

DISCIPLESHIP EXPLORED

LEADER'S GUIDE

*For the Universal Edition and
International Student Edition*



Discipleship Explored: Universal Edition Leader's Guide
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Introduction

Welcome to the Universal Edition of *Discipleship Explored*.

This eight-week course is designed as a follow on course to *Christianity Explored*, in which people are introduced to the basics of the Christian faith through reading and discussing Mark's Gospel. The course aims to take people the next step in their understanding of what it means to follow Jesus Christ – that is to be his disciple.

Discipleship Explored is different from many basic courses for new Christians. They are often concerned to put in place some of the mechanics of following Christ: prayer, Bible reading, church membership etc. But this course is built around a detailed study of Paul's letter to the Philippians – a group of believers who had recently started out on the Christian life.

During this eight-week course, your group will work their way through this short letter learning from the example of these early believers, and the teaching that they were given. What your group will learn is so much more than a simplified 'how to' of the Christian life. They will discover the inevitability of suffering for our faith; they will see the need to guard the truth against false teachers; they will learn the need for personal holiness as they hold out the word of life to others; and they will find out the secret of true contentment.

CRYSTAL CLEAR LANGUAGE

This Universal Edition is written with a concern to make the language crystal clear and accessible to the widest range of potential users throughout the world. Many of the words in the Bible are complex and difficult to understand for those who have been believers a long time, let alone those who are just taking their first tentative steps. So these studies are designed to be suitable for a wide variety of groups, including those for whom English is a second language.

Those starting this course, perhaps after having finished *Christianity Explored*, may have already made a commitment to Christ, but many will not. It is our prayer that, as people discover the challenge, joy, fellowship and contentment that comes from knowing Christ and following him, they too will come to trust him as their saviour as they meet with you week by week.

This Leader's Guide is divided into two sections. The first will train you to use the course, and the second will be your guide each week as you lead the studies, giving answers, background and other helpful information to encourage you as you lead your group through Philippians.

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SECTION 1

How to run the course



Planning your Discipleship Explored group

Helping a new believer on their first steps in the Christian life has to be one of the most exciting and rewarding experiences available to us. It's also vitally important – because the patterns of thinking, belief and behaviour we encourage in them will set an important pattern for the rest of their lives. We have an opportunity, with God's help, to help a new Christian build a life of joyful and effective service.

You may be someone who usually skips introductions, but can we please encourage you to read through these notes carefully. They will help you prepare properly for your important role as a spiritual guide and friend.

WHO WILL COME?

Discipleship Explored is a course that explores what it means to follow Jesus, and is written for those who are new Christians. However, there will be many who will benefit from this course who do not fit into this category. You may have:

- **People who are not yet Christians.** *Discipleship Explored* is a follow-on course to *Christianity Explored*. Many who finish that course will still be at the investigating stage, and may not yet have made a clear commitment to Christ. Do not be concerned about this. During the course they will have the facts of the gospel repeated to them, and they will discover more of the reality of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.
- **People who are unsure if they are Christians.** For many people, the experience of coming to Christ is a long drawn-out process, with several important moments of decision and understanding along the way.
- **People who have been Christians for a while.** *Discipleship Explored* is a terrific refresher course in what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and will help people grow who may have been Christians for years.

Because the course involves discussion, it is best to limit the size of a group to a maximum of 12 (6-8 if you are working with internationals). More than this, and the quieter people in the group will not feel able to participate. It may be best to have separate groups for those with English as a second language, as this will allow everyone to go at a pace they are comfortable with – but don't worry if this is not possible.

HOW WILL I INVITE THEM?

Advertise the course in your church bulletin, during the Sunday services and at events you run for internationals. Explain who the course is for, and what will happen at it.

At the end of *Christianity Explored*, participants should be invited to join *Discipleship Explored*. The *Christianity Explored* leaders will know who from their group is ready to go on to *Discipleship Explored* and should be encouraging them to do so.

The beauty of studying Mark's Gospel in *Christianity Explored* is that participants should now be eager to explore another part of God's word. Not only that, but they will also want to maintain the friendships they have developed while on the course.

You can make your own invitations and posters using the downloadable logos available at www.discipleshipexplored.org. You might also use the *Discipleship Explored* trailer from the DVD, also downloadable from the same website.

WHERE WILL WE MEET?

Try to find a place where you will be able to meet every week at the same time. The important thing is that the environment should help people relax so that they will be encouraged to discuss freely. Sharing a meal together will help with this.

Comfortable church premises provide a neutral meeting ground that is also free of distraction.

Homes are another option, but be aware that some may not be used to visiting one another's homes. Alternatively, some groups may meet in a hired room. Be careful of choosing a place that is too exposed to the public, where there can be many distractions or people may feel embarrassed.

If your group has previously done *Christianity Explored*, then it's ideal if you can continue to meet in the same place.

WHEN WILL WE MEET?

Once a week for eight to ten weeks is the time required to complete the course. You should be able to complete the studies in 1½ to 2 hours, depending on the ability of the group.

Choose the time to suit the particular group of people you are aiming at. Often Christians can get into a rut when planning meetings. We may have become used to meetings that start at 7.30pm and end by 9.30pm. That may or may not be the best time for the guests. Have you considered that lunchtime may be best for some kinds of groups, or even early morning, mid morning or afternoon? Be imaginative, but realistic, about the people being invited, and ask them what might suit them best.

You will also need to spend time with the participants outside of the course in order to have the time to deal effectively with issues that come up during the studies. Time spent with individuals is also the quickest way to develop a trusting relationship.

A caution: it is completely inappropriate to be meeting up one-to-one with members of the opposite sex. There may also be important cultural differences that you are unaware of if you are meeting with someone from another country. See the section on Cross Cultural Discipleship on page 31 for more about this.

WHO WILL LEAD?

Ideally, you should have two leaders for every six participants. The leaders are responsible for guiding the studies and discussion. In a mixed group, it is desirable to have both a male and a female leader so that they can deal with pastoral situations appropriately.

Leaders should be Christians who are able to teach, encourage discussion and care for participants. They should be able to teach the Bible faithfully and clearly, and handle pastoral situations with care and sensitivity.

WHAT WILL WE NEED?

- **Food.** If you are able to share a meal together, it will make the whole experience better. On a practical level, people will talk and participate more if they spend more time together, and they will open up to you as the leader more as they spend more time with you. If it is impractical to serve a meal, provide light refreshments (coffee and cake, for example). Getting your group members involved in bringing food, or helping in its preparation, will help them feel it is 'their group' rather than something that you are running for them.
- **Bibles.** Everyone on the course – leaders and participants – will need a Bible. There are downloadable sheets of the Philipians material in the NIV version available at www.discipleshipexplored.org, or you can download and print out other versions of the Bible, including foreign language versions, from www.biblegateway.com

For the sake of clarity, it is important that everyone uses the same version. (The version used throughout the course material is the New International Version.) If they do not already have one, participants should be given a Bible at the start of the course, preferably one they can take away with them. In many cases it will also be essential to provide participants with a copy of the Bible

in their own language. You can find information on locating Bibles at www.discipleshipexplored.org.

- **Study Guide.** Make sure you have enough copies of the Study Guide so that every participant has their own copy. Provide pens as well.
- **DVD.** It is not essential to use the DVD for the Universal edition of *Discipleship Explored*, but you may find it useful to show it as a kind of summary at the end of the study. Certainly, watching the programmes yourself will increase your understanding of Philippians, and help you to explain it more clearly to your group.

Preparing yourself and your co-leaders

YOUR OWN CHRISTIAN LIFE

We want to help new Christians to grow in spiritual maturity, equipping them to serve God faithfully wherever they are. We want them to learn to obey Christ as Lord – that is what it means to be a disciple.

One thing we will discover in Philippians is the importance of the personal example and godliness of a leader. People learn about what it means to be a disciple, not just from the things we teach, but from our behaviour as well.

That's why Paul tells Timothy to "set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity ... watch your life and doctrine closely" (1 Timothy 4:12, 16).

Read the following verses and then write down what it will mean for you to "set an example" during *Discipleship Explored*.

- **John 13:35**

- **Romans 15:14**

- **Ephesians 4:29**

- **Ephesians 6:18**

- **Hebrews 10:24**

- **1 Peter 3:8-9**

Pray that you would be able to put these verses into practice.

YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIBLE

- **Get to grips with Philippians.** You will need to be thoroughly familiar with this letter. Although it is short, it involves complex ideas that can be hard to understand. Work through the introduction to Philippians on page 4 of the Study Guide, but also read the letter several times. A good commentary would be helpful (see page 18 for recommended commentaries). We have supplied some material to help you in the second section of this Leader's Guide, but there is more you should be getting to grips with.
- **Think about the passage from your group member's point of view.** What might they not understand? What questions and problems might come to their minds? Which words will you have to explain to people learning English? (There is a words list to help you each week.)
- **Think about different ways of explaining things.** Although this is a Bible study, some people think visually, so you might want to get a whiteboard or a large sheet of paper to write on. This is also useful for writing up new words (for those learning English). You may be able to think of some diagrams / illustrations which will help people to understand an important point.

YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE MATERIAL

- **Know the material.** Go through the questions in the Study Guide, watch the DVD and read the notes in this Leader's Guide – so that you know where the session is heading, and can guide the group through it.
- **Make the material yours.** In any course, you will need to do some adaptation to suit your particular group and circumstances. We have put a large amount of thought, experience and testing into developing this course. If it is in here, it is in for a good reason. But you will need to think up some illustrations, stories, analogies, personal experiences etc that you might want to use, so that it is personalised for you.
- **Work out how long things will take.** You will need to know the material well enough to know how to speed up or allow longer on the various questions. Don't rush – give people time to digest what the Bible is saying and its implications, and remember that those with English as a second language will need more time to think than native speakers. But don't let it drag on, especially if the discussion is going off the subject. Work out (and write down in your booklet) approximately how long each section should take. *Remember, it's best to finish with people wanting more, rather than feeling that the session went on forever.*
- **Plan time to prepare.** Putting the dates of the meetings in your diary is not enough. Plan time for preparation, administration, arriving early to set up, and time to meet up with group members outside the meetings. And of course, time to pray...

YOUR PRAYER COMMITMENT

One of the main reasons why we don't pray is that we don't plan to pray. As you set aside time to prepare for your *Discipleship Explored* group, include time for praying for the other leaders, hosts and guests.

- If you are a lone leader – then ask someone else to pray with you each week.
- If there are a number of leaders – then meet up and pray.
- Why not organise a prayer group? – recruit people from your church to pray for you as you meet together with your guests for each session.
- And remember to pray yourself – keep a list of the people who come, other leaders and even other groups. Put the list where you will see it daily (in your Bible?) and pray for them.
- Use the word of God to pray – this helps avoid mental drift and ensures biblical praying. It allows God to set the agenda for your prayers. Pray for people along the lines of the main point of each session. Philippians 1:9-11 is a great prayer to pray for the whole group.
- Pray specifically and expectantly. God loves to answer prayers, and, if you pray for specific things to happen, and for particular problems to be resolved, you will be encouraged as you see God answering.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR FELLOW LEADERS

You will be praying, studying and teaching your group together, so it's important to get to know each other before you begin. Meet together and work out who will be taking particular responsibility for looking after people who are in the group. The quality of your love, respect and fellowship with others in the leadership team is an important part of how the group will see what it means to be a disciple.

PREPARE FOR PASTORAL PROBLEMS

People often come to Christ in very messy circumstances. These will not resolve automatically or immediately. Some will take a considerable amount of thought, time, prayer and encouragement before they are resolved. Try to anticipate the pastoral issues that are likely to arise for the people in your group and how you will deal with them. Think about how you would help people with these issues and which parts of the Bible will be particularly relevant to them.

Meet with your co-leaders to discuss how you might handle some of the issues listed on the next page. It is important to know when it is right to pass on these difficulties to someone who is more experienced at dealing with them, or to involve a health professional or a suitable trained counsellor.

How would you help a person who was...

- *sleeping with a partner?*
- *dealing with addictions?*
- *unsure that God can forgive them for something they've done?*
- *coping with broken family relationships?*
- *dating a non-Christian girlfriend or boyfriend?*
- *worried that they are not a Christian?*
- *rejected by non-Christian friends or family?*
- *struggling with bad debt or unemployment?*
- *wrestling with same-sex attraction?*