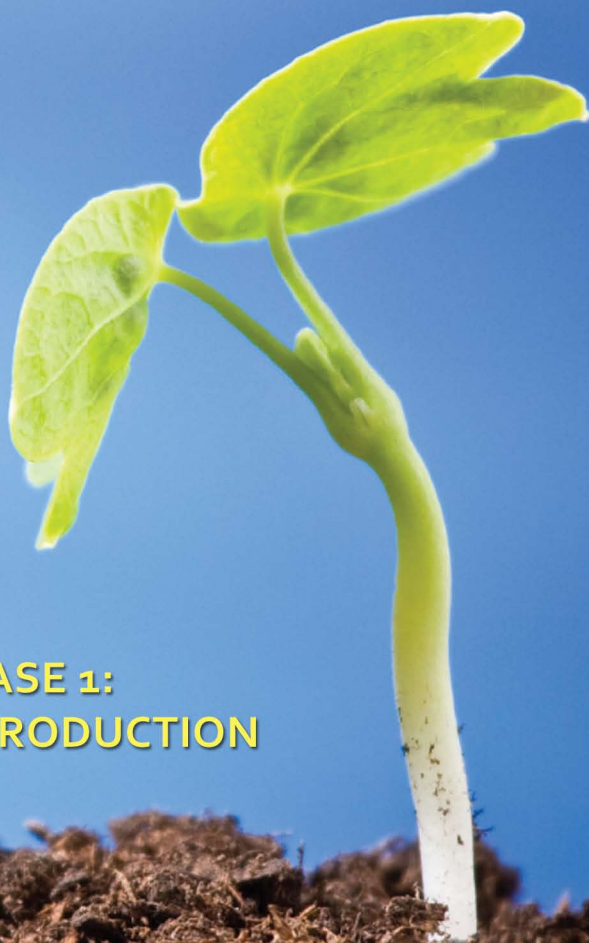


Growing Disciples

a programme to help Congregational churches
grow in purpose and confidence



**PHASE 1:
INTRODUCTION**



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THE PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAMME

Welcome to Growing Disciples – your resource to help churches grow in purpose and confidence, as communities of disciples.

'Discipleship' is at the heart of many of the challenges we face as churches today – how to follow Jesus, be communities of faith, hope and love, and make new disciples. Most Christian courses focus on the individual disciple, but this resource aims to build confidence and relationships between people.

Growing Disciples aims to:

- deepen the church's sense of community
- urge the church to value its wide-ranging gifts and insights
- build people's confidence to try new ideas and roles
- help the church to connect faith with real life
- resource the church to make more of a public impact

Growing Disciples is designed to be encouraging:

- it is flexible and workable for all churches, and gives you the opportunity to make choices
- it is about building upon existing knowledge

It is also ambitious and demanding:

- it does not offer quick-fix solutions, but shows that many of the issues we face require us to give time and commitment – to talk with and trust each other
- it needs its participants to be honest, to reflect openly on our challenges and be willing to try new things

It is based on four values or themes, as outlined on the next page.



THE LOVE OF THE PROGRAMME

1. L is for LEARNING

- Learning is a lifelong process
- Learning is not just about absorbing lots of information, it is about having the confidence to use what we know
- It recognises that learning leads to positive change
- The programme values how different people learn, and that the aim is to share our 'Good News'

2. O is for OPENNESS

Learning is most effective when we are 'open' ... so:

- Aim to be as open as you can with your own thoughts and feelings, trusting that others will listen
- Be open to others' thoughts and feelings, and commit to be good listeners and learners, especially when other people's ideas are different from yours
- Aim to be open to God speaking through one another, and take notice of the quietest voices and the most vulnerable

3. V is for VISION

As we learn openly with each other, our purpose grows:

- This should help the church re-discover what it is for – this may mean considering what it is not for
- You could take this as an opportunity to be ambitious... eg. what are your church's ambitions? How do you hope to be a sign of God's new world in your situation?

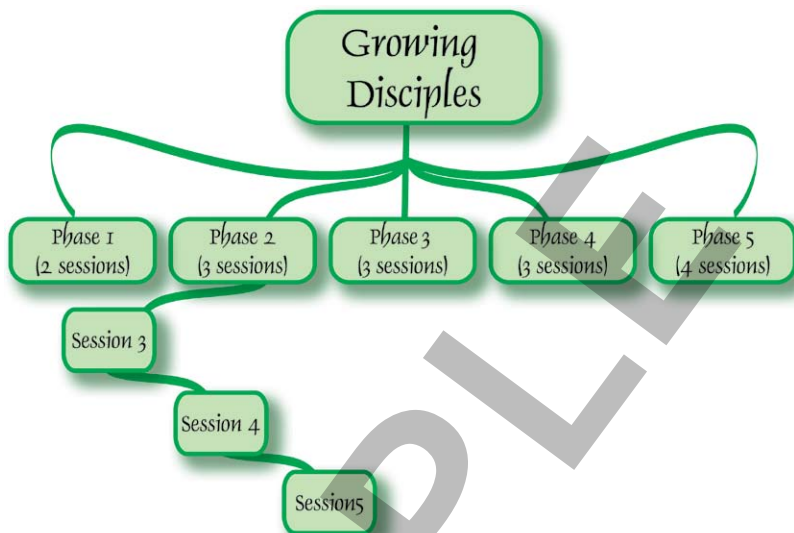
4. E is for ENGAGEMENT

This resource will help people to engage with each other in a new way, perhaps on a new level:

- It will help the church value its diversity and unity, with people's range of gifts and shared commitments
- It will help the church engage with the world around it, building or deepening relationships in order to make a positive impact as a community of Jesus' disciples

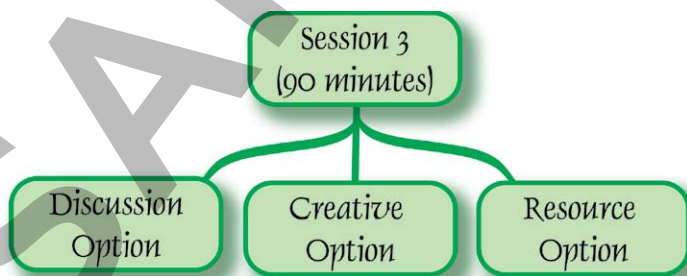


HOW THE PROGRAMME WORKS



In summary, Growing Disciples works like this...

- a programme of 15 sessions, split over 5 'phases'
- each session lasts 90 minutes
- each session can be done in one of three ways – a Bible-based discussion, a creative option, or a session to help you make your own resources



Some of the options are in the 'phase' booklets, but others are online (www.cfgoingdeeper.wordpress.com) or on the CD.

The programme is designed to be flexible, to help you make it your programme. For example, you could do 2 or 3 sessions on one day; you could join with another church; there may be Area events for mutual support. But remember: be sensitive to each other.

THE PROGRAMME OUTLINE



Phase 1: Introduction – helping the church to evaluate where it is now and how it can use this programme to move forwards

- Going deeper together
- Sharpening up

Phase 2: Growing as a Learning Community

– helping the church to identify its Good News

- learning with each other: disciples are all different
- learning with the Bible: reading in community
- learning with hope: the church signals God's new world

Phase 3: Growing as a Worshipping Community

– helping the church to experience its Good News in its worship

- worshipping with each other: involving different people
- worshipping with the Bible: how the Word speaks today
- worshipping with the world: engaging with culture

Phase 4: Growing as a Listening Community

– helping the church to embody its Good News in its shared life

- listening to each other: showing care for all people
- listening to God through each other: finding God's way
- listening to God in the world: thinking how to be ethical

Phase 5: Growing as a Missionary Community

– helping the church to practise Good News in its public life

- going public: relating to God's weird-&-wonderful world
- talking about faith: listening and evangelism
- building the new world: hospitality, peace & justice

Evaluation – the programme ends with a session to help the church consider its impact and ask 'where next?'

TIPS FOR GUIDES

Each session will need a guide, and it may be a good idea to let different people play this role because:

- a) the guide is not expected to be an 'expert' who knows all 'the answers'. This will encourage those attending to think for themselves.
- b) it is good practice to give a range of people the opportunity to try a new role, especially as different exercises require various talents for the role as guide.

Guidance for guides

● Before the session

1. Read through the relevant session beforehand, so you are familiar with its questions, tasks and shape.
2. But don't feel you need to talk around the questions, or do extra preparation. The sessions are designed to encourage the whole group to discuss and explore together, to learn with one another, so it would not be appropriate to pre-empt people's discussion or insights by offering prepared 'answers'.
3. Bring the necessary equipment as recommended in the notes and ensure the room is prepared (involve other people with this), but of course, it is for each group to decide on the practical arrangements – see page 9 for some useful questions.

● During the session

1. Welcome people and begin with a time of worship
2. State the aim/purpose of the session as stated in the notes
3. Guide people through the process, bearing these in mind:
 - a. Purpose: you may need to remind people of the session's aim, if the conversation wanders too much
 - b. Topics: the questions are a springboard for discussion, not 'leading questions' designed to take people to a single answer



TIPS FOR GUIDES



c. Allow silence: try not to end any times of silence too quickly, because they can be creative moments, when someone may be plucking up the courage to speak

d. Let discussion flow: although each session has a purpose, the guide should not be too controlling

e. Manage the pace: try not to hurry the session; allow for flexibility, but aim to finish on time

f. Listening skills: help people listen to each other; encourage only one to speak at a time; ask if everyone can hear, and repeat people's key points if necessary

g. Understanding: check that people understand each other, but try not to make it your role to explain what people mean – let people explain themselves, which may mean prompting them gently with further questions

h. Summarise key discussion points, as a way of marking where things have got to. The group may even want someone to write them down for a future follow-up; but try not to feel you need to 'iron out' all the creases in a discussion or explain away the genuine differences – not everyone has to be in complete agreement, so sum up the differences as well as the common ground

i. Handle differences: try not to force people to pretend they really agree with each other, or put words in their mouths, but equally don't turn differences into gulfs – remember to affirm the Body, diverse but united

4. Close with a time of worship (perhaps include open prayer).

● **Afterwards** (however experienced the guide feels)

With 1 or 2 people, evaluate the session and how you feel it all went. How did you feel about it? How were any tensions dealt with? What have you learnt about being a guide?

PLANNING THE PROGRAMME

Issues to consider when planning your use of Growing Disciples
(Refer back to them during Session 2)

- Shall we meet weekly or monthly?
- Shall we meet in the same way each time or in different ways (e.g. always a midweek evening, or with a whole day event)?
- Shall we link with another church or with Area events?
- Shall we have refreshments / food / no food?
- Could different people lead our opening & closing worship?
(some of the options include some worship material)
- Shall we try having different people to guide each session?
- Shall we try using a mix of options to help us explore & grow in new ways – balancing discussion and creativity?

Some commitments:

- We will aim to begin promptly and use our time well
- We will make a commitment to being open with each other
- We will treat this as an opportunity for growing as disciples
- We will treat this as an opportunity for growing in purpose
(the programme aims to affect the life of the church)

In deciding whether to use this resource, also ask yourselves:

- Why are you interested in using this resource at this time in your church's life? What makes this a significant moment for you? In what sense is it timely?
- What else is going on in your church's life or in the life of your wider community? What challenge do you face which makes it relevant to think about your purpose at this time?
- What do you anticipate being the effect of venturing on this journey with one another? In what ways are they unknown?





Option A:

Method: Being thoughtful together

Aim

To help encourage the church to talk about its challenges and opportunities – with a focus on deepening its relationships

Outcome

By the end of this session, you will have a glimpse of what you hope to achieve

Structure

- A short time of worship
- An opening thought
- A short time to discuss initial questions in small groups
- A Bible reading
- A time of discussing – first in groups, then together
- A closing time of worship

Opening Worship (10 minutes)

Opening Thought: (5 minutes)

Jesus was in the business of 'growing disciples' – people who would be his apprentices, learning while on the job together.

So: If we want to grow as Jesus's disciples, and make a bigger impact on the world around us, we must go deeper together ...

- Deeper with God – discerning God's purposes for us
- Deeper with each other – building stronger relationships
- Deeper with ourselves – recognising our own gifts



SESSION 1: GOING DEEPER TOGETHER

Some Initial Questions: *(10 minutes)*
(discuss in pairs or small groups first)

1. What is the job of Jesus' disciples? How are you disciples?

2. How do you think you could help each other to grow as disciples?



Read Luke 5: 1-6 (either ask someone to read it, or act it out)
(5 minutes)

This story tells of Jesus' encounter with the fishers. He starts in shallow waters, teaching the crowds where they are. But then he asks the fishers to go out to deeper water, which is where big things start to happen ...

Further questions (maybe discuss in groups first, then together)
(30 minutes)

3. The crowd was pressing in on Jesus. What pressures are pressing in on you and your church?

4. The fishers were busy washing their nets. What parts of the church's life need washing or mending?

SESSION 1: GOING DEEPER TOGETHER

5. Jesus started near the shore. In what ways does your church stay where it feels safe, in shallower waters, near solid ground?



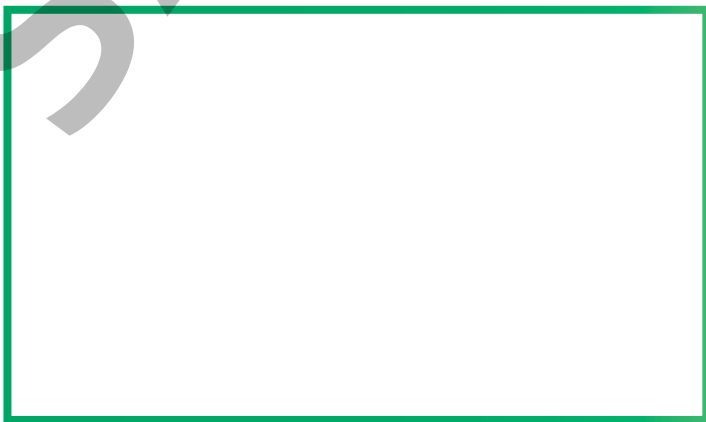
6. Jesus says, 'Put out into deep water and let down your nets.' Simon is not convinced it will work ... What makes you nervous?



7. But he said, 'I will let down my nets.' What encourages you to try something new? What aspects of your faith inspire you?



8. Which do you think has been the most important question for your church so far? (Ask everyone to make a suggestion.)



SESSION 1: GOING DEEPER TOGETHER

Evaluation

(10 minutes)

- What worked well during this session?
- What worked less well during this session?
- What do you intend to take from it? (make a note of it)

A large rectangular box with a green border, intended for taking notes during the evaluation. A large, light gray watermark reading "SAMPLE" is diagonally overlaid across the box.



Closing Worship: (10 minutes)

Ask someone to read Psalm 139: 1-3

Close in prayer. You may like to use the following short prayer:

Life-giving God,

we thank you for this opportunity to go deeper –
to discover more about ourselves, our needs, our gifts;
to grow in our relationship and trust with each other;
and to deepen our love for you as we follow Jesus daily.

So bless this journey which we share together
and may we know you are with us, always. Amen.

Option B:

Method: Creative together

see www.cfgoingdeeper.wordpress.com



Option C:

Method: Resource (for worship)

see www.cfgoingdeeper.wordpress.com



SESSION 2: SHARPENING UP

Option A:

Method: Discussing together



Aim:

To help the church explore its sense of purpose

To help identify the church's weaknesses, in a supportive way

To help the church plan its use of Growing Disciples for itself

Outcome:

By the end of this, you will have a better picture of how your church views its challenges and its sense of vision or purpose

Structure:

- A short time of worship
- A Bible reading (read aloud by one of the group)
- A time for discussion – first in groups, then together
 leading to decisions about how to use Growing Disciples
- A short time of worship

Opening Worship *(10 minutes)*

Reading the Story – 2 Kings 6: 1-7 (this text is from the NRSV) *(5 minutes)*

Now the company of prophets said to Elisha, 'As you see, the place where we live under your charge is too small for us. Let us go to the Jordan, and let us collect logs there, one for each of us, and build a place there for us to live.' He answered, 'Do so.' Then one of them said, 'Please come with your servants.' And he answered, 'I will.' So he went with them. When they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees. But as one was felling a log, his axehead fell into the water; he cried out, 'Alas, master! It was borrowed.' Then the man of God said, 'Where did it fall?' When he showed him the place, he cut off a stick, and threw it in there, and made the iron float. He said, 'Pick it up.' So he reached out his hand and took it.



SESSION 2: SHARPENING UP

Discussion-starter (start in small groups, then together)
(15 minutes)

1. What is this story about? What stands out for each of you?
2. Notice the prophets' bigger vision for themselves. What is your church's vision? How could it be bigger / more ambitious?
3. Notice they all play their part. In what ways does your church find it difficult to value and use everyone's contribution?

Natural Church Development process:

(whole group) (30 minutes)

The following are based on the Natural Church Development's 8 key areas of a church's life, which have been found to be very important to a church's overall health. Think of them as different tools or 'axes', each helping the prophets to fulfil their overall vision (and you to fulfil yours):

- i) nurturing loving relationships
- ii) small groups giving support and learning together
- iii) ministry which makes good use of people's gifts
- iv) leadership which empowers people to participate
- v) effective and creative decision-making
- vi) passionate/vigorous spirituality
- vii) inspiring worship
- viii) meeting new people through meeting their needs

for further information, see www.ncd-uk.com

advocating the process of building a 'healthy' church

see the extra information on the Growing Disciples CD

In that light, discuss the following questions: (in groups first)

4. A prophet drops an axe-head, and Elisha asks to be led to it.
 - a) Which of the above 8 areas has your church 'dropped'?
 - b) How can you supportively help each other to see this?

SESSION 2: SHARPENING UP

5. Elisha does a simple thing (he throws in a stick), but it has a miraculous effect (the axe-head comes to the surface). So what simple things might your church do to bring its issues to the surface and to 'sharpen up' its tools to address them?

Evaluation (whole group) (10 minutes)

- What worked well during this session?
- What worked less well during this session?
- What do you intend to take from it? (make a note of it)

Closing worship (10 minutes)

You may like to use this short prayer:

Living God,

we pray as we start out on this new journey

that we will use it as an opportunity for refreshment,

to help us celebrate the purpose we share together –

to live by faith, hope and love, as disciples of Jesus,

and to make a difference in your world.

So bless us, and help us to make new decisions wisely,

in the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen.

Option B:

Method: Creative together

see www.cfgoingdeeper.wordpress.com

Option C: Method: Resource for worship

see www.cfgoingdeeper.wordpress.com



FURTHER RESOURCES

In addition to materials at www.cfgoingdeeper.wordpress.com, there is the accompanying "Growing Disciples" DVD.

Books

Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development Handbook: A Practical Guide to a New Approach* (BCGA, 1998, 2002)

Brian D. McLaren – *Church on the Other Side: Exploring the Radical Future for the Local Congregation* (Zondervan, 1998, 2000, 2006)

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Also, there may be a Growing Disciples advocate in your Area

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Are you interested in Growing Disciples?

Growing Disciples is a comprehensive resource to help churches grow in purpose and confidence as communities of disciples.

- Does your church sometimes want to think about new possibilities, but it is not sure where to start?
- Do you ever feel as though you are struggling to scratch beneath the surface of the issues you are facing?
- Does your church hope to grow in its relationships and to act confidently in your community, but you need encouragement?

Growing Disciples is a 15-session programme, with a variety of materials – discussions, creative activities and resources. It aims to help churches grow as communities of disciples who

- learn together about their faith
- worship together in ways which relate to the world
- listen to each other, the world and God
- engage in mission for the sake of God's world

The programme aims to identify, celebrate and share the Good News of Jesus Christ within and beyond the Church.

Here are some comments from people who have piloted it:

"It's a really helpful resource, getting churches to talk together and actively consider what could change... and how best to do it"

"A useful tool – if everyone is willing to participate, and be honest – and act on the discussions"

Is your church looking for something to help you grow in confidence?
Then this is the resource for you...

