

Following in Jesus' footsteps

The life of a missional disciple : part 2



10 September to 19 November 2017

Dear Friends,

This is the second booklet in our series looking at the fact that it is clear that God is interested in far more than us simply accepting Jesus and turning up at church each week. God is not looking for religious converts, he is looking for people who will leave their old way of life behind and live radically different lives. He is looking for people that will put him first and put aside all idols. People he can shape and mould so that they can take part in his mission to redeem his world, to be his witnesses and to make disciples of all nations.

Dallas Willard said that "A disciple is who Jesus would be if he were you." In an attempt to address the challenge of "what does that mean" we are looking at the "Up/In/Out" way that Jesus modelled discipleship. Rather than have a booklet focussed solely on "Up" and having to wait a couple of months to get to "In" and then "Out" each booklet has a mix of each aspect; and actually each topic doesn't necessarily fit into just one of those dimensions so things get mixed up a bit.

Some of the topics in this booklet address those hard moments when faith meets life; what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus confronted with disability for example? What is there to say to a world that has different sexual ethics to Christians - are we just out of date? What do we believe the Bible says about same sex relationships, what does that mean for how we interact with others?

The booklet also has easier topics in it such as studying the Bible, prayer, what it means to be the family of God. Topics that will help us to build in our faith and stand together so that we are better able to engage with the realities of life in 21st century Britain.

My expectation and prayer is that as we open our hearts to God through this series we will experience the joy of becoming more like Christ, and find fulfilment in taking up the challenge of being missional disciples in his world; I hope you will join me in the journey,

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Neil Douglas', written in a cursive style.

Neil Douglas

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Using these notes

These notes are designed to be used with or without the sermon. The preacher may well not pay any attention to the questions in the preparation of the sermon or indeed the Bible passage listed, instead they will seek to bring what they feel God wants to say to Ebenezer on that morning. Each topic is quite wide and there are many different ways of approaching it. That is why the first question is always about the sermon.

The questions then provide a way of engaging with the topic each week regardless of whether you have had an opportunity to hear the sermon or not, but please do try to listen to the sermon as it should enrich your study of the topic.

Date: 10 September
Theme: Holding to the teaching of Jesus
Key Readings: John 8:31-32
Additional Readings: 2 Corinthians 10:5; James 1:21; Romans 6:17-18

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. Jesus turns to Jews who had believed in him, and said “if you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples” - why might he have said this to believers?
2. Our tendency as humans is to stop 'holding' to the word, and to be led astray by our own opinions and pre-conceived ideas. Where have you seen churches stop holding to the word? Where have you compromised your holding to the word? What caused that?
3. Paul tells us to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:5). How might we practically do that in our day to day life; what disciplines might help us?
4. James urges us to get rid of moral filth in our lives, things that we have our hearts set on (James 1:21). Paul talks about wholeheartedly obeying (Romans 6:17-18). Why do we struggle to move from believing to obeying, are there any areas that you've noticed people struggle with particularly?
5. In John 8:33 the Jews claim they have never been slaves to anyone; a remark often heard today. What and who do you see people in slavery to today?
6. Jesus promised that the truth will set us free - pray that freedom into each other's lives; it might be helpful to share particular needs for freedom if you are comfortable doing so.

Leader's Notes

Q5 - Many people are in subtle places of slavery, for example to the opinion of others. The cosmetic and hair-products industry trades on this by subtly making us victim to the way others will see us, and enslaving us to the opinion of others. Other forms of slavery are less subtle, such as substance abuse. There are a wide range in between - this question is intended to help the group spot subtle situations of slavery.

Date: 17 September
Theme: Living as church family
Key Readings: Romans 12:9-21
Additional Readings: Hebrews 4:11-13; Titus 3:2; James 4:6

Questions from the sermon

- a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. Paul writes “Love must be sincere” (v9), in essence love does not hide behind a mask. What does this mean for how we live with and communicate to each other?
2. Read Hebrews 4:11-13. What does the writer prescribe as the cure for insincerity? How does that work out in day to day life?
3. Paul tells us to “be devoted to one another in love” (v10); read Titus 3:2. How do we reconcile this with v9, how can we live this out in our mid-week groups and in the wider church family?
4. In Romans 12:16 Paul tells us to live in harmony, not to be proud, and to associate with everybody. Read James 4:6. What does godly humility look like? What are the challenges to living in this way?
5. Read Acts 2:42-47, and then notice in v46 that they regularly ate together. This is an outworking of Hebrews 12:13. What was the result in Acts 2:47? How might we translate this into our modern lives? What gets in the way?
6. Has this study raised any challenges for you? Please share them with those around you and then pray for God’s power to help you overcome the challenges, even as you commit to set them aside.

Leader's Notes

We are formed for God's family. This means we are to love other people. God is love and he wants us to learn to love just like he does. God has created a laboratory on earth where we can practice learning to love each other. That place is called the church and the task of learning to love each other is called fellowship. The Christian life involves more than believing: it also involves belonging. God wants you to be part of his family, the church. In this study we will look at how you build the kind of relationships that provide deep, satisfying, meaningful fellowship with others. The Greek word 'fellowship' in the Bible is 'Koinonia' which means being as committed to each other as we are to Jesus Christ. That is what real fellowship is all about.

Q1 - In real fellowship we share our true feelings, we don't hide behind a mask. Be authentic and admit where you are weak, where you have sins, where you have blown it. Deep intimacy occurs not in the dark, but in the light. In the dark we hide things; we don't want people to see our faults, failures or flaws. In the light we are out in the open and fully visible just as we are. That is called authenticity. If we are living in the light of God's truth we don't try to hide our faults. The truth is you are only as sick as your secrets. Revealing your feeling is the beginning of healing.

Q2 - It's not pop-psychology that makes you authentic. It's not therapy that makes you authentic. It's not sentimentality that makes you authentic. It's coming into contact with the Word of God. When we look at the Word of God and let it touch our soul and show us where we don't measure up and where we need to grow up, then we are forced to be authentic.

Date: 24 September
Theme: Bible Study
Key Readings: Deuteronomy 11:18; Proverbs 4:20-27;
Romans 12:1-2
Additional Readings: Psalm 119:9-16; 2 Timothy 3:16

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. Paul tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:1-2) - think back over the last 24 hours - what have been the influences on your mind?
2. What do Moses (Deuteronomy 11:18) and Solomon (Proverbs 4:20-27) add to Paul's instructions?
3. Read Psalm 119:9-16 and 2 Timothy 3:16. Thinking of these and what we've read so far, what is the difference between a devotional reading of scripture and studying it?
4. Reflecting on Romans 12:1-2 and Proverbs 4:20-27 - what part does God play and what part do we play in our transformation? How well do you feel you do your bit, what commitment are you going to make to yourself?
5. Studying the word isn't for doctrinal purity but for inner transformation. Why do you think so many people resist or refuse to practice this discipline?
6. Richard Foster suggests the biggest challenge is not finding time to study, but convincing ourselves it's important enough to set time aside. How do you relate to this statement?
7. Spend time encouraging each other with stories of how studying the Bible has shaped your life for the better

Leader's Notes

A 2015 survey established that UK viewers averaged nearly 4 hours of TV a day (that's over 60 days of viewing a year. During those 4 hours 80% use other devices like their laptop or mobile phone while watching. How many times have you seen people (or even done so yourself) reading with their iPod in or the TV on? Stanford University Prof. Nass says the human brain listens to song lyrics with the same part that processes words; the same part that is being used for studying so something has to give!

We fill our lives with noise, and we aren't always that discerning about what noise. We watch TV, listen to the Radio or our own music while we eat, socialise and sometimes even as we go to sleep and wake up. Never before has the human mind been so bombarded with information, been so willingly exposed to such repetitive and character influencing data.

If we are to be a Royal Priesthood, living Holy and godly lives, we must try to expose ourselves to the positive influences of God that we have looked at through these studies.

Foster¹ suggest there are four parts to study :

- 1) Repetition: this is fundamental in changing our character, especially if we are to combat the effects of society and the TV.
- 2) Concentration: this requires freedom from other distractions. Listening to the Radio or TV while studying may ease the unease felt in silence but doesn't aid concentration.
- 3) Comprehension: We must fully understand what we have read before we can apply it. This might take several repeat readings before that moment of "getting it". In 2 Peter 3:15,16 even the Apostle Peter admits to finding some of Paul's writing hard to understand. If one of Jesus' inner circle struggled to understand at times, we can give ourselves a break if we have to re-read something a few times.
- 4) Reflection: this practice allows us to see it from God's perspective. What did we feel? Why did we feel it? What should we be feeling.

¹ R. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, pp.81-83.

Date: 1 October

Theme: Intentional Living

Key Readings: Luke 9:23-26

Additional Readings: 1 Corinthians 15:58; Matthew 12:40; Luke 9:51; Matthew 6:33

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. Bearing your cross is a common phrase and often means putting up with inconvenience. What is that actual meaning of the phrase?
2. To face rejection because we are Christians we have to be identifiable as Christians. What are good and bad ways of being visible Christians?
3. What did Jesus tell us to seek first? (Matthew 6:33) What does this mean in practice, how does it work out at home, at work, in school, in the shops, etc?
4. Read Luke 9:51 and stop and ponder the implications of that verse. What thoughts come to mind?
5. What has God given you to be intentional about?
6. Have you any heroes who inspire you with their determination? What can you learn from them? (they don't have to be Christians!)
7. What distracts people generally from the things God calls them to be intentional about? What gets in the way for you?
8. Answering these questions well required honesty and a willingness to make yourself vulnerable. Spend some time praying for each other and encouraging each other in your walk with God.

Leader's Notes

Q1. Somehow we have allowed the cruelest ever torture device to come to stand for relatively minor inconveniences. Criminals bore their own crosses as they were marched to be crucified. The cross actually means being prepare to face rejection and death. Living a life for God, separated from the values and lifestyle of the world.

Q2. This question is really trying to make us think through how we can be truly good news rather than an irritant.

Q4. There are some things common to all Christians such as being ready to give a reason for the hope that we have, letting our light shine, making disciples, and so on. Then there are specific callings on every individual's life. If anybody is unsure of their personal calling then spend some time sharing what gifting each of you sees in them and help them to see how God might be calling them.

Date: 15 October

Theme: The fruit of the Spirit

Key Readings: Galatians 5:16-26

Additional Readings: 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:6; Romans 5:5

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. The letter to the Galatians is a letter to a church that is under pressure to live according to the law, see for example Paul's rebuke of Peter in 2:11 or his comments in chapter 3. What does he mean here in 5:16 when he says "live by the Spirit"?
2. v19 contains a long list of the works of the sinful nature. These are clearly not a comprehensive nor structured list, but how might you group them? What sort of issues would each group raise in a person's life? How might such works of the sinful nature affect a church fellowship?
3. In v22 Paul describes the result of the Spirit as fruit whereas in v19 he described the result of the sinful nature as works (or acts). What might be the significance of the different term?
4. How does the fruit of the Spirit compare with the works of the sinful nature? What impact does the fruit of the Spirit have on a fellowship compared with the works of the sinful nature?
5. Thinking about Paul's writings, which part of the fruit is likely most important from his point of view? (1 Corinthians 13, Galatians 5:6 and plenty of other verses) Why might that be and what can we learn from it? (Romans 5:5)
6. If you had an apple without pips, or a pear without its skin, it wouldn't be complete. Look over these examples of the fruit of the Spirit, what else might you add to get a fuller picture?
7. If you feel able share with each other aspects of the fruit of the Spirit that you find hardest to let flourish in your life. Use this to guide your prayers for each other.

Leader's Notes

Q1. If a law could have been written that gave life, then God would have written it and we would have a law that made us righteous. But it can't and he didn't; we are all sinners. Some of us may commit far worse sins than others, but we are still sinners and sin is just sin. It doesn't matter how big or small it is, it is sin. So the whole world is a prisoner of sin. The law is like a mirror, it shows us our sin. How many of us use a mirror to clean ourselves? None - the mirror stays on the wall, we don't scrub ourselves with it! In the same way the law is a mirror, we can't be made clean by using it.

The law is no longer a means of acceptance with God. It no longer marks out Israel from other nations in some exclusive sense, we all have Christ and access to faith in Christ. It reveals God's will and provides a moral check, and it still convicts people of sin. But when we seek God's will we don't turn first of all to the Mosaic law as the guardian to tell us, we listen to God's Spirit and the teachings of Jesus. These teach us to love God and to love others. By doing this we will actually do what the law tried to tell us to do, that is God's will.

Q2. There is no right answer, but they group roughly into sexual sins, religious sins, social sins, drinking sins. They all lead people away from God, and the social sins in particular would destroy a church fellowship.

Q3. Living by the Spirit allows the Spirit to bring forth fruit in our lives and our dependence is on the Spirit. Living by the sinful nature we are active in engaging in wrong works. Our responsibility is to co-operate with the Spirit.

Date: 22 October

Theme: Prayer

Key Readings: Matthew 6:5-15; Luke 11:1-13

Additional Readings: 1 Thessalonians 5:17;
Philippians 4:6; Ephesians 6:10-20

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. Read Matthew 6:5-15 and Luke 11:1-13. Spend a few minutes meditating on them. What do you notice?
2. Share with each other your own prayer practice. When and how often do you pray? Do you kneel? How long do you spend listening, meditating and studying first? Have you an experience of God that happened through prayer that you would like to share?
3. Returning to the passages, which bits of Jesus' instructions do we have most difficulty with? Why?
4. What stops us from praying? Why are we reluctant to commit time and energy to prayer? What makes us think we are not "very good" at praying? Luke 11:1 - why is it important to view prayer as a learning process?
5. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17 and Philippians 4:6. R Kent Hughes said that continual prayer is less about words and more about the posture of the heart. What do you think he meant by this?
6. Read Ephesians 6:10-20, what else do we learn about prayer from this passage?
7. Time to put it all into practice - pray together!

Leader's Notes

Foster in his book *Celebration of Discipline* says this:

“Meditation introduces us to the inner life, fasting is an accompanying means, study transforms our minds, but it is the Discipline of prayer that brings us to the deepest and highest work of the human spirit. Real prayer is life creating and life changing. Prayer – secret, fervent, believing prayer lies at the root of all personal godliness.”²

Wow. How many of us can say we have ever thought of our prayer lives like that? The thing is, if we want it, it's ours for the asking, if we are disciplined enough. Eugene Peterson speaks of how we learn to talk. As infants we first hear the speech of our parents and gradually over time, we are able to repeat back and then formulate statements and questions. Prayer is exactly the same. First we have to hear God and after a while we will understand enough to repeat, express our feelings and needs, and then to ask. The important element of all this is that God is always the one who has spoken first. This is why we looked at meditation first, so what is first in our spiritual quest is to hear God's voice, so we might then respond.

Often people claim to have lost faith in God or at least in prayer when a fervent prayer of theirs has gone apparently unanswered. However, if we went to turn on the TV only to find it didn't work, would we stop believing in electricity and radio waves, or rather would we start tracing the fault that prevented the TV from working? Prayer is just the same. If we have prayed and nothing happened, we have a choice to make. Either we stop believing in the power of prayer, or we have to start finding out what we did wrong and fix it.

² R. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, p.42.

Date: 29 October
Theme: Disability
Key Readings: Genesis 1:27
Additional Readings: John 9:1-12; Psalm 115:16; Romans 8:13-14; Jeremiah 33:25; 1 Timothy 2:4; Romans 8:19-21

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What do we mean by disability? What types of disability are there? What do we understand as causing them?
2. Genesis 1:27. What do we understand when we read that God made humankind in his own image? How does this affect our thinking about those with disabilities?
3. Read John 9:1-12, and especially v3-4. It may help to consider this better translation “Neither this man nor his parents sinned but so that the work of God might be displayed in his life, we must do the work of him who sent me whilst it is till day.” What, if anything, does this tell us about why the man was born blind?
4. Read Jeremiah 33:25 and consider what you know of Genesis 1. What do we understand from that about how the world works? How might that affect our view of genetic variation?
5. Read Psalm 115:16 and Romans 8:13-14. What does this tell us about the interplay of God’s sovereignty and human freedom? What does that tell us about how we should respond to disability?
6. 1 Timothy 2:4 and Romans 8:19-21 - what do we understand by salvation? What does this tell us about God’s desire for his creation? What does it tell us about how God views each person?
7. This has been a complex and difficult study, and each of us will have had different revelations from it as the Spirit has spoken to us. Share these with each other and then pray together especially for any needs.

Leader's Notes

Q1. This question is meant to be an easy opening question that highlights the range of physical and mental disabilities, and their causation through accidents or genetics.

Q3. God's will is not arbitrary, hence disabilities are not merely accidents nor are they directly intended by God. God in his providence allows events to happen in this world and for human freedoms to be expressed. The passage tells us nothing about why the man was born blind.

Q4. God's sovereignty and human freedom are not mutually exclusive. God put us here on earth to tend it for him, and he sovereignly allows us to do so as we wish to. However his desire is for us to live by his Spirit and to care for creation in line with His will. We are responsible for how we participate in God's plans and for alleviating the suffering that comes with such participation.

Q5. God's will is not opposed to the laws of nature, he set the fixed laws of heaven and earth. Within those laws is the process of regular genetic variation that results in human diversity and indeed diversity of all other living organisms. These laws are necessary to maintain diversity in the world, of which one aspect is disability.

Q6. God doesn't desire 2 classes of people, the saved and unsaved, the whole or disabled, black or white, or any other classes you may determine. God wants to bring the whole creation into renewal and he wishes all to be saved and whole. All people are valued by God.

Date: 12 November

Theme: Family relationships with unsaved family members

Key Readings: 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Additional Readings: Luke 14:26; 1 Corinthians 5:9-10; 1 Peter 3:1-2

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What tensions or difficulties do you find in your relationships with unsaved family members? Where do they surface?
2. Jesus' words in Luke 14:26 are highly challenging, but what do they actually mean? How do we find ourselves conflicted in trying to live them out? How do you resolve that conflict?
3. Sadly the behaviour of unsaved children has, in the past, led some Christian parents to exclude them from their homes. Some of us have a disreputable sibling or one whose lifestyle we find incompatible with the gospel. How might 1 Corinthians 5:9-10 inform how you might act? What are the practical difficulties and concerns you have with following Paul's instructions?
4. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:22 that he has "become all things to all people so that by all possible means [he] might save some." How might this work out in our family relationships, what are the dangers?
5. I hesitated to put 1 Peter 3:1-2 into this study for fear that it could start a debate about the relationship between men and women, please don't let it! Instead if you were to take the principles of the verses and apply them to Christians (of either gender) in relationship with family members (of either gender) who are not Christians, what might this mean?
6. Think back over your answers to questions 2 through 5. Have you found anything to help with your answer to question 1? Share those thoughts, or other things that have struck you in this study with the group before praying for each other.

Leader's Notes

Q2. Despite what some have said in the past, this is not a command to hate your family! Jesus is setting out that he has first call on your life, and that you must be prepared to set aside everything, including in the next verse your own life, in order to follow him.

Q3. Often the concern is that of appearing to condone sin; if that is raised in the group then maybe spend some time considering how you might maintain a positive relationship with the family member that is non-judgemental yet doesn't condone their sin.

Date: 19 November

Theme: Same gender relationships

Key Readings: Mark 10:6-8; Genesis 1:27 & 2:24

Additional Readings: Genesis 19:1-11; Judges 19:16-24 Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; Jude 1:7; Romans 1:26-27; Genesis 2:20b-24

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. How does the following observation complicate this topic? ‘Our parents grew up in a world where practising homosexuality was illegal; we grew up in a world where it was “immoral”; and today’s teenagers have grown up in a world where it is “normal”.³
2. What do Genesis 19:1-11 and Judges 19:16-24 have in common? Sensitised as we are to the homosexual references in them, what might we miss? What might these passages actually be about?
3. Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13 seem clear enough, but how does 18:19 and 20:18 confuse things?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; Jude 1:7 and Romans 1:26-27. Have a look at the leaders’ notes for this question. What are your thoughts and conclusions?
5. Apart from perhaps Romans 1 it is hard to say from these texts what God is against. Looking at it from a different angle how did Jesus define marriage in Mark 10:6-8? Many argue that because Jesus didn’t condemn same sex relationships he was in favour, how would you respond having read Mark 10:6-8? What is Jesus in favour of?
6. Genesis 2:20b-24 - what did God ordain for human relationships? In the light of all the above how do you view same sex relationships?

³ Phil Jump, “Community of Grace”, The Baptist Ministers’ Journal, Volume 323, July 2014, pp.18-19.

7. Do you still sin? Have you over the years realised that some parts of your life are actually still sinful and had to work through them with God? How have you experienced grace? How then might we respond to those in same sex relationships?
8. This is a complex, divisive and difficult issue - come together in prayer and pray for each other, for God's church, and for those he has called to provide servant leadership within it.

Leader's Notes

Of all the studies we have this has the potential to be the most difficult and divisive. It is an immensely difficult topic to work through and one where there are honestly held profoundly different views. Please bear with one another in love, and with me as the author of these notes! If anybody has questions or concerns having completed this study then I would happily meet up and try to work through those with them.

Q2. In both these passages there is a violation of the hospitality customs as well as the objectifying of another person for sex - both of these cut to the heart of the law to love your neighbour as yourself.

Q4. 1 Kings 14:24, 15:12 2 Kings 23:7 - the Hebrew word 'Qadesh' means temple prostitute and is inaccurately translated as sodomite or homosexual.

In 1 Corinthians, the word sodomite or homosexual are sometimes used, but they are incorrect translations of the Greek 'malakos' which means something closer to 'effeminate' or the Greek practice of pederasty, which is older men having sex with boys.

1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 refers in Greek to 'arsenokaitai', which is unclear in its meaning. There are three uses of the word 'arsenokaitai' in ancient times. Firstly, in the Sybelline Oracles, dating 6th Century BC, it says, "The ARSENOKOITAI from the north will abduct our children". Secondly Paul uses the word, in the 2 places mentioned above, and thirdly St. John the Father of Constantinople, says that ARSENOKOITAI is something that some men do to their wives.

Some English Bibles translate Jude 7 as "homosexual practices". This is an inaccurate translation of 'hetera sarx' which means, literally,

'strange flesh' to describe the flesh of the angels who were sent by God to evaluate Sodom and Gomorrah.

Q5. However uncomfortable the truth is, it is true that scripture is not as directly clear on the topic as we'd wish it to be. However Jesus defines marriage as ordained by God as between one man and one woman for life, and refers to Genesis 1:27 & 2:24. If he had wanted to change the definition he could have done so here and in Matthew 19:4-6.

Q6. God ordained marriage to be between male and female, and provided sex only within marriage. Anything else is outside God's plan and happened after the fall in Genesis 3.

Q7. It is all too easy to focus on same sex sin and forget the sin in our own lives, yet the truth is that "we are all sinners saved by grace" and "whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for us". It is also true that as you draw closer to Jesus you slowly realise that there is more idolatry and sin in your life than you first realised.

Maybe we should love and welcome all, and allow the Spirit to do his work in changing and renewing people - our role is to model out a Christian life and encourage people to hold fast to God. The difficulty we face is knowing if or when we need to lovingly point out sin in the lives of others, especially as we remember Jesus' words in Matthew 7:1-5.

Notes:

