

Vol. 1 Issue 3 • September 2024

DISCŌ VER

The discipleship newsletter for St Mary's Risborough

discō = Latin, 'to learn'

Welcome to the Autumn Newsletter

What should have been an August edition slowly turned into a September Autumn one as the summer seemed to just fly by. In this edition Bryan Matthews has written an article on 'How to Disciple', which looks at discipleship from a different perspective. I have also written an introduction to the Ministry Fair that is coming up in September. As one person said to me recently, the different ministries we run are 'the engine room' of our work at St Mary's. It's a great way to describe these ministry areas, as without them, we would not make much headway in helping people to develop their own discipleship or help others in our community to know the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Like an engine, they are often under the hood and we don't see them running, we just see the effects they have in moving us forwards.

I have also included an article to explain what 'Practicing the Way' is all about and why it is important that we encourage each other to join the course. Ronel has written a reflection for us on her experience of the course we ran at the Yurt group earlier in the year. Finally I have included some more information on stewardship, specifically some pointers towards tithing, and some more thoughts about the Bible.

God bless.

Rev. Andrew Walmsley

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How to Disciple

Bryan Matthews

One of the misunderstood aspects of discipleship is a belief that it is something that only happens within the Christian community and it is only the church that does it. In actual fact, pretty much every hour of every day we are being disciplined, by everything we consume or look at. The news, TV, cinema, theatre, our mobiles and tablets -and especially our social media. You only have to think back to the awful riots in our cities and towns in August where people were given significant misinformation about the dreadful Southport murders - misinformation that they believed and acted on with evil intent, resulting in some quite awful behaviour-that can be the price of being 'mis-disciplined'. It's less a question of whether "am I being disciplined?" as to "what is disciplining me and what am I being disciplined into?"

This was first brought home to me back in 2014 when along with a few people from St Mary's, together with other churches in the area, I attended an Aylesbury Deanery Learning Community Initiative (DLI). This ran for several days over two years and equipped us to fulfil our church mission and inspired us to fulfil God's purpose for His church.

Over those important sessions, we learnt a particular mantra which was best summed up as 'If churches don't disciple people, then society will'. The sadness is also that quite often secular society is more effective at disciplining people than the church is. Why is that, how do they disciple people, and what can we learn from it?

As a piece of homework for the DLI, we were tasked to go out and find out how local companies succeed in disciplining people. Kathryn and I choose Marks & Spencer's and Iceland Stores respectively. Supermarkets and department stores have, perhaps surprisingly, a need to disciple both their customers and staff.



Take the supermarket Iceland as an example. It needs to disciple its customers so that they will shop with them regularly. This is so that they will be satisfied enough with its product range, pricing and customer support so that they will want to return, and that their staff are committed to their values to make their overall vision of "...to deliver sustainable, profitable long-term growth for the benefit of its stakeholders.." be achieved.

Iceland uses a series of taglines to attract and retain customers – for some decades it was the line "That's why mums go to Iceland" previously promoted by 'Mum's favourite', Peter Andre. To bring Iceland up to date and be more inclusive they have now altered their slogan to the more neutral "That's why we go to Iceland" promoted by reality TV star Josie Gibson.

For their staff, Iceland disciple them by gaining their loyalty through five key commitments:

- We love our customers
- We care
- We work together
- We hate waste
- We look after our own

DISCIPLESHIP

The package of staff benefits reflects that (consultation with staff over changes, 15% discount on all products, better than average leave etc) and Iceland are consistently rated as one of the best major UK firms to work for and the company continues to increase the number of shoppers to its stores – plus the 10% discount for over 60 shoppers on a Tuesday helps!

How then can this help us disciple new followers of Christ? It is about using similar techniques to the likes of Iceland and other companies who promote their products and services through a form of 'brand loyalty' and 'nudge' people to accept their belief & their value system for the greater good. Sometimes like Iceland, it involves changing who we appeal to and making our message -that of Jesus- one that speaks to all areas of the community.

Most people are what you would call 'cultural Christians' -people who 'like' Jesus, call themselves 'Christian' and who may even attend church but who do not actively 'follow' Him. The command from Jesus in Luke 9:23 was clear in what Jesus asks of us ("If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me..."). Dr James Merritt, an American pastor summed it up like this:

"If you are going to be a disciple of Jesus, that means for the rest of your life you have to put Jesus before you, above you, ahead of you and instead of you. You've got to come to the point where your life is all of Jesus and none of you. Once you realise what Jesus has done for you and you receive the Jesus that has done so much for you, you refocus every part of your life on this question: "What can I do for Jesus?"

That is what discipleship means -the cost to the self can be great but in the end, boy is it worth it -over to you, Christian!

Coming up in September: Ministry Fair

Recently we have been asking you to think, pray and reflect on what God is calling you to do with your time, talents and money. On September 22nd at all of our services we will be holding a Ministry Fair in church. The aim of the ministry fair is an opportunity for everyone to see the wide range of activities that are run at St Mary's. It will also be a chance to talk to people who are involved in these areas.

We cannot run these ministry activities without your support of time and money. In between and after our services we would like you to spend time finding out more about these ministries and how you might play a part in supporting them. During the following week we would then like you to consider how you can volunteer to help run or support these ministries. As you will see on the day, there is something that we all can get involved in, no matter our age, or abilities. We also want you to consider your giving, as we cannot run these activities without your financial support.

There will then be a follow up to this on Sunday 29th September. In each of our three services there will be a time of response where we would like you to bring to God the area you can volunteer, and a response to giving. For some of us this may be to continue volunteering in a ministry we have been involved in before, and so we commit ourselves once more to that ministry area. Or for others God might be calling you to volunteer in a new ministry. It will also be a chance to offer to God our giving, thanking God for all He gives to us, and offering to God what we can afford.

Our prayer is that the ministry fair will enable all of us to see the scope of what God is doing already in our church and community, and give us the vision for what we could do in the future.



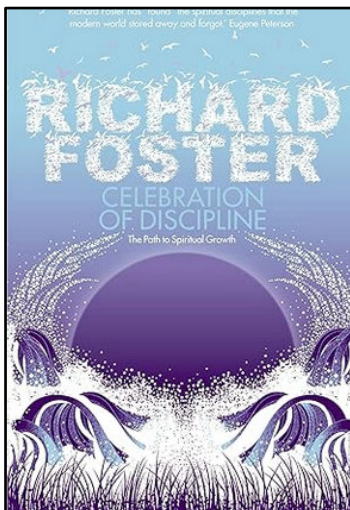
Practicing the Way : Spiritual Disciplines for the Modern Age

Rev. Andrew Walmsley

Psalm 42:1–2 (ESV)

*As a deer pants for flowing streams,
so pants my soul for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?*

Back in 1980 Richard Foster wrote the book 'Celebration of Discipline' as a way of introducing and engaging everyone with the classical spiritual disciplines. In the introduction he wrote:



"In one important sense, the Spiritual Disciplines are not hard. We need not be well advanced in matters of theology to practise the Disciplines. Recent converts - for that matter people who have yet to turn their lives over to Jesus Christ - can and should practise them. The primary requirement is a longing after God."¹

For many this seems like hard work, and even though they may dabble with various disciplines from time to time, they never truly put them into practice. They fail partly because of ingrained habits and a way of life that takes them away from focussing on God. Yet as Foster comments above, these disciplines are for everyone, but the key is a longing for God.

Brother Lawrence recognised the importance of this back in the 17th Century. In his book 'Practising the Presence of God' he urges that all can come to God and dwell with him.

"We cannot escape the dangers which abound in life without the actual and continual help of God: let us then pray to Him for it continually. How can we pray to Him without being with Him? How can we be with Him but in thinking of Him often? And how can we often think of Him, but by a holy habit which we should form of it?"²

We need to escape the bad habits of our lives and come to God. For this to be effective it needs to be a continual way of life that forms new habits. Foster sees this as a path, a new journey that we will travel along. The danger for many is that they see the process, the joining of the path, as enough to make the change in their life, and because of that they fail. The path (or journey) does not produce the change, merely becomes the place where change can occur.³

1 Richard J. Foster, Richard Foster Omnibus (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2000). P.124

2 Brother Lawrence, Practising the Presence of God, Ninth Letter

3 Foster, p. 131

This is where the Spiritual Disciplines come in. It is about changing how we live so that we use the right practices to help us become formed in the image of Christ. In his book 'Practicing the Way', that has been written to go alongside the course of the same name, John Mark Comer write about the importance of the practices. He points out that at the beginning and end of the Sermon on the mount Jesus uses the word practise:

Beginning

Matthew 5:19 (NIVUK84)

but whoever practises and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

End

Matthew 7:24 (NIVUK84)

24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

He comments that this is not how people see following Jesus and being formed to be like Jesus. They do not see the things they do as practices.⁴ If they did see things as practices then they may view things differently. Too many people want the easy way and forget that it is not just about trying but of training. To change the habits (often of a lifetime) we need to retrain ourselves so that we can begin to learn how to put the practices into action. Comer uses the illustration of the person attempting to run the marathon. They would not just stick a pair of new trainers on and expect to run 26.2 miles. To complete the marathon they would need to train. Over weeks they would build up their training so that by the time the marathon comes round they are ready to complete it.⁵

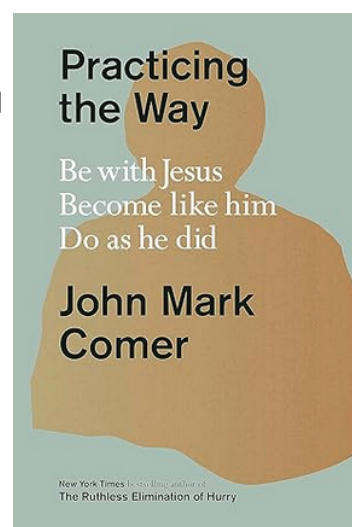
This is how we need to view the Spiritual Disciplines. They are practices that we can begin to include in our lives to help us come closer to God, and to become more like Christ. We can learn how different disciplines work, and how to build these into our lives. Over time these will build so that they become the norm, they become the new habit that helps us dwell with God. But they will need time and training so that we learn where and how to use them.

The book and course 'Practicing the Way' are a great way to help us learn what the Spiritual Disciplines are and how we can begin to build what is often termed a 'rule of life'. What does this mean:

*"A Rule of Life is a schedule and set of practices and relational rhythms that create space for us to be with Jesus, become like him, and do as he did, as we live in alignment with our deepest desires. It's a way of intentionally organising our lives around what matters most - God."*⁶

He goes onto quote Rich Villodas who said:

"This rule doesn't mean a list of rules. It's more of a set of practices, relationships, and commitments that is inspired by the Spirit for the sake of our wholeness in Christ."



4 John Mark Comer, Practicing the Way, (SPCK, London) p. 105

5 Comer, p. 106

6 Comer, p.161

Comer goes on to say that a rule of life can bridge the gap and help turn them into habits, in one sense rewiring our nervous system. *"Without a rule, these ideas will likely devolve into sentimental cliché."*

So I want to encourage you to read the book if you have not already done so, and then join the course as we run this in church. It will introduce you to something life changing, something that will deepen your longing for God, and will change how you live in community with others and how you see the world.

7 Comer, p.169

Sign up for Practicing the Way now, in Church or online using the QR code below:



A Reflection on Practicing the Way

Ronel Murray

I completed the 'Practicing the Way' course in early summer and know some of you will be reading the book prior to the next course starting in September. I found the course and course material excellent. I had an interest in discipleship and was looking for a course to go deeper with Jesus. My lifegroup watched The Chosen together this year and I was struck by how faithful the Disciples were in their journey with Jesus. What a privilege it must have been being with Jesus and learning from Him as his Disciples.

I found the 'Practicing the Way' book and course compelling and it made a profound difference to my faith journey. I have always liked the rhythms of monastic life and the individual Practices is a good way of adding discipline to our daily lives and walk with Jesus. I now practice the Sabbath regularly and have a rhythm of daily prayer, reading my bible and I listen to Lectio 365 and other material. There are nine Practices which I have explored further. I also followed John Mark Comer's podcasts from the course and have added some of the complementary reading like Peter Scanzero's Emotionally Healthy Spirituality to my reading list. The course does demand reading and "homework" before and after the sessions which I included as part of my weekly discipline during the course. I found the spiritual health reflection, a self assessment tool and spiritual formation sessions particularly helpful in my faith journey. The course is presented in a relaxed, uncomplicated manner and the group discussions are a lovely way of enjoying fellowship and community. I can't recommend the course more highly. Enjoy your journey following Jesus.



The Bible in a Year : Give it away!

How do people find out about the Christian faith? Would you be surprised to know that more people come to find out about the Christian faith by reading the bible than by attending a course! That's the information that was discovered in the 'Talking Jesus' report back in 2022. When asked the question 'where would people find out about the Christian faith?' 22% of non-christians said they would read the bible, compared with only 7% who would do a course. This increased to 35% of people who were non-practicing Christians.

This is why the Bible is so important for us today. It is why it is important to read the Bible ourselves so that we know and understand what the Bible is about and contains, and why it is important that we use every opportunity to give the Bible to others who might never have read the bible.

We have got a number of copies for you to purchase of the new 'Easy Read Bible'. This is a bright colourful version of the Bible that has been set out in a way that those not accustomed to the Bible will be able to access easily. At the time of writing we have copies available for only £2.99 - cheap to buy and cheap to give to someone. There are also copies of the 'Easy Read Gospel' for only £1.99, so once more a real opportunity for us to buy a few copies and then give them to people we meet when we think we might have the opportunity to put a bible in their hands.

You never know, they might be one of the 22%-35% of people who pick it up, read it, and then start asking God into their lives. Unless we give them that chance we will never know the effect reading the Bible might have.

It's never too late to start reading the Bible in a Year



If you have not started reading the Bible in a Year it is not too late to start. The whole point is to get us all to start reading more of the Bible each day. It is amazing what you will discover. If you have not started because you have found it hard to read three passages each day, then why not start it with the cut down version that picks out small sections of each book to read.

Or why not buy a copy of the 'Easy Read Bible' and work through the Old Testament and New Testament. You would be surprised how much of the Bible you will get through.

Bible in a year Celebration

If you have been reading the Bible in a Year, whenever you started, we are having a celebration to meet, talk, drink tea / coffee and eat cake. This will be held on Saturday 7th December at St Mary's Church, at 10am.

Put it in your diary and then sign up nearer the time.

What happens when I tithe?



The following are some insights to help you think about tithing.

Those who adopt the tithing principle...

Follow the advice of Paul about proportionate giving: "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income..." (1 Cor 16:2) [4 Paul does not mention giving a tenth in his writings, but it is unlikely that he expected anyone to give less than that – especially given his Jewish background]

Follow the example of many Christians who have adopted this sound and guiding principle [tithing] which provides them with the basic biblical parameters to shape their giving of money to the Lord. The Giving for Life report recognised that there are many churches and Christian individuals who continue to find the tithe helpful, encouraging and challenging. It stated that "many people find proportionate giving and tithing to be a helpful and challenging way of assessing whether we are truly generous, setting that which we give away in the context of that which we keep to fund our own lifestyles."

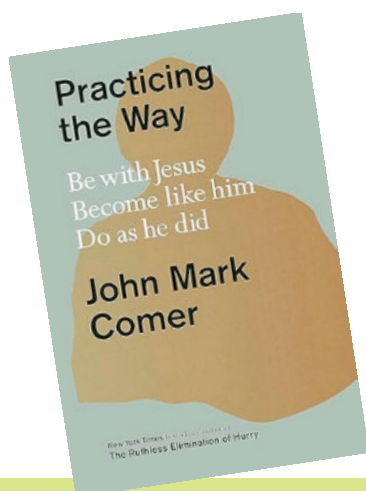
Follow the advice given in a Pastoral letter from the House of Bishops: "...all those who have the Church's welfare at heart must ask themselves not merely 'what does the Church need in the circumstances now facing it?' but 'what am I called to give gladly out of the bounty God has given me?'. The response should be tested against the standards already established of the tithe (10 per cent of take home pay to charitable purposes) and that set by the Synod of not less than 5 per cent of net income to the church."

Experience a new dimension to their giving. In his book *Spiritual Health Warning*, Bishop Michael Baughan states that: "....anyone who has adopted the tithing principle will say that it has been a new dimension to their giving. It means that God has first claim on our income and not the remnants of what we can afford when we have spent what we want on ourselves. The practical steps of putting the actual cash on one side each week or month, or of setting up a separate bank account, or of some other helpful method, means that you start by thinking of living on the other nine-tenths. The money for the Lord and for the needs in the world is set aside, and regular giving is possible and thought-through. The sharing in the offering at church services becomes not an embarrassing feature, but a positive part of our worship."

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Resources

In every newsletter I would like to suggest some resources on Discipleship or related topics.



John Mark Comer : Practicing the Way

ISBN: 9780281086672

If you have not read the book yet, this is the accompanying book to the course that we will be running in Church, starting 25th September. The book (as I mention in the article on pages 5-6) is all about how we can live and be formed to be more like Jesus. It is a great book and highly recommended by all who read it.

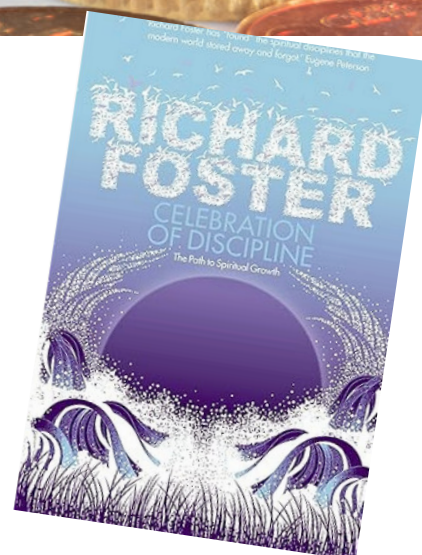
Richard Foster: Celebration of Discipline

ISBN: 9780340979266

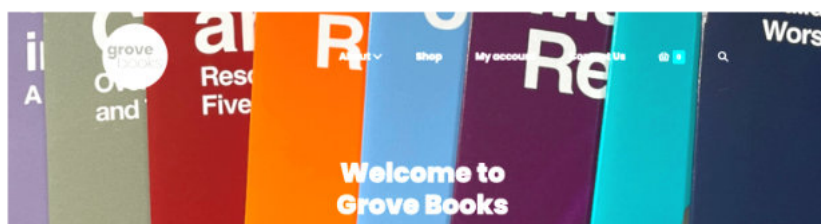
Arguably the most established contemporary spiritual classic by our most profound living religious writer. This timeless classic has helped well over a million people discover a richer spiritual life infused with joy, peace and a deeper understanding of God.

The book explores the 'classic disciplines' of Christian faith: the inward disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting, and study; the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission and service and the corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance and celebration.

If you want to get an in-depth understanding of spiritual disciplines then there is no better book.



Grove Booklet series



If you have not come across the Grove booklet series before then they are well worth looking at. They are a series of themed booklets that give a quick look at a wide range of topics (see side image). These short booklets are usually only 28 pages long but give a good overview of the topic, with questions and resources for further reading.

For more information visit www.grovebooks.co.uk



We have a number of Life Groups that meet during the week. They come in all shapes and sizes, and meet at different times - afternoon and evening. Life Groups can become one of the most important ways that we can grow as disciples as we meet with others to study, pray and develop. If you are not in a group and want to join one then please speak to Claire Barbary, Liz Stoddard or any of the clergy and we can help organise this for you.

SPECIAL AUTUMN EVENTS

MINISTRY FAIR Sun 22 - 29 Sept

giving of our time, talents & resources

HARVEST FESTIVAL Sunday 6th Oct

celebrated at all morning services

LIGHT PARTY Thurs 31st Oct, 4-6pm

Games, crafts, food for all the family

TIME TO REMEMBER Sun 3rd Nov, 3pm

A memorial service for loved ones

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY 10th Nov, 10am

Civic Service in Church followed by Act of

Remembrance at the Market Hall at 11am

EAST WINDOW DEDICATION SERVICE

with **BISHOP STEVEN**, Sun 17th Nov, 5pm

In memory of Di & Gos Home

GLITTERBALL for **DAVID & JO** Fri 22 Nov, 7pm

Music, dancing & food as we begin our farewells

BIBLE THROUGH THE YEAR, Sat 7 Dec, 10am

End of year celebration in the Chapter House

ST MARY'S, CHURCH STREET
PRINCES RISBOROUGH HP27 9AA
WWW.STMARYSRISBOROUGH.ORG.UK
parishoffice@stmarysrisborough.org.uk



01844 273300



St Mary's AUTUMN TERM DATES 2024

Sharing the love of Christ with all

What's on this Autumn at St Mary's

SUNDAY WORSHIP *livestreamed to YouTube

8am Holy Communion (said) **9.30am Holy Communion***

11.15am 'Live@St Mary's' with the Worship Band

- Sept 1 What's in your heart?
- Sept 8 Jesus responds to a mother's love
- Sept 15 Who do you say I am?
- Sept 22 What God wants
- Sept 29 Give God what is His
- Oct 6 Looking beyond creation to the Creator
- Oct 13 Finding rest in Jesus
- Oct 20 Serving Others
- Oct 27 Come all you who are thirsty
- Nov 3 A taste of Heaven
- Nov 10 10am Civic Service: *We will remember them*
- Nov 17 Believing
- Nov 24 Jesus Christ, our King

MID-WEEK HC Wednesdays, 10.30am in church

ST PETER'S EVENSONG & shortened HC

15th Sept, 13th Oct (Harvest) at 6pm, 10 Nov at 3pm

WHOLE CHURCH PRAYER EVENING

Weds 4 Sept and Tues 19 Nov 7.30pm

UNPLUGGED Sun 6 October 6.30pm in church

An opportunity to unplug from the world around us

ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

Children's groups meet **Sundays** in the 11.15am service

PLAY CAFE Tuesdays in term time, 9.30-11am, church

MESSY CHURCH 3.15-5pm in church

29 Sept Messy Harvest

PRACTICING THE WAY Begins **Weds Sept 25**

7.30-9pm in the Chapter House

This Autumn Discipleship Course runs for 8 weeks

ST MARY'S MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES

@THE YURT Weekly Wednesday meeting, 7.30-9.30pm

@THE YURT Weekly Mon & Fri morning prayer, 7.30-8am

Narnia Retreat: Sat 21 Sept / **Bread & Bible:** Sat 2 Nov

@CULVERTON FARM Maker & Fixer Group

3rd Sunday of the month, 3-5pm, all ages welcome

At **Kop Hill Climb** all day on Sun 15 Sept

TEA FOR ALL Sunday, 2.30pm in the Chapter House

22 Sept **27 Oct** **24 Nov**

MONTHLY LUNCH CLUB Weds, 10am to 3pm, church

4 Sept **2 Oct** **6 Nov** **4 Dec**

BREAKFAST & TALK Saturday, 9-10.30am, Church Hall

LADIES: **31 Aug** **2 Nov**

MEN: **14 Sept** **9 Nov**

BEREAVEMENT DROP-IN Mon, 3pm, Chapter House

9 Sept **14 Oct** **11 Nov** **9 Dec**

This newsletter has been produced as part of the work of St Mary's Church, Princes Risborough. For more information about the work that we do please see our main website www.stmarysrisborough.org.uk. For enquires please contact the church office or email them: parishoffice@stmarysrisborough.org.uk