



## 5. Images of evangelism (1)

Can you think of things that help to make and nurture new disciples?

If so, how do we start using them?

### Introduction

The good news of Jesus Christ has come alive in people's transformed lives and kingdom living in multiple different cultures and contexts through the ages. These have given the world glimpses of God's kingdom. People are drawn to the gospel as they see it lived out in attractive living. A critical question for us is: what sort of disciples are we trying to form?

It can perhaps look as if we are trying to form disciples that show up, pay up and shut up and we have well-worked out practices to form this sort of disciple. But we know there is more to discipleship than this. If someone has discovered the experience of the love of Christ and wants to investigate and commit themselves to a Christian way of life – what practices can we as a Christian community, introduce them to, perhaps outside of a Sunday morning context, to enable them to become apprentices of this Christian way of life? Becoming a disciple is an intentional formational process. It doesn't happen accidentally.

### Why this matters

In the Gospels we glimpse stories of how encounters with Jesus transformed people's lives. The rich man Zacchaeus joyfully gave away half his wealth (Luke 19:1-10), fishermen left old occupations to become healers and teachers (Mark 6:6-13), a healed demoniac went back into his village to share what had happened to him (Mark 5:19-20), a woman was affirmed in a traditionally more male role of sitting at his feet to learn (Luke 10:38-42). Jesus taught that on the day of judgement those who have fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick and prisoners who would enter God's kingdom (Matthew 25:31-46). James urged people to be not only hearers, but doers of it (James 1:22).

The Methodist movement began with small groups exploring what it meant to be disciples of Jesus. In the 1720s a group of student friends at Oxford

University met regularly to study together, pray, read the Scriptures, attend church, visit people in prison, and teach poor children to read. These principles were to become core to Methodist discipleship, which held together 'works of piety' (devotional practices) and 'works of mercy' (disciplines of practical caring). Methodists belonged to classes (small groups) and held one another accountable to three simple principles: do no harm, do good and love God.

The Evangelism Consultation encouraged people to think about the important influences that had formed them as disciples. People identified a range of people who had at different times invested in them: taught, mentored, challenged and supported them. There was general agreement at the importance of an intentionality in being formed as a disciple: disciples need to learn a number of practices and be held gently accountable for using them. Small groups were seen as important. These needed to be safe places for people to be themselves, ask questions, share lives, have fun, and enjoy hospitable fellowship. They also needed an intentional outward focus to enable people to integrate faith and life. Worship of a high quality and good foundational biblical teaching were seen as crucial.

### Further resources

- Martyn Atkins, *Discipleship and the People called Methodists* (downloadable from the Methodist website <http://www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/discipleship-and-the-people-called-methodists>)
- Roger Walton, *The Reflective Disciple: learning to live as faithful followers of Jesus in the twenty-first century* (Norwich, SCM Press, 2012)
- For an eight-session resource aimed at those new to faith or new to Methodism, see *Compass* (available from Methodist Publishing after September 2013).
- For a range of resources on spiritual practices, visit [www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/evangelism/resources](http://www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/evangelism/resources).

# Questions for discussion

The following questions are suggested as ways of taking the conversation forward.

**1. What was helpful in your own process of becoming a disciple? And what was unhelpful?**

**2. What sort of disciple are you trying to form?**

**3. What learning activities, practices and support are needed to form this sort of disciple?**

**4. How can we find ways of helping people who are outside Church culture become apprenticed disciples of Jesus?**