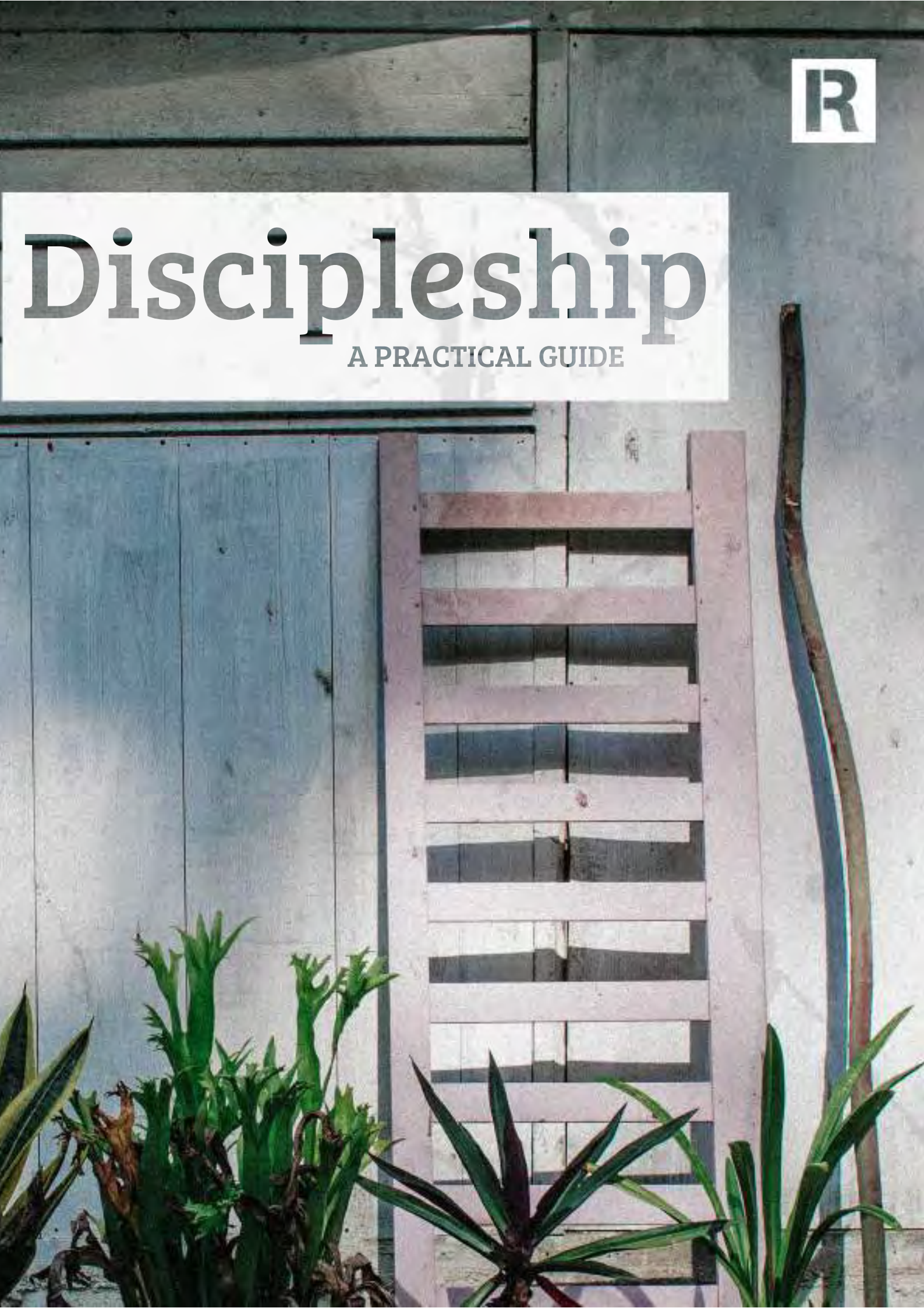


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Discipleship

A PRACTICAL GUIDE



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Introduction

Discipleship is an element of faith that every Christian feels they really should understand, but often are too embarrassed to admit they actually do not. Discipleship is fundamental to Christianity, yet many of us struggle to define it, don't understand how it works, and don't know how to go about it. Even those who do know what it is and understand roughly how to go about it can easily be prevented from moving forward into discipling relationships with others by a sense of personal inadequacy.

This booklet has been written to demystify discipleship so that we can do it purposefully and effectively. It will do so by explaining what discipleship is, why it is so important, and how to go about it. It will also recommend tools and resources to help us in our discipling relationships with each other. In order to see how discipling works out in practice for those in our congregations who are already doing it, there is a section containing write-ups detailing the real-life experiences of some of our members. It is sure to inspire you, and help to guide you to get started in these relationships too.

Our confidence to disciple others does not rest in our own ability, but in the commission, the teaching and the promise of Jesus.

Imagine if everyone at RHC were involved in discipling relationships: every person would be deeply known, loved and cared for, and spurring one another on to be more like Christ. We would be living out the vision of that healthy church Paul writes about in Ephesians 4:16: where Christ is our head and each part of the body is working properly, and the whole body grows so that it builds itself up in love. How amazing it would be for us to taste and experience this reality as a church!

OUR CONFIDENCE - THE COMMAND, THE TEACHING AND THE PROMISE OF JESUS

The Gospel of Matthew ends with an incredible commission. As the disciples gathered around the resurrected Jesus in worship, He spoke to them:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
(Matt 28:18b-20)

Those of us who have become God’s children through faith in Jesus form part of a 2000-year-old chain of disciples, stretching back to this moment in history when Jesus commissioned His disciples to go and make disciples. We are those who have been taught the gospel, have believed in Jesus, were baptised in His name, and are now sent out with His authority to make disciples of others.

Our confidence to disciple others does not rest in our own ability, but in the commission, the teaching and the promise of Jesus. Firstly, Jesus commands us to go (“all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore...”), which means that He takes responsibility for His mission through us. Secondly, Jesus Himself provides the content we are to share (“teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”). We don’t have to worry that we aren’t smart enough or don’t know enough, we simply have to share His Word with others. Thirdly, Jesus gives us a magnificent promise of His continued presence with us as we go (“and behold, I am with you always”).

THE MISSION OF RHC

This understanding of the mission of every Christian forms the foundation for the mission of Redemption Hill Church. Our church’s mission is “to make Spirit-filled disciples of Jesus Christ through the gospel”.

This mission statement reflects the following:

1. **The commission that Jesus gave us:** that all at RHC are to be active in making disciples.
2. **The kind of disciples that we want to see:** that all at RHC are following Jesus and living in step with the Spirit who empowers us to live this new life in Christ.
3. **The way that these disciples are made:** through the gospel of Jesus Christ, as we understand the grace of God in all its truth and respond to it with the obedience of faith.

As a church we are excited to join Jesus in His mission to make disciples through us. Let’s begin by exploring what exactly discipleship is.

What is Discipleship?

A Vision for Discipleship at RHC

This morning, whilst exiting MacRitchie Reservoir on the return leg of my morning run, I started thinking about the first time I ever ran at MacRitchie. It was about seven years ago. At the time I was eating unhealthily and failing to exercise, and as a result was about 16 kilograms overweight. I was still the same person, but a far less healthy version of myself than I should have been. Whilst I knew what a healthier version of myself would look like, various factors made it hard for me to get myself there. Fortunately, a friend came alongside and invited me to run with him. He picked me up early one morning and we did a short jog at MacRitchie. Whilst it nearly killed me, as a far more experienced (and fitter) runner, he had to be willing to run for a shorter distance and much slower than he would have liked, to help me do a run that I wouldn't have done on my own.

Over the next few months, we met there on a regular basis as he trained and pushed me, gradually getting my fitness levels up and my weight down, and instilling a love for running.

That was seven years ago. Looking back, we only ran together for a couple of months, but those months made a huge impact on my life because he helped me become healthy in a way that I could sustain by myself long after we were no longer running together. We could say, that in the area of health and exercise, he disciplined me.

Christian discipleship is the process of helping one another become like Jesus. It is coming alongside another person for a season to walk with them and help them (and allow them to help us!) become like Jesus. Becoming like Jesus means that we are helping one another grow in our relationship with the Father, bearing the fruit of Christ's character in our lives, and living for His purposes here on earth in the power of the Spirit. Becoming like Jesus means that we love others and long to see them become like Jesus too. Therefore, disciples are also concerned with discipling others. Let's explore a few New Testament passages that show this.

HELPING ONE ANOTHER BECOME LIKE JESUS

Firstly, in the book of Romans Paul teaches that it is part of God's eternal plan that we might be conformed to the image of Jesus. Romans 8:29 says, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." This is only possible because of Jesus' death and resurrection, as He is the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18), and the firstfruits of those who have eternal life (1 Cor 15:20). God's eternal plan is that we will become like His Son.

Secondly, in 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul teaches that because Christians are no longer spiritually blind they are able to behold God's glory, and this slowly transforms them into the image of the Lord. He says, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." This transformation is a slow one

that happens one degree at a time, through our knowing and worshipping God. In sum, Christians are slowly being transformed into the image of Christ.

Thirdly, Paul shows us in the book of Ephesians that God, through Jesus, has given us a new life recreated in the very image of God. Because God has done this for us in Christ, we are to be active in taking off the old self and active in putting on the new self. Ephesians 4:21-23 reads, “you... were taught in him... to put off your old self... to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” When we put on this new self, we are restored to our original calling as God’s perfect image-bearers.

Fourthly, the Apostle John shows us that when Christ returns we will be fully like Him. 1 John 3:2 says “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him...” The Apostle John shows us that those who have put their faith in Christ have already become God’s children, and one day will be transformed to be fully like Him. This is the final stage of our salvation, when the process of us becoming more and more like the Father’s true Son, Jesus, is complete. This completion happens at His return. God’s ultimate plan for us is that we will become like His Son.

Finally, Paul shows how this vision of seeing one another become like Jesus is the focus of his ministry. In Colossians 1:28 Paul says, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.” By preaching Christ, Paul is labouring to see believers become mature in Christ.

These are just a few of many passages in the New Testament that teach the same idea – that God has worked in history to redeem sinners and return them to the perfect image of His Son, Jesus Christ. This happens by Jesus taking on flesh, living a righteous life, dying a substitutionary death in our place, and

then rising again in victory over sin and death. Our role is to help one another become what God is making us to be.

DOES THIS MEAN WE ARE ALL GOING TO BE IDENTICAL AND... BORING?

Some might be afraid that this vision of discipleship implies that all Christians are effectively going to be clones of one another, and that it will result in an incredibly boring world. Nothing could be further from the truth! God has made every human being unique. Each human being's uniqueness is meant to demonstrate some facet of God's image. We all have different strengths, abilities and personality traits. Far from being part of what's wrong with the world, our differences are all individual threads woven together into one giant tapestry displaying God's glorious image. When God restores us to the image of Christ, He is not going to remove these unique aspects of our person that display God's glory. On the contrary, these very differences will demonstrate God's glory even more clearly than they do now. How can that be?

Sin has corrupted every facet of our lives. Our bodies decay; our motives are mixed; our strengths are undermined and become weaknesses. We could say that **because of sin we become less of who we truly are**. Whilst still retaining something of our individual uniqueness we have also become less than all God created us to be. We don't do the things we want to do and we have become the kind of people we don't want to be. The Bible calls this being enslaved to sin.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ has come to save us from our sins and begin the process of restoring us into the unique individuals God created us to be. We will be fully ourselves in the most glorious way, reflecting God's image through our own strengths, abilities and personality traits. We will reflect Jesus by being free of sin and living a life that demonstrates God's glory, while still displaying the unique character He has given us. In a nutshell,

Christian discipleship involves becoming a sinless version of yourself, with all the character and holiness of Christ, and all the intricacies that God has woven into your life.

IN WHAT WAY EXACTLY ARE WE BECOMING LIKE JESUS?

But what exactly does it mean to become like Jesus? There are three ways in which we are called to become like Jesus: **in relationship with the Father**, **in the character of Christ** and **in the purposes of God**.

1. Relationship with the Father (Rom 8:15-17)

Whereas sin separates us from God and leaves us as orphans, disciples know they are dearly loved sons and daughters of the living God and walk in real relationship with Him. Disciples are continually growing in their identity as sons and daughters of the Father. They know that they are completely accepted by Him on the basis of Christ's finished work. God's Spirit dwells within them, assuring them that they are indeed God's children, and leading them to cry out to their Father. They know God deeply, abide in Him and His words, hear His voice, and seek to please Him. Therefore, when we talk about being conformed to the image of Christ, we are talking about knowing the Father and walking with Him on earth as Christ did.

2. Character of the Son (Gal 4:19, 5:22-23)

Whereas sin corrupts our character, disciples are continually being sanctified to become more like Christ. In Galatians 4:19 Paul says to the Galatians that he feels as though he is in anguish of childbirth until 'Christ is formed' in them. As we are conformed to the image of Christ we find that we are becoming like Him in our inner person, as evidenced by what we love, how we love, and our commitment to righteousness and holiness. In the subsequent chapter of Galatians Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit – this is essentially the character of Christ that God wants to see formed in us.

3. Fulfilling God's Purposes in the Power of the Spirit (Matt 6:10, 33)

As those who now know the Father and are increasingly growing to be like Jesus, it's only natural that we would long for all of God's purposes to come to pass on earth. When Jesus spoke about this He referred to God's kingdom being established on earth. He asked us to pray for God's kingdom to come (Matt 6:10) and to personally seek God's kingdom first above all other things (Matt 6:33). Disciples therefore want to see God's kingdom come in the lives of those around them (through evangelism and discipleship), and in their communities (through seeking God's justice). They are aware that God has saved them by grace and prepared good works for them to do (Eph 2:10).

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

One of the dangers of talking about 'becoming like Jesus' is that it can be hard to grasp what this looks like in a concrete way. Even though it is helpful to spell out how relationship with the Father, the character of the Son, and fulfilling God's purposes assist us in understanding what it means to become like Jesus, some further clarity would be beneficial.

The following table takes our five RHC values and then fleshes out two aspects of each of them that could be helpful to bear in mind as we disciple one another.

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| GOSPEL-CENTRED | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identity is found in Christ as a son / daughter of the Father.• Lives a life of continual repentance and faith. |
| THEOLOGICAL DEPTH | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Growing in knowledge of who God is through worship services, church community and personal disciplines• Loving God with all our heart, soul and mind. |
| EXPERIENTIAL FAITH | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Walks in constant fellowship with God through His Spirit.• Actively being used by God with the gifts He gives to bring His Kingdom into this world. |
| COMMUNITY ON MISSION | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Known by the church, and building one another up in the faith.• Willing to give generously for God's Kingdom to come and for the church to be built up. |
| CITY RENEWAL | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Displaying a life under God's rule in every area, and testifying to the gospel that brings us joyfully into this Kingdom.• Serving those in need with mercy and justice. |

The danger of listing items such as these is that people may view them as a checklist to follow in order to be a good disciple, which would be a mischaracterisation of the gospel. It is not that we follow this list to become a good disciple, but rather that these are the fruits of true discipleship that bear witness to our inner transformation. The way that we can follow Jesus and bear this fruit in our lives will be fleshed out later in this booklet.

GOSPEL-CENTRED

1. Identity is found in Christ as a son / daughter of the Father:

- We do not find our identity or security in finances, job status, relationships or anything other than the love of Christ.
- We live lives seeking only to please God, and are not pressured to act in any way out of a need to please any person, or from fear of any person.
- We live with both humility (knowing Christ had to die for our sins) and gospel confidence (knowing God's great love for us).

2. Live lives of continual repentance and faith:

- We are aware of temptations to sin and the functional ways that our hearts tend to turn away from Christ, and gladly confess these to God and others.
- We actively put our faith in Christ in the midst of temptations in order to 'live by faith and not by sight'.

THEOLOGICAL DEPTH

3. Grow in knowledge of who God is through worship services, church community and personal disciplines:

- We obey God's command to participate in the weekly gathering of the church, and are encouraged in our faith through relationships with others in the church.
- We personally draw near to God through the Word and prayer, deepening our understanding of God's Word.

4. Love God with all our heart, soul and mind:

- We grow in heartfelt affection and devotion to God as we understand His grace in all its truth.
- We love things in this world in the correct order, meaning that love for God is above all other loves.
- We have a growing hatred of sin and every weight that hinders us from freely running the race of our faith.

EXPERIENTIAL FAITH

5. Walk in constant fellowship with God through His Spirit:

- We remain in step with the Spirit by abiding in God's Word and love, and are careful not to grieve the Spirit or put out the Spirit's fire.
- We pray without ceasing, and engage in meaningful relationship with God as He leads us and speaks to us.

6. Are actively being used by God with the gifts He gives as we seek the Kingdom's advancement into this world:

- We seek to build up the body of Christ by using gifts (spiritual and natural) that God has given us for this purpose.
- We see not just our resources but also our very lives as instruments to be used for righteousness, and seek to bring every area of our lives under the influence of the Kingdom of God (rule and reign of God).

COMMUNITY ON MISSION

7. Known by the church, and building one another up in the faith:

- We live our lives in a transparent way before other members of the church, free to confess sins, share struggles, and open to the encouragement of others in the church.
- We give ourselves to others in the church body, to serve them with God's Word in love so that they are built up in the faith.

8. Willing to give generously for God's Kingdom to come and the church to be built up:

- We seek to live generously as a response to Christ's generosity to us, and are willing to deprive ourselves of comfort and pleasures for the strengthening of the church and the glory of God.
- We tithe the first-fruits of our incomes to the church and live lifestyles of generosity.

CITY RENEWAL

9. Display lives lived under the rule of God in every area and testifying to the gospel that brings us joyfully into His Kingdom:

- We continually seek to see every facet of our lives (family, vocation, hobbies, finances, thought life, etc.) brought under the rule of God and displayed as a sign of His coming Kingdom.
- We are able and eager to share the gospel with others, including leading them in evangelistic Bible studies.

10. Serve those in need with mercy and justice:

- We are moved by the gospel of Christ to live a life of service to others in response.
- We understand that Jesus came to serve and not be served, and are willing to empty ourselves even as Christ emptied Himself for the sake of His enemies.

ALL CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP IS THE FRUIT OF ABIDING IN, AND WALKING WITH, JESUS

Once again, all of these aspects are the fruit of the gospel's work in our lives, and not a list of things we must do to earn God's favour. Therefore, whilst desiring to see this fruit in our lives, we should not aim for the fruit itself, but rather we should seek a deeper abiding in Christ that will cause the fruit to be produced naturally. Our discipleship of one another is to help one another become like Jesus as we abide in Jesus through the gospel, so that this fruit is produced in our lives.

This means that becoming like Jesus is fundamentally relational. We are to 'walk in him' (Col 2:6), and enjoy fellowship with Him, having Him speak to us, lead us, guide us and comfort us. This living relationship with God through His son is fundamental to how we bear fruit in our lives. Our discipling of one

another is not simply to try and produce various behaviours in each other's lives, but rather to encourage a living relationship with God that will result in the fruit we want to see. Our later section on 'How Discipleship Happens' will flesh this out in more detail.

BEING LIKE JESUS MEANS WE WANT TO SEE OTHERS DISCIPLED TOO

In Mark 10:45 Jesus says that “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”. Becoming like Jesus means that we are turned away from ourselves and are willing to spend our lives for the sake of others. What we desire most for others is for them to know Jesus's saving power and to become more and more like Him. Therefore, as we become more like Jesus we become more and more committed to discipling others. The church is therefore a community of people who are themselves becoming like Jesus and helping each other do so too.

In sum, discipleship is becoming like Jesus. We find ourselves being recreated in His image, growing in a deepening relationship with the Father, bearing the fruit of Christ in our lives, and living for His purposes here on earth, which includes discipling others. Why is this so important? This is what we turn to next.

Why is Discipleship Needed?

In Robert Ludlum's 1980 novel *The Bourne Identity* (later turned into a movie franchise), Jason Bourne wakes up aboard a fishing boat in the Mediterranean, having been pulled from the water in an unconscious state by his rescuers. He is suffering from retrograde amnesia, and apart from discovering he has been shot and has a small chip embedded in his body, he has no recollection of who he is or how he got there. From this point on, the movie franchise follows Bourne as he slowly remembers pieces of his past and rediscovers his identity. The story is one of rediscovering who Bourne really is, and what he is meant to do.

Bourne's retrograde amnesia illustrates the condition we find ourselves in as a result of our sin. Originally created as God's image-bearers to know and love Him, we are called to live as His representatives who steward His creation. This is what it means to be His image-bearers. This is the good life, filled with the joy of knowing God and devoting our lives to a truly meaningful purpose. Another word we could use to describe this is holiness.

But sin has struck our lives, leaving us adrift at sea, mortally wounded, with every facet of our beings affected. We don't know who we are anymore – and so search for our identity in our abilities, possessions and professions. We don't know God anymore – so we search for satisfaction in our relationships with each other, instead of receiving the satisfaction that comes from being in right relationship with God. We don't know what we are to do with our lives anymore – so instead of living for the flourishing of creation we live for ourselves, using people rather than loving them. We don't know how to speak anymore – using our words to tear down rather than build up. To use biblical language, we no longer walk as God's sons and daughters by the Spirit, but we walk according to the flesh.

In this context the gospel comes like an unexpected letter announcing tremendous news – we can be healed! Our faculties can be restored. We can walk and speak and think and know rightly again! Christ has come as God's perfect image-bearer to restore us in our relationship with God, and to enable our lives to reflect Him to the world. Jesus who died for our sins and rose again now calls you and me to follow Him as His disciples. In this way we can see that discipleship is learning to be ourselves again; it's learning to be who were we made to be; it's learning to live as we were intended to.

Here are three reasons why we desire to pursue discipleship:

1. Because we want to enjoy God (1 Peter 3:18)

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God”. Sin's effect is alienation from God, but now through Jesus we have been brought near to know God as our Father. We know that there are pleasures at God's right hand forevermore! There is nothing more glorious and thrilling than walking in deep relationship with God. Therefore, we long to grow in discipleship that we might walk more intimately with our Father.

2. Because we want to enjoy life to the full (John 10:10)

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (NIV) Sin is fundamentally self-destructive, like drinking poison. But we want our neighbours and ourselves to have fullness of life. Therefore, we long to become more and more like Jesus so that we can, by faith, begin to ‘take hold of that which is truly life’ (1 Tim 6:19).

3. Because we want our lives to count (Matt 6:19)

Jesus said that we should not lay up for ourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy, but that we should rather lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven. Scripture shows that whatever is built apart from God in this world is not going to last. It would be like investing all our life’s savings into a company, only to discover the following day that the company is about to file for bankruptcy. On the contrary, we want our lives, actions, thoughts and dreams to be built upon God’s eternal kingdom that will last forever. We want this not only for ourselves, but for our friends too.

All these are offered to us through Jesus, and the means by which we can make them a reality this side of heaven is called discipleship. So, how do we do this? This is what we turn to next.

CHAPTER 3

How Discipleship Happens

We've said that discipleship is the process of becoming like Jesus. We've also spoken about how becoming like Jesus will mean that we love others and are enthusiastic to see them become like Jesus too. So, how does discipleship happen?

Discipleship happens as God's Word, the gospel, is applied to our lives, and we respond with faith.

DISCIPLESHIP HAPPENS AS GOD'S WORD, THE GOSPEL, IS APPLIED TO OUR LIVES, AND WE RESPOND WITH FAITH

In Paul's opening section in his letter to the Colossians, he describes the way that the Colossians are growing and bearing fruit for God (Col 1:3-7). Paul explains that the way they are being discipled is the same way that believers all over the world are being discipled (Col 1:6). Let's look at this in more detail.

The process begins when we hear and receive God's Word, the gospel. Paul states this in Colossians 1:5 – "Of this you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel". All of scripture is God-breathed and useful for training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16), and all of scripture ultimately points to Christ (Luke 24:27). Therefore, when we handle God's Word rightly, we find it teaches us about the nature of God, the reality of ourselves, and the finished work of Jesus. Paul is showing us that it is God's Word, the gospel of grace, which produces transformation in our lives. As the Colossians heard God's grace expounded through His Word, they bore the fruit of the Spirit, which was seen in their faith in God and love for the saints (v 3, 8).

It's important that we pause here for a moment to ensure that we don't misunderstand what Paul is saying in Colossians 1. There are many incorrect ways we can use God's Word to disciple people. We could use God's Word to try and urge people to be good and to please God by obeying His Word in their own strength. Obeying God in our own strength is what happens when we see God's holy ways, and endeavor to commend ourselves to Him by trying our best to keep His ways through our own will. But obeying God in our own strength is not the gospel. In fact, it's counter to it. The Bible is not primarily a list of rules to keep in order for us to earn God's favour. Rather, the Bible shows us the perfection of God's holy nature and the good news of what Christ has done for us: how He saves us from our sins, justifies us fully before God, and reconciles us to Him as his children.

Discipleship happens as God's Word, the gospel, is applied to our lives, and we respond with faith.

As a result of His work in our lives we love Him, and desire to obey Him from our hearts: hearts that have been made alive to Him and had His law written on them by His Spirit. So, the Bible does show us how to live, but it does not do so apart from Christ's work, which is the means by which we are acceptable to God as well as the power to be able to live holy lives from the heart. Christians obey God because we are already his beloved, justified children. We do so from a transformed heart that is the work of God, not by the strength of our wills in order to earn God's favour. Therefore, if we use the Bible to urge people to obey God in their own strength in order to earn God's favour, we are effectively saying that the gospel is not needed, and that Christ died in vain (Gal 2:21). There would be no need for a Saviour.

Whilst using the Bible to urge people to be good and please God by their own efforts might produce short-term behavioural change, it cannot produce heart-felt change that springs from a deep love for God. Rather, a true disciple does seek to obey God, but it is the 'obedience of faith' (Rom 1:5), where we have come to so love and trust our Heavenly Father that we seek His will in our lives for no other reason than to please Him.

Where does the obedience of faith come from? In contrast to self-reliant effort, the obedience of faith comes as we understand God's grace in all its truth (Col

1:6). Therefore, when we open God's Word we do not see it as simply a list of principles for a good life or as a list of rules we must obey to earn God's favour.

What do we look for when we open God's Word?

We seek to:

- a. understand the righteousness of God
- b. understand ourselves in the light of His righteousness
- c. see how Christ has fulfilled God's law perfectly on our behalf and conquered our sin by dying and rising again
- d. put our full trust in Christ
- e. seek to obey Him with the obedience that springs from our faith in Him in the power of His Spirit

In sum, we could say that discipleship happens as God's Word is understood and His gracious good news is applied to our lives. This application of His truth involves repentance for our sin, faith in Christ, reconciliation with our Heavenly Father and fellowship with the Spirit. This is what it means to be gospel-centred. And this is why the mission of RHC is to make Spirit-filled disciples of Jesus through the gospel.

Our responsibility then is to hear God's truth, and apply His grace to every part of our lives. Paul explains in Galatians 3:1-3, that just as the Christian life begins with the glorious call of the gospel and our response of faith, so our growth in Christ happens by responding in faith to God's Word. It is the gospel that continues to grow and bear fruit in our lives as we understand God's grace in all its truth.

WHERE DISCIPLESHIP HAPPENS

We saw from Colossians 1 that God's Word was shared with the Colossians by Epaphras, who was the 'discipler' (1:7). How do we hear God's Word of grace that bears fruit in our lives? The three main ways that Christians hear God's Word are through our corporate worship on Sundays, through our personal devotions, and through Christian fellowship. Here, we will focus on Christian fellowship as that is the focus of this booklet and what we want to encourage in our church.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

In addition to corporate worship, the Bible describes normal Christian relationships as involving multiple relationships with other Christians in which God's Word is being shared with one another for the sake of growth. This can happen in small groups such as community groups, one-to-one Bible reading relationships, or in any place where two believers meet up. Any time two Christians get together to read the Bible, pray, or speak about their own personal life and walk with God, this kind of fellowship can and should happen.

People often ask what the nature of the discipling relationship should be. Is it a discipler to disciple-type relationship, where one is teaching and the other is learning? How mature does one have to be to disciple another? The reality is that discipling relationships take many forms. It could be two believers at a similar stage, meeting to learn from each other and grow, or it could be a relationship where one believer is more mature than the other. However, regardless of the nature of the relationship, in every discipling relationship where the Word is being shared, both parties are hearing the Word, understanding themselves in the light of who God is, and then responding to His grace. Therefore, even in relationships where one is very mature and the other is a very new

believer, both will be strengthened, edified and become more like Jesus through spending time together.

Many Christians enjoy spending time with other Christians, but the nature of their interaction may not actually be Christian fellowship, which by definition is helping one another become more like Christ. Whilst healthy Christian relationships will often involve us spending time with each other in a variety of settings (being in one another's homes, watching how families function, etc.), we do not want to make the mistake of thinking that simply spending relational time with one another is the entirety of Christian discipleship. We can learn much about living out our faith in the midst of daily challenges and struggles by observing how others live, but we also want to encourage our relationships to be intentionally Christ-centred. We can do this by asking each other purposeful questions about our faith. Instead of a casual, "Hi, how are you? How are you doing?" and going on to talk about our work or our children, we can try asking about our friends' faith: where they are struggling, what they are praying for, what they have learned about Jesus this week, and so on. Even more deliberately, we can decide to sit down together, open God's Word and use it to build one another up for mutual growth and strengthening. So how exactly do we go about entering into these kinds of relationships?

THE 'HOW TO' OF DISCIPLING RELATIONSHIPS

1 Intentionally meet up

Discipleship doesn't just automatically happen. It's intentional. Jesus pursued those that He wanted, and called them to Himself. We want to be intentional about building relationships for the purpose of mutual growth. Discipleship therefore requires an intentional conversation with those with whom you are hoping to grow your faith. Ask them if they would be willing to spend time with you so that you can help each other to grow in godliness. When the

relationship is clear, it will be far easier to discuss your lives with each other. You can agree to meet weekly, fortnightly or monthly. Generally, the less regular the meet-ups the harder it will be to establish some momentum. A regular rhythm helps to make it easy to remember and do consistently.

Sometimes we are nervous of entering a discipling relationship because we are afraid of getting stuck in something that's not working long term. The best way to avoid this is to start by setting a mutually agreed time frame. Agree to study a particular Epistle, or work through some material that has a definite end point. This brings the time to a natural close. You could of course decide to continue with some other material if you feel the relationship is mutually beneficial, but if it's not working out then this provides an easy exit if needs be. You can always encourage the person to meet up with someone else for discipleship too.

We see that Jesus taught His disciples both formally and informally, letting them get to know Him personally, and allowing them to see how He lived His life. As we seek to grow in a culture of discipleship at RHC, we should supplement our Bible studies by folding people into our very lives. We can invite them into our homes, to visit us in our workplaces, to follow us as we run errands, bring them along on vacations, and invite them into the rhythms of our lives. By doing so, we are showing them what a life of following Jesus looks like.

At RHC each congregation has discipleship deacons whose role it is to equip members, as well as to connect people for discipling relationships. They would love to help you find someone to meet up with for the purposes of discipleship. Alternatively, you could ask your CG leader or one of the congregation leaders to help you get connected.

2 Discover God's Word

We saw previously that it was the growth in understanding of God's grace through His Word that bore fruit in the Colossians' lives. Therefore, when we get together we want to be learning about God's grace through His Word. There are a number of ways we can do this.

Firstly, the best way is for us to work through a passage of scripture together. By simply reading through a passage of scripture and asking good questions to understand its context, determine its meaning, and apply it to our lives, we can hear God speaking to us and grow by understanding His grace. There is nothing more powerful than God's Word, and whilst there are other kinds of material that can be profitable to work through in discipling relationships (see Appendix), there is nothing as good as scripture. Simply open in prayer, read through the passage slowly and ask good questions of the text as you seek to determine its meaning and application to your life.

Some might feel intimidated to read through scripture without any kind of guide, so we have included a simple Bible reading framework called COMA in the Appendix for you to use. For others who might need more help, a simple Bible study guide such as those produced by 'The Good Book Company' is highly recommended. You can find out more information about these resources in the Appendix.

Secondly, there are good Christian books one can read through. Either each person can read a chapter or two on their own and then you come together and discuss what has been read, or you can actually read out loud to one another during the meeting. There is a great variety of Christian books out there: see the Appendix for a list of recommendations.

Thirdly, other Christian documents or tools can be helpful to work through together with other Christians for the purpose of growth. Our own "Truths

That Make Us Sing” is a question-and-answer catechism booklet with scripture references, recommended songs and a devotional write-up that you can use to grow in the foundational doctrines of the faith. Again, see the Appendix for more details.

3 Apply it one another’s lives

As stated earlier, the goal of discipleship is essentially to become like Jesus in relationship with the Father, in character and in purpose. This means that we do not study the Bible or any other Christian material for the purpose of increasing our knowledge about God or Christianity, but so that we know Him as our Father, become like His Son, and live out His purposes for our lives in the world in the power of the Spirit. This means that as we study God’s Word we are eager to see how it applies to our own lives and the lives of the people we are discipling.

In order for good application to happen, there are three things needed. Firstly, we need to ensure we understand the meaning of the text properly before jumping to application. The COMA method of studying a passage is helpful in this regard because it forces us to discover the meaning before we seek to apply it. Secondly, we need to open our lives to one another. This is so that the discipling process can truly meet our needs. If we aren’t aware of what is really going on in one another’s lives then our discipleship is less likely to take deep root in our hearts. Often, vulnerability shown by one party helps the other party open up their life too, so don’t be shy to share what’s going on in your life and how God is speaking to you. Establishing trust in the relationship (promising not to share with others the struggles or confidences of the person you are meeting with without first asking their permission) will help make both parties feel safe too. Thirdly, we should ask good questions that encourage the person we are meeting with to reflect on how this passage speaks into their life. Helping our friends apply scripture by prompting them with good questions can be

more effective than just pointing out the obvious. Saying, “You should trust God more,” is far less effective than asking, “How is this passage calling you to trust God in your current situation?” for example.

4

Help one another to respond in faith

This step might seem unnecessary to some, but once we’ve met up, received God’s Word and applied it to our lives, we want to be deliberate about putting courage into each other to follow God. We are not simply emotionally unattached co-readers, we are fellow brothers and sisters, and we long for each of us to become more like Jesus. Therefore, as we open God’s Word together we want to graciously urge each other to draw near to God, to respond to Him in faith, and to see that Jesus is indeed better. In 1 Samuel 23:16 Jonathan met with David in a difficult time and helped him find strength in God. We want our times with each other to be times where our fellow disciple feels our love and is strengthened in their faith by our encouragement. The scriptures show us that we can also use the spiritual gifts God gives us to speak to one another for our mutual “upbuilding and encouragement and consolation” (1 Cor 14:3).

This will necessarily involve us taking time to pray together. This step of praying together is an often neglected aspect of discipleship, but it is crucial to draw near and talk to our Father, and it is also important to model what prayer looks like. We should aim to allow time at the end of all our meetings to speak to our Father and pray for each other, asking His Spirit to continue to work in us as we meditate on what we have seen in His Word.

We do not want to minimise the importance of prayer in discipleship. Praying with one another when we meet helps to actively direct our attention to God and cast all our dependence upon Him, as well as indirectly helping us to learn from each other how to pray. Praying for one another when we are apart

reminds us that it is God who is ultimately working in our lives to make us like Jesus.

Amongst other things prayer is the natural cry of those who have been made God's children (Rom 8:15); a great sanity and refuge for those who live in the busyness of a city (Matt 11:28-30); rebellion against the status quo of the world (Matt 6:10); and a means of personal transformation (Col 1:9-14).

Some might find it intimidating or even embarrassing to pray with others in public spaces. Whilst we want to be sensitive to those we are discipling, we should not be intimidated by the prevailing culture that urges us to keep our faith private. All human beings are worshippers and demonstrate that in a variety of ways every day. As Christians, we worship and trust in the one true God, and should not be ashamed of quietly turning to Him in prayer with other believers.

5 Encourage the person to find subsequent discipling relationships

Remember, disciples who become like Jesus want to see others disciplined. Therefore, when we've come to the end of our time with someone, we want to encourage them to go and find someone else with whom they can spend time in a discipling relationship, so that these relationships will be growing all over the church.

Where To From Here?

For many Christians, discipleship can seem intimidating. The goal of this booklet has been to demystify discipleship so that we can do it purposefully and effectively, and also to give some practical tips on how to enter into discipling relationships with others. The final section contains true stories of discipleship to show how discipleship happens in practice and to give you the confidence to step out in this area.

Some of us may still have some fears. Perhaps we are uncertain about making a long-term commitment. If so, just commit to meeting with someone for a fixed time, or agree to study a short book together, after which you can re-evaluate. Some may be unsure what to do in the sessions themselves. Just open God's Word, read it honestly, ask the Spirit to help and ask good questions of the text. If you don't feel equipped enough to just open the Bible with someone else, consider getting a good Bible guide (there are recommendations in the Appendix). This means that you can do Bible reading with anyone, it doesn't have to be someone wiser or more mature than you. Rather than pretending you are an expert, seek to explore and discover the Bible together with your discipling partner. Others may not be sure if entering into a discipling relationship is worth the investment. The stories that follow will show you how God has blessed even the most sceptical as they have taken this step of faith.

Discipling Stories

As has been explained in this booklet, discipling relationships take many different forms, and yet all have the goal of helping one another become like Jesus. What follows is a selection of stories and testimonies from RHCers who have been in and benefited from discipling relationships. These stories are included to encourage and inspire you as you enter into these relationships yourselves. Unfortunately we don't have space to include all the amazing accounts of how God has used discipling relationships at RHC, so we have selected a few to showcase a range of approaches, different life stages, and various permutations of relationships and personal situations that can work in discipleship. Enjoy reading how God has been at work in the lives of these brothers and sisters through the discipling ministry of ordinary fellow believers!

Jason: *“I have a discipleship relationship with Tom. It began about two and a half years ago as a regularly scheduled (every two weeks) sit-down after breakfast, when together we would explore Christianity and the meaning of being a Christian through sharing experiences and studying scripture together. Tom was the one who initiated the idea over coffee one morning. We had been working out together and praying together as part of a men’s group for several months, and I think he noticed in me a desire and therefore an opportunity to go deeper.*

Tom had learned that in order to impact people and help them make real change in their lives, you have to get to know them on a one-to-one basis, showing that you really care about how their Christian lives are going. His father was a great role model for him at an early age and he wanted to help me take my Christian life a step further.

Initially we met at a coffee shop and afterwards agreed to meet at my house every two weeks on Saturday morning for about two hours. It evolved a bit, such that we would alternate between homes, so that Tom didn’t always have to be the one to travel. A number of times we would also make breakfast for each other and just enjoy each other’s company for a while before diving into the study.

During our meetings, Tom shared a number of things that he had learned through the years that were illustrative demonstrations of Christianity (e.g. The Wheel; The Armour of God), supplemented by scripture. We would talk about his walk of faith and he would ask me to share things from my life, past and present. Sometimes, he would ask me to do a bit of homework in advance before our next meeting.

I had some hesitation at first. But after we met for the first time, I was excited for the next meeting. I felt I was really learning a lot and connecting with someone on a much deeper level than any of the other male relationships in my life. We met in public a few times and at first I was fearful and worried about other people overhearing our conversation.

However, that fear went away and though it is still a bit awkward at times, I'm a lot more comfortable now speaking about my faith and praying together in public.

The challenges are our busy schedules. I've got a very demanding job and a family with two young boys (12/13). There are always lots of activities and my schedule is normally pretty full on. Tom has a new baby as well and he is finding that the time he used to have for himself is now taken up with being a Dad.

Simply to make the time, do it and commit. It will have an immediate and beneficial impact on your Christian journey, no matter where in that journey you are. There have been countless benefits to me from this discipleship relationship, but two specific things that I value very much are:

As a result of the encouragement and guidance of Tom, I often begin my day (five of seven on average) with scripture reading and quiet time with God.

I now regularly read scripture, do devotions, and reflect and pray with my beautiful wife Lisa.”

Stefan:

“I had previously joined an existing men’s group, which then broke up into smaller groups. Looking back, this was part of God’s plan for me, as I was looking for a smaller group where I could freely share my journey as a Christian, including the challenges and the joys. I also wanted to connect with Christians at different stages on their journey with God, so that I could learn and share my experiences, challenges and joys. In turn, this would make me more accountable to how I am doing as a Christian.

Our small group of two to three men meets once a week on a Tuesday morning before work for 60–90 min in a coffee shop close to my office. We do not follow a fixed reading plan or other structures. Sometimes we read specific passages from the Bible or study specific aspects of Christian life through prepared questions. I value the flexibility that we have, so that we can address certain topics as they come up.

I had already come to the conclusion that we would get the most out of this if everybody shared as openly as possible, because that creates an atmosphere of trust. That’s why I was convicted to take part, and I had no fears or concerns about doing so. Trust is more difficult to establish in a larger group, but now in this smaller group it is easier. In the current set-up, I feel completely secure and comfortable to share everything on my heart with my fellow Christian brothers.

Discipleship requires a certain amount of discipline. It is important to show commitment and to attend as often as possible. Business travel and other things can pose a challenge, but we are committed to make every effort to meet regularly.

It is great to have discipleship with Christians who are at different life stages and at different stages on their journey of faith. It has been a great benefit to me to get advice and comfort on different aspects of my Christian life from people of diverse backgrounds. This unity in diversity is a true blessing of being part of God's family.

Discipleship is the setting that helps me best work through situations when my Christian beliefs come up against the day-to-day challenges of life. It helps me to consistently live out a Christian life on workdays as well as Sundays.”

Start with a small group or even one-to-one, in order to feel the power of having a trusting relationship with other Christians. This would then be a good foundation for forming larger discipleship groups, allowing you to richly benefit from the different experiences and wisdom of a wider range of Christians.

Brandon:

“The three of us meet every week or every other week depending on our schedules. We usually read a chapter of a book or the Bible together and then pray for each other. Sometimes, when we are busy, instead of trying to cram in a Bible study we still just try to catch up for a quick meal and see how we are all doing so that we can still encourage each other. During the week we try to text each other to keep in touch too.

I started this group to make sure that all of us are being cared for and encouraged in our walk with God. It is also for us to have accountability when it comes to fighting sin.

Previously we were going through some books of the Bible (the last one was the letters to the churches in Revelation) but now we are going through Finally Free, a book on sexual purity by Heath Lambert. It's a really good book and has great general advice on how accountability groups can be effective.

Initially I was afraid that I would be unequal to the task of facing some of the challenges that we were going through. I was also fearful that the group would kind of lose steam and stop meeting. I definitely was inadequate, but I realised that God really just needed us to be walking alongside each other and praying for each other. None of us has a silver bullet of Bible truth that can just be applied to solve each other's problems: instead God gives us grace in our trials as we encourage and walk with each other.

There are seasons when everyone is having a tough time or is very busy, and then it becomes easy to just give up meeting. In fact there were times when the group stopped meeting for a while, and it took some perseverance to get it back on track. Ironically, while it feels tempting to just hide and back away during these seasons, that is probably the time when we need encouragement from each other the most.

Although I initiated the group, I've been humbled over the years just to be able to receive help and grace from these brothers. Slowly but surely, I've

come to see the beauty of God's wisdom in setting up the church such that we all have different strengths and weaknesses so that we can all help each other (1 Cor 12). And that is a much more beautiful picture than if we were all self-reliant, self-righteous dudes.

For those thinking of doing discipleship, I advise you to temper your expectations. It's going to take some time for a relationship to be fruitful and natural. Don't be disappointed if after the first or second or even the fifth session things still feel awkward – discipling and relationships are hard! I think it's important to be prepared to be vulnerable in these relationships – it's easy to feel frustrated and wonder why this guy I'm meeting doesn't care about me or why the conversation always hovers around platitudes from the Bible, but if I don't share what's really going on then it's hard to expect otherwise.

You don't have to talk about super-spiritual stuff all the time. I think it's off-putting if every meeting is agenda-laden. On some days when we're busy, we just have a meal and chat and pray at the end. Discipleship is about doing life together.

Also, I need to keep reminding myself that the time when you most feel like hiding from Christian community is most likely the time you need it the most. Don't try to run from your discipleship group when things are going badly. It's fine to tell them that you need some space, but having them praying and encouraging you is a great blessing and one of the means of grace that God has given to us in these times.”

David: *“Oliver, Brandon and I have an informal discipleship relationship. When we started we were students at a similar phase of life looking for regular fellowship and accountability. We were involved in a CG, but Oliver was unable to come regularly and we wanted to be able to check in on him on a regular basis. Brandon and I were already meeting regularly, so instead of having an additional commitment we decided to merge our meetings.*

Our weekly meetings are wherever is practical on that day. We neither study in the same school nor stay near each other, so we have to be adaptable to give and take and accept some inconvenience sometimes. Malls near the MRT are more accessible, and we try to keep the meeting time to no more than two hours. The best places are quiet cafes and coffee shops like Coffee Bean, Toast Box and Mosburger where you get some privacy and don't feel like you are being chased away.

We usually have a meal together to catch up on each other's lives. After that, we read the material that we have, which could be a book of the Bible or a book on Christian living. Right now we are reading a book recommended by Brandon.

When we started, my greatest reservation was feeling inadequate to listen to other people, and the fear of being vulnerable to others. My fears were valid, and in fact they are confirmed every time we meet together, albeit to a lesser degree as time goes by. Someone in the group will have to be the first person to be vulnerable, and this sets an example for the others to follow suit. The amazing thing is that everyone has the same reservations, and the more often you meet, the more you realise that you don't have to be fully equipped to listen to the other person, and you understand that your struggles and sins are not unique to yourself. Part of the remedy is to do it over and over again.

What's been really encouraging is that I have been reminded of God's truth and I experience His grace and love very tangibly through our relationship. In wrestling with sin, seeking counsel in life circumstances, finding comfort and knowing grace, Brandon and Oliver have ministered to me in many ways.”

Persevere.

Your concerns and awkwardness are probably worth overcoming for the sweetness of fellowship in a discipling relationship!

Eugene: *“Right now, I am part of three Bible reading groups for men. Each group meets once every two weeks for an hour to read a passage from the Bible, study it together, share our lives and pray for one another. We meet during the work-week (when we most need encouragement from God’s Word and each other, and when we most need to be reminded that we are children of God) either early in the morning or during lunch.*

The size of each group is different. I meet Teck Hao on Monday morning at a cafe near Botanic Gardens MRT station. It’s an unusual location, but it turns out to be where we intersect on our respective work commutes. I meet three to four men on Thursday morning at Raffles Place, and another three to four men during Friday lunch near City Hall MRT station.

Teck Hao and I first started reading the Bible in mid-2017 (I think!). We started with 1 Timothy and then decided to just keep on going – so we finished up 2 Timothy and Titus. When we started, we were kind of intense and met every week! I’ve really benefited from reading the Bible with him. If nothing else, it made me read those epistles at a deeper level. The Friday group came about when we did a survey of RHC men who wanted to read the Bible and realised that Friday afternoon was a potential slot. The Thursday group was something that Simon started in 2017 and we have just carried on with it.

For me, the motivation was just to grow in spiritual maturity together with a bunch of men. Bible reading is a good way to do it. It’s an effective resource (2 Tim 3:16), backed by God. It does take a bit of preparation for the person leading the group. For me, I just read the same book for all three groups. Right now, that’s Philippians. And I read the commentary the week before to prepare.

It's not always smooth sailing: there have been times when I overslept or when I didn't have enough time to prepare due to a busy period at work. I do try to be clear on the level of commitment by estimating how long it will take us to read the book together. After we are done, guys can decide if they want to do another book or find another group or take a break – that's fine since we all go through different seasons in life and our needs may change.

It's a challenge sometimes finding the right day and time. That's not always easy to do even among a small group. But my hope is that over time more men will experience the benefit of just taking some time to read the Bible together, and go on to lead their own groups.”

For those who would like to join or start a group, email the deacons in your congregation with possible dates/times and locations.

Teck Hao:

“I currently have just one commitment and it is with Eugene (see response from Eugene above). I took part in several book studies last year:

With Ming Yang weekly on weekday nights at random food places. Ming Yang initiated it as he wanted to equip me with the COMA framework to help me lead Community Group and encourage me to start reading with other brothers in the Community Group. The material we used was selected chapters in the Gospel of Matthew.

With John Cheng + Jared Sia on alternate weekday nights at a Buona Vista foodcourt. We went through the book of James with guiding questions from a book suggested by John Cheng. It was my idea to meet to further Ming Yang's goal for the Community Group.

With Timothy Ng on alternate Monday nights at random food places and subsequently at Dave Rhardja's place when he joined us for the final few studies. Tim initiated this to help him start reading God's Word more intently. We went through the book of Job using an online guide.

*With Eric Laug on selected Saturdays/Sundays irregularly based on both our availabilities, at places near church in between the second and third services, and sometimes at his place. We went through a book entitled *The Gospel at Work*, which Eric suggested to help me cope with struggles at the workplace.*

The biggest challenge I found was the need to spend time preparing for the studies before we met. At one point I had four studies going on concurrently, so that was quite tiring in terms of preparation and I wouldn't really recommend it.

I definitely benefited a lot from reading with Ming Yang and Eugene, where I felt it was more a case of them teaching me. For the other studies where the relationship was more peer-to-peer reading, I think both parties benefited equally. For the one I did with John and Jared, I led most if not all of the sessions and I felt blessed in terms of getting to know the two of them more intimately from their sharing.”

***It was a good pathway
that allowed us to
meet up and continue
the fellowship.***

Sam: *“I do Bible reading with four different groups of guys in RHC, of which I would say that two constitute more of a ‘discipleship relationship’. I am reading Philippians with Eugene Lim and a few other (older) men at Raffles Place every other Thursday, and the Gospel of Luke with my Community Group leader Charles Low on alternate Sundays. It’s been very encouraging and I always leave these sessions refreshed because of the views and experiences that these older guys (not too much older, but still!) share with me, and the way they lead me to see how I can fix my eyes on God amidst my problems and challenges at work and in life.*

In both these groups it was Eugene and Charles respectively who initiated. I’m really privileged to be in a church community where the older people do always take the initiative to try to disciple someone younger or younger in faith. I became more open to the idea of reading with older guys after a church camp in 2016 where we had a session on one-to-one Bible reading and the pastor was sharing about how cross-generational relationships (or just reading with someone older) could really benefit both parties because of their different experiences and perspectives. Being in a church culture that encourages forming such relationships is definitely a big motivating factor. Another motivation is to learn the ropes from these older guys so that I can disciple others in future!

When I first started reading with older guys in the church, I was somewhat concerned as to what I could offer in return for their time, and whether or not they would understand what I was going through (back then I was still a student) and could empathise with me, etc.

These concerns were unfounded because after a couple of sessions I felt like we were both refreshed by the Word and had been used by God to speak words of truth and encouragement to each other. Older men might not be in the same season of life as me, but they’ve been through these stages before and can speak into my heart. And obviously, they’re also more than happy to walk with another brother in Christ.

Another legitimate concern was whether I had the time to meet, considering school and work and personal time, etc. I would say that by the grace of God, He's given me some discipline in spending my time wisely, so I have tried to make an effort to take that hour or so to meet up with these other brothers. It really does help make the day more productive at work too after reading on a Thursday, as I'm reminded of my identity in Christ when I work.

The biggest encouragement to me is to know that there are older guys in church who are willing to walk alongside me, go through life with me, speak truth and love to me in times of need, and point out the sin in my heart when I'm blind to it. To have someone more mature in the faith to approach can be really beneficial, especially when I feel lost and need counsel. They've never failed to give me helpful advice, but more importantly to point me back to what matters – the gospel of Christ. They show me that yes, life can be messy, and being a Christian doesn't mean that these problems go away, but God is still sovereign over all of that, and He still loves me despite my flaws and my problems and my sins, as Jesus' death on the cross shows.

My advice to others is: go for it! You may have thoughts like, "It can wait till next year," or "I need to get my life in order first," or "Work is too busy – perhaps when this project ends," or "I do not know who I can read with." These could be real reasons and concerns that you face when deciding to commit to a discipling relationship, but whichever season of life you are in, if you wait until you are absolutely free from responsibilities, distractions and concerns, you'll be waiting a long time. I truly believe God honours a desire to enter into a discipling relationship with fellow brothers, and uses both (or all) parties to encourage and sanctify each other. So take a step forward and get in touch with the discipleship team. Let them know your concerns about dates and timing, etc. With our church growing ever larger, I'm positive the team will be able to connect you with someone to read the Bible with and to disciple or be discipled.”

Victor & Elizabeth:

“Our discipleship consists of two couples: one married a year ago and the other coming up to their wedding. We often meet at each other’s respective homes, roughly every other week, usually over dinner after a workday.

*Our discipleship evolved from David and Victor’s study of the Bible with each other. As Victor and Elizabeth’s wedding was approaching, and the Sng’s were planning to go through the book *Meaning of Marriage*, it seemed to be a good fit for us to do it together in order to have diversity of opinion and to grow closer and learn more about one another.*

*We use this guide and the associated videos, in addition to the book “*The Meaning of Marriage*”. Before the meeting we read one chapter of the book. During the meeting, we go through the video for that chapter, then go through the questions for that chapter in the guide and share our thoughts. The questions are a good guide that often lead us to discuss other related topics.*

The main challenge is finding time where all four of us are available, and working around last-minute changes in work schedules. However, everyone has been flexible and accommodating.

It has been really encouraging to hear that fellow couples are going through very similar issues, and to see that God does work through broken vessels like us to offer help and support when needed. It has been a great benefit to share situations that may arise and to learn how to turn to God and respond in godly ways.”

Just do it!

For those who are already friends, it’s a no-brainer.

For those on friendly terms, it can help deepen the friendship.

And for those who are not yet familiar with one another, it’s an easy way to break the ice because you have so much in common through Jesus.

// SARAH

Sarah:

“I’ve been meeting for a one-to-one book study with Hui Ling for a couple of months. Originally I didn’t know much about discipleship meetings, apart from hearing them mentioned a little among my friends. I met Sarah Tan after third congregation one day. She invited me out for dinner and while we were eating she said she had invited me because she wanted to pair me up with someone for one-to-one Bible reading. (I didn’t even realise that’s what our dinner was about; I thought she just wanted to get to know me!) I was really happy to be paired up with someone and it was a blessing for her to think of me.

Sarah connected me with Hui Ling, and we met a couple of times at church to get to know each other. She’s a doctor and I’m a teacher; we are both interested in doing our jobs well and we like learning. We didn’t know what book to study. We were thinking about 1 and 2 Thessalonians but in the end settled on How People Change by Paul Tripp and Timothy Lane, because it had been recommended by my CG leader.

We meet for dinner at a cafe every three weeks and discuss a chapter of the book. It’s been so helpful and practical. We both have good head knowledge of our faith but have found the main message (so far) to be that God wants to change our hearts. At the end of our first discussion, Hui Ling said, “Now what one action point shall we take away from this?” Setting a small application goal was a good challenge because we knew we would ask each other about it next time. We pray together at the end, asking God to help us put into practice what we have discussed. In our most recent session, the line that stood out to both of us the most was, “We are not only thinkers but worshippers.” This resonated with both of us since one of the things we have in common is that we are career-focused. So we are learning to be more Jesus-focused.

At first I was concerned that I don’t know Hui Ling very well. But our conversation has been wide-ranging, allowing us to get to know each other. We come from quite different backgrounds but we have found it easy to talk honestly together. It has been a really pleasant surprise to realise that our mutual faith in Christ allows us to come alongside each other and grow together in a purposeful way.”

Two women:

“Our discipleship relationship is just the two of us, catching up and reading the Bible together. We got started because one of us was looking to meet up with someone to read the Bible regularly, and the other was available and happy to do it!

We try to meet twice a month depending on how busy we are. Most of our meetings happen at either one of our homes, but there have been a few times when we have met in a cafe/restaurant. We have eight young children between us so logistically it's not always possible, but we do try to meet without the kids so that we can focus our attention on each other and our Bible reading.

We had both read the Bible with other people before, had seen how good it was and wanted to keep up the habit. Bible reading helps us to grow in faith and in the knowledge of God, as we share our life with someone else. We were also looking for deeper sharing and fellowship, which we thought could be better achieved in a one-to-one arrangement compared to a bigger group. Logistically, it's also much easier to be regular in meeting when there's only one other person's schedule to suit.

We are currently reading through Galatians using the COMA framework. We spend some time catching up and then we dive straight into our reading. We read very few verses each meeting (usually five to ten). We start by reading aloud together, then slowly work through each verse, using the COMA questions as a guide. Then we pray for each other, and go off feeling very well-nourished, having dug deeply into the Word with a sister in Christ.

Our main concern when we started was that we might not be able to meet as regularly as we hoped, and that it would be hard to keep up the discipline of reading together. There was a fear of giving up if things became difficult for us, as we both have young children to take care of and don't have live-in help. In fact we aren't able to meet as regularly as we would like. Kids get sick or hurt, baby-sitting arrangements fall through...

life happens. Being committed to meeting regularly helps. We try our best to find workarounds, but even if we can't, we just pick up where we left off the next time, even if it's a whole month later. When we do meet we cherish it and are thankful for it. Reading the Bible together less often is better than not reading together at all.

The joy of digging into the Word with a sister in Christ just cannot be overstated. Meeting with a like-minded person and teasing out truths in the Bible together by asking questions and working through the details of specific words, phrasing, repetitions, etc. has helped us to glean more from the Bible than we could do on our own, and also to experience the joy of deep fellowship centred on the truths of Christ and the gospel, anchored in love for one another through His love for us.

A discipling relationship will probably be more rewarding and life-giving than you anticipate. However, if you don't know the other person well, it might be a little awkward the first few times. Give the relationship time to normalise instead of expecting things to improve quickly. Be open and willing to be vulnerable, trusting God to work. Commit to meeting together for a period of time and do your best to stick to it. Although it may seem easier and more natural, don't limit yourself to meeting only with people you know well, or people who are in the same life stage as you, or people you know you'd get along well with. Be open to what God has in store and the people He may bring into your life. The gospel does transcend these 'boundaries,' and a fellowship around the Word will result in a deeper unity than a fellowship centred on other similarities. Enjoy!"

Kai: *“I would say that the discipleship relationship between Chris and me is that of sisters in Christ! Chris is older than me and in a different life stage (she is married to Jake and they have a three-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Aly), while I’m single, graduated from college not too long ago and currently in my first job.*

We have been meeting since the beginning of 2016. We had a more regular meeting schedule at the beginning – though now we meet on average once a month, on a weekday night, at Chris’s house. It really helps that we live very close to each other (about ten minutes’ walk away) so that gives us more flexibility in arranging timings to meet.

I got to know Chris when I started attending their Community Group (Jake’s and Chris’s, now known as Gary and SuLi’s) at the end of 2015, soon after I became a member at RHC. A few months later, Chris messaged me about reading the book of Proverbs together. I was pleasantly surprised and in fact very touched that she reached out to me, especially as I had been praying quite intently for a female mentor leading up to that.

For me, wanting to read the Bible was definitely out of an acknowledgement of how much I really need God’s Word in my life, and also how essential relationships are in the process of being changed and becoming more like Christ. In 2016, God revealed to me a lot of my weaknesses and insecurities, and I was honestly quite overwhelmed because I realised that in many areas of my life my identity was not based in Christ. I felt like a spinning top that kept wobbling around on the table top, and I knew that the only way I could be secure in Christ was if I made Him my vertical axis – and a large part of that is by reading His Word. I thank God for sending Chris at such a timely moment and providing for me a community in RHC to speak the truth in love as we learn together how to apply the gospel in our lives!

We are currently reading the book of Proverbs together, going through one chapter each time we meet. Before the session, we take turns to come up with questions that we can use to discuss the passage together. During the session, we read the passage and seek out ways to apply God's Word in our lives, in areas where we may change and grow in God's wisdom. We end off the session by praying for one another.

My initial concerns took two forms – one to do with understanding God's Word itself and the other regarding the discipleship relationship. I would say that the latter is more daunting! As with any relationship, there is a fear of being vulnerable before someone else, and having a willingness to expose the areas in our lives that we ourselves may be afraid of.

Being able to be vulnerable with someone is a gift and grace from God: it would be easier to keep things hidden. This is especially compounded by a fear of being judged or even condemned by someone else when they know of our secret sins. I remember one of the weaknesses that God revealed to me in 2016 was that I cared so much about what other people thought about me that I often kept a stiff upper lip regarding what was really going on in my heart. This turned out to be detrimental, as a lot of the things I was hiding just kept snowballing until I reached breaking point. It was through that drastic episode that God taught me how important it is to let other people into my life and truly be honest about what is going on, in order to live a life that is blameless and pure before Him.

How this relates to a discipleship relationship is that God's Word is living and active, and has the ability to expose what is in our hearts – as long as we don't try to repress or deny what He is revealing to us. I think that in order to grow in a discipleship relationship we must be honest not just before God, but also before the people we choose to be accountable to (our Bible-reading buddy). It definitely can be a challenge to constantly have a willingness to be honest about our heart's condition, though being

reminded that we are all sinners saved by grace and that there is no condemnation in Christ allows us to be vulnerable. Whether or not the other person responds in grace is an outcome we trust Him with.

Practically, it is a challenge to constantly ground ourselves in God's Word and apply what we have learned from each study, even after the meeting has ended. It is similar to the challenge of applying what we learn at Sunday service. When it comes to one-to-one Bible reading, a good method is to choose a key memory verse for each session, and to constantly cling on to it during the week. Another possible way of constantly applying God's Word could be to choose a certain area of our lives where we really want to see change and ask our buddy up-front, "Can you keep me accountable in such and such an area? I give you the right to ask me any time about how I'm doing in (this area), I won't be offended!"

For me the discipleship relationship as a whole has been really encouraging, not only during the time when we are reading the Bible together. I really like how I get to be part of Chris's and her family's lives when I go to their place for Bible reading, as we meet in their home and usually have dinner before the study. It is very heart-warming for me just seeing how they love and care for one another as a family, even in the simple things like watching how they get Aly ready to go to bed!

The benefit of the relatively longer relationship (two-plus years) between Chris and me means that we are able to journey together amidst all the ups and downs of life and are constantly reminded to root ourselves in God's Word regardless of the season.

Pray about who, how and when God might bring such a person into your life for a discipling relationship. And after that, remain very flexible about what that relationship looks like.

Having a discipling relationship that works involves similar variables to those that affect relationships in general, as discipleship means making a commitment to journey with someone usually at least a few weeks or months. Sometimes, even if two parties might be very keen to read the Bible together, if the season of life is not right (for example due to transitions and changes) that can derail plans. We need to trust God's plan as to how things turn out in the end. Existing long-standing discipleship relationships could also come to an end due to a change in season (if for example someone moves out of the country or gets married, etc.). Even in this we have to learn to trust God, let go of the degree of closeness we had with someone, and be thankful for the time that God allowed us to share together!

Realistically, I think it can be helpful to share some similar contexts as the person you are going to read the Bible with (for example being in same CG, living in the same neighbourhood, working in the same area, etc.) as this could help in coordinating timings to meet. However, if God has other plans it just means that both parties may need more time and effort to make things work!”

Eliana:

“My relationship with Tyra is really fun and at times a little nerve-racking for me! At first, I was concerned about whether or not I’d teach her something wrong or unbiblical. However, I learnt to trust God and just say whatever God has given me. We only started meeting recently and are still getting to know each other, but I hope and pray that as we continue our Bible sessions I’ll get to see Tyra grow to love the Lord her God more and more every day. At the end of the day, Tyra’s growth in faith will not be due to my own strength or abilities – I’m just a small part of her life, and there will be many others in future to influence her and teach her the love of God. All this happens only by the grace of God.

I was offered this opportunity to do Bible-reading sessions with Tyra by her mum, Niki. As an older youth, I wanted to spread the love that I’ve been given, so if this was one of the ways I could show love to someone younger than me, I was all up for it. Also, because of the mentors I’ve had in my life who support, care for and love me, I’ve developed a desire to pass that on to those younger than me, especially the younger youths.

We meet at least once every other week either at a cafe or MacDonald’s. For now, we just have casual conversations to get to know each other, and I’m also sharing some other things I’ve learnt that have stuck with me. Soon we plan to start going through the book of Mark with some materials I have found.

As I mentioned, I was afraid of teaching Tyra something that maybe she wouldn’t be ready for or something wrong. Also, I wasn’t sure how she would respond. I personally have pretty low self-confidence, so I wasn’t sure if I could even influence Tyra.

I find it challenging when Tyra asks questions that I do not have the answer to. Also, I’m not sure how complex I can be in my explanations of things that she asks. Another challenge is prepping for the study itself. Often I’m so caught up in my own life that I forget I need to just stop and sit down to do the preparation.

But it was really encouraging when Tyra gave me feedback on the first session, saying that she did like and appreciate the advice I gave to her, which boosted my confidence. It's also really cool that Tyra and I are similar in some ways, like how we both like to listen to worship music!! So I try to select a song every session to listen to!

God is the only one who can save, who can change the hearts of others and do the impossible. Discipleship is kind of like serving – it's NOT ABOUT YOU! It's about how God is going to use you to impact your mentee. When you focus too much on yourself and your own efforts, you might find yourself saying things that put you in the spotlight but are not of God. Remember that at the end of the day the spotlight belongs to God. Be aware that just because you talk about God doesn't mean you are actually pointing your mentee to God. And remember that you won't ever be all-knowing – both of you are learning at the same time, so don't be too discouraged if some days things may not work out. Relationships take work, and effort!”

Not to place your confidence in your own work, but to have faith and confidence in God.

Tyra: *“I meet with Elie at a restaurant or cafe near church. We meet on Sundays before second service (10 am – 11 am) every second week. Sometimes Sara and/or Reb will join us.*

My mum arranged it with Sara, Geoff, Reb and Elie to build relationships with people in the church who are a bit older than me so we can talk about struggles in school, friendship and how the gospel applies to us. Usually Elie prepares Bible verses and we listen to a song together on the same topic. We look at the Bible verses and the words in the songs to see what they mean and how they apply to our life. We also have Bible reading material from Geoff to go through. There are things to do during the week – scriptures to read and questions to answer that we will talk about when we meet again.

At first I was a little unsure because I didn't know where the meeting would be and what it would be like, but now I feel excited and I look forward to it. I wish we could meet every week! We have a problem finishing in time so that we can get to church for the second service. I really appreciate it that Elie prepares very well for the sessions, and she even prepares songs to listen to because she knows I really love music. We get along very well and I feel like Elie really understands me. Elie also prays for me during the week and I pray for her too. Everyone should totally do it! But make sure you find a quiet place so you're not distracted.”

// JEREMY & LEON

Jeremy: *“I desired to see gospel growth so I asked Leon if we could meet up. Currently we meet for morning coffee once every two to four weeks depending on our schedules. During the meeting we spend some time catching up and then read scripture from the books of 1 Peter and Colossians. Initially I was worried that we might not be able to connect, since we come from different backgrounds and are at different stages in life, but my fears were unfounded.*

Through this discipling relationship I am really enjoying learning God’s truth and seeing gospel growth. It has also been a blessing to see Leon shepherding his family and processing various trials in the light of the gospel. He is now better prepared to care for his family’s spiritual wellbeing as they head back to the Netherlands.

My advice to others is: just do it. Take the initiative, just as Christ took the initiative with us. Trust in the power of the Word to overcome any differences and barriers.”

Sau Ling:

“I used to meet with four or five university-going girls every week for about one to two years. This original arrangement with the five girls was suggested by one of the girls who has since moved overseas. When things got busy and the church timing changed, I would meet them individually to catch up on an ad-hoc basis, about once a month or once every two months. This went on for about another year. As I’ve started to co-lead a CG this year (which the girls are not part of), I’m now meeting one girl one-on-one and two girls in a separate setting. Both meetings happen once a fortnight either in church or near their homes. Usually we use the COMA framework to go through books of the Bible, or use sermon review guides.

At the beginning I only agreed to do it because the girl who approached me was so enthusiastic that I felt bad about rejecting her, but it’s turned out to be one of the biggest blessings of my life so far. The girls have become my friends and they even feel like younger sisters to me, whom I deeply care for (and am sometimes over-protective of). Even those girls I don’t meet up with regularly are still in my prayers and I try to meet up with them when I can. As I spend more time with them, I have established a deeper relationship with each of them and I naturally care more about them. It has become less of a ‘ministry’ and more of a ‘friendship’. True friends always remain in your heart and mind!

I think they appreciate walking with someone who’s in a different life stage but who’s been through some of the things they are going through. And I appreciate the zeal and enthusiasm they have for the Word and the way they care for their peers. They are definitely very edifying relationships. Their faith is very encouraging for my own heart when I grew weary myself. Spending time with them and caring for them also allows me to see beyond my own cares and understand that I’m part of a larger story that God is writing.

Initially I did have some concerns that I wasn’t equipped with enough knowledge of the Bible to give the right biblical advice, but God has been

gracious, and has always supplied His Word and His Spirit to speak to me in times of need. Reading the Bible together also means that I don't have to necessarily figure out the Bible on my own. The girls are often quick to point out things about the Word that I've not considered, so I've been learning too! Also, for any pastoral issues I know I can always turn to the elders or older people for advice (after first assessing whether the issue is confidential).

The commitment to weekly meetings was daunting to me at first, but after a while we adjusted the frequency of meetings to accommodate what people were comfortable with. It is good to determine at the outset how often and for how long (six months, one year?) you intend to meet so that you can set realistic expectations. You can always adjust as you go along.

Even though initially in my mind it seemed like I was 'serving,' I've benefited so much from reading the Bible with the girls and journeying through life with them. They have personally encouraged me in how they walk out their faith even in some challenging circumstances. Knowing that God is the one causing the growth and change, I've felt like it's one of the biggest privileges in the world to be given a front-row seat to see how God is faithful to complete the good work He has started in the girls' lives.

My advice to others is to take the words of Jesus seriously when He says, "Go and make disciples of all nations." Trust the Bible when it says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."

***Take a leap of faith
and let the Holy Spirit
be your guide. And be
amazed at what God
has in store for you!***

Additional Resources

TOOLS AND RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FOR DISCIPLESHIP

How to get started? If you'd like to join a discipleship group or be connected to another person to read the Bible with, we'd love to help you do so! There is an online form on the RHC website that you can submit at <https://www.rhc.org.sg/one-to-one-bible-reading/>. Our discipleship deacons will get in touch with you, to help pair you up with another suitable person or to place you in one of the existing discipleship groups.

ONE-TO-ONE BIBLE READING

Here is a short summary of the suggested COMA framework for reading the Bible. Please refer to David Helm's book *One-to-One Bible Reading* for a more comprehensive understanding of this approach.

1. Read the passage aloud.
2. Ask some **context** questions of the text:
 - What sort of writing is this? (A letter, a narrative, a poem?)
 - Are there any clues about the circumstances under which it was written?
 - What has happened so far?
3. Ask some **observation** questions of the text:
 - Are there any major sub-sections or breaks in the text?
 - What is the main point or points?
 - What surprises are there?
 - What are the key words? What words or ideas are repeated?
4. Ask some **meaning** questions of the text:
 - How is this text related to other parts of the book?
 - How does the passage relate to Jesus?
 - What does this teach us about God?
 - How could we sum up the meaning of this passage in our own words?
5. Ask some **application** questions of the text:
 - How does this passage challenge (or confirm) my understanding?
 - Is there some attitude I need to change?
 - How does this passage call on me to change the way I live?
6. Pray together about what you have learned.

To make it a little easier for you to use some of the ideas and suggestions in One-to-One Bible Reading, here are some easy-to-photocopy sheets that you can use either in preparation or in your one-to-one meetings: <http://www.matthiasmedia.com/Samples/otobr/OTOBR-Sheets-for-copying-US-letter.pdf>

The excerpt above is taken from: Helm, David One-To-One Bible Reading, Kingsford Australia & USA, Matthias Media & Holy Trinity Church, 2011.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

This list is obviously far from exhaustive but at least it's a starting point for you to consider when you want to meet together with others and are wondering what to do. If you'd like to use a Study Bible and/or a commentary, the ESV Study Bible and The Bible Speaks Today series are helpful tools.

New Christians

If you know someone who just became a Christian, this may be a good tool for the next step of understanding the basics of the Christian life (prayer, church, evangelism, etc.): <https://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/just-for-starters>

Truths That Make Us Sing Catechism

A catechism is a series of questions and answers designed to convey the essential truths of the Christian faith so that we might more deeply know and rejoice in God. RHC has put together a catechism to serve as an easy introduction to the most important things that we believe as a church. The format makes it easy to remember even for youth and children, and is an invaluable resource to have at your fingertips when faced with questions. It can be very helpful to work through this with another Christian for the purpose of growth.

And to help us better appreciate and apply these essential truths, a devotion booklet (with a passage for each catechism question) has also been produced.

Both the catechism and devotion booklets can be downloaded from our website (under devotional in the 'Read' tab), or you can approach anyone at the RHC Hub on Sundays if you would like a hard copy.

READING THROUGH THE BIBLE

1. The Bible
2. Great study guides from The Good Book Company (details below)
3. One-to-One Bible Reading by David Helm
4. How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth by Gordon Fee
5. God's Big Picture by Vaughan Roberts
6. Evangelism, by Mack Stiles
7. Honest evangelism, by Rico Tice

FOUNDATIONAL BOOKS

1. Christian Beliefs by Wayne Grudem: very comprehensive book on the basic Christian doctrines. Great for building a strong foundation in knowing God
2. The God Who is There by DA Carson: explains how the whole Bible fits together as one story pointing to Jesus
3. Gospel-Centered Discipleship by Jonathan Dodson
4. Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus, by Mark Dever
5. What is a Healthy Church? by Mark Dever
6. What is a Healthy Church Member? by Thabiti Anyabwile
7. What is the Gospel? by Greg Gilbert
8. Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples, by Francis Chan
9. Taking God at His Word, by Kevin DeYoung
10. God is the Gospel, by John Piper

CHRISTIAN LIVING

1. A Call to Spiritual Reformation by DA Carson: an excellent book going through Paul's prayers in the Bible
2. How People Change by Paul David Tripp: a book that challenges us to apply the gospel in all of our lives and explains how God uses the gospel to change us
3. Knowing God by JI Packer: a great book for deepening your understanding of who God is
4. A Praying Life by Paul Miller: an excellent book to help develop your prayer life
5. Relationships: a Mess Worth Making by Paul Tripp
6. Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life, by Donald Whitney

TOPICAL STUDIES

1. The Gospel at Work by Greg Gilbert: a great book about how Christians should view their work
2. Overcoming Fear, Worry and Anxiety by Elyse Fitzpatrick
3. Holding on to Hope: A Pathway Through Suffering to the Heart of God by Nancy Guthrie: tremendously helpful book which includes a Bible study from the book of Job on the topic of suffering
4. Is God Anti-Gay? by Sam Allberry

WHERE TO FIND GOOD RESOURCES

1. Book Depository offers free delivery worldwide online at www.bookdepository.com
2. Matthias media www.matthiasmedia.com
3. The Good Book Company www.thegoodbook.com
4. St Helen Church Bishopsgate has helpful bible study resources <http://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/bible-study-resources?ref=nav>
5. Christian bookstores in Singapore, which include SKS Books Warehouse, and Shalom Christian Media. You can find their details online.



R REDEMPTION
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