

Wide open —Christian Ed at Home

Adapted from an article by JOELLE BRUMMIT-YALE in the Presbyterian Outlook



Scripture: Mark 8:27-38 (Note: you may want to read The Message version of the text, found at Biblegateway.com)

Materials: whiteboard and/or pencil and paper; ideas for serving others as a family

When I moved to the South 24 years ago, I learned a new descriptor for a child who is very active and talkative: *wide open*. While this characterization isn't always considered positive, I love it. Even though it is used to describe children's behavior, it also points to the unfettered spirits of our young disciples. Children approach life open to what it might bring. They openly share their thoughts and feelings. They play hard and with abandon. But they also learn quickly that the world around them prefers that they moderate their feelings and behavior. Yet Jesus calls us to be "wide open," offering all we are to our discipleship. In today's lesson, children will explore Christ's call and its meaning for them as Jesus' young disciples.

Introduce

Begin by asking children what Jesus did during his ministry that we are asked to do as his disciples.

- Write the list on paper or a whiteboard so they can refer back to it.
- Then, ask them which of the items on the list they find easy to do and which are more difficult. Note that Jesus often asks us to come out of our comfort zones to care for one another.

Prepare

Prepare to read aloud Mark 8:27-38.

- In this passage, Jesus calls on his disciples to give their lives for their faith.

- This image may be frightening to younger children. If you are working with younger children, you will likely want to use The Message version of the text, which you can find at Biblegateway.com.
- Share with the children that this reading presents Jesus having a conversation with his disciples and eventually a larger crowd gathered in a village near Caesarea Philippi. In it, Jesus begins to share about the suffering and death he will endure.

Read

Read aloud Mark 8:27-38.

- Ask the children to recount how Peter reacts when Jesus tells the disciples he will go through a great deal of suffering and eventually death.
- Note that Peter isn't willing to accept this message. He pulls Jesus away from the group and scolds him for saying this. Jesus is undeterred.

Wonder

Focus in on verses 34-37.

- Ask the children what Jesus tells the disciples and the gathered crowd they must be willing to do for their faith.
- In The Message version of the text, Jesus says, "Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self." Encourage the children to reflect on what this might mean.
- Why is "self-help no help at all"?
- What does Christ-like "self-sacrifice" look like?

As you and the children discuss this text, it is worth highlighting that "self-sacrifice" does not mean ignoring one's basic needs.

- Because children can view ideas in black and white, they may believe Jesus is asking them to completely ignore their own needs in favor of caring for others. This can develop unhealthy behaviors.
- Shift the discussion to looking at how service to others can not only provide care to others — it can also help make you more of yourself. You come to learn who you are and develop as a person of faith.
- Encourage the children to wonder about how service might help them grow. How can service help open you up — as an individual and as a person of faith?

Do

To help the children connect Jesus' call to their own lives, plan a day of service together.

- Ask them to think about where and when they could focus a full day on caring for some part of God's creation.
- You may want to connect to a ministry that the congregation is already involved in.
- As you plan, encourage the group to notice what they will be sacrificing to serve. Make a list of things they will not be able to do that day. Ball up the list

and throw it out while offering a prayer letting God know that the children are willingly sacrificing these parts of their lives to serve.

After you have held the day of service, debrief with the children.

- Ask them to recount ways that they acted as Jesus did throughout the day.
- Then discuss how the experience reinforced their faith. How did a day of self-sacrifice bring them closer to their “real selves”? What did they realize about themselves? What did they already know that was reinforced?
- Encourage them to find moments within their lives to lean into the idea of “self-sacrifice” for God’s creation. Note that these opportunities help us open ourselves up so that our connection to God and our faith can strengthen and expand.



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