

Hanging out with Jesus

6 interactive Bible studies for 9–14s

Corin Child



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Published by

The Bible Reading Fellowship

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Abingdon OX14 3FE

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Website: www.brf.org.uk

BRF is a Registered Charity

ISBN 978 1 84101 790 7

First published 2013

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed in Singapore by Craft Print International Ltd

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Foreword

It's our passion to see our 'tweenagers' in love with Jesus and his good news and for them to grow up to be committed and passionate teenagers. We want what is best for them and we know that Jesus is the only answer to all that life will ultimately throw at them. Because of this, we know that the Bible is the way for them to start to see God's love for them and how he impacts their world.

Corin Child has put together a fantastic tool for any church to help their young people engage with the book that is screaming God's love to them. *Hanging out with Jesus* is a tool that will help any young person see God's bigger story for them and how he has plans for them in all areas of their life. So many young people don't understand all that Jesus can give them and support them in. They often see him as just another human being or a distant God who has no relevance to school or the struggles of homework or the opposite sex. As Paul says in Ephesians 3:12, 'Christ gives us

courage and confidence.' Jesus is the one who walks us through all of life and gives us strength.

My hope is that this generation becomes fascinated with Jesus in a way that I never was at their age. What makes this book distinctive is its focus on Jesus and nothing other than him. Often we try to disciple our young people in the ways of 'Christianity' or the ways of 'church' or even the ways of 'religion', but it's Jesus who is the fascinating one. He's the one who captivates our imaginations with a more beautiful way of living.

This book will help you and your 'tweenagers' engage with Jesus and all that he wants for us. Jesus invites us to join him as we sit, kneel, climb, be surprised, stand up and live for him. In Jesus we will find a life with which nothing else can compare.

Cris Rogers

Vicar of All Hallows Bow, Tower Hamlets, London

Introduction

We become like the people we spend time with. This is true of everybody—we all influence our friends in one way or another—but it is especially true of young people, as their growing personalities search for an answer to the question, ‘Who do I want to be like?’ Parents understand this instinctively and cannot help keeping an eye on the company their children keep. Who we hang out with changes us.

The Gospels record an occasion when some children were taken to Jesus. They had been brought by parents or carers, presumably, who hoped that some of Jesus’ goodness would rub off and that the children would be blessed in some way. The disciples, impatient, shooed them away, but, even as they did so, Jesus called the children back, saying, ‘People who are like these little children belong to the kingdom of God.’ Jesus wanted people—young people in particular—to know that spending time in his company was not just permissible; it was what they were born for.

Hanging out with Jesus encourages young people to discover that this is still true today. It does so through the eyes of people who stumbled across the divine character of Jesus and, through spending time with him, found their lives turned around. These were ordinary people—housewives, fishermen, officials. Their stories are recorded in the Bible, giving hope to every other ordinary person who wants to hang out with someone extraordinary and allow the experience to change them for the better.

The approach of this course

If Jesus offered a welcome to young people, it makes sense that we should, too. A welcoming, positive approach to young people is the key. Below are three hallmarks of a good group that I hope are at the heart of this material.

- **Expectation:** Young people do well under the eye of people who believe in them. This material trusts that young people can do well at activities that sometimes carry a ‘grown-up’ label—getting to grips with the Bible, being prayerful and offering themselves to God in a deliberate and serious way.
- **Gentleness:** There is a balance between stepping forward in welcome and standing back out of courtesy. In an encounter with Jesus, people need time and space to realise what they have learned; this is especially true of young people who have a lot of life changes to process as they are growing up. So, gentleness is needed in a group. Faith cannot be rushed or demanded; it can only be patiently nurtured.
- **Hospitality:** Arranging a Christian group is primarily an act of welcome. Young people will usually respond by enjoying themselves and making the most of their time together. They may also make a connection with the hospitable God, learning to approach him with the same natural ease.

The shape of the course

The six sessions

1. Sitting with Jesus (Luke 10:38–42)

- How it can be difficult to be still, but how it can be important to do so.
- Story: Mary and Martha.

2. Kneeling with Jesus (Mark 1:35–37; Matthew 6:6–8)

- Why people pray, and what's at the heart of prayer.
- Story: the way that Jesus prayed, and his advice on how to go about praying.

3. Climbing down to Jesus (Luke 19:1–10)

- When we've been doing things the wrong way and we need to do things differently.
- Story: the remarkable change in the life of Zacchaeus.

4. Surprised by Jesus (Luke 24:13–35)

- The range of emotions that we go through every day.
- Story: Cleopas and friend on the road to Emmaus, who went from despair to elation.

5. Standing up for Jesus (Acts 2:32–41)

- Causes that are worth supporting.
- Story: what made Peter go public about Jesus.

6. Living for Jesus (verses from Ephesians)

- The value of good advice.
- Story: the guidance Paul gave for living in the light of Christian faith.

A typical 'Hanging out with Jesus' meeting

1. Welcome time

A good welcome is always welcome! Young people coming to a group meeting will feel more happy and relaxed if they receive a little hospitality when they arrive—somewhere comfortable to sit, a drink, something to nibble. Talk to parents who have dropped their children off as well—at the very least, to confirm what time you expect the session to finish. When a group meets for the first time, introduce group members to each other (perhaps ask which school they go to and where they live). Don't worry if everyone seems shy: this probably won't last, and the opening material is designed to get people talking if they aren't doing so already.

2. Starting

To 'officially' start the session, a brief conversation or exercise is suggested. This asks the young people to get thinking about something in their experience.

3. Using the prompt sheet

Each session has a 'prompt sheet' provided, which is photocopiable and also downloadable (see www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk/extra-resources/) so that every member of the group can have one. The sheet is designed to make a connection between the experience of group members and the experience of people in the Bible. For instance, the prompt sheet for the first session asks everyone how fidgety they are feeling; the connection is with Martha, who couldn't sit still like Mary did. Not all the questions on the sheet are serious. Some are there mainly for fun and, as we've already said, young people like to have fun. Allow a pause for everyone to complete their sheet, and then discuss the results.

4. Looking at the Bible

By now, the young people should be tuned in to the theme and ready to look at what the Bible has to say. Try to have enough Bibles (in the same translation) for one each. Holding a Bible in your hands and starting to use it can be oddly fascinating, especially for those who are new to it. Alternatively, you may have some Bible software and a large screen on which to display it. If so, group members could take it in turns to find and display the passage. Once you have read the passage, you can use the discussion questions provided.

5. Time out for God

Growing in faith is about more than knowing the right answers. It also involves responding spiritually. This, after all, is what Jesus' first disciples did: when they came across Jesus, it affected their behaviour. So, after the time of Bible study, young people have some 'time out for God'.

Exactly what is on offer will vary according to the resources of your fellowship. For thoughts on how to set up your particular building, see the ideas below. Whatever you do, the idea is that the young people should be able to spend the time individually and independently as a way of responding to God. This may seem strange at first, but this is the point: it is a learning experience, finding out what it's like to give some time to God in this way.

If, at first, you are wondering how this can possibly work with the group that you have, make the first quiet period very short (perhaps five minutes), and ask the young people themselves for their ideas. Show them the space you are going to use and ask, 'How shall we set this up?'

6. Afterwards

This is a brief time of regrouping after the quiet time, using a discussion or simple exercise. Reflecting at this point will be in what has been going on during the quiet time. It will also help you, as the group leader, to discover a little of what the young people are thinking.

7. Finishing

How you finish will depend partly on the mood of your group and partly on how much time you have remaining. If you prefer a lively conclusion, some ideas for party games are provided on the theme of each session.

Making space: using your building

A few years ago, when I considered setting up this sort of group for the first time, I wondered what resources our church had to help young people come closer to God. Gradually it dawned on me that the Victorians had already given us something—an interesting building that was designed to provoke prayer and wonder. Having seen the effect of cathedrals on otherwise lively groups of children, I started to think about our building not as something old and fusty but as something curiously stimulating.

Try this yourself. If you have an old church building, look at it with fresh eyes. What are its lovable peculiarities? What do schoolchildren gather round when they visit? How could young people come closer to God in this place? Alternatively, you may have an adaptable modern building, which may include side rooms that you can adapt to give a different 'feel', using lighting, drapes or decorations. The same applies if you are using somebody's home. Stand in the room you have and imagine what would create a feeling of stillness and wonder.

From here you can think of the activities you will lay on to encourage quietness and thoughtfulness. Here are a few ideas.

- **Prayer materials:** These can be as simple as slips of paper on which to write prayers and a place to put them, or as elaborate as wire prayer holders or an area with votive candles (if this can be supervised).
- **Music:** Set up some CD players or mp3 players with headphones playing Christian songs. Provide some beanbags to sit on, and print out the lyrics for the young people to follow.
- **Book corner:** For those who like to read, place some age-appropriate Christian books and magazines in a quiet and comfortable corner.
- **Art tables:** Provide plenty of space and some materials (paper, pencils, chalks, Plasticine, scratch art, Magna Doodles, Hama beads, calligraphy pens and so on). You will probably need to give the young people an idea of what to make or draw (it could be something related to the Bible study they have been doing). One good way of doing this is to have a ready-made example on the table.
- **Computer area:** Computers can be a window on the world, and young people are quite used to this. If you have one or more laptops available, you could load some interactive Bible software for the young people to explore (headphones are a good idea).

If you have an internet connection, you could set people the challenge of finding out more about the Bible story they have been looking at, including works of art and photos of biblical locations. However, computers can also be a distraction, so make sure they aren't used for other things.

- Focus piece: You could put a thought-provoking object in a central position for the young people to gather round. For instance, you could have a dimmed area with a lit bubble tube, where young people sit and imagine their prayers rising to God.

Don't feel that you need to provide all these activities; indeed, if you put out too much, it could end up being less of an aid to contemplation and more of a sensory barrage. Notice that in some of the sessions you will find particular suggestions for prayers during the period of 'time out'.

Sitting with Jesus

It has been said that for their first two years, children are encouraged to walk and talk, and for the next 16, they are told to sit down and shut up! Sitting still and remaining quiet does not always come naturally to young people, particularly when it's enforced. One of the discoveries of growing older, however, is that being still and quiet makes us receptive, which is why we must sometimes choose to do it. It is important for all sorts of activities—getting to know friends, listening in lessons and even watching TV.

The story of Mary and Martha in the Bible is about a choice between being busy and being still, on an occasion where stillness was more important. It is an influential story for Christians, who have believed for centuries that it's important once in a while just to stop, because that's the best chance we have of clearing our minds and noticing things that God might want us to think about.

Starting

Make sure that the area you're using is comfortable and relaxed. If possible, have soft chairs or beanbags available to sit on, arranged in a circle.

Once everyone has arrived (and had a drink and a biscuit), ask the young people about sitting still. Can they think of places where they like sitting still and others where they hate it? When they're at home or at school, who sits around a lot and who rushes about? Do they know anyone who never stops rushing around?

Now try an experiment. Ask your group to be still and silent for one minute. See if they can manage it. Then ask the group how they found the exercise. Was it easy? What distractions were there? What was going through their minds? Did their bodies want to stay still? What's the point of a game like this?

Using the prompt sheet

Hand round the prompt sheets (see page 19) and ask the members of the group to spend a bit of time

completing them. Then compare their answers.

Group members may suggest 'church' as a place where you have to be quiet. It may be worth asking the whole group about this. Does everyone agree? Why are people quiet in church? Are all churches like this?

Don't be afraid to go off at tangents. If someone has a funny story about sitting at someone's feet, let everyone hear it: it's all part of the fun of a group conversation.

The question in the middle of the prompt sheet, about whether it is better to sit down or be busy in the kitchen, is a deliberately odd question, intended to arouse curiosity. It is, of course, a lead in to the Bible study.

Martha and Mary

Hand round some Bibles and ask everyone to look up Luke 10:38–42. Read the passage and then ask the group some questions.

- Look at verse 39. What sort of thing do you think Jesus might have been talking about that Mary found so interesting?
- Martha was doing all the work by herself (v. 40). Do you feel sorry for her?
- Jesus says that 'only one thing is necessary' and that 'Mary has chosen what is best' (v. 42). What exactly was the thing that Mary chose?
- Do you think this story means that when someone at home asks you to help with the housework, you have a biblical reason to refuse?

Time out for God

Explain that, because of stories like this, Christians often choose to be still and quiet. This has a purpose: they want to focus on God and on what he has to say to us.

Just as Mary chose to sit and listen to Jesus, the group now has a chance to try out the same thing. Spending time in silence may feel a bit odd at first (especially if they found one minute hard at the start of the session),

but it won't be for very long and they may learn to enjoy the calm of this special time that has been set aside.

Show the group around the space that you have arranged for the quiet time, and point out any books, CD or mp3 players, art materials, writing materials or other resources that will be available. If people in the group have mobile phones, it is a good idea to collect them in a bag that you will keep in a safe place. Handing over mobiles is a sign that you are committed to avoiding distractions.

Before the quiet time begins, go round the group and ask everyone to say which activity they have chosen to do. Encourage anyone who hasn't decided at least to say where they are going to start. Mention that you will let everyone know when the time is up.

Then leave them to it. Position yourself somewhere inconspicuous but where you can still see what is going on. Quietly intervene if anyone is being distracting or disruptive: ask how they are finding the exercise, and ask them to remain quiet for the sake of the others in the group. Ten or 15 minutes is probably long enough for this first go at 'time out'.

Afterwards

Ask the members of the group to sit together again and briefly ask how they found the time they have just spent. Did they enjoy it?

Consider for a moment the following groups of people who regularly set aside time to be still before God. What do you think of each of these? Do you think you could manage what they do? If you have access to the internet, you could show web pages and video clips for each of the groups.

- The Taizé Community: people from across the world, living and working together, welcoming over 100,000 young people every year to live simply and spend time in prayer and worship.
- 24/7 Prayer: an organisation that encourages people to pray at regular points in the day (whatever they are doing) and has someone, somewhere in the world, praying at this and every moment.
- Monks and nuns: people who follow special rules for living, including vows that they will not do certain things (like getting married) and will do other things (like attending services every day).

Finishing

To finish the session, pass round a plate of small chocolates, sweets or biscuits. Before each member of the group can take their sweet, they must name one

thing that has particularly made them think.

Alternatively, you might like to finish on a light-hearted note by playing some group games. Consider the following loud and quiet games:

Shouting game

Group members pair up and then stand on opposite sides of the room. One person is given a Bible verse; the other has a pen and paper. The person with the verse must shout it across the room for the other person to write down (over the noise of all the other pairs doing the same thing).

Bunch of keys game

One person is blindfolded and sits on a chair or stool. A big bunch of keys is placed under the chair. In complete silence, another member of the group is nominated to creep forward and try to steal the noisy keys from under the chair without the blindfolded person detecting them and touching them.

Sleeping lions

Everyone in the group lies completely still on the floor, apart from one or two 'rangers' who roam around trying to get the 'lions' to move or make a noise. The rangers cannot touch the lions but can wave their arms, tell jokes, sing badly and so on.

Guess a minute

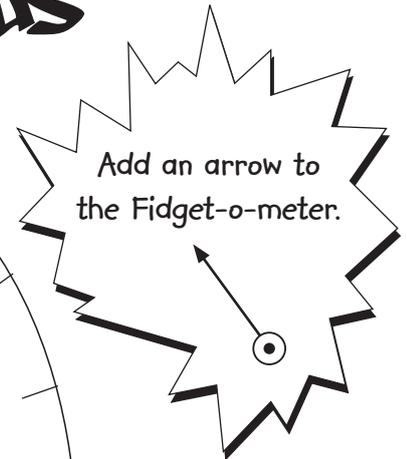
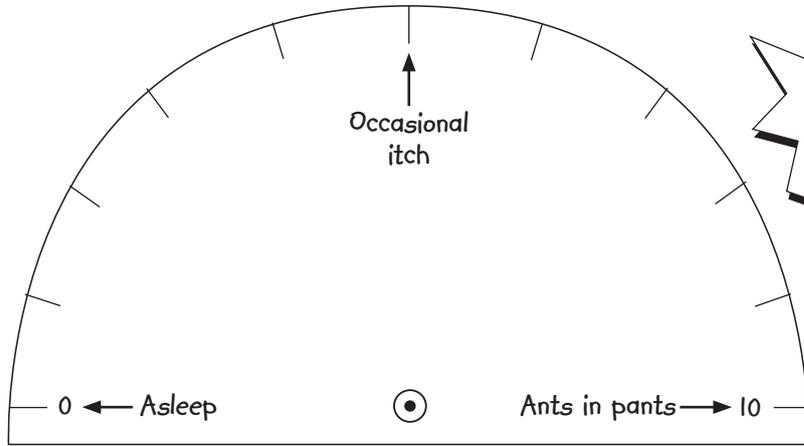
An adult with a watch says 'Go' and times one minute. Everyone in the group has to bury their head in their arms and guess when a minute has elapsed, after which they stand up and call out 'That's a minute!' The person who gets closest wins. (Make sure people take their watches off for this game!)

Hanging out with Jesus Session 1

Sitting with Jesus

Are you ever lazy? Tick the box.

no



How fidgety are you feeling right now?

This person is sitting down



This person is very busy in the kitchen



Which is better?



3 places where you have to be quiet

1.
2.
3.



places where you have to be busy

1.
2.
3.



Have you sat at anyone's feet recently... and did they smell all right?

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