

'This book illuminates, guides, encourages and challenges readers to think about what it means to follow Jesus.'

THE REVD CANON DR SHARON PRENTIS

GUY DONEGAN-CROSS

DISCIPLESHIP WALK THIS WAY



*Living the life of an
everyday Christian disciple*

Praise for Discipleship: Walk This Way

‘Compassionate and realistic, *Walk this Way* affirms the value of the ordinary while also painting a distinctive and powerful vision for the future.’

The Revd Alan Garrow, vicar, St Peter’s Harrogate

‘In these books Guy shares from his own story as well as from years of pastoral experience, blending deep truths with practical insight into how to radically follow Jesus. Read them to grow as a disciple and be part of discipling others.’

Andy Winnill, director of mission, Church of England Birmingham

‘Like an experienced and sage companion on an adventurous journey, this book illuminates, guides, encourages and challenges readers to think about what it means to follow Jesus.’

The Revd Canon Dr Sharon Prentis, deputy director, Church of England Racial Justice Unit

‘With clarity, honesty and real-life wisdom, Guy bridges the gap between knowing about discipleship and actually walking it out in daily life... perfect for individuals, small groups and church leaders who want to cultivate a culture of authentic discipleship. They don’t just offer information; they offer transformation. Highly recommended!’

The Revd Canon Andy Glover, team leader of Hoole Baptist Church and Fresh Streams

‘I love the fact that [Guy] has treated discipleship as a whole-life issue. It is not about just the passing on of knowledge. This book will show you how to follow Christ with all aspects of your life and how to teach others to do the same. I cannot recommend it enough.’

Dr Harvey Kwiyani

‘Here is a great work... Mature, love-filled wisdom, beautifully and humbly shared, pointing us towards the master. So good.’

The Revd Richard Wilson, vicar, St Mary’s Reigate

‘I invited [Guy] to speak about discipleship... I saw the fire was still burning within him to present to the world a no-frills, practical and challenging walk in the footsteps of Christ.’

Adrian Holloway, author, senior pastor, The Beacon Church, Camberley and founder, The John 3:16 Trust

‘Here we find an approach to Christian discipleship rooted in a deep understanding of the Bible and which offers theological thinking stimulated by the questions those exploring faith are asking. I commend this resource to you and pray its use in ministry bears much fruit for the kingdom!’

The Rt Revd Michael Volland, bishop of Birmingham

‘These books are packed full of brilliant insights into the life of the disciple. They are full of great stories and quotes. Guy makes this life seem very accessible.’

Nic Harding, director, Kairos Connexion

‘Guy has given the church an accessible, enjoyable route into the adventure of discipleship which will be fruitful for local churches and study groups... Drawing repeated connections between theology and practice, these resources will be stimulating for the many people in our church communities who thirst for learning and further growth.’

The Revd Dr Samuel Gibson, vicar, St George’s Edgbaston

‘This work provides essential insights into missionary discipleship as well as a framework for going deeper in our individual walk with Christ. A timely, much-needed resource for the church both corporately and individually.’

The Rt Revd Arun Arora, bishop of Kirkstall

‘What I like most about Guy’s take on faith is that there’s no one-size-fits all; there’s space for different people, different gifts and the messy realities life. All in all, Guy’s books are probably some of the warmest, most encouraging ones I know for taking the next steps to follow Jesus.’

Canon Dr Mark Powley, archbishop’s mission enabler for the north

Discipleship Walk This Way



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GUY DONEGAN-CROSS

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Ministries

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In memory of and with thanks for Rollo.
We got to walk the way together.

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Introduction

Whether you have been a Christian for a while or are just beginning to explore your journey, this book is written for you if you find yourself wondering what difference being a disciple really makes.

It follows on from the shorter *Start This Way*, which you can read first but don't have to, which introduces how discipleship begins, what the foundations of being a Christian disciple are and the daily attitude of a disciple. This book, *Walk This Way*, is a guide to the lifestyle, character and aim of being an ordinary Christian disciple.

Together, these books aim to explain what discipleship means for everyday Christians, in a way normal people can relate to. More importantly, they are a resource to help shape the way you live. When you have finished them, you will hopefully have experienced a little more lived discipleship and will know how to continue to grow and follow.

These books have a particular emphasis on lived experience, the 'So what?' of Christian life. As we noted in the first book, sometimes we can wonder what difference being a Christian disciple makes to the average person who spends most of their life doing the same things as everyone else in the world. Our lives seem, superficially at least, very similar to most of the world's population.

We know Christians *believe* things which are different. The issue is how those beliefs are meant to affect our daily lives. How do Christians *experience* life differently? How might being a disciple change the direction of my life? What does God hope that I will become? These books explore what discipleship is, but they are more interested in digging into how discipleship *feels*.

Start This Way began by acknowledging that the word ‘discipleship’ is common in the church but unusual everywhere else. Even though Jesus used it often, there are many perspectives on what it can mean. But these books are written with the aim of unlocking this word and what it means in daily experience. Doing this can offer us the way to a life less ordinary – the existence we were made for.

Two particular groups of people might find this book helpful.

You might have been a Christian for many years but think there might be more to it. You don’t feel that different from anyone else. When someone asks you if you are a disciple, the question feels uncomfortable. There might be some Christians who have believed the right things for many years but find themselves in a rut. We might have ideas about God, life and the universe which we hold on to, but we struggle to know what it means to live as a disciple. If anyone asks us what a disciple is, or how to live the Christian life, we might lack confidence in knowing what to say. We might feel we are going through the motions.

If this is you, the book aims to explain and explore what discipleship means in a way most people can relate to. More importantly, it is a resource to help shape the way you live.

Or perhaps you are a church leader, priest or minister. This book springs from my experience of trying to help develop disciples in the local church and across a wider area. A lot of us long to make discipleship our focus but know how challenging it can be to make this the priority. For those who long to see the growth of confident disciples, *Walk This Way* tries to offer a robust roadmap to genuine development rooted in lived experience.

Alongside the companion book, *Start This Way*, *Walk This Way* can be used as a journey of at least a year which might help move someone from an initial course, like Alpha, to a greater experience of confident, everyday discipleship.

The books aim to explain where discipleship begins in an easily relatable way. They aim to be accessible, but not lightweight. They offer theological thinking springing from questions most people ask and illustrated by lots of real-life examples.

Content

Start This Way considered why we even think about being disciples in the first place. It looked at some of the reasons why we wrestle with this unfamiliar word. It boiled things down to the **heart** of discipleship – a life of surrendering to God being at the centre. It looked at how surrender to God can be experienced in varied ways at different times. It explored the **foundations** of our thinking and feeling which need to be in place before we make any attempt to be a Christian disciple. What we *do* as disciples always needs to be a response to who we *are* as disciples.

Finally, it looked at the one principle which helps us to begin to experience discipleship in our everyday lives – the daily **attitude** of a disciple which will make all the difference. It outlined what it feels like to be people who pay attention to God and respond to what God might be showing us in our daily lives. This is how we ‘follow’. It finished with some very practical guidance on what this might feel like, and addressed some of the questions or insecurities about the idea of paying attention to God.

Lifestyle



Following on from those beginnings, *Walk This Way* is a guide to experiencing the **lifestyle** of an ordinary disciple.

The first chapter introduces the lifestyle of a disciple as being a kind of apprentice. An apprentice is someone who sticks close to their leader or teacher. As they experience that closeness, the one they are following starts to rub off on them. Over time, they start to do the things they do,

in the way in which they do them. In the same way, the lifestyle of a disciple has three elements. Firstly, it is a lifestyle of increasingly ‘being with God’. This leads to, secondly, the disciple’s character becoming more like Christ’s. This in turn leads to, thirdly, the disciple increasingly joining in with God’s work in the world.

Chapter 2 explores how disciples can continue to grow in this lifestyle throughout their lives. How does what we know actually change us, in any long-term way?

Chapters 3–7 focus on what it actually means to ‘be with God’. Above all, discipleship lifestyle begins and continues by regularly being aware of God’s loving presence. Apprentices want to be close to the one they are following. They examine how the habits of being a Christian disciple can help us live closely to God. There are chapters on worship, taking bread and wine, prayer, the Bible and the principles of a balanced life. These practices help us to give God our attention and space in our daily lives.

Character



Chapters 8–11 explore how we might change as people. We know Christians are meant to be ‘Christlike’, to be growing more like him in character. We ask what Christian **character** is and in what ways we are called to be different. We look at whether and how our character can really change. We unpack age-old wisdom about what helps us to grow, the role of the things we do regularly, how much is about us or God and why we need each other to change. We finish by looking at how disciples can approach life’s difficulties.

Aim



Finally, *Walk This Way* looks more specifically at the meaning of being a ‘missionary disciple’ by exploring the **aim** of a disciple’s (and every human being’s) life. Chapters 12–19 ask: what are we living for? We examine the nature of God’s mission in the world, and where we fit in

with that mission. We look at how God equips us, in our weakness, to take part in it. We see how mission is for everyday life, not just a special part of it. It is for everyone, not just a few people. We investigate how mission can include everything we do, in the 95% of our lives we spend not in church buildings. We look at God's ultimate plan for the world, and how his promised future shapes our daily lives. We explore aspects of mission: sharing faith naturally and helping others to grow, being a blessing alongside other Christians, fighting for a better world and whether praying for things makes any difference.

Reading with others

Like *Start This Way*, this book is designed for individual and group use. Each chapter also contains questions within the text and at the end to help people reflect on and respond to what they are reading. A relevant Bible passage is offered. It is suggested that a good way of listening to God in the Bible passage is simply to read it through twice, and then use Discovery Bible Study questions:

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about people?

What does this passage say about how God calls us to obey?

In the light of what we now know about this passage,
what is God calling you to do? (I will...)

Who might you share this story with this week?

The Discovery Bible Study method is accessible for anyone and helps us apply the Bible to our real lives. Used over time it will enable most people to have confidence in listening to God through scripture. It will also be a method which others can pick up quickly to use with others. (There is an appendix about leading Discovery Bible Studies well on page 288.)

1

Design for life

*What feels different about being a disciple?
How will being a disciple begin to shape my lifestyle?*

Has anything changed?

If you ever develop a close friendship, commit to someone, open yourself up to someone in a trusting way, or get married, on the surface things might look just the same. You might ask yourself, 'Has anything changed? What is different now?'

And the answer comes back: nothing... and everything.

'Nothing' in the sense that, like most people around the globe, you continue to spend your time sleeping, eating, doing domestic jobs, working or studying, watching TV, seeing friends and resting. While we might do them in a slightly different way, most people in the world spends their lives doing similar things.¹

Superficially, most of the activities you did before your friendship or commitment to another person carry on. Christian disciples spend most of our lives doing things that most other people do. At first glance we might not seem that different.

However, for me, after I had met some key friends, or after getting married, it is also true to say that everything felt that it had changed – my life had shifted. From then on everything had to be more and more with reference to someone else. What I paid attention to changed. My choices and priorities started to change. My motivations began to alter. Even my character was affected.



The presence of close relationships meant that, although I was still doing the same things day by day, the way in which I went about those things and the reasons I did them, had fundamentally altered. I didn't need a list telling me 'How to be a friend' or 'How to be married' (although practical advice from more experienced people is always welcome). I needed to let these new relationships change my lifestyle. Completely.

It is the same with being a disciple. There the original disciples were, carrying on their daily business of mending their nets, when Jesus called to them saying, 'Follow me.' They had no hesitation but dropped the nets immediately, because they understood exactly what they were being invited to do.

On the surface they continued to live normal human lives. But their compass points had moved. They had thought they were living in one kind of world; they now knew they were living in another. They might not have had a clue where they would be sleeping or eating that week, but they knew that their lives were different now, and they had some idea of what following him would feel like.

Many things a disciple naturally starts to do over time are quite new. There are real changes which affect how we use the time we have in this earthly phase of life. They are essential things – like being able to pray, worship or listen to God. We will be exploring the experience of these later.

Before we get into specifics, what might help us understand what has shifted? What is the natural lifestyle of someone who wants to surrender to God? What's the *shape* of their life? What is the aim of discipleship?





What was the life of a disciple in Christ's day?

In and around the time of Christ, disciples would live with and follow their rabbi so closely it was difficult to know where the life of the rabbi ended and the disciple's life started.

Jewish people said, 'May you be covered with the dust of your rabbi.' In other words, may you be walking so closely with them, listening to them and watching them that at the end of each day may you be covered with the dust they kick up from the road in front of you. The call was not to 'Believe in me,' but to 'Follow me.' To be a disciple is about being someone who learns as they follow.

The best way of describing what this feels like is to think of being an apprentice to someone. While we might find it hard to understand the word 'disciple', most have an instinct for what being apprenticed to someone means. It is a useful equivalent in helping us understand what the lifestyle of discipleship looks like.

Being an apprentice involves three things. First, you must **be close to someone** – so that you can know them, observe them, listen to them and learn from them. You have to *be with them*.

Second, as this happens, you find that you gradually **become a bit more like the person** you are apprenticed to. This might be at the very basic level of learning certain techniques or skills which you start to copy or it may even be that aspects of their character start to rub off on you – the way they handle conflict, for example. You will increasingly be able to anticipate how they might react to things and start to act in that way yourself. You are increasingly *becoming like them*.



Third, the ultimate aim of an apprentice is **to take on the work of the person you are following** – to the extent that you are able to apprentice other people. An apprentice craftsperson becomes an expert craftsperson. You are carrying on the work of the teacher, *joining in with their task*.

This framework of being with someone, becoming more like them and joining in with their work is exactly what we see developing in the life of Jesus' disciples. This became their lifestyle. People who surrender to God are invited into the very same way of life. Like them, we are with God in our daily lives. Just as their characters were changed by being with Jesus, so we too are becoming like Christ in character and skills. In the same way that they carried on Christ's work, we are joining in with the work of God's Spirit in the world.



Being with God

The lifestyle of discipleship is firstly about 'being with God'. If he is to be at the centre of our lives, then it is obvious that sticking close to him will become our focus. If you want to learn from a teacher, you spend as much time with them as possible.

It is obvious how the first disciples could be 'with Jesus' – they walked and talked with him, literally. But what do we mean by 'being with God' now, in our daily lives? Isn't God everywhere, all the time? When are we ever not with him?

While he was on earth, Jesus could only ever be in one place at one time. But before he went to his Father, he promised his disciples:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and *be with you forever*— the Spirit of truth... you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave



you as orphans; I will come to you... On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you... My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

JOHN 14:16–18, 20, 23 (emphasis added)

God is already with us, so in what way can I be with him? I often have times when I am in the same room as someone, but I zone out of the conversation. We are in the same space, but my mind is elsewhere. I can find myself suddenly being brought back to giving that person my full attention, and sometimes that can feel like I am noticing them for the first time. They have been there all along, but I have been unaffected by the fact.

When we talk about ‘being with God’, our part is to be *aware* of the reality that he is always with us. It is to consciously call to mind the presence of his Spirit. Dallas Willard puts it this way:

The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to keep God before our minds. This is the fundamental secret of caring for our souls... as we take intentional steps toward keeping God before us. Soon our minds will return to God as the needle of a compass constantly returns to the north. If God is the great longing of our souls, he will become the pole star of our inward beings.²

Discipleship lifestyle starts here – by giving God our attention in every possible way. Jesus told us that before we *do* anything we must abide in him (John 15).

Archbishop Rowan Williams says that:

Being a disciple means to be someone who keeps watching, listening and learning. There’s no magic, or celebrity, or certificates to it. Just watching, listening and learning as an ongoing process.³



God is always with us and invites us to know him more and more. The first thing an apprentice does is to pay attention. It turns out that the daily attitude of listening to God and responding to him is also the start of a disciple's lifestyle.



Becoming like Christ

As an apprentice spends time with their teacher, it is only natural that they become more like them. Character change is a key part of being a disciple. In fact, it is part of being fully human.

Character change is not about taking away your uniqueness or your freedom to make choices. The aim for Christian disciples is not to become clones of each other. God gifts each person with their own distinct personality – the way we come across to others, whether we are naturally loud or quiet, etc.

Character change is about the development of the inner person – what the Bible calls our 'heart'. This is the place from which we make the decisions, choices and priorities which affect others. When Paul writes to early Christians, he says that the 'fruit of your salvation [is] the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ' (Philippians 1:11, NLT). Paul longed for us to be mature in Christ and that Christ would be formed in us.

The aim is that as we grow in being with God, Jesus' priorities and instincts increasingly become our own.

As we are with him, we gradually want to love others like Christ loves them.

As we spend time abiding in him, we increasingly see the world and make choices based on what Christ does.



The main evidence which shows someone is a disciple is not about success or circumstances. Instead, it is about character. Disciples should be able to look back five years and, whether our circumstances have been good or bad, be able to see how our characters are a little bit more like Jesus. Similarly, five years from now we should hope that we will be able to look at who we are today and see how we have changed.

As we grow in becoming like Christ, our expectation is that, although we cannot be perfect while sin remains present in the world, we will be being transformed into his image. Sometimes character change can happen in dramatic moments, but because God always cooperates with us, it is mostly a lifelong journey. Another friend of mine once had a tattoo on her arm of the Chinese character for death. It was an expression of the hopelessness she felt about life. But there came a day when she wanted to tattoo over those characters and instead covered them with a tattoo of the crown, and words about how God has shown his love for her. Getting there had been a journey, but the change to the outward mark on her arm was a sign of a change in her heart.

PAUSE What do I like about my character?
What would I like to change?



Joining in with the Spirit

As an apprentice, you spend time with your teacher and you find yourself becoming more like your teacher, but the fulfilment of your apprenticeship is to be able to do the things your teacher does, joining in with their work. Ultimately you will grow into being able to apprentice others.



The aim of a discipleship lifestyle is to join in with God's work in the world. Jesus' first call to his disciples was: 'Follow me.' His last call was: 'Go and make disciples.' They moved from being called to be with him and become like him to being sent by him.

It is sometimes easy to split our lives up into sacred parts, which we think God is interested in, and secular parts, which we think he isn't. The opposite is true. We can join in with God's mission in everything.

We do this in small or great ways, at home, work, in our neighbourhoods, and even sometimes at church. God, through his Spirit, is at work in every area of life, bringing the whole world back to himself, healing what has been broken. God, through his Holy Spirit, is working his purpose out, and disciples get to join in with this work. We call this mission (which means 'being sent'), and it involves healing, justice, looking after the planet, sharing faith and nurturing others as disciples.⁴

The apprentice will gradually take on the work of the teacher and do things the way the teacher does them. Dallas Willard describes it like this: 'I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner in which he did all that he did.'⁵

It is easy as well to split the church community up in our thinking, feeling that some people are more called than others. In this way of seeing things, 'missionaries' are a special class of people who join in with the Spirit around the world. Some people think that church leaders or priests have a deeper, full-time commitment to the mission of God than most other people.

Again, the opposite is true. The disciple who is serving God's purposes in the school kitchen is just as much involved with God's work as the priest. He is serving children, being creative with food, ensuring the environment is well-cared for and demonstrating the compassion of Jesus to those who are stressed.



The builder is joining in with God's mission just as much as the missionary in a foreign land. She is creating spaces which help people live well and enjoy the goodness of God's creation and healthy community. She is serving colleagues, ensuring safety and well-being, offering her story of discipleship to those who are open.

Apprentices become their teacher's hands and feet wherever they are. It is striking how Jesus passed his mission on to every disciple, and how quickly he entrusted them with his work. They learnt on the job, as they put prayer, preaching and healing into practice. They did not have to wait until they became experts.

As we begin to surrender to God, what lifestyle are we entering? A discipleship lifestyle is about having a close relationship with someone in which we are increasingly being with them, becoming like them and doing the things they do. In further chapters we will unpack what this means in practice and what it will feel like in our lived experience.

Summary

At first glance, disciples' lives might not seem that different from others. I do similar things day by day to most people, but the *way* in which I go about those things and the *reasons* I do them are fundamentally altered.

The first disciples understood exactly what they were being invited to do. They knew what following Jesus would feel like.

Disciples in Jesus' day were like apprentices – this can help us understand the lifestyle of being a disciple.

Apprenticeship is about being with God, becoming more like Christ and joining in with the Spirit's work.



The first and most basic thing I can and must do is to keep God before my mind, to give God my attention in every way possible.

Listening to God and responding to him is the start of a disciple's lifestyle.

As I am increasingly with God, the priorities and instincts which Jesus has increasingly become my own.

The fulfilment of my apprenticeship is to be able to do the things my teacher does, joining in with his work.

REFLECTING

What might help me pay attention to God?

How do I feel about becoming more like Christ?

What kinds of things would I like to do
to join in with God's work?

BIBLE PASSAGE

John 10:25–33

RESPONDING

How am I going to put into practice paying attention to God?



Notes

- 1 Did you know, for example, that the country where on average people sleep the most per day is China (9 hours, 2 minutes) and where people sleep the least is South Korean (7 hours, 51 minutes)? Interestingly in global terms people in China also spend the most time in paid work per day (5 hours 15 minutes) compared to, for example, the UK, where the average daily work time is 3 hours 55 minutes. **ourworldindata.org/time-use#how-do-people-across-the-world-spend-their-time-and-what-does-this-tell-us-about-living-conditions**.
- 2 Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' essential teachings on discipleship* (Monarch Books, 2006), p. 125.
- 3 Former Archbishop Rowan Williams, 'Being disciples', talk given at Fulcrum Conference, 2007.
- 4 These are known as the five marks of mission. They were first put together in 1984 by the Anglican Consultative Council, fully adopted in 1990, and are widely accepted across many denominations as a guide for mission throughout the world.
- 5 Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our hidden life in God* (Harper Collins, 1998), p. 283.



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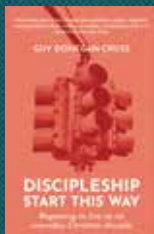
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Guy Donegan-Cross has worked across churches in Birmingham in roles encouraging and resourcing discipleship and leadership. Prior to that he was in parish ministry in four different contexts, most recently leading St Mark's, Harrogate. He loves helping people to grow in their everyday experience of being Christian disciples. He is married to Ruth and they have four children and a Norfolk Terrier. He loves his improvisation group and the free jazz on offer in Birmingham!

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