

FURTHER EDUCATION SUNDAY
MAY 15TH 2022



Suggested Readings for Use on Further Education Sunday

John 1 v 35 – 42 (NLT)

The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, "Look! There is the Lamb of God!" When John's two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus.

Jesus looked around and saw them following. "What do you want?" he asked them.

They replied "Rabbi" (which means teacher) "where are you staying?" "Come and see," he said. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of those men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ).

Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, "Your name is Simon, son of John – but you will be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

Luke 2 v 41 – 52 (NLT)

Every year Jesus's parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. When Jesus was twelve years old, they attended the festival as usual. After the celebration was over, they started home to Nazareth, but Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn't miss him at first, because they assumed he was among the other travellers. But when he didn't show up that evening, they started looking for him among their relatives and friends.

When they couldn't find him, they went back to Jerusalem to search for him there. Three days later they finally discovered him in the temple, sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them and asking questions. All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

His parents didn't know what to think. "Son," his mother said to him "why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere."

"but, why did you need to search?" he asked. "Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they didn't understand what he meant.

Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And his mother stored all these things in her heart.

Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and all people.

Psalm 119 v 33 - 40 (NLT)

Teach me your decree, O Lord
I will keep them to the end.
Give me understanding and I will obey
Your instructions.
I will put them into practice with all my heart.
Make me walk along the path of your commands,
For that is where happiness is found.
Give me an eagerness for your laws
Rather than a love for money!
Turn my eyes from worthless things
And give me life through your word.
Reassure me of your promise,
Made to those who fear you.
Help me abandon my shameful ways;
For your regulations are good.
I long to obey your commandments!
Renew my life with your goodness.

Sermon Notes for Further Education Sunday

The Bible has lots to say about learning. Whilst there was no such thing as a 'Further Education sector' in biblical times, there are plenty of principles applicable to a scriptural understanding of education in general.

In the Psalm (Ps 119.33-40) there is a passionate prayer from the writer for understanding. It is really important to see understanding as part of learning. Children and young people can learn lots of information but fail to understand the importance or application of that learning. Understanding is concerned with the move from knowing about to knowing why and how. For example, in relation to Creation in Genesis, scientists may well know the how of creation but can't explain the why. Full understanding brings wisdom which is more than just knowledge.

In the world of Further Education one of the phrases I hear most often from young people is 'I get it now'. As they engage with their subject and as their learning preferences are met, often in a more hands on and practical way, then understanding dawns. In biblical terms this idea of understanding is often termed revelation. It is revelation – and the transformation that goes along with it - that is the answer to the Psalmist's prayer. This prayer for understanding can and should also be our prayer.

This psalm contains a really lovely piece of writing which talks of the joy that comes from the application of learning. In FE contexts, it is common to see students experience the joy of work done well as they practice applying what they have learned. The holy nature of work is again reflected in the early chapters of Genesis, in which God ordained Adam to

tend the garden. My [Nigel's] oldest daughter studied theatre make-up at a college and she took her skills to the local civic theatre each term to do make up for local amateur groups. She used to glow with joy.

Scripture makes it plain that learning should lead to understanding and that that understanding should be applied and when it is we have joy. The pastor, writer and speaker Skye Jethani talks about having a theology of vocation and recognising how Gods blessing is generally worked out in three main areas: the creative (eg through gifts of prophecy, preaching and teaching), the entrepreneurial(through gifts such as the gift of administration – the supernatural ability to derive order from Chaos) and in caring (gifts of love and pastoral care). If we accept that God can lay a vocation on our hearts in such a broad way and not in the traditional narrow way of vocation equalling Christian service or ministry, then there must be options for people to explore all of lifes opportunities and in exploring discover a Godly call on your life. In this way FE can be seen to be a wonderful vocation for discovery.

The final part of the reading from Psalm 119 also hints at how life (in all its fullness) comes from Godly learning.

So often education can bring a kind of death to many young people. The current school system doesn't suit everyone. Those who don't fit often fail to achieve academically, in terms of gaining recognised qualifications and their failure stays with them, causing their hopes and dreams to wither. That happened with my [Nigel's] younger daughter who had special educational needs and just couldn't do everything the system expected. However, once at an FE college, she was able to pursue a care course that revealed her natural gifting in this area of work. She still found the academic side hard but she pressed on and achieved. She was student of the year for two years running and gained a job at which she excelled. She gained life through learning that was right for her. Her FE education was a literal life saver.

At first glance, the passage from John chapter 1 (about the call of Simon) seems little to do with education. Yet it contains, for me, one of the most profound truths of scripture. In most of the translations of this passage, Jesus says 'You are Simon, you will be Peter' (a prophecy fulfilled later in Matthew's gospel when Peter confesses Jesus is Messiah at Caesaerea Phillipi). That phrase 'you are... you will be' is an example of Jesus seeing us as we are (our hopes and dreams, our faults and failings, with our natural gifts and inclinations), but also seeing our potential (who we could be in him). Jesus sees in each of us our potential. In him we can fulfil that potential in amazing ways.

The FE sector deals with a wide range of students. In addition to 16-19s studying vocational courses and some higher education students, colleges also frequently provide programmes for those children and young people who struggle to cope with mainstream school. In my [Nigel's] days in school I would often hear people referred to as 'a troublesome child', 'a wicked boy', or 'a waste of space'. Often children labelled in such a negative way would adopt that label and eventually be excluded. I would often challenge what people said about these students and ask: when they looked at someone who or what are they seeing? I would try and encourage people who labelled children so negatively to see a child with

potential; someone whose life could go in a different direction if they were given a chance. Many of these students found a place in FE and once there, sometimes things would change. They were given a chance to fulfil their potential. In her care course, my daughter was told by a future employer: "we can't afford to be without what you have to offer". That was a 'Jesus moment' and it transformed my daughter's outlook.

Kitty te Riele is an educational theorist from New Zealand who spends a lot of time reflecting on further education, and sees as key to its success the application of a pedagogy of hope. By this, she means that we deliberately interrupt lives and help them move in a new direction where possibilities of change overwhelm a probability of disappointment. In FE, we see echoes of an approach that Jesus offered to those who became his disciples, learners in the school of a rabbi. It's an approach we can take on board in our churches schools and colleges with confidence.

Our final reading (Luke 2.41-52) is the only account of Jesus' childhood which we have in the Gospels. However, culturally speaking, it focuses not upon Jesus' childhood but upon his move into adulthood. This is a story of transition. It is set in the context of a school. What does it tell us about education? The final verse is for me key: 'Jesus grew in wisdom, stature and in favour with God and all people'. It gives us a Godly perspective on human development, and it also shines a light on a more holistic approach to education generally.

Note that it says Jesus grew in wisdom. Education, in scriptural terms, was for wisdom and not just knowledge. He gained knowledge but also discernment. He was able to apply what he learned to the world and all its problems. If we were to ask our government what is the purpose of education they might suggest that its ultimate purpose was to create economic capital – training people to do jobs that will generate finance that will keep this country going. Some other countries express their answer differently. I once heard Tony Campolo share that in Italy the purpose of education was to make people good! To fill the kingdom with good citizens... wisdom is the basis of that goodness. Along with compassion and love, it could transform a kingdom. Jesus was educated for wisdom.

Jesus grew in stature – in other words his physical well-being. He looked after himself physically/mentally.

He was well fed, had a good diet. This approach is certainly echoed in schools and colleges with an emphasis on combatting obesity and healthy lifestyles, but also in the way that so many colleges step in to help disadvantaged students with practical needs such as food and clothing.

Jesus grew in favour with God. Education and development without God and faith will never be a full education. This isn't just a belief held by Christians or people of faith. It is clearly recognised in the whole agenda relating to SMSC, which remains as non statutory guidance for FE. The spiritual must form part of our experience of school and college. Jesus gained favour with God through prayer but also through right living, obedience and compassion.

The definitions of what constitutes spiritual development might differ from a purely Christian understanding, but it is there. That's why FE Sunday, which we celebrate today, becomes so strategically important. Churches linking with colleges can help provide that spiritual element through chaplaincy initiatives, through input to tutorials, through

classroom support and prayer. If we withdraw from the sector, then the space will be filled by someone else.

Jesus grew in favour with all people. Education is relational. It is social. It is done within the context of community. The church is meant to act as God's model community. In a church striving to be the community God wants, the world can see how relationships can work in ways they can't see elsewhere. In church we can see each person valued for who they are not for what they do or what they earn. In church we can see an ethos of others first always. In church we can see grace lived day to day. Community is the context for transformational education.

FE colleges provide some great communities. Relational work is key to their success in so many ways but a college linked to a church could enhance that even more. An unconditional offer of love and service could be a real chance to reach some young people that are struggling as well as supporting those who are already doing well.

All of these thoughts I have applied to education and in particular to that given through our further education colleges but they apply equal to all human development and as such provide us with guidance in our mission to all those in our communities. How might we apply what we have learned from these passages to our churches vision for outreach and how might that extend to supporting our colleges?

These thoughts are captured on the accompanying video.

Small Group Ideas

Why not have your small groups focus on FE during the weeks surrounding FE Sunday?

You could show the video that goes with the notes above, draw on the Bible readings and use the content as a starting point for discussion and prayer. Why not invite a guest who has connections with FE so that they can share their own experience?

Here is a suggested outline for a small group evening:

- Starter: In your group share any experience of colleges you or members of your family might have. Work out how much you know between you as a group.

- **Film: Watch the short intro film – What is a further education college?**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p64cTC06Lzk> How do group members respond?

- **Reading: Read the three bible passages that form the foundation of FE Sunday this year – John 1 v 35-42, Luke 2 v 41-52, Psalm 119 v 33- 40 Then watch the accompanying video:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QvT3dEqeS7k>

- **Discussion: At the heart of the readings are thoughts about education.**

- o In our church context how can we ensure our teaching brings purpose, joy and life?

- o How are we able to identify and help people fulfil their God-given potential?

- o How might we build community, a deeper prayer life and educate all our church members for wisdom?

- o Do the readings speak to us in other ways about our church family life?

- o How might we further engage with the FE Sector as a church community and as individuals

- Prayer: Spend some time praying for FE as you draw your meeting to a formal close. You could use some of the prayer resources available as part of FE Sunday or if you have a guest you could ask them for specific prayer needs.

- Response: As you close your meeting give space to allow people to respond to what they have learned – do any of your group feel that working with FE could be for them or should be a ministry initiative within your church?

If you feel you would like to know more or have further input, feel free to contact West Midlands Churches FE Council at info@wmcfec.org.uk

Prayers for Use in Churches on FE Sunday

You can either use these prayers as they are, or use them to inspire your own.

Father God, on this day we bring to you our prayers for all those involved in Further Education:

We pray for students. We ask that they will find and fulfil their purpose as they study. We ask that they will discover their place in their college community, making friends and finding joy and life in their studies. Bless them with a love of learning and may they come to discover you in all they do and those they meet.

We thank you for all students and all they bring to our communities.

We pray for teaching staff. We ask that they will be fulfilled in their work. We ask that you will bless them with patience and tolerance. We pray that you will sustain them physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually as they teach and reach out to students day-in, day-out. We thank you for them and their commitment to helping so many young people.

We pray for management. We recognise the economic and political pressures that exist in the world of education. We know that hard decisions are having to be made on a daily basis. We ask for compassionate wisdom for all involved in managing our colleges. We ask that you will give them insight and empathy so that they can be assured in their decision making. We thank you for them and their commitment to the sector.

We pray for chaplains and chaplaincy volunteers. In so many of our colleges the church has responded to the needs of staff and students alike and established chaplaincy projects. We pray for chaplains, for church volunteers, for organisations such as Festive who support Christian students, that you will equip them to be bringers of good news. However they serve, whatever needs they are asked to meet, bless them with grace and may they bring your presence into the heart of the places they visit. We thank you for them, for their call and their vision.

And finally we offer prayers for (NAME YOUR LOCAL COLLEGE). We recognise its important place in our community, the hard work and dedication of its staff and the successes of its students. May it be a place of life for all who are part of its community. We thank you for (NAME COLLEGE) and rejoice in all its achievements. Help us discern how best we may serve it in future and guide us in our dealings and contacts.

All these prayers we offer in the name of Jesus
Amen