

For the next few weeks we're going to look at the kind of things Jesus did during his ministry and see what we can learn from him. There is a real upsurge of thinking about discipleship across the church in the UK at the moment. Jesus told his followers that they were to go and make disciples and, at that time, all they knew was what he had done. The preaching and teaching of Paul was unknown and there had been no outreach outside Israel. In fact, the term disciple doesn't appear outside the gospels and Acts because it needed a different terminology for a non-Jewish audience.

So, what did they do to make disciples? They did what they had seen Jesus do! Over the next few weeks we're going to think about some stories from the bible where Jesus meets different people and what we can learn from them about how to make disciples.

But, I think the first thing we have to do is try and answer the question, what is a disciple? Well, in one sense it is really quite simple. The word which we translate disciple refers to a learner or student, someone who is apprenticed to a teacher to learn from them. A disciple aims to learn the ways, practices and wisdom of his teacher:

Luke 6:40 *A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.*

Luke 5:33 *The and they said to him, the disciples of John fast often and offered prayers, and so did the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink.*

Whether it's the disciples of John, the Pharisees or Jesus, the basic point is the same - the learners stand in relation to the teacher, whose teachings and way of life they seek to learn and adopt. Of course, they are learning intellectual content: a way of thinking and perceiving the world, a body of knowledge and understanding. We often see Jesus teaching his 'learners' this way in the Gospels: Matthew 5:1-2 *Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying.....*

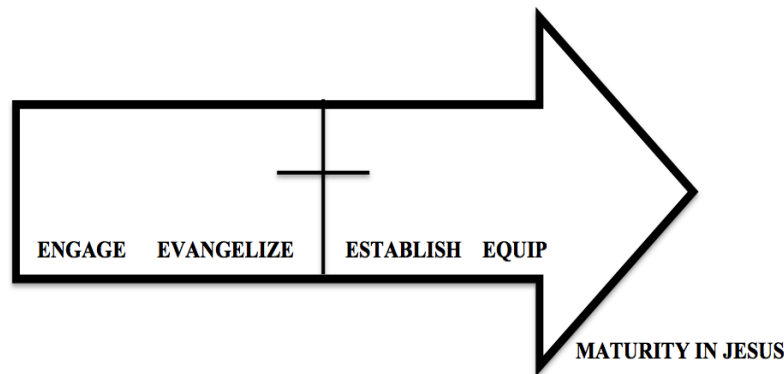
Of course, this was not simply academic learning. They were learning a way of life based on an understanding of certain truths about reality. The goal for them was not only to know what the teacher knew, but also to be like their they weren't so much learning a subject as learning a person. This is why they often followed the teachers around. They not only heard the teacher's words but saw those words being put into action as they shared life together. In the Gospels we see these learners often asking Jesus questions to get him to clarify and elaborate on his teaching.

Perhaps this is one reason that the concept of following has come to dominate most people's thinking about discipleship. If asked, I suspect most of us would say a disciple is someone who follows Jesus. However, it would perhaps be more accurate to say a disciple is someone devoted to learning Jesus.

To learn Jesus - to submit yourself to his teaching, to walk in his ways - will mean reassessing all our current loyalties and commitments. Jesus makes it very clear that saving our old life is not an option; it's only by losing our lives that we can save them. Following Jesus in the Gospels is very much like repentance. It's abandoning my current existence and heading off in a new direction, to learn a whole new life from a new master, and to be part of the new Kingdom that he will bring. Of course, many of us have taken those first steps of faith and we find our lives quite different to what we expected they might be.

There is no one system, or perfect way, in order for us to learn how to do this. But, we need to learn how to do it. When we were in Australia last summer I spent some time talking to people engaged with the Vine Project and I liked the way they understood the process of making disciples. Therefore, that's what I'm going to look at over these next weeks.

You have already seen this diagram and will see it in different forms as we work through this process.



You see the four words: engage, evangelise, establish and equip. I hope these words and this simple diagram will help all of us to understand a little bit more about how we can go about the task of making disciples. So, to give us a fuller understanding of the diagram, here it is presented slightly differently.

Every diagram has its own limitations and the issue here is that the domain of darkness did not end at the cross, and so, that should really continue along with the kingdom of the Son.

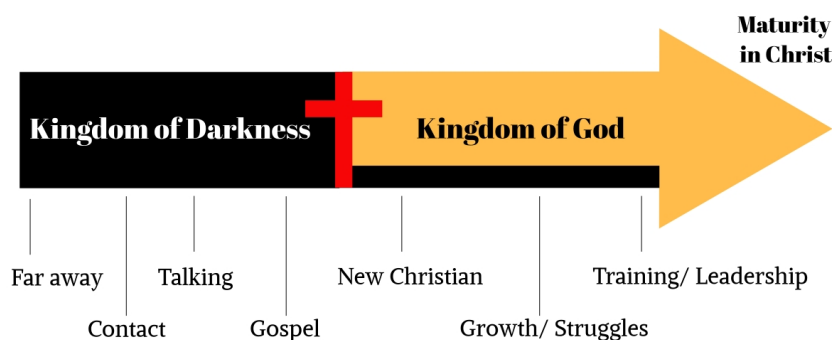
However, the point is to explain what we're about and that we don't have to be responsible for every step of faith someone takes – we simply have to do our bit. That's why you'll hear me talk about moving people a bit to the right! If you think about this image, we want to move people to maturity in Christ. All of us need to keep on moving toward God, toward maturity Heb 6:1 *We must try to become mature and start thinking about more than just the basic things we were taught about Christ.*

So we know that it's about encouraging toward God and maybe you're sitting there thinking I can't do that. And to some extent that's true of us all – we can't really take people to the right of where we are ourselves. If we don't know God we can't really help people to know God; if you're a new Christian you wouldn't expect to be training people who have been Christians for years.

However, some of you are brilliant at making connections and starting a process of getting to know people while others are better at talking about faith, and others are great at teaching or training. Very few people have the gifts to take people from the far left to the far right – and fewer still have the time it takes!

We also need to be aware that people are at different places and, in fact, it is not always a simple, straight-line progression through this process.

So, let's look at the diagram.



- Far away – There are people who want nothing to do with God, who see no value in faith and they would be at the far left of our diagram. They may be known to us but most will not be.
- Contact - We also know people with whom we have some contact – hairdresser, shop assistant, work colleague, neighbour etc.
- Talking - Then we have the folk we can have a good conversation with, perhaps even spend time with them. We know don't have faith but we have something in common with them.
- Gospel - Then there comes a point where we must share our faith with other people – usually, but not always, those with whom we can have a good conversation.
- New Christian – I wonder how many of us know a new Christian? Are we seeing people come to faith? We've certainly seen people returning to church and even faith.
- Then we know people who are trying to live out faith and some who are taking steps of leadership.

Over the next few weeks we're going to look at all of these areas, but for now we're going to think about those who are far away from God and those with whom we have some contact. That comes under the first of our 'E' words – engage.

Engaging is about getting to know people who are not yet Christian. Many of us who have gone to church for a long time don't know all that many people who don't also go to church. But we know some. One of the stats from the Talking Jesus course is that 65% of people know a practising Christian. You could, of course, highlight that 35% of the population don't know a Christian, or that some of those who are Christian may not set a very good example for others to follow. But let's accept that as true and focus instead on the 65% because it is there that we can have the most positive effect because they already know a Christian. Many of that 65% could be in that far away or contact area and need to be engaged. Another stat from the course is that 20% - 1 in 5 of people who have a conversation about Jesus, God, faith would like to find out more. They would love to have another conversation, or come to church to check it out, or do an Alpha course or whatever. Our default position is, "they're not interested." But one in five is interested!

So how do we engage with people –

- Be ourselves!
- Pray for specific people – opportunities to talk will come. On the talking Jesus course we've been encouraged to pray for five people to come to faith, believing that one of those five, and hopefully more, will do exactly that.
- Listen to what they're saying.
- Don't be afraid to challenge (politely!).

Look at Jesus in John 4. He was himself. He was tired and hungry and had sat down at a well while his disciples had gone to find some food. He often took time by himself to pray and to recharge. He often broke the social rules of the day and so, when a woman appeared at the well, he did the very thing he shouldn't have done – he spoke to her! I wonder if there are people or places we get hung up about and don't go to, thereby missing out on God conversations?

Interestingly, v4 *Now he had to go through Samaria*. While this was the shortest route to Galilee from Judea, the Pharisees would not have gone through Samaria because of the almost hatred they had toward each other. Jews would not have wanted anything but minimal contact with Samaritans, and vice versa. So why does John say Jesus 'had' to go that way? I think we are to see that Jesus was not afraid to step out of the 'normal' way to do things, and also that he knew there would be some sort of significant moment on the journey.

Even something as simple as asking for a drink of water opened up a conversation. It really doesn't have to be difficult! Be yourself. Be polite. Talk to people. Be friendly.

Jesus starts a conversation and we discover that this woman has a little bit of belief. Not too surprising because they worshipped God, just not at the Temple in Jerusalem. The woman does what lots of people do she tries to keep the conversation on what she believes – she keeps trying to talk about Jacob and where 'true' worship should happen. People will do that. They'll tell you why you shouldn't believe in God, or why they believe something else – but they'll try and keep to that – especially if they want an argument, and to 'win'. We should treat people with respect even if we profoundly disagree with them – always remembering that winning an argument is not the goal: introducing people to Jesus and seeing lives transformed by his grace is the goal.

Jesus listened and he turned the conversation by talking about himself. That's what we should do if we get the chance. Remember, we're thinking about those people we have limited knowledge of, or whom we know are far from God. None of us are Jesus! He had insight into the life of this woman and her needs that nobody else had. When the disciples brought the food back we're told they were 'surprised' to find him talking to a woman. They didn't understand what had taken place and we'll come back to the outcome of the story later.

Jesus was able to have this conversation because:

- He was able to be himself
- He had prayed in advance
- He listened
- He wasn't afraid to challenge her understanding

I think it's that last part that enables us to move from Engage to Evangelize but we need to have done all the rest first – and it may take a long time to get there. The danger is that when

we think of specific people to engage with we chicken out and simply say they're not ready to go further or that they're not interested – but we've not actually been intentional about moving them to the right: encouraging them to move nearer to God. I know for myself that the main reason that happens is that I don't pray that God will show me the people that I could speak to, therefore, I often miss opportunities to speak about Jesus.

So, the challenge for us all is to think of 5 people with whom we have contact but we are not sure of where they stand with God, or we know they don't have faith, and begin to pray for them regularly. Pray that God will work in their lives and that we will get, and take, opportunities to begin conversations about faith. We don't convert anyone. We don't make them Christian by force of argument. Holy Spirit does that work – our job is to have a conversation and set an example of faith and life. Let's pray...