

Discipleship

A challenge to pursue intentional friendship





What exactly is discipleship? People have many different ideas of what it should look like. There are “tried and true” programs to buy, there are classes to take and studies to do, but so often people do not really understand what discipleship is or how to do it.

There is no magic program for discipleship. That is the bad news, but it is also good news. The good news is that discipleship is simple; you are probably already doing it. It requires commitment, but how it looks will be different for everyone.

This year I am challenging you to strip it back. Forget everything you think you know about discipleship and join in for something real and simple. This booklet will have ideas, encouragement, and challenges that may help you along the way.

What is discipleship?

Discipleship is really just intentional friendship. It doesn't require special curriculum, books to study, or authorized groups. It happens best naturally.

Discipleship happens when you are intentional about building a relationship, making time for someone, and listening to them.

It requires giving another person a lot of your time and energy. It requires being open and vulnerable about your own struggles as you walk through life together. This is why it is not something you can do with a lot of people. To do it well, you should focus your energy on just two or three.

Let's look at Jesus' example:

Jesus had a lot of followers, but only twelve disciples. Of those twelve, he had an inner circle. He spent time with them, prayed with them, ate with them, fished with them, and spent countless hours walking with them. (All the travel Jesus did was on foot so those men spent a lot of time walking together.)

Jesus lived with Peter when they were in Capernaum. (Matthew 8:14-17, Mark 1:29-31, Luke 4:38-44) You cannot possibly put on a show all the time when you are living with people; they see you at your worst and at your best. The disciples got to see how Jesus behaved when he was tired and hungry, not only when he was teaching and healing people. Likewise, Jesus saw them at their best and at their worst.

Jesus involved his disciples in his ministry. They worked together and they served people together. Let's look at the example of feeding the 5000 in Matthew 14:13-21 and the 4000 in Matthew 15:29-39. In both of these instances, the crowds did not necessarily know how God had miraculously provided for them, but the twelve disciples did. They were involved in Jesus' prayer, in his faith, and in the miracle. They helped pass out food. They got to be a part of what He did.

So, how is this different from friendship?

This is where we often make it more complicated than it needs to be. After all, who has more influence over us than our friends? Who do we impact more than those closest to us?

I am not talking about the casual friendships that stay surface level. It is the deeper friendships, where we can let down our guard and practice active listening. The friendships where you know how to pray for someone or show up for them because you know their struggles and victories. These relationships are some of the most formative and shaping.

This simply requires intentionality and prayer to be a priority in the relationship.

Start with prayer:

Ask God to help you recognize the people who you already have this kind of relationship with.

Ask Him to show you people who He would have you develop this kind of relationship with.



Ask God to show you how to show His love in that relationship.

Then pray for the person and follow God's leading. (This isn't a one time thing.)

Discipleship often requires stepping out of your comfort zone. It is not easy to make time for other people consistently and to be intentional with that time. It is not easy to pray for that person every day. It takes time, energy, thought, and sometimes money to build a meaningful relationship. Teaching by example is a lot of work.

Often times, God puts unlikely people on our hearts. They aren't always easy people to get to know, or they might need a lot of your energy. Relationships are hard and discipleship relationships often require even more energy.

"Results" are never a guarantee, but people are always worth the time, energy, and cost. Every person reflects God in some way, we are all image bearers.

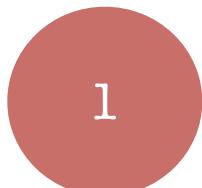
Every relationship is an opportunity to serve Jesus.

"Later Jesus and his disciples were at home having supper with a collection of disreputable guests. Unlikely as it seems, more than a few of them had become followers."

Mark 2:15
(MSG)



Five Steps



Look for ways to serve or bless.
(Eyes wide open)



Pray!
(Add this to your daily routine)



Practice active listening.
(Eye contact, follow-up questions)



Be open. Be real. Be vulnerable.
(This one is a hard one but you can do it!)



Keep showing up.
(Repeat)

Practical Tips

Find a walking partner. Exercise is important for all of us and walking is something we can do all year around. Set up a regular time and walk with someone every week. How far you go doesn't matter. You do not have to have deep conversations right away, relationships take time. Do not force it, just show up, listen, and be yourself.

Help someone with a project. Working together is a non-threatening way to be together.

This is a way to serve one another and to build relationships.

Invite people over and go to their homes as well. Eat together, cook together. Cooking with people and eating with them is a great way to build relationships. Inviting a family into your home, or inviting someone to join in with your family is a great way to let them see who you really are and to get to know them.

Think about the people you interact with regularly. The parents you sit near at the sports field; the people in your exercise class; the person you work closely with every day; or the family who lives next door. These relationships are already there.

With a little extra effort you can make a major difference.

Be intentional about taking time, serving, opening up, and listening. You have no idea what this could lead to.



Practical Examples from our Congregation

A member of our congregation has a small group where families regularly eat together, spend time together as families, and meet practical needs for one another. This includes childcare needs, financial needs, and more. This support is ongoing and not a one time thing.

A member of our congregation loves to cook and bake. They often bring meals or treats to people in need (or people who aren't in need) to help them feel loved and seen.

A member of our congregation sees financial needs and quietly meets them. This has opened up many relationships that would have never been possible otherwise.

A member of our congregation is a prayer warrior. They do not forget the struggles of others in the midst of their own busy life and often follow up with the people they are praying for.

A member of our congregation has built intentional relationships with their coworkers, not just leaving it at a casual friendship. They pray for their coworkers, do things to make them feel special, and engage in good conversation whenever possible. They have become known as a wise person to come to with struggles.

There are too many examples to share. These examples are meant to show you that this will look different for everyone, but the desire to be the hands and feet of Jesus is the same in each situation.

What about teaching and preaching?

Jesus taught his disciples (John 11:1) and preached to large crowds. These things are important and good. But these were not Jesus' primary tools for discipling.

He spent three years with these people and we only have a small portion of what happened during that time in the Gospels. At best we only have a small glimpse of the every day moments. We don't hear much about them eating together, laughing together, serving one another, and sitting around the fire, though this would likely have made up the majority of their time together.

When the twelve heard Him teach, they knew His life backed up His words.



So he got up from the supper table, set aside his robe, and put on an apron. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples, drying them with his apron.

John 13:4-5 MSG

What about Bible Studies?

If what we see in Scripture is discipleship through relationship, what about things like Bible studies, book studies, and classes?

These can be a wonderful thing and are certainly not a waste of time. Learning about Jesus and His Word is always valuable. Some wonderful relationships come out of Bible Study groups. These groups can be a great place to ask deeper questions, learn more, and be vulnerable with others.

The challenge comes when study does not bring growth. This should be unusual but it is not. We tend to fall back into old habit, and study after study can often be done with no real life change.

Studies often last six to ten weeks and then disband. Discipleship through relationship is different. Relationships are usually long term and the time spent together is usually informal. Faith and Christian life is modelled through action instead of through words only.

Study groups are a wonderful and valuable thing but they should come secondary.



Questions to ask

Are my words backed up by my life? When the people closest to me hear me speak about living like Jesus do they roll their eyes because they know that I am still just as selfish and proud as I was before I met Jesus?

Do the people who are close to me know that I am imperfect and that I mess up, but that I am slowly becoming more like Jesus?

Do the people around me know that they can be honest about their struggles, doubts, and fears because I am open about mine?

Do the people around me know that I will love them unconditionally? Relationships that are built on trust, friendship, and honesty allow discipleship to happen seamlessly.

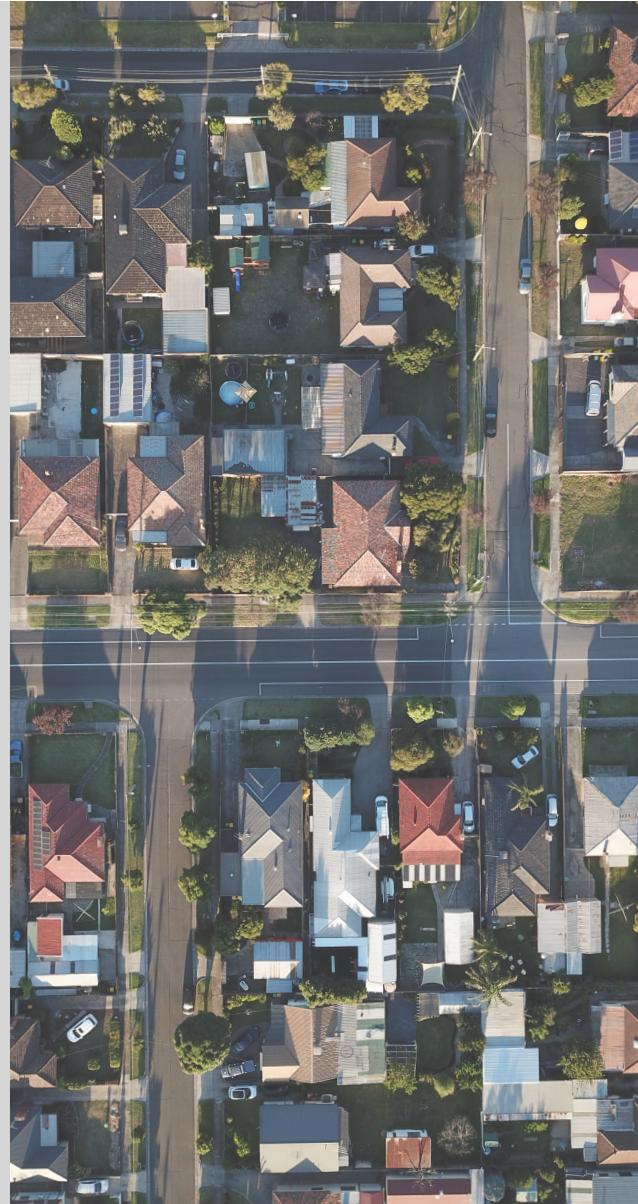
Am I making the most of every opportunity God gives me to be his hands and feet to those around me?



We're going public with this,
as public as a city on a hill. If
I make you light-bearers, you
don't think I'm going to hide
you under a bucket, do you?

I'm putting you on a light
stand. Now that I've put you
there on a hilltop, on a light
stand—shine! Keep open
house; be generous with your
lives. By opening up to
others, you'll prompt people
to open up with God, this
generous Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:14-16
(MSG)



Put it into action

Think about the people you interact with each week. People who know Jesus and people who do not. Write down a few people who come to mind. (work, recreation, family, neighbours, other)

Of those you listed above, are there any that you already have a relationship with that you can pursue a deeper relationship with? Do they have needs you can meet? (Make realistic plans. Start with one or two people, preferably at least one who does not already know Jesus and follow Him.)

Make prayer the first thing and a regular thing you do. It is easy to rely on your own strength and wisdom, but that is not what we are called to do! We have the Holy Spirit who offers the wisdom, insight, and strength that we need to be effective. Go forward on this discipleship mission in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Remember that I am here for you! I would love to hear about your experience, give you more information, talk through ideas with you, or whatever you need.

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