

# Discipling International Students

## Introduction

This material is not a "Discipleship for Dummies" training manual. It is a collection of ideas, experiences and suggestions, more like an artist's palette, designed to be used as a resource for those concerned to help international students who have already accepted Jesus Christ to make the most of their time here in UK. Each student is unique, and although many may have much in common, it is most important to treat each individual separately. Some are babes in Christ. Others are mature and aware of their needs. Some are here for just a brief period. Others are around for several years. Some will be returning to countries where the church is persecuted. Others will be facing totally different challenges when they return.

Our goal must be to build a relationship with each student so that we can assess their situation and work out together with them what is feasible within these constraints. A "tailor made" program for each student will then maximise their potential. Discipleship Bible study groups, local or national training courses, church programmes and campus fellowship groups can all be integrated into this personalised scheme which will be complemented by reading and on line resources. As we progress with this development programme we will be teaching each student how to feed themselves and how to help others do the same. This means that even our discipling programme itself is something that they can take home and adapt to their local situation to serve others.

Once we have got to know a student and they have recognised their need to grow and be trained, then an on-going process of mentoring will provide encouragement and "fine-tuning" of their program. Sometimes they begin with great enthusiasm but further into the term, with looming exams and a back log of course work, their energy disappears, and we need to help them learn the priority of maintaining their spiritual life under pressure. In this way we can help them to integrate spiritual things with everyday secular activities. The development of a holistic life style centred on the Lord Jesus Christ is a vital factor in effective witness in the work place.

If we can provide these potential Christian leaders with information about the resources available and train them in using these "tools of the trade" then we shall multiply ourselves a hundredfold in countries throughout the world.

## Discipling International Students

Many of us are involved in sharing the Gospel with international students, for example running VISA or international Christianity Explored courses. It is a wonderful privilege to see the Holy Spirit at work as they respond to the Master's voice, to see some being baptised and starting on a new life with Jesus.

But what happens when they return to their home countries? How many continue to follow Jesus, to grow in faith and to share the good news with others? Some do, but sadly, many are like the seed that fell on rocky places and amongst thorns, falling away from their early love.

This paper seeks to help you:

- understand some of the difficulties for young disciples in their home countries and
- help prepare them, whilst they are here in the UK, to flourish on their return.

**But first of all what, or who, is a disciple?**

'A disciple is one who responds in faith and obedience to the gracious call of Jesus Christ. Being a disciple is a lifelong process of dying to self while allowing Jesus Christ to come alive in us.'

*(Discipleship Essentials, Greg Ogden, InterVarsity Press, 1998.)*

Below are some of the qualities of a disciple identified by staff at a recent Friends International conference. They particularly had in mind international students returning home, having come to Christ whilst studying in the UK:

- Integrity, humility, discipline, discernment, perseverance, patience, steadfastness, courage, adaptability, non-naivety, zeal, initiative
- Resilience under opposition
- Tolerance of negative attitudes of others towards them
- Love for God and others
- Faith in sovereign God
- Sense of God's call on their life
- Desire to grow in spiritual maturity
- Ability to feed themselves and apply Scripture to daily life
- Submission to Christ in all areas
- Biblical understanding
- Ability to articulate their faith
- Ability to critique own culture
- Ability to identify good church and teaching
- Commitment to other believers
- Understanding of body life and ministry
- Servant heart
- Heart for mission

## What difficulties and challenges will they face when they home?

*The following list is not intended to be exhaustive and issues will overlap under different headings, but the headings may help you think from the student's perspective and imagine the different relationships and contexts within which they will live. Appendix B contains short case studies that go deeper into some of these issues – it is copied by kind permission of Miriam and Wichit Maneevone of the ICF, San Diego, from their Discipleship Lifestyle Manual.*

### Work

- Long hours, Sundays
- Bribery
- Ambition, expectations to rise to top
- Different work practices, ethical dilemmas
- Jealousy from work colleagues
- Debt or feelings of obligation to employer

### Relating to family (and friends)

- Facing family indifference to new faith or even rejection
- Handling arranged marriages or pressure to marry
- Tithing ('my parents' money')
- Role of husband/wife in different cultures
- Readjusting to parenthood/marriage after absence
- Family pressures to conform, family expectations and family structure
- Debt or feelings of obligation to parents

### Relating to other religions

- Facing ancestor worship – obeying parents or God
- Attending the temple
- Facing special ceremonies – weddings, funerals etc
- Placating departed spirits
- Physical threat

### Church/Fellowship

- Is there a church? Can they find fellowship, support?
- Different church culture e.g. baptism, communion, worship style
- Kind of people – graduates or not
- Lack of discipleship resources e.g. literature
- Suspicion from local Christians
- State persecution/restriction of Christians

### Lifestyle

- Views of status and success e.g. 5 Cs in Singapore
- Multiplicity of roles expected of some people
- Use of Sunday
- Attitudes to sex, marriage, divorce
- Surrounded by non-Christian religion and culture

### Not prepared...

- With an idea of God's overall plan and their place in it....

And not forgetting all the issues of missing friends and meeting old friends who may have changed or not have changed as they have, or who are not as interested in their experience abroad as they hoped...

## But what new opportunities are there?

### Influence

- More employable
- Future leaders of church, society and nation
- Earning/ giving potential

### Salt and light

- Understand their own culture afresh and work out faith in their own culture
- Lifestyle changes (being salt and light for the gospel)
- Role-modelling the Christian life (e.g. Christianity not just for westerners)

### Within the church

- Serving in local church
- Introducing new ideas and access to new resources
- Share skills, experience
- Bring encouragement to other Christians
- Bring a global awareness and vision to the church
- Discipling and training
- Church planting

### With other international students

- Continuing networks and links with the UK
- Sender of students to the UK
- Minister to international students in their country
- Help other returnees settle back well.

## So how can we help people?

Some students are here for only a few weeks but many are here for several months or even years. What are the key issues for us to consider?

Five key questions as we prepare people for return:

1. Will they feel confident enough to live in a situation hostile to the Christian worldview?
2. If they do not have a Christian sociology (social ethos) and support are they prepared well enough to live without it?
3. Will they become salt and light influencers in their jobs and cultures or only survivors?
4. Are they confident to deal with worldview clashes at several levels e.g. Maintaining a Christian witness with family and friends who are not Christians and also in the workplace, ensuring their professional practices are in line with scripture?
5. Have they had practice here in discipleship e.g. could they plant a church or start a care group? could they serve a church or help other Christians? Could they use their gifts to minister? Are they going to merely survive or be part of building the Kingdom?

*(These five points were made by a leader of the ICF (International Christian Fellowship), San Diego, on a video, produced by them about their ministry.)*

***So what topics need to be covered during their discipleship?***

Below is a curriculum devised by John and Ruth Chambers of OMF, which they have developed over many years of work with international students.

***A curriculum for discipleship of international students******1. Nurture***

- ***Assurance of salvation***
- ***Commitment to be a disciple***
- ***Quiet Time***
- ***Bible Study -Systematic Bible study – independent spiritual food***
- ***Prayer***
- ***Worship & fellowship – local Church***
- ***Dealing with our past – powers of darkness, abuse etc***

***2. Understanding***

- ***Who is the God of the Bible***
- ***What is Man – Creation, Fall, God's image***
- ***Sin and its disastrous effects***
- ***God's plan of grace – start in Genesis not NT***
- ***Redemption and justification***
- ***The Church – God's family –type of church***
- ***What happens when we die? Christ's return***
- ***Bible overview***

***3. Maturity***

- ***The work of the Holy Spirit***
- ***The fruit of the Spirit***
- ***A Christian character – discipline***
- ***A life of faith – “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God”***
- ***Conduct – morals and ethics***
- ***Becoming a light in the darkness***
- ***Building a Christian World View***

***4. Ministry***

- ***Understanding God's call***
- ***Avoiding Christian consumerism***
- ***God's equipment –spiritual gifts***
- ***The workplace as a mission field***
- ***Intercession and spiritual warfare***
- ***Justice and the redemption of society***
- ***Learning how to teach the Bible so others can feed themselves***

The last section identified topics they need to cover but if they are to persevere in this they need motivation and clear purpose and certain key methods need to be used with them and developed in them if they are to do so. This is described in the following section.

## **Motivation**

*You can take a horse to water....*

Students have a busy academic study programme, so any Christian curriculum must be fitted around that, and it is a daunting task.

### 1. *Vision building - Where they fit into God's plan*

- **God's calling, not ours! Expose them to the Word**
- **Informing themselves of the need**
- **Intending to be used – counting the cost**
- **Preparing for what is to come**

### 2. *Building independence – empowerment*

- **Fledging the disciples, avoiding paternalism**
- **Following God together – we are all learning**
- We are their role models – spiritual hunger ... personal discipline

### 3. *Resources*

- **finding and using what's available**
- **take home books, CD's, web-sites**
- **contacts, networks, Mission links, IFES**

### 4. *Learning accountability*

Stimulating spiritual growth with a friend, prayer partner, mentor

- **Here**
- **Then at home**

### 5. *Encouragement & perseverance*

- **Struggles with old habits**
- **Every problem is an opportunity**

### 6. *Conferences & Fellowship groups*

## **Methods / models of working**

Referring back to the five questions mentioned earlier, it is clear that discipling or helping people prepare to return home is not only about what 'we' teach 'them'. It is also about providing opportunities for them:

- Can we find ways of helping new Christians develop and use their gifts whilst they are in the UK, help them serve, help them initiate and lead whilst they are here? (e.g. for some it may simply be leading a Bible study; for others it may be leading a cell group with people from their own country. Some might be involved in establishing an international church.)
- Can they be exposed to different kinds and size of church so that they are not disappointed when they find the church at home is different?
- Can they have the chance to pray, sing and read/discuss the Bible in their own language with people from their country?
- Can they have the chance to share their faith with their countrymen and women?

- Can they work through some of the 'case study' issues with others from similar backgrounds who have faced this issue or will face it?
- Can some have the chance to live with Christians and see a different approach to daily life?

***Links with other Christians back home***

Key to survival is having a good Christian friend back home, having fellowship and being part of the body of Christ in a church. It is very important that we help the new believer with this. Friends International have contacts in a number of countries and may be able to help you with this.

**Debbie Dickson, John & Ruth Chambers**

## Appendix A: Some useful resources for helping international students prepare to return home

<b>Name</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Publisher</b>	<b>ISBN</b>	<b>Description</b>
Think Home (revised 2000)	L Espinelli-Chinn	International Students, Inc.		A practical guide, suitable for use with both Christians and others.
Home Again (1993)	N Mirza	The Navigators	08910 97570	Explains issues facing returners and lists helpful scripture references related to specific issues.
Returnee Workbook – Preparing Yourself Back to Japan with Jesus (2002)	Japanese Christian Fellowship Network	JCFN Contact via website, below.		Exercises to help Japanese students prepare to return home. Includes topics such as ‘Church Life in Japan’, ‘Building a network’ and ‘Being entrusted with a mission’. Available in Japanese and English.
Following Jesus in the Real World – Discipleship for the Post-college years	R Lamb	InterVarsity Press	08308 16089	Mix of scriptural insights, stories of recent graduates and sound advice for students.
Disciplemakers’ Handbook	A Fryling et al	InterVarsity Press	08511 06919	Includes resource material that you can use and also good book list.
Discipleship Essentials	Greg Ogden	Intervarsity Press	08308 11699	A workbook for twos, threes or individuals
Design for Discipleship		NavPress	08910 9036 to 43	Seven workbooks plus a leader’s guide. For individuals or small groups.
Just for Starters	Good Book Company	Matthias Media	18752 45472	Seven foundational Bible studies...could well be followed by...
The Complete Christian (Colossians)	Philip Jensen and Tony Payne	Matthias Media		Eight studies on the Christian life, reading Paul’s letter to the Colossians.
Putting the Bible to Work in Our Culture (Case studies from life back home) (1994)	John Eaves	InterFACE Ministries, Atlanta, <a href="http://www.iface.org">www.iface.org</a>		Ten case studies set in different countries, with discussion questions and Bible texts. Issues such as ‘Distracted by career success’, ‘Revering my ancestors’, ‘My marriage in two cultures’.
Basic Christian Living (1994)	Ian Barclay	IVP		16 study chapters going through Ephesians, with comment and questions that lead to discussion about practical issues.

## Useful Websites

[www.intervarsity.org/ism](http://www.intervarsity.org/ism)  
[www.philippproject.org.uk](http://www.philippproject.org.uk)  
[www.graduateimpact.com](http://www.graduateimpact.com)  
[www.ifesworld.org](http://www.ifesworld.org)  
[www.isionline.org](http://www.isionline.org)  
[www.friendsinternational.org.uk](http://www.friendsinternational.org.uk)

## Appendix B: Case Studies

From 'Developing International Student Ministry Leadership through Discipleship Lifestyle' by Miriam and Wichit Maneevone

### 1. Family Relationships

- How can I face the rejection of my family? I want to believe God, but I love my parents and family. Will I be strong enough to face the trials that will come if I believe? What if I become a Christian, but I don't have the strength to really live the life God wants?
- If my family knew I was a Christian, they might kill me. Do I have to tell them? Can I be a secret Christian?
- My parents have arranged a marriage for me, but he/she is not a Christian. I think he/she must be a nice person. He/she is from a good family. Do I disrespect my parents by not obeying? God says to obey my parents. He is not a Christian now, but maybe I can make him one. What should I do? I don't know any Christian men in my country. If I say no to this proposal, maybe I will not have a chance to marry. If I can find a man/woman to marry who is a Christian, my parents will not agree. What should I do? Does God really say I can only marry a Christian?
- The Bible tells us to tithe. Yes, I want to, but my money is my family's. They are supporting me. They are not Christians. Am I expected to tithe my parents' money? I ask them for only the amount I need. Do I ask for more so I can tithe?
- The Bible tells us to meet together for worship. My non-Christian parents want me to spend the weekends with them, but the church insists that I should go to church on Sunday. How can I win my parents if I don't respect them and obey? How can I keep following God and be encouraged to grow if I don't go to Church? I can go Wednesday, but the church does not accept that as truly following God. What to do?
- I came to America with my parents' support to study engineering. Now I have become a Christian and wonder what I should do because I am interested in learning about the Bible. Should I pursue my original goal which my parents agreed to? If I changed my mind to study the Bible, my parents would not only be disappointed, they would withdraw their support and I'd have to go home. They would lose face and so would I. How can I study the Bible and still pursue my studies?
- My father died last month. He never told me that he loved me. How can I know the love of my heavenly father when I never experienced the love of my own father? Just recently I have come to believe in Jesus, but my father never believed even though I told him. Although I didn't know his love I am so sad that he couldn't spend eternity with me in heaven with Jesus. To think he is forever in hell is terrible. What can comfort me?

### 2. Religion and Ceremony

- My family is not Christian. We have an altar in our home for the spirits of our ancestors. It is my duty to put some rice and incense to pay respect to them every day and kneel and pay homage to their spirits. Also, there are certain days when we are expected to perform other duties to our ancestors. Now that I am a Christian what do I do? Should I respect my parents and do this because I am in their home? If I am disrespectful because of my behavior, how can I get them to listen to me when I try to tell them about God? I should show God's love through my life. Do I follow this family custom and obey my parents, or does God not want me to do this? Should I avoid the issue and come in late or leave early when I know they do this? How can I talk with my parents about this?

- Some cultures require certain visits to the temple or giving food to the monks who come by the house every morning. Should I refuse to participate in this and risk offending my parents and my neighbours? When do you make an issue of cultural things?
- Types of cultural versus Biblical questions come up over and over again, but the situation may vary. Do I go through the "cultural" (non-Christian) wedding ceremony wearing kimonos or traditional formal dress as well as the "Christian" one? Do I invite monks and priests to the wedding and reception because my parents want it and they are paying for the wedding?
- One student from Thailand said, "In our culture we give a blessing to the young couple by pouring 'holy water' over the bride's and groom's hands. The monks have chanted prayers over the water to make it 'holy'. Do I participate and pour water over my friend's hands at her wedding even though I don't believe the water is holy, or do I avoid the issue by not participating in this part of the reception, which would insult my friend?"
- My friend (or family member) died. In our culture we do certain things to placate the spirit of the dead. What should I do when certain things are expected of me by our culture? The Bible does not say clearly that I shouldn't do them, but I know that doing them doesn't make the person go to heaven or hell. Not doing them, may estrange me from my family or friends and make an unnecessary break. It makes it harder for me to share the gospel with them, especially at this time when they may be more open to spiritual truths about life after death, heaven and hell and know the God of comfort.

### 3. Society and Culture

- *I don't know any Christians back home. In fact, I have never even heard of a church in my country. There is no fellowship for me. What can I do to meet this need? I am not strong enough to stand alone. It is okay to be a Christian here, but how can I live as a Christian back home?*
- My parents worked hard to pay for my education. I am expected to help in my family business when I go home. I know that my parents often bribe officials to get what they want. I know that to get important favours we even have to offer the official his choice of prostitutes. I can't agree with this, but how do I go against my parents when this is the common practice? Do I just look the other way? They will do what they want even though I oppose. Cheating and not telling the truth are just commonplace practices in our business world. How can I live a Christian life in this setting?
- I became a Christian in America. I know that there are Christians back home, but because they are from such a low part of society and uneducated I can't relate to them. I don't mind being humble and worshipping with them because I know we are all the same before God, but I just don't have much in common with them. Our worldview is so far apart that real fellowship is not possible in the long run. How do I find people with a similar background to meet with? I can't start a church myself, I work full-time in my profession, but I am willing to use my spiritual gifts to help. How do I get started?
- I come from China where we are only allowed to have one child. I am pregnant now and did a test. It is a girl, but my husband really wants a boy. I don't want an abortion, but my husband is very angry when I refuse. What can I do?
- How can I explain to my parents what is Christian and what is Western when I don't know myself. I can't decide what is just style of worship or certain traditions and what is really Biblical. Sometimes I want to repeat something back home because it felt good to me in the American Church, but the church back home can't accept it. What can I do?
- I became a Christian in the US and returned home and my mother reproached me for not slurping my noodles in the fashion which was typically good mannered. My mother asked, "Oh, is it Christian, to not eat properly?" My family often mistakes certain changed behaviours as Christian rather than Western. They don't like the changes they see in my independent thinking and some of my behaviours. They attribute the changes to Christianity, which is true in some things, but some things I changed without realizing while living in America and growing up to be a grown man rather than the teen I was when I left home.
- I come from Japan. I will marry a Christian when I go home. We want to establish a Christian home. Neither of our families is Christian so it will be hard when we don't have a model to follow. We have one very difficult question for us. When I start working in a new company I am expected to work so many hours, from early morning to very late at night. The church also makes demands on our time, so the day

off is not really a day off at all. How can we find time to build our relationship when work and church take all our waking hours? We will hardly have time to see each other like we want to. The question is, how can we establish a Christian home when the workplace and church both demand so much time and energy from us?