

Time with Young Disciples

Why

- Inviting children into theological reflection
- Embodying inclusion
- Communicating to both children and the congregation that children belong in worship
- Teaching and practicing the language of faith
- Modeling for adults

What

A Time with Young Disciples is a regular and intentional moment in the order of service that engages children more fully in the language and practices of worship so that they may grow in faith and devotion to God.

The content of your Time with Young Disciples should always be...

- Your primary choice should always be the scripture used for the sermon that day. If it is a difficult passage for children, or one better suited for a teaching/learning setting rather than worship,
- then choosing an aspect of the worship service, the sacraments, or the church year is a good alternative.

How

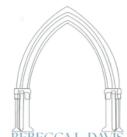
Connect → Tell → Proclaim → Pray

OR

Tell → Connect → Proclaim → Pray

A basic outline for a time with young disciples includes **telling** the story, a way for children to **connect** with the experience of the story, a conclusion emphasizing the **proclamation** point, and a **prayer**.

The connection to experience can come either before or after the story but is often best used at the beginning as a means of engagement. It helps children learn that the Bible relates to their lives as well as to adults. In other words, here are two ways of structuring your time with young disciples: **CTPP** or **TCPP**.



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T

TELL the Biblical in your own words using vocabulary that is well-suited for children.

The order of **TELL & CONNECT** is interchangeable.

C

CONNECT the story to their lives. Make it relevant to children using experiences from their lives.

P

PROCLAMATION POINTS ask in one or two sentences: **WHAT** do you want children to understand from this passage or topic? **WHY** is it important for their lives? **HOW** is it made visible for them?

P

Craft a **PRAYER** you will say with children using language that is understandable and relatable to them. If children are repeating your phrases, use shorter segments of the whole.

1

SELECT THE TEXT

- What is this week's sermon text?
- Will it work with children?
- If not, will you use another lectionary text or use an aspect of worship or the church year?

2

TEXT IN CONTEXT

- Read, sit with and pray about your topic or text
- Consider how the text or topic connects with children
- How shall you tell the story in a way that children understand and it enhances and engages their experience of worship?

3

PROCLAMATION POINT

- Determine the Proclamation Point.
- What Good News does this text or topic have for children today?
- A Proclamation Point is not a "moral of the story." It is a 1-3 sentence summary of:
WHAT do you want them to understand?
WHY it is important to their faith?
HOW they live it?

4

MAP OUT THE STORY

- Map out how you will tell the biblical or worship story
- Mark key points for the main scenes you want to use.
- Remember you are not reciting the text but telling the story.

THEN...

- Craft the closing prayer
- Anticipate questions
- Develop your outline
- Rehearse!!!



Do's & Don'ts

- Do tell the Biblical and theological stories of our faith in compelling and relevant ways that connect with children's lives - this is what forms faith!
- Do consider having an open Bible on your lap as you tell the story.
- Do stay within a 3-5 minute time frame for the TYD.
- Do remember this time is also about fostering relational faith, not just delivering content.
- Do be mindful of your audience - your primary focus is on the children rather than playing to the adults in the room.
- Do ask questions of the children. We are inviting them into the practice of thinking theologically, and questions are a key aspect of that process. Some questions may be rhetorical and others leave space for responses. Allow a short time for responses. It is likely not all children who have raised their hands will be called on because of time. Invite those who do not have a chance to respond during the formal TYD to tell you after the service. Let them know where you'll be and that you'll look forward to hearing their responses.
- Do use child-friendly vocabulary that translates complex Biblical and theological concepts into understandable or "gettable" language.
- Do manage laughing & showboating. Understand, and help the congregation (including children) understand, the difference between laughing in delight of what a child says and laughing at a child. Words of affirmation for a response that is genuine, yet brings delighted laughter, can help frame the laughter. With showboating - redirecting behavior, reframing a silly response, a gentle hand on a child's shoulder can help temper disruptive behavior. Adopting the practice of having a second adult sitting in the midst of the children to assist quietly and respectfully is also helpful for "crowd control." Foster the understanding that wiggles and giggles are an innate part of a child's behavior and perfectly acceptable within congregational norms. Sitting absolutely still is not the goal.

Note:

- If using a children's book as a way to illustrate the text or help explain a theological concept, paraphrase the story, showing the pictures rather than reading the entire book page by page. Reading a picture book well can take far longer than 3 - 5 minutes and runs the risk of the focus being on the book rather than the Biblical or theological story.



Do's & Don'ts

- **Don't use cutesy language or cutesy gimmicks. It takes the focus away from the relationships and the Biblical/theological message.**
- **Don't pass out candy. We do not know allergies and family norms. Plus, if some congregation members expect children to sit still, giving them candy is not the most helpful choice. Let the adults with whom they are sitting determine if their child/ren will have candy in church.**
- **Don't put children on display as if they are there to entertain. Consider having the children sit on the floor with you facing the congregation. This is especially important when churches livestream their services and children's images can be captured on the internet. It reduces the risk of photo manipulation.**
- **Don't stand over children and talk "down" to them. Sit with them or in a lower adult size chair facing the children.**
- **Don't use "Object Lessons." There is a difference between using a "prop" and giving an object lesson. The meaning of the prop remains the same and is employed to emphasize the text. (e.g., lost keys, a broken vase, a piece of pottery, etc.) The prop becomes an "object lesson" when it is used to convey the message and/or becomes the center act of the time together. (e.g., We are not soured, soiled milk jugs and God's grace does not operate like a faucet of running water flushing out the dirty, rotten part of us! God's family is like this melted candy, etc.) Focus on relationships. God is relational. Faith is relational. The Gospel is relational. Children are wired (brain science confirms it) to seek a relationship with the Holy One. Jesus is NOT a singing zucchini or tomato.**

