

# Following in Jesus' footsteps

The life of a missional disciple



# 4 June to 23 July 2017

## Dear Friends,

In the first three months of this year we looked at different peoples encounters with Jesus. During our studies we saw how Jesus healed many people, and how each encounter was life changing..

Reflecting on that series it seems clear that God is interested in far more than us simply accepting Jesus and turning up at church each week. God is not looking for religious converts, he is looking for people who will leave their old way of life behind and live radically different lives. He is looking for people that he can shape and mould so that they can take part in his mission to redeem his world, to be his witnesses and to make disciples of all nations.

Now, all that is easy to say, but it does leave the question of exactly what does it mean? I came across a quote, for which I have sadly lost the reference, that describes the problem well: "There are many fine preaching churches, and social action churches, and praying churches, and churches where the worship in music and song are sublime, but it is rare to find a church where the main thing is exactly what Jesus identified as the main thing. 'Go and make disciples' was Jesus' final instruction to the disciples he had made."

Dallas Willard said that "A disciple is who Jesus would be if he were you." In an attempt to address the challenge of "exactly what does that mean" we are going to start out on a series of studies focussing on the "Up/In/Out" way that Jesus modelled discipleship. Rather than have a booklet focussed solely on "Up" and having to wait a couple of months to get to "In" and then "Out" each booklet will have a mix of each aspect.

Of course not every topic fits neatly into one of "Up/In/Out" so expect to find some weeks where we cover more than one dimension.

Some studies are also overview or background and don't fit neatly into the "Up/In/Out" model at all.

If you have access to the internet then there is a really helpful video on the discipleship page of the Hope Whitby website (or it can be accessed directly at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnNjku3FUw>). In the video it notes that we are all good at one aspect of Up/In/Out, ok at a second and pretty poor at a third. It goes on to say that rather than settle for imbalance a disciple works on their weaknesses so as to become good in all 3 dimensions.

My expectation and prayer is that as we open our hearts to God through this series we will experience the joy of becoming more like Christ, and find fulfilment in taking up the challenge of being missional disciples in his world; I hope you will join me in the journey,

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Neil Douglas', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Neil Douglas

## **Using these notes**

These notes are designed to be used with or without the sermon. The preacher may well not pay any attention to the questions in the preparation of the sermon, instead they will seek to bring what they feel God wants to say to Ebenezer on that morning. Each topic is quite wide and there are many different ways of approaching it. That is why the first question is always about the sermon.

The questions then provide a way of engaging with the topic each week regardless of whether you have had an opportunity to hear the sermon or not, but please do try to listen to the sermon as it should enrich your study of the topic.

**Date:** 4 June  
**Theme:** Introduction to the Empowered Life  
**Key Readings:** Matthew 28:19-20; Romans 8:18-30  
**Additional Readings:** Philippians 2:12-13; Ephesians 4:13

### **Questions from the sermon**

What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

### **Questions**

1. Jesus said “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19); what is the difference between a disciple and somebody who has simply accepted Christ as their saviour?
2. How would you describe somebody who is conformed to the likeness of Christ (Romans 8:29)?
3. Paul told us to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12); how might we do that?
4. Paul urges us to “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). When we are born we are infants, then we become toddlers, infants, teenagers and so on. What spiritual age would you say you are?
5. The crunch question - are you willing to let Jesus disciple you, and submit your life to the demands and changes that this would mean? What are your hopes and fears of that commitment?
6. If disciples are those who make disciples, who are you discipling at the moment?
7. Some of these questions touch deep issues for us, spend time sharing and praying for each other.

## Leader's Notes

Q3. In “The Cost of Discipleship”, Dietrich Bonhoeffer says that without the call to deeper discipleship, the doctrine of grace (the forgiveness of sins and the love of God) is cheap grace. Speaking later of Martin Luther, Bonhoeffer says:

“The Grace he had received was costly grace. It was grace, for it was like water on parched ground, comfort in tribulation, freedom from the bondage of a self-chosen way, and forgiveness of all his sins. And it was costly, for, so far from dispensing him from good works, it meant that he must take the call of discipleship more seriously than ever before. It was grace because it cost so much, and it cost so much because it was grace.”<sup>1</sup>

Q5. The time in history when the Christian church has grown the fastest (the first 300 years after Christ) is when living out their faith meant social exclusion, financial penalties and the very real possibility of death. In a time and nation where such persecution does not exist, why are we so half hearted about the practice of our faith?

Eugene Peterson says that instead of everything being instant and immediate, we should view our spiritual life as an ongoing pilgrimage, or “a long obedience in the same direction”.

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<sup>1</sup> Bonhoeffer. Dietrich, The Cost of Discipleship (SCM Press, London) 2001. P.8

**Date:** 11 June  
**Theme:** Living the life of Christ  
**Key Readings:** Matthew 10:16-27; Luke 6:35-42; John 13:15-17  
**Additional Readings:** Hebrews 5:7-8

### **Questions from the sermon**

What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

### **Questions**

1. Read Hebrews 5:7-8. Jesus learnt obedience through what he suffered during the days of his life on earth - what might this have meant during both his early life, and during the parts of his life recorded in the bible?
2. "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master." (Matthew 10:24). Having reflected on the life of Jesus, can you think of ways in which this quote from Matthew has come true in your life? Are there times we might have resisted being like the master, what were they?
3. Read Luke 6:35-42. "Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (v40) - in this passage from Luke, what are the characteristics of somebody who has been fully trained?
4. The passage in Luke demands that we respond equally to all and without judgement. How practical is this in our lives, and what gets in the way of our following this command of Jesus?
5. Read John 13:15-17. What challenge is Jesus issuing to us through this passage? (it may help to refer to the first 14 versus)
6. Jesus took the role of a servant, yet we often focus on our own needs and become self-centred and indifferent to the needs of others. Jesus calls us to demonstrate a quality of life to an extent that others are led into a life of discipleship because of what they see in us. With this in mind spend some time praying for each other.

## **Leader's Notes**

The term 'disciple' is used consistently in the four gospels to describe the relationship between Christ and His followers. Jesus used it in speaking of them, and they employed it when referring to one another.

The term didn't pass out of use in the days following Pentecost; on the contrary the word runs throughout the Acts of the Apostles (see 9:1,26; 20:7, 30; 21:16). In fact the members of the early church were known as disciples before they were first called 'Christians' at Antioch. See Acts 11:26.

The word signifies 'a taught or trained one - a student', Jesus is the teacher and we are the students. He has all knowledge of the ultimate purposes of God for us and we are the seekers after truth.

As a teacher the Lord Jesus is not merely a lecturer, from whose dissertations we may deduce certain lessons; nor indeed is He only a prophet who delivers His burden and then leaves us with the issues. Rather He is the teacher who bends over His pupils with a set purpose of training them step by step, until they become identified with the teacher Himself.

**Date:** 18 June  
**Theme:** Worship  
**Key Readings:** Romans 12:1-2; Mark 14:1-11;  
John 4:20-24  
**Additional Readings:** Psalm 100; Luke 10:38-42

### **Questions from the sermon**

What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

### **Questions**

1. Read Romans 12:1. What does Paul mean? What is worship?
2. Everybody worships something. Think of people and situations where people have been worshipping something or somebody other than God. What were they, what might we learn about worship from them?
3. Mark 14:1-11 describes an extravagant act of worship. Luke 10:38-42 also describes an act of worship. What similarities can you find in these stories. What might we learn about worship from them?
4. Read John 4:20-24. What does this tell us about worship?
5. Read Romans 12:2. Central to worship is our refusal to conform to the pattern of this world, and our transformation by the renewing of our minds. How does this process work? What practical things can we do to co-operate with it?
6. We were made to worship God. It is the priority for our whole lives, and it is the greatest privilege. It has implications for our time, our lifestyle, our money, our energy and our ambitions in life. It is about giving everything to God. Spend some time prayerfully recommitting to worshipping God as a living sacrifice in spirit and in truth.

## Leader's Notes

William Temple said "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God." Worship is our response to God's initiative, John 4:23 tells us "true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks" - note that it is God who seeks worshippers and draws them to himself.

Q1. In short, worship is the way we live, not what we do on a Sunday at church. Ephesians 1:6 tells us we were made for the praise of his glory. The Westminster Shorter Catechism explains that the 'chief end' of mankind is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

Q3. The alabaster jar of perfume would have cost around a year's wages, the woman was showing costly devotion to Jesus and surrendering her own needs, plans and ambitions. Mary does something radical and counter-cultural in adopting the position of a disciple when she should have been working in the kitchen with Martha.

Q4. Worship in spirit and truth doesn't refer to human spirits, but rather to worship that is dynamically animated by God's Holy Spirit. This is worship that is empowered by God, informed by the revelation of God, and directed to God by those He created. This worship engages our whole beings.

Q5. There are loads of good answers here, thinking about how our thinking is formed, what we feed our minds with, and how we change over time will help to get to one!

**Date:** 25 June  
**Theme:** Meditation  
**Key Readings:** Joshua 1:8; Luke 7:11-17  
**Additional Readings:** Psalm 1:2, 63:6, 119:15, 143:5;  
Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Philippians 4:8;  
Colossians 3:2

### **Questions from the sermon**

What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

### **Questions**

1. What do you think of when you hear the word "meditate"? Share with each other what you know of any different types of meditation.
2. Biblical meditation differs from other forms of meditation. Can you identify how? (The following may help: Psalm 63:6; 143:5; 119:15; 1:2).
3. Read Deuteronomy 6:6-7, Joshua 1:8, Philippians 4:8, Colossians 3:2 - the Bible clearly encourages us to meditate yet it isn't a common practice amongst Christians. Share your thoughts on this and any experiences you may have.
4. Read the 3 different types of meditation described in the Leader's Notes below - what do you see as advantages or disadvantages of each type for you personally?
5. We are now going to practice Imaginative Prayer meditation. Turn to Luke 7:11-17. The leader will guide you through the steps (see instructions below "leading the meditation").
6. Share with each other anything you experienced or felt doing the meditation - remember this is a first time and there are two other methods to try.

## Leader's Notes

Q2. Most forms of meditation we encounter today require you to either empty your mind or to concentrate on your self or on visualisations. Biblical meditation differs in that we focus either on God himself, his works or his law - this of course includes any of the Bible. The Hebrew word we translate as meditate means "to mutter", so focusing on the Bible includes reading it aloud - its only comparatively recently that we have started reading silently.

Richard Foster summarises it simply "Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to hear God's voice and obey his word. It is that simple. I wish I could make it more complicated for those who like things difficult."<sup>2</sup>

### Three main types of meditation:

1. **Centering** (or Re-collection) – where one sits with palms down, setting down before God the things that are on our minds and hearts. The worries of the day, the distractions of life. Give them to God to mind for you, and now turn your palms up to receive what God has for you. Sit without agenda and wait on God. Sometimes thoughts about the things you have set down will return, but when they do, gently set them back at God's feet and relax in the presence of God. Sometimes when starting especially, a key word or phrase repeated gently and without urgency helps maintain focus. "Be still and know that I am Lord". Sometimes you will have profound experiences, and sometimes you will have nothing more than time spent with God, just the two of you – still nothing to complain about! Once your time is over, don't rush to take back those worries. It is probable that they are no longer so heavy or troublesome anyway.

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<sup>2</sup> R. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, p.21

2. **Lectio Divina** – This has 4 steps:

- **Lectio** – reading a passage of scripture slowly, a few times over, and slowly a word or phrase will begin to stand out to you.
- **Meditatio** – chew over the phrase or word. Reflect on it. What are your thoughts and feelings about it (good or bad), if bad why do you feel this way? If good, what is God offering you through this?
- **Oratio** – allow yourself to become completely given to prayer – express with honesty how you feel, think and desire. Pray until you are empty.
- **Contemplatio** – let go of all thoughts and feelings and rest in God’s embrace.

3. **Imaginative Prayer** :

- Select a passage from scripture. It’s often easier, especially when starting out to be in the gospels. It can be an event or a parable.
- Read it several times through so that you are familiar with it. Seek to identify the main person in the story, the different character and characteristics, the setting then and any possible connection with your life now.
- Relax in quiet, and ask God for guidance.
- Imagine yourself in the story. Who are you, what do you see, hear, smell, taste and feel? Look at the details around you. Is Jesus there, and if so go to him and talk with him. Tell him your concerns and listen to his answers.
- Gradually move from then to now, bringing the feelings you had in the story into the present. Give that to God, give thanks to God, remain open with God and listen.

## Leading the meditation

Quietly and slowly direct the group through the following steps. It's not a race, it's supposed to be in people's minds so God can speak directly to them, so your input should be minimal, just asking the questions and giving time for the rest of the group to explore the answers.

- Begin by praying that you will be blessed with God's presence, and through the Holy Spirit, you will experience what Jesus wants you to know.
- Read the passage through a few times, allowing your eyes to rest on different bits that catch your interest.
- Now sit comfortably and close your eyes, and imagine you are there in the scene. Who are you? What crowd might you be in? What can you see? Allow your eyes to take in little details: expressions on faces, physical demeanour of those present. E.g. Any contrast between the mourners and the crowd following Jesus. How does Jesus look? What does his expression tell you?
- What can you hear? Listen for the words being said.
- How do you feel? How did you feel when you saw the coffin? How did you feel when you saw the widow? When you saw Jesus? How did you feel when He approached the coffin, touched it, spoke to the widow?
- What concerns do you have that this has raised in you? Walk over to Jesus and ask him about them. Listen to his answers. Sit with him and rest in his company for a while.

**Date:** 2 July  
**Theme:** The life of love  
**Key Readings:** John 13:31-38  
**Additional Readings:** 1 John 3:10; 1 John 4:20; Genesis 4:1-8;  
Colossians 2:2;

Acts 2:44-45; John 17:20-23; Acts 1:8; Romans 15:1-7

### **Questions from the sermon**

What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

### **Questions**

1. Read John 13:34 and 1 John 3:10. What are the marks of a disciple, how does that require us to behave?
2. Read Genesis 4:3-8. Cain makes an outward show of loving God, what does 1 John 4:20 have to say about this? Have you experienced different groups of Christians, or individuals, demonstrating they don't love each other? If you have, what was wrong?
3. Paul talks about disciples being united in love (Colossians 2:2), what does that mean for how we live through each day of our lives? (See also Acts 2:44-45)
4. Read John 17:20-23. This is Jesus' last prayer before his arrest, what are the implications of this part of it? (See also Acts 1:8)
5. What practical things can we learn from Romans 15:1-7 that might help us to live out this commandment?
6. If you are able, share with those around you areas where you know you struggle to live up to this commandment, and then pray for each other.

## **Leader's Notes**

The command to love one another has an outer orientation. It isn't focussed on my needs, my rights, how I feel about what is going on. Instead it is focussed on the welfare of others, on meeting the needs of others and not on meeting my needs. Romans 15:1-7 - "Christian love is that caring, forgiving, spontaneous, redeeming love which is the essence of God's nature."<sup>3</sup> It is about seeking the good of others first. Or to put it another way it is about relating to people in a way that reflects their great worth in God's eyes, and therefore in ours.

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<sup>3</sup> NIVAC 1 Corinthians, p.259 footnote

**Date:** 16 July

**Theme:** Work

**Key Readings:** Genesis 1:27-28

**Additional Readings:** Genesis 2:15, 19-20; 2 Thess 3:10

### **Questions from the sermon**

What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

### **Questions**

1. God sometimes, though it is very rare, calls people to a particular task or profession. Can you think of any biblical examples?
2. How do you understand God's universal command to work? What scriptures can you find on the topic?
3. What is God's call on your life? How, if at all, does it relate to your job or unpaid work?
4. Is church work a higher calling than other work?
5. What do you make of Archbishop William Temple's comment that to choose a career on selfish or individualistic grounds, without a true sense of calling, confirmed corporately, is "probably the greatest single sin any young person can commit, for it is the deliberate withdrawal from allegiance to God of the greatest part of time and strength"?
6. We all have a frontline, a place where we meet those outside the community of Christian faith. Where is your frontline? How might the group pray for you in it?

### **Leader's Notes**

The Theology of Work Project has published a free e-book called "Calling - A Biblical Perspective" and it is a useful resource if you wish to study this topic further (it was also a stimulus for the above questions). It can be downloaded from [www.theologyofwork.org/resources/free-ebook-calling](http://www.theologyofwork.org/resources/free-ebook-calling). The London Institute of Contemporary Christianity also has significant material available at [www.licc.org.uk](http://www.licc.org.uk).

Q1 - If by “calling,” we mean a direct, unmistakable command from God to take up a particular task, job, profession or type of work, then calling is very rare in the Bible. No more than a hundred or so people were called by God in this sense. God called Noah to build the ark. God called Moses and Aaron to their tasks (Exodus 3:4, 28:1). He called prophets such as Samuel (1 Samuel 3:10), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4-5), Amos (Amos 7:15) and others. He called Abram and Sarah and a few others to undertake journeys or to relocate (which might be taken as a kind of workplace calling). He placed people in political leadership including Joseph, Gideon, Saul, David and David’s descendents. God chose Bezalel and Oholiab as chief craftsmen for the tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-6). Jesus called the apostles and some of his other disciples (e.g., Mark 3:14-14), and the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul to be missionaries (Acts 13:2). The word “call” is not always used, but the unmistakable direction of God for a particular person to do a particular job is clear in these cases. Aside from these, very few people in the Bible received an individual call from God.<sup>4</sup>

Q2 - God's command to work starts at the very beginning of Genesis when he created humankind, and continues throughout scripture. It is picked up by NT writers, such as Paul, in 2 Thess 3:10

Q4 - Just in case, "No"!! Look at different calls in the Bible, for example Deut 31:14 and 1 Samuel 16:12-13. God calls to both types of work. We just confuse it by calling and ordaining people to church work, but in reality church work is not a higher calling; it is just a different front line.

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<sup>4</sup> Calling ebook, p9

**Date:** 23 July  
**Theme:** Sharing the faith  
**Key Readings:** Colossians 4:3-4  
**Additional Readings:** Luke 24:45-47; Matthew 4:19,  
28:18-19; Luke 5:17-26; Hebrews 7:25;  
Acts 13:36

### **Questions from the sermon**

What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

### **Questions**

1. Whilst writing to the Colossians Paul is in prison (Colossians 4:18), yet what is odd about his prayer requests? What are his priorities? (Colossians 4:3-4)
2. Read Luke 24:45-47 - what does Jesus tell us is God's mission written throughout scripture? What is our role (Matthew 4:19, 28:18-19)?
3. Read Luke 5:17-26. What does this story tell us about the group of friends, and what does it tell us they thought of Jesus? How are you challenged or inspired by those answers? Does Hebrews 7:25 encourage you?
4. The group of friends encountered a barrier and took a great risk in breaking through to get their friend to Jesus. What barriers do you see in your witness and that of the church. How might you overcome them?
5. Acts 13:36 tells us that David served God's purposes in his generation. What do you believe to be the mission of God in the world? What is your involvement in that mission?
6. Spend some time praying about the answers to the questions in this study, and asking God to empower each of you with his Holy Spirit.

## Leader's Notes

Romans 8:19-22 tells us that "the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God."

God is not only redeeming people but also the whole of creation and therefore every aspect of our lives will be impacted and we will see that our mission goes beyond the saving of individuals.

We long to see churches where this kingdom life is being lived in community, creating communities of grace and truth in the middle of society. These kingdom communities will not remain isolated, but be concerned to see the redeeming, reconciling, reforming message of Jesus impacting every aspect of the society of which they are a part.

This new kingdom life that can only be lived by the power of the Spirit of God will be a priestly life and will draw others to our God. The life of discipleship is the life of mission.<sup>5</sup>



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<sup>5</sup> P. Maiden, *Discipleship*, p.153.