
Lent 2020: What is God's Vision for Eastleigh Parish Church?

DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS MATERIAL

Session 1

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SUGGESTED ORDER/OUTLINE FOR THIS SESSION

1. Introduction to this material (10mins)
2. Time of worship (10-20mins)
3. Bible reading & discussion (45mins-1hr)
4. Open prayer (15-20mins)

Section 1: Introduction to this Material

➤ *[Please read this section to the whole of the group.]*

As long as Lent has been observed, it has been a season for reflection. This Lent, we'd like to encourage every member of Eastleigh Parish Church to reflect on this particular question:

What is God's vision for Eastleigh Parish Church?

The season of Lent ends with the Easter weekend. Every year we rehearse both the greatest low point in the whole of history (the death of Jesus) followed by its highest moment of glory (the resurrection of Jesus). The death & resurrection of Jesus was immediately followed by some key events which are summarised by Luke in **Acts 1:1-11** *[please ask someone to read this out loud]*.

Like Luke, Matthew also recorded those final moments of Jesus' earthly ministry. As his time with the disciples drew to a close, he spoke these final words to them,

'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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 28:18-20

You might say that Matthew 28:18-20 is the 'mission statement' that Jesus gave to His Church. In this case, the action of making disciples is absolutely fundamental to the life of the Church.

During the years that Jesus lived alongside his 12 disciples, he gave them a masterclass (along with the best-possible example) of how-to disciple someone else. Although we live thousands of miles and centuries of years distant from that time, the 4 Gospels present us with a faithful record of how Jesus made disciples; and in the rest of the New Testament we are offered an example of some of the highs and

lows of the experiences of the early Church as they sought to replicate the task of disciple-making that Jesus had left them with.

The question for us then isn't '*shall we commit to making disciples?*' (To do this would be to fail to appreciate what Jesus had asked us to do!) – but instead, the question is more like this,

“How shall we go about making disciples? What should we be doing, and how shall we go about it?”

Over these 6 weeks of Lent, we hope (and pray!) that God will bless us all with a clear vision for the next season in the life of Eastleigh Parish Church. There's going to be a lot of opportunity for you to share your ideas and to listen to others. Please do try and keep a notebook and pen handy – and to make a note of any key thoughts/ideas that God may lay on your heart. (In all likelihood, if it is God speaking through you – and not just your bed-time cheese – other people will have been led to the same conclusions too. So please don't be afraid to share your thoughts, however odd they may at first appear to be.)

But first, before we do anything else, we need to 'fix our eyes on Jesus' (Hebrews 12:2). The vision that we are seeking – if it is to be worth following – needs to be God's and not ours! For this reason, we're going to begin in worship.

[End of section to read to whole group.]

Section 2: Worship

Please worship together in way that is most suitable for your group. Here are a few **suggestions** that you might find helpful:

- Read Hebrews 12:1-3, and then meditate on these verses in silence for a few minutes before singing or worshipping in another way.
- You could consider using some of these songs:
 - Be Thou My Vision: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Optrm7IF16s>
 - 10,000 Reasons: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSxocnlaN0A>
 - In Christ Alone: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouGuG97I2RY>
- You might find it helpful to read a Psalm aloud together; perhaps Psalm 91 or 139.

Section 3: Bible Reading & Discussion Questions

- Explain that you're now going to read 2 Bible passages, and then have discussion.
- Please appoint someone to re-read Acts 1:1-11 and Matthew 28:18-20 out-loud to the whole group.

(If you don't already have a usual Bible version that your whole group uses, you might like to try either the NIRV (New International Readers Version) or the NLT (New Living Translation). You can download printable Bible readings for free at www.BibleGateway.com)

Important Notes

- ! PLEASE keep a brief note of any helpful points that might emerge from your group's discussions during Lent. This could be done on behalf of the whole group, or as individuals (or both). You'll have the chance to share from these notes with the wider church later in Lent.
- ! Try to involve the whole of the group in a discussion on the following topics – all of which emerge from the introduction that was read at the start of the session.
- ! These questions are far from perfect... As leader, once you've got a sense of the direction of the questions overall, please feel free to lead the conversation as you see fit.

Discussion Questions

1. The introduction (at the start of this session) said that Lent is a season for reflection.
 - a. How would you describe your response to being asked to reflect on God's vision for Eastleigh Parish? Do you feel like you already know what we ought to be doing? Do you have a vague idea? Or are you all-at-sea?
 - b. Do you enjoy reflection, or do you find it frustrating? Do you like discussion, or do you prefer action?
 - c. Are you surprised to have been asked to join in with this? Or would you prefer if Ian & the Ministry Leadership Team simply announced what they thought the vision ought to be?
 - d. Spend a moment reflecting on all your church experience (whether it's 1 month or 100 years). Can you describe a time that you or those near you received a vision (an idea or plan) from God and saw it through to completion? What was that like? What did you learn through that experience about hearing from God?
2. The introduction above said, *"Matthew 28:18-20 is the 'mission statement' that Jesus gave to His Church. In this case, the action of making disciples is absolutely fundamental to the life of the Church."*
 - a. Do you agree or disagree with this? Why/Why not?
 - b. Is there something else that is equally or more important? If so, what is that, and why do you say that?
3. It has been said, *"Rather than being genuine disciples of Jesus, lots of so-called Christians are just people who go to church."* (You may need to repeat this quote a few times...) What do you think of this comment? Do you agree with it? Why/why not? Have we ever encouraged people to 'simply come to church' rather than becoming a disciple of Jesus? Share examples if you can (and if they are helpful!).
4. What's the difference between belief in Jesus and discipleship of Jesus?
 - a. Does this differentiation matter? If so, why/why not?
5. Is there difference between belonging to a church and taking part in its activities and being a disciple of Jesus?
 - a. Does this differentiation matter? If so, why/why not?
 - b. What are the possible consequences of this question?
 - c. Is EPC clear on this differentiation, and if so, how might we be clearer?

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6. Using a pen & paper, spend a couple of minutes on your own writing a list of what you think are the most important elements of Christian Discipleship.... (e.g. caring for the poor, personal prayer or engaging in evangelism).
 - a. What categories/headings/items are in your list? Why? Discuss...
 - b. What items have you left out that you might have included? Why was that? What criteria did you use for what was to be included/left out?

Note to the Group Leader:

- When appropriate, please bring this discussion to a close.
- Explain that we're going to have a moment of quiet prayer to regather our thoughts and to invite God to speak to us.
- Explain that after this prayer, you're going to be asking one final question for discussion.

- Please invite the group to be silent for a whole minute. (*You might like to open your hands in your laps as a way of saying, 'Lord, I'm listening'.*)

Final Discussion Question

7. Having read Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:1:11 tonight, and with all of our discussion in mind as well:
 - a. Are there some things/activities that we spend a lot of time/energy/resources at EPC that might be reappraised so that we might have a clearer disciple-making focus?
 - b. Can you suggest new ways of doing things that we ought to consider in order to 'make disciples'?

As before, when appropriate, please bring this discussion to a close. Please remind/invite everyone to keep a note of their thoughts/ideas from tonight's session.

Section 4: Prayer

- Please spend some time praying for:
 - The specific needs of your group, and;
 - Any themes/topics that may have emerged from your discussion tonight.
- Now is a good time to pray the Lord's Prayer together.
- Finally, please end your time of prayer using the suggested prayer for Lent from this week's Outlook:

"Dear Heavenly Father, what is your vision for Eastleigh Parish Church? Please give us ears to hear, hearts to care, and the willingness to respond to all that you show us. Amen."