



For  
*now*

– *being the church  
in unusual times*

## For *now* – following Jesus together

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### *Just now: Discipleship in difficult and dark days*

Many of the methods we usually deploy to develop discipleship in our congregation's life have been impacted by restrictions on gathering together arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. An aspect of church life that particularly requires us to be together has suddenly become more difficult when circumstances have forced us to be apart. However, more than ever we need to find simple ways of helping one another to follow Jesus together against the background of unusually dark days.

**Watch** a short introduction to this session by [clicking here](#)

**Read:** James 1:2-8. [Click here](#) for the passage

**Talk about:** *God at work in our circumstances*

Following Jesus isn't all about enjoying special experiences on the mountaintop, but also learning to follow him in the difficulties of the valley. Followers of Jesus need to understand they aren't immune from suffering and that discipleship often involves a cost. These verses teach us about our own trials and suggest ways in which we might encourage others in their faith as they experience difficult circumstances.

- 1.** The idea that we could 'consider it pure joy... whenever we face trials of many kinds' (v1) challenges our very feeling-centred response to life's ups and downs. James addresses his instruction to 'brothers and sisters' together. In what ways can other people gently help us gain a deeper perspective on what God is doing in our lives when circumstances are difficult?
- 2.** These verses read like a roadmap for this season of life, charting the landscape of our struggle to find joy (v2), persevere (v4), depend on God for wisdom (v5), and believe and not doubt (v6). Which of these are you finding particularly difficult in present circumstances as you try to follow Jesus? In which area have you found encouragement?
- 3.** Some of the things we might have come to rely on for spiritual growth have been stripped away during the Covid-19 pandemic. Restrictions mean that Sunday worship has been disrupted and other church programmes have been paused. In what ways has this caused you to have to find fresh ways to persevere and develop resilience in your discipleship? How have you experienced the help of others, or reached out to express your support to someone else, as you have tried to follow Jesus together? What little things have made a big difference?

4. Verse 4 presents discipleship as something that slowly and painstakingly matures before coming to completion. How are you finding yourself having to exercise patience and perseverance in following Jesus in this unusual season of life? In what simple ways can you help others who are struggling to just keep going?

**Consider:** *Ways we can follow Jesus together*

There are simple things we can all do both to develop our own discipleship and also encourage the faith of others. Used as appropriate, these might help your congregation develop discipleship together while navigating ongoing restrictions.

- **Bible** – Commit to reading a section of the Bible together. Why not start with the book of James and read a section each day. If you can, read it alongside others from your congregation or small group and share what God is teaching you.
- **Share** – Stay in touch via a Whatsapp group, or pick up the phone to speak with someone else from church at the same time each week. Use these opportunities to share what you find yourself going through and what you are learning.
- **Pray** – Develop a list of five people to pray for. Use this as a rhythm for your own prayer life, but also ask those on the list how you can be praying for them and encourage them that you will do so. Keep adding to the list in the weeks ahead.
- **Connect** – When church meetings or small group gatherings are less regular, try to connect with others for a short video call. Get someone to share a verse from Scripture that has spoken to them and take time to pray for one another.
- **Read** – Pick up a Christian book to read that will help you in your spiritual growth. If possible, aim to read it at the same time as others so that you can share what you are learning.
- **Walk with** – Order a copy of one of PCI's Proximity discipleship series. Invite a younger or older Christian to go through the eight sessions with you.

**Try:** *Tips for developing a discipleship conversation*

- **Start** – Start by asking, "what is God teaching you at this time?" Give space to reflect more deeply on the answer and time to listen.
- **Develop** – As you listen to what is being shared, consider if the response is a promise to be remembered, a truth to live by, a challenge to step into, or a sin from which to repent. Develop the conversation by asking, "how do you think you need to respond to what you've been learning?"
- **Encourage** – Share one encouraging thought in response to what has been said. It might be a short Bible passage, a relevant example from your own life, or some of your own reflections linked to what the other person is learning.
- **Next steps** – Suggest some simple next steps by pointing to any helpful resources, books, podcasts or opportunities that might help shape further thinking or develop response.
- **Pray** – Ask for something in particular for which prayer is needed. Then pray. Keep it short, simple and tailored to what you know of where this person is on their journey of faith – still searching, new believer, long time follower of Jesus.

**Pray:** About what God is leading your congregation to do for now to follow Jesus together.



## **Follow up?**

Proximity is a series of short booklets providing biblical content and practical questions on a range of discipleship themes usable in one-to-one or small group discussion.

[www.presbyterianireland.org/proximity](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/proximity)

