

WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP: JOINING IN WITH THE SPIRIT



Session 3: Making disciples

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Why is discipling others and sharing faith challenging?



The Revd Jemima Prasadam is a priest who likes to talk, but her style is less to preach from the pulpit than to build a community by chatting to anyone of any faith she meets on the streets.

After 20 years honing her skills in Lozells parish, she retired to London, where she makes a point of speaking to anybody, whether she is waiting in a bus queue, at a coffee shop, or buying a pint of milk. It might start with a comment on the weather, or a smile for a toddler, but often the talk turns to matters of faith and there is always a word of support or encouragement – and, occasionally, an invitation to church.

"I don't know if I have talent for striking up conversations; I am just being myself," she said. "Jesus talked to people, even about the most mundane of human things. The Church seems to have lost that; I don't know why....I don't go out looking to talk to people, but I am ready to do it," she said. "I don't pass anybody without saying 'Hello', and when I leave, I always say 'God bless you'. There is no set pattern: it is spontaneous.

"People are perhaps reading a newspaper. I ask is there anything good, and they usually come out with something. Some people are very British and reserved, but most people are prepared to talk. They often say they are not religious, but I say we are all spiritual beings and they agree; so I simply tell them that weak and simple people like me call that God.

Some people come across as angry; they have been let down by their faith or are too busy at work. But many accept my invitation to come to Trinity Church. Last week, seven people came at the same time. They included two Hindus, one Japanese woman, an Irishman, and a Scottish woman. Many of them come again. I am not proselytising or recruiting: I just invite them to come along." (From a Church Times article)

Three times in the New Testament Jesus tells us to, "Go and make disciples." Bishop Steven Croft says, "If ever a single verse could be said to have shaped the history of the world, it is this one."

As we have seen, God grows the church, we join in with His mission, but the existence of the church, and the calling given to every Christian, is to fulfil Jesus' "Great Commission".

We are all different personalities, with different gifts, but the more we can grow in confidence in not only being disciples, but making disciples, the more we can experience the kind of fruitful existence Jesus hoped for in our lives: "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:8)





As we have seen, to join in with God's mission is the end point of an apprentice. If we are being with God, and becoming like Christ, we will naturally reach out as Christ did. Elaine Heath writes that, "To be people whose meaning is love is to become broken bread and poured out wine....a complete belonging to God, of full commitment to the reign of God in this world..."

In this course we have seen that the first two marks of mission (which lead on to the other three) are to "proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom and to teach, baptise and nurture new believers". We have also seen how a spiritually healthy life has an "out" dimension, as well as an "up" and "in".

If worship is our highest calling, then mission is our most urgent assignment. But while most might agree that the first two marks of mission make natural sense for disciples, many disciples have varying degrees of confidence when it comes to faith sharing.

Sherry Weddell tells a story of a pregnant teenager Sarah who showed up at a local parish church. But Sherry comments, "What troubles me is: an unchurched teen shows up, in a small parish in a small town, week after week, clearly interested in the Mass, with a young man who has been active in the parish since he could walk, and no one wants to tell her the good news."

Sarah said, "It would have taken next to nothing. No one said, here, read this, tell me what you think. No one asked me to come to any kind of lecture or meeting. No one prayed with us or said they were praying for us. It's not that I think I'm so special, it's just that....What were they doing? Why didn't they think this was important today?"

Sherry challenges us by saying. "...the parable of the lost sheep is reversed today: ninety-nine sheep have gone off and one remains in the sheepfold. The danger for us is to spend all our time nourishing this one remaining sheep and not have time to seek out those who are lost." Jesus told His disciples, "... there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." (Luke 15:7) He told them to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world". (Matthew 5: 13-16)

The apostles in Acts were accused of "...filling Jerusalem with their teaching." (Acts 5:28) Acts tells the story of the early church growing in diversity, geographically, and in number.





Many things might have contributed to a lack of confident witness –

we have lived over the last few decades with a background and mindset of church decline and feel powerless;
society has become more diverse and we feel unsure about how to “proclaim” anything, whether faith-based or not;
we might be fearful of being manipulative when individual choice counts for so much;
we might think faith should be a private matters;
we might simply be afraid of causing offence or being rejected;
we are not sure how much “freedom of expression” we are allowed in certain contexts;
we might be confused about what “evangelism” is – the New Testament gives little advice on how it’s done or what it is;
we may lack confidence in our own discipleship and therefore not know how to share it with others (we only tend to pass on what we have first experienced).

The aim of this session is to equip us to be freed from these fears so we have confidence in being able to take whatever opportunities God gives us to disciple other people, believing this is the most precious gift anyone can offer. We will look both at how to share faith naturally with those who might not yet identify as Christians, and how to help others grow as disciples.

Our possible lack of confidence may be less a question of whether we may do it but how we get to do it. This session aims to offer some motives, ideas and ways forward.

A few years ago, the World Council of Churches wrote a document called Mission and Evangelism. In it they wrote,

“

God leaves us free to choose how to share our faith. But our options are never neutral – every methodology either illustrates or betrays the gospel we announce.”

In other words, we all carry a message about what we believe through our actions and words. If we choose not to share faith, we are still saying something. The only question is: what good news do we want to carry in our lives and how might we share it?



How is discipling others joining in with the Spirit?



Just as the Holy Spirit is at work in God's world and invites us to join in with His mission, so in every step on our journey of discipleship the Spirit is at work in us.

Every significant part of our faith development is the work of the Spirit. This has to be the case because our wills – the place of our desires and choices – do not work completely as they should. We have competing desires and sinful reactions. No part of us can develop without God's help. So...

It is the Spirit who shows us our need for God's grace and gives us an accurate picture of God and ourselves:

"...he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment." (John 16:8) It is the Spirit who helps us see the truth about who Christ is: "when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth....He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you." (John 16: 13-14)

It is the Spirit who enables us to put our trust in Christ:

Paul wrote: "No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:3) Oliver O'Donovan writes that "active belief in Christ needs to be evoked in us by God himself."

It is the Spirit who assures us that we are God's children:

While in a general sense every human being is God's child, the Bible usually keeps that term for those who have "been adopted" by God through Christ. The Holy Spirit makes this possible and enables us to experience it: "...the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship...The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." (Romans 8: 15-16)



It is the Spirit who grows the character of Christ in us (the fruit of the Spirit):

"And we all...are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

The outcome of any faith-sharing and discipleship depends not on what we do, but on what God's Spirit is doing. It is not our job to convict anyone of their sin, for example. This means that we have the freedom of knowing that, while we have a part to play in discipling others, God does all the heavy-lifting. From the start we can be freed from the burden of thinking it is about our effort.

And because God is at work in everyone, long before we meet them, rather than needing to ask, "How do I do this?" a better question might be, "Where is God already at work in this person, and how might I notice or encourage it?"

Humanly-speaking, what kind of relationships help people come to faith?



A recent research survey of 383 people who have come to faith as adults showed that for most people the process of coming to faith is a gradual one. In this, it highlighted that the church community and individual relationships with others were the most significant factors in helping them to do so.

Over 80% of them had had contact with a church during childhood, and 90% said that the church was very significant.

92% had a relationship with a Christian which led to their own journey. 87% of them knew someone was praying for them and the same number had responded to some kind of invitation to join in with the church in some way.

More people said that an individual explaining the Gospel was significant, than those who said that a public speaker explaining the Gospel was significant. Only two people said the internet had been helpful.

This emphasis on the significance of relationships and community as the environment for faith-sharing and disciple-making is seen in the ministry of Jesus and the early church.

Jesus almost always worked in groups.

While some evangelists have the gift of reaching out as individuals, for most disciples the call to make disciples is always done through relationships, and with others in community.

Jesus called His disciples to be "salt" in the world – seasoning society with God's kingdom, and "light" – being a visible sign of God's kingdom. But in Matthew 5 He calls them to be this together.



Similarly, Jesus always sent His disciples out at least in pairs to join in with His mission. And He rarely nurtured His disciples individually – most of His interactions with them were in groups.

It was and is the life of the community that speaks loudest.

The French Christian philosopher Pascal said there was little point in trying to persuade anyone of the truth of religious belief. Instead, the best way is to make people wish it were true because they can see the rich reality of life in the kingdom lived out by those in the church. Once people's hearts notice something they find attractive, often their minds will catch up.

Our love for one another is the demonstration of God's love which provokes curiosity. Acts 2: 42-47 describes the life of early Christians in community, being together in worship, discipleship and service.

As a result, they enjoyed “the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (verse 47) At its best, faith-sharing isn’t an activity we do, but flows out of who we are as a Christian family.

As Dallas Willard writes, “There is a special evangelistic work to be done, of course, and there are special callings to it. But if those churches really are enjoying fullness of life, evangelism will be unstoppable and largely automatic.”

Elaine Heath adds that, “...the expression of loving community is the greatest apologetic for the gospel.”

They showed commitment to those around them.

In the next session we look more at how as a gathered church we can go to others and be a blessing. While it’s true that sharing faith often starts with taking the initiative to meet people where they are at, this sometimes can be balanced with the decision to stay with the people God has placed us with.

It is striking how much of Jesus’ ministry took place in a small area. Of His 32 miracles, 28 were in Galilee – an area far from the religious centre of Israel and seen as a backwater. Most of his time was spent among the Jewish villages of the North West, around Capernaum where he had his base. Most of the places Jesus visited would have been within a two-day walk of Capernaum.

Jesus gave the Great Commission in Galilee and not in Jerusalem. Often, He would encourage people to stay, rather than go. After healing a demon-possessed man, Jesus tells him to, “Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.” (Luke 8: 38-39)

They were radical in including people.

Just as Jesus scandalised the religious leaders because of the company He kept (“Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” Mark 2:16) so the early church demonstrated God’s agape love by turning the social expectations of the time upside-down.

In a community in which in Christ there was no difference in status between “neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28) the sight of seeing slaves and their owners in an equal relationship must have been extraordinary.



Whereas Jewish men at the time might pray, “I thank you God that I am not a woman, not a Gentile, not a slave” we are told that in Philippi the earliest converts and founder members of the church are a woman (Lydia – who opened up her house for the church), a Gentile (the jailer, whose whole house is baptised) and a slave (healed of a spirit through Paul). (Acts 16: 11-40).

A notice from outside a church in Wales captures the flavour of this attitude of openness, “We extend a special welcome to those who are single, married, divorced, gay, filthy rich, dirt poor. We extend a special welcome to those who are crying new-borns, skinny as a rake or could afford to lose a few pounds. We welcome you if you can sing like Pavarotti or are like our vicar (who can’t carry a note in a bucket). You’re welcome here if you are just browsing, just woke up or just got out of prison.

“We don’t care if you’re more Christian than the Archbishop of Canterbury, or haven’t been in church since little Jack’s christening. We extend a special welcome to those who are over 60 but not grown up yet, and to teenagers who are growing up too fast. We welcome keep-fit mums, football dads, starving artists, tree-huggers, latte-sippers, vegetarians, junk food eaters.

“We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted. We welcome you if you’re having problems, down in the dumps or if you don’t like organised religion. We’ve been there too. If you blew all your money on the horses you’re welcome here. We offer a welcome to those who think the earth is flat, work too hard, don’t work, can’t spell, or because grandma is in town and wanted to go to church.

“We welcome those who are linked, pierced or both. We offer a special welcome to those who could use a prayer right now, had religion shoved down your throat as a kid or got lost in the one way system and wound up here by mistake. We welcome tourists, seekers and doubters, bleeding hearts.....and you!”

How do we practise hospitality?



As we have seen, the main way we give God's Spirit the room to work in us and through us is by developing practices or habits in our lives.

"Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality." (Romans 12:13)

The practice of hospitality, whether we offer it as individuals to other people, or together as a church, provides the best space in which faith sharing and disciple-making can happen.

In addition, as a way of joining in with God's mission, the practice of hospitality offers a gift to our society where many are struggling with loneliness and mental health challenges. If we want to stay committed to people, offering relationship and a welcome which includes them, the more we can practise hospitality the more these values can be demonstrated: "Dear friend, when you extend hospitality to Christian brothers and sisters, even when they are strangers, you make the faith visible." 3 John 5 (The Message)

Much of Jesus' disciple-making took place over food. Famously He says three things about why or how the Son of Man came: "...not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many," (Mark 10:45) "to seek and save the lost," (Luke 19:10) and finally He did this by "eating and drinking." (Luke 7:34)

Whether this is a simple drink, or a meal, the practice of hospitality creates a space for disciple-making and faith-sharing because we are sharing who we are as much as what we say. It is an equal, sharing environment. It is hard to imagine any meaningful relationship developing without hospitality.

We have seen how relationships and experiencing the life of the church is so important when it comes to faith sharing. But perhaps rather than asking, "How could this person come to church?" a good starting-point might be, "How might this person encounter church over a table?" Two other principles are helpful in how we practise hospitality.

Deliberately seeking to offer hospitality to those who can't offer it back.

One of Jesus' parables puts it plainly: "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." (Luke 14: 12-14) Unconditional hospitality shares the faith and disciples others by demonstrating the nature of God's self-giving love.

Receiving hospitality.

The practice of hospitality can be as much about our being willing to receive from others, as offering space to them. Jesus frequently ate at others' homes and was unafraid to ask for help. In doing this, we meet others as equals and demonstrate that we are not the answer to any needs they might have.



What is evangelism?



We read the words “witness” or “evangelist” over 20 times in the book of Acts. Evangelism comes from a word which means good news. It is clear that the passion of the church was to present the good news.

While we might be aware of examples of *bad* evangelism, the idea of telling good news is a wonderful gift in the Bible: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” (Isaiah 52:7)

As this course and this verse hopefully show, the good news is about so much more than 'getting people into heaven'. In fact, it is more about 'getting heaven into people'.

The invitation is to know that God’s kingdom is near, and to respond. Someone translated this definition of evangelism as a call to “re-think how you’re living your life in light of your opportunity to live in God’s Kingdom today and forever by putting your confidence in him.”

The good news is sharing that because “Your God reigns” the world is a safe place to be. The good life is to live in God’s kingdom, to be filled with His love, and to be with Him, become like Him and join in with Him. In simpler terms the good news is Jesus’ invitation to “Follow me.” In essence this will mean presenting Jesus and inviting people to allow Him to be at the centre of their lives.

Archbishop William Temple wrote,

“

To evangelise is so to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit that people come to put their faith in God through him, to accept him as their Saviour and to serve him as their King in the fellowship of his Church.”



A later conference of bishops from around the world said, “To evangelise is to make known by word and deed the love of the crucified and risen Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that people will repent, believe and receive Christ as their Saviour and obediently serve him as their Lord in the fellowship of the Church.”

And Pope Paul 6th wrote that “there is no true evangelisation if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the son of God, are not proclaimed.”

However, because God always meets people very differently according to their need, responding to Christ and embracing God’s kingdom will start with different emphases depending on people’s situations. For some, it may mean being aware of the depth of God’s love and forgiveness, for others it may mean a much more intentional need to turn away from a lifestyle, for others it may mean surrender to Christ as Lord. This is another reason why listening relationships and knowing people are key, rather than a one-size-fits all message.

When helping someone come to faith, particularly in the early stages, we need to ask God to help us understand the right approach. William Temple said the way in which people surrender to God is always different because it is “as much as I understand of myself responding to what I know of God”.

Is every disciple an evangelist?



As Peter and John told the authorities, “As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:20) As we have seen, we all carry 'news' of some sort whether we intend to or not. And as a church community, in a real way, we are the message.

It is equally true that everyone needs the opportunity to hear and understand before they can respond. As Paul wrote, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.’” (Romans 10:13-15).

Jesus explained his own mission of preaching to his disciples as “what he came out to do.” (Mark 1:38) He then spoke of sending them as the Father had sent Him. (John 20:21). Jesus gave the task to all his disciples to be disciple-makers – no one was excluded. (Matthew 28:16-20)

But it is also clear that there are people who have a specific gift of evangelism within the church. It is one of the particular five gifts Paul says Christ gives to His church to carry out His mission. (Ephesians 4: 7-11)

How do you know if you have this gift?

Evangelists are people who naturally speak about the good news with enthusiasm, telling the core story of God, believing God is working today. They love spending time with and gathering people, and particularly with those who don't call themselves Christians, in a naturally infectious way. They have a heart for those who are lost and love deeply.

Evangelists make God's truth accessible and relevant to seekers. They create curiosity and excitement. They translate it into different cultures, making the most of what media are available.



Without evangelists people can fail to notice God's transforming work, lack confidence in sharing their own story, refrain from inviting others to God's family and become dry in faith. They call the church to pay attention to those outside its community, recruiting others to God's mission, often with urgency. They drive for growth and make sure there are opportunities for people to respond to God's kingdom.

If you are a natural story-teller, focussed on those outside the church, and can easily enlist others to join in you may have the ministry of evangelism. You may be a good salesperson or in your work life be involved in some kind of public relations role.

While not everyone is gifted with this ministry, we all get to be witnesses. Jesus described all His disciples as His witnesses taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

A helpful way of understanding the heart of a witness comes from Peter who wrote, “Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect.” (1 Peter 3:16) Paul adds, “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” (Colossians 4: 2-6) There is a confidence and readiness in taking the faith-sharing opportunities that God gives us at the heart of being a witness. The rest of this session aims to offer ways to develop this.

How do I grow in wanting to share faith?



A bookmark offers 'Helpful reasons for and attitudes in mission and faith sharing' which hopefully will give encouragement and motivation to every disciple and meet some of the fears we have outlined.

To focus on the main way in which we might grow to want to share our faith Elaine Heath tells a story which is a good example of people who are unafraid to be witnesses, and most importantly why they are able to be confident in doing so. She describes taking a group of students to visit some Missionaries of Charity (Mother Theresa's order) in Dallas, USA, where they meet Sister Salvinette who tells them,

"We go out two by two and knock on doors in the neighbourhood. We offer to pray with people and to listen to them talk about whatever is going on in their lives sometimes. Sometimes they don't want to talk to us or let us come in. It's always because they think we want something. We tell them no, we are just there to pray for them and get to know them. That is how we basically do our ministry. We find out what they need, what is going on in their lives, and we pray about that with them and try to help them if possible."

"Sometimes my students think it is good to offer neighbourly help as a form of evangelism," I told her, "But they are reluctant to tell those they are helping that they're doing it because of Jesus or the gospel. They think that offering such kindness in the name of Jesus is coercive toward those they help. This is, after all, a pluralistic world."

Sister Salvinette grew animated. "We would never coerce anyone," she said, "But we always do these things for Jesus, and we tell people about him. Remember, Jesus said that if we are ashamed of him before men, he will be ashamed of us before the father!" She then told a story of a man she met while knocking on doors in the neighbourhood. When she offered to pray for him after talking with him, he refused, saying he didn't believe in prayer or her faith.

'That's okay,' she answered, 'I need prayer for myself so you can just listen while I pray for both of us.'" However, what is striking is the way in which Elaine says the nuns grow in their motivation to do this: "The basic ministry, the sister told them, is prayer. They use mostly silent prayer contemplating the love of God in front of the sacrament. This is how they receive the love they need to give to the people.

'We could never do what we do if we did not pray this way,' she told us. 'It would be too hard.'" According to Elaine Heath, if we are lacking in confidence or desire to witness for the Lord, the only place that will change is as we allow ourselves to receive His love. For the nuns this is through contemplation. In whatever way, the more we can be reminded how much God loves us and others, the more our desire to share Christ with them will develop.

HELPFUL REASONS FOR MISSION AND FAITH SHARING:

BECAUSE THE END-POINT OF DISCIPLESHIP IS TO IMITATE GOD
shaping our lives around what He does.
Our mission is based on who God is and what He does. God is a missionary God who came to us in Christ. Jesus always went to others and responded to their needs.

BECAUSE THE MORE WE JOIN IN WITH GOD, THE MORE WE CAN BRING PLEASURE TO HIM
"So we make it our goal to please him. Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others...For Christ's love compels us." (2 Corinthians 5:9-14)

BECAUSE IT IS A RESPONSE TO WHAT WE HAVE RECEIVED FROM THOSE WHO SHARED FAITH WITH US.

BECAUSE EACH GENERATION NEEDS TO RECEIVE THE GOOD NEWS IN THEIR OWN WAY.
"The gospel must be proclaimed afresh in new ways to each generation, since every generation has its own unique questions. The gospel must constantly be forwarded to a new address, because the recipients are repeatedly changing their place of address." (Alan Hirsch)

BECAUSE WE THRIVE WHEN WE ARE PART OF A PURPOSE bigger than ourselves.
Our original purpose was to "be fruitful" and reflect God in the world. We were blessed in order to be a blessing to others. A balanced life includes "acting justly."

How did Jesus show His disciples how to share faith and what can I learn from that?



We only need to share the good news of the gospel in the way that Jesus did. One key insight is that Jesus knew He could not be everywhere at once, and so focussed His mission.

For example, in Matthew 10 He tells His disciples to “go only to the lost sheep of Israel.” Neither did He go to everyone or respond to every request: “Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: ‘Everyone is looking for you!’ Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.’” (Mark 1: 36-38)

In addition, not everyone responded to His offer – and He didn’t force them. For example, in Mark 10 the rich young ruler did not want to be pursued. “At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth....Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!’”

There were people who were not ready to hear His message, and they reacted strongly against Him. He warned His disciples it would not always be easy. If the teacher is not warmly received, the students should not expect a warm welcome.

The key principle is that He sent His disciples out to look for those who were “of peace”.

“After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where He himself intended to go... Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you.” (Luke 10: 1-6)

Because only the Holy Spirit can prepare someone to receive good news, the first step in sharing faith naturally is always being aware of when people are able to be “of peace” towards God, at any given moment. You might be able to relate to this – there may be, or have been, times when you are more open to God’s loving presence in your life.

Jesus and the disciples started with the people who welcomed them, listened to them, served and supported them, and were warm to them.

Jesus said that when you find a person who is warm towards God, stay there. We should not force dialogue or relationships where they do not naturally flow. He even warned his disciples against being distracted by those not ready to receive their message. (Luke 9:5 and 10:4)

Paul did the same. On arriving in Philippi Paul set out to find a person of peace. He knew where to look and found Lydia. He stayed there and planted a church. (Acts 16) While we can show God’s love through our words and actions to all, but if people are not “of peace” we must be careful not to put pressure on them.



Why is sharing my story so helpful?



After Jesus healed a man born blind the religious leaders quizzed him, trying to catch Jesus out: “A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. ‘Give glory to God by telling the truth,’ they said. ‘We know this man is a sinner.’ He replied, ‘Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!’” (John 9:24-25)

The man couldn’t answer all their questions, but he could tell them his story. In a context of so many different voices and points of view around us our experiences have more credibility than our ideas and can help point others to the presence of God.

Being prepared to give an answer to those who ask is less about witnessing to the depth of our knowledge about God, and more about sharing the genuine story of how we know Him in our daily lives. If we get the opportunity, the best way of telling our story is naturally and spontaneously.

But some people might find that having a framework can help us to know how to start.

Further materials include an example of someone’s story, and a bookmark of some possible ways of shaping how we share our faith.

SHARING YOUR STORY:
SOME IDEAS

THE THREE PS.

People
The character or characters I most identify with in the Bible are...because...

Passages
The bible passage(s) which have been important to me in my journey are...because...

Places
A place where I know the presence of God in a special way is...because...

SOME HELPFUL QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

Which people or experiences have most influenced my own faith journey?
What are the milestones in my faith journey?
When did I first become aware of God in my life?
What are the things about Jesus that makes him special to me?
Have there been times when God has seemed absent?
How did I learn from these times?
What doubts and questions remain with me?





How do I help if someone wants to become a Christian?

Being a disciple is a lifelong journey which, as we have seen, begins and grows in different ways, and continues throughout our lives. Helping someone come to faith always means finding out where God is already at work and starting from where they begin.

Three useful questions which can help us engage with people are:

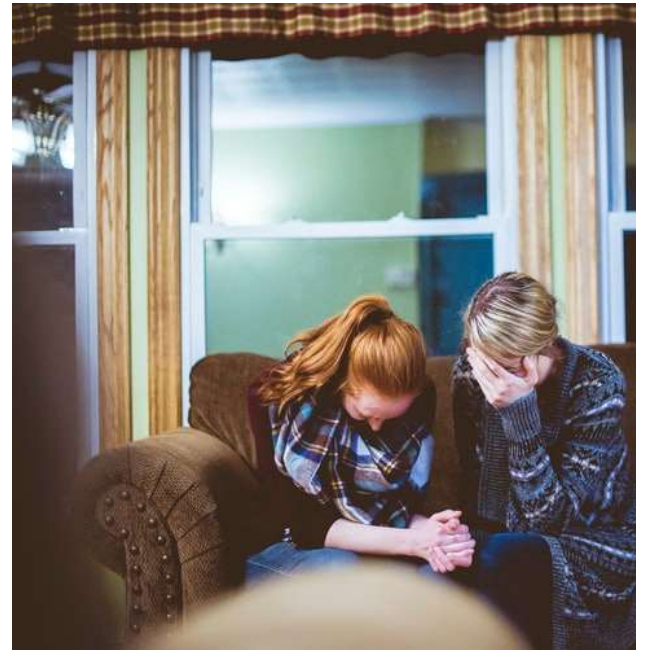
Who are you? (Lovingly listening to their story...find out who they are, rather than first offering your story.)

Where are you? (Finding out where they are with faith/God/spirituality/church – again, honouring them and working out whether they are “of peace” at the moment.)

Why don't you? (What's the next step along the way that would be helpful? It may be coming to church, or going on a course, or it may be as simple as having a coffee together.)

While much of the time we may be helping one another take the next step forward it is important that we gain the assurance that we are His disciples. Whether or not we have begun to follow Christ through a process or an event, for many people this assurance involves a definite moment in which there is an inner and an outer response to God.

If someone asks us, “How do I become a Christian?” the inner response is to help them “repent” i.e. to turn away from being at the centre of their own life, and “believe” i.e. put God at the centre by surrendering to Him.



But this will start with different emphases depending on their situation – for some, it may mean being aware of the depth of God's love and forgiveness,

for others it may mean a much more intentional need to turn away from a lifestyle, for others it may mean surrender to Christ as Lord.

You will need to ask God to help you understand what the right approach is – so knowing them, and having listened to them, will be so important.

Simply offering to pray with someone expressing these two attitudes, in whatever language is appropriate, will help them step into the assurance of being in Christ.

The outer response, which expresses publicly and tangibly the identity and calling of a disciple, is baptism.

Why does baptism matter?



To be baptised is to be immersed. When John the Baptist called people to be baptised they already knew what it meant.

Long before John, the people of Israel would ceremonially wash people and objects which were set apart for God and could then enter His Temple. As time went on, the Jewish people grew in the hope that God would return and “wash” His people. (Zechariah 13)

So as the time of Jesus' arrival drew near, groups of Jewish people combined this sense of wanting to be cleansed and set apart for God with this commitment to the new thing He had promised.

Some started to baptise themselves (sometimes daily) as a sign that they wanted to be set apart for God and ready for the new thing He was going to bring to the world. They were preparing a “highway for the Lord.”

No Jew saw baptism as a 'magic' thing that washed sins away – it was a sign of what God was doing in the heart. But it outwardly expressed that they had inwardly turned to God and wanted to be set apart for His purposes.

This helps us understand why Jesus marked the beginning of His mission by being baptised, why He commanded His disciples to baptise other disciples (Matthew 28:19) and why Peter, on the day of Pentecost, told everyone who wanted Jesus to be Lord and Messiah, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ.” (Acts 2: 38)

Baptism was not an optional extra, but an outward sign which showed and inward change. If someone comes to a point of surrendering inwardly to God through Christ, the outward sacrament of baptism, or confirmation is a natural and necessary way of marking this change.

The bookmark, 'What Baptism Means' unpacks its significance in more detail.

WHAT BAPTISM MEANS

IN THE JOURNEY OF DISCIPLESHIP BAPTISM IS THE SACRAMENT WHICH MARKS US OUTWARDLY AND CELEBRATES:

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO US.

IT MARKS THE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

GOD WANTS WITH US, AS HIS CHILDREN WHO ARE GIVEN A NEW IDENTITY IN CHRIST, MADE RIGHT WITH GOD: "IN CHRIST JESUS YOU ARE ALL CHILDREN OF GOD THROUGH FAITH, FOR ALL OF YOU WHO WERE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST HAVE CLOTHED YOURSELVES WITH CHRIST." (GALATIANS 3:26 - 27). THE WATER SYMBOLISES BEING COMPLETELY COVERED IN CHRIST.

WE KNOW WE ARE FORGIVEN

AND REBORN SPIRITUALLY THROUGH THE "WASHING OF REBIRTH AND RENEWAL BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHOM HE POURED OUT ON US GENEROUSLY THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR SAVIOUR. (TITUS 3:5-6). PETER WRITES THAT "BAPTISM THAT NOW SAVES YOU ALSO-NOT THE REMOVAL OF DIRT FROM THE BODY BUT THE PLEDGE OF A CLEAR CONSCIENCE TOWARD GOD." (1 PETER 3:21). THE WATER SYMBOLISES BEING WASHED CLEAN, IMMERSSED IN GOD'S PRESENCE, AND PASSING THROUGH THE WATERS OF BIRTH.

WE LIVE IN THE LIGHT OF FUTURE RESURRECTION

CONFIDENT THAT ETERNAL LIFE HAS ALREADY BEGUN. "WE WERE THEREFORE BURIED WITH HIM THROUGH BAPTISM INTO DEATH IN ORDER THAT, JUST AS CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD THROUGH THE GLORY OF THE FATHER, WE TOO MAY LIVE A NEW LIFE." (ROMANS 6:4). GOING INTO AND OUT OF THE WATER SYMBOLISES DYING AND RISING TO LIFE.

OUR BELONGING TO THE FAMILY OF THE CHURCH.

"FOR WE WERE ALL BAPTIZED BY ONE SPIRIT SO AS TO FORM ONE BODY--WHETHER JEWS OR GENTILES, SLAVE OR FREE--AND WE WERE ALL GIVEN THE ONE SPIRIT TO DRINK." (1 CORINTHIANS 12:13).



How do I make disciples?

One of the aims of Way of Discipleship is to give us starting points in our lived experience for our own discipleship, but also to be able to pass that on to others.

The bookmark 'Starting Points for Sharing Faith and Discipling Well' lays out in a simple way an outline of how we might start to accompany people well on their discipleship, using some of the tools in the course.

It suggests ways to have a good conversation, help someone come to faith, build confidence, support everyday faith, and help people understand how God grows Christ's character in us.

There are also some suggested Discovery Bible Study passages. Using the bookmark as a resource to get you started may hopefully build confidence in supporting others.

As it reads at the bottom, "People don't need a perfect example. They just need a real one."

STARTING POINTS FOR SHARING FAITH AND DISCIPLING WELL

HAVING A GOOD CONVERSATION:

How can I listen well? Where can I see God already at work in this person?

Who are you?
Where are you?
Why don't you?

HELPING SOMEONE START THE JOURNEY

What is the good news for them?

What does surrender to God look like for this person?
In what ways might they need to change their thinking about life?
In what ways do they need to trust God?
How might they put that into words?
What might we ask the Holy Spirit to do?

SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR DISCIPLING WELL:

We grow through content, demonstration, practice...

Am I modelling as well as explaining?
Am I supporting them in putting into practice what God is showing them?
What can I share of my own experience/struggles which might help?
How can I pray with and for this person?





How do we share faith naturally with people of other faiths?

Andrew Smith's book, 'Vibrant Christianity in Multifaith Britain' sets out from a Birmingham context many of the issues we might face in sharing faith with those of other faiths.

He acknowledges the anxiety this might cause: "...For some people of different faiths the very act of evangelism is deeply problematic, if not sinful....for many families, particularly Muslims I listen to, the issue is not necessarily joining Christianity but leaving Islam. The objection might not be that a family member has become a Christian but that they have left the faith of their family."

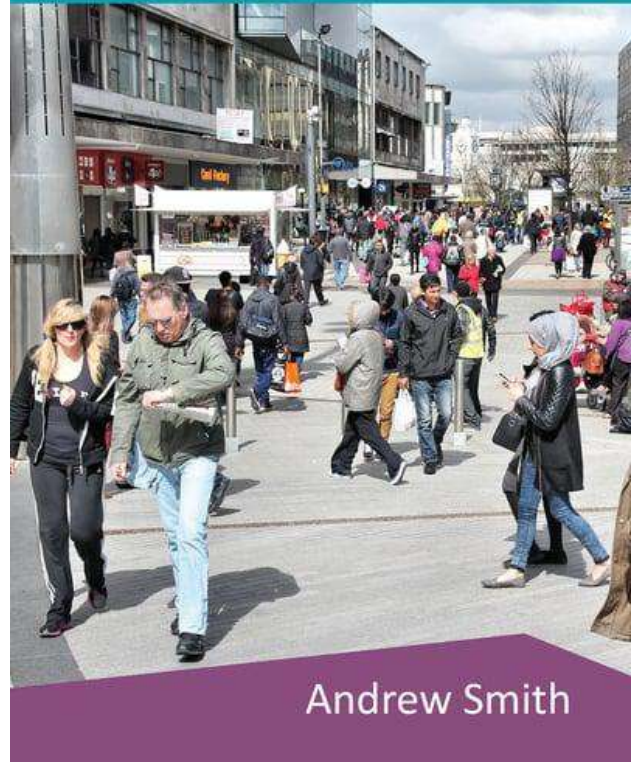
While being sensitive to these issues he says, "One concern is that people of other faiths, and usually that means Muslims, will be offended if we speak about the Christian faith. In my experience nothing could be further from the truth; the vast majority of people are not sitting around waiting to be offended by Christians talking about what they believe but are quite happy to chat about faith."

He offers some principles as a way of engaging well.

Holding together being confident in loving people and being confident in loving God.

"I have met Christians committed to interfaith work who are intensely focused on loving their neighbours of different faiths, but when I mentioned my belief in Jesus as the son of God, they complained that I'm causing tensions and difficulties by raising beliefs others don't subscribe to. They are obeying the commands to love their neighbour but at the expense of holding fast to God. Somehow we have to find a way constantly to obey both these commands."

Vibrant Christianity in multi-faith Britain



Andrew Smith

He argues that loving people of other faiths involves being able to share faith with them: "We are called to love our neighbour of any faith and at the same time to be faithful in loving God. A friend of mine who is a leader in the Sikh community often says that if we want to do interfaith well, then we should do faith well. We should make sure people are rooted in their own faith so that they can contribute well in interfaith settings."

Loving people enough to go to them where they are

"It's worth reminding ourselves every now and then just how much God loves the Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and others living near us or appearing on the news. However much we might learn to love our neighbour, it will never be as much as God loves them. The more we are confident in our love for God, the greater love we can have for a neighbour, as we see them as made in the image of God and loved by him."



"When the disciples followed Jesus, they found that it meant following him to places where they were likely to meet Samaritans. Jesus didn't avoid them; In fact, he deliberately sought them out. From the start, discipleship meant following Jesus into some uncomfortable places to meet all sorts of people whom one didn't usually mix with.

"So, this raises the question - are we pleased to see people of other faiths living in our neighbourhoods? Do we love them enough to think, 'Oh good, I'm glad you live here?' Do I want people to listen to me talk about my faith? If the answer is yes, then I need to do the same to them and listen to them talk about their faith. Do I want people to visit my church? If so, then I need to be willing to visit their gudwara or mosque."

Being genuine, equal in relationship and honest

"Loving our neighbour is a key concept in how we relate to people of other faiths, and we have to do that while continuing to love God faithfully. When we love in this way we start to treat people not as a threat, or a project or a target for evangelism, but as people. People sometimes ask me how they can start a conversation with their Hindu friends. I say start by asking, 'How are you?' Treat them as people, be interested in them, love them.

We are not at one end with everything to give and nothing to gain from others. We are on a par with others, at times helping, at other times being helped, just as a servant benefits from those they serve. As an aside while sharing our faith can be an act of love, I question whether it always feels like that. For an act of love to be genuine, the recipient has to be able to see it as that. As a Hindu friend of mine once said, 'Why would I invite you to my house when you think I'm an idol worshipper, a sinner and need to convert?'"

Sharing faith positively and humbly

Believing that, "I firmly believe that the gospel is good news, so it can be proclaimed as good news without our having to criticise other beliefs for being bad news," Andrew has worked with others across Birmingham of all faiths to produce some guidelines for ethical witness (see handout).

They include "Sharing our faith should never be coercive...We will speak of our faith without demeaning or ridiculing the faiths of others...We will speak clearly and honestly about our faith, even when that is uncomfortable or controversial."

He summarises his approach to sharing faith with others in a story: "I was once at a meal with some young adults of different faiths. During the meal the issue of conversion came up and a Sikh friend turned to me and said, "I understand that if you saw someone who had no faith and was down on their luck, homeless and a drug addict, that you'd want them to become a Christian, but do you want me to convert?" My answer was this:



I think being a Christian is the best thing ever; I find it gives me hope and purpose and an assurance of salvation, so I'd love everyone to find that too. So, yes, I'd like that for you, but no more than for anyone else; you're not a target. But also it's optional. I'm not going to force you to convert; you're allowed to say no. And another thing: if you want me to shut up about my faith I will."

