

DISCIPLESHIP

Know It. Nourish It. Live It.

Exploring practical discipleship,
building healthy community

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Welcome to Discipleship!

It is our conviction that being a disciple of Jesus is a whole-life, lifelong adventure, responding to God's love, empowered by the Holy Spirit and lived out in the church and community.

To explore the implications of discipleship we have chosen to focus on three areas, knowing our faith, nourishing our faith and living our faith. For each area we have offered four interactive sessions. You will see the 'lightbulb' icon signaling questions to answer, reflections to share and things to do.

The image of the passionfruit which can be seen on the cover of the book and elements of which mark the different sections, reflects the passion we feel for a deepening discipleship for the contemporary church. The flower was named *Passiflora* by Catholic missionaries arriving in Latin America. Jesuit priests used the parts of the flower to symbolize the passion of Jesus and our response (see passion flower p.31). The three stigma to represent the three nails; the five anthers the five wounds and the rays representing the glory of Christ. The response to Jesus' passion is found in the ten petals representing the disciples who go into hiding. Judas had betrayed Jesus and only John remained faithful at the cross with Mary.

We use the image simply to convey that we are called to be passionate about our faith - to feel strongly about it and compelled to share our love for God with others. Just like the passionfruit vine, we are called to bear fruit, to live out the faith that we confess. For many of us our faith remains in hiding rather than lived out. We hope that as you engage with these sessions you will experience growth, confidence and fruitfulness in your own life.

If your church is following this material you may like to consider the possibility of including services and sermons based on the same themes of each session. We envisage the material being used in this way allowing for follow up in small groups gathering to share insights and fellowship.

The course is primarily designed for groups, but our hope is that individual readers will also find it helpful. For each session, under 'Checking the Route', there is the opportunity to listen to a talk given by Juli Wills, Howard Mellor or Tim Clifford. These talks can be found on the United Church Winchester website: ucw.org.uk/discipleship under the 'Groups' section.

Finally, thanks are due to Anne Lim for her fabulous design and to Steve Pittis, Rosie Mellor and Sue Clifford for input, careful reading and encouragement.

Juli, Tim and Howard.

October 2020

Notes on the Course

For Leaders

These 12 sessions are intended for use with small groups, although of course individuals can engage with them to great effect. There are a few practical things to know about the material:

- Each week there is an audio insert under the section 'Checking the Route'. This can be found at www.ucw.org.uk/discipleship for additional material relating to this course.
- Sessions 9 to 12 offer an opportunity to watch a short on-line video.
- There is probably too much material to use in one 90 minute session, so you will need to decide which to use and which to leave out. You might, of course, decide to spread the material over two sessions.
- It is hoped that the series will be used in the whole church community and that there might be sermons based on the themes running concurrently with house group meetings.

It's always important to consider how you are going to lead a group. You may have been leading groups for many years and feel it's unnecessary to read yet another set of guidance notes but here are just a few suggestions for your consideration.

- Ensure everyone knows who's who, don't make assumptions that people know each other.
- Be clear about start and end times and stick to them.
- Try to ensure that everyone can see each other in the group.
- Encourage people to write down their answers so that everyone has something to share.

- Be proactive in encouraging contributions and similarly sometimes it's important to curb the enthusiasm of the over garrulous.

For Participants

It's not just the leaders who have responsibilities, we all need to consider our involvement in a group, so here are a few suggestions for ground rules that you might wish to discuss and add to if appropriate:

- We will listen carefully to each other, and we will think about what others are trying to say, and what God may be saying to us through them.
- We will watch out for each other and invite others to speak rather than dominate the discussion.
- We will respect that someone else may express things differently from how we would express them.
- Disagreement and searching questions are acceptable, when expressed sensitively and with respect.
- Personal information shared with the group is confidential and should not be passed on without permission.

For Everyone

You will find it helpful to bring a version of the bible you prefer to each session. There are spaces for your notes in the book.



KNOW IT

1. My Story
2. God's Story
3. Engaging with the Story
4. Telling the Story

KNOW IT

A disciple is a follower, a learner, an apprentice, listening and emulating the teacher. Many people think that being a disciple is merely a question of going to church on a Sunday, saying the words, singing the hymns, going home and trying to be a nice person. It's a good start! However, being a follower must be more than that.

If you follow a football team, you probably do more than just watch the match on a Saturday. You know about your team and the rules of the game and, if possible, play, or have played, yourself. Similarly, as a follower of Jesus we are called to learn more about him and his teachings and from that knowledge go on to live our lives inspired by him.

In this **Know It** section of this Discipleship course we shall start where we are, with what we know about our faith in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We know that Jesus was sent by God to show us what God is like, and Jesus invites us to have a personal relationship with him. So, a lot of what we focus on in the next four sessions will come from the life and teaching of Jesus.

We all come with our own perspective, our own doubts and confusions, and they are valid. However, a good relationship is based on knowing the other - their background and hopes and desires. It is the same in our relationship with Jesus, the important thing is to keep asking the questions, to find out more about the one whom we claim to follow.

So be prepared to share, to be challenged, to be open to different views and to grow in knowledge of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

1. My Story

Introduction

In this session, we shall seek to talk about what our Christian faith means to us as individuals. We will do this by discussing how we currently relate to Jesus, by exploring how our understanding of faith has developed over time and discovering how others have described faith.

Opening Prayer

*Lord God, the light of the minds that know you,
the life of the souls that seek you
and the strength of the wills that serve you;
Help us to know you that we may truly love you,
and so to love you that we may fully serve you,
whose service is perfect freedom;
Through Christ our Lord, Amen*

Gelasian Sacramentary, 8th Century

Getting Started

Imagine you were introducing a guest speaker to a group. What information would your introduction include? Think for a moment and jot down a few points, perhaps thinking about a meeting you have been to where either you or someone else introduced a guest speaker.

Now imagine you are introducing a good friend to another group of friends. What sort of things might you say in that

introduction? And how does it differ from introducing a guest speaker? Discuss how the two forms of introduction differ.

Reflect and share about whether Jesus is a friend or guest speaker in your life.

Checking the Route

For an audio introduction by Juli Wills go to www.ucw.org.uk/discipleship.

It's probably fair to say that many of us find it hard to talk about our faith. We may have been Christians for a long time, and take our faith for granted. We were 'born into the Christian faith' so what more is there to say? Sometimes we hesitate to speak because we are unsure of the 'right thing' to say, so rather than 'get it wrong' we keep quiet.

But what if it is much simpler than that? If Jesus is our friend, can we not just talk about him as a friend, describe what friendship with him might mean in practical terms?

Having said that, we are called to think about our faith, to allow it to grow and develop. Methodism traditionally uses a fourfold approach to learning about our faith in order to apply it to contemporary issues and our Christian practice.

- We are encouraged to look at **Scripture** - it is important to read the bible and seek to understand it.
- We need to consider **Tradition** - the wisdom and creativity of Christians over time and throughout the world, including hymns, prayers, poetry, art, and such things as the creeds and catechism.

- Thirdly we are called to use **Reason** - to think things through, using our own critical thinking to make sense of God's world.
- Finally **Experience** - our own experience of the world is important, we gain wisdom and maturity, especially when we pray and reflect about life and faith with other Christians.

That is why, in this series on Discipleship, we are not just focusing on our own knowledge, but we shall be looking at how we **Nourish** our faith and **Live** it out in the world. It can all be summed up in Colossians 2:6 'As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.'

Going Deeper

💡 Discuss the following questions:

- Do you have a favourite hymn or bible passage which really resonates for you?
- Jot down any ways in which that hymn or bible passage expresses something about your relationship with, or how you feel about, God, Father, Son or Holy Spirit. Share with the group.

💡 Have you ever been asked about your Christian faith or why you are a Christian?

- Can you remember the sorts of things you said in reply?
- Did your reply focus on Jesus, or the Church?
- Share your thoughts with the group.

Looking at the Acts of the Apostles

The disciples spent seven weeks hiding their relationship with Jesus but at Pentecost some things changed. We are going to look at Acts 2:14 and 22-39 where we read of Peter boldly declaring his faith in Jesus. The crowd assume the disciples are drunk but Peter explains what has really happened.

Peter in 2:14 sounds confident and convinced. This a very different Peter to the one in the Chief Priest's courtyard, Luke 22:60-62. He has been transformed and we see a radical change in Peter. Why is he so different now?

💡 Pick out words or phrases which he uses to describe Jesus in Acts 2:22-24 and 36-39.

- How do you relate to these words about Jesus?
- Which ones, from your experience, would you add?
- Would you say Peter is talking about Jesus as a guest speaker or a friend?

The crowd interrupt the sermon! They have a question 'Brothers, what should we do?' The answer though brief is revealing and has four parts to it: repent, believe, belong (be baptized), and receive (2:37-38).

- Are these four elements of coming to faith ones to which you relate?

Time for Reflection

Through the years, the Church has sought to find ways to express our understanding of faith. Much time has been spent

trying to find 'the right words' and many declarations of faith have been produced. Probably one of the most enduring of these statements of belief is the Apostles Creed. We will look at it in more detail in the next session, but for now let us remind ourselves of it.

In a time of reflection, read through the Apostles Creed below noticing any parts which resonate for you or have had an effect on your life.

*I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.*

*I believe in Jesus Christ,
God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again,
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.*

Where Do We Go From Here?

Make some time between sessions to reflect again on the Apostles Creed and perhaps use it in your prayer time. Ask God for a deeper understanding of your faith and how it affects your life.

You may also like to start a **Learning and Gratitude Journal** for the duration of this series on discipleship. Try each night to note something you have learnt about God, or would like to thank him for that has happened during the day.

Closing Prayer

*Sovereign God, you are our light and our salvation,
to you be glory and praise for ever.*

*We thank you for the Cross
and the wonder of Christ's love for us:
he is the light of the world.*

*Anoint us with your Spirit
as you call us into your marvellous light.*

*May our lives bear witness to your truth
and our lips proclaim your praise.*

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Steven Wild, Methodist Church

Thinking Further

Peter, John and the disciples had definitely known Jesus as a friend. They had the good fortune to know him personally, they had been there when he told his stories, performed miracles, spoke with power and authority. They had been there at his arrest, some had witnessed his crucifixion and they had all met him after his resurrection. Then he was gone again, and they were confused and afraid. When they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they were radically changed and knew what they

needed to say. Peter couldn't stop himself from talking about his 'friend and saviour', Jesus Christ.

Take time to read the way John speaks of his friendship with Jesus in 1 John 1:1-4. There is deep friendship but also respect for Jesus and delight in finding the way to Life.

Resources

Take a look at www.thestoryproject.org.uk which aims to give people both the platform and the confidence to share their story of life and faith. Ordinary people sharing about an extraordinary God. The Story Project is a project of the Methodist Church in partnership with Cliff College.