

COVID and Discipleship

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This follows the ‘Faith-Based Facilitation’ model. You may wish to consider the ‘Four Theological Voices’ when reading Scripture (NB all references are from the NIV, 2011). Please see OurHub for details.

Introduction - The issue

Amid this global pandemic, the Church in all its varied expressions of ministry has had to forge ahead with God’s mission in nuanced ways, proclaiming the unchanging word of God, providing hope and resourcing the body of Christ through whole-life discipleship. The challenge for the Church in this climate is to find ways in which to recover and maintain its central vocation, which is to make disciples while addressing the challenges that have come about as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, there is hope.

Who is a disciple?

A disciple is one who commits to learning from the one they choose to follow. Jesus’ disciples were not only his students, they also had a personal attachment to him which in turn shaped their whole lives (Adeyemo, 2006, p1249). Therefore, a disciple is one who flourishes on their daily journey with Christ. Discipleship also involves ‘helping people to understand what it means to serve God’s purpose in the whole of their lives and reminding Christians of the significance of their identity as disciples and the significance of their everyday places’ (Hudson, 2019, p10). Therefore, whole-life discipleship has the double effect of helping a believer grow in their own relationship with Christ, but also enables them to love their neighbour as God would have them.



The First Step - What is whole-life discipleship?

Whole-life discipleship enables the body of Christ to continue to grow and flourish spiritually. Neil Hudson suggests that the purpose of discipleship is to:

“inspire and equip Christians for their everyday contexts and to develop Christians who have a renewed imagination of their Monday to Sunday contexts ... Christians that have a greater confidence around the difference they could make to their frontlines in schools, offices, shops, gyms, libraries, homes and wherever they are seven days a week.”

(Hudson, 2019, xiii)

In the same vein, Bishop Graham Cray stated that ‘churches have to realise that the core of their calling is to be disciple-making communities’ (LICC, 2007, p4). This is discipleship which empowers believers to live a ‘Jesus-shaped life’ (Oxbrow, 2017, p8). Local churches have always been places where people learn to become disciples (Hudson, 2019, xv). These disciples are empowered to recognise that they are disciples of Jesus and regard their ‘everyday places as places of opportunity for the reality of God’s Kingdom to break in’ (ibid).

Major Noel Wright suggests that effective discipleship makes people more aware

about God in their everyday. He suggests fruitful/quality discipleship prompts Christians to reflect on questions like: Do I see my job as ministry? Does my church equip its parents to become better parents and grandparents in their ministry, to become a blessing to their children and grandchildren? How should I regard my interactions with the shopkeeper as mission? According to Major Noel Wright, this attitude helps a believer understand that what they do daily is living out mission. Major Ian Mountford suggests Romans 12:1-2 as a clear example of how mission is part of our everyday contexts.

Questions for reflection

- What challenges might your local church face as it considers discipling congregants in a post-COVID-19 climate?

According to Hudson (2021), ‘whole-life discipleship matters because God’s people find themselves in places and situations where they can grow more like Jesus, and where they can demonstrate the reality of Jesus to others.’ The church community should be a place where their acts are affirmed and continue to help them be ‘better equipped to follow Jesus into whatever each day might bring.’

Going Deeper - What does the Bible say about discipleship?

The Bible demonstrates the importance of discipleship countless times. Tokunboh Adeyemo states that there are about 290 variants of the word ‘discipleship’ appearing in the Gospels and the book of Acts (Adeyemo, 2006, p1249). As disciples, believers are called to:

Live a life worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ:

Philippians 1:27; Matthew 5:13-16; Galatians 5:13-26; Philippians 4:11-13.

Live a life of humility following the example of Jesus Christ:

Philippians 2: 1-11.

Live life as unto the Lord:

Colossians 1:15-21.

Live a life that demonstrates love towards God and love for your neighbour:

Matthew 22:37-39.

Live as God’s sent-scattered people:

Matthew 28; John 20:21.

There is a cost to discipleship:

Mark 8:34-38; Luke 14:25-33; John 12:24-26.

Questions for reflection

- How has the impact of COVID-19 affected your personal faith and understanding of God, yourself and your place in the world?
- What kind of support might you require in order to move forward in your faith journey?
- How does your own discipleship help to resource others?
- How have you been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic? What pastoral care might you require to support you through that?
- What pastoral care might you need to help you to speak prophetically into issues affecting society today besides COVID-19?
- What pastoral care might you be able to give to others experiencing challenges?



Reflection - Whole-life discipleship in practice

Moving from the personal to our place in the world, whole-life discipleship should not only encourage growth in personal faith but also ensure Christians have an impact in their everyday contexts within their communities (LICC, 2007, p4). Neil Hudson suggests the following actions to guide whole-life discipleship within congregational contexts:

- Keep prayer central (without becoming more about the tools and behaviours of discipleship rather than enjoying a life with God).
- Help one another learn the way of Jesus.
- Live it out myself as a leader.
- Explain clearly what the Church is embarking on.
- Extend the invitation for people to follow Christ and to a lifetime of whole-life discipleship (Hudson, 2019, pp42-44).

The role of the Church and church leaders is to continue to adapt their discipleship and ensure it is relevant for the world today and the challenges therein. According to Major Noel Wright, ‘the Spirit is at work. Leaders need to teach/inspire, enable and equip God’s people to live out their faith in their everyday conversations with shopkeepers, bus drivers, teachers and the many people they encounter in the everyday contexts. That is how we fulfil the Great Commission. We need to find ways to inspire and resource people for the everyday.’ (Noel Wright, 2021)



Moving Forward - Prayer and lament resources

- Greene, M (2010), *The Great Divide: The Biggest Challenge Facing the Church Today and What We Can Do About It*. London: LICC.
- Hudson, N (2019), *Scattered and Gathered, Equipping Disciples for the Frontline*. London, Intervarsity Press, 2019.
- Hudson, N (2021), *Why Does Whole-Life Disciple Making Really, Really Matter?* Available at: <https://licc.org.uk/resources/chapter-1-making-disciples-for-everyday-life/> (Accessed 25 May 2021).

We hope you have found this helpful. A bibliography for this chapter and the full COVID-19 booklet that addresses key themes in greater detail is available on OurHub. If you have feedback or any ideas you’d like to share, email rdu@salvationarmy.org.uk.