

**ASSESSING FRUITFUL DISCIPLESHIP PRACTICES AGAINST THE
FIRST-CENTURY RABBINICAL NORMS THAT SHAPED JESUS' MODEL
OF DISCIPLESHIP**

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Abstract

This is a qualitative research project using thematic analysis to explore fruitful approaches to discipleship in four large UK churches. Healthy practice, with regards to discipleship, is identified and evaluated against the findings of the literature review. The literature review highlighted the first-century rabbinical practices that shaped Jesus' model of discipleship, as illustrated in Mark's gospel. The research demonstrates a correlation between what first-century believers understood by discipleship and fruitful discipleship practices today, particularly around the themes of:

- Leadership
- Discipleship pathway
- Practical teaching and training
- Community (personal responsibility and mutual accountability)
- Mission
- Serving

The conclusions provide a benchmark enabling any church to evaluate their discipleship practice. This benchmark also challenges the approaches to learning, both in churches and for theological colleges in training church leaders to make disciples in the churches they will lead.

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Introduction

Background Information

This dissertation offers a comparison between Jesus' model of discipleship and current practices through research into churches identified as being fruitful in making disciples. A first-century understanding of discipleship establishes a clear benchmark for use in evaluating current practice in discipleship, establishing a measure of fruitfulness. The findings give outcomes which can be adopted and adapted across the wider church.

In 2015, the then Bishop of Sheffield, Steven Croft, submitted a report called *Developing Discipleship* to the Church of England General Synod, noting a "lack of a coherent and concisely stated common understanding of discipleship."¹ This confirms a degree of confusion that has led to a plethora of approaches to discipleship. For instance, Stezer takes an evangelistic viewpoint; "Disciple-making means the totality of the process from making initial contact with a person who has no knowledge of the gospel, to the steps that lead to hearing the gospel, then from hearing the gospel to responding to the gospel."² Others such as Bonhoeffer³ and Tozer,⁴ focus on the cost of following Jesus. Willard⁵, Foster⁶, and

¹ 'Gs 1977 - "Developing Discipleship," accessed 11 June 2019, <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/g%201977%20-%20developing%20discipleship.pdf>.

² Ed Stetzer, "Disciplemaking: How Do Evangelism and Discipleship Go Together?", *The Exchange | A Blog by Ed Stetzer*, 19 December 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2019/december/how-do-evangelism-and-discipleship-go-together.html>

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Pocket Books, 1995).

⁴ A.W. Tozer, *Crucified Life: How To Live Out A Deeper Christian Experience* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2011).

⁵ Dallas Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

⁶ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008).

Whitney⁷ highlight spiritual disciplines as vital for discipleship. Clark⁸ and Johnson⁹ state that charismatic impartation is the key. Morden¹⁰ addresses discipleship from the standpoint of authority, prayer, and the Holy Spirit. Mike Breen advocates a programme based approach called LifeShapes that enables growth as a Christian.¹¹ Fink uses a holistic definition of discipleship but omits the questions of how to achieve “the process of becoming like Christ in our nature, character, values, purposes, thoughts, knowledge, attitudes, and will... it’s the process of becoming spiritually mature.”¹² These viewpoints from a range of authors and sources demonstrate the wide variety of approaches to discipleship which provide no objective basis for evaluating current best practice.

Focus and Value of this Research

This research aims to provide a reliable basis for evaluating discipleship, through the literature review, establishing the benchmark of first-century discipleship understood by Jesus and his followers. Then by identifying fruitful discipleship practices from a cross-section of UK churches. Comparing current good discipleship practice with first-century understandings of discipleship is a unique approach, not reflected in other research. The result is a clearer understanding of discipleship providing principles and practices that any church can adopt and adapt to their context.

⁷ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014).

⁸ Randy Clark, *There Is More Reclaiming the Power of Impartation* (Mechanicsburg: Apostolic Network of Global Awakening, 2008).

⁹ Bill Johnson, *Strengthen Yourself in the Lord: How to Release the Hidden Power of God in Your Life* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image Publishers, 2013).

¹⁰ Peter Morden, *The Message of Discipleship: Authentic Followers Of Jesus In Today’s World* (London: IVP, 2018).

¹¹ Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture, 2nd Edition* (Greenville: 3dm Publishing, 2014).

¹² Todd M. Fink, *Biblical Discipleship: Essential Components for Attaining Spiritual Maturity* (Sutherland: Selah Book Press, 2016), 6.

I have a vested interest in this research; I am a vicar in a large Anglican church. My aim is not just to produce a piece of general research but to make discoveries that would impact my leadership and approach to discipleship.

The Research Method and Objectives

This is a qualitative research project investigating fruitful discipleship in UK churches, identifying good discipleship practice, and evaluating them against the findings of the literature review. The literature review highlighted the first-century rabbinical practices that shaped Jesus' model of discipleship, as illustrated through Mark's gospel.

My research objectives are to:

- Identify universal principles of discipleship from first-century biblical practices.
- Investigate examples of current fruitful practice helping people to grow as life-long disciples.
- Evaluate current approaches to discipleship against first-century practices.

Literature Review

A literature review of how first-century rabbinical practices shaped Jesus' model of discipleship as seen and evidenced in Mark's gospel was written in preparation for this dissertation. It assumed the possibility of establishing a biblical benchmark for assessing understandings of discipleship today. It explored three aspects of rabbinical practices; becoming a rabbi, the rabbi-disciple dynamic, and the Way the disciple followed, all illustrated from the gospel of Mark.

Becoming a Rabbi

The review highlighted the exacting educational process that a young man would journey through to become a rabbi; through Bet Sefer, Bet Talmud, and Bet Midrash. From the age of five through a child went to the synagogue for Bet Sefer, learning to read, write and memorise vast swathes of the Torah. From age ten, a boy moved onto Bet Talmud, with a focus on oral interpretations of the Torah and broader Jewish Scriptures. By thirteen, most boys finished studying and learned a trade. Only the best students carried on with Bet Midrash at the personal invitation of a rabbi. They studied, and followed, the interpretation of their rabbi in the detailed life application of the Torah and oral tradition.

Only after 70AD were there formal rabbinical schools that would bestow the title 'rabbi', before that the title would be given informally, not based on completing academic studies.

Mark 6:3 describes Jesus as 'the carpenter'¹³ indicating he followed the family trade rather

¹³ Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark - New International Biblical Commentary New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Inc, 1995), 92.

than going through Bet Midrash.¹⁴ Vander Laan concludes that “Jesus best fit the type of rabbi believed to have *s’ mikhah*, the authority to make new interpretations of the Torah. Most teachers of the law could only teach accepted interpretations. Teachers with authority, however, could make new interpretations and pass legal judgments.”¹⁵ Hence the response of the people in Mark 1:22-28 as Jesus teaches in the synagogue and then drives out an evil spirit: “What is this? A new teaching – and with authority!” Barclay supports this observation, noting that most rabbis quoted numerous authorities to prove their point whereas Jesus speaks with his own authority.¹⁶

Mark’s gospel echoes these findings, that Jesus followed the religious, educational, and culturally acceptable norms in his upbringing and ministry, referring to Jesus as a rabbi on four occasions. In Mark 9:5, at the transfiguration, Peter calls Jesus, rabbi. When Jesus asks the blind man what he wants (Mark 10:51), his response is “rabbi; I want to see.” Peter again addresses Jesus as a rabbi in the story of the withered fig-tree found in Mark 11:21. Finally, in Mark 14:45 Judas greets Jesus with the title ‘rabbi’ before the kiss of betrayal. Bultmann has no doubts that the characteristics of a rabbi are shown clearly in Jesus’ way of teaching and broader ministry:

“But if the gospel record is worthy of credence, it is at least clear that Jesus actually lived as a Jewish rabbi. As such, he takes his place as a teacher in the synagogue. As such, he gathers around him a circle of pupils. As such, he disputes over questions of the Law with pupils and opponents or with people seeking knowledge who turn to him as the celebrated rabbi. He disputes along the same lines as Jewish rabbis, uses the same methods of argument, the same turns of speech; like them, he coins proverbs

¹⁴ Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg, *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus: How the Jewishness of Jesus Can Transform Your Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 28.

¹⁵ Ray Vander Laan, *In the Dust of the Rabbi: Small Group Edition Discovery Guide: Becoming a Disciple* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 25.

¹⁶ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, The Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975), 32.

and teaches in parables. Jesus' teaching shows in content also a close relationship with that of the rabbis."¹⁷

Rabbis expected their disciples to adopt their values, teaching, and lifestyle. They would follow in 'the dust of their rabbi'¹⁸ - imitating his ways of thinking, speaking, and living life. An essential quality was the willingness to submit to the interpretive authority to their rabbi. It was an immersive experience that went far beyond academic theory. They practised what he preached. Jesus though is more than *just a rabbi*. Mark 1:1 introduces "the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." A Christological understanding of Mark underlines the significance of shaping life around Jesus' life and teaching. "At its very heart, Christianity is, therefore, a messianic movement, one that seeks to authentically and consistently embody the life, spirituality, teachings, and mission of its Founder."¹⁹

At the root of any current view of Christian discipleship should be a deep commitment to follow Jesus as Lord, which entails submitting to his teachings and putting them into practice. A church would do well to emphasise the significance of counting the cost of being a Christian and of using personal spiritual disciplines to imitate Jesus way of life.

¹⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, "Chapter 3: The Teaching of Jesus: The Will of God – Religion Online", <http://www.religion-online.org/book-chapter/chapter-3-the-teaching-of-jesus-the-will-of-god/>.

¹⁸ Vander Laan, *In the Dust of the Rabbi*, 16.

¹⁹ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016),101.

Rabbi-Disciple Dynamic

Wilkins shows that Jesus based his style of discipleship on a broad Old Testament understanding of a master/disciple relationship and then developed it further during three years of ministry. One significant development was his call to follow to those not usually chosen. "Come, follow me" is how Mark 1:14-20 and 2:13-17 describe the calling of an unlikely group of fishermen and a tax collector—men plying their trade who therefore had not completed Bet Midrash. That does not mean Jesus disciples were ignorant of spiritual things as working men. Vander Laan contends "they had a deep knowledge of the Torah and were familiar with oral tradition. The people of Galilee were the most religious Jews in the world in the time of Jesus."²⁰

Nevertheless, this is a striking departure from the system of academic merit that saw potential disciples presenting their qualifications and asking to be taken on by the rabbi. The call of disciples who had not been through Bet Midrash was a radical change from the cultural norms of the day. It creates a foundational, new principle that anyone can be a disciple, no longer based on nationality or educational accomplishment, but open to all; Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male, or female (Galatians 3:28). Mark 3:31-35 illustrates this principle when Jesus declares "Here are my mother and brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." The result of this comprehensive call was a large "mixed sort" of disciples attaching themselves to Jesus.²¹ However, while that call to follow extended to all, it was not without cost or expectation.

²⁰ Ray Vander Laan, "Rabbi and Talmidim," *That the World May Know*, <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/rabbi-and-talmidim>.

²¹ Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Leicester: IVP, 1992), 177.

To follow Jesus meant journeying with him, not just learning in theory but to putting it into practice; “Jesus was their Master not so much as a teacher of right doctrine, but rather as a master-craftsman whom they were to follow and imitate. Discipleship was not matriculation in a Rabbinical College, but apprenticeship to the work of the kingdom.”²² Peter demonstrates the point, “We have left everything to follow you” (Mark 10:28), and later, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you” (Mark 14:31). Deep loyalty and commitment were expected of the disciples for any rabbi.

To follow Jesus as a rabbi was not individualistic; it was a call to follow in community. Best,²³ Henderson,²⁴ Barton,²⁵ Bivin,²⁶ and Milne²⁷ agree to the significance of being called into a community of disciples, as well as the crucial step of commitment expected. The Kingdom of God is not a place but a present tense community.²⁸

The teaching style within that learning community encouraged disciples to engage in discussion around the Scriptures, everyday life, and crucially their rabbi’s perspective on both.²⁹ To follow a rabbi was a deeply relational experience; the rabbi would question each disciple as they journeyed together; ‘Why did you do that?’ Likewise, the disciple questioned the rabbi about their thinking or some aspect of his life.³⁰ Mark 8:27-30 recounts

²² T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus - Studies of Its Form and Content*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 239-40.

²³ Ernest Best, *Following Jesus*, (Sheffield: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1981).

²⁴ Suzanne Watts Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

²⁵ Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship & Family Ties in Mark* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

²⁶ David N. Bivin, ‘First-Century Discipleship | JerusalemPerspective.Com Online’, <https://www.jerusalemerspective.com/555/>.

²⁷ Douglas J W Milne, ‘Mark--the Gospel of Servant Discipleship’, *The Reformed Theological Review* 49, no. 1 (1990): 20–29.

²⁸ Best, *Following Jesus*, 208.

²⁹ Doug Greenwold, ‘Being a First-Century Disciple | Bible.Org’, accessed 9 April 2020, <https://bible.org/article/being-first-century-disciple>.

³⁰ Greenwold, “Being a First-Century Disciple”.

Peter's confession of Christ. Jesus asks him two questions; "Who do people say I am? Who do you say I am?" The goal was to develop discernment; how to think and live for themselves in such a way as honoured the rabbi's teaching. More than mere knowledge, the ways of the rabbi became ingrained in the lives of his followers.

Jesus' disciples were called by grace, not merit, into a community of faith to journey with Jesus, their rabbi. What is remarkable is that at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is gifted to all followers of Jesus, in all places and through all times. Jesus becomes our eternal rabbi and following him is made possible and empowered by the Holy Spirit. "The essential components of discipleship function as vehicles which combine the grace of God and human effort for attaining spiritual maturity."³¹

These observations indicate that any church engaging in fruitful discipleship will value and practice belonging to an immersive community of faith, with the opportunity to ask questions of faith and life (and in turn be challenged themselves). People learn and grow within community, which is captured well by Vander Laan, quoting "the wisdom of the rabbis: do not live without a rabbi or die without a disciple."³²

The Way

"A disciple of Rabbi Jesus is one who totally surrenders to Him and His way of seeing and doing things. As such, a disciple comes with a willing desire to conform all aspects of his or her life to the authoritative Lordship of Jesus Christ."³³ Disciples follow the Way of Jesus; it is

³¹ Fink, *Biblical Discipleship*, 191.

³² Vander Laan, *In the Dust of the Rabbi*, 172.

³³ Greenwold, "Being a First-Century Disciple".

a Way of living and a Way of mission, which goes far beyond the expectations of a historic rabbi-disciple relationship. Disciples will carry the same message, have the same ministry, demonstrate the same love and compassion (Mark 12:30-33), imitate the same religious and social practices (Mark 2:23-27), belong to the same family of believers, help with the same humility (Mark 9:35, 10:42-45), seek first the same kingdom purposes (Mark 1:14-17), and live sacrificially even if it means death (Mark 8:34-35). "Discipleship is becoming like Jesus, our Lord and Founder and experiencing his life as it is lived through me/us, and it lies at the epicenter of the church's task."³⁴

Wright views Mark in two sections; "the first eight chapters introduce us to the first secret: this Jesus of Nazareth is, in fact, the Messiah. The second eight chapters introduce us to the second secret: this Messiah is not the military warrior, but the Servant King."³⁵ Identifying Jesus as both the Son of God and the messianic Servant King is essential for his disciples because in following him, they are to imitate not his identity but his purposes and practices. "Faithful discipleship can best be understood not as the correct appraisal of Jesus' Christological identity, but as the disciples' collective participation in Jesus Christological mission."³⁶ Following Christ means coming into the community of fellow followers receiving strength and support for life but also to be equipped to participate in the mission of Jesus. Mark 1:17 is the call not just to follow but to be fishers of men which is key to the purpose of the Way. "Jesus relationship with his disciples is based on both presence and practice. Practice is the participation in the Christological mission of Jesus."³⁷

³⁴ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 101.

³⁵ N. T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

³⁶ Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, 241.

³⁷ Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, 4.

Markusse³⁸ shapes her argument around Mark's theme of frequent failure by the disciples, summing up the Christian journey in Jesus declaration "with man, this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27). She makes a persuasive case that the reality of a disciple's life reflects the tension between failure and reconciliation; living as a disciple is impossible without the grace of God at work. The disciples are "active, though faltering, participants in the kingdom reality that Jesus both proclaims and enacts."³⁹ Their failures were more to do with a crisis of practice rather than belief; doubting their own delegated authority to bring God's kingdom on earth as in heaven. Mark 8:29 records Peter's Christological confession yet within days he slumbered through Gethsemane before fleeing at Jesus arrest (Mark 14:32-50).

The very nature of the Way is putting into practice the mission and purposes of rabbi Jesus. Hirsch talks of "the idea of the imitation of Christ is the idea of embodiment, which involves patterning and modelling in the context of lived life."⁴⁰ In Mark 1:15 Jesus proclaims, "The time has come... the kingdom of heaven is near. Repent and believe the good news".

Today's disciples must continue to keep the balance of abiding in Jesus while pursuing the mandate to make disciples; his followers adopt the mission of Jesus which extends to the whole world.

The literature review has uncovered principles of discipleship that serve as transferable approaches to discipleship and provide a measure for establishing good practice. To

³⁸ Gabi Markusse, *Salvation in the Gospel of Mark: The Death of Jesus and the Path of Discipleship* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2018).

³⁹ Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, 13-14.

⁴⁰ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 121.

understand Jesus as the promised Messiah, who lived and taught as a rabbi raises interesting questions. The rabbi-disciple relationship was critical to the development of the disciple. That intimate relationship is not available in the same way today, even given the ministry of the Holy Spirit. What is the role of church leadership in making disciples? This question is not raised overtly by the literature review where Jesus the rabbi is teaching and revealing himself and his purposes. While the message remains the same, the function of leading and embodying that teaching is now in the hands of church leaders. How is this achieved in churches today? What is the role of the leader? What practices help this process? Jesus breaks with rabbinical tradition in calling all to follow, rather than just the educated elite, was not without cost or expectation. Is there an emphasis in the church today on taking personal responsibility for growth and of counting the cost of being a Christian? There is an essential Christological dimension to Jesus that means he is more than a rabbi. Carrying on the mission of Jesus is a mark of his followers and should still be a mark of discipleship today.

These are the themes that should emerge in the qualitative research into good practice in churches today – if they do not appear, then a further investigation into why not must be made.

Methodology

Introduction

This research is rooted in Practical Theology aiming to understand what churches are doing to address the challenge of discipleship, not just what is happening on the ground, but what is bearing fruit in making disciples.

Swinton and Mowat defined Practical Theology as “critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world with a view to ensuring faithful participation in the continuing mission of the triune God.”⁴¹

Research Questions

The research questions seek to uncover the examples of good practice that are helping people to grow as life-long disciples. Is there a correlation between the ways of first-century discipleship illustrated in Mark’s gospel and the aspects of fruitful discipleship demonstrated in a cross-section of UK churches, today? If there is a correlation, how can that help churches the make disciples? Do church leaders have a clear understanding of what the mission of Jesus is? What are the challenges to discipleship, and how can they be met?

These were the key research questions I was seeking to answer. They are practical rather than theoretical and lent themselves to investigating existing practices of churches, primarily through interviewing church leaders.

⁴¹ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research - Second Edition*, (London: SCM Press, 2016, 24.

Methodology Rationale

Hammersley defines qualitative research as, “a form of social inquiry that tends to adopt a flexible and data-driven research design, to use relatively unstructured data, to emphasize the essential role of subjectivity in the research process, to study a small number of naturally occurring cases in detail, and use verbal rather than statistical forms of analysis.”⁴²

A qualitative, rather than quantitative approach was appropriate for several reasons.

- The literature review establishes the benchmark of first-century discipleship. To compare it against spiritual formation today requires qualitative rather than quantitative research. What are the practices and stories coming from churches across the UK?
- Spiritual formation has many complex and multiple variables that go beyond the analysis of numerical data. Exploring those issues with a small selection of church leaders allowed greater depth and nuance to the research.
- Qualitative methods like interviews are better for describing, interpreting, and gaining in-depth insight into specialised concepts like spiritual formation. The analysis was verbal rather than statistical, providing a ‘thick’ description⁴³; the explanations and meanings understood by the leaders engaged in discipleship.
- A flexible research approach was preferable for both the semi-structured interviews and the analysing of the transcripts, allowing themes and categories to emerge rather than fit into prescribed boxes.

⁴² Martyn Hammersley, *What is Qualitative Research*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 12.

⁴³ Clifford Geertz, *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973)

- The context was an important factor in gathering the data. The church setting, demographic and leadership influenced the practices of the church, which would not have been apparent with a quantitative approach.

I agree with Silverman in concluding that “sometimes, qualitative research is just a good fit for the (research) questions.”⁴⁴

Method: Thematic Analysis

Narrative analysis is a broad term for a suite of approaches “concerned with the search for and analysis of the stories that people employ to understand their lives and the world around them.”⁴⁵

Braun and Clarke argue that within narrative approaches, thematic analysis is a distinct method focusing on what is said by the interviewee rather than on how things are expressed and as such should be a foundational method for qualitative analysis. “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data.”⁴⁶

I adopted the Six Phases of Thematic Analysis⁴⁷ outlined by Braun and Clarke as the basis for the study.

⁴⁴ David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, (London: Sage Publications, 2013), 122.

⁴⁵ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 412.

⁴⁶ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, “Using thematic analysis in psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2006), 77-101.

⁴⁷ Braun and Clarke. “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology.”

1. Familiarising yourself with your data: this included having the interviews transcribed, thorough reading and re-reading and initial notetaking looking for meanings, patterns, and themes.
2. Generating initial codes: this involved the finding, collating, and systematic coding of the ideas in the interview transcriptions to make initial sense of the data.
3. Searching for themes: the codes were analysed and grouped into potential themes, which in turn were blended to form broader overarching themes.
4. Reviewing themes: the themes were examined and refined until they encapsulated the coded data and the first thematic map began to take shape. There was also quite some to-ing and fro-ing between the transcript data and the emerging themes to check the themes held integrity to the data and to check nothing had been missed out.

The result was a solid list of different themes, how they linked together, and the overall picture they painted of the thematic map of the data.

5. Defining and naming themes: this involved capturing the heart of what each theme was about through a process of detailed analysis. It mapped the specific themes coherently into the broader narrative and produced clear definitions and names for each theme that was consistent with the research questions.
6. Producing the findings: This was the final version of the analysis, written considering the research questions and drawing conclusions to be evaluated in-depth in the final discussion chapter in the light of the literature review. "A successful thematic analysis allows the researcher to gain an in-depth and critical understanding of their data."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Alexander Seal, "Thematic Analysis" In Gilbert, Nigel and Stoneman Paul (eds) *Researching Social Life*, (London: Sage Publications, 2016), 444.

Following this six-phase approach enabled a rigorous and thorough study of the data, including scrutiny for potential pitfalls, which resulted in trustworthy conclusions.

Overcoming Potential Pitfalls

I was mindful of the following five pitfalls and my underlying assumptions:

1. Any potential power imbalance between researcher and interviewee. There were four churches selected for the study. There are all large, evangelical, and thriving with a commitment to discipleship. I assumed that discipleship is part of the call upon Christians and churches, that spiritual formation is possible. There was no power imbalance as this was not studying up or down but sideways⁴⁹, with church leaders who were peers.
2. To avoid generalised or inconclusive results due to a superficial process or analysis. I endeavoured to counter this using the criteria that “high quality qualitative methodological research is marked by (a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence.”⁵⁰ The research questions were sufficiently focussed, and the conclusions were measured against them to ensure specific useful outcomes.
3. By using inadequate validity standards, I assumed that there were identifiable elements to growth which would give a structure for comparing approaches to discipleship across different churches. “The concept of validity in qualitative research is illustrated through the explication and differentiation of primary criteria, secondary criteria, and techniques.

⁴⁹ Ursula Plesner, “Studying Sideways: Displacing the Problem of Power in Research Interviews With Sociologists and Journalists,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 17(6) (2011), 471–482.

⁵⁰ Sarah J Tracy, “Qualitative Quality: Eight “Big-Tent” Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research” *Qualitative Inquiry* 16(10) (2010), 837–851.

Credibility, authenticity, criticality, and integrity are considered primary criteria, whereas explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence, and sensitivity are considered secondary criteria”.⁵¹ An awareness of the issue of validity helped safeguard against matters in this area.

4. The study not being rigorous enough. Pope argues that “as in quantitative research, the basic strategy to ensure rigour in qualitative research is systematic and self-conscious research design, data collection, interpretation, and communication.”⁵² I assumed that the methods employed would be rigorous enough to stand up to scrutiny and make the results useful in shaping the thinking of churches looking to make disciples.

5. The challenge of researcher bias. “Qualitative research depends in much larger part on producing a convincing account. In trying to do this, it is all too easy to construct a narrative that relies on the reader’s trust in the integrity and fairness of the researcher.”⁵³ I attempted to negate this bias by declaring my vested interest, setting out my assumptions for the study and by applying the six-fold steps set out by Braun and Clark.

The Research

The research project involved a small sample of four churches. There were no interviews with vulnerable adults or children, and the meetings were held online via Zoom. Interviews were recorded on two devices and then transcribed. These are held online in a secure, password-protected OneDrive account.

⁵¹ Robin Whittemore, Susan K. Chase, Carol Lynn Mandel, “Validity in Qualitative Research”, *Qualitative Health Research*, 11 (2001), 522-537.

⁵² Nicholas Mays and Catherine Pope, “Qualitative Research: Rigour and qualitative research” *The British Medical Journal*, 311:109 (1995).

⁵³ Mays and Pope. P111

Interviews transcripts were the basis for using thematic analysis to identify, analyse and interpret patterns within the qualitative data that related to how those churches approach intentional discipleship.

Research Findings

The literature review formed the basis of the interview questions, which begin with an overview of the subject, while the other questions dug into more of the detail. Each question forms a section heading, with an overview of the codes and patterns concluding with a theme. There is an initial reflection of what I believe are the significant findings at the end of each section. In the Discussion part of this dissertation, these initial reflections will be analysed more deeply against the conclusions of the literature review.

Q1. What do you think is bearing fruit in making disciples in your church?

Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4	Themes
Discipleship Pathway = growth path Jesus' aim is the church making disciples Church's aim – making disciples who make disciples Leader's mindset	Roadmap Journey movement Leadership aim Whole life transformation	Leadership priority	Discipleship Pathway (evangelism, discipleship, serving, planting) Strategic leadership & planning Leadership	Showing Leadership
Devote Bible/Prayer	Sunday Service (teaching, prayer worship)	Sunday services Sunday teaching Practical faith	Sunday services	Sunday Services
Grow Groups	Connect Groups Intentional	Bible in Small groups	Small Groups Variety of groups	Growth within Community
Deployed Sphere of influence Humble Servants	Serving Social transformation ministries	Serving	Volunteering Volunteers on the staff team	Serving
Develop – gifts and character	Relational courses Transition points	Practical examples (of living out faith)	Intern programme Leadership Year	Practical Teaching & Training
Evangelism Go -obey -	Alpha & Post-Alpha	Evangelism Christianity Explored	Evangelism	Evangelism
<i>Fig. 1</i>				

All the interviewees referred to the importance of showing leadership in some form or another. Each has a strategic plan; “we wouldn’t do anything unless it was about growing whole-life disciples” (2:15). In each case, it started with people who were not yet Christians and led through conversion, nurture through to serving or ministering in a place of responsibility. It was apparent that each leader had the mindset that the overarching goal of the church was to make disciples; “In everything, we do kind of think, how does it fit in towards this aim of making disciples who make disciples?” (1:124). This mindset shaped the strategy communicated to the church.

All articulated the importance of the main Sunday gathering as the prime platform for Bible teaching, prayer, worship, as well as establishing the church culture and communicating the vision and values of their church; “I think the reality is that they (Sunday services) are just vital, aren’t they, for bringing people on” (4:66).

Likewise, each leader expressed the vital importance of community groups in the discipleship journey of church members. Whether it was a midweek Bible study group or a more general interest group, they are intentional catalysts for growth; “big picture-wise our small groups are really significant” (4:5).

Every person cited the opportunity to serve as bearing fruit in making disciples; “We are looking for the people who are humbly getting on with serving the Lord and serving the church. We will develop them in all kinds of ways to be leaders of leaders” (1:118). Each uses practical teaching and training to develop gifts and character appropriate to people in their faith journeys; “We are always trying to look for stuff that is going to equip people and help people be a disciple in their workplaces” (2:47-48).

Finally, each leader described the importance of evangelism, ensuring there are intentional opportunities for people to explore faith and take the next steps in responding to the gospel. One stated, “So, working from the outside in: We’re intentional about bridge-building into our community with Christian witness” (3:26-27).

Initial Observations For Further Discussion

Given the idea of bearing fruit is the overarching question that captures the big picture of making disciples, it is worth noting that all four leaders express the same key themes. The detail may differ from church to church, but the themes remain the same. This is encouraging as it indicates there may be transferable principles that other churches can explore and adopt. Each church is intentional in their approach to discipleship identifying a pathway that shapes the ministry of the church; “So the first thing is to shift the aim of what church is about totally, generally, and to keep on asking the question, *Are we making disciples who make disciples?*” (1:58-59). Each identified a journey of faith that requires a nuanced response in terms of ministry. Evangelism, belonging, nurture, maturing and serving all feature in this theme of a pathway of spiritual development and will be analysed more deeply in the light of the literature review.

Q2. How do you raise levels of commitment to Jesus across the breadth of the church members? Which ways have been the most effective?

Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4	Themes
Journey of faith Take up your cross Obedience based discipleship	Leadership expectation <i>Pray, Give, Serve</i>	Leadership Plan - 5 layers of commitment: outreach, bridge- building, nurture, maturing, developing leaders	Leadership development Raise up leaders	Leadership development
Mentoring/apprenticing Tell & Show, Model behaviour Self-feeder, Lifelong learners Imitation, Personal responsibility	Connect group Connected – a key to being known, belong, committed, growing Welcome	Leadership development (interaction, reading, discussing) Invitation only	Intern programme Equipping/training	Mentoring Community
Character - resilience, teamwork & self- motivation Authenticity and integrity Vulnerability Permission & Encouragement		1-year Discipleship course		Character development
Practical preaching & teaching Teaching & Prayer	Practical preaching	Bible application – homegroups Applied discipleship		Practical Teaching & Training
		Intentional events to build bridges Witness events Evangelistic course	Church planting Revitalisation of churches	Evangelism
Servant heart/Shared life	Serving	Serving	Serving opportunities Empowering people	Serving
<i>Fig. 2</i>				

In looking more closely at effectively deepening commitment for church members, it was striking that leadership is again key for all four churches. This time it is the development of leaders within the church. Each approach is different but places a premium on training and raising leaders which each identified as means of deepening commitment. “We do a lot of leadership development with our leaders. We run a few different levels of programmes - that’s really important because then we know that they’ll feed in...” (2:153-155).

All four cited the importance of mentoring within a tight-knit community, either one to one or in a small group setting and usually facilitated by a senior church leader. One leader in describing the content of his year-long discipleship group stated; “it almost doesn’t matter what you read together because the interplay between people at a certain level of maturity, trying to work that out, I’ve found to be the most beneficial” (3:127-128). Two of the interviewees went further to describe the process as being about character development rather than purely skills or knowledge. One explained how he views leadership development, stating, “we can teach that stuff, but what we can’t teach are those character issues” (1:228).

Three of the leaders believed that practical teaching and training encouraged people of all stages of faith to go deeper in their commitment, “we do lots of practical tool kit stuff: You want to know how to read the Bible? This is how you do it” (2:128-129). Relating teaching or courses to everyday life, like parenting or marriage from a biblical perspective, helped apply the Bible to life; “different things grab different people’s attention, or scratch where people are itching” (2:142-143).

Two of the four highlighted evangelism or witness as a means of deepening commitment. They described a process where people were encouraged and equipped to be a part of the

whole church process of outreach. One church is developing an ambitious church planting strategy that relies on sending out trained and motivated laypeople to enable the plant; “I think the plants will help because you’re asking for quite a big commitment” (4:317).

All the leaders pointed to serving as a critical component in the growth of people; “we try to encourage people to step up” (4:83). There is a desire to release people in their spiritual gifts by offering training, support and a sense of belonging to the mission and ministry of the church; “the idea being that if people are gifted in different ways, then how do we help them train up in those areas; to be more effective, more reflective in terms of working that out in practice?” (3:102-104).

Initial Observations For Further Discussion

Each church takes the development of leaders seriously. There is a sense of movement, a growth to maturity that mirrors a deepening commitment in a person. It is the fruit of the strategic growth pathway described in the last section. The development at the initial stages of a person’s faith journey is more generic – courses, small group communities, financial giving and serving. Those who mature through those stages receive more intentional and personal opportunities to develop, often through some sort of mentoring; a small group of peers who meet over a lengthy period with a senior leader from the church. While they all differ in content, the key is meeting together, sharing life, and reflecting biblically; “you look at the ones that are devoted, and you develop them... Not the most gifted, not the most talented, I’ve been blinded by that in the past, way too often. I’ve gone for gifting over character. So instead we are looking for the people who are humbly getting on with serving the Lord and serving the church. We will develop them in all kinds of ways to be leaders of leaders” (1:115-119). One church has a very developed ministry amongst students which

includes an intensive mentoring/discipleship internship, which is noteworthy as it shows the spiritual hunger of the individuals rather than the maturity of faith; “When I talk to people, most of the key younger folks (under thirty-fives) - the ones that are really engaged - have either done ours or someone else’s internship programme. Broadly speaking, the impact of that long term is massive” (4:48-50). These are significant findings will be explored further.

The issue of “serving the Lord and serving the church” (1:118) is a theme common to all four churches. One leader spoke of “exposing people to lived-out faith... in the way that we encourage people’s service in the wider church” (3:10, 12). Faith cannot be purely theoretical; it is practical and lived out, which has implications for how people learn. The rational Western mindset encourages the use of courses to give information and to measure commitment by attendance. The first-century Hebrew way of learning was through apprenticing with a rabbi. It was highly relational and immersive, which clear in the literature review and merits discussion in greater detail.

Q3. What helps people in your church follow the teachings and values of Jesus?

Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4	Themes
Practical preaching/teaching	Sermon series Practical teaching/courses Bible Lab – more in-depth studies	Preaching & teaching the Bible Sunday service – Bible Testimonies	Preaching	Practical Preaching & Training
Shared life Disciple-making mindset Involvement	Connect groups	Small Groups - Bible application	Small Groups – linked to sermon series	Community
Leader - Honesty/vulnerability Model behaviour Honesty about hardship/struggle/grief Be real	Encouragement	Culture of expected growth	Communicating vision & values	Leadership culture
Spiritual disciplines	Personal QT	Bible reading	Mentoring	Mentoring
				Personal Spiritual Practices
<i>Fig. 3</i>				

The primary way that people in the church learn to follow the teachings and values of Jesus is through the Bible. The preaching at Sunday Services is critical. The sermon series aims to be practical and down to earth, making the Bible relevant to life today; “We do take seriously that the sermon on the Sunday is a critical part of building those bridges for people, and applying it” (3:177-78). The centrality of the Bible is re-enforced at each church by encouraging personal spiritual practices with a strong emphasis on Bible reading and

prayer; “In terms of what we put on, it’s things like that and our Sunday teaching and our (small) group material. Also, we encourage people to have a personal time with God and read the Bible. Prayer is really important” (2:123-5).

Preaching is a vital means of teaching the values of Jesus. However, each interviewee also recognised the importance of mid-week groups meeting to discuss and reflect on the sermon passage and applying it to life; “The Bible studies that are hosted in smaller groups are focused on applying it. So, the implication is, this is the stuff that changes you, and we try to spur each other on (as Hebrews puts it) but taking the ‘each other on’ bit seriously” (3:180-82).

The final theme to emerge for this question was again the role of leadership, this time in creating the church culture; “in terms of membership we say, If you are part of (the church) we ask you to *pray, serve and give*. That’s our three things: *Pray, serve, give*. What we have seen is that, because we bang on about that quite a lot, we want you to think about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, and if you are committed to growing in him” (2:76-80). Each leader prioritises the Bible in preaching, discussion and application in small groups, and self-feeding through personal spiritual practices. Each church sources or produces material to be used in those groups for every sermon series; “The reality is we use a variety of materials, and we ring the changes depending on where the leadership feels that we need to focus” (3:79-80). Each person also spoke of the culture that is created by the leaders of the church; “I can’t share my life with hundreds and hundreds of people... but I can share the ups and downs of my life, and in doing so, I give them permission to be able to open up in their lives. When you are vulnerable like that you get so much more connection with people than trying

to pretend everything's fine" (1:289-91). Communicating the values of the church creates an expectation of what leads to spiritual growth and formation.

Initial Observations For Further Discussion

How people engage with the Bible is vital, and there are fascinating contrasts to be made with how first-century disciples approached both the Scriptures and learning from Jesus.

What was fruitful then can be compared to what is fruitful now but may also highlight our blind spots today.

The role of the leader in creating the culture of the church is also worth noting; "Helping people grasp what we are trying to do so that they can come on board with that" (4:168).

However, it is creating a culture not just through strategic planning and vision casting but also through modelling personal spiritual struggles, practices and priorities; "That's the currency of discipleship - reality - being able to share the ups and downs of my life" (1:278-79). This nuance to creating a culture that is both corporate yet individual will be explored further in the light of the literature review.

Q4. How do you encourage the use of spiritual disciplines? Which ones?

Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4	Themes
Personal Bible reading Prayer Giving Fasting Fast Till 5 Friday Serving Solitude	Bible reading Prayer Listening to God Giving/Generosity Stewardship Sabbath rest Quiet Days	Bible study Prayer Giving Serving (use gifts) Reading Evangelism	Bible reading Prayer Prayer ministry Prophecy Fasting Celebration Reading	Personal Spiritual Practices
Model behaviour Encourage	Leadership example 'integral in who we are and what we do.'	Model behaviour		Leadership modelling
	Connect Groups	Learn together		Community
Teaching on Spiritual Disciplines	Spiritual direction	Discipleship course Practical teaching – 'how to.'	Sermon series	Practical Teaching & Training
<i>Fig. 4</i>				

All agreed on two core spiritual disciplines; bible reading and prayer; “Throughout the (small) group material we write, they all keep popping up, especially Bible reading, prayer, and listening to God (2:165-67). Another said “we’ve pushed and promoted daily Bible study and prayer. A fairly classic quiet time is the thing that we communicate as a norm for people” (3:195-6). Churches with a charismatic emphasis also included prayer ministry, listening to God or prophecy which I have included as sub-sections to the broader theme of prayer.

Financial giving figured as a personal spiritual discipline for three of the churches; “giving - generosity - is a spiritual discipline. We talk about generosity a lot. Not just as, please give to keep the church going, but actually it’s a spiritual indicator of your heart” (1:319-20).

Similarly, “I think that the way we do it here is about generosity, about stewardship, as a whole-life disciple of Jesus your money belongs to Jesus as well” (2:189-91).

The rest of the list is an eclectic mix where one or sometimes two of the churches focus on a subject. A closer inspection helps to differentiate between spiritual disciplines themselves, those *practices* that help a person to grow spiritually, and the *means* to encourage those disciplines that the church uses.

Fasting, serving, solitude, sabbath rest, more extensive reading, evangelism, and celebration all feature as personal spiritual practices but are not found uniformly across the churches.

Why not? I can offer three potential reasons. The previous section introduced the first – the leader sets the culture of the church, so what the leader values and models determine what the church follows. Taking fasting as an example, “we have a thing called *Fast Till 5 Friday*, to introduce fasting. We say to people, why not make your Thursday night your last meal, and then fast until 5 o’clock on Friday? We do that every week” (1:309-11).

On the other hand, another reported, “I think as leaders we are rubbish at fasting, and it’s really interesting, isn’t it, how the leaders make a real impact.... if people know that you’re fasting they may give it a go” (2:162-3). The second reason is to do with the interview style itself, as people are talking, it is a stream of consciousness, rich data but not a systematic or complete view on the question. With more time or further reflection, I suspect that all the leaders would have added further to their lists. For example, interview 4 yielded quite a list of personal spiritual disciplines but aside from citing a recent sermon series, did not address

the part of the question asking, *'how do you encourage the use of spiritual disciplines?'*

Thirdly, that spiritual disciplines themselves, while valued, are not a top priority issue for the churches and so are not encouraged systematically; "We really want people to grow in those things, but we don't do a spiritual disciplines course or sermon series. It's just integrated into who we are as a church" (2:171-73).

As to the *means* used to encourage spiritual disciplines, leadership as a role model is a powerful motivator for others to practice spiritual disciplines; "I was converted from being an atheist at 18. I had no clue about the Bible, or prayer, or anything, and there wasn't anybody teaching that at the time either. But I - with a couple of friends - sort of learned it. We learned to pray together; we learned how to study together. So, I always thought I want to make sure that I'm actually helping people on that practical level to do it" (3:196-7).

Two churches mention small groups or the community aspect of learning and practising together Addressing spiritual disciplines one leader reflected that they appear "throughout the (small) group material we write, they all keep popping up" (2:165-66).

All the churches had some form of practical teaching or training to encourage spiritual disciplines; "In terms of establishing those disciplines, that's one of the big things that we try to do in the discipleship course" (3:215-16). Another said, "since I've been here, we've done a sermon series on spiritual disciplines. We did a term on fasting, we did a term on prayer, and we did a term on feasting. They were what (the senior leader) prayed about and felt that we needed to push" (4:174-76).

Initial Observations For Further Discussion

I am interested in the fact that only one church put evangelism as a spiritual discipline. A later question addresses how people adopt the mission of Jesus, which is a central theme in

the literature review. It indicates a degree of importance not reflected in the disciplines encouraged by most of the leaders interviewed, despite the fact they all included it in the section as to what was bearing fruit.

Both the purpose of spiritual disciplines and the leader as a role model are worth investigating further as they have echoes of the rabbi-disciple relationship highlighted in the literature review.

Q5. What is the role of the Christian community in your discipleship approaches?

Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4	Themes
Grow Group Interest Groups Trust Low control, high accountability Encourage responsibility & initiative Family redefined Membership Marks of Membership: love/loved, give/receive, serve/served, celebrate/celebrated	Connect Groups (44%) (23 groups) Community Group (68%) Up, in and out Family Intentional Service teams Hospitality Socials Retreats	Home Groups Diversity Friendship, Fellowship Mutual accountability Discipleship course	Home Groups (50%) Primary means of discipleship Interest Groups	Diversity of Community types Family Service teams Hospitality
<i>Fig. 5</i>				

The role of some form of discipleship community is vital for each of the leaders; they are “foundational” (3:277), “massive” (4:211) and “we try really hard to do community well... if

you look in the Bible... that's integral to what church is and how to grow disciples." (2:217-8), and "every week, we encourage people to go to small groups" (1:351). Small groups are where faith becomes personal and practical on numerous levels, "we are intentional about our sermon series, but our applied discipleship happens really in the small groups, our home groups" (3:66-8). There is an opportunity for developing a sense of belonging and of pastoral care which is especially important in larger churches; "The first question I'll ask if anybody says to me, I don't really feel part of the church, is, Are you in a grow group? Or if they say to me, I've not really been looked after and pastorally cared for, I'll say, are you in a grow group?" (1:346-49). There are fellowship and friendship "I think fellowship is a particular gift of the Spirit who enables quite diverse people to unite in Christ. But I think, alongside that, friendship is an even more precious gift at the level of mutual accountability in faith and life" (3:279-281). They are a place for engaging corporately in some of the core spiritual disciplines; "Every Connect group has to have some element of Bible teaching, worship and prayer" (2:223-4). Another said, "we try to unpack what's preached on a Sunday in the smaller group setting" (4:142). Finally, there is a missional edge to the groups, "it's anecdotal, but it's there, it's happening. You hear stuff all the time about people serving their community, people sharing their faith, inviting people to Alpha" (2:289-90).

Two leaders described small groups in qualitative terms, as a family; "Community is really important, and one of the things people say about (our church) is that it feels like a family, which is quite bizarre bearing in mind the size of it" (2:214-5). Another said, "when you give and receive, love and be loved, serve and be served, celebrate and be celebrated... those kinds of things make you part of the family" (1:342-45).

One leader mentioned broader groups like service teams as also being vital if they meet regularly and intentionally to build each other up in faith. They share many of the same elements as a small group but are a reasonable response to the busyness of people and the dangers of overcommitment; “it’s multifaceted... but it’s hard, and it’s a challenge in our church because of the size (2:246-7).

The same church also focusses on the importance of hospitality as a means of building a sense of belonging and family in a large church environment; “operationally we think a lot about that because they’re really important to build community” (2:230-31).

Initial Observations For Further Discussion

Small groups create community and are the prime means for people to have a sense of belonging, practical application of faith and shared purpose. This is a pivotal element to discuss further -not just what they do but also the *outcomes* for individuals and the church in equipping and developing new leaders; “broadly speaking, it’s raising up leaders, empowering people and equipping them “(4:119). Another leader said “how do I know people are Christians and are growing as disciples of Jesus? I guess it’s seen through their lives and actions, not necessarily if they’re coming along to stuff. And it’s through conversation and Connect group leaders feeding in. I do lots of training with Connect group leaders, and I talk to them about how things are going and the challenges they’re facing. I listen to what’s going on—as a leader, having an overview and a sense of the spiritual temperature of the church” (2:146-51).

The literature review included much about the quality of the community following Jesus, and it will be interesting to assess the research findings in more detail in the discussion section.

Q6. What is the evidence of church members adopting the mission of Jesus to make disciples?

Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4	Themes
Evangelism measurables (baptisms, Alpha participants, books given out, cards returned)	Anecdotal Bringing people to Alpha	Presence evangelism Safe for honest questions Thy Kingdom Come (pray for 5) Invitation Events Leadership enables Regular opportunities Witness v Evangelism	Church planting teams	Evangelism
Grow Group numbers Indicators of heart trajectory	Connect groups serving missionally Invite folk to serve missionally Send folk to serve other churches	Bridge-building groups	Intern development	Community
<i>Fig. 6</i>				

Of all the questions posed, this one had the least response which shows in just two themes emerging. Evangelism is a priority for all the churches, although none find it particularly easy, particularly in evidencing church members involvement. One distinguished between friendship and presence evangelism; “actually our friendship evangelism is poor. We have only probably half a dozen people who are good at actively inviting friends to our linked activities. Our’ presence evangelism’ appears to be - in the grace of God - rich. Two-thirds of the people who come on exploration courses have quite tenuous connections to individual Christians but have overlapped with the church, say through the café” (3:314-18). Another cited a significant number of tourists coming to faith – a reflection of the church’s presence

rather than of church members inviting people along. One leader saw it as a downside of being a large church; “my observation is that few do (invite) because a larger church is a safe place to have your own culture in, I think” (3:329-30). A similar comment was “I think our people could be more missionally-minded. It’s one of our frustrations. I think sometimes it’s a little bit too comfortable, and we try to shake people up” (2:277-8).

There are different means to evaluate evangelism – “there are some things you can measure. Like how many people have done Alpha this year?” (1:401-2). The numbers attending or responding to an invitation, don’t show how many people were invited or more pertinently who did the inviting. Another example of something measurable was around church planting; “I think the plants will help because you’re asking for quite a big commitment. We had a big chunk of people go. 32 is quite a big number for us” (4:317-8).

Then there is the anecdotal evidence; “it is anecdotal, isn’t it! It’s people telling their Connect group; I was just sharing with my colleague about Jesus...” (2:271-72). Perhaps the best evidence, both measurable and anecdotal lies again with the small groups of the churches; “how many people we’ve got in grow groups. Whether they are growing, shrinking, multiplying, starting new ones, some of it is just involvement in church stuff. It’s more anecdotal...” (1:410-11).

Some leaders briefly addressed some of the means used to encourage members to adopt the mission of Jesus. The primary means of internalising church teaching was either belonging to a group, or serving in ministry; “we have seen lots of people come into our church by starting by serving on something like the homelessness ministry with their neighbour or their friend from the school gate” (2:297-99). “Another said “In terms of how we encourage individuals within the church to be more gospel-minded, really our focus has

been mainly through things that - all year round - look a little bit like Thy Kingdom Come. So, who are your five people you're praying for?" (3:324-26).

Initial Observations For Further Discussion

Only one leader spoke of the mission of Jesus as making disciples; "whereas somebody else could have none of those things going on at the moment, but the orientation of their heart is towards Jesus, and they are moving towards him. Actually, that would be a disciple in terms of trajectory" (1:448-50). The other leaders defaulted to thinking of Jesus mission in terms of evangelism, which I find fascinating as all have well-articulated discipleship pathways that include evangelism as the first step; "broadly speaking, the Pathway is evangelism, discipleship, serving a need, and planting" (4:255-56). If there is confusion in the leader's thinking, then church members will not have a clear idea either. There is further discussion required over the understanding of Jesus mission in the light of the literature review.

Q7. What are the biggest challenges you face in discipleship within your church?

Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4	Themes
	20% just ticking along	Counting the cost of discipleship Materialism Busyness	Passengers (apathy, burnout, ageing) Not looked after leaders Wary of overcommitment Engaging people Lack of community Lack of individual responsibility Volunteers v Staff	Lack of engagement
	Diverse spiritualities in large church Sexuality question		Communicating the vision Some ministries detached from the main church	Owning the vision
	Students & tourists-transient Comings and goings		Church tourists	Transient
	Oversight – gauging depth of people’s discipleship No real measure Can’t see people’s hearts		Hard to gauge spiritual formation in a large church	Lack of measurement
Never-ending, always more to do, more to learn				Never-ending
Fig. 7				

Three of the four leaders pointed to a lack of engagement for various reasons. At a fundamental level, some choose to keep their distance for a variety of reasons. For some, it is due to the busyness of life, for others the lure of materialism and for still others the attraction of a different activity; “I reckon there’s about 20% who are quite comfortable

going to play golf and attending their gardens” (2:299-300). It is people who have either never counted the cost or have done so and chosen to stay at a low level of engagement; “the *cost of commitment* is the 3-word answer - but in relation to a materialistic, time-poor culture” (3:366-7). The one leader who did not mention this as a challenge is the only one not in a structured national church but from an independent church. For people to join the church as a member, they must own the vision, values and ministry of the church. The other three churches are from an Anglican tradition with more diverse congregations and no barriers to membership; “we try to walk quite a middle path and hold people in our church with lots of different views. We’ve got really conservative people, and we’ve got really liberal people. We sometimes manage it, but it’s a struggle sometimes in discipleship” (2:331-34). Owning the vision is closely tied to lack of engagement. If people do not hold the vision, then they are not engaged, revealing either a lack of commitment or poor communication of the vision by the church leadership; “We struggle a little bit with communicating the vision” (4:337-8). Given that all the interviewees lead large, growing churches, the balance is more likely to tip towards the former than the latter; there is evidence that communicating vision and values is essential and provides direction for the church and its members.

One church had quite a range of reasons why people do not engage; some are apathetic, others burned out, some have just grown old and slowed down naturally, while others come because it is a big church that does things well and so “you attract passengers, and the trick is getting them engaged more. That’s quite a difficult thing” (4:334-5). The same leader quoted a church survey, saying; “Lack of community, that’s quite apparent. When we did the survey, it was one of the biggest reasons why people were grumpy” (4:326-7).

Two churches are in large, picturesque, university cities that draw both students and tourists throughout the year, which brings its challenges: “So transient it’s untrue! And because we are transient, that’s really tricky” (2:85).

The same two churches also recognised the challenge of trying to measure something qualitative, someone’s discipleship, in quantitative ways, particularly in a large church setting where it is impossible to know everyone personally; “I think having a grip on everything. We try really hard to have systems in place to see where people are involved. But ultimately, because of the size, it’s really hard to actually know where people are at in terms of the depth of their discipleship” (2:304-6).

Interestingly, one leader answered the question from a personal rather than church perspective; “The challenge is for me knowing I’m never done and helping them know they’re never done. We’ll never be done because there is always more to learn” (1:457-8).

Initial Observations For Further Discussion

Struggles with people engaging are a “lack of personal responsibility” (4:327-8). I believe the notion of personal responsibility is a critical concept that deserves further scrutiny, given the literature review.

Another challenge, particularly for larger churches, is the danger of a lack of community, which I will address in the Discussion section as a part of the broader theme of discipleship within community.

Q8. Was there any particular support, resources or training that made a difference to you?

Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4	Themes
<p>The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry Spent Matches (Roy Moran)</p> <p>Intentional mentoring</p> <p>Authentic mentor</p> <p>Personal commitment</p> <p>Process (above, peer, below)</p> <p>Targeted mentoring</p> <p>Hunger to keep growing</p> <p>Freedom in Christ course</p>	<p>Seek good input</p> <p>Reading</p> <p>Arrow programme</p> <p>Varied ministry experience</p> <p>Freedom in Christ</p> <p>LICC – Transforming work</p> <p>Planning Centre – software</p> <p>Learning Community</p>	<p>Reading & studying</p> <p>Theological input</p> <p>Peer Group</p>	<p>5Q Alan Hirsch</p> <p>Culture of Honour</p> <p>The Power of Belonging: Discovering the Confidence to Lead with Vulnerability (Will van der Hart)</p> <p>5 Dysfunctions of a Team</p> <p>Overflow (Matthew Porter)</p> <p>Reading</p> <p>Arrow Programme</p> <p>Varied ministry experience</p> <p>Freedom in Christ</p>	<p>Book recommendations</p> <p>Lifelong learners</p> <p>Arrow programme</p> <p>Peer Group</p> <p>Personal experience</p> <p>Freedom in Christ</p> <p>Church resource recommendations</p>
<i>Fig. 8</i>				

Initial Observations For Further Discussion

This was a personal question to glean useful resources that people use, both as individuals and as a church. The only point I will explore further is the notion that they are all

committed to personal growth and are life-long learners; “I think that me being fed and resourced and refreshed is really important in the way that I lead on discipleship at (church), so I seek stuff out” (2:367-8). They use a variety of methods including reading, courses, learning communities, peer groups and mentoring but whatever the means, there is a desire and drive for personal growth; “You have to want to be a disciple. You’ve got to be willing to learn from somebody” (1:511-12).

Concluding points

The role of the leader or leadership team has emerged as an unexpected key to discipleship in churches. This was not immediately obvious in the literature review and needs exploring in greater depth in the discussion chapter. The leaders interviewed evaluated *fruitfulness* against a strategic overview of some form of intentional discipleship pathway that begins before a person is even a Jesus follower. How a church demonstrates and proclaims the gospel, both corporately and individually is vital in this process. Nurturing and deepening the commitment of believers is also a part of the discipleship pathway. The leader is essential in establishing the pathway; they create the culture of the church, the style and depth of teaching, which spiritual disciplines are encouraged, enable the opportunities for people to grow through serving or establishing authentic community that aids personal spiritual formation. This process of growth raises up new leaders, and their development is essential for the health and mission of the church. To make disciples, who make disciples who in turn make disciples is to take the mission of Jesus seriously.

The next section will assess these themes in light of the literature review. Is there any correlation between the practices of first-century discipleship illustrated in Mark’s gospel

and the aspects of fruitful discipleship shown in a cross-section of UK churches, today? If there is a correlation, how can that help churches the make disciples? Do church leaders have a clear understanding of what the mission of Jesus is? How can the challenges to discipleship be met?

Discussion

The research demonstrates a correlation between what first-century believers understood by discipleship and fruitful discipleship practices today.

The literature review focussed on how first-century rabbinical practices shaped Jesus' model of discipleship as seen and evidenced in Mark's gospel. It explored three aspects of rabbinical practices; becoming a rabbi, the rabbi-disciple dynamic, and the Way the disciple followed. The review uncovered principles of discipleship, providing a benchmark to compare with contemporary approaches to discipleship in UK churches.

The research questions explored the key elements of making disciples and the examples of good practice that are helping people to grow as life-long disciples. The results, listed below, form the section headings throughout the discussion section. They indicate the themes that require interpretation in the light of the literature review and further discussion of the implications for discipleship today.

- Leadership
- Discipleship pathway
- Practical teaching and training
- Community (personal responsibility and mutual accountability)
- Mission
- Serving

Leadership

The role of the leader was not immediately evident in the literature review but was pivotal in all the research interviews. The primary role of the rabbi was as a teacher, but there is also a leadership function to the rabbi's role. He makes the decisions; his disciples accept and follow in his footsteps. For example, in Mark 1:38, despite a fruitful time of ministry in

Capernaum, Jesus directs his disciples; “Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so that I can preach there also.” This leadership function is easily overlooked because of the Christological nature of Mark’s gospel, revealing the unique character and work of Jesus. The key is understanding that despite the significant Christological emphasis, Jesus purpose is not to proclaim himself but the kingdom of God. The demonstration and proclamation of the kingdom of God pass to the emerging church and remains the focal point for Christian leaders today. The coming of the kingdom is the goal, behind Jesus whole ministry and teaching as a rabbi. In Mark 1:15 Jesus proclaims, “The time has come; the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” Rabbi Jesus is teaching in word and deed about the kingdom of God. His death is the gateway promising citizenship to the kingdom of God to all who walk through it. So following the rabbi, Jesus is not an end in itself but the means of living as adopted citizens of demonstrating and proclaiming God’s kingdom; “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15).

How does this happen? In the gospels and the rest of the New Testament, it is the Holy Spirit who will continue the ministry of the revealing the kingdom of God but, significantly, through the people of God; “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one, the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). This enabling work of the Spirit reveals how Jesus focus on God’s kingdom will carry on through his followers. The rabbi-disciple relationship was critical to the development of the disciple. That intimate relationship is not available in the same way today, even with the ministry of the Holy Spirit. While the message remains the same, the function of leading and embodying that teaching is now in the hands of church leaders. The leadership function of

Jesus continues, directed by the Spirit but mediated through the God-given gift of leadership for the sake of the kingdom of God.

An overwhelming finding is that intentional leadership is vital to fruitful discipleship; leaders shape the culture of the church, the style and depth of teaching, evangelism, which spiritual disciplines they encourage, creating the opportunities for people to serve or establishing authentic community that aids personal spiritual formation. The process of growing new leaders and their development is essential for the health and mission of the church.

This has two implications for the theological training of church leaders. Is there an emphasis on the significance of discipleship for shaping priorities for future ministry? Second, how are people being taught? Do models of training overly rely on an academic, classroom approach? If so, this research challenges that; Jesus used a highly immersive, relational, apprenticeship model, so the disciples learned on the job.

A limitation of the research was the focus on larger churches; the research suggests they see fruit reflected in attendance, outreach, giving, community groups and serving. Part of the research question is to discover the good practice of those churches. Still, it would be useful to have a contrast with churches that are struggling to make disciples, particularly in their leadership approaches. The research supports the literature review in identifying intentional leadership, committed to the making disciples in obedience to the mission of Jesus to bring the kingdom of God, is central to discipleship in the local church.

Discipleship Pathway

The literature review highlighted the pathway that the disciples followed. Even preceding the initial call to follow Jesus in Mark 1 and 2 the men would have been through the comprehensive grounding of Bet Sefer and Bet Talmud, so they had “a deep knowledge of the Torah and were familiar with oral tradition.”⁵⁴ The fact that they were all men with trades meant they had not qualified to study Bet Midrash, yet the call to follow had been extended to them too – discipleship became part of the call for all believers. Discipleship in the first century was an “apprenticeship to the work of the kingdom.”⁵⁵ Following in the “dust of the rabbi”⁵⁶ was a holistic, immersive learning experience growing in the ways of speaking thinking and living life just like their rabbi.

The research identified each church is intentional in identifying a pathway or process to make disciples; “So the first thing is... to keep on asking the question, are we making disciples who make disciples?” (1:58-59). Each leader identified a nuanced journey of faith, incorporating evangelism, belonging, nurture, maturing and serving. It is not a static picture but a sense of movement, a deepening and maturing faith a person. For the churches researched, making disciples is the fruit of the strategic growth pathway. The content of the pathway is explored under the remaining headings of this discussion – the point here is to acknowledge there is a discipleship pathway seen in both first-century and contemporary followers of Jesus.

⁵⁴ Ray Vander Laan, "Rabbi and Talmidim," *That the World May Know*, <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/rabbi-and-talmidim>.

⁵⁵ T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus - Studies of Its Form and Content*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 240.

⁵⁶ Vander Laan, *In the Dust of the Rabbi*, 16.

That being the case, there is scope for more research into what that pathway might look like and how churches respond to the needs of people at different points along that journey. The rabbi-disciple model suggests that it is not a linear, academic journey – the western mindset of a school curriculum but a highly relational apprenticeship. That is a serious challenge in our society. One of the biggest hurdles that the research showed was the busyness and accompanied weariness of people. In a time-poor culture, how can people engage in the journey of an apprentice? It would also be interesting to investigate if the failure of some churches to make disciples occurs in just one phase in the discipleship pathway. Using a well-known international example, “several theologians and missiologists, including the Rev. Dr John Stott, observe the numerical growth of Christianity in Africa as being “an inch deep and a mile wide.”⁵⁷ In terms of a discipleship pathway, the African church appears to be strong on evangelism but much weaker with nurture. Where are the blind spots for UK churches? Is it a national picture or something to be assessed church by church? These questions are beyond the scope of this work but would be a fruitful area of further study that could serve the UK church well.

Practical teaching and training

The development at the initial stages of a person’s faith journey appears to be generic – courses, small group communities, financial giving and serving. It is a refining stage that reveals the level of commitment and hunger of an individual to follow Jesus. It is akin to the steps of Bet Sefer, and Bet Talmud discussed in the literature review. Those who mature

⁵⁷ Para-Mallam, ‘Theological Trends in Africa: Implications for Missions and Evangelism | Lausanne World Pulse Archives’, accessed 29 July 2020, <https://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/lausannereports/920/03-2008>.

through those earlier stages receive more intentional and personal opportunities to develop. It often involves meeting together over time, in a smaller peer group, with a senior leader from the church; sharing life, and reflecting biblically; “you look at the ones that are devoted, and you develop them, not the most gifted, not the most talented, I’ve been blinded by that in the past, way too often. I’ve gone for gifting over character. So instead we are looking for the people who are humbly getting on with serving the Lord and serving the church. We will develop them in all kinds of ways to be leaders of leaders” (1:115-119). So, leadership creates a culture that is both corporate, allowing all people to engage and grow in their faith, yet individual as they intentionally invest in a few. It echoes the findings of the literature review; Jesus taught the crowds but invested more deeply in the Twelve.

Western society today places great emphasis on courses, conferences, and programmes to impart knowledge. While this may serve well in the earlier phases of discipleship, there is less weight given to intentional character and spiritual formation in smaller group settings built around a senior church leader. The research suggests larger churches have developed the practice of developing individuals. It is an area to worth more research for theological training, particularly of new ministers; there ought to be clarity in the minds of national as well as local church leaders of the significance and importance of learning in community through practical apprenticeship. It would aid the development of good practice and models of leadership and mentoring, which help leaders to mature further as disciples but also provide a model for them to use in their ministry. If teaching leaders is through a classroom programme, then that is the dominant model they will take into church context. If they are disciplined intentionally and relationally, then that will be the model they adopt in ministry.

Community (personal responsibility and mutual accountability)

The literature review highlighted the importance of community in the rabbi-disciple relationship. It was an immersive experience that required deep commitment and loyalty; a willingness to submit, not only to the authority of the rabbi in all matters of faith and life but to live within a broader learning community. There was a high degree of mutual accountability, and individualism in discipleship was not an option. This quality of community life raises significant challenges for churches today, as highlighted in the research. All the churches viewed smaller communities as pivotal, the prime means to a sense of belonging, practical application of faith and shared purpose. That is a high goal in keeping with first-century discipleship, yet churches cited the struggle to engage people, a sense of apathy amongst some and lack of personal responsibility for their growth as a disciple. It may reflect the quality of leadership of individual groups. They are led not by rabbi's but by people who themselves may be reasonably immature in their faith or living hectic working lives which don't allow for the depth of preparation or pastoral sensitivity that encourages more significant commitment.

A potential solution to this problem is perhaps to be found in the notion of the discipleship pathway already discussed. The initial stages of coming to faith and nurture of young believers follow a more generic route; there are courses, conferences and small groups that help people in their spiritual formation. As people exercise personal responsibility, they grow as disciples and then require a more personal and intentional discipling. In the first-century, all people had a significant grounding in the Scriptures. Still, it was the hunger and willingness of the individual to follow a rabbi that determined who became a disciple. It is possible churches today, in desiring to minister to all, have lost this nuance of looking for

those with a hunger to grow and willingness to prioritise faith in a world of busyness. Are churches encouraging people to count the cost of being a disciple? As one leader phrased it, “sometimes we’ve thought that just teaching the Bible to people was going to change the world, but actually it’s in teaching them to *obey*. Obedience-based discipleship makes the difference, not knowledge-based and head-based” (1:32-34). It has implications for how people view the mission of Jesus and the call to follow the Way. Faith is not merely a means to a better life, a spiritual mirroring of our consumeristic culture but a call to count the cost of the journey of faith with a like-minded community committed to the mission and Way of Jesus.

A key question is how to develop those who are hungry and maturing. The research suggested that mentoring was important, especially if a senior leader was involved. The precise form of mentoring seemed less important than having a forum for the leader to spend time with a select group of people. It tallies with the literature review and would be a fruitful area of further investigation given the significance in an individual’s development; true discipleship will always involve a higher degree of understanding of the Way often coupled with serving in areas of gifting which build the church. It is at the heart of leadership development and appears vital to church growth. It mirrors the development of Jesus disciples from followers to participators in his mission. How can churches offer an appropriate community that helps people at different stages on their discipleship pathway? One church holds regular hospitality events, encouraging community at the initial phase of searching or connecting with the church. Another has a one or two-year internship programme and is now looking to extend to three years.

The conclusions from both the literature review and the research are clear; genuine community is a crucial component of fruitful discipleship. It would benefit every church leader to reflect further on how to create that community across the spectrum of spiritual maturity in their church.

Mission

The literature review drew out the distinction between Jesus as a rabbi, a teacher to be followed and his Christological dimension as the unique Saviour of humanity. Discipleship is more than becoming Christlike in our character; it is also adopting the mission of Jesus; “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe is condemned” (Mark 16:15-16). This commitment to the Way; the mission and purposes of Jesus that were a mark of the early church and should still be a mark of discipleship today.

The literature review gives a rich and wide-ranging understanding of the nature of discipleship that requires both abiding in Jesus while obeying the commission to make disciples. It is both a way to live and a purpose in life.

Comparison with the research shows a degree of confusion around what discipleship is; only one leader described Jesus mission as making disciples. The other leaders all described Jesus mission in terms of evangelism. It is a striking conclusion given that each person spoke about their discipleship; “broadly speaking, the Pathway is evangelism, discipleship, serving a need, and planting” (4:255-56). It is a confusing picture reflected in the plethora of books written about Christian discipleship. Some focus narrowly on evangelism, others on abiding through personal spiritual disciplines, some on counting the cost of following and still others

on some form of charismatic impartation. Whatever the reason if the scope of discipleship is not clear in the leader's thinking, then it is unlikely church members will have a clear idea either. First-century disciples followed the Way; both the lifestyle and the mission of Jesus to make disciples. A fruitful church today would do well to take note of all the facets of discipleship, develop a pathway that encourages growth through every stage and communicate that clearly until it is part of the culture of the church.

Serving

The literature review made clear that faith is not theoretical; it is practical and lived out. The first-century Hebrew way of learning was highly relational and immersive; as an apprentice to a rabbi; "Jesus was their Master not so much as a teacher of right doctrine, but rather as a master-craftsman whom they were to follow and imitate. Discipleship was not matriculation in a Rabbinical College, but apprenticeship to the work of the kingdom."⁵⁸ All the churches identified serving as an essential facet in discipleship; a point where faith is put into practice. It is necessary to clarify the primary point of service is for the purpose of discipleship.

It prevents three potential problems, the first being when people are recruited to be on a rota because a task needs to be done. If that is the attitude of leadership and church members then it is detrimental to discipleship; it does not encourage the discovery and development of spiritual gifts, and it does not create an atmosphere of expectation of formation. It is a broad criticism levelled at any church that is continuously seeking

⁵⁸ T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus - Studies of Its Form and Content*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 239-40.

volunteers rather than inviting people to serve. The starting point should be investing in the individual and giving them opportunities to serve that will shape character, develop their gifting, and reinforce the purposes of Jesus. It is illustrated both by the rabbi-disciple dynamic described in the literature review and the development of people highlighted in the research.

The second potential issue is seeing the minister as a 'one-person band', doing just about everything in the church and becoming a bottleneck on both church growth and discipleship. Whether that is the minister reluctant to delegate or the congregational expectation, it is harmful. An apprenticeship model encourages community, putting faith into practice and deepens commitment.

The third potential difficulty has already addressed under the heading of practical teaching and training, namely how people learn. The rational Western mindset encourages learning through training courses as the primary means used to impart knowledge. The literature review was crystal clear that training was on the job apprenticeship that involved hands-on participation. Mark, along with the other gospels, show an increasing involvement in practical ministry over the three years they watched and imitated their rabbi, Jesus.

Following the Great Commission, the disciples had their experience to draw on, as well as the model of how Jesus ministered. It was still a stretch but a manageable one. The research supported this finding; all the churches held a high view of all-member ministry and giving opportunities to serve. Opportunities to serve are opportunities to grow as disciples and the church today would do well to tie training to openings to serve and minister to others.

Conclusion and Personal Reflections

The literature review identified universal principles of discipleship from first-century biblical practices and there was a clear correlation in the research findings of current fruitful discipleship practice. The findings provide a benchmark enabling any church to evaluate their discipleship practice.

An immersive, relational approach to learning raises questions of how churches teach; is there an over-reliance on courses to impart knowledge rather than whole life engagement? Taking this a step further, the notion of discipleship as apprenticeship also challenges the traditional approaches of theological colleges in training church leaders; do emerging leaders have a clear understanding of what the mission of Jesus is and are they themselves apprenticed to make disciples in the churches they will lead?

I started this research by declaring my personal interest to make discoveries that would impact my leadership of a church and how I approach discipleship. The last section concludes with my areas for further reflection to implement fruitful practice in making disciples.

The church I lead has the broad aim to be a growing church, shaped by the Great Commission to make disciples, and the Great Commandment to be a community of love. It is encouraging that both the research and the literature review underscore the significance of both areas. Those broad aims need to be broken down into practical steps of implementation which the research has helped to highlight.

The importance of strategic leadership with regards to current best practice in discipleship was striking; each leader could readily articulate a discipleship pathway, and this guided their priorities in ministry.

In parallel with this research, the Senior Leadership Team of my church discussed a discipleship strategy that gives opportunities for people to develop a living faith and supports individuals to grow as disciples of Jesus and in turn to go and make disciples. This strategy emerged alongside the research findings; raise apprentices who learn, grow and in turn, are equipped to disciple other apprentices in the Way.

The research underscored the challenge of personal responsibility in spiritual formation. We encourage every church member to self-identify where they are presently in their journey with Jesus so that they can choose appropriate steps for their continuing growth. This notion came through clearly in the research; “my job specifically - is to ensure that *everybody*, wherever they are in their discipleship journey, can move on” (2:21-22). I recognise that this is not a linear path but a lifelong journey of twists and turns for every disciple, however our *Growth Track* helps to provide an understanding of the stages of growth that a disciple may journey. The Growth Track also outlines some of the catalysts that can help people to grow; this includes membership of a discipleship community, committing to personal spiritual disciplines, courses, and opportunities to serve, as appropriate to every stage of maturity.

The research has given me much food for thought in fine-tuning these catalysts for growth in our church context. The challenge around small groups is not just about forming community, but intentional communities pursuing both the Great Commission and Great Commandment. We are trialling a variety of community groups that engage a higher

proportion of church members offering an appropriate level of challenge to stretch an individual's faith. Early indications are promising. We have seen a growth in the number of people making professions of faith, a more significant commitment to nurture groups and intentional communities meeting weekly to root people in the practices of faith. Smaller *Huddles* of four people have been established for those more mature in their faith; these have proved catalysts for growth and release into further ministry. Senior leaders are involved at the forefront of these different community groups, leading five regular groups at different stages on their faith journeys. It is interesting to note the similarities with Jesus' hands-on approach as a rabbi. These initiatives are rooted in the research but will need further monitoring and adjustment over time.

The research has challenged me to recognise that we have a large volunteer base that is not necessarily being disciplined within their roles. The task is to equip the volunteers so that they are aware that whatever they are undertaking has a spiritual dimension to it; the idea being to mirror Jesus' approach, of calling and commissioning people to follow and grow experientially, through serving.

My final reflection is a personal one; each of the leaders of the larger churches was committed to their own development, describing themselves as lifelong learners.

Discipleship begins with me; I have a responsibility to keep growing on my own journey of faith. To put into practice the mission and purposes of Jesus, my rabbi; to hold the tension of abiding in him while pursuing his commission to make disciples.

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Appendix – Sample Interview

1 Interview 1

2 **Q: What do you think is bearing fruit in making disciples in your church?**

3 A: Last year / 18 months ago we put together a discipleship pathway. We actually wrote some
4 stuff down.

5

6 I've done some talks which may eventually become a book called *Disciples Squared*. It's the
7 Great Commission that it came from. The end of that I say, What's Jesus' aim for the church? I
8 draw lines going up and say, Is it to get people to come to church? I draw a line and a little church
9 next to it. I say, Actually, that's not a *bad* thing. The churches that want people to come to them
10 tend to do better than churches that would appear *not* to want people to come. By not being very
11 welcoming or friendly. By not having a visible presence in their community. By only being
12 concerned about the ones they've presently got. So it's *good* to want people to come to church,
13 but that wasn't the aim of Jesus. He never said, *Go into all the world and get people to come to*
14 *church*.

15

16 Next line I'll draw is, We want them to become Christians. I'll draw a little cross next to it. Is that
17 Jesus' aim? That people will become Christians, rather than just church-goers? (Which is the best
18 that you can get if you just want people to come to church. The best you can expect is that you get
19 church-goers. Which is why you end up with less people going to church - because they are just
20 church-goers. That's an ever-decreasing number who will keep on dying, basically, because you're
21 not filling in at the bottom with new people.) So, of course we want people to come to Christ. I'll

22 draw a cross and say, That's the next stage up. And the way that the churches which challenge
23 people to give their lives to Jesus see more people give their life to Jesus. The ones who actually
24 evangelistically say that there is a line of faith to cross. Be done with the old. Become a new
25 creation. However baptism is done - it's done. Weirdly I'm still an Anglican, as you know, but here
26 in Ivy we don't do infant baptisms. It's something by which people say *goodbye* to the old life and
27 *yes* to the new life. But again, Jesus didn't just say, Stop there at saying *yes* to Jesus.

28

29 And the next line up would be baptisms. I'd draw that with a little wavy water thing. Or is the aim
30 of the church (draw another line above that and a Bible next to it) just to teach the Bible to
31 people? Obviously it's very important to teach the Bible to people. But Jesus said to teach them to
32 *obey*, not just to teach them knowledge. Sometimes we've thought that just teaching the Bible to
33 people was going to change the world, but actually it's in teaching them to *obey*. Obedience-based
34 discipleship makes the difference, not knowledge-based and head-based (how many bits I've
35 underlined, or know the Greek of...) So, none of those things hit the mark in terms of what Jesus
36 was saying the purpose was.

37

38 Then I'll say, Who was Jesus talking to? It was the disciples. So the next line above I'll draw a *D* and
39 say, Jesus spoke to the disciples and he said, Go and make disciples. And then I do the *disciple*, the
40 *D*, and I put a '2' next to it, like "disciples squared". So the aim of Jesus, if you can picture this -
41 going up - was that disciples would make disciples. He's not happy with anything less than that.
42 Just people coming to church, saying *yes* to... (I said a prayer in 1973 / I've been baptised in this
43 church / I have been on the Alpha course / I go to a house group...). All those things are great -
44 they're not bad - but they're not IT. The IT isn't even just disciples. We can make the aim of
45 discipleship disciples, but actually the aim of discipleship is *disciple-making*, according to Jesus. He

46 got those eleven who were (and it says *some doubted*, so they weren't even the first eleven)... He
47 said, Now you are going to go make disciples of all nations. You are going to teach them to obey
48 everything I've commanded you. You are going to baptise them in the name of the Father, Son and
49 the Holy Spirit. And I am going to be with you when you go and do those things.

50

51 And so, if we aim at making disciples who make disciples, then you *will* get people who have
52 obviously given their life to Jesus. Whatever baptism looks like in the church that they're in -
53 they've probably been baptised. They are going to want to know the Bible because they want to
54 tell other people about the Bible. And they are going to end up with some kind of church that
55 meets. As Mike Breen says: If you *aim* at building churches you might not necessarily get disciples,
56 but if you aim at getting disciples you will always end up with something that looks like church.

57

58 So the first thing is to shift the aim of what church is about totally, generally, and to keep on asking
59 the question, *Are we making disciples who make disciples?* Because if we don't do that, we are not
60 even making disciples. And so that for me is the aim. We've raised the bar effectively on that, and
61 we push people as much as we can in terms of what we're doing. That is the norm rather than the
62 exception. Some people might think that the norm is *I just come to church and other people do*
63 *stuff*. But actually the norm for Jesus is biblically that. That's what he then said in Acts. That was
64 their clear understanding of what was meant to happen in the power of the Holy Spirit, as we
65 celebrate on Sunday. That they would then go and that they would make those disciples who wait
66 for the power from on high and then go and do it.

67

68 This is our discipleship pathway, our growth path: The world is broken. We live in a broken world.
69 People in it are lost and alone. That's the prodigal son story - although the story is of the prodigal

70 *sons*. One of them was lost in the world; he's easy to spot because he smells like a pig in the end.

71 The one that is harder to spot is the one who was lost in the house. There are a lot of people in the

72 church who are still lost, and the hard thing is they don't even know they are lost, because they're

73 in the house. But they are prodigals. So with the lost in the world - when they returned home - the

74 father gives him various things to show him that he's come home. They celebrate - this is a party.

75 And then he gives him a ring, a robe and sandals. The ring is a sign of authority, that you get to do

76 stuff. The robe is a sign of identity, that you're in the house. And the sandals are a sign of

77 commissioning, because you've got places to go.

78

79 So, with people who come to faith from *no* church background, we need to be looking at giving

80 them a ring, a robe and sandals. And celebrate them. That's the first bit of their discipleship

81 journey. The people that are lost in the house; we need to help them know what the older brother

82 didn't know, which was (the father told him everything that he needed to know)... *My son*

83 (identity), *you are always with me* (belonging) and *everything I have is yours* (commissioning). So

84 that's what we need to share with people. And actually encourage people in our churches that

85 they've got a commission as well, to be able to go.

86

87 We've gone through these different *Ds* along that. So, first of all there's DISCOVER; we want

88 people to discover who we are. And discover who Jesus is. That involves stuff like our online

89 presence, which is outward focused rather than internally focused. There are signs outside this

90 building that say, *We want to help people find their way back to God*. That's what we are about.

91 We've turned it *out*... We're not about *us* and the existing membership. We're saying that we're

92 here for *you*, and we want you to find your way to God (and we believe that's Jesus). We're letting

93 people discover us. Being *A city on a hill that cannot be hidden* is a big part of that. For people to

94 find Jesus - he says basically - make sure that they find YOU.

95

96 Next one is DELIVER, which is getting them across the line of faith. Deliver the baby. Say to people,

97 You need a new life. You must be born again. Here's what it looks like. Here's how we do it. This is

98 what we do. Now is the moment. Don't put it off. The best thing you can ever do. The only regret

99 I've got is that I didn't do it sooner. Let's do it... We regularly give opportunities for doing that.

100 We've also implicated into DELIVER the actual deliverance ministry that we can encourage people

101 towards as needed. I know you guys do *Freedom In Christ*; it's something we've run for a long time

102 - we need to redo it. It has been very helpful for people. As well as just general prayer for

103 deliverance at times.

104

105 DEVOTE is from Acts 2:42 to the end. It says that they devoted themselves to the apostles'

106 teaching and to prayer, and to one another, effectively. So we say, I can't devote *you*, I can only

107 devote *me*. They devoted *themselves*.... We encourage people that these are the practices in the

108 early church; this is what it looks like to be a devoted person. You're going to be reading the Bible

109 (apostles teaching), prayer and one another. So we have practices that we encourage people to

110 do. Like daily Bible reading and prayer - individually and together. And grow groups / small groups.

111 So we say that for us a mark of membership is that you are going to be in a grow group. Across the

112 sites we have between... the lowest is 65% and the highest is 85% of people are in grow groups.

113 And we say, That's not good enough; we want it to be 100%.

114

115 So, from that you look at the ones that are devoted and you DEVELOP them. You get the leaders

116 from the devoted ones to those things. Not the most gifted, not the most talented... I've been

117 blinded by that in the past, way too often. I've gone for gifting over character. So instead we are

118 looking for the people who are humbly getting on with serving the Lord and serving the church.

119 We will develop them in all kinds of ways to be leaders of leaders. And then, once they are found

120 and at home, not lost and alone - when they know this is my place, this is where I belong and the

121 Father loves me... From *that* place of identity we want to encourage them to be DEPLOYED to go

122 back to the broken world, full of lost and alone people, and help them find their way back to God.

123

124 So we pretty much go round that circle throughout the year. In everything we do we kind of think,

125 How does it fit in towards this aim of making disciples who make disciples?

126

127 **Q: That's absolutely brilliant, thank you. That really resonates with me as well. You seem to**

128 **indicating there is different stages of faith as well. So you have different approaches, depending**

129 **on if someone is searching for faith, or if someone is at the point of deployment. Or different**

130 **levels of devotion, depending on where they are. The rest of the question is to unpack that a**

131 **little bit... How do you raise those levels of commitment that are appropriate? So, if you've got**

132 **someone who has come along to church for the first time, but they've not yet encountered Jesus**

133 **for themselves... You are at that stage of, yes they need to be delivered into the kingdom as a**

134 **baby. You'll have a certain approach there, but you'll have a different approach if someone is**

135 **further on. But it's a common question - and I can see it back in the first century discipleship -**

136 **this idea of commitment that's appropriate to where people are. How do you address that in**

137 **practice?**

138

139 **A:** I think I often refer to my own story and the reason I came to faith. Zoe gave me a Bible and

140 only underlined one verse in it, Mark 8:34. *Then Jesus called the crowd to him, together with his*

141 *disciples, and said, 'If anyone will come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and*

142 *follow me*'. So, whoever we are, there's a crowd and there are the disciples. The difference is that
143 the disciples pick up a cross. And the cross will be different, depending on where you are in the
144 journey. Effectively, in that sense, for somebody it's just take up your cross for the *first time*. For
145 someone else it's actually *carry* it. And that might be, learn to stand yourself and be a self-feeder.
146 For someone else it might be to learn to get somebody else....

147

148 We encourage people. We talk about *apprenticing*; that's something we talk about in NEW THING
149 which is the new church planting thing I'm a part of. About having apprentices at every level. We
150 reckon that the best way to grow is to teach and show somebody. I'm not saying that we're 100%
151 successful in it. But we want to model that everybody who is doing anything has an apprentice
152 that they are showing them how to do it. So the grow groups will have... I identified an apprentice,
153 and we like the apprenticeship model. 2 Timothy 2:2 is a key one for us. It says, *About these things*
154 *that you've received, pass them on to people, so that they themselves will be qualified...* It's that
155 idea of everybody... You don't just tell me you're *doing* it. Who are you *showing* it to? Because
156 that's how you are going to grow best.

157

158 I try and preach across to *everybody*. First of all I'll think about *me* when I was 21 and far from God
159 and had no idea... When I first started coming along to church. What wouldn't I have got at all?
160 I've got a message that gets him to take up his cross. And then I've got a thing about these various
161 other people that I *know* in church... Rather than abstract categories I actually think of a few
162 people. What would be the next challenge for *them*? And how - from this passage - do I give *them*
163 the next step?

164

165 Discipleship is the L plate; we never stop learning. People who think they've stopped learning -

166 who think they've got no more to learn - have got more to learn than anybody else. So I want to
167 push in on that. Again, the obedience-based discipleship, rather than head knowledge. So often
168 people fool themselves that they are a mature disciple... At the moment we are going through
169 James and I'm talking on Sunday about the wisdom that comes from above. What it looks like. It's
170 pure and humble. Whereas in Corinthians Paul says that knowledge puffs up. But love builds up.
171 It's those marks of maturity that we want to be encouraging in people. Not, Well I did this course /
172 I've done that / I've been coming here for years... They are all false levels. They are like a Greek-
173 thinking mindset. Whereas the Hebrew mindset - as no doubt you will know from looking at &
174 teaching discipleship stuff - is to follow the rabbi. Become like him, submit to him. *Imitate me as I*
175 *imitate Christ*. It's that *imitation* that true discipleship is about.

176

177 **Q: So, is that measurable at all? It may not *be* measurable - I'm just asking the question... On the**
178 **one hand it's easy to say, We've had 50 people do the Alpha course; that's a measurable thing.**
179 **But of course that doesn't mean you've got 50 people come to faith. Or, as you say, 50 people**
180 **can do a course, that's not... You're talking about something that's *qualitative* here and I'm just**
181 **wondering how you're able to look at your church and say, I can look and see through these very**
182 **relational means you've been describing that people *are* maturing, they *are* growing...**

183

184

185 A: I think you can gauge if people are. It's very difficult to judge anybody else, isn't it? You've got
186 to judge yourself. This Sunday I'm going to go through the marks at the end of James 3. He says
187 that the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peace-loving and considerate... It's like from
188 Dallas Willard and some of his books: These are marks that *are* measurable. Over time I'll say, Rate
189 yourself from 1 to 10 on these things and think: Am I making progress? Am I more peace-loving

190 now than I used to be? Because James says that is a mark of true wisdom. Is my thinking pure?
191 And if you're not sure, ask the people who live closest to you to rate you on these things as well.
192 That's something I'll do on Sunday as part of the teaching. Encourage people to think: Where am I
193 really?
194
195 There are lots of passages and different things we can do and ask people. We've done the
196 discipleship Bible study - the DBS stuff - with those questions: What does this passage say about
197 God? What does it say about me? We've actually *not done* a sermon series for 7 weeks last year or
198 the year before... We went through the seven signs of John's gospel in the services. We just
199 encouraged people to read the passage, then get in little groups together and ask the questions:
200 What does it say about God? What does it say about people? What does it say about me? Who do
201 I need to tell this to? People engaged together in that and found it really good and helpful. I don't
202 think they would want it every week, but for seven weeks it helped people to see themselves as
203 capable self-feeders, rather than people who have to rely on someone with a gift of teaching all
204 the time to tell them what to do.
205
206 I want to in various ways in my teaching, and in our small groups, keep putting it back onto *them*
207 in terms of their own measurement - their own gauge. But I do think that it's right those closest to
208 people can end up seeing it. They'll see the blind spots in me that I don't see, in the same way that
209 I'll see them in others. So, watching the DEVOTED thing is a key one, and servant-heartedness and
210 those kind of things. You can have people who want leadership but won't ever stack the chairs.
211 They are last in and first out. They are the test for me of true spirituality, more than somebody
212 who has rehearsed the Bible verse...
213

214 It's that trying to get away from (and you're doing an MA so here we go, but it's fine to do an MA)
215 the academic... I'm just going to do a blog today actually if I get a chance to finish it, about the
216 Cambridge University stuff. There's a really interesting debate they've just had about how they are
217 going to move online. Justine Greening was talking about what we are preparing young people for
218 in the future. It really resonated around discipleship. She was saying that in the new jobs market
219 going forward the academic qualification is *zero* (they did this stuff around accounting firms etc).
220 The most successful high performers... their academic qualification had *zero* correlation to how
221 good they were at the job. They looked at it and said there are three things that actually make the
222 difference. The young people who were doing really well had been through some struggles in their
223 lives - and overcome. They could give evidence and talk about teams that they'd been on /
224 contributed to / loved being in. And they all had jobs, like paper rounds even, and stuff like that.
225 So they had resilience, team work and self-motivation. And they were saying, We're not going to
226 employ anymore on the basis of somebody having *this* qualification or *that* qualification. Because
227 we can teach that stuff, but what we can't teach are those character issues.

228

229 To me it resonates so much around discipleship and leadership questions, and what the *church* has
230 historically gone for in terms of its leadership; where it's trained for and looked for, and thought,
231 Because you've got, whatever, therefore you'll be good, but actually, as we know....

232

233 **Q: What helps people in your church follow the teachings and values of Jesus? How does that**
234 **get ingrained in folk?**

235

236 At the moment we're doing these things called *Faith Lifts* just about every day, apart from
237 Saturday. Those are being taught in terms of regular output throughout all of this. It's people

238 seeing that we all try to work it out. It's people like me at times talking about our failures, our
239 mess-ups. We're not perfect. I screw up. I need help. Being up - appropriately vulnerable - is a big
240 part of it. Rather than putting on masks of religious piety. Being able to say, I struggle with this.
241 And even voicing stuff. Andy Stanley's book *Deep and Wide* is very good because he talked about
242 how we need to be able to say, "Guys we've got a passage at the moment we'll look at... It starts
243 with a talking snake. It's going to freak you out. Let me explain why that's all right." I'm always
244 about... How do we put it on the bottom level? That's the only way it can do that, and it's
245 preaching more like Jesus than an apostle like Paul. It's bringing stuff down. Common language
246 that's accessible to people; bringing it into the everyday.

247

248 I'm going to talk on Sunday and probably I'll say, The headlines have been dominated by
249 somebody doing something that he says is reasonable and legal. They are the things he's been
250 saying. But the question isn't *that*. The question is, *Was it wise?* There are all kinds of things I
251 might say, That was legal and I thought it was reasonable... The question is, was it wise? So in that
252 sense bringing everyday teaching is part of that, and trying to bring it into the everyday, so
253 therefore we're doing stuff, not just on Sundays; we're highlighting the ways in which people can
254 get involved in the week. Or *already* are involved in their world - because of that DEPLOYMENT
255 question.

256

257 We didn't have a church building anywhere in that pattern. It's to recognise that you are a
258 disciple-making discipler (meant to be) wherever your sphere of influence is. Jesus said, Go into all
259 the *world*... You could even say there's a world of finance, there's a world of education, there's a
260 world of the arts... There are all these worlds waiting for Christians to go and make disciples in. Go
261 into your world, knowing that he is going with you. And I'm not saying I voice it every time, but

262 have that mindset, for *me*, that that's what we're *for*. Rather than just for repeating services on
263 Sundays into the future. That's the teachings and values of Jesus embodied in life. I think it's
264 preparing people for hardship. It's actually being real around grief issues and struggles. Talking
265 about Jesus who wept... Just the other week one of my best friends died. I was there when he died
266 on Friday and on Sunday I was preaching on the screen. I had a box of tissues next to me while I
267 was doing it. I'm trying in that to work out what it is in front of people; how a Christian manages
268 grief and has hope and can talk about this stuff. I think that's what I want to model to our guys.

269

270 I just got off a call with our site leaders. They were saying about a marriage course - we want to do
271 that - and in fact the guy who led the marriage course is the one who just died. He was one of my
272 best friends. But we were saying, what are we going to do about the marriage course? I said to
273 them, When you talk about the marriage course on your sites, don't just say, There's a marriage
274 course. Appropriately, as married people, talk about your own ups and downs, and say that none
275 of us have it together. I've done this and it has helped. Or, isn't lockdown awful sometimes? Being
276 stuck in with this person, even though you've said you're married to him forever. But actually you
277 need some space and some time. We're all different. Find ways to be real. That's the currency of
278 discipleship - reality - being able to share the ups and downs of my life.

279

280 I'm saying this from a top down perspective, because if we do that right it will filter down. I can't
281 be encouraging people in discipling relationships, like at the Academy, where we've got all these
282 guys who are students, who are discipling one another. I want to model that it isn't, You're going
283 to be the mentor all the time of this other person and teach them things you know about the
284 Bible. Because it's *shared life*. I did a blog recently and I put in at the end of that, Paul said, *When*
285 *we came to you we loved you that much (Thessalonians) that we didn't just share the gospel with*

286 *you but we shared our very lives with you.* That's discipleship. We thought it's alright sometimes to
287 just share the gospel with people, but we've got to love them enough to share our lives with them.
288 I can't share my *life* with hundreds and hundreds of people, but I can *share* my life; I can share the
289 ups and downs of my life and in doing so I give them permission to be able to open up in their
290 lives. When you're able to be vulnerable like that you get so much more connection with people
291 than trying to pretend everything's fine.

292

293 **Q: Thank you, that's really helpful. Just going back to the DEVOTE part of your pathway... As you**
294 **said, you encourage people to read the Bible. In what way do you encourage people to use**
295 **spiritual disciplines, and if you do, which ones...? Bible reading is obviously one of them, but**
296 **which ones would you emphasise?**

297

298 A: We talk about *Win the day*, which is like, do your Bible reading in the morning. I always talk
299 about how we - me and Zoe - start our day by doing four chapters. Start a plan - you might get to
300 love it. We've read through the Bible all this time. We listen to it and we read it together and we
301 talk about that Bible reading. We say, Start your day right and your day will go a lot better.

302

303 Obviously prayer... We teach on prayer a lot. We encourage prayer. We encourage people to do
304 the big stuff like the Manchester prayer thing. We have our own prayer meetings. We teach on
305 prayer in different seasons in different ways. We encourage people to download apps and those
306 kind of things that can help. Like the Lectio -thing that Pete Greig is doing. We'll sometimes
307 feature a book which might highlight something.

308

309 We have a thing called *Fast Till 5 Friday*, to introduce fasting. We say to people, Why not make

310 your Thursday night your last meal, and then fast until 5 o'clock on Friday? We do that every
311 week. That's not all that fasting is, but it's a good way in. It gives us something to talk about - what
312 fasting looks like.

313

314 Those would be the main spiritual disciplines. We recently did a series called *The Church That Acts*.
315 We went through Acts 2:42 to the end. We talked about how they devoted themselves to the
316 apostles' teaching and prayer and to one another. Then we looked at spiritual disciplines for each
317 one - what those could look like.

318

319 Also, giving - generosity - is a spiritual discipline. We talk about generosity a lot. Not just as, Please
320 give to keep the church going, but actually it's a spiritual indicator of your heart. Every single week
321 at Ivy we'll say something brief around, Here's the vision of the church and this why I believe it
322 matters. If you're in this we encourage you to give regularly, because the things you put your
323 treasure into show where your heart is. Here's how..., etc. I will wrap that fully in terms of a
324 spiritual discipline. We encourage people to get involved in social stuff like serving, Barnabas,
325 homeless, all these kinds of things. We try to be a generous church to lots of missions.

326

327 I see all of those as being spiritual disciplines that we want to model as leaders and encourage the
328 community here. It's who we are as Ivy.

329

330 **Q: What role does... you've alluded to it a number of times already... what is the role of the**
331 **Christian community in your discipleship approaches?**

332

333 A: We have a membership. We just did a thing last Sunday where we talked about membership. I

334 talked the week before about being a family. I said that James was Jesus' younger brother. The
335 context is *family redefined*. He always writes to them in terms of them being his brothers and
336 sisters, whereas there was a point where he was talking about Jesus just as his older brother.

337

338 Everything's been redefined now, and now he sees the church as his *first* family. I went on to talk
339 about membership and belonging, being part of something. I talked about being part of the
340 universal church when you become a Christian, but making a choice to go into a local community. I
341 said that as part of becoming a member there are various marks of membership. You can just
342 come along and watch online. However we reopen, we have people who might come and observe
343 and even sing and join in. But you're only really part of it when you become a member. When you
344 give and receive, love and be loved, serve and be served, celebrate and be celebrated... Those kind
345 of things make you part of the family. If you don't feel a part of it, it's because you've not *become*
346 part of it. What you put into it is what you get out of it. I talk in those very clear terms. The first
347 question I'll ask if anybody says to me, I don't really feel part of the church, is, Are you in a grow
348 group? Or if they say to me, I've not really been looked after and pastorally cared for, I'll say, are
349 you in a grow group?

350

351 Every week we encourage people to go to small groups. And we have now moved to a thing called
352 *Right Now Media* which is excellent. It's been a big headache solver for us (I could connect you to
353 the guy... depends on the size of the church...it's not that expensive for what it does for you...) You
354 just get brilliant teaching. We are doing James at the moment, for 12 weeks. But we've got Francis
355 Chan teaching everybody in the week. A 12-week series on James. Absolutely loving it! I don't
356 have to write house group notes. They are getting a clip with Francis Chan and brilliant notes they
357 can go through and really dig into it. So that's one thing we are doing in terms of our small groups.

358 It's been hard getting good material for the grow groups. We did try the DBS thing but to be
359 honest with you, after a bit it just gets a bit boring. And some of the passages don't lend
360 themselves to those questions. So you can't just say, that's the answer, because it's plainly not.
361 But we found that really helpful.

362

363 In terms of community I think people will opt in as they want. We have women's groups, men's
364 groups, prayer triplets, men's Bible studies, women's Bible studies, mixed grow groups that meet
365 in homes (days / evenings), mums & toddler groups... You name it, we've got some kind of a
366 group. They are connected to sites. We have this model where we have different sites. The sites
367 connect to them but don't control them in any way. I don't know what the mums & toddlers Bible
368 study group are looking at. They have trusted leaders who get on with it, and if we started to hear
369 anything weird then we'd step in, but we don't tend to.

370

371 **Q: That's a wide array of groups. Did they start at grassroots level or are *you* saying, we're
372 starting a men's Bible study - who's interested? Which way round does that work?**

373

374 A: Yes, we did that. Three guys from three different sites just recently met and said, We'd love to
375 start something in this lockdown that's going to help men. And they said to me, Would you come
376 on the first one and share something for 10 minutes, while a couple of guys talk about their ups
377 and downs? That was on Saturday; we had 65 men who came on the Zoom call for an hour and
378 fifteen minutes. All I did literally was turn up. We generally just want to trust people to have a go
379 at stuff.

380

381 One distinction I've made over the years is, very clearly I'll say, It's *our* thing and *your* thing. If

382 somebody comes and says, I want to start... I'll say, Great, sounds like God is really helping you
383 start something there - that's great - I'll be praying for you. It's not Ivy's thing, it's *your* thing.
384 You're an Ivy person, so we love you. Great, go for it! I'm here to help. But it's not something we
385 are going to be giving a lot of airtime to on Sunday and putting all over our things... If they want to
386 advertise it on a Facebook page, that's great. You know, Laurence is starting a men's thing if
387 anybody wants to come... but it's not the Ivy men's group.

388

389 Over the years I've learned that actually I'm reticent about things we put our name to as Ivy,
390 because then I'm responsible for it. Whereas if it's *their* idea I'm responsible to help *them* but
391 ultimately I don't have to... When they move on and go to another church because it's way better
392 than our church (because they really care about people like we don't)... Then I'm not left holding
393 their thing that they came with (which was the brilliant idea that they did in their *last* church
394 which was better than our church, too). Not being bitter, cynical or anything like that... You've
395 been around the block enough for me to be able to say that, I think.

396

397 **Q: Again, you spoke about this at the outset, but it's one of my questions here: What's the**
398 **evidence that church members are adopting the mission of Jesus to make disciples?**

399

400 A: Baptisms. People saying *yes* to Jesus and going on Alpha courses... As we go round the circle it
401 will depend on which discipleship question is being asked. But there are some things you can
402 measure. Like how many people have done Alpha this year? I've written a book called *Work It Out*,
403 which is for people who say, Yes I want to become a Christian. It's better when we meet
404 physically... I would say, Hands up if you want to give your life to Jesus, and I'm going to give you a
405 book that will explain what that means. Then we could note how many books we gave out, as an

406 indication that somebody had crossed the line of faith, or had done something meaningful for
407 themselves. In various events we'd end up with a card that said *yes / no / Alpha*. And we could tell
408 from that whether people were responding.

409

410 How many people we've got in grow groups. Whether they are growing, shrinking, multiplying,
411 starting new ones... Some of it is just involvement in church stuff. It's more anecdotal... One of our
412 guys who used to be one of the elders (he's now a professor of nuclear stuff) has just produced a
413 course for young people about how to think about their future, etc. He's a Christian and he's put it
414 out there and it's going to be going wider in different areas. Our conversation with him is... He's
415 making disciples in some way, and it's that kind of thing. You hear back stories of people, who've
416 told people...

417

418 Or, we just did this crazy thing called *Today*, where we put evangelism on for 24 hours online on
419 YouTube and Facebook. We contacted lots of evangelists and said, Could you give us your best 10-
420 minute *How To Become a Christian* -talk and we will video it and put it out there. Then we put it
421 together with testimonies. The figures from that, in terms of views, were amazing: We had like
422 250 000 views on FB and we had on YouTube loads of people watching. You can get the stats, and
423 the average view time on YouTube was 16 minutes, which is amazing! You know, for thousands of
424 people to watch them. Some people are very quick to disparage the online stuff, "It's people who
425 just bob in and bob out, and you're not really making disciples like that."

426

427 This may be something that you've already looked at, but one thing that Alan Hirsch has always
428 taught me is discipling people further back. When did the disciples become disciples? Three years
429 with Jesus... they've still not got it. They're still looking at him going up to heaven and saying,

430 When is he coming back? Where has he gone? They didn't just hear the great commission, it

431 would appear...

432

433 So, what's a disciple? It's a learner. To me everybody who's coming on our FB is a disciple

434 potentially, because they are wanting to learn about Jesus. Even the people who come on - not

435 that we get many of them - who want to argue or moan, or something... Well, they've got a

436 reason. The guys I'm engaging with as a result of these incredible opportunities in this new season.

437 People who are watching our FB stuff and then connecting... Guys I used to be in the police with...

438 People I was at school with. They are all like, How come you believe this? And I'm like, Oh, you're a

439 disciple because you are coming with a question about Jesus. So maybe you are not far from the

440 kingdom of God, because you are saying: I don't understand how you can have been in the police,

441 and seen the things that I've seen, and be a believer. Help me make sense of that. That's a

442 disciple!

443

444 There's all that stuff around *bounded sets* and *centred sets*... We can make the marks of

445 discipleship that they *do* the Bible study, they pray the prayer, they come along and are serving...

446 They are *indicators*. But actually you can have somebody who is doing *all* of that, and yet hates

447 God. And totally hates *you*, and is against *everything* you stand for. But they've got the marks.

448 Whereas somebody else could have *none* of those things going on at the moment, but the

449 orientation of their heart is towards Jesus, and they are *moving* towards him. Actually, *that* would

450 be a disciple in terms of trajectory. Which is perhaps more important than the measurable

451 outcomes that we all like.

452

453 **Q: What would you say the biggest challenges in discipleship are at Ivy?**

454

455 A: You're never done. I read so many things that make it look as if discipleship is a programme that
456 you put people through. Or a 12-week course. Or, We did a sermon series and we've done
457 discipleship... The challenge is for *me* knowing I'm never done, and helping *them* know they're
458 never done. We'll never *be* done because there is always more to learn. There's always more to be
459 shaped. There's always the heart that needs to be changed more. That's the great thing too: We'll
460 be thinking this Sunday about wisdom that comes from above, and I'm looking at the list myself
461 and I'm thinking, There are some of those things that I'm *nowhere near!* After 30+ years of
462 following Jesus I'm not actually very considerate. And the people who live closest to me would
463 rate me lower than me. Which means I'm not very humble either. I'm not done with *me*, but we
464 do it better together. The isolation path of discipleship for me... It's good to have some solitude...
465 Oh, that's another one obviously in the spiritual disciplines: Solitude. We encourage people to take
466 some time, be on your own, do the retreated thing. At the beginning of the year, *the book of the*
467 *year* that I encouraged everybody to read was John Mark Comer's new book. So many people said,
468 I only had time to read that in lockdown. Those spiritual discipline things that are in there are
469 great to help people. I love that book because that's the way I'd want to teach it. It's real. I think
470 we've got a lot more of that kind of stuff that is accessible to people these days and it's good for
471 us to have those.

472

473 **Q: Well, that lends itself to the last question... I'm asking more on a personal level I guess... Is**
474 **there any particular support, or resources or training that made a difference to you in this area**
475 **of discipleship, or discipling others?**

476

477 A: I guess the speciality area for me would be church planting. I'm convinced that there is no point

478 in planting churches unless you are disciple-making. So disciple-making is at the root of everything.

479 There have been a number of books that have challenged me over the years. There's one called

480 *Spent Matches*. I can't think of the name of the guy who's done that. But that's brilliant; really,

481 really good.

482

483 I was disciplined, which is unusual, I think, in the Church of England background...I mean

484 *intentionally* disciplined.

485

486 **Q: What did that look like?**

487

488 A: It wasn't done by the Church of England. There was a guy who came across from Canada while I

489 lived in Glossop, called Tony Price. He wasn't intellectually... You know, if he got through Bible

490 college it was by the skin of his teeth. He had been a builder and a drug addict.... He came out to

491 Glossop from Canada and wanted to start a church. He did some outreach - he was a great

492 evangelist. I wanted to reach out to students - to high school kids - so he came and helped, just

493 because he wanted to tell people about Jesus. Then we became friends. He was older than me and

494 I could just *tell* he knew Jesus. And he knew the word. And he knew how to help people find Jesus.

495 I was in the police at the time and I said to him, I want to learn from you. I think that's where

496 discipleship starts. Less with somebody saying, I am a mentor / coach and you may drink my bath

497 water... Its more, people with a hunger seeing something in somebody and saying, I want some of

498 what you've got. And us to be the kind of leaders that somebody would say, I'd like to learn that

499 from you.

500

501 I said, I work three shifts, could we meet up every now and then, and he said, Every morning I'm

502 up at six with my Bible open. If you want to come to my door *at six*, I'll give you a cup of tea and
503 we'll do it. He said, If you come at ten past I will have already started and I won't let you in. There
504 were a few times - I had been working three shifts and I'd get there a bit late - and he would just
505 shout out of a window "Proverbs 6:6" which was, *Go to the ant you sluggard, consider his ways*
506 *and be wise*. That was it! When I did get there on time we went through Proverbs and we'd read
507 through Psalms. Then we'd get up sometimes early in the morning and go up on a hill and pray
508 over Glossop.

509

510 It was a year of *life on life*, regular stuff. And it was really down to me to do it. That's something
511 that people need to get. Discipleship isn't something I can do to anybody else. You have to want to
512 be a disciple. You've got to be willing to learn from somebody. I love the Andy Stanley thing that
513 says, It's not my job to fill *your* cup, it's my job to empty *mine*. That's my job now as a leader, to
514 pour into other people who are open to me - and not everybody *will* be - what I've got. I love it.

515

516 Paul Scanlon talks about the difference between a coach and a mentor. He says that a coach helps
517 me get better at my job - whatever it is - and a mentor helps me get better at being *me*. There's a
518 brilliant thing I read a while ago... There was a guy who was a UFC trainer in the States, I can't
519 remember his name. He was saying that to get better (and I had done some judo years ago so I
520 know roughly what this is)... If you want to get better and - say you're a green belt in judo - you
521 need to go and get thrashed by a black belt, then wrestle with a couple of green belts - about the
522 same as you - and then go teach a white belt. That's how you are going to grow. You grow by
523 finding somebody who's up there - in a sense above me - some people who are colleagues at the
524 same level, and by teaching it down to somebody. I love that as a picture for discipleship, of a
525 growing disciple-maker. I can name some people in those spots and I've always tried to make sure

526 I've got them. Because that's going to keep *me* growing enough to be able to grow somebody else.

527

528 There's a guy called Luke Smith who works for *Fusion*. A while ago he contacted me and said,

529 Could we do a discipling thing; would you teach me? I was like, Mate you live in York. You're

530 involved in student ministry - I'm not involved in student ministry. I do like you and everything, but

531 I don't know how it's going to work. He said, Look, I'm not asking for you to be about my marriage,

532 or my finances, or any of that. The only thing I want to know from you is, will you help me with my

533 preaching? He said, If 2-3 times a year I can just send you some of my talks and then once a year

534 we meet up and I'll get you lunch and dinner and you tell me what I could improve on in that

535 specific area.... I've got somebody else for my marriage, somebody else for my money, somebody

536 else for something else... You're just *that*. I like that too, in terms of discipleship, not being - what

537 again some people want to make it... I think sometimes they have a need in themselves, that I

538 have to be the *mentor* to somebody else. I can see that sometimes that becomes an identity issue

539 for them. That isn't necessarily always helpful.