

Session 5: Christian Life in Practice (The 'What' of Discipleship)

Head

Heart

Hands

PRACTICAL

"Christians grow when we have practical and realistic plans and practices to prioritise our spiritual growth".

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".

ACTIVATED

"Christians grow when we put into practice new ideas and teaching we gain, often from the invitation of others".

Session Aims

- To develop a richer, more rounded sense of the life of discipleship into which we are called.
- To appreciate the value of balance in Christian discipleship, particularly between the 'upward, inward and outward' aspects of life with God.
- To reflect on how this links to our own experience and that of our church community.
- To practice some tools and questions discipleship enablers can use in their own context.

Key Bible Passages

- Micah 6.8 - What does the Lord require of you?
- Mark 12.28-34 - The Two Greatest Commandments
- Luke 4.14-21 - Jesus announces the Kingdom
- Matthew 5.1-16 - The Beatitudes and being Salt and Light
- Luke 6.12-19 - Jesus prays, calls the twelve, teaches and heals the sick
- John 15 - Abiding in Christ, loving one another, being fruitful
- Matthew 28.16-20 - The Great Commission

Warm Up Questions

- Who, for you, is the most inspiring example of a Christian life lived well? *(If possible, try and think of a real person you know, rather than a biblical or historical figure).*
- At school we learnt that a verb is a 'doing word' - i.e., it describes an action or state of being. What verbs best describe the life of Christian discipleship? *(Start with verbs found in the New Testament - e.g., following, obeying. What other 'ings' would you add to this list?)*

Main Session Content and Questions

What does the Christian life look like in practice?

As enablers of discipleship, how do we make the vision of discipleship we share with others...

- simple enough to be memorable and livable, but also...

- rich and enough to reflect everything that Christian life involves and all our different life circumstances?

1. **The best place to start: The Two 'Greatest Commandments'** (Mark 12.28--34)

- Love the Lord your God with all your heart...soul... mind... strength... Love your neighbour as yourself.
- It's easy to over-complicate... so how do we keep these two 'greatest commands' central?

Discuss:

How are we doing with these two 'greatest commandments' currently?

Reflect on Jesus' words about loving God with 'heart... mind... and strength'. Do you tend to focus on loving God more with your intellect, your feelings/experiences, or your practical activity? Is there one of these aspects you could explore further?

How is our church/small group doing with these two great commandments?

What has helped us grow in love for God? And neighbour?

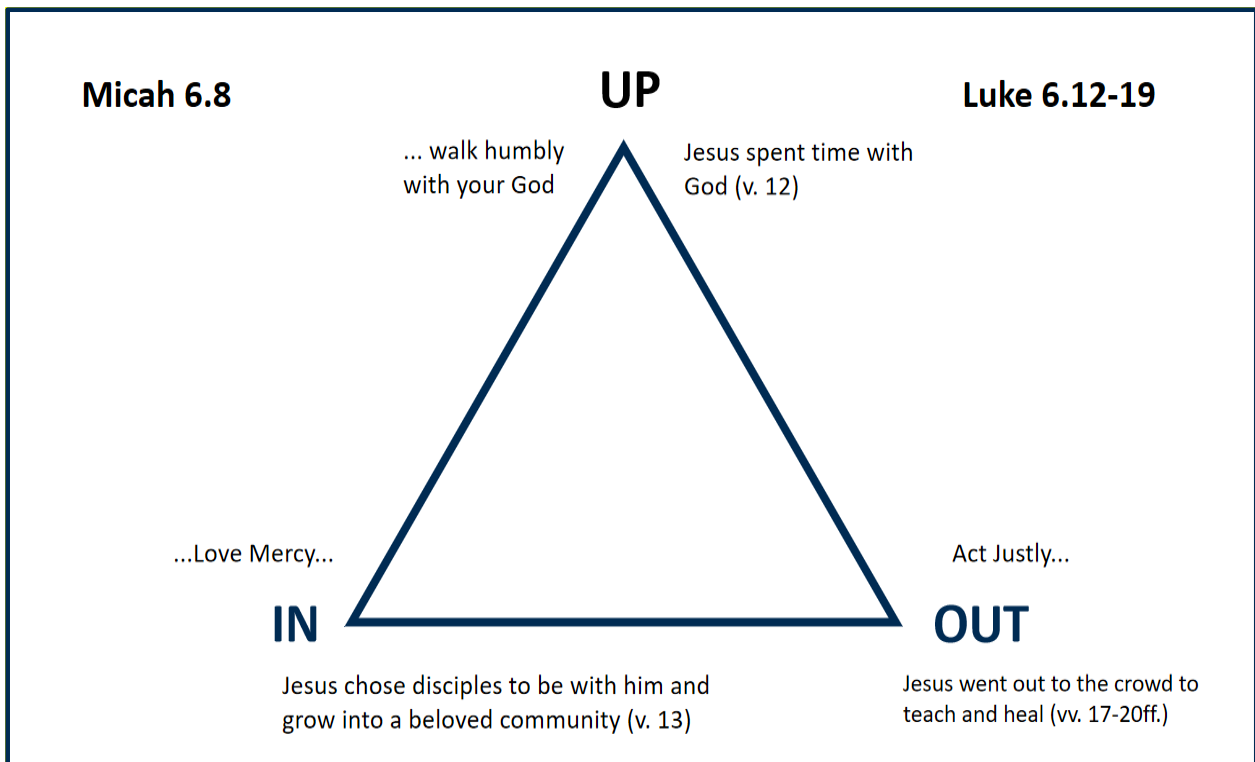
(If time:) Jesus says we should 'love your neighbour as you love yourself'. How are you doing with loving yourself in the way that Jesus has in mind?

2. Taking it Further: Up, In, Out

Jesus' life had an upward, inward and outward dimension - e.g., Luke 6.12-13, 17-19:

UP	Love for God	Jesus went up the mountainside to pray (v.12)
IN	Love for Church	Jesus called the twelve and formed them into community (v. 13)
OUT	Love for the World	Jesus taught, cured and healed (vv.18-19)

- Parallels with Micah 6.8 and John 15. Offers a vision of a balanced Christian life (see triangle overleaf). We need each of these three things.
- What might happen if one or more of the three are missing?



Up/In/Out Discipleship Questions:

Choose some of the questions below to discuss in groups. You are unlikely to have time to discuss all of them in one session, so choose the questions which are most relevant to you at this time.

NB: We'll spend a future session looking at the 'UP' dimension, so if time is limited, we'd suggest spending more time looking at the 'in' and 'out' dimensions this time.

Overall

- What is the balance between the upward, inward and outward dimensions in your own life currently?
- Do a 'gut instinct' mark out of 10 for these three dimensions in your life at the moment. (These things aren't easy to measure or score, but sometimes giving something a gut instinct rating can reveal a lot about our sense of yourself). Is there an area you need to give greater attention?

Relationship with God (UP)

- There's no 'fruit' without abiding in Christ (Jn 15). What is your pattern of abiding?
- What might help you to connect with God?
- How much is your time connecting with God like a 'transaction', and how much is it a connection or relationship?

Relationship with others (IN)

- Jesus called a few people so that they could be with him. Who are the 'few people' in your life with whom you walk as a Christian?
- Who is encouraging you at the moment?
- Who are you encouraging?

Relationship with the world (OUT)

- In what ways are you bearing fruit for God?
- Where do you have the opportunity to be a blessing to others? Where are you taking those opportunities?
- Jesus went to the crowds (Luke 6). How are we 'going out' to others? How might we?

Enabling Others to Grow in Discipleship

- What has helped you to becoming a more loving person? What things help others become more loving (of God, neighbour and self)?
- How 'balanced' is your church community in the three areas - Up, In, Out?
- How can you support others in noticing the balance of relationships in their lives?
- What would your church/group look like if you put 'up, in, out' at the heart of your planning and activity? (Try to get as practical and specific as possible!)

3. Six 'Streams of Living Water'

Richard Foster suggests 6 broad 'streams' of Christian living which are found in the Bible/life of Jesus and 2000 years of Christian history.

They are not six 'activities to do' (though all involve practical commitment). Instead they're channels for God's grace to flow into us, and channels for God's love to flow out into the world through us.

ALL of these are for ALL Christians, whatever your tradition or theology. The six 'streams' are shown on the next page.

Six 'Streams of Living Water (Richard Foster)

The Prayer-Filled Life <i>(The Contemplative Tradition)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● A life of loving attention to God, e.g., through prayer, meditation, silence● Fanning the flames of our relationship with God● Resting in God, being with being with God
The Virtuous Life <i>(The Holiness tradition)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Developing 'holy habits' that re-shape our lives more into the character of Christ, and rooting out sin that gets in the way● Training for discipleship so that at all times we are ready to 'do what needs to be done, when it needs to be done'
The Spirit-Filled Life <i>(The Charismatic tradition)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Discovering and using the gifts of the Holy Spirit, growing in the Fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc.)● Living not under our own steam, but in co-operation with the Holy Spirit leading and guiding us
The Compassionate Life <i>(The Social Justice tradition)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Living out Jesus' command to love our neighbour as ourselves - acts of love, kindness and compassion● Living out the prophets' message that God is a God of justice and peace, and acting justly is true worship
The Word-Centred Life <i>(The Evangelical Tradition)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Engaging deeply with Scripture so that it transforms us.● Taking seriously Jesus' message to 'repent and believe the Good News'● Taking part in Jesus' command to 'go... make disciples of all nations'
The Sacramental Life <i>(The Incarnational Tradition)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Seeing God at work in the creation and everyday life● No sacred/secular divide: we don't out our Christian lives in a box● Using art, music, symbol, etc. In worship● Meeting God in the Church's rites + sacraments (e.g., Communion)

Diving into these six 'streams' is an invitation, not a burden. Together, they offer a rounded and balanced vision of the Christian disciple's life. We don't have to attend to these all equally all the time - there are different seasons and stages of life.

Six Streams Discipleship Questions:

- How are these six 'streams' part of your own life currently?
- Are you sensing an invitation to explore one of them further?
- How could the six streams help to shape the common life of your church or small group?
- What would your church/group look like if you designed your priorities and activity around the six streams? What would be different? (Try to get as practical and specific as possible).