bible passage together, you may want to summarise by saying something like this:

"Jesus tells a story about a master who goes on a journey and entrusts his servants with different amounts of money. Two servants use what they've been given faithfully. One hides his gift because he is afraid."

This story isn't really about money; it's a metaphor for the gifts that we have! Jesus is teaching that God entrusts different gifts, opportunities and responsibilities to each of us. He isn't asking us to compare ourselves with others. He simply asks us to faithfully use what we've been given."

In his book 'On Priesthood', Archbishop Stephen writes, "God is calling together a band of players, musicians, scholars, conductors - those who play the violin and those who play the spoons."³ Each of us is invited to play our part in the next movement of God's story. Whether we "play the violin or the spoons", every person has a place in God's kingdom."

Key ideas to share with young people

1. Everything we have is a gift from God.
2. God gives different gifts to different people.
3. We can practice stewardship every day! It might look like:

- *Using your talents to serve others*
- *Helping at home or church*
- *Caring for God's creation by recycling or picking up litter you see on the street*
- *Encouraging a friend*
- *Being generous with your time*
- *Using your gifts without comparing yourself to others*

Faithfulness matters more than impressiveness!

³ Archbishop Stephen Cottrell, On Priesthood (Hodder & Stoughton, 2020), p. 109

Discussion

Take some time to read through the questions before the session and pick the ones that feel most appropriate for your group. Don't feel pressure to ask every question. Sometimes one really good conversation is far more valuable than rushing through them all.

- *In the story, why do you think the servants received different amounts?*
- *What stopped the third servant from using what he'd been given?*
- *What gifts do you sometimes overlook in yourself?*
- *Why is comparison unhelpful? Can comparison ever be helpful?*
- *How can your gifts help build God's kingdom?*
- *What might faithfulness look like for you this week?*

Prayer

Hand out a piece of paper to each young person. Invite everyone to spend a few quiet moments thanking God for one gift, opportunity or relationship he has entrusted to them.

After some time reflecting, invite young people to draw themselves on the paper. Around their picture, encourage them to write/draw the gifts that they think God has entrusted to them. If they're musical, why not draw themselves playing their instrument?

On the other side, encourage them to write/draw one practical way they could use that gift to bless someone during the coming week.

You could finish by praying something like:

"Generous God, thank you for every gift you have given us. Help us not to compare ourselves with others, but to faithfully use what you have entrusted to us. Show us how to play our part in your story and use our gifts to serve you and bless others. Amen."

Leader encouragement

Remember that we all, but especially young people, often underestimate what God can do through us! Your encouragement may help them recognise gifts they haven't yet seen in themselves. The way you celebrate different abilities, value every contribution and create opportunities for young people to use their gifts, all model faithful stewardship. Don't underestimate how powerfully that can shape their understanding of vocation!

SESSION 6

DISCOVERING YOUR SHAPE – “Who’s God shaping me to become?”

Leader introduction

Over the past five sessions, we’ve explored five different pictures of vocation. We’ve discovered that following Jesus isn’t simply about choosing a future career. It’s about becoming the kind of person God is shaping us to be today.

Some of us naturally love serving behind the scenes. Others enjoy encouraging and caring for people. Some find themselves speaking about their faith, whilst others are passionate about standing up for what’s right or using their gifts to bless others. The wonderful thing is that God doesn’t ask us to fit into one box! Each of us reflects something unique about who he is.

Today’s session is an opportunity for the young people to look back over the journey we’ve been on and ask: *Where do I see God at work in me?*

Note to leaders

Some young people may immediately identify with one of the five themes, others may relate to several, and some might feel they fit into none of them. Remind them there are no right or wrong answers.

This isn’t a personality test or a way of deciding their future career. It’s simply an opportunity to notice where God might already be at work in them.

Game option one: ‘Four corners’

You’ll need:

- *Five signs, one with each theme written on (servant, shepherd, messenger, sentinel, steward)*
- *Pre-prepared scenarios (some examples below)*

Place the five signs around the room. Read out different scenarios and ask everyone to move towards the vocation they think best responds. Explain that there often isn’t one correct answer! You may need to re-cap what each theme means beforehand.

Some example scenarios:

- *Someone is sitting alone at lunch.*
- *A friend is struggling.*
- *Someone asks you why you're a Christian.*
- *You notice someone being treated unfairly.*
- *Your church has been given £100 to bless the community.*

Game option two: 'Would you rather'

You'll need:

- *Pre-prepared questions (some examples below)*

Read out the pre-prepared 'would you rather' questions and allow time for brief discussion after each one.

Here are some examples you could use:

Would you rather...

- *quietly help behind the scenes or lead from the front?*
- *encourage one friend or speak to lots of people?*
- *organise a project or care for someone who's hurting?*
- *notice problems or create solutions?*

Game option three: 'Action!'

You'll need:

- *Nothing!*

Divide young people into five teams. If you have fewer young people, you could have two teams, with both teams having multiple goes.

Each team receives a vocation (servant, shepherd, messenger, sentinel, steward). Give them three minutes to create a frozen picture (or a very short sketch without sound) showing that vocation in action. Everyone else guesses which one they're portraying.

Link

After the game, you may want to transition into the next section by saying something like this:

"Throughout this series we've discovered that God's calling is much bigger than choosing a future job. He's shaping each of us to become more like Jesus. Today isn't about deciding which one you are forever. It's about noticing where God might already be at work in you and asking how he wants to continue that work."

Exploring the passage: 1 Corinthians 12.12–27

After you've read the Bible passage together, you may want to summarise by saying something like this:

"In these passages, Paul describes the Church as one body with many different parts. Every part is needed. Every part matters. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you', and the hand cannot become the foot!

In the same way, God gives each of us different gifts, passions and opportunities. Some people naturally serve. Some care. Some speak. Some watch. Some steward.

None of these callings is more important or greater than another. Together they help the Church reflect the whole character of Jesus. They're all needed!"

Key ideas to share with young people

1. God calls every Christian.
2. God shapes each of us differently.
3. We often grow in more than one area.

As we've explored in this series, you may have recognised yourself in several of these pictures:

- *Servants love people.*
- *Shepherds care for people.*
- *Messengers share the hope of Jesus.*
- *Sentinels watch and act with courage.*
- *Stewards faithfully use what God has entrusted to them.*

Our aim isn't to choose one identity! Our identity is found in Christ and the love He has for us. The aim instead is to keep becoming more like Jesus, who perfectly embodied every one of these vocations.

Discussion

Take some time to read through the questions before the session and pick the ones that feel most appropriate for your group. Don't feel pressure to ask every question. Sometimes one really good conversation is far more valuable than rushing through them all.

- *Which session has challenged you the most?*
- *Which session has encouraged you the most?*
- *Have you noticed God speaking to you during this series?*
- *Do you think our calling can grow and change over time?*
- *Which vocation feels most natural to you? Which feels hardest?*
- *How can we encourage one another to keep growing?*

Prayer

Place five posters around the room, one for each vocation (servant, shepherd, messenger, sentinel, steward). If you played game option one, do re-use the posters from that.

Hand out some post-it-notes to the young people. Invite everyone to spend a few quiet moments walking around the room.

Encourage them to stop at whichever poster they feel most drawn to today. They might also choose a second poster representing an area where they'd like God to help them grow.

Invite them to write their name (or initials) and one simple prayer before sticking it onto the poster.

For example:

- *"Help me become more courageous."*
- *"Teach me to care for people."*
- *"Help me use my gifts well."*
- *"Give me opportunities to share my faith."*
- *"Show me how to serve like Jesus."*

Allow a good chunk of time for this activity. Afterwards, you could finish by praying something like:

"Heavenly Father, thank you for creating each of us uniquely! Thank you that you call every one of us to follow you. Continue shaping us into people who serve, care, share your good news, watch for where you're already at work, and faithfully use the gifts you've given us. Help us to become more like you every day. Amen."

Leader encouragement

Remember that vocation is a lifelong journey! This series isn't about helping young people to discover one perfect label. It's about helping them recognise that God is already at work in their lives.

As you continue to encourage, challenge and pray for them, remember that you are helping them become people who reflect Jesus in countless ordinary ways. Don't underestimate the impact that those small moments can have for years to come.

WHAT'S → YOUR PART ← IN GOD'S STORY? YOUTH SESSION GUIDE

 **called.**

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