

THE ID COURSE

LEADERS'
NOTES



INTERNATIONAL DISCIPLESHIP

Bible discussions for international students
who want to be disciples of Jesus Christ



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THE **ID** COURSE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28:19-20

We are all aware that our calling is not to make converts but to make disciples. To do so is probably the greatest privilege we can have. To disciple cross-culturally will challenge and stretch us in unimagined ways. Yet it will bring fulfilment and rewards in equal measure. It will also constantly remind us that we too are disciples in the making!

It's All About Relationship

“The Great Commission does not tell us to teach discipleship. It tells us to make disciples ... ‘Discipleship’ is abstract, ‘disciple’ is personal. You can design a course on discipleship with or without getting involved with any of the people for whom it is designed. But you can only make disciples by engaging life to life, person to person. That’s why the Lord Jesus walked and talked, ate and prayed, laughed and wept with his disciples, instead of arranging for them to be sent a manual. He made disciples by sharing his life with them.”¹

The foundational truth has to be that discipleship must happen in the context of relationship. For many cultures, non-verbal communication is more important than verbal. Who we are and how we live will communicate more than what we say.

“Discipling relationships are marked by intimacy, whereas programs tend to be focussed on information.”²

1 Dowsett 2001: 156–157

2 Ogden 2003: 124

So Why a Course?

Clearly the Christian faith has content. Jesus linked discipleship very closely with His teaching:

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:31b-32

We must always bear in mind that our aim is transformation of lives, not accumulation of knowledge, change not content. Yet it is the Word of God and our engagement with it which will transform lives:

“The task of making disciples revolves around training in obeying Jesus’ teaching.”³

A Topical Course?

There is undoubtedly huge value in working our way systematically through one book of the Bible and such should always be encouraged. Yet there is also great profit in a topical course which addresses ‘live’ issues for international students. Many cultures are primarily pragmatic and the education system in many countries does not train in the drawing out of principles. The key question for many new or not-yet disciples is not ‘Is it true?’ but ‘Does it work?’ Or as a student is quoted as saying, “Westerners always ask the question, ‘What should we say?’ But in Eastern countries, ‘What should we do?’ is a much more important question”. Experience demonstrates that if we can show Christianity has answers and guidelines for some of life’s big issues, then it becomes much more compelling, attractive and reasonable.

Why These Subjects?

The subjects covered are by no means exhaustive. They are chosen as issues which repeatedly appear as questions/areas of concern for international students. They will be issues for returnees and in some cases they are not covered in British discipleship material. Hopefully the studies also begin to model how we might approach other subjects.

In addition, the chapters will hopefully lend themselves to further reflection and discussion in our discipleship process with international students.

3 Dowsett 2001: 25

THE PROGRAMME

- CHAPTER 1 **Who am I?**
My identity in Christ
- CHAPTER 2 **Forgiveness**
I am forgiven and forgiving
- CHAPTER 3 **Guidance**
How do I make decisions?
- CHAPTER 4 **Family Life**
How should I relate to my parents?
- CHAPTER 5 **Relationships**
Questions about marriage and singleness
- CHAPTER 6 **Church**
I belong to a new community
- CHAPTER 7 **Culture and Religion**
Religious customs concerning death and the after-life in my country
- CHAPTER 8 **How I use my Time**
Understanding Biblical principles of work and rest
- CHAPTER 9 **Money and Possessions**
How should I use my money?
- CHAPTER 10 **You shall be my Witnesses**
How can I tell others about Jesus?

Each chapter begins with personal and cultural questions and chapters 2-9 include case studies.

USING THE ID COURSE

Who is it for?

The course is for international students. It is primarily targeted at those who have come to faith while in the UK, but should also be valuable for those already Christians. As some of the issues discussed could be stumbling blocks to those considering the Christian faith, it may also be of benefit to those who have not yet made a commitment to follow Christ. Experience shows that some international students come to faith when they are able to consider a Biblical view of some of these issues.

International students are a distinct group in that they will largely be returning home. The course is written to help returnees think through issues before returning and to stand and thrive as disciples of Christ in often challenging cultural situations. Clearly those cultural situations vary enormously and for that reason the course aims to be fairly generic and to lay down principles while asking the students to apply them to their home situations.

Some of the issues discussed are particularly relevant for those from an East Asian or African background. However, others are clearly of general relevance. There is huge overlap and there is great value in all students discussing these issues and seeing how they apply to their individual situations.

Linguistically, the course aims to be accessible to a wide spectrum of students from intermediate level language students to more fluent speakers. Leaders can adapt material accordingly.

One-to-one or Groups? Dividing Groups

The format allows for a course which divides into small groups, one small group or a one-to-one. Each setting has its own strengths and weaknesses. Groups allow for interaction and sharing of experience; one-to-ones may encourage more honest sharing.

There are pros and cons of keeping similar backgrounds together. Clearly similar

cultures will share common experience and may allow for deeper interaction.⁴ On the other hand, we sometimes only fully understand our own cultural perspective when faced with another's and there can be great strengths in the interaction between cultures. Make-up of the larger group/numbers of leaders etc may well dictate this for many of us.

How to approach the studies

Clearly it's absurd to think we can do justice to any of these topics in one Bible Study. Each could easily fill a course on its own plus demand a lifetime of discipleship to work out the implications! The aim is to raise awareness of issues and to begin to share Biblical principles.

The course is written so that it could be completed over ten weeks. In reality with some students we may not have much longer. However, please feel free to approach the subject matter flexibly. Approximately two hours per session is envisaged (to include socialising, starter activities and prayer). If time allows, each chapter could last two or even more sessions. Depending on the group, some of the chapters will contain too much material for one study. Occasionally, e.g. in the chapter on male/ female relationships, suggestions are given on how to divide the chapters. The material in each chapter also lends itself to a Day Away or one-off event.

The Leaders' Notes

These are an integral part of the course. Each chapter in the Leaders' Notes starts with an **Introduction and Background** to the topic and then gives **Aims** for that study. There are also a few suggestions of **Starter Activities/Extra Resources**. Extra notes are only added to questions where some background is necessary or where different views exist.

Generally, leaders therefore need to make choices about what to include and what to leave out. There may be a temptation to leave out the group discussion questions or the case studies. That would be a mistake as these ground the studies in the cultural context of real life.

4 *If it is possible to have a group together operating in their native language there will be enormous benefits in encouraging the students to engage with their faith in their own language.*



Group Discussion (In pairs or small groups)

These are intended as thought starters. You may or may not need all of them depending on how well you know the group and how well they know each other. The questions are designed both to be 'ice-breakers' and to start where the students are. They fulfil an important function in providing a bridge between the students' personal and cultural situations and the Bible's teaching. They should help them feel comfortable before moving into the Biblical material and asking how the teaching should shape and inform all our values and beliefs. The questions are also valuable in facing the students (and us!) with pre-suppositions and current values. Allow approx. 10-15 minutes for this section. Sometimes the students may just discuss in pairs or small groups, sometimes there may be time for selective feedback.



What Does The Bible Say?

This clearly contains the 'meat' of each chapter. It is hoped that the question, 'What does the Bible say?' will be one that students will take home with them.

The use of Bible verses

Usually there are too many Bible verses to read each one in any study. Some are given for completeness or to avoid the danger of 'proof-texts'. Leaders will need to plan how to use these verses in the study time. Some suggestions for where two or more references are given:

- Just read the verse in bold (the primary verse for that question)
- Divide them among the group and ask individuals or pairs to look them up and report back to the group
- Encourage the group to look up some at home

Apart from key verses at the end of each chapter, Bible verses are not printed. This is partly because to print each would affect the size and cost of the book, but also it wouldn't allow the student the opportunity to find their way around the Bible. The desire is to continually point them to the Bible and to learn how it all fits together.



Case Studies

The case studies are a key component of weeks 2-9. There are no case studies for chapters 1 or 10. In the first week you may need longer to get to know people and to get into the series; in the last, there may be finishing off to do. Each study is based on real situations (although names where used have always been changed). Case studies allow the group to 'earth' the studies in real life, and experience shows that the use of these makes the studies 'come to life'. For the sake of time, you may need to choose one or two studies, but don't be tempted to skip them. In planning each session, allow 15 mins for these studies. N.B. There is often not an easy answer or just one solution to these situations. Avoid giving the impression there is and try to steer students away from thinking there is.



Think and Pray

This is an opportunity for reflection either within the group time or at home.



Key Verse

It would be good to encourage group members to memorise these verses so that they build up a selection of verses summarising lessons learned by the end of the course. If possible, encourage them to learn the verse(s) in their own language.



Extra Study

This section provides additional Biblical material for further discussion or home study.

And Finally... Our Attitude as Disciplers

It is not our job to give people all the answers!

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” **Romans 12:2**

The Bible places great value on the mind. Jesus wanted disciples who could think through on issues. Our role is to prepare students to live life daily with Christ through exposing them to the Word of God and its claims and challenges. We should be modelling using the Bible as our handbook. They may need to work out the implications of different issues for themselves.

“Jesus allowed the disciples to live with conundrums. He intentionally set up mental train wrecks. Running on the same tracks towards each other were two diametrically opposed thoughts. No easy answers were provided, nor were there fill-in-the-blank workbooks. He wanted disciples who would have to think through the issues. . . Jesus intentionally troubled the disciples by challenging their cherished assumptions.”⁵

The Gospel and the claims of Christ will often clash with culture (and that includes our own.). How those clashes are worked out is often not straightforward and can be a messy process. We need to avoid thinking we have all the solutions to the issues faced by returning international students. We should resist the temptation to think there is always a ‘right’ (=simplistic?) answer’. This particularly applies to the case studies.

We should also be aware that some of the discussion topics may awaken personal pain in the students. We need to have great compassion and also patience. It is good to remember too that some cultures fear ‘being ‘different’ more than anything else.

Bible Study leaders/disciplers need humility. We cannot dictate how students should live or react to situations. Our job is to open up the Word of God and share Biblical principles, to teach how to apply those principles and to live out

our own walk with God before those we are discipling. We should desire to emphasise and model the Lordship of Christ and leave students to work out the implications in their individual situations. Most important of all is prayer. We need to pray that the Holy Spirit will do His work of conviction and enlightening. Paul gives us the basis of a prayer for those we are discipling:

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” **Colossians 2:6-7**

Bibliography

Dowsett, Rose, *The Great Commission* (London: Monarch Books, 2001)

Ogden, Gregg, *Transforming Discipleship* (Downers Grove, US: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003)

5 Ogden 2003: 89

CHAPTER 1

WHO AM I?

My identity in Christ

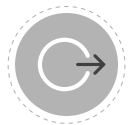


Introduction & Background

While identity is important to all of us, it may be particularly so to those who have transferred to another culture and then in time returned to their own. This is the situation of our international student friends.

When we spend time in another culture, imperceptibly we pick up aspects of that culture, in behaviour, attitudes or values. This contributes to reverse culture shock when we return home. Most returning international students have significant adjustments to make as they settle back into their home country. For those who have converted to a new faith while abroad, there is therefore a double adjustment. And this may need to be worked out in cultures where religion is part of one's national identity.

In addition to looking at issues of identity, chapter 1 should also serve as an opportunity to review the Gospel message with those who have come to faith or those who haven't yet, and to deal with any misunderstandings or lack of assurance of faith.



Aims

- To affirm the group members in their own national identity and all the positives of that

- To help the group members acknowledge and verbalise the different changes which have taken place in them while abroad
- To examine some of the changes which occur when a person becomes a Christian and to lay the foundation for how that might impact on our values, priorities and decision making.



Starter Activities/Useful Resources

You might like to bring along things which illustrate your identity e.g. passport/family photo/items that relate to your occupation/hobbies etc.

A clip from the DVD 'The Bourne Identity' ⁶ (13: Snow/sheltering from snow >17: Finding passports) provides a good introduction to the subject.



Additional Notes

Page 9, Question 2

And what stayed the same?

It is important to get across the positives of national identity. Those studying overseas or who have become Christians while abroad haven't suddenly become British or Western.

Page 10, Question 4

Below are listed some aspects of your new identity to think about.

Individuals or pairs could consider one or more of these and then report back to the group.

CHAPTER 2

FORGIVENESS

I am forgiven & forgiving

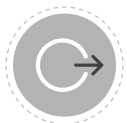


Introduction & Background

Many Christians struggle in this area and pastorally it often becomes a block to Christian growth. For many internationals, cultural elements such as 'losing face' will be very strongly embedded in their thinking and forgiveness may even be seen as a weakness. The challenge is to address the Biblical teaching while being sensitive to personal pain. Be aware there may be deep hurts in your group; some could be victims of betrayal or abuse. Don't lay a cloak of guilt on people. Forgiveness is often a process and requires time.

It is also important to establish what forgiveness isn't. In forgiving someone we are not saying that whatever has happened 'doesn't matter'. Sometimes what has been done to us does matter a lot and we need to acknowledge wrongdoing and pain. However, in forgiving, we need to free ourselves to move on.

It will be good to allow time and space to pray, individually, as a group or in pairs, whichever seems most appropriate.



Aims

- To re-emphasise the forgiveness we have received in Christ
- To open up the subject of our forgiveness of others and to understand its importance for Christian growth



Starter Activities/Useful Resources

Personal testimony and stories are often very powerful in this area.

You may want to introduce some Christian biographies which speak of forgiveness e.g. *The Hiding Place: Corrie Ten Boom*⁷.



Additional Notes

Page 12, Question 1

What does it mean 'to forgive' someone?

A helpful definition is: To choose to stop being angry with someone who has hurt us or done wrong; to desire and pray for the best for that person.

Page 13, A Parable of Jesus

You may need to say something briefly about parables and how to interpret them e.g. they are not allegories and usually only have one main teaching point.

Page 14, Section A ii, Question 11

So, what was wrong with Peter's question (v21)?

It placed a limit on forgiveness.

Page 15, Section C, Question 3

Why does it help us if we forgive someone?

Ultimately, lack of forgiveness damages us as much or maybe more than the person who has wronged us.

7

The Hiding Place: Corrie Ten Boom.

Ten Boom & Sherrill, *The Hiding Place* (Hodder and Stoughton, 2004)

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