



DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

EXPLORING DISCIPLESHIP

**With
Dr. Jeffrey D. Jones
Andover Newton Theological Seminary
In partnership with
American Baptist Churches of Indiana & Kentucky
and American Baptist Churches of Greater Indianapolis**

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INTRODUCTION

Jesus called disciples during his earthly ministry. Jesus stills calls disciples today. Through the church, Jesus calls people to “Come follow me.” What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? How can we live our lives as disciples? What can the church do to nurture and strengthen disciples? These are all questions that we hope to address in this DVD series *Exploring Discipleship*.

In 2010 the American Baptist Churches of Indiana & Kentucky designated the Year of Discipleship. Part of this emphasis included an event with Dr. Jeffrey D. Jones of Andover Newton Theological Seminary. At the event, Dr. Jones shared his insights regarding the questions above. As a result of this event, the American Baptist Churches of Indiana & Kentucky and the American Baptist Churches of Greater Indianapolis received a grant to make the work of Dr. Jones available in a DVD format for distribution to our congregations. A Discipleship Team composed of pastors and lay leaders also created a Discussion Guide to accompany the videos.

We hope you will use this DVD and Discussion Guide to encourage conversations about discipleship in your congregation. The DVD is divided into segments for short viewing and times of discussion. The Discussion Guide contains questions related to each video segment. Of course, all good group leaders will adapt the questions to the setting and circumstances of the participating group. You may wish to add stories or scriptures that help solidify the concepts being taught. We suggest watching a video segment and then having discussion after each segment.

While there are no set time limits for each video segment and discussion, leaders will find it helpful to plan on each session taking at least one and one-half to two hours of time. A session does not need to be completed in one sitting; Sessions can be broken up over the course of several gatherings together. For this reason, the five sessions could take up to 10 hours to go through. Leaders will want to plan ahead by viewing each segment in advance and formulating questions for the discussion. This is not a “fill in the blank” kind of program with only one correct answer. This is an open discussion and exploration of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and how we can live as disciples.

This DVD and Discussion Guide might be used in adult Sunday School classes, boards or committees of Christian Education, or with any group in the congregation that is concerned about how your church can become a disciple-forming community. The material in the DVD is based upon the work of Dr. Jones in his book, *Traveling Together: A Guide for Disciple-Forming Congregations*, published by The Alban Institute, copyright 2006.

We hope that you will make discoveries and have new learning as a result of sharing in this exploration. We would love to hear your experience and your stories of how your congregation is continuing to become a disciple-forming community. Share your stories with us by email at: abcin@abc-indiana.org

Video Discussion Guide for Session 1

SESSION 1: PART ONE: When Old Answers Don't Work

Focus: Dr. Jones shares his own experiences of church life.

In the video we just watched, Jeff claims, “*All the old answers about what it means to be and do church don't work anymore.*” Is this true? Do you find any “old answers” that don't “work” like they used to?

SESSION 1: PART TWO: A Changing World

Focus: Dr. Jones deals with how our world has changed and is changing.

Jeff identifies some changes in the outside world that have made it difficult for our old church programs to get the same results they used to. What changes in our world does he identify? (Remember, Jeff said that the “blame game” is entirely unhelpful. We want to focus on identifying issues and responding faithfully, not complaining about the way things are.)

SESSION 1: PART THREE: A Changing Church?

Focus: Considering the changing world, how does this affect the church?

Jeff mentions Phyllis Tickle's observation that the church has had to make some major adjustments once every 500 years in order to better minister the same Gospel to a changing world around us. If the church were to hold a new “rummage sale,” what things might we need to let go? Why?

SESSION 1: PART FOUR: Back to Bible Basics

Focus: Dr. Jones revisits an importance Bible passage about discipleship.

What “fresh” insights did Jeff share about discipleship from Jesus' ministry with his first disciples?

Jeff said that the main verb in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) is *disciple*, rather than *go*.

How does this change the way you view the mission of the church?

When Jeff was talking about early Christian life in the book of Acts, did any of his observations strike you as helpful suggestions for the church today?

SESSION 1: PART FIVE: Questions for a Disciple-Forming Community

Focus: Where God is at work in the world today.

What is **God** up to? Where can we see God clearly at work, redeeming His creation and developing disciples in our church and community?

How can **I** join in? In what ways can we obediently participate in the work of redeeming creation and developing disciples, which God is already doing around us?

What does **the church** need to be in order to facilitate an environment where people can join in with what God is doing? What are some things our church can do, change, or stop doing, in order to more fully participate in God's work of redeeming creation and developing disciples?

THINKING ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP

If you had to write a definition of “*disciple*” based on Jeff’s discussion so far, how would you define it?

How then would you define “*discipleship*” based on our discussion so far?

Video Discussion Guide for Session 2

SESSION 2: PART ONE: What is a Disciple?

Focus: Investigating a working definition of disciple.

Jeff provides his definition of a “disciple.” He says, *“That’s always what a disciple does – learns more about the person who is the master, so it is possible to follow that person’s way of being and living more fully.”* What do you think of this definition? What would you add or subtract?

Jeff also makes this point about the purpose of the church: *“We are in the discipleship business, not the church starting or church maintenance business, not even in the baptizing business. The core purpose of the church is to form disciples.”* How do you feel about identifying discipleship as the core purpose of the church?

SESSION 2: PART TWO: Growing as a Disciple

Focus: Discovering the ingredients that are necessary for growth as a disciple.

Jeff shares that growing as a disciple is a result of experiences in our lives. What experiences have you had in your life that you feel have enabled you to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ?

How would you relate your experiences of growth in discipleship to the three areas of deepening, equipping and ministering?

SESSION 2: PART THREE: Deepening with God

Focus: How a disciple deepens his/her relationship with God.

What has been your experience with spiritual disciplines as mentioned by Jones?

Which spiritual disciplines have been most helpful to you, and which ones do you feel a need to explore further?

SESSION 2: PART FOUR: Deepening with Self

Focus: What it means to deepen our relationship with self.

Self-understanding is a difficult endeavor. How do you feel you have grown in your own self-understanding? What has helped you in this area?

Jeff quotes Anselm Gruen, *“And God will transform everything that we hold out to him, until the image of Jesus Christ shines out in us too.”* How do you understand this statement? How have you seen it in your own life?

SESSION 2: PART FIVE: Deepening with Others

Focus: How community plays a vital role in deepening.

Jeff says, *“It takes a community to make a disciple.”* How has community been important to your growth as a disciple?

In quoting Bonhoeffer, Jeff says, *“[Christians] need other Christians as bearers and proclaimers of the divine word of salvation.”* How have you witnessed this played out in your life? When have you been encouraged by others?

Video Discussion Guide for Session 3

SESSION 3: PART ONE: Discerning Our Gifts

Focus: Investigates the relationship between equipping and gifts.

In the Ephesians passage, which gift or gifts has God used through you?

What have others said to you that might confirm that you possess some of these gifts?

Assess how effective your church community is in helping members discover their gifts.

SESSION 3: PART TWO: Discerning Our Call

Focus: Discover the connection between recognizing and responding to a call.

Have you ever considered yourself “called” by God for a particular area of service? If so, share your experience with your group.

Why is it difficult to see ourselves called by God in the same way as we view our pastors?

What does your church community do to help individuals discern their call?

Jeff says, *“We can participate in the redemption of all creation by using our gifts in the work of Christian service in our homes, our congregations, our work and schools and in our communities.”* How do you react to this statement?

What impact could we have individually if we used our gifts, talents, and abilities outside of our church?

Name places in your wider community where these gifts are needed.

What needs in your community concern you most?

Do you have a passion for any one of these?

Where might God be calling you to use your gifts and abilities to participate in the redemption of all creation?

SESSION 3: PART THREE: Acquiring Skills and Knowledge

Focus: The role of the church in helping disciples acquire skills and knowledge.

What is your church community doing to equip members so they may use their gifts to answer God's call and build up the body of Christ?

THINKING ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP

Step back to think about what you have discovered so far. Consider this quote from Jeff:

“If we truly believe that we are all called as disciples to be engaged in God’s mission of the redemption of all creation and that the church is a community that works to form disciples for this ministry, then it is essential that we find a way to equip people for ministry, not just in the church, but also in the world.”

What could your church community do in the next year to help members discern their gifts and call to ministry as disciples of Christ?

Where might you find funds in your budget to help even one person acquire skills and knowledge for his/her passions?

What implications might Jeff's statement have for the total work of your church community?

If this statement were taken seriously, how might it change the work of:

- your Nominating Committee?
- your Board of Deacons?
- your Church Board?
- every Ministry Team?

Video Discussion Guide for Session 4

Pre-Session: Before Viewing the Video

As the group assembles, ask the participants to answer these two questions:

- (1) *“Where Is Your Church Involved in Ministry?”* (Handout for each participant.)
- (2) *“What has been the most significant event, activity or program you have been involved with in your church experience?”* (Handout for each participant.)

As persons complete this assignment, welcome them to this session of the discipleship training. Affirm their willingness to be a part of this important learning experience. Thank them for offering their gifts and insights to help strengthen the discipleship ministry of their church.

SESSION 4: PART ONE: Where We Have Been

Focus: A brief review of the areas covered thus far in the series

Jeff has helped us to look at these important understandings thus far in our sessions together.

We’ve acknowledge the radical and rapid change that is taking place in the world today and the profound impact it is having on congregations.

We’ve affirmed that in a time of change it’s important to get back to the basics in order to be clear about our core purpose.

We’ve explored the notion that the core purpose of the church is to be a disciple-forming community.

We’ve made the case that in reclaiming this core purpose, the church and individual congregations will discover a path to renewal and redevelopment that will enable them to be both faithful and effective in today’s world.

We’ve indicated that there are three types of experiences that are needed in order for people to grow as disciples: **deepening**, which is about growing in relationship; **equipping**, which is about growing in gifts; and **ministering**, which is about growing in service.

SESSION 4: PART TWO: Ministering – The Third Element of Discipleship

Focus: Explores the meaning of ministering.

Jeff makes the statement, *“In order to grow as disciples people need experiences of serving others.”* How do you respond to this statement? How do you see growth and service as being connected?

Read James 1:23-25. Why is it important for disciples to not be “hearers who forget but doers who act?”

How are persons encouraged to minister within your congregation?

Does your congregation utilize the pattern of serving on boards or committees as the primary way in which persons utilize their gifts?

Jeff shares, *“Wherever it is, however – in the congregation, home, work, school or community – ministering is always about using our gifts to respond to God’s call to share the love of God with others.”*

Look again at **Where Is Your Church Involved in Ministry?** which you completed prior to the beginning of our session. Compare the list of places where your church is involved in ministry with the concept of ministering being about everything we are about as disciples.

Are there areas where individuals are involved in ministry which we did not list because they are outside the walls of the church?

What are some of those areas?

How are those areas of service helping form disciples?

SESSION 4: PART THREE : The Hearty Stew

Focus: The relationship among the three elements of discipleship.

We have now explored three elements of discipleship – deepening, equipping and ministering. Where in your journey have you experienced all three elements – deepening, equipping and ministering – occurring in programs or activities?

Review the responses to **My Most Significant Event** handout.

What made this event so significant for you?

What element served as the primary focus of the event: deepening, equipping, or ministering?

Were all three elements present in this event? How?

Was the power and impact of the event dependent upon the material presented or because of the total environment of the event?

What can we learn from these insights?

How has your congregation been able to create a culture of discipleship?

SESSION 4: PART FOUR: Discipleship and Evangelism

Focus: Exploring the relationship of discipleship and evangelism.

Jeff speaks of how the three elements of deepening, equipping and ministering are intertwined. He says, *“There is a real sense in which you can’t have one without the others. That means there are no exclusively deepening, equipping and ministering experiences. While they may focus on one element, most experiences provide the possibility for all three to occur.”*

Review your responses to **Where is Your Church Involved in Ministry?**

What does your list indicate about your areas of discipleship?

Where are the opportunities for each element of discipleship present in your congregation’s involvement?

How does your discipleship ministry help equip your congregation for evangelism?

Video Discussion Guide for Session 5

SESSION 5: PART ONE: Looking at Deepening, Equipping and Ministering from a Congregational Point of View

Focus: Exploring how the elements of discipleship operate within the life of the congregation.

In this session Jeff asks the question, “*What does a disciple-forming congregation do?*” and offers the answer that, “*A disciple-forming congregation provides experiences of deepening, equipping and ministering.*” He believes that many congregations are already doing much in these three areas, but may not recognize their work as such because they have not looked at it from this perspective.

What examples of deepening, equipping and ministering can you think of in your congregation? (Remember that the three processes are interrelated and may be happening informally in the life of the congregation rather than as formal, instructional programs.)

Jeff states: “*Discipleship needs to be the orientation and commitment of the entire congregation.*” He believes that discipleship is an enculturation process that needs to be “*lived into,*” that “*we grow by being around others who are growing as disciples,*” and that “*everything a congregation does needs to be done in the spirit of discipleship.*” He suggests looking at the activities of the church and determining how each helps or hinders in the process of forming disciples.

Select a few random activities from the life of your church and discuss them now as a group, determining the role they play in helping (or hindering) your church in making disciples.

SESSION 5: PART TWO: Importance of Spiritual Vitality in Becoming a Disciple-Forming Congregation

Focus: Exploring the relationship between spiritual vitality and discipleship in congregational life.

We are reminded in the video that churches have spiritual vitality when there is a deep desire to “*see Christ more clearly, love Christ more dearly and follow Christ more nearly.*” When this happens there is contagious spiritual growth that is obvious in the lives of individuals and the church as a whole.

Do you see this “*contagious spiritual growth*” happening in your church? If so, where do you see it?

If not, why not?

SESSION 5: PART THREE: Challenges and Qualities of Disciple-Forming Congregations

Focus: Becoming a disciple-forming community in your congregation.

Deepening: Jeff talks about the need to create space in the congregation where people can be honest and interact with each other at a deep level of trust. He mentions a “*spiritual and behavioral covenant*” which allows people to deepen in relationship with each other, as well as with God.

Do you think this type of intentional covenant would be helpful in your congregation? Why or why not?

Equipping: Jeff talks about the importance of providing funds to equip those laity who minister in the community, so they may build their skills.

In this “missional” way of thinking, is this something you can see your church including as a budget item, along with continuing education for clergy, church leaders, and Sunday School teachers?

Ministering: Jeff promotes a “lean” church organization structure in which fewer people are involved working on boards so that more people can be involved in ministering in the world.

Would you consider your present church organization to be on the heavy side or the lean side of the scale?

Are you constantly trying to fill board or committee positions?

Could you reduce the number of those positions and still get the work of the church done effectively and efficiently, giving people more time for ministry outside the church?

Jeff states that striving to be a disciple-forming congregation “*impacts everything in the life of that congregation.*” At this time, please look at the worksheet **Qualities of the Disciple-Forming Congregation**, filling it out individually as directed at the top.

When finished please compare and discuss the results as you look at your church in terms of:

spiritual vitality
Mission
shared ministry
Structure

worship
gifts and call
commitment to equipping
small groups

As you do so, think of how discipleship influences and/or is influenced by each of these categories. Think of specific examples within your own congregation where you see the presence of these qualities and indicators. In instances where they are not present in your congregation, ask yourselves what you could do differently as a church to help you move away from “not at all” and closer to “completely” as indicated on the worksheet.

Where Is Your Church Involved in Ministry?

Please list below all of the areas where your church is currently involved in ministry.

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My Most Significant Event

Please describe the most significant event, activity or program you have been involved within your church experience.

What was the event? (Please give a brief description.)

What was the stated focus of the event?

What about this event made it so special for you?

What was your greatest learning from this event?

QUALITIES OF THE DISCIPLE-FORMING CONGREGATION

Mark each of the statements 1-5 according to how accurately it describes your congregation with 1 meaning “not at all” and 5 meaning “completely”.

_____ **Spiritual Vitality**

There is within our congregation, both personally and corporately, a deep desire to grow in relationship with Christ and to discern and respond to God’s call.

Indicators of spiritual vitality might include:

- abiding desire to grow in relationship with Christ
- trust in the power of God to accomplish the things God is about
- comfort with and genuine reliance on prayer and praying together
- deep yearning to discern and respond to God’s call
- openness to change in order to respond more fully to God’s call
- ability to confront difficult issues that change inevitably brings and to deal with conflict in a spirit of love
- active participation in experiences that lead to spiritual growth
- regular conversations about God’s presence and leading in personal lives and the life of the congregation
- an enduring spirit of gentleness and compassion
an underlying sense of joy and humility

_____ **Vital, Transforming Worship**

The worship services of our church provide for both members and new-comers a powerful experience of the transforming power that comes through an encounter with the holy.

Indicators of vital, transforming worship might include:

- a variety of music styles
- active participation of worshipers – sharing concerns, singing, praying
- leadership from laity as well as clergy
- variations in worship format
- sermons that speak to personal and congregational realities
- opportunities for worshipers to respond to the worship experience
the use of art to enhance the worship space and express the worship theme

_____ **A Focus on God’s Mission**

The primary concern of our church, expressed both individually and corporately, is for those who are not members.

Indicators of a focus on God’s mission might include:

- ongoing processes to discern God’s call both to individuals and the congregation
- an emphasis on serving those who are not members rather than just meeting the needs of members

- a budget that puts a priority on what happens outside the church building rather than within it
- a willingness to be different, to stand over against commonly accepted cultural practices and beliefs
- an openness to conflict and controversy

Gifts and Call as the Basis for Ministry

Our church pays careful attention to the discernment and development of God-given gifts and uses these as the basis for determining the involvement of members in ministry.

Indicators of gifts and call as the basis for ministry might include:

- a group in the church with responsibility for helping members discern and develop their gifts
- regular opportunities to engage in gift inventories
- financial resources available to members to be used to develop gifts that the congregation has discerned
- opportunities to practice gifts in an accepting, affirming setting
- an unwillingness to simply fill slots on boards and committees

Shared Ministry

Our ministry, both within and outside the church, is shared by clergy and laity based not on predetermined role, but on gifts.

Indicators of shared ministry might include:

- active participation of laity in worship, pastoral care and other ministries traditionally seen primarily as belonging to clergy
- a willingness to adjust the role of clergy to their gifts
- the presence of ministry teams that are led by laity
- a willingness of laity to take initiative
- a willingness of clergy to give up control

Commitment to Equipping

Our congregation has a strong commitment, both emotional and financial, to support the equipping of both laity and clergy for the ministries to which God has called them.

Indicators of a commitment to equipping might include:

- significant budget provision for laity to develop skills and acquire knowledge needed for ministries to which they have been called
- frequent opportunities for Bible study and spiritual growth
- continuing education and sabbatical provisions for clergy
- participation in training events beyond the congregation
- training opportunities for ministry in the world, not just jobs in the church

Lean, Permission-Giving Structures

Our church has a minimal organizational structure that functions to encourage and support the involvement of members in ministry.

Indicators of lean, permission-giving structures might include:

- procedures for new ministry that don't require getting multiple permissions (both formal and informal)
- church board responsibilities limited to essential maintenance functions
- the presence of numerous ministry teams
- a clear understanding of values, beliefs and policies that define the parameters of possible ministry
- "yes" as the default position when a group of people want to begin a ministry
- a small percentage of church members serving on established boards that care for the maintenance of the institution so that most people are freed for ministry

_____ Holistic Small Groups

Our congregation offers a variety of small group experiences that offer opportunities of deepening, equipping and ministering based on particular interests and concerns of the participants.

Indicators of holistic small groups might include:

- a variety of small groups based in a variety of interests
- prayer, action, learning and sharing as part of every small (PALS) group
- training opportunities for small group leaders
- a significant percentage of church members involved in a small group

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