

Session 1: Introducing the Journey

Head

Heart

Hands

ENVISIONED

“Christians grow when we have a clear vision of God, ourselves, and everyday faith that has spiritual growth as an obvious and desirable consequence”.

SUBMITTED

“Christians grow as we continue to choose to lay down our will for the sake of God’s.”

Session Aims and Introduction

- Exploring we mean by Christian ‘discipleship’ and the priority Jesus puts on discipleship and making disciples.
- Reflecting on our understanding of discipleship, and New Testament pictures of discipleship.
- Exploring how Jesus invited others, how they responded, and what that means for us today.

Opening Prayer

Thanks be to you, our Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits which you have given us.
Most merciful Redeemer,
Friend and brother,
May we know you more clearly,
Love you more dearly,
And follow you more nearly,
Day by day. Amen.

Key Bible Passages

- Mark 1.16-20
- John 15.8
- Matthew 28.19

For further reading:

- Galatians chapter 4
- Ephesians chapter 5
- Matthew chapters 5-7

Tool or Practice to Try

Choose *ONE* of the following options (or both if you wish)

Option 1: Preparing for the Journey

Humility (alongside joy and love) seem to be really vital ingredients in enabling others in discipleship. Praying Scripture on a regular basis, and letting it shape us, keeps us firmly rooted in God and God’s priorities.

Ask:

- How is my personal rhythm of prayer and Bible reading currently?
- Where does it give me joy?
- What is more challenging?
- What specific steps could I take to develop a daily rhythm of prayer and Bible reading?
- What can help ensure my rhythm of prayer and Bible reading opens me to God’s transformation (rather than just being a routine I do)?
- What question would you like the group to ask you about this next time?

Try praying daily:

*Create in me a clean heart, O God
And renew a steadfast spirit within me,
Do not cast me from your presence,
Or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
And grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me (Psalm 51.10-12).*

Write the question you'd like others to ask you next time here:

Option 2: Pictures of Discipleship

What is being a Christian all about? All of us have a basic understanding of discipleship that we carry around in our heads. This has probably been shaped by our experiences of God and church, other people who have influenced us, and perhaps our own personalities too.

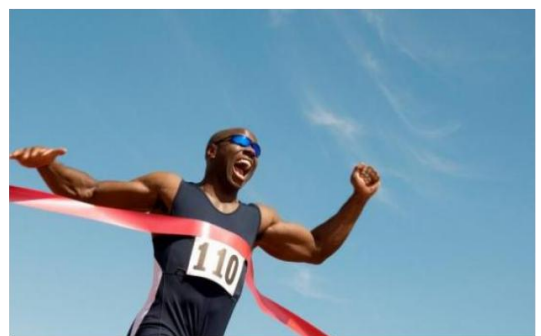
At the beginning of this journey, it's worth pausing to identify and reflect on our 'default' picture of Christian discipleship. Being aware of our own perspectives (the insights we bring, but also the limitations of our own thoughts) can help us become better enablers of discipleship for others.

Look at the pictures on the next page (without looking at below at the Bible passages they might represent).

- Which one or two of these pictures most strongly represents your understanding of the Christian life? Why?
- Which photo(s) were chosen by other people? What do you learn from their choices?
- Were there any photos which didn't speak to you so strongly about the nature of Christian discipleship? Why?
- What other New Testament pictures of the Christian life can you think of? (There are many!)
- Why do you think there are so many biblical pictures of life with God? What would we miss if we only described discipleship in one of these ways?

Each of these pictures echoes a description of the Christian life found in the New Testament:

- Becoming child in God's family (1 Jn 1.3)
- Being sheep in God's flock (Jn 10.11-14)
- Strangers in the world/citizens of heaven (1 Pet 2.11; Phil 3.20)
- Members of Christ's Body (1 Cor 12.27)
- Priests at God's altar (1 Pet 2.5)
- Builders/Stones in God's building (1 Cor 3.9; 1 Pet. 2.5)
- Servants trusted with talents (Matt 25.14-30)
- Solders in God's Army (2 Tim. 2.3, 24; Eph 6.11)
- Runners in a Race (Heb 12.1; 1 Cor 9.24-27)
- Ambassadors of the King (2 Cor. 5.20, Rom 5.10)
- Good soil/a fruit-bearing plant (John 15; Matt 13)
- Giving light to others (Matt 5.14; 2 Cor 3.12-18)



Core Session Content - part 1

- 'Discipleship' - a tricky/unfamiliar word for many people – even in church.
- Sometimes we might need to start with other language. But talking about 'discipleship' can also remind us of the distinctive life we're called to.

Jesus and Discipleship

- Many ancient teachers had 'disciples' who followed them and tried to live out their teachings.
- The New Testament uses 'disciple' 268 times – most common word for people following and learning from Jesus.
- Jesus calls disciples at start of ministry (Mk1.16-20)
- Jesus says we show ourselves to be his disciples as we 'bear much fruit' (Jn 15.8)
- At Ascension, Jesus calls his followers to 'go and make disciples... baptising them... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded' (Matt 28.19)
- His followers knew they were his disciples; we should be too.

What is a 'disciple'?

- 'At root, a Christian disciple is someone who puts their trust in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and daily chooses to be a learner from, follower of, apprentice to, Jesus Christ'.
- Disciple = 'mathetes' (learner/follower/student).
- 'We are people who spend our lives apprenticed to our Master, Jesus Christ... a learner, but not in the academic setting of a school room, but rather at the work site of a craftsman' (Eugene Peterson).
- Discipleship as: 'a continuous and growing willing surrender to God in Christ as the centre of my life, above anyone else, every day, in everything' (Guy Donegan-Cross).

Questions/Space for Notes...

What language do you/your church use to describe Christian life?

Do you think of yourself as a 'disciple'? Why (not)?

What do you think about being an 'apprentice' to Jesus?

How do you feel about 'surrender' to God being at the heart of discipleship?

Discipleship Questions (use for yourself and with others)

- What language do you use to describe/label the process of being, doing and growing as a Christian?
- What language gets used to describe Christian life in your local church or context? What are the strengths and limitations of this language?

- What is your gut reaction to the word 'discipleship'? What are the pros and cons of using this word when talking about the Christian life?
- What do you think of the idea of being an 'apprentice' to Jesus?
- How do you feel about surrender to God being the heart of discipleship? How might we listen to God every day?

Core Session Content - part 2

How did Jesus go about calling people to discipleship? How did they respond? What do we learn from this for our own discipleship? What do we learn from Jesus about inviting others too?

1. **Scattering the seed widely** (like the Parable of the Sower). How is my life 'good soil'? How do I 'scatter widely'?
2. Jesus calls us to **'seek first the Kingdom of God' and 'make disciples'**. Discipleship is the priority; growing church structure/activity won't in itself grow disciples.
3. Jesus **welcomes anyone**, regardless of social distinction or reputation. Do we feel welcome? How can we give this radical welcome to others?
4. Jesus preaches: 'repent, for the Kingdom of heaven has come near'. As discipleship enablers, we **take the plank out of our own eye first!**
5. Jesus **offers a rich, attractive vision of the Kingdom** of God. What is my vision of the Kingdom? How might I share this with others?
6. Jesus is **realistic about the costs of discipleship** - but also the

Questions/Space for Notes...

'Paying attention and responding' is a key discipleship practice. What helps you do this?

How far do you agree that our priority should be discipleship?

greater costs of 'non-discipleship'. How can I also be realistic with others?

7. Jesus was **intentional/planful** about his own mission. How can I be planful about my own discipleship - and about enabling discipleship?
8. Jesus was also **highly interruptible**. How can I put people before process, and give headspace and diary space to God and others?
9. Jesus **goes to the lost and hungry** in particular. How am I bringing my hunger/lostness to God? How is my heart for the last, least and lost?
10. Jesus invites people into **conversation**, often using **questions**. What do I want God to do for me? What 'aches' do you hear from others?
11. Jesus **invites people to use their gifts/skills** for the Kingdom. What are my gifts? How do I help others discern theirs?
12. Jesus gathered a band of close followers. Renewal has often started with **small, mutually accountable groups committed to prayer, discipleship and mission**. How could this happen in my church?
13. Jesus teaches his disciples to look for the '**people of peace**'. Am I 'of peace' to God and others? Who are the people of peace local to me?
14. Jesus affirms people who respond to him **expectantly, gladly or with perseverance**. What does this mean for me/my walk with others?
15. Jesus **doesn't force anyone to follow him**. We don't make discipleship a heavy burden on people's backs.

What aches/spiritual needs do you see in your context?

What's your experience of accountability in a small group?

Who are the 'people of peace' in your context?

Discipleship Questions

It's been suggested that our main calling is to **become and to make disciples, rather than to grow the church**. How far do you agree?

Jesus **meets people where they are hungry/in need**. What 'aches' or needs (spiritual, mental, physical) do you see in your context?

What is your 'ache' to enable others in their discipleship? Why is it important to you?

The examples given here all show people paying attention to God and responding. This is central to discipleship, and to this journey together. **What helps you pay attention to God - and respond?**

Jesus called a small group of close followers to learn, grow and participate in his ministry together. **What's your experience of small discipleship groups in which members are accountable to each other?** Who could we gather with, to do this?

In your context, who seems warm towards God- i.e, **who are the people of peace?** What can help us walk with those people?

Preparation for Next Time:

1) **Sharing your Story.** In the next session you are invited to share your own personal story including your walk with God. Hearing stories of faith can offer powerful encouragement and learning. Becoming used to sharing your own story of faith honestly and vulnerably can also encourage others. You will have about 15-20 minutes to share your story (depending on group size). Stories can include...

- Moments when you have surrendered to God.
- Times when you have paid attention to God and responded.
- How God has used important life events to grow you.

If you wish, you can use the **Spiritual Journey Map practice** from the Session 2 material (which will be available in advance) to help you. You don't need to share any details you don't want to share.

2) **Watch the Session 2 video:** God's Story and Ours (The 'Why' of Discipleship).
