

Catherine
Hutton

Disciples
StudyNotes
FOR SMALL GROUPS & PERSONAL REFLECTION

INTRODUCTION to the series...

If you are a follower of Jesus, you are a disciple.

During the preaching series that accompanies this guide, the following aspects of early discipleship and indeed our own will be looked at from Biblical and practical viewpoints.

Disciples Gather Together

Matthew 5:1-13

Disciples Learn Together

Matthew 5:14-20

Disciples Eat Together

Matthew 26: 17-30

Disciples Follow Jesus

Matthew 4: 18-25

Disciples Have a Go

Matthew 14: 22-36

Taking our key texts from Matthew's Gospel, we are exploring elements of discipleship which are critical to our healthy growth and usefulness as followers of Jesus.

One of the themes that is running throughout the series is the importance of our obedience to act on Jesus' command.

Obedience is the beginning of discipleship and is the quality that finds the disciple there amongst the 5000 on the mountainside, committed to learning, leaving all behind them to follow Jesus and also stepping out of the boat.

A question that begins this series could be 'have you valued your free-will and trusted the irresistibility of God's grace too the extent that you have lost the habit of obedience?'

There has been a resurgence of small groups, especially in the newer and revived churches. These groups give space to safely discuss issues of faith. In our groups, we don't expect that any one person will have the answers and we certainly aren't looking for experts to join them. Rather, we are seeking to find a place for every person to grow in faith among friends.

I pray that as we seek to be good disciples, we might know the joy of hearing the call of Jesus and the desire in our hearts to respond with willingness and hope.

Enjoy the series!

Love, Catherine

Session 1 Gather Together

As you Gather 5-10 minutes

What are the things that you like to do when you have no other pressures on you?

(Gardening, theatre, embroidery, baking, walking, cinema etc)

Pray & Worship 10 minutes

Sing a hymn or a song that speaks of fellowship in our worship of God

Pray

1. For those who have shown you the Godly way of life & faith.
2. That God will bless your Group in your discussion today.
3. For a greater desire to gather with God's people to learn.
4. For opportunities to share faith this week.
5. For love and kindness to be central in your discussion and fellowship.

Read the Word 50 minutes

Matthew 5:1-13 The Passion Translation (TPT)

One day Jesus saw a vast crowd of people gathering to hear him, so he went up the slope of a hill and sat down. With his followers and disciples spread over the hillside, ²Jesus began to teach them:

³ *“What wealth is offered to you when you feel your spiritual poverty! For there is no charge to enter the realm of heaven’s kingdom.*

⁴ *“What delight comes to you when you wait upon the Lord! For you will find what you long for.*

⁵ *“What blessing comes to you when gentleness lives in you! For you will inherit the earth.*

⁶ *“How enriched you are when you crave righteousness! For you will be surrounded with fruitfulness.*

⁷ *“How satisfied you are when you demonstrate tender mercy! For tender mercy will be demonstrated to you.*

⁸ *“What bliss you experience when your heart is pure! For then your eyes will open to see more and more of God.*

⁹ *“How blessed you are when you make peace! For then you will be recognised as a true child of God.*

¹⁰ *“How enriched you are when you bear the wounds of being persecuted for doing what is right!*

For that is when you experience the realm of heaven’s kingdom.

¹¹ *“How ecstatic you can be when people insult and persecute you and speak all kinds of cruel lies about you because of your love for me! ¹² So leap for joy—since your heavenly reward is great.*

For you are being rejected the same way the prophets were before you. Cont/

¹³ *“Your lives are like salt among the people. But if you, like salt, become bland, how can your ‘saltiness’ be restored? Flavourless salt is good for nothing and will be thrown out and trampled on by others.*

The first attitude that we need to demonstrate as disciples is one whereby we find ourselves available and teachable - along with the rest of God’s people. In Matthew 5, the disciples and the followers were able to sit together and receive the teaching that Jesus was bringing to them all.

What are the advantages in being part of a gathering?

When do you find being part of a gathering difficult- no matter how small the group may be?

The teaching is not exclusive for a ‘Chosen One’ to take up the mantle of Jesus after his death and continue his ministry - instead it is thoroughly inclusive. All who gather are given the message - and from that moment, they are given the responsibility to live a life in step with the teaching they have heard.

We are ‘part of’ rather than ‘the only’. Disciples are part of a team, a group who will serve God and be a blessing to the world.

Talk about the size of the gathering. It is on a mountain similar to Moses hearing the Law from God.

Why might Jesus have taken the opportunity to tell the largest number of people possible the most important message of God’s kingdom values in the Beatitudes?

In the Beatitudes, Jesus describes a lifestyle - life choices - that echo God’s heart for the world. He describes not ‘individuals’ but a people who are living so closely in-step with God that their life choices and their whole way of living ‘bring Heaven’ to bear in places of poverty, brokenness, pain, injustice, anger and violence.

As a whole people of God, we will find that our personalities warm more naturally to different areas of the Beatitudes.

Turn to Romans 12:5-8 and remind yourselves of the different gifts for the Body of Christ. As you look through the Beatitudes in the passage from TPT and also in your own Bible, you will find parts that come more naturally to you.

Spend some time considering why it particularly matters for a gathered people to have heard this teaching.

Liam Goligher in his Keswick Bible Teaching (July 2015) reminds us that Jesus is demonstrating his divinity and claiming authority himself being the 'true and faithful Israel' as well as 'the second and last Adam'.

The mountain is the new Sinai and the people present would hear resonances of the Old Testament throughout his sermon. Jesus gathers the remnant; the faithful who will hear God's word and he places this new teaching into their hearts.

As gathered people, we recognise the corporate nature of both our calling to follow Jesus and the responsibility placed on us to bear the kingdom-values of God into the world through mission and service, evangelism and prayer.

Where do you gather to work out these kingdom values in your every-day?

How easy is it to be gathered with this purpose?

Reflection & Refreshment *25 minutes*

Over refreshments, talk about the uses of salt.

The final verse of this passage (13) makes the point that we are to be flavoursome and useful. A handful of salt is more use for preserving meat than a single grain. A shovelful of salt is more use for de-icing a dangerous path than a couple of shakes from the salt-pot.

The pot is filled with grains gathered together.

The individuals of the kingdom gather together to be of most effect for the Kingdom of God in the world.

Goligher also comments that; *"The world needs preservative for it is fallen. It is rotten. Festering with germs of evil. The church is salt in the world."*

As people of God who have gathered to hear the message of God's Kingdom, we now have the tools for living as People of God.

How can the different gatherings that you are part of help you to be effective in choosing to live a life that is Godly on the inside and full of scriptural holiness in how it is lived.

Talk about encouragement and accountability.

Pray for the people you gather with.

For courage to live the life that God has called them into.

Session 2 Follow Jesus

As you Gather 5-10 minutes

Are you a follower by nature?

Do you follow a sport team, a political party, a band or personality on social media?

Do you follow instructions or recipes?

Pray & Worship 10 minutes

Sing a hymn or a song which asserts faith and obedience to God

Pray

1. That you might hear the voice of Jesus speak to you.
2. For open ears for every member of your group.
3. For a greater desire to follow Jesus.
4. For those who are struggling to be faithful.
5. For evangelists within our community.
6. A greater understanding of God's Word.

Read the Word 50 minutes

Matthew 4:18-25 New Living Translation

18 One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. 19 Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” 20 And they left their nets at once and followed him.

21 A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too. 22 They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind.

23 Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. 24 News about him spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralysed—he healed them all. 25 Large crowds followed him wherever he went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns, Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River.

A disciple is a person who has responded to the call or command to 'follow me' (19). Whatever was going on is laid aside for the sole purpose of the following. It is a decision made from faith in the one who calls and acted on in a demonstration of that faith in Jesus in a response of obedience.

Look at verses 18-22. Circle the key words or phrases as you see them. What impresses you about the description?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer comments about the call of Levi in Mark 2:14;
The call goes forth, and is at once followed by the response of obedience. The response of the disciples is an act of obedience, not a confession of faith in Jesus. How could the call immediately evoke obedience? p.61

It is in our response to the call that faith begins to flow. In the passages, we notice that there is no period of deliberation and consideration. When we see deliberation happening, we notice blocks to following Jesus being placed; such as in Luke 9:57-62.

Spend some time discussing the importance of our obedience for our discipleship.

Can you 'follow Jesus' without really going with him?

Maybe you have your own story to tell...

In the space below, draw out a diagram of you and Jesus - maybe include the things you do in life.

Consider: Are you closer to Jesus or the old way of living?

Re-read the second part of verse 19.

Jesus took their skills and transformed them into something of value for the people they would meet.

Talk about how this has been true in your life.

Look at Romans 11:1&2. Talk about how God changes your own thinking.

The call to follow Jesus is a work of grace within our lives. As Jesus calls, grace is poised to be unleashed for the transformation of our whole being. He will re-position us so that we see the world from a grace-filled viewpoint and re-align our decision-making so that it is God-centred. The key to this is our act of will that says yes to following Jesus. Bonhoeffer suggests that;

The first step places the disciple in the situation where faith is possible. If he refuses to follow and stays behind, he does not learn how to believe. He who is called must go out of his situation in which he cannot believe, into the situation in which, first and foremost, faith is possible. P 67

A disciple must follow Jesus. It is in the following of Jesus that our learning and the faith increase, as we become effective witnesses to the transforming love of God in Jesus Christ. A shift from old to new has to occur. There are times when we can look back over our years of faith and find that the 'following' has been stalled. In these times, both obedience and faith diminish.

On the line below, chart your life in 5 or 10 year increments. Note the times of faith flourishing and faith stalling. Make some observations about how your obedience was re-ignited and the faith that came afresh. Pray.

Reflection & Refreshment *25 minutes*

Over refreshments, talk together about how faith is made possible for those who have not yet heard the call of Jesus.

How can your group work towards being ones who 'fish for people'... 'bake' for people? 'Imagine Church' for people? 'Chat together' for people? 'Garden' for people ...

Think about how Jesus took the disciples on a journey of faith and showed them how to use their abilities for God's kingdom.

As you follow him, he will use yours too... Pray together about being people who show others how to follow Jesus.

The first step must be regarded to start with as an external work, which effects the change from one existence to another. It is a step within everyone's capacity, for it lies within the limits of human freedom... Although Peter cannot achieve his own conversion, he can leave his nets. Bonhoeffer, p70

Session 3 Have a Go

As you Gather *5-10 minutes*

Is there something you always wanted to try but didn't dare to? Maybe you have been able to do something you never dreamed you would have the opportunity to accomplish? Share your stories.

Pray & Worship *10 minutes*

Sing a hymn or a song which celebrates the confidence we have in God.

Pray

1. Prayers of thanksgiving for all God is.
2. Prayers of celebration for all God does.
3. For a bigger vision of God's possibilities for you and your group.
4. For greater faith.
5. For a church which is faithful and obedient to the call of Jesus
6. For your minister and church leadership.

Read the Word *50 minutes*

Matthew 14:22-36 NIV

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, 24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. 25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." 28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." 29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" 32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." 34 When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. 35 And when the men of that place recognised Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him 36 and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

At some point, having the courage to trust that the faith is there to have a go at the impossible is part of the disciple's journey. For Peter, it was to get out of the boat and to allow the knowledge of who Jesus is to support his feet on the water when the substance of the water on its own was insufficient. These are the moments that define us. Can we move into un-walked territory simply because Jesus asks us to trust him?

Talk about the circumstances when you most need to know that you can trust Jesus.

In the passage, the circumstances are that it is cold, dark and the waters are choppy. The figure of Jesus is possibly a ghost, because it makes no sense for an actual person to be walking on the water towards the disciples in the boat.

How does the presence of fear in a situation affect your faith?

There are many times when God's followers have been called to trust God and to step out of their own particular boat.

When Abraham walked Isaac up Mount Moriah in Genesis 22:1-18, it was a supreme act of faith in God's promise on Abraham's part.

When Mary said "Yes!" to the angel in Luke 1:38, she too stepped onto a path that she trusted God to navigate.

When have you been called to trust Jesus to hold you through something impossible? What were the hardest moments of trusting?

What advice would you give yourself when he calls you to do something 'impossible' for him?

In the previous study, we looked at having our minds and responses transformed by grace. Having a go at something that Jesus does can cost everything. Peter realised that his life may well be in danger as his faith wavered in verse 30. In Peter Maiden's book, Discipleship Matters, he describes the attitude of the missionaries;

The pioneering missionaries travelling in inland Africa did not expect a long life. They were normally young people in their twenties who knew their ministry would probably last a year or two before they succumbed to disease. Consequently, they would pack all their belongings not into a suitcase, but in a coffin, and then set sail to Africa. These coffins,

standing on end with shelves inserted, made great cupboards apparently - until required for other duties! p 44

How might the passage about being called to walk on the water help you to understand the commitment of the ‘pioneering missionaries’?

The passage is in 3 parts. The dismissal by Jesus and the journey of the disciples alone. The meeting with Jesus and the challenge and response. The landing and the faith of the people that Jesus will heal their sick.

Spend awhile thinking about where you stand in the passage. Are you being sent by Jesus? Are you being challenged in your faith to a deeper level of trust? Are you coming along with the crowd for what Jesus offers? Share your situations and pray together.

Reflection & Refreshment *25 minutes*

Over refreshment, we look at further words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who describes the process of Peter’s faith;

Peter knows he dare not climb out of the ship in his own strength - his very first step would be his undoing. And so he cries, ‘Lord, bid me to come to thee upon the waters,’ and Jesus answers: ‘Come!’ Christ must first call him, for the step can only be taken at his word. This call is his grace, which calls him out of death into the new life of obedience. But when once Christ has called him, Peter has no alternative - he must leave the ship and come to him. In the end, the first step of obedience proves to be an act of faith in the word of Christ. P 72

What are you being called to have a go at?

In your group, pray, talk about and organise something that you can do together which will require you to ask Jesus to give you the grace for a greater faith than you have on your own.

**What have you been avoiding that Jesus is calling you to?
Be brave! Disciples have a go and Jesus holds them up.**

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Shine like Stars in the Universe

Philippians 2:15

60 Years of Worship in the Heart of Sprowston

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catherine.hutton@methodist.org.uk



Celebrating the Diamond Anniversary Year of
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