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# **Being Disciples: Through Lent with Matthew**

By Peter Carrell and Lynda Patterson

**NOTE: PUBLICATION VERSION WILL INCLUDE ILLUSTRATIONS**

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## **Introduction**

Inspired by Bishop Victoria Matthews' call to her Synod (September, 2013) for a year of discipleship in the Diocese of Christchurch, this Lenten study series guide introduces Jesus's teaching on being a disciple as conveyed through the Gospel According to Matthew.

The guide is specifically designed for use in small groups in ministry units. Each session is based on a Bible study from Matthew, which is the Lectionary Gospel for 2013/14 (Year A).

The format offered is an introductory reflection, some study notes, questions and then suggestions about praying together in the light of the study.

Each group utilising these studies is encouraged to study and pray in a manner appropriate to the group's life. Some groups will have been meeting together for years, some may form especially for the six weeks of Lent.

## **How to Run A Study Group Using These Studies**

We recommend a 60 -- 75 minute programme for the group plus time for refreshments served at the beginning, end or in the middle of the group's session.

Here is a guideline for the 60 -- 75 minutes:

Icebreaker (10 minutes) This could take any form appropriate to the life of the group.

Opening Prayer asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate Scripture (1 minute)

Read the Introduction to the Study (5 minutes)

Reading the passage from Matthew's Gospel with time following for silent reflection (5 minutes)

Reading the Notes on the Text and Questions (5 minutes)

Discussion of Questions (15 -25 minutes)

Prayer (15-20 minutes)

For each study at least one illustration is supplied. This illustration could contribute, as appropriate, to times for reflection or for discussion.

## **Praying in Your Study Group**

Some groups are well-versed in different ways of praying together. The generic guideline provided here after each study does not require such groups to pray differently to their

established custom(s). This guideline is offered for groups which are new to praying together.

## **Introduction to Matthew**

The Gospel of Matthew is the first gospel presented to readers of the New Testament. It may not have been the first gospel to be written down (that was likely Mark) but it quickly became the preeminent gospel in the life of the second century church, perhaps because, of all four gospels, it had most to say about the life of the church.

The enduring value of this gospel for the church lies in its distinctive great stories, themes and texts from, including the Three Wise Men, the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, the Parable of the Talents, and the Great Commission.

Matthew's Gospel is a teaching gospel, setting out what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in the kingdom of heaven. Consciously imitating the teaching of Moses set out in the five books of the Torah (Genesis to Deuteronomy), Matthew presents most teaching of Jesus in five blocks of material: 5:1-7:29; 10:1-11:1; 13:1-53; 18:1-19:1; 24:1-26:1. In each case the teaching block has a similar beginning and a similar ending. The great theme of the five blocks is 'life in the kingdom of heaven'. Matthew's stress falls on walking according to Jesus' "way of righteousness" and producing spiritual fruit accordingly, with severe consequences for those who do not.

Those who walk in this way are 'disciples', people who learn from and follow the Teacher, Jesus, obeying all that he has commanded them to do. One commandment is to 'make disciples' (28:20). Thus disciples of the Jesus enlarge his band of disciples.

In each study which follows we take up an aspect of 'making disciples' according to Matthew's Gospel. By 'making' we mean both the calling of people to discipleship and the development of people as disciples.

## **Matthew 4:18-22 STUDY ONE The joy and terror of being called**

When I was a child, my parents' generation always seemed very concerned about what I would do when I grew up. I remember my uncle sitting me down for a talk when I was six and telling me, with a serious look on his face, "You know, if you have a trade, you'll never starve." My cousin was a year older and but born on the same day, and he remembers similar conversations, reluctantly endured. We used to have joint birthday parties and in one particularly memorable year he was given a play set called "Junior Plumber" complete with plastic wrenches and spanners and U-bends and I was given something called "My Little Baker," which was full of pastry cutters and recipes for things involving marshmallows. We were both a bit bewildered, but we knew better than to say anything. There is a picture taken of both of us on that day. We are propped ...

[omitted text]

Sometimes we imagine we've misheard because the call of God is so utterly terrifying. Like those first disciples, we may be asked to give up lives and livelihoods and family relationships for a promise of...well, I'm not quite sure. Trusting Jesus that much just seems irresponsible.

One of my tutors at University was a nun who had worked in South Africa [omitted text]

The call to discipleship is a commitment to live right here right now. Faith is about getting real. Faith is a commitment to look at what goes on beneath the surface of life, to tackle seriously the really big questions like -who am I? and who is it that God intends me to become?. Faith means that you have joined a resistance movement, and what you're resisting is living in the shallows. You are resisting taking life at face value, and becoming hypnotised by the glitter and the fluff which stretches out in front of our noses. Time to wake up, and slowly begin to unwrap the person you are called to be here and now.

**Read** Matthew 4:18-22

### **Notes on the text**

Disciples are made not born. Andrew, Peter, James and John were born fishermen. Their destiny was to fish, but Jesus comes to call them to a new future. They will still fish but their catch will be people and their nets the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus' first call is "Follow me." Where is he going? What journey are these new followers going to take?

One journey is simply geographical: "Jesus went throughout Galilee" (4:23). Another journey is theological: "When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain ... his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying" (5:1-2). A third journey is to the cross: Jesus died on one and calls his followers to follow him there too – we may not be actually crucified but we are asked to die to self in order to live wholly for Christ (16:24-26).

[omitted text]

We may not be fishermen but the call of these fishermen models the call of Jesus to each of us. We are called by Jesus to a new way of life, "Follow me." There is joy and terror in this call. Our joy is in being personally called by Jesus to be his disciple. Our terror is in the lack of a precise map for our future. Jesus wants us to follow him wherever he goes and to share with him the task of calling others to follow him.

### **Questions**

What is most striking about the way the four fishermen respond to Jesus' call?

Have you ever made a radical life change? What happened?

What unexpected pathways has following Jesus taken you along?

### **Prayer together**

Spend some time in silence reflecting on what is challenging and encouraging in this study.

As appropriate share requests for prayer together.

## **Matthew 8:23-27 STUDY TWO Disciples in crisis**

Up until a few years ago, my experience with earthquakes was fairly unextraordinary. I slept through a middling-sized one in a tent in Iceland when I was in my 20s. (I remember rising bleary-eyed from the depths of sleep and thinking that it must have been something I'd eaten.) I experienced the Great Lincolnshire Earthquake in England in 2003. (In Oxford, where I was living, it dislodged a slate.) All that changed, of course on 4th September 2010 [omitted text]

There is a time in everyone's experience when our lives get derailed. It may be unexpected bad news which makes the bottom drop out of your world: the letter from the hospital telling you to make an urgent appointment because those spells of dizziness aren't what you think; it may be accompanying someone you love [omitted text]

It's not enough to believe that Jesus can do something about life's train wrecks. You have to trust that he is with you throughout them.

**Read** Matthew 8:23-27

### **Notes on the text**

Matthew tells this story in a couple of ways which draw out lessons in discipleship. He places the story immediately after two dialogues about discipleship, and he describes Jesus getting into the boat differently to Mark and Luke. Matthew writes, 'his disciples followed him' (8:23). These details alert us as readers to dig deep into the story for what it will teach us about being followers of Jesus.

[omitted text]

What are the disciples learning here? Jesus describes them as "little faith ones" (oligopistoi). Does this mean that they need to have more faith, less fear; greater trust, less terror? Possibly. But likely Jesus is making a different point. It does not matter how much faith the disciples have but whom they have faith in. With a little bit of faith present, Jesus can work the mightiest of miracles. Even though their faith and our faith is miniscule, Jesus will save them and us from the storms of life.

### **Questions**

What challenges you most about this story? What part of the story encourages you most?

Can you remember a situation in which your faith wavered? What happened?

When the disciples are afraid, Jesus calls them 'You of little faith.' Does this seem fair?

### **Prayer together**

Spend some time in silence reflecting on what is challenging and encouraging in this study.

As appropriate share requests for prayer together.

### **Matthew 10:37-42 STUDY THREE Disciples in mission**

When I was a student, one of my friends and I were the only people left in college over the Christmas vacation and we decided to open up a temporary hostel for the homeless. The college authorities had trusted us with the keys - rather foolishly - and there were acres of empty bed

space. What could possibly go wrong? [omitted text]

My home parish in Oxford was surrounded by community houses owned by mental health charities. One Sunday morning, a slightly bedraggled man came in during the sermon and started passing a hat around. There was a kind of nervous Anglican Shuffle going on. People dug into their wallets, coughing anxiously, all without ever looking at the guy who was passing around his beanie. Eventually the man marched up to the altar [omitted text]

When I was in the process of applying for ordination in the Church of England, I had an interview with my bishop. He was rather distant and terrifying and had a reputation for asking difficult theological questions and being very fond of cricket. [omitted text]

**Read** Matthew 10:37-42

### **Notes on the text.**

Matthew 10:1-11:1 is one of the five blocks of Christ's teaching in the gospel. Its theme is "disciples in mission." It has many practical instructions about the way missional activity is to be conducted, some of which clearly correspond to specific characteristics of the time (e.g. the focus on Israel to the exclusion of Gentiles and Samaritans, 10:5-6; the manner of entering and leaving a place, 10:11-15; the possibility of being flogged in synagogues, 10:17).

[omitted text]

A further question emerges. Why does Jesus talk about discipleship in this way? Why can't discipleship be like, say, collecting stamps or playing darts at the local pub - demanding of us, but not totally demanding? Something is at stake which goes beyond Jesus being a demanding person. There is a desperate need for humanity to be transformed. The gospel diagnoses this human condition and offers a remedy for it. The remedy is urgently needed: part-time disciples will not meet the need. Only those who take up their cross and lose their lives for Jesus' sake will be worthy of Jesus and useful in his mission (10:38-39).

Jesus then goes on to make an extraordinary claim in verses 40-42. We only need to cite verse 40 as 41 and 42 essentially repeat the claim which is, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." A disciple is Christ to those she or he meet. Those who welcome a disciple of Christ welcome Christ, indeed, welcome God.

From our perspective Christ invests in us extraordinary responsibility (to be Christ to people) and opens up amazing possibilities (for those we meet to encounter Christ through us). From the divine perspective we are the mission of God in the world: Christ has no hands except our hands, no feet except our feet and no voice except our voice. How awesome that the God we have encountered in Christ should take us, frail and fallible as we are, and make us like Christ as divine agents of God's mission!

### **Questions**

What inspires you most about this passage?

Is Christ too demanding of his disciples?

What are the roughest challenges we face as disciples?

Do you prefer to think about yourself as a 'Christian' or as a 'disciple'? What makes the

difference?

### **Prayer together**

Spend some time in silence reflecting on what is challenging and encouraging in this study.

As appropriate share requests for prayer together.

### **Matthew 11:28-30 STUDY FOUR When the going gets tough**

When I was very young, I remember that phone had dials. You had to stick your finger into the little round holes and manually move them to connect to the number. My parents used to talk about a time when phones came in two pieces. You had to crank a handle on the side of the phone and hold up the earpiece, and wonder of wonders, you would be connected to an operator. A real human being sat in an exchange somewhere and physically connected lines on a switchboard. When push-button phones appeared [omitted text] Almost without recognising it, we squeeze out the time for reflection, or silence, or just standing still and watching.

this passage in Matthew offers some gentle words of comfort and promise from Jesus. "Come to me, all you that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

I was waiting for a Warrant of Fitness recently and a TV programme was playing in the corner. [omitted text]

What did those words of Jesus change?

If you ask the burdened people, or the driven, or those overshadowed by anxiety or high expectations, any of these who have come to Jesus down through the ages, they will probably testify that those words changed everything.

St Augustine recognised the same basic pattern of human life 1600 years ago. "Oh God," he said, "you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you." The relentless wanting is not new. As human beings, we seem to be hardwired to keep looking for [omitted text].

**Read** Matthew 11:28-30

### **Notes on the text**

Our previous study focused on disciples in mission (Matthew 10). After that Jesus is provoked to speak sharply about his mission in response to a question from John the Baptist (11:2-24).

A softer tone is found in 11:25 when Jesus commends those who have received his message. [omitted text]

Yet we could hear all this as all about us. Here, so to speak, is a lovely and loving promise of a better life. But there is something we should not miss. It is the answer to the question why Jesus can make such a promise. 'I am gentle and humble in heart.' That statement is worth a long pause.

Sometimes Jesus appears elsewhere in the gospel, indeed in this very chapter, as a demanding and combative master. But the appearance is not a good guide to the reality: Jesus is gentle and humble in heart. We can come confidently to him as one who cares for us.

## Questions

What strikes you most about this passage?

Can you remember any situations when you felt Jesus' message of rest applied to you?

What does this passage tell you about who Jesus is and why we follow him?

## Prayer together

Spend some time in silence reflecting on what is challenging and encouraging in this study.

As appropriate share requests for prayer together.

## Matthew 18:10-22 STUDY FIVE Disciples in community

In the 1850s, a reasonably well-to-do local farmer from the place where I grew up in Ireland went on holiday to Glasgow, and came across false teeth for sale in a pharmacy. False teeth were still very much a novelty at this date [omitted text]

We sometimes have the idea that right at the very beginning of its history, the church was a case study of perfection. Ever since then, we think, it's been slowly unravelling like the sleeve of a jumper until we're left with what we have now – a slightly ragged and compromised organisation.

Matthew only uses the word *ekklesia*, which we translate 'church', at two points in his Gospel. One of them is here, in a passage about what to do if you disagree with a fellow-disciple. It seems that conflict between members of the church has been there right from the start. The Body of Christ has a shadow side.

[omitted text]

We sometimes get idealistic about the church as a community like something out of Cheers, where everybody knows your name. But it's actually much closer to the dysfunctional Vestry from the Vicar of Dibley. The challenge is that it's made up of people - people who can be difficult, selfish, infuriating and unreliable, but yet are our fellow disciples. Authentic community is hard to come by, but Matthew reminds us that it's worth working for – because when we are gathered in Jesus' name, however hard it is, he is right there in our midst.

**Read** Matthew 18:10-22

## Notes on the text

This chapter has begun with the disciples coming to Jesus to ask, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' (18:1). Jesus' answer focuses on the character of those who live under God's rule: humility. Jesus then talks about what disciples do when they live together under God's rule.

Each disciple is important (18:10-14)

[omitted text]

Quarrels can be sorted out (18:15-17)

[omitted text]

Forgiveness is required (18:21-22)

[omitted text]

Secondly, Jesus makes a major promise in the course of this teaching, 'For where two or three gather in my name, I am there among them' (18:20). Disciples follow Jesus. When Jesus is no longer physically present with his disciples, still he is with us. We do not walk alone. When we meet together in Jesus' name to work out our life in community, he is among us.

### **Questions**

What surprises you most about this passage?

What are the sharpest challenges you face being a disciple with other disciples?

How does this passage help?

What difference does meeting with others make to your experience of Jesus?

### **Prayer together**

Spend some time in silence reflecting on what is challenging and encouraging in this study.

As appropriate share requests for prayer together.

### **Matthew 28:16-20 STUDY SIX Disciples in the making**

When I was 17 years old, and learning to drive first time round, I made one fundamental error. I looked through the local newspaper and chose a driving instructor who advertised, "Lowest prices guaranteed!" He was with the 'L Pass-o' driving school, which should have made me very suspicious in itself, but I was young and optimistic and paying for lessons by working part time in a factory making toilet seats for aeroplanes. At first, things went quite well. The instructor didn't say a lot. [omitted text]

There's a theory that says disciples are learners- the word we translate 'disciple' means a student or a pupil or a trainee. We sometimes imagine a disciple being a bit like a learner driver. You observe carefully, memorise the road code, absorb those little rules which help you remember what to do - mirror, signal, brake - then very tentatively take off into traffic. You know you've succeeded when you pass the driving test and for the first time they let you take the car out all on your own.

But that's where the analogy falls down. [omitted text]

What do we allow people to see in us? Confident, smart, well-polished religious people who know all the answers and all the formulae? Or people who, because of Jesus, are learning day after day, again and again, to believe in God as if for the first time? Believing in God is the most significant and transforming, joyful and terrifying, enterprise that is possible for us to be a part of. Because the God in whom we are learning to believe day after day is the God who is not afraid

to be our God; not afraid to be in the middle of our world of suffering and stress; not afraid to be human with us.

**Read Matthew 28:16-20**

### **Notes on the text**

Matthew began his gospel with a genealogy in chapter one, anchoring the life-story of Jesus into the history of Israel. He ends his gospel with a commissioning which mentions 'all nations'. The story of Jesus will continue through the stories of his disciples. Their job is to continue the work of Jesus in the world.

[omitted text]

*Matheteusatei* is rarely found in the New Testament: just four times, and three of those are in Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 13:52; 27:57; 28:19, Acts 14:21).

[omitted text]

Reading these verses alongside Matthew 28:19, we can build a picture of what 'making disciples' involves. People hear the gospel and respond to its message by committing themselves to Jesus. They are taught about Jesus and taught the teaching of Jesus. Their response to the gospel sets them on a path of following Jesus and learning from Jesus. On that path other disciples lead and encourage new disciples forward in their life with Christ.

### **Questions**

What challenges you most about this passage? Why?

What appeals most about being a disciple today?

What is most uncomfortable about being a disciple today?

What is your role in making disciples?

### **Prayer together**

Spend some time in silence reflecting on what is challenging and encouraging in this study.

As appropriate share requests for prayer together.