

# Discipleship Small Groups

## Study Guide

*If found,  
please return to:*

## MEETING OUTLINE (75 minutes)

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### GATHERING (5 minutes)

- o As people gather, allow 4-6 minutes to catch up with one another.

### PRAYER (2 minutes)

- o Open with prayer. Try to start consistently and promptly at 4-6 minutes after the appointed time, to live into the expectation of honoring the group by arriving on time and ready to participate.

### TEACHING VIDEO (10 minutes)

- o Screen the day's teaching video.

### BIBLE MEDITATION (15 minutes)

- o Invite the group to listen to the day's scripture as it is read and pick out the word or phrase that stands out to them.
- o Invite a group member to read the passage slowly and clearly.
- o Go around the circle and invite each person to share the word or phrase that stood out to them. At this point, we are only sharing the words, not commenting on why they stood out.
- o Invite another member to read the passage a second time.
- o Go around the circle again, this time inviting each member to share in one minute how the passage connects with their life today.

### TEACHING (5 minutes)

- o Small group leader wraps up the Bible meditation, sharing a personal example of how the day's scripture meets their life, or touching on the teaching bullet points given in each lesson.

### DISCUSS (30 minutes)

- o Choose one or more of the discussion questions.

### LIGHTNING ROUND (5 minutes)

- o Reserve 5 minutes at the end of the meeting for each person to share in 30 seconds or less their take-away for the day.

### CLOSE IN PRAYER (8 minutes)

- o Invite people to share any prayer concerns they have.
- o Close in prayer, using either the written prayer or praying extemporaneously.

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## Preface

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### Why discipleship?

Jesus calls us to be his disciples. From the Greek, literally, “learners.” Yes, he calls us to learn about him, but even more he calls us to learn him. He calls us to learn his voice, to learn his touch in our spirits. He calls us to learn the contours of his love for us, the delight and mercy of his gaze upon us, the freedom and strength that he brings forth in us. He calls us to learn the easy rhythms of his grace as well as the textures and moving light of a life lived in him.

As is said, “May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi.” Meaning, may you walk so closely behind your rabbi, so eager not just to imitate him but to become more intimate with him, that you are covered with the dust that rises up with each of his footsteps.

We invite you this Lent to ponder just what it is that Jesus is saying to you right now. You have a group of friends and hopefully soon-to-be friends with whom to listen, with whom to discuss, with whom to enjoy the ever-fresh faithfulness of God. We trust that he’ll come to us with a word of promise, and he may well come with a call, too.

Friends, let’s listen together.

The Rev. Dr. Kristine Blaess  
Senior Associate Rector

## Introduction

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The Church’s reason for being is, by the Holy Spirit, to bear the glory of Christ that he received from the Father for the sake of all people. We are called not simply to proclaim the reign of God but to embody it within our common life together, the overflow of which is the means by which we are sent forth to bless others.

We will know we have accomplished our mission for St. George’s when our lay leaders have been furnished with the means and confidence to lead others in learning what it is to discern God’s voice, to grow in obedience to Christ, and to share the Good News with others.

We embrace our calling as church to mean we are Christ’s ambassadors across the breadth of all our familial, social, professional and civic contexts. Bearing witness to Christ is not limited to our membership and participation within the institutional life of the parish.

Making disciples is about three things:

- 1) Embracing the call to a lifetime of learning how to follow Jesus as Lord.
- 2) Sharing life in community with others who desire to follow Jesus as Lord.
- 3) Desiring to witness to the Lordship of Jesus in relationships outside the church.

Our prayer is that this devotional guide and the conversations that spring from your engagement with it will take you deeper into your lifetime of learning how to follow Jesus as Lord, draw you into deeper relationships with fellow Christians, and whet your desire to share the Good News within your family, your social groups, and at work.

The Rev. Leigh R. Spruill  
Rector



I am used to looking for signs of God's presence in crisis and in blessing. I am forced to look to God when I have failed or sinned. I am already motivated to look to God when everything comes together in an experience of wholeness and arrival. But the random ordinary? That is when I am getting ready for the next triumph. Or drifting into the next disaster. But how about exploring that everyday ordinariness for the presence of God and the workings of grace? When 'nothing is going on,' is there, perhaps, something going on? The flat times, the in-between times, the routine behaviors are also (in the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins) "charged with the grandeur of God."

• Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles*

## Week One

### Attentiveness: What is God saying to us? Learning to Listen and Respond

*God invites us to observe and reflect when his kingdom breaks in among us. He invites us to discuss with trusted confidantes, asking, “What is God saying about himself, or about us?” and “What will we do about it?” He invites us to be accountable to one another, and to take courage and act.*

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.  
– Hebrews 1.1-2

Opening Prayer: #59 For Quiet Confidence

O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP p. 832)

Video clip 1 | Attentiveness

Bible meditation | Mark 1.1-15

Teaching

“Repent and Believe” (Mark 1.15) is the bedrock gospel message. As we again and again go through the process of “repenting and believing” it is up to us to incorporate, cultivate, and embody the gospel into our lives and various contexts. There is nothing formulaic or prescriptive beyond this except that our lives will follow the pattern of Jesus.

Repentance is the transformation of our imagination; a reorientation of our wills and desires toward God, a willingness to think in a new way.

Belief is the incorporation of that new imagination or newly reoriented wills and desires, into our daily lives. Belief is made known in our actions.

The leader is invited to share a story of a time they have experienced a nudge or inkling that seems from God. Has it opened the way to think and act differently? What happened next if the leader ignored the nudge? What happened if the leader “went with” the nudge?

Discussion questions

- God breaks in on the world and speaks to us “in many and various ways” (Hebrews 1.1). What are some of those ways that you can think of? What is a way through which God has spoken to you in the past, or is speaking to you in this current season of life?
- Where is God “breaking in” to have us consider a reordered or newer or deeper way of life? What sorts of nudges or inklings do you harbor that make you ponder the question, “If my life were different, it might be more like this or less like that. . . ?”
- Can you name one practical thing you would like to commit to in the next two weeks to strengthen your spiritual life in Christ?

Gather prayer concerns

Closing Prayer: #61 A Prayer of Self-Dedication

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated unto you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (BCP p. 832)



How does one remember God, reach for God, realize God in the midst of one's life if one is constantly being overwhelmed by that life? It is one thing to encourage contemplation, prayer, quiet spaces in which God, or at least a galvanizing consciousness of his absence, can enter the mind and heart. But the reality of contemporary American life – which often seems like a kind of collective ADHD – is that this consciousness requires a great deal of resistance, and how does one relax and resist at the same time?

- Christian Wiman, *My Bright Abyss*

## Week Two

### Rhythm: Learning to Develop a Fruitful Lifestyle that Embodies Healthy Rhythms of Rest and Work

*We are healthiest when we allow God to lead us freely through hourly, daily, weekly, and seasonal rhythms of abiding, growth, fruitfulness, and pruning.*

In the beginning. . . God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it. . . God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. . . And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. – Genesis 1-2

Opening Prayer: #32 For the Good Use of Leisure  
O God, in the course of this busy life, give us times of refreshment and peace; and grant that we may so use our leisure to rebuild our bodies and renew our minds, that our spirits may be opened to the goodness of your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP p. 825)

Video clip 2 | Rhythm

Bible meditation | John 15.1-15

Teaching

It is helpful to note that God created us in Genesis 1 for two things: relationship (Covenant) and fruitfulness (Kingdom). How do these realities touch on rest and Sabbath? Note that the first full day of human life (Day 7) is a day of rest (Genesis 2.2-3). What does this tell us about God’s intentions for our relationship with Him and our fruitfulness? We do not rest from work; we work from rest.

The leader is encouraged to offer personal testimony: share specific challenges you face in balancing rest and work as well as offering

examples of how you have developed patterns that honor our God-given need for rest and Sabbath.

Be aware that identity questions are tied up in our struggles with healthy rhythm: “Who I am is bound up in how busy or productive or in demand I am.” This false vision of fruitfulness is deeply embedded in our cultural consciousness. But in God’s eyes, “Who I am” is already given, and we work out of that place of belovedness and security.

Discussion questions

- What does Genesis 1-2 teach us about God’s rhythm of work and rest?
- Listen to Psalm 23.2-3a: “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside still waters. He restoreth my soul.” Where do we experience green pastures, still waters, restoration? Bear in mind that these experiences do not happen only in solitude or prayer or even only in worship. They are also experienced in time with others, those closest to us. What would a healthier DAILY rhythm of life look like?
- Is there a word of identity that God wants to speak to you?
- Where in your life are you experiencing particular fruitfulness right now? Why do you think that is the case?
- Where in your life do you sense God is calling you to pruning? What might that look like?
- How can this group help with accountability?

Gather prayer concerns

Closing Prayer: # 24 For Vocation in Daily Work  
Almighty God our heavenly Father, you declare your glory and show forth your handiwork in the heavens and in the earth: Deliver us in our various occupations from the service of self alone, that we may do the work you give us to do in truth and beauty and for the common good; for the sake of him who came among us as one who serves, your Son Jesus

Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (BCP p. 261)

## Week Three

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How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it. . . Jesus did not write a book but formed a community.

- Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*

## Week Three

### Relationships: Learning to Integrate Devotion to God, Community, and the World

*Jesus' life overflowed with joy and power as he devoted himself to his three great loves: his Father, his disciples, and the crowds. God calls us to find joy and balance in our relationships, too: with God, with our families and friends, and with our broader networks and the world.*

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. – Philippians 1.3-6

Opening Prayer: **Proper 9** The Sunday closest to July 6  
O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (BCP p. 230)

Video Clip 3 | Relationships

Bible Meditation | Luke 6.12-19

Teaching

The balanced Christian life consists of relationships oriented to three dimensions: UP, IN, and OUT. UP (with God), IN (with the family of God – literally our families and the church) and OUT (with the people in the world around us). Luke 6.12-19 shows Jesus living fully into all three dimensions: v. 12 Jesus got UP with God, vv. 13-16 Jesus invited people IN; vv. 17-19 Jesus reached OUT.

The purpose of our time together in these groups is to deepen our relationship with God, growing in our capacity to discern and do his

will (UP), to deepen our relationships to one another (IN), and to develop character and skills to bless beyond the group (OUT).

Very few churches or individuals always maintain a perfect balance. It is useful, therefore, to regularly examine the dimension(s) in which we are feeling growth and life and the dimension(s) in which we are not and may need to focus some attention. The leader is invited to share specific examples of how they are either living into, or struggling with, their UP, IN, and OUT relationships.

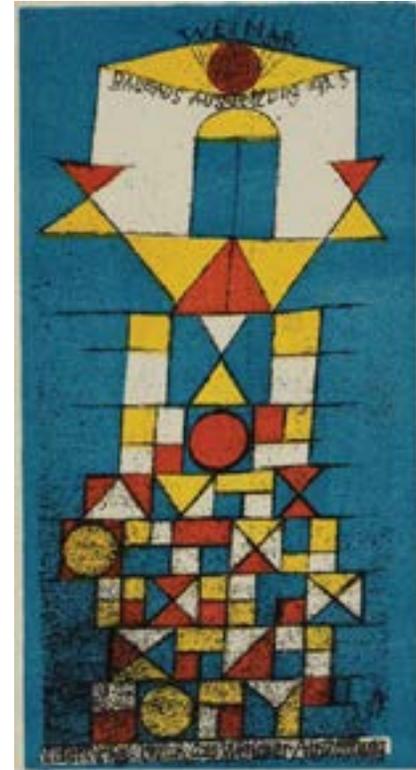
Discussion Questions

- Rank your current spiritual life on each dimension of UP/IN/OUT (on a scale of 1-10).
- Do we have fears that might be preventing us from rejoicing in these relationships? Or are there places where God might be wanting to speak a work of identity to us to free us into deeper relationships?
- Where are we experiencing life and blessing in our relationships? What might God be saying to you about it?

Gather Prayer Concerns

Closing Prayer: From Evening Prayer

O God, you manifest in your servants the signs of your presence: Send forth upon us the spirit of love, that in companionship with one another your abounding grace may increase among us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP p. 125)



The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant - first to make sure that other people's needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wise, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or at least not be further deprived?

- From *Servant Leadership* by Robert K. Greenleaf

## Week Four

### Leadership: Learning to Grow in Grace and Apprenticeship Others

*Jesus calls us to be both disciples (learners), and leaders who apprentice others. Learning happens in relationships, community, and personal investment in another.*

After Jesus had washed his disciples' feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. —John 13.12-17

Opening Prayer: **Holy Cross Day** September 14

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross that he might draw the whole world to himself: Mercifully grant that we, who glory in the mystery of our redemption, may have grace to take up our cross and follow him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen. (BCP p. 244)

Video Clip 4 | Leadership

Bible Meditation | Luke 22.24-27

Teaching

Jesus teaches us to embrace the serve/inspire/empower model of leadership over the “worldly” superior/lordship/expert model. To do this, we have to commit to relationships. Learning happens in

relationships, community, and personal investment in another.

The crisis of leadership in contemporary western culture is born of a loss of the model of learning through apprenticeship (a commitment of time in a mentor-mentee relationship). The more prominent model today is one of acquiring expertise, specialization, and narrow skills for limited jobs rather than character development and the nurturing of personal habits and godly wisdom.

We seek to model Jesus' own pastoral plan of apprenticeship with his disciples as the means for forming leaders who make disciples. Jesus' ministry in the gospels is bracketed by two clear exhortations: “Follow me” (Mark 1.17) and “Go and make disciples” (Matthew 28.19). We at St. George's are passionately committed to deeper engagement with what it means to be a disciple of Jesus as well as one empowered to make disciples in his name.

The leader is encouraged to share the story of a time they have taught someone to do something new by following the pattern, “I do, you watch. I do, you help. You do, I help. You do, I watch.” This is the same pattern Jesus used to teach his disciples.

Discussion Questions

Consider these other scriptures below. What do they tell us about the nature of Christian leadership?

- “I urge you, therefore, be imitators of me.” (1 Corinthians 4.16)
- “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” (Hebrews 13.7)
- “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” (1 Peter 2.21)

Discipleship is not fundamentally a matter of explaining things, teaching content, or sharing information. It is a matter of imitation. Jesus calls us to imitate him.

- What would others in your groups (family, friends, co-workers, neighbors) most likely identify as something they want to imitate about your life? Why? How might you continue to build on these gifts so they are even greater assets to the people you lead?

### Gather Prayer Concerns

Closing Prayer: **Saint Andrew** November 30

Almighty God, who gave such grace to your apostle Andrew that he readily obeyed the call of your Son Jesus Christ, and brought his brother with him: Give us, who are called by your holy Word, grace to follow him without delay, and to bring those near to us into his gracious presence; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (BCP p. 237)

## Week Five

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”When Jesus sent out his disciples on his mission, he showed them his hands and his side. They will share in his mission as they share in his passion, as they follow him in challenging and unmasking the powers of evil. There is no other way to be with him. At the heart of mission is simply the desire to be with him and to give him the service of our lives. At the heart of mission is thanksgiving and praise. We distort matters when we make mission an enterprise of our own in which we can justify ourselves by our works. . . the Church’s mission began as the radioactive fallout from an explosion of joy. When it is true to its nature, it is so to the end. Mission is an acted out doxology. That is its deepest secret. Its purpose is that God may be glorified.”

- From *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* by Lesslie Newbigin

## Week Five

### Mission: Learning to Mobilize for the Sake of the Kingdom

*God gives us our identity as beloved children and mobilizes us as authorized kingdom representatives, never solely for ourselves, but always for the other.*

My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad.  
O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.  
– Psalm 34.2-3

Opening Prayer: From Evening Prayer

O God and Father of all, whom the whole heavens adore:  
Let the whole earth also worship you, all nations obey you,  
all tongues confess and bless you, and men and women  
everywhere love you and serve you in peace; through Jesus  
Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP p. 124)

Video Clip 5 | Mission

Bible Meditation | Matthew 28.16-20

Teaching

Jesus spent three years teaching, eating meals and traveling with his disciples. Surely they did not feel ready to do what Jesus sent them out to do when he ascended into heaven: “Make disciples of all nations.” Yet Jesus promised that his Holy Spirit would be with them, comforting them, paving the way for them, giving them the words to speak. And indeed, between Jesus’ ascension and Christianity being decreed the religion of the Roman Empire in 313AD, the church grew from several hundred to more than 65 million people.

This incredible growth happened not so much through the heroic missionary efforts of a few gifted evangelists, as through communities of ordinary Christians opening their lives to other communities (maybe their neighborhood, maybe their trade

guild. . .). Household reached out to household. Community reached out to community. And drawing near to the vibrant, outward-looking Christian community, people found their deepest yearnings for identity, belonging, and salvation met. They were received, not into a solitary faith, but into the faith of a community embodying the gospel.

The leader is invited to share a story of where they’ve found belonging that has impacted their life, or a time when they have extended belonging to another.

Discussion Questions

- Think of a time when something happened to make your faith seem more real or more important to you. Who was involved? What transpired? How did you respond?
- Who are the people God might be putting in your path to influence right now? You’ll recognize them because they seem to like you, they are open to you, and they are interested in what you’re doing. These might be people you’ve known for a long time, your regular barista, or someone you see once at the grocery store.
- Is there a community God might be inviting you to join, or a community to which God might be inviting you to reach out?

Gather Prayer Concerns

Closing Prayer: From Morning Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen. (BCP p. 101)





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