

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

What makes discipleship hard and how does hope help?



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

Why can being a disciple of Christ be hard?



Understanding the information (30 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

Someone wrote, "...the Scriptures teach us that there is no path to God that does not pass through the wilderness. The God of the Bible is the God of the desert." (David Runcorn)

There at least four good reasons why in some ways the difficulties of life can intensify for a Christian disciple.

You are now a 'new creation' - open to God changing you from the inside out. While we have been made "perfect forever" as a once for all act, (Hebrews 10:14) we are also open to change as we allow God to be in control. We are always surrendering to Him.

You are now seeking what God wants in the world above everything else. This choice can put you in conflict with your own instinctive desires (what the Bible calls the "flesh") – and with the some of the values which surround you (what the Bible calls "the world").

You are now engaged in the spiritual battle between good and evil. For example, Jesus warned that for some throughout history (and many in the world today) that will include experiencing persecution.

You are not immune to the common sufferings of being human, as we wait for the completion of God's victory.

Discipleship means becoming like Christ through difficulties, not despite them.



An American woman called Nancy is crippled and confined to a wheelchair, yet she has embraced a stunning vocation. Nancy runs adverts in the personal section of her local newspaper that read: “If you are lonely or have a problem, call me. I am in a wheelchair and seldom get out. We can share our problems with each other. Just call. I’d love to talk.” The results have been amazing. Each week at least thirty people contact Nancy and she spends her days counselling and comforting people.

When asked how she became crippled she replied that she had tried to commit suicide! She went on to explain, “I was living alone. I had no friends. I hated my job, and I was constantly depressed. I decided to jump from the window of my apartment, but instead of being killed I ended up in the hospital paralysed from my waist down.

“The second night I was there Jesus appeared to me and told me that I’d had a healthy body and a crippled soul but from then on I would have a crippled body and a healthy soul. I gave my life to Christ right there and then. When I got out of the hospital I tried to think of how a woman like me in a wheelchair could do some good, and I came up with the idea of putting the ad in the newspaper. And the rest, as they say, is history.”

As disciples we can grow in knowing how to react when times are difficult, in our understanding of suffering and death, and in our response to God. We can increasingly grow in responding to difficulties as Jesus did. He was a “man of sorrows” and “acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3), but He was also the “pioneer and perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12:2) – the greatest example of how to respond to suffering. Like Nancy, we can become those whom God is able to use and transform in the midst of difficulty.

Knowing our ultimate hope is key to being able to face life’s challenges. In some senses Christian hope is a mystery, but it is not a guess. **Ultimate hope comes from understanding the whole story of Bible.**

In brief, the whole story of the Bible can be seen as God’s plan to reunite God’s space (heaven) with human beings’ space (earth). The crucial thing is that ‘heaven’ in the Bible is not so much an other-worldly place we go to when we die, but a way of saying ‘wherever God is fully present’. The Old Testament is the story of God seeking to bring heaven back to earth through a covenant people, who meet Him in the Temple – the one place in which heaven and earth can touch.

But it is through Jesus, who united God and humanity in Himself again, that God began to reunite all of heaven and earth. This is why when Jesus arrived John proclaimed, “The kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” Wherever Jesus went, he brought the kingdom of heaven to earth, and through the cross became the ultimate temple sacrifice which broke down the barrier between God’s space and us (this was why the curtain in the centre of the Jerusalem temple which was meant to separate us from God’s presence was ripped in two when Jesus died.) (Matthew 27:51)

We are still waiting for this reunion between heaven and earth to be complete. There will come a ‘Day of the Lord’ when the Saviour we eagerly await from heaven (Philippians 3:20) will return to free the world from corruption, completely defeating evil by judging with justice, and restoring us. God will make “all things new” (Revelation 21:5) – new in the sense of not being a completely different thing, but a restored and renewed version of something that already exists. In Jesus He would not “condemn the world, but ... save the world through him.” (John 3:17)

Our ultimate end is not to ‘go to heaven when we die’ or that we will not be taken off the earth to go to ‘heaven’. The idea that ultimately God wants us to be with Him in a purely spiritual heavenly existence, removed from the earth, would be a departure from the story, not the completion of it.

Our hope matters because the picture we have of God’s ultimate future completely shapes our discipleship today. If we believe that the world will be destroyed and that our final aim is to escape to heaven this has potentially disastrous results. We might stop caring for the earth because we believe it has no long-term future anyway. We might think God is only interested in the “spiritual” parts of our lives – because these are the only things that ultimately matter – rather than the everyday work we do. Instead, the Christian hope for a reunited heaven and earth opens up a vision of life in which everything we do now matters. God will take everything we do in line with His kingdom into the future. Even when things are hard, we can know that our labour is never in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Discuss: How can our hope of a renewed earth keep me going when times are tough?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read 2 Corinthians 4: 7-18 which describes both the reality of suffering and the beauty of our hope.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:
What does this passage teach me about God?
What does this passage teach me about people?
How does this passage call me to obey God?
What might I do in response to this this week?



Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://youtu.be/xbC2DzLXhZM>

What struck you as important in the video?



Responding to God’s leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, “What might God be showing me and how might I respond?” They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, “Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?”



Group prayer (5 minutes)

But as for me, my feet had almost slipped;
I had nearly lost my foothold.
For I envied the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
They have no struggles;
their bodies are healthy and strong.
They are free from common human burdens;
they are not plagued by human ills.

When I tried to understand all this,
it troubled me deeply
till I entered the sanctuary of God;

When my heart was grieved
and my spirit embittered,
I was senseless and ignorant;
I was a brute beast before you.
Yet I am always with you;
you hold me by my right hand.
You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me into glory.
Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.

From Psalm 73





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