

Through-Life Discipleship

- *Following Christ throughout the ages and changes of life*



What is 'Through-life discipleship'?

'Through-life discipleship' is a term we at St Peter's Saltley Trust have created, to draw together questions concerning age, life stages and the journey of life from cradle to grave, and where they intersect with the Christian faith and Church community. Questions such as what are the particular challenges to living out our faith at different points in our life; what does it look like to grow in maturity and faith; how can we bridge the gap between young and old we might find in our church; or how can churches support people in the key events and turning points of their lives?

Ageing affects all of us. We believe that, far from being incidental, God is interested in our growing up and growing older. Just as speaking of 'whole-life discipleship' makes the point that we are seven-day Christians, 'through-life discipleship' emphasises that the Christian life is a lifetime's journey with particular challenges and opportunities at different ages and stages.

As part of a wider project, involving partnership with various churches, dioceses and groups around the West Midlands, these study materials are designed to help people start to explore this theme for themselves and consider how their church could be more attentive to people at all points in their journey.

Overall Aim

- To give participants (churches) an opportunity to explore questions related to 'through-life discipleship' and start to consider the impact of these upon their church life

Specific Aims

- To reflect, with use of the Bible, on questions related to age, the life course and generations
- To consider how one's church could be more intentional in addressing the needs of different ages, life-stages and generations
- To encourage and instil confidence in the church's mission and discipleship

Who is it for?

These materials are designed to be used in small groups such as church home groups or equivalent. Whether you have picked up these materials in response to a particular felt need or interest with regards to age and generations, or you are just starting to explore this theme, it is hoped that these

will be able to take you on to a further level of reflection and understanding. There could be added value in a whole church using the materials or perhaps a commissioned working group with the support of the church leadership as it is hoped that these sessions will inspire a practical response to how church can address questions concerning 'through-life discipleship'.

The Four Sessions:

This course is made up of four sessions which will last 1 hour ½ each. However, we must emphasise they are only 'starter-study materials', it may be that you wish to plan something beyond these four sessions to draw everything together. Please feel free to be flexible with how you use the material, as you may feel it worthwhile to spend more time on particular questions and activities than originally accounted for.

1. The lifelong journey

We can often view life as a journey and our faith is something that potentially will be with us through it all, though growing and changing along the way. There is value in taking a wide view of our lives, taking time to look back on how far we've come and looking to what the future might bring. Further to that our view of the past and of the future can significantly shape our present. This session will give opportunity to reflect upon the past, start to look forward and consider how we can persevere through all that life brings.

2. Life stages & discipleship

Through our lives our circumstances change and how we live out our faith can look very different because of this due to various family or work commitments, time pressures, roles and responsibilities. This begs the question how can churches be attentive to the different needs and opportunities that different stages of life present; in their care for the congregation, in their worship together and in equipping people to live as disciples throughout the week? This session will reflect upon what it means to be disciples and how this might look different in the various stages of life.

3. Life changes and turning points

Just as we can see in our lives different stages, these stages are often marked by obvious turning points such as leaving school or retiring. Change can often be exciting, but it can also be unsettling and sometimes particularly stressful. The Church has had a tradition of marking particular life events or turning points such as in baptisms and weddings but it is worth considering why does the church mark some turning points in life but not others? This session will give opportunity to reflect on life's turning points and consider what the church can do to support and encourage people through them.

4. The generations

Church can often be one of the few organised social spaces in which a number of generations come together and with this mix comes different life experiences, values and interests. Churches have the role of passing on the faith to the next generation but can there be a balance of learning from both young and old in the congregation? This session will reflect on what differences there are between the generations and what would help to grow healthy relationships between young and old.

Session Plan

Each session includes a Bible study, some further input for discussion and reflection, occasions for individual reflection, an activity for considering how this learning could be applied and also some

prayer/worship. Some sessions may also include optional further reading to take away after the session.

St Peter's Saltley Trust

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