

Discipleship Enablers: Introduction

What’s this About?

This Discipleship Enablers journey is aimed at helping a group of people have an experience of growing as disciples. We will be helping each other to grow in putting God at the centre of our lives, and becoming more used to paying attention to Him and responding.

But it is also about helping us to have confidence in being able to help others grow based on what we are experiencing, and having some basic tools to help with that. The aim is that participants draw on these to start or develop their own group within their local context, in a way which works best for those people, in that place.

A Journey of Rounded Discipleship

You’re probably exploring this journey because you have a sense that authentic Christian discipleship is about much more than just coming to church every Sunday, believing certain doctrines or trying to be a good person (not that any of these are wrong!). This journey is intended to help you explore a deeper experience of Christian discipleship, and to help others to do the same. Throughout, we’re aiming at a vision of discipleship which draws on Jesus’ own practice, the life of the early church, the experience of Christians through history, and more recent research and practice.

What will this look like?

Each time we meet we will therefore be doing two things:

- Sharing some simple principles and questions which will help us grow as disciples throughout the whole of our lives, and responding to them.
- Reflecting on how to help others grow with those same principles within our contexts.

The content and the method are intended to be accessible, memorable, shareable and adaptable to help you in whatever context God has placed you. There will be plenty of opportunities for group interaction.

Discipleship is always better in person because part of what matters is learning from real-life examples and relationships. However, in contexts where geographical distance or other factors are a challenge, it is possible to run the programme as a hybrid experience with two in-person days (at beginning and end), and monthly online meetings in between.

Outline of the Journey

1. Taster session – in which the vision and expectations for this journey are set out, and the person helping you grow will share something of their own discipleship.

2. Introductory retreat day, in which we will get to know one another, share something of our own discipleship and our expectations, explore how God’s story intersects with ours, who God is and how God sees us, and pray.

3. Meeting once a month for 12 months (after that, the group can, if it wishes, continue to explore further topics for a limited period of time - but that’s up to you). In each session we will reflect on a discipleship principle and explore a related tool or practice, seeking to listen to what God might say to each of us and respond. We will have the opportunity to share something that might be helpful to be asked the next time we meet.

- Keeping to an agreed length of time is helpful in ensuring that you feel able to commit. One of the challenges we face in growing disciples is the pressures on people’s time. Being clear about time requirement will help you plan and take part.
- Similarly, the monthly intervals offer enough regularity to build a sense of relationship and momentum in the process, while giving enough time between sessions for you to begin to respond to what God might be saying in a meaningful and non-anxious way.

The suggested session topics are given below. A diocese or denominational body running the programme may well want to add to or change aspects of the journey. It is designed to be flexible and responsive to local needs.

The topics are:

- Taster Session: Introducing the Journey
- God’s Story and Ours (*The ‘Why’ of Discipleship*) [retreat day]
- Who is God and how does God see us? (*The ‘Who’ of Discipleship*) [retreat day]
- What does Christian life look like in practice? (*The ‘What’ of Discipleship*)
- Becoming Whole-Life and Through-Life Disciples (*The ‘When and Where’ of Discipleship*)

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- Understanding how we Grow as Disciples (*The ‘How’ of Discipleship – part 1*)
- Developing a Healthy Discipleship Environment (*The ‘How’ of Discipleship – part 2*)
- Paying Attention and Responding to God (*The ‘How’ of Discipleship – part 3*)
- Abiding in Christ (*The ‘How’ of Discipleship – part 4*)
- Emotionally Healthy Discipleship (*The ‘How’ of Discipleship – part 5*)
- Minding the ‘Gaps’ in our Lives (*The ‘How’ of Discipleship – part 6*)
- Discovering Calling, Gifting and Ministry (*The ‘How’ of Discipleship – part 7*)
- Discipleship Enabling Skills, Character and Questions (*The ‘How’ of Discipleship – part 8*)
[final retreat]

Depending on the group’s appetite to continue, further session topics can be suggested.

4. **Final retreat day:** Review and next steps.

What this Journey Is - and Isn’t

- ✓ **An opportunity to reflect and to grow:** one of the most crucial things about learning and growing in anything is the opportunity for reflection on what you are doing, in a supportive atmosphere of mutual learning and accountability.
- ✓ **‘Double-teaching’:** one of the fundamental principles of Discipleship Enablers is that it’s best to experience something for oneself before seeking to pass it on to others. It’s hoped that in this journey you will both grow in discipleship yourself, develop the understanding and skills to pass it on to others, and then do so.
- ✓ **An Introduction:** it’s just not possible to cover everything about enabling discipleship within 12 sessions (not least because there are many authentic and fruitful ways of enabling discipleship, and every Christian is different). But we do hope this gives you a place to begin, or to develop what you are doing.
- ✓ **Relatively low-tech:** Although there are videos covering the main session content available online, Discipleship Enablers is designed to run with little technology or expensive resources. After all, you never know where and when you will be engaging in discipleship conversations!
- ☒ **Not a silver bullet or quick win:** authentic discipleship is a lifetime’s journey. There is no single ‘blueprint’ and certainly no discipleship production line, so it’s important not to assume that when you have completed this programme (or helped others to complete it) that, hey presto, a disciple is made!
- ☒ **Not a qualification:** Discipleship Enablers is not a qualification in itself - your personal learning and growth is much more important than a piece of paper.
- ☒ **Not about control:** Authentic discipleship is always freely-chosen. Mutual accountability is important, but it’s never right to coerce or spiritually abuse others.

Expectations

- **Between Meetings:** There’s no written work involved in the programme. You may be asked to read a section from the session content in advance of each meeting. This will help you become familiar with the material, giving more time in sessions for discussion about applying it in your context. The only other task between meetings is to the learning from the sessions within your own context, and come to group sessions ready to reflect on practice.
- **Passing it on:** The expectation is that you will, after an initial period and if circumstances permit, gather and run your own local group, drawing on the experience you are having. As a result, over time, the sessions will include a bigger element of mutual support/reflection on what you’re doing in your own local church.
- **Flexibility:** If between the group and leader(s) you feel it would be good to spend more than one session on a particular focus, that’s okay. With some of the content, particularly the principle of listening to God and responding to what He is saying, you may well need more than one session in order to truly embed this.
- **Timescale:** The main aim is not to get through material, but to go on a journey in which we are being led by God. This programme has been designed with an initial twelve month commitment in mind, meeting once a month, with an option to extend for a further 6 months by agreement. When you share the material with your own local groups, the actual journey may be shorter or longer depending on how regularly you meet, and what you feel is needed to help you be disciples who can make disciples.

At the end of the journey it may be that God is leading the group to continue, particularly as you are starting to grow others. Suggestions are offered as to how this can be done.

The values and expectations of our group

The first session is a taster session. After that, you can choose whether to continue on this journey. Before deciding, it may help to reflect on whether you can get behind the values and expectations underpinning the sessions. This will involve:

- Prioritising meetings in our calendars.
- Being committed to mutual accountability as an opportunity, not a test – though you will never be asked to share anything you don’t want to.
- Maintaining confidentiality.
- Encouraging friendship and honesty.
- Letting the leader know if you can’t make it, or are delayed.
- A commitment from the leader: to keep to the allotted time.

We hope you will want to join us on this journey!

Discipleship Enablers Resources

There is a session guide/resource to accompany each session. There will be a bit of variation between sessions, but the headings below give you a basic sense of the overall shape of the material.

The handout for most sessions then mostly takes the following shape:

Session Aims and Introduction - A quick summary of the purposes of the session and how we hope it will help you and others.

Discipleship Story - Some people learn best through principles and concepts; others prefer to learn through stories. Each session includes an optional ‘discipleship story’ you can use to reflect on.

Core Session Content - Introduces the main ideas and principles for each session in somewhere between 10 and 20 minutes (you can read the session guide or listen online).

Key Bible Passage - Each session comes with a key Bible passage to reflect on, relating to the session theme.

Tool/Practice - Use this to help you/your group reflect on the session theme – often including a diagram/reflection tool. These are designed to be tools/practices you can keep coming back to, to help frame and re-frame your discipleship.

Passing it On - A few key principles to remember when using the session’s material yourself or with a group.

Discipleship Questions - Some discussion/self-reflection questions you can use in a 1-1 or group setting, and some questions to help you think about how the session material can best be used in your own church.

Further Resources - A small selection of useful books, websites, videos, etc. for you to explore further (in own time).

Go Deeper (Extension Activities) - A selection of further, optional reflective tools and practices, from various sources, for you to explore and use in your own time.

You are welcome to share this material with any groups you are working with in your own church. As this is a pilot, please don’t share it any more widely at this stage, or publish it online. Thank you!