

Session 1: Invitation to Discipleship



ENVISIONED

SUBMITTED



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

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

Hands

Opening Prayer

Note to Enablers: Commit the time to God. Lead a prayer or invite prayer as you feel comfortable, or use this suggestion:

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.

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.

Key Bible Passages

Key passages:

- Mark 1.16-20
- Matthew 28.19
- John 15.8

For further reading:

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

Discipleship Story

Note to Enablers: Use this story, or a story of your own involving people learning about discipleship/being a Christian

The Youth Group

‘So what do you think being a Christian is all about?’. There was silence around the room as young group members as some youth group members pondered how to answer, and others waited for someone else to speak first. ‘Umm... we believe that everything in the universe was created by God... he’s the prime mover’, said the boy who aced his GCSE Religious Studies earlier that summer. ‘We need to be kind and love other people’, said the girl who was always the first to befriend newcomers. ‘We trust that Jesus died and rose again to save our sins’, said the girl whose family did Bible study every day at dinnertime.

‘That’s all good’, said the youth group leader, ‘But what does being a follower of Jesus mean to you?’ Another long pause. Sensing a change of tack was needed, the leader spread some photos out on the table - a whole variety of different images. ‘Pick one that speaks to you about what life with God is like’. The group gathered round and shuffled the photos. When they had chosen, the youth leader called them together again. ‘I chose this one’, said a girl pointing to a photograph of a runner crossing the finish line, ‘I love athletics, and this one reminds me that being a Christian is like a race through life. We have to train for it, it can be hard at times, but there’s a great prize at the end’. ‘I loved this one’, said another boy, holding up a photo of a tree full of birds. ‘It reminds me of that story Jesus told about the mustard seed - when it grows into a tree, it’s full of fruit and the creatures make their homes in it’. ‘I love this one’, said another girl, showing a picture of a cabin door open and sun streaming in. ‘It reminds me that God invites anyone to come and live with him, and because we’re Christians, we are meant to invite others too’. The youth leader smiled. Now they were really getting somewhere.

Core Session Content – 1

Note to Enablers: If using handout, make this available to the group at this point. It’s recommended that the Core Session Content is split into two parts (roughly 10 minutes each), with an opportunity for discussion after each section. This is to vary the approach and help people’s concentration. For a group that is used to sitting and listening for longer periods, you could alternatively cover all of the core content in one go, and save all the questions to the end.

This 12-month journey is called ‘Discipleship Enablers’ because we’re seeking to grow into this calling to discipleship for ourselves, and to help others do the same. We’ll seek to help each

other, as a group of Jesus’ followers and apprentices (his ‘disciples’) to grow in putting God at the centre of our lives, becoming more used to paying attention to God and responding to God’s call. But it’s also about developing in how we help others grow, based on what we are experiencing, and having some basic tools and practices to help with that.

Probably already you have some questions: Perhaps you’re wondering why the focus on discipleship rather than church growth, for example? Perhaps ‘discipleship’ is an unfamiliar or off-putting word? Or perhaps it’s a long time since you’ve paused to reflect on what following Jesus is really all about? So in this session we’ll...

- Introduce the word ‘discipleship’
- Consider Jesus’ call to discipleship
- Offer some first thoughts about the ‘shape’ of Christian discipleship
- Try one or two activities/practices to help us prepare for the journey

‘Discipleship’: a Tricky Word?¹

When people hear the word ‘discipleship’ a variety of things come to mind: some people think only of Jesus’ original band of ‘disciples’. Others might instead picture the ‘disciples’ of a cult leader. For others, it just sounds a bit old-fashioned and obscure. Even many churches don’t use the word ‘discipleship’ to talk about being, living and growing as a Christian.

Sometimes it can be helpful to ‘translate’ traditional Christian jargon into everyday English, particularly for people exploring faith for the first time. On the other hand, the unfamiliarity of the word does not have to be a problem. It can be a gift, reminding us of the distinctive life into which Jesus calls us.

Jesus and Discipleship

The idea of becoming someone’s ‘disciple’ was very familiar in Jesus’ day. Jesus’ understanding of discipleship was unique, but before and after Jesus, many people were (or had) ‘disciples’. In ancient Greece, Plato was a disciple of Socrates. Many Jewish teachers (rabbis) had a set of teachings (known as their ‘yoke’), and disciples whom they would invite to ‘follow’ them and live out their teachings. In the Gospels, people also called Jesus ‘rabbi’ or ‘teacher’ ninety-nine times.² Jesus had disciples, whom he invited to ‘Come, follow me’.

In the New Testament, ‘disciple’ is the most common label applied to those who are committed to following and learning from Jesus. ‘Disciple’ appears 268 times in the New Testament (mainly

¹ Parts of this section and those which follow are an edited and abridged version of Guy Donegan-Cross, *Discipleship: Start this Way* (BRF, 2025), 8. Used with permission of the author.

² Although at least once Jesus refuses the title ‘rabbi’ - Matt. 23.1.12!

in the Gospels), whereas the word ‘Christian’ only appears three times (and may originally have been an insult!). In this sense, Jesus’ contemporaries would have known exactly what he meant when He called them to be his ‘disciples’.

Right at the beginning of his work the first thing Jesus did was to call disciples to follow Him, and they responded:

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. (Mark 1:16–20)

Shortly before his arrest, Jesus underlined the call to fruitful discipleship to his closest followers at the Last Supper:

This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples (John 15.8).

Right at the end of Jesus’ earthly work, discipleship was still his priority. Jesus told his disciples to:

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19)

Like us, Jesus’ committed followers could be unsure of themselves and sometimes got things wrong. But they knew they were his disciples, and it was obvious to others. Dallas Willard writes: ‘Being a disciple or apprentice of Jesus is a definite and obvious kind of thing. To make a mystery of it is to misunderstand it. There is no good reason why people should ever be in doubt as to whether they themselves are his students or not’.³

So 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.

The New Testament’s Greek word for ‘disciple’ is ‘mathetes’, meaning a learner, follower or student. However, a particular kind of learner is meant here. Eugene Peterson suggests that as Christians, ‘we are people who spend our lives apprenticed to our master, Jesus Christ. We are in a growing-learning relationship, always. A disciple is a learner, but not in the academic setting

³ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our Hidden Life in God* (Harper Collins, 1998), ***.

of a schoolroom, rather at the work site of a craftsman. We do not acquire information about God but skills in faith’.⁴

What does this look and feel like day to day? Guy Donegan-Cross describes it as:

*A continuous and growing
willing surrender
to God in Christ
as the centre of my life,
above anyone else,
every day, in everything.*⁵

We all place our life-flag somewhere. Disciples are learning to do it with God in Christ. While every disciple will have a unique path, each will be shaped by this same inner attitude: being willing to make this surrender to God.

Discipleship Questions – 1

Note to Enablers: If your group is larger than six, you might split into groups for these questions. As in all the sessions, this is a menu of questions. You don’t need to go through them in strict order. Choose those that feel most relevant to you (but equally, don’t avoid the more challenging ones!).

- What language do you use to describe/label this 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?

⁴ Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (IVP, 2nd Edn 2000) 17.

⁵ Guy Donegan-Cross, *Discipleship: Start this Way* (BRF, 2025), 38.

Main Session Content – 2

Note to Enablers: If splitting into small groups for discussion, come back together for this part.

How did Jesus go about calling people to discipleship? How did they respond? What do we learn from this for our own discipleship? As we start to think about being discipleship enablers, what do we learn from Jesus about inviting others too?

Here are a few (subjective) reflections and observations. Many of them relate to topics we’ll explore further on this journey together. What other Gospel stories come to mind for you? What would you add, about how Jesus gets people’s attention - and how we respond?

- The Parable of the Sower paints a picture of God as a farmer **scattering the seed widely**, inviting as many people as possible to respond (Matt 13.1-23). I sense an invitation here to co-operate with the Holy Spirit in cultivating my heart, mind and life so that it’s ‘good soil’, ‘hearing and understanding’ the Good News, so that good fruit can grow. Am I, like the sower, also invited to ‘sow widely’? Even if not all will respond?
- Jesus calls disciples to follow him, learn from him (Matt 11.29) and become a new kind of family together (Mark 3.33). Jesus calls us not to church growth (he says ‘I will build my church’ - Matt 16.18), but to **‘seek first the Kingdom of God’** (Matt 6.33), and to go and **‘make disciples’** (Matt 28.19-20). Growing church structures and activity, by itself, will not necessarily grow disciples.
- I notice Jesus **extends the invitation to the Kingdom to anyone**. He doesn’t discriminate according to nationality, ethnicity, wealth or age. He welcomes those who have high-profile jobs (religious leaders and Roman centurions) and those who others sneer at (tax collectors, prostitutes, beggars, and those pushed to the margins due to physical, mental or spiritual illness). You’re welcome regardless of how holy you look, or how much of a celebrity you are (not). As apprentice discipleship enablers, we follow Jesus’ example of radical welcome.
- One of the hallmarks of Jesus’ preaching was the message: ‘repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near!’ (Matt 4.17). But before seeking to assist anyone else in this area of their lives, I hear this as an invitation to **recognise and turn away** from my own sin and fallenness. As an apprentice Discipleship Enabler, I take the ‘plank’ out of my own eye before looking for the ‘speck’ in someone else’s (Matt 7.3).
- Jesus offers people a new, deeper vision of God – one in which God is their heavenly Father (Matt 6.26). Jesus came that ‘we may have life, and have it to the full’ (John 10.10). We see a foretaste of this in his ministry. I take this as an invitation to develop a full vision of the Kingdom of Heaven and life with God. As an apprentice discipleship enabler, I recognise the importance of communicating a **compelling vision of the Kingdom of God** – and my excitement about it – to others.

- Jesus doesn’t duck the costs of discipleship: he likens it to ‘carrying one’s cross’ (Luke 9.24). So I don’t enter into this discipleship journey thinking that everything will be sweetness and light. There will be ups and downs and struggles. I commit to **being realistic** with those I journey with – recognising that following Jesus means going through, rather than around, life’s challenges. On the other hand, the costs of ‘non-discipleship’ may be greater.⁶
- Jesus had clear plans for his mission – early in his ministry he determines to preach around the towns of Galilee (Mark 1.36-28); at another point he firmly sets his face towards Jerusalem (Luke 9.51). I learn from this to be **intentional and planful** about both my own rhythm of spiritual practice, and about my part in God’s mission.
- However, Jesus is also highly **interruptible** - e.g., his response to the man lowered through the roof by friends (Mark 2.1-12), or the woman who touched Jesus’ cloak (Mark 5.22-43). I learn from Jesus to put people before process, making head-space and diary-space to pay attention to God’s prompting and unexpected encounters with others.
- Jesus **goes to those who are lost ,and those who are hungry** – spiritually, mentally, physically. (Matt. 9.12). He sees his ministry like a shepherd searching out a lost sheep, a woman looking for a lost coin (Luke 15.1-10). I learn to acknowledge my ‘lostness’ and bring my hunger and desire to God, asking him to transform them. From this, I learn the importance of having a special heart for ‘the last, the least and the lost’. Like Zaccheus (Luke 19.1-10) I sense a call to turn the joy of salvation into a generous life.
- Although Jesus was certainly clear in his teaching, I notice that in his small-scale interactions with people, he values conversation, allows people to be active agents in responding to him. Often he **invites, encourages or challenges using questions** (perhaps as many as 300 in the Gospels!), rather than talking at people. Think about his meeting with Bartimaeus: ‘what do you want me to do for you?’ (Mark 10.51). I reflect on that question for myself: what do I want God to do for me? And as an apprentice discipleship enabler, I also learn to listen for the ‘ache’ that others express and walk with them as they bring it to God.
- I notice how Jesus **invites people to redirect their gifts and skills in the service of God’s Kingdom** – e.g., to Peter and Andrew, ‘follow me, and I will make you fishers of people’ (Matt. 4.19). I commit to the continuing discernment of the gifts which God has given me. I commit to continuing to learn new skills in discipleship, and to help others do the same.
- As well as speaking to the crowds, Jesus **gathers a small group** of close followers around him, **teaches, models and involves them in his work** (Mark 3.13-19). I notice the value Jesus places on fellowship and the accountability of a small group following Jesus together. As an apprentice discipleship enabler I see the importance of creating small groups of safety,

⁶ On the ‘cost of non-discipleship’ see extracts from Dallas Willard’s *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (HarperCollins, 1991) here: https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/610e6b9cc6752780cf5b9fc5/633df791de9e1466659591d2_The%20Cost%20of%20Nondiscipleship.pdf

support and challenge. It’s worth noting that most authentic renewal movements in church history have started with small groups committed to prayer, discipleship and mission.

- As Jesus sends out seventy of his disciples, he teaches them to **look for the ‘people of peace’** – those who might be open to him and his message (Luke 10.1-6). I ask myself: am I a ‘person of peace’ – in relation to God, and in relation to others? As an apprentice discipleship enabler, I learn not to prejudge who the ‘people of peace’ in our churches and communities.
- I notice that Jesus praised the faith of several people he encountered. Think about the centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant (Matthew 8.5-13). Or the Canaanite woman who kept on asking Jesus to heal her daughter, even though he’d said he was only ministering to the Jewish people (Matthew 15:21-28). He held up children’s glad and uncomplicated acceptance of his message as an example to others (Mark 10.15). I ask myself: how am I **responding to God’s invitation**? Like a little child? With expectation and persistence? I commit to **praising the faith of others** when I see it. And arguably like Jesus I these encounters, I am open to being changed by them too.
- Jesus **does not force** people to follow him (e.g., the rich young ruler – Matt 19.16-20). Jesus also says: ‘my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matt 11.30). For myself, I see the importance of accepting Jesus’ invitation, encouragement and challenge every day. I learn not to make discipleship a burden on people’s backs (Luke 11.46) but ‘carry each other’s burdens (Galatians 6.2). I commit never to pressure anyone else into discipleship.

Discipleship Questions – Part 2:

Note to Enablers: You can split into smaller groups again here.

- 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 see others develop in their discipleship? Why’s this 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?

Tool or Practice to Try

Note to Enablers: You have a choice of TWO practices for this session (or do both, if you wish).

Option 1: Preparing for the Journey

Read to group: It’s really essential that we get our hearts in the right place to start this journey together. One recent book on making disciples suggests that humility (alongside joy and love) is an essential quality for anyone supporting others in discipleship.⁷

Two vital tools for keeping us humble and rooting us in God’s are regular prayer and Bible reading. Eugene Peterson, the creator of *The Message* Bible paraphrase, writes of the importance of being deeply rooted in Scripture and prayer: *Christians don't simply learn or study or use Scripture; we assimilate it, take it into our lives in such a way that it gets metabolized into acts of love, cups of cold water, missions into all the world, healing and evangelism and justice in Jesus' name, hands raised in adoration of the Father, feet washed in company with the Son.*⁸ Peterson also wrote that: *Scripture and prayer are not two separate entities...It is the fusion of God speaking to us (Scripture) and our speaking to him (prayer) that the Holy Spirit uses to form the life of Christ in us.*⁹

Reflect for yourself and ask each other:

- 1.How is my personal life of prayer and scripture reading currently?
- 2.Where does prayer and reading the Bible give me joy? In what ways is it more challenging?
3. What specific actions could I take over the coming weeks to develop a daily rhythm of prayer and Bible reading, to keep me connected with God?
- 4.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)?
- 5.What question would you like the group to ask you about this next time? (The more specific and practical the question is, the more achievable it is likely to be).

Pray: Perhaps you might like to pray Psalm 51.10-12 every day throughout our journey? We’ve noticed many people enabling others in discipleship pray this prayer regularly.

*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.*

⁷ Alex Fogleman, *Making Disciples: Catechesis in History, Theology and Practice* (Eerdmans, 2025).

⁸ Eugene Peterson, *Eat this Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (2011).

⁹ Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 202.

Option 2: Pictures of Discipleship Photo Activity¹⁰

On the next page you’ll see twelve pictures.ⁱ Each of them echoes an image of the Christian life found in the New Testament. On page 12 you’ll find a Bible passage and a short description.

1. For a group activity, use the photos on the session handout, or for larger images **print pp.11 and 12 double-sided** (pictures and related verses should then print back to back).
2. **Spread the pictures out in front of you.** Keep them picture-side up for now.
3. Spend a few minutes **thinking about which picture most strongly represents your understanding of Christian discipleship**/the Christian life. Why? (You might be drawn to several of the pictures but try to choose just one for now).
4. If you’re doing this with a group, **listen to others share about which picture they chose and why.** Then **share your choice with them.** (There is no wrong answer).
5. When you have talked about the pictures, **turn your chosen picture over and read the Bible passage and description** which the picture relates to.
6. Then, **turn over the others,** read the verses and talk about the ones which you didn’t choose this time. What influenced your choice?
7. Finally, **discuss:** What are the advantages of having more than one picture of the Christian life? What would happen if we defined Christian discipleship only in relation to one of the pictures? What would we miss? Would something be distorted?
8. **Enabling Others:** How would an activity like this work in your church/group? If you weren’t using the pictures provided here, how would you do it differently?

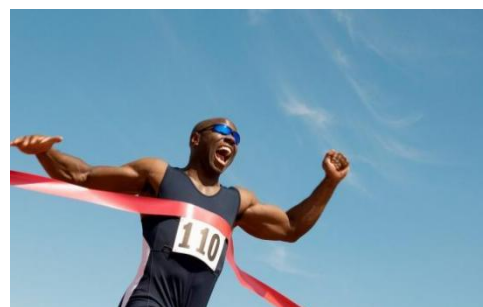
All of these are biblical pictures of the Christian life, so they all have something to teach us. You will relate to some more strongly than others. You may even react negatively to some of them, perhaps because of your personality, life experiences, church tradition, beliefs or wider cultural factors. But is there something we can learn from each?

Purpose of the Activity: The aim of this activity is to get you to stop and reflect on your own ‘default’ picture of discipleship. Most of us carry around a set of assumptions about the nature of the Christian life. Often we don’t pause to examine it very closely – but it can be helpful to do this from time to time. If you’re accompanying others on a discipleship journey, it’s also important to be aware of your own particular preferences/biases so that we don’t simply make disciples ‘in our own image’, but in the image of Jesus.

Note to Enablers: *If you like this 12 picture activity, you may be interested in a larger photo pack, **Talking about Faith**, produced by the Diocese of Worcester and St Peter’s Saltley Trust, which can be used in the same way.¹¹ If you have a confident group wanting a creative activity, try making a discipleship ‘map’ to illustrate the starting point, journey, terrain, signposts and destination of the Christian journey through life (see **Go Deeper - Discipleship Map extension activity**).*

¹⁰ The activity is inspired by a book exploring 12 images of the Christian life, written by Warren Wiersbe, and variously titled *Who Am I?* or *Gallery of Grace* (first published 1988) - although some of the images chosen here are different.

¹¹ Visit: www.saltleytrust.org.uk/publications/ to order.



<p>A child in God’s family</p> <p>Jesus teaches us to pray ‘Abba, Father’. John writes: ‘see what love the Father has lavished upon us, that we should be called children of God!’ (1 John 1.3). Following Jesus means we’re now members of God’s family; fellow Christians are our sisters and brothers.</p>	<p>Sheep in God’s flock</p> <p>Jesus calls himself ‘the good shepherd’ and says he knows his sheep and they (we) recognise his voice (John 10.11-14). Following Jesus means listening for God’s voice, trusting in his care and following his guidance as he leads us to safety.</p>
<p>Strangers and Pilgrims in a Strange Land</p> <p>The apostle Peter writes that Christians are ‘foreigners and exiles on earth’ (1 Peter 2.11); Paul writes that instead, ‘our citizenship is in heaven’ (Phil 3.20). As followers of Jesus we’re not fully at home in society, but travel through it, acting lovingly to all we meet but knowing our ultimate destination is elsewhere.</p>	<p>Members of Christ’s Body</p> <p>Paul often describes Christians as ‘members of the Body of Christ’ (e.g., 1 Corinthians 12.27). Jesus continues his work through this Body, with the help of the Holy Spirit. As followers of Jesus we do not act alone in this but as part of a bigger community (the Church as the Body of Christ) and play our part.</p>
<p>Priest at God’s Altar</p> <p>‘you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’ (1 Peter 2.5). Following Jesus means offering up the world to God in prayer and worship, and ministering to the world in God’s name. We bring our ‘sacrifice’ of a repentant heart to God.</p>	<p>Builders, and Stones in God’s Building</p> <p>God is building his Kingdom in which God’s priorities reign. We are the building, or stones in the building (1 Corinthians 3.9, 1 Peter 2.5). As we carry out the Great Commission to go and make disciples, we are part of generations of ‘builders’, each adding to God’s building by our careful labour (1 Corinthians 3.10).</p>
<p>Servants Trusted with Talents</p> <p>In Jesus’s Parable of the Talents, the Master (God) gives each of his servants money (‘talents’) in trust to use for God’s service. As followers of Jesus we are to live our lives in ways which bring benefit to God’s Kingdom - not just hiding them in a hole in the ground (Matthew 25.14-30).</p>	<p>A Soldier in God’s Army</p> <p>We are engaged in a war/struggle against the ‘powers and principalities’ of this world and the other. The New Testament letters compare followers of Jesus to soldiers - we want to please our commanding officer (the Lord) in all we do, rather than please the world (2 Tim 2.24); we expect to suffer in our service of Christ (2 Tim 2.3); we arm ourselves spiritually for the fight (Eph. 6.11).</p>
<p>A Runner in a Race</p> <p>Paul and the writer of Hebrews compares the Christian life to a race which is run by obeying God’s truth (Gal. 5.7) and avoiding getting tangled up in sin (Heb. 12.1). This is a race which we need to train for (1 Cor 9.26-27), run with perseverance (Heb. 12.1), run in the right manner, and at the end gain the prize (1 Cor 9.24).</p>	<p>Ambassadors of the King</p> <p>Paul describes himself and his associates as ‘Christ’s ambassadors’, bringing a message from God and urging his hearers to make peace with God (2 Cor. 5.20). As Christians we are reconciled to God (Romans 5.10). As we take up Jesus’ commission to ‘go and make disciples’ we arguably become ambassadors of Christ too.</p>
<p>Good Soil / A Plant Bearing Fruit</p> <p>God is like a farmer sowing the seed of the Kingdom in the world. As followers of Jesus, if we abide in Christ (John 15), hearing, understanding and obeying God (Matthew 13), we’ll bear fruit for God’s Kingdom. We need to be ‘good soil’ and ‘fruitful plants’ for God.</p>	<p>A City on a Hill</p> <p>Jesus calls his followers a ‘city on a hill’: our good works for God give light to others, who glorify God as a result (Matt.5.14). In 2 Cor. 3.12-18 Paul also describes Christian life in terms of reflected light: as we see God’s glory we are transformed and this light shines for others to see.</p>

Passing it On:

Note to Enablers: This section is mainly for your reference, although you can share these thoughts and others with your group if you feel it would be helpful to do so.

- The invitation to follow Christ is **good news!** There are costs, but arguably the costs of ‘non-discipleship’ are greater. Don’t ever make discipleship a millstone around people’s necks.
- Discipleship is one hand **very simple**; on the other hand **a lifelong, whole-life adventure**. In talking about discipleship we need the right balance between simplicity and complexity: too vague or complex and people may struggle to know what discipleship looks like and how to go about it. Too simplistic and it becomes narrow, missing much of what God invites us into.
- **Language is important:** Before embarking on this journey with your local group, you might want to test out the language people use to describe the Christian life and Christian growth.
- **Kindness and patience:** Although it’s mostly likely that the people you are accompanying will be hungry to grow, some of the vision of discipleship outlined in this session may be entirely new to people who have a Sunday-only conception of what being a Christian is all about. You may well have to take people on a journey here. Be patient, and kind.
- **Remember what this *Discipleship Enablers* journey can and can’t do.** Theologian Tom O’Loughlin says whilst it’s true that disciples are ‘made, not born’, that doesn’t mean they’re mass-produced.¹² Richard Foster similarly writes about spiritual formation: ‘cookie-cutter curricula are, frankly, like cookies – all sweetness with precious little nutrition’.¹³ Just going through a programme doesn’t make a disciple: God produces growth; our job is to ‘catch’ what God is doing and join in. What a journey like this can do, however, is to help us reflect on our current attitudes, assumptions, behaviour and state of heart. And it can introduce us to some collective wisdom, tools and practice which can help us co-operate with God more deeply in the situations where we find ourselves.

Further Resources:

The point here is not to read endlessly about discipleship but to practice it. However, there is much wisdom to draw upon in books, videos and courses. This is inevitably a very subjective selection!

¹² Thomas O’Loughlin, *Discipleship and Society in the Early Churches* (James Clarke, 2022), 15.

¹³ Richard Foster, *Casting a vision: the past and future of spiritual formation* (Renovaré, Denver CO, 2019) [<https://renovare.org/messages/casting-a-vision-the-future-of-spiritual-formation>]

Reading: Introductions to Discipleship

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (sometimes called: *The Cost of Discipleship*) (first published 1937).
- Guy Donegan-Cross, *Discipleship: Start this Way*, and *Discipleship: Walk this Way* (2025)
- James Dunn, *Jesus’ Call to Discipleship* (Cambridge, 2008) - accessible introduction by a well-regarded biblical scholar.
- Pete Maidment and Paul Butler, *Living your Confirmation: Putting Promises into Action* (2012). [Although written as a book for people being confirmed, it is a pretty good, accessible overview of the Christian life through the lens of baptismal promises]
- John Stott, *Basic Christianity* (2021 edition)
- Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (1998)
- Rowan Williams *Being Disciples* (2016)

Books which were useful in developing the New Testament Pictures of Discipleship activity:

- Warren Wiersbe, *Gallery of Grace* (1988)
- Anthony Byatt, *New Testament Metaphors: Illustrations in Word and Phrase* (1995) - now quite hard to come by.

Courses:

- **The Pilgrim Course** (Church of England) - <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/pilgrim-course> (purchase)
- **Way of Discipleship** (Guy Donegan-Cross/Church of England Birmingham) - <https://wayofdiscipleship.org/> (free to access)
- **The Discipleship Course: Discovering what it means to follow Jesus** (Lucy Peppiatt and Matt Lynch) (purchase)

Other Resources

- **Talking about Faith - Photo Pack** created by the Diocese of Worcester and St Peter’s Saltley Trust (limited copies available free by emailing bursar@saltleytrust.org.uk) - can help a group surface their own gut understanding of the nature of the Christian life, particularly with a group who aren’t used to discussing faith with each other).
- **Safar** - discipleship app. Material for short one-to-one conversations around Christian basics. This was created for new Christians in Iran - however, it could be useful for anyone with little church background as it assumes little prior knowledge. <https://www.safar.org/>

PLEASE SHARE WITH YOUR GROUP OTHER RESOURCES YOU HAVE FOUND HELPFUL!

However: ‘there is no end to the writing of books, and too much study will wear you out’ (Ecclesiastes 12.12).

Go Deeper (Extension Activities):

Tools to help you and others reflect on the ‘shape’ of their discipleship currently (note that all of these reflect the authors’ particular understandings of the authentic Christian life, which may differ):

- Activity: Creating a Discipleship Map
- Reading: Some of the ideas behind Discipleship Enablers

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- Golden City on a Hill: Created by AI
- Construction worker: <https://www.fundeu.es/blog/radio-5-albanila/construction-worker-bricklayer-albanila-749546/>
- Traveller on a journey: photo by ShareFaith on pexels.com
- Athlete breaking tape: 30843844 from https://www.dreamstime.com/photographerlondon_info Photographerlondon
- Plant growing in soil: Photo by AS Photography: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/closeup-photo-of-sprout-1002703/>