



DISCIPLESHIP

Learning along the way

By Alison Lublink & Anton Lim



Part 1: What is Discipleship?

Read: Matthew 28:18-20, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Ponder:

When we read the New Testament of the Bible, we see a lot of stories that revolve around Jesus and his disciples. But what *are* disciples? What did it mean for these people to be disciples of Jesus?

The general premise of being a disciple of Jesus while he walked the earth, seemed to be to learn what Jesus did by watching him; do the same thing with Jesus present and giving guidance; and then continue to share Jesus' ways after he ascended into heaven. It's a pretty basic model of teaching; but it was effective enough to allow Christianity to spread all throughout the region in a short amount of time after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension.

Think of when someone teaches a child how to ride a bike. They start off as being the biker. The person who doesn't know how to bike perhaps sees them doing it (maybe they're a child riding on the back of the bike) and watches how it's done. Then, they put that child on their own bike with training wheels. They hold on and guide them as they figure out how to balance and keep pedaling. And then eventually, they remove the training wheels, let go and watch as the child bikes off down the road on their own.

Teaching/learning to ride a bike is a very similar process to discipleship. As Christians, we are all somewhere in the discipleship process. We can learn from one another how to apply Jesus' teachings to our lives today to walk closely with him and eventually go on to start that discipleship process with someone else. It's a wonderful example to us for how to mentor and disciple people in any subject - whether that's how to be a follower of Jesus, how to ride a bike, or how to be a good surgeon.

Dr. Situma, the coordinator of BethanyKids Uganda, and pediatric surgeon, started working in Mbarara a few years ago as the only surgeon at the hospital. Dr. Felix later joined the unit as a pediatric surgeon fellow. For the last 3 years they have been working together closely. Dr. Felix considers Dr. Situma to be his friend and mentor. They have performed surgeries and conducted surgical camps together on several occasions. They also usually discuss complex cases as colleagues. It is through this mentorship relationship

that Dr. Situma is able to help guide Dr. Felix to one day do pediatric surgeries on his own.

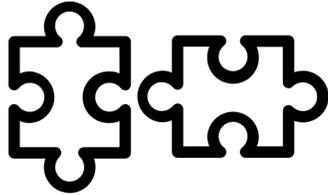
We learn what to do by watching; do that alongside our teacher; and then go out into the world and try it on our own before starting the process with someone else. What does this look like in different areas of our lives, including our faith?

Discuss:

1. Have you ever been in an "official" discipleship relationship with someone? If so, what role did you play in that relationship (e.g. discipler, disciple)? What was that experience like for you? If you haven't been in a discipleship relationship, is there someone you have watched and/or listened to for advice in your faith journey?
2. Do you think discipleship is necessary or needed? Why or why not?
3. When you think about your career, friendships, faith, family - what types of discipleship have occurred officially or organically in those areas?
4. When you read the scripture passages for today's devotional, what stands out to you about discipleship?

Pray: God, help me to consider and be open to areas in which I need to be challenged to grow. Help me to see how I can be better disciplined and/or disciple. Let me not lose sight of the importance of learning from others, and more importantly from you, in my faith journey.

Do: How can you serve your community better? You don't have to rush out and find someone to disciple or be disciplined by. But rather, consider how you can encourage others to grow in their faith; job; interests; and consequently how you can start to be encouraged in yours.



Part 2: God's Purpose for Discipleship

Read: John 13:34-35, John 15:1-17

Ponder: Discipleship - an intentional process with an end goal in mind, that will take an extended period of time to reach.

Discipleship was always part of God's original plan to create a people who would be a reflection of His image.

It is through discipleship that God would continue his redeeming work of building His Kingdom, with Christ as King. Discipleship is the ongoing journey of a life in response, and thus reflection of the great King who humbled himself, even to the point of death.

No doubt Jesus' disciples were indeed his disciples for the three years of his earthly, physical ministry as they followed him, learned from him and ministered with him. But their discipleship journey didn't end at the

conclusion of Jesus' death. One might even say the turning point took place the day he died and the days after his resurrection.

Perhaps it was only after he showed them that "greater love" is when he "lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). God's great redemptive act was to show his great love for his lost and separated creation - his own son sacrificed in order to make it possible for a restored relationship between mankind and their creator. True great love demands great sacrifice. Jesus' disciples were both witnesses and recipients of that act of love. The rest of their lives as disciples of Jesus included both the verbal testimony of such great love, but also the lived out acts of sacrifice and suffering, from which others would benefit.

Discipleship is the journey to continue to be a witness to Christ's ultimate act of love, and to live a life in response to that - one of sacrifice to help those in need.

At BethanyKids, discipleship takes place regularly, and is perhaps most obvious between the medical staff and children they serve. But we have also seen Christian discipleship taking place in the everyday life of staff. Before COVID-19, BK staff would make the extra effort to support each other during times of need such as the death of a family member. Staff are often seen going out of their way to assist patients in tasks outside of the medical care such as registration, clearing of bills, and

assisting with language barriers between a parent and a cashier.

Though you may not be working in the medical field, there are always ways we can serve others or go the extra mile. As we engage in God's purposes of discipleship, look and listen for the opportunities today, tomorrow and this week to serve others.

Discuss:

1. Considering your specific season and circumstances in life, what are ways in which you can serve those in need by going the extra mile?
2. What can be some of the obstacles in the way of you serving those in need? Why can it be difficult to serve those in need?
3. What is a recent example of someone who made the extra effort to serve you, or meet a need.
4. Who is someone you deeply respect, or inspires you? What is an area of their daily life that motivates you to do the same thing(s)?

Pray: *Note: this prayer is risky, so read it first before you pray it!*

God, I want to love like you did. Lead me into and through a season in which I am to love, not conveniently, but sacrificially. Intersect my life with someone that you want me to love and to serve.

Do: If there was a person that came to mind in question 3 above, take a moment to thank them. Grab a piece of paper or something that you'll see regularly. On it write:

	Today	Tomorrow	This Week	This Month
Look				
Listen				
Serve				

As you pray the prayer above and go about the next month, keep a record here of the names of those people whose lives you have served.



Part 3: Jesus, The Ultimate Mentor

Read: Luke 9:57-62, Luke 14:27

Ponder: The 12 disciples chosen by Jesus weren't the only ones following him as he went from city to city. Together with his authoritative teaching and acts of mercy and compassion, crowds gathered, and most certainly many followed him physically. Jesus was a polarizing figure in the day, attracting many who celebrated what he was teaching and doing, but also those who were opposed to his gaining popularity. It was hard to be on the fence about Jesus - you either wanted to follow because you wanted to be like him, or you followed because you disliked him and wanted to witness his demise.

Luke's account (Luke 9:57-62) of three men expressing their desire to follow Jesus is worth pondering when it comes to discipleship. While Luke captures three exchanges between these would-be followers and Jesus, it is likely these instances were plenty. Jesus has something to say about what it would mean to follow him, to have him as an ultimate mentor.

To the first man, Jesus explains that "wherever he goes" has no guarantee of a comfortable life. He peels back the external image of what might have appeared to be this amazing ministry to reveal that it is not that glamorous, that there are no guarantees about how your living conditions will look. Having Jesus as the ultimate mentor doesn't promise comfort.

The second man might have been caught off guard by Jesus' invitation to follow him. The second man couldn't follow because he had some major commitments - he wanted to get his family's affairs in order. It's possible that the father wasn't even dead yet, so what the man could have been saying is that he couldn't follow until that happened, and any inheritance affairs were settled. Then following Jesus would be a possibility. Jesus challenges the man to think carefully about to whom he is committed.

The third man, perhaps hearing of the earlier exchange, isn't too concerned about the future of family affairs. He just wants to minimize any possible confusion or complications by going back to explain to the family his decision to follow Jesus. Following Jesus

does bring about a certain degree of inconvenience. Jesus was counter-cultural in what he taught and how he lived in relation to others. Following Jesus can be complicated and inconvenient when having to explain it to those in your familial culture, and those in the broader culture.

And lastly, we see in Luke 14:27 that to follow Jesus is to carry one's cross. To identify with Jesus isn't a matter of wearing a cross, or some external label, but a matter of how one might live. To endure suffering or to serve those who are suffering.

Without a doubt, the staff who work with *Bethany Kids* understand that to follow Jesus is to currently be working in their respective roles and locations. There is little comfort in some of their work environments, or even personal living arrangements. There is a great emotional toll that comes from providing care for ill children and helping parents and family adjust to all the changes needed in their lives. Carrying their cross is indeed a daily experience, but one they do out of their understanding that Christ first carried a cross, enduring suffering, inconvenience, relational complications, and comforts.

If Jesus is the ultimate mentor, what does it mean for you and me to carry our cross daily?

Discuss:

1. When it comes to following Jesus, which exchange with Jesus and one of those men, most resonates with you? Why?
2. Jesus spoke some challenging truths to the three men, getting them to pause and reflect on the costs of following him. Though we have the life accounts of Jesus, which God can speak to us through, who is someone in your life that is asking you the tough questions, or presenting the realities of what it is to follow Jesus?
3. Take a few moments to ask yourself right now, in the midst of your circumstances - why follow Jesus?
4. Ask the same question of someone you respect (perhaps a mentor figure).

Pray: God, there's no point hiding the fact that following Jesus is not a walk in the park. Yet considering the sheer magnitude of who Jesus is and what he accomplished at the cross, I long to follow. Admittedly, it is not easy, for I like my comforts, my conveniences, and the complex-free aspect of life. But I want to follow you, Jesus, and I want to carry my cross. In this moment, in this season of life this is what I'm struggling with _____. Help me to follow you through this and despite this. Give me the strength to make the sacrifices I need to make because I know you made the sacrifices you made to rescue me.

Do: Keep leaning into this topic of discipleship. Keep asking the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of your life to

open up to his transformative power. While in this space of reflection, bring others in. Ask others why they follow Jesus. If you can find someone who is older, or in a further stage of life, ask them to share about a difficult season or event in life and what it looked like to be following Jesus.

Do also take the time to acknowledge the struggle, or the sacrifices you've made - not for the purpose of boasting, but to see that out of it, following and being with Jesus is the ultimate joy.



Part 4: Other Mentors in the Bible

Read: Joshua 1:1-9, 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Ponder: A common assumption about being a mentor, or seeking out a mentor is that the mentor has to have it together. It's easy to exclude yourself from mentoring some on the notion that you may not have a lot to give, or not be as successful and accomplished as another possible mentor. The same can be said of how one goes about looking for a mentor.

From today's reading we see two other mentors in the Bible who impacted their mentee. No doubt, Moses and Paul were men who served faithfully and were used powerfully to usher in major events in the history of God's people. Much can be said of their leadership and the decisions they had to make. They were great mentors to Joshua and Timothy respectively.

Just as the twelve disciples were able to intimately observe Jesus' daily life as he fulfilled his father's plan,

so too did Joshua and Timothy experience and learn from their mentors.

What stands out (to me) is both Moses and Paul did not hide from the realities of their past. Moses' murder of a man was likely known throughout the Israelite camp. His prohibition to enter the promised land was a direct consequence to his disobedience of God's direction. Paul's past included his involvement in the persecution of the early church of God's people.

Firstly, despite this, God was still more than able to have these two individuals lead others. Secondly, these instances were not obscured from what was known in any mentoring relationship. These two mentors lived in the light before God and thus before those they mentored. Their "success" was acknowledging rightly that they were weak, but God was strong. Out of their weakness Moses and Paul mentored Joshua and Timothy.

One of the best God-given contexts for a mentoring relationship to form and grow is that between a child and their parent(s). I think of Chemutai and her son Ethan who came to *BethanyKids* in Uganda for help. Chemutai had given her life to Christ the day she found out about her son's congenital abnormalities. With a long journey of seeking surgery and healing, Chemutai has always held onto the word of God, reciting Psalm 23 during the six times Ethan was in surgery. As Ethan will live out his life, despite the physical challenges, he has had a front row seat to witness his mother's trust in

God. Out of her weakness, her hope in God gives her strength to face each day.

Discuss:

1. If you have a mentor, what have you learned from the mentor's life experiences that came out of either a weakness, or an experience of failure, or suffering?
2. As you look at your own life, what might God be doing in your life to show his strength despite your weakness or what seems to be a "tainted" past?
3. Why do we have a tendency to evaluate others (and consequently ourselves) based on our successes, but not our weaknesses and failures?
4. Paul might have admonished his mentees in their deficiencies, but he also sought to keep peace. Are there mentor/mentee relationships that you're a part of (either in a spiritual sense, or even as a parent-child, or a boss-colleague relationship) where you could seek to keep peace? What would that look like?

Pray:

For those mentoring or desiring to mentor:

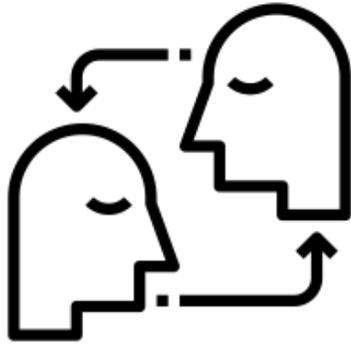
Lord, help me to see your grace and mercy marked all through my life's story. Out of these experiences, help me see that what I can offer to someone in mentoring is to point to your goodness and faithfulness, power and strength.

For those who are being (or desire to be) mentored:

Lord, lead me to a person who will mentor me so that I may know and follow after you. Lead me to a person who lived their life in faith that you showed up and overcame whatever weakness, shame, sin they had in their life. Provide me a mentor who will help me follow Jesus.

Do:

1. Start a discussion with a few friends about mentoring (to mentor or be mentored). Be intentional about making it known that you want to take action.
2. Find a biography of a Christian that you know about (or ask for recommendation). Explore and understand that the lives of many leaders came out of some form of difficulty in life (be it their own sin and weakness, or a circumstance beyond their control).



Part 5: The Discipleship Process

Read: Acts 2:42, Ephesians 4:11-17

Ponder: What does this discipleship process really look like? Well, Acts 2:42 puts it very simply when it describes the nature of the beginning of Christianity: new followers of Jesus devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, and to eating and praying together.

When we break it down further, it is important to know that we are spending time learning from other Christians. This helps us to become mature in Christ. Modelling these biblical principles for one another provides us with examples of how to show Christianity in action. This is applicable whether we've been a Christian for 20 days or 20 years. We always have something we can learn from one another.

Coming to *BethanyKids* in Kenya as an intern really taught Bourny a lot as he observed how the staff members related to one another. Throughout his stay as an intern, the different staff members motivated him to grow in each and every aspect of his life. However, the lesson that stood out for Bourny was how they nurtured each other in different ways and involved God in everything.

Walking alongside people means supporting one another and growing together; not growing independently, but together. This communal way of living and learning produces an important Godly love for one another.

In Ephesians 4:11-17 we see an example of what it looks like to grow as a faith community. Among other things, it involves speaking the truth in love to one another, and growing together as one church, one body, building itself up in love.

In November of 2020, Lydia from *BethanyKids* Kenya lost her mother. She has wonderful colleagues who kept on calling her over the phone, not realizing just how relieved she was once she received a call from them.

After the passing of her late mother, Lydia reported back to work. Every time she would share the story of her loss with her colleagues, she felt relieved. Once she was able to talk it out more and more, she felt better. It was because of this community, and this

mutual mentorship that she was able to feel loved and find comfort.

Mentorship and discipleship isn't all about top-down teaching where one person tells you everything you need to know. Rather it is about living, learning and loving together. As one person experiences a struggle, the other can help. As one experiences joy, the other can share in that happiness. The discipleship process is about working together and openly sharing.

Discuss:

1. Would you say that your faith is siloed or rooted in community? Why would you define it in that way?
2. What are some ways that you can add more community (like in Acts 2) to your faith journey? (e.g. Attending church [online or in person], joining a Bible study, enlisting a friend to chat about faith topics or pray together, doing a book study with someone, etc.)
3. Are there people that you observe and take note of as they go about their faith journey? What are some key lessons that you've learned from them?
4. As you read Ephesians 4:11-17, what about discipleship stands out to you the most? Why do you think this is? What does it spur you to do?

Pray: God of the sun, the moon and the earth and all the vastness of the universe - you love us so much that you sent your son to this earth to walk among humans

and to show what it looks like to be God in the flesh. We are so thankful for his example to us and we pray that you'd help each of us to find ways to model and see modelled, his love, wisdom and compassion. Let us use these examples to mentor and help one another.

Do: Take action this week to expand your horizons with discipleship. Find a way to connect with someone (or a group) else to strengthen your faith. This might be one of the examples in the discussion question, or perhaps something else comes to mind. You can choose what seems comfortable to you right now. Discipleship doesn't have to mean diving into the deep end of discomfort, but rather a willingness to learn from one another.



Part 6: How to Discern God's Voice

Read: John 8:31-32, 2 Peter 1:3-8

Ponder: So often in Christian circles you'll hear phrases like "Just listen for God's voice" or "Just trust in what God has to say to you." But often it can feel like we don't even know where to start to "hear" God's voice. Is it going to be some big booming sound that trumpets from the sky? Will it be whispered in my ear when I least expect it? Does it only happen when I'm praying? Or can God speak to me while I do the dishes? Honestly, it seems a little mystical and downright confusing.

I have never once heard God audibly speak to me the way it seemed to happen in the Old Testament. Maybe there's something wrong with me, or maybe I'm doing it all wrong. But whenever I've "heard" God "speak" to

me, it's been through a feeling, a sense or through someone else's mouth.

Recently, one of our colleagues in Kenya started to have some challenges on her knee and hip that brought pain and instability to her joint, making it difficult to move. Out of compassion, Jane, another BK employee was compelled to start therapy immediately and prescribe a home program, as it's her area of specialty. As they continued with therapy, Jane would seek God's intervention on what to administer to this woman or exercises to give at that specific time.

Mentors show their mentees that God is our ultimate, most significant source of wise counsel. Jane did this even during therapy by showing her colleague that she was consulting with God on what exercises to do. For Jane, perhaps she felt peace when deciding on a course of therapy and knew that this was God's "voice."

Sometimes when we are looking for answers from God we flip open the bible and treat it like a fortune cookie, expecting it to just share some handy quip. But the best way to discern God's voice is to be studying the scriptures daily, and noting themes, patterns and things that stand out to us. What keeps coming to mind day after day as we read through a book in the bible? Rather than hunting and pecking for advice, let's dig deeper and pay attention.

Let us be an example to others of how to be in tune with God and to be aware of when he is "speaking" to

us. How this happens will look different for each person, but let's be open about when we hear God and when we struggle to hear him.

Discuss:

1. How do you usually discern what God wants you to do? How do you know this is right?
2. Can you think of a time when you desperately wanted to hear God speak to you but it seems like he didn't? How did that make you feel? Why do you think that happened? Do you think there's a way that he "spoke" to you that you missed?
3. Have you ever just "randomly" thought of someone and wondered how they're doing? What did you do when that happened? That could've been a prompting from the Holy Spirit for you to pray for that person or reach out to them. Would you consider doing that next time if you didn't do it before?
4. How can you be an example to others for what it means to listen for God's voice?

Pray: O Holy God, who is in all, sees all, hears all. You know when we need to hear from you and you know that it can be hard for us to "tune into" what you are saying to us. Help us to find ways of paying attention to when you speak to us through the counsel of a friend; the rustling of the trees; the patterns in your scriptures.

Do: Choose a book of the bible and start reading it. Maybe a few verses or a few chapters each day; start with what seems manageable to you. Highlight or

journal important things that stand out to you: specific words, phrases, ideas, thoughts that come to mind. After a week of keeping track of what you're noticing, see if there's a theme or a pattern. Ponder and pray about how this can speak into your life. You might just find that God is "speaking" to you. Share your findings with one other person.

BethanyKids

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