

# DISCIPLE



A high-commitment, transformative  
Bible study programme



“If you make my word your home, you will indeed be my disciples.”

John 8:31 (NJB)

## Foreword

DISCIPLE has the support of the Methodist Church in Britain for its quality and effectiveness. Within the range of small group resources for developing spirituality and discipleship it occupies a unique place, offering intensive but non-academic Bible study which people find both engaging and life transforming. In more than 15 years of its availability in the UK it has established an impressive track record for building confidence in Christian faith. We hear so many stories of how people have found their way into new forms of Christian leadership, mission and ministry as a result. It is our hope that this booklet will provide you with the information and the inspiration to try it for yourselves in your church or circuit.

The Revd Jenny Ellis



DISCIPLE groups from Exeter and London

## What is DISCIPLE?

DISCIPLE 1 is a 34 week Bible study programme, covering the whole biblical sweep of salvation history from Genesis to Revelation. Participants follow a disciplined pattern of daily home study leading up to a regular (usually weekly) group meeting. DISCIPLE originated in the American Methodist Church and has undergone regular revisions. It has been taken up in British churches for more than 15 years.

*“I have led DISCIPLE courses both with people on the periphery and those who have been attending church for years. Groups have included Methodists, URC and Anglican friends. DISCIPLE takes time and commitment but it is so worth it. I came into ministry with a call to deepen discipleship and it has been so fulfilling, a real blessing, to see people mature and blossom as Christians. I have learned so much from sharing other people’s experience and perspectives in the groups. Participants have been helped to live as disciples in their work place, and take up a variety of ministries. I would enthusiastically recommend DISCIPLE 1 and the further courses from the same stable.”*

*The Revd Hilary Howarth, superintendent minister, Northwich and Winsford Circuit*

## Who is DISCIPLE for?

DISCIPLE is suitable for ecumenical study and a wide variety of learners over the age of 16. A group size of 12 is ideal. Motivation and commitment matter more than previous study experience. DISCIPLE can bring together people new to Christian faith, and those of Christian maturity. It also provides an ideal opportunity for continuing local preacher development or for equipping children’s or youth workers.

**Inclusion:** In their home study, participants will read large swathes of text. With the use of an audio Bible and some additional support, people with visual problems or reading issues have been successfully included.

*I was encouraged to meet a participant who completed the course despite having dyslexia. An audio Bible and support from a fellow group member was all it took. She spoke passionately of how formative Disciple was in enabling her to become a Local Preacher.*

*Viv Morrissey, Training Officer, Leeds Methodist District*

## Why DISCIPLE?

The aims of DISCIPLE may be summed up in the words of Ephesians 4:12: “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” (NRSV)

DISCIPLE aims to transform rather than inform. Its sub-title “Becoming Disciples through Bible study” indicates that Bible study is not an end in itself. Each session ends with a personal challenge to draw conclusions for Christian living and to reflect on how the text speaks to one’s own life.

Fulfilling God-given potential is an integral part of the Christian life. The DISCIPLE study encourages individuals to discern their giftings with the help of fellow group members, and to find their part in God's mission and ministry.



DISCIPLE group - Exeter

Although information isn't the goal, DISCIPLE participants do gain a solid grounding in scripture and an appreciation of the unity of the Bible. With the help of the scholarly DVD clips and their study manual notes they come to understand more about the different types of literature in the Bible, and the backgrounds in which they were written. New light on the Old Testament helps students gain fresh insights into the New. The session titles (listed below), along

with theme words, theme verses, key characters, events and topics, help people remember the sequence of the biblical story.

***“DISCIPLE transformed the church. It made them think about what they were doing, what the church was about and what the Gospel was about. Seven years later they are still talking about it. People took on roles they would never have dreamed about, with fresh commitment and enthusiasm.”***

***Deacon Jenny Jones***

## **Old Testament**

1. The Biblical Word
2. The Creating God
3. The Rebel People
4. The Called People
5. God Hears the Cry
6. God Sends the Law
7. When God Draws Near
8. The People Without a King
9. The People With a King
10. God Warns the People
11. God Punishes the People
12. God Restores the people
13. Songs of the Heart
14. The Righteous are Like a Tree
15. When Trouble Comes
16. People Hope for a Saviour
17. (Inter-Testamental Period)  
The Time of Transition

## New Testament

18. Radical Discipleship
19. Mounting Controversy
20. The Hidden Messiah
21. God Seeks the Least, the Last, the Lost
22. Lifegiver
23. Advocate
24. The Explosive Power of the Spirit
25. The Gospel Penetrates the World
26. Put Right with God Through Faith
27. A Congregation in Ferment
28. The Son Shall Set Us Free
29. A Pastor Gives Guidance
30. Our Great High Priest
31. A People Set Apart
32. We Never Lose Hope
33. Gifts of Each DISCIPLE
34. A Last Supper Together

*“DISCIPLE has brought the Bible to life for me in a uniquely challenging, personal and life changing way. I think that the deeper and more integrated understanding of both the Old and the New Testament that this study gave helped me to acknowledge God’s call upon me, and has influenced the way I think and act in every aspect of my life. The months of study, prayer, self-examination and discussion somehow produced a response of gratitude, generosity of spirit, and commitment to humble service with a certainty of trust in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.”*

*Catherine Staton*

## DISCIPLE and the Bible - Principles of Bible Study

There are many different approaches to the authority of scripture. Disciple asks people to commit to principles of Bible study which recognise diversity and encourage openness to fresh perspectives through sharing. The underlying assumptions are of the human/divine nature of the Bible. The actual texts were written by people like us in their cultural settings, under the inspiration of God. We are encouraged to be real and honest in bringing our life questions and experiences alongside the study of God’s word, and to be open to hearing God speak to us as we seek to connect life, faith and scripture. We are helped in this by studying and praying together in community. The length of the DISCIPLE Bible study builds trust and can take mutual sharing to new depths.

*“The DISCIPLE course has been very well received in London. We find ourselves from different Methodist Conferences from all over the world and we learn and grow together. So of course the DISCIPLE course is a very good tool because not only does it encourage us to respect each others theologies it also brings that element of learning from one another and growing together.”*

*Daniella Fetuga-Joensuu, Training Officer, London Methodist District*

## Components and structure of DISCIPLE

The Bible itself is the text. The Study Manual provides background notes, and a schedule of readings for each day, to prepare for the weekly session. Each session begins with a DVD clip in which a Bible scholar provides insight into the text.



DISCIPLE group - London

All group sessions, which are of two to two and a half hours duration, follow the same pattern: gathering, a short devotion, the DVD segment, discussing what people have discovered in their daily studies, group Bible study of a selected passage, exploring the implications for discipleship, and closing prayer. A variety of Bible study methods and approaches may be used. In the group people will experience working in pairs, small groups, the whole group, or occasionally, alone.

A Leaders' Manual gives session outlines and guidance for successful facilitation.

### Who can lead DISCIPLE?

DISCIPLE group leaders are the facilitators who enable the group to work well. They learn alongside the group as fellow students. It is not expected that they will function as Bible experts. (Scholarly input comes from the DVD clips.)

Leaders need to be good communicators with an ability to work with people. They bring commitment, time to give, and a willingness to undergo leader training. They may be ordained or lay people. It is recommended that leadership is shared by two leaders and so an ability to work as a team is required. This co-working model makes for a helpful diversity of style as well as having practical benefits across a lengthy course.

DISCIPLE can be cascaded in churches if at the close each group identifies those with the potential to become the next leaders. An apprenticeship model can enable a potential recruit to co-lead chosen sections of the course in order to develop their confidence and test out whether this is for them.

### DISCIPLE – the results

DISCIPLE graduates speak of increased confidence to talk of God and faith, a renewed desire to serve God, living the Christian life with greater integrity, moving into leadership, involvement in mission or community service. Many have found DISCIPLE hugely formative in hearing God's call and responding to it.

*“Part way through my second DISCIPLE course, as co-leader, I quite suddenly recognised that God was not only calling me to a ‘vocation’ but to candidate for full-time service in the Church as a Methodist deacon! DISCIPLE was not the only influence but I believe it was because of the depth and reality of the encounter with God through God’s word in DISCIPLE that my barriers were demolished and the call recognised and accepted.”*

**Catherine Staton**

## Getting started

### Promotion

The prayerful support of congregations is a good base from which to start. Promotional materials include a short PowerPoint presentation with an embedded video, suitable for showing in church or circuit meetings. Some churches have offered a taster session or an information meeting. Recruitment of participants is most effective when done at a personal invitation level and leaflets are available for this purpose. By all means use posters and church magazine articles, but inviting DISCIPLE graduates to help spread the word is best of all!

DISCIPLE is a high challenge and high commitment study, but one which people have found richly rewarding. It is realistic to be clear about the time involved, and commitment to daily study and prayer, from the start. People will need to devote at least 30 minutes a day, plus the session meeting time. Some churches have enabled people to take part by job sharing, or providing cover for important roles, so as to free up time over the duration of the study.

### Leader Training

It is strongly recommended that leaders attend training. Using the materials as they are meant to be used, working within the philosophy and ideals of DISCIPLE, and to an appropriate model of group facilitation, are critical to achieving successful outcomes and maintaining DISCIPLE’s high reputation. Information about leader training is available on the Methodist Church website: [www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk)



DISCIPLE group - Exeter

### Planning

The group begins with an orientation meeting. Most groups plan their schedule of dates on a weekly basis but it is possible to meet fortnightly which gives a longer preparation time between meetings. At least two breaks should be allowed in the schedule. The venue could be a home or a church lounge. For such a protracted study, comfort and a welcoming atmosphere is important. Many groups have found it helpful to combine the final two sessions into a retreat day and have booked a special venue for that.

### Finance

If group members contribute a small donation each week this can easily cover the cost of study manuals and contribute to the cost of Leader Training.

## Recognition

It is good to honour the discipline and devotion participants will have brought to the study, and to draw things to a close at the end, with a service of recognition. Badges and certificates are available to order. This could be a specially planned event or integrated into a circuit service, for example. Make space for people to share what DISCIPLE has meant to them as this is powerful promotion for the next group.

## Continuing Bible study

From the same stable DISCIPLE 2, 3 and 4 are designed to enable more detailed study of selected books of the Bible. Also, shorter Bible studies which establish the DISCIPLE pattern of working, are available. "Christian Believer" enables exploration of key Christian doctrines and is backed up by an additional reader. See [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com)



DISCIPLE group - Exeter

has been established and found to be so enjoyable and rewarding.

## How to obtain materials

Further information, including the downloadable video and PowerPoint material is available from the Methodist Church website: [www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/small-groups/key-resources](http://www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/small-groups/key-resources).

Methodist Publishing sell the Study Manuals, Teacher Helps and DVD sets:

Methodist Publishing

17 Tresham Road

Orton Southgate

Peterborough PE2 6SG

Telephone: 01733 235962 Email: [resources@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:resources@methodistchurch.org.uk)

[www.methodistpublishing.org.uk](http://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk)

Cokesbury, the publishing arm of the United Methodist Church, have all other resources including badges and certificates. See [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com)

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