

# Discipleship

## Sandra Crawford

You have got one minute to write down the 10 sermons that have had the most influence on your life (I reckon even preachers will struggle to get above 3!!)

You now have another minute to write down 10 people who have had the most influence on your life.

When I analysed my list of 10 people it was mostly made up of Christian leaders who had taken me under their wing at some point or another in my life (it also included my mum and my husband). I've been a follower of Jesus for 25 years, and as I look back there have been a number of key people, who have encouraged, challenged, taught, given me opportunities to serve, and invested time in me. They allowed me into their homes, their families and their lives, and I watched and learnt. There have also been times when I have chosen to go it alone, and soon found myself in a mess.

I look at the life of Jesus and see him spending time with people, investing in people, loving people, and doing life. He had the 12 disciples, who he spent oodles of time with. Out of those 12, there were three who he seemed to have a closer friendship with, and then there was John who had a special relationship with Jesus. With the disciples, Jesus loved, cared, hung out, went on picnics, went fishing, went to weddings, ate with them, taught them, delegated to them, chastised them, went on walks with them, he lived life with them. Beyond this group there was a wider group, and then the hundreds of people whose lives Jesus touched.

I am a youthworker. For youthworkers Matthew 28:19 says

'Therefore go and make youth groups in all nations, playing crazy games, eating pizza, and baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them about sex, drugs, self esteem, Big Brother, relationships, and other stuff which crops up on the journey'.

A minister recently said to me that youth work was about babysitting young people, and we needed to get more serious about discipleship. I have to admit, I couldn't even be bothered to respond, I think I smiled sweetly and kept my mouth shut (a rarity for me).

If I look back to a particular group of young people I worked amongst over a period of 8 years, we spent loads of time together. We had teaching times (usually Sunday mornings, or cell group), we had youth group nights where we ran off energy, invited friends, ate too much junk food, we also had a fairly open house, and young people would drop in, eat our food, watch TV, play with our children's toys...just be part of our lives. Sometimes they would come wanting to talk through a particular issue; sometimes they just wanted to 'be'.

Opportunities to talk through issues, to challenge behaviour, to encourage, to bounce around ideas often came naturally as they ate us out of house and home.

Within this group of about 12 young people, I had a closer friendship with some than others. One of those young people I still have a close friendship with. For the past 11 years I've had the privilege of intentionally walking alongside Helen; through school, GCSEs and the fear of failure, family issues, death of family members, sibling rivalry, college and career choices, and she has walked with me through the ups and downs of being a minister, the birth of 2 children (well she wasn't actually there for the event, but you know what I mean). She has seen the good and the bad, the times I've messed up, and the times I've struggled to get up and carry on. She has seen a normal Christian trying to live for Jesus 24/7. I haven't been the only person that has walked with her; in fact I made sure there were others. Our relationship has changed on the way, she has grown from being a 12-year-old girl in the youth group, to a young leader, and now a young adult, a family friend, and a peer as she is now a children's worker in a Baptist church.

There are dangers of having such an in-depth and close friendship with a young person, however I was also being discipled and mentored, and my relationship with Helen was often part of those discussions. I recognise the dangers of creating dependency, of being accused of favouritism, of creating a clone (please God, no!); but let's recognise the dangers, strive to avoid them and get on with the task.

When I was at college I remember studying part of a module on Discipleship, it consisted of critiquing various books, courses, and ready to use meeting guides. I found this quite a weird way of looking at discipleship, because for me discipleship means intentionally walking alongside someone; living life together.

Juan Carlos Ortiz said

'Discipleship is not a communication of knowledge or information. It is a communication of life. Jesus was concerned with formation, not information.' (Disciple: A Handbook for New Believers, p109, Lake Mary, Florida: Creation House, 1975).

Discipleship cannot be confined to a series of courses that we offer, the latest book or gimmick that we can buy. It can't be a something that we can tick the box on our aims and objectives at the end of the year; it should be an ongoing process for each of us. It is about taking Jesus' example and doing life together.

BIOG
------

Sandra is a Youth Specialist Minister and has been a missionary to the North West of England for the past 12 years (originally from Essex). She is currently the Regional Minister for Youth for the NWBA and also the Youth Pastor at Leyland Baptist Church.

She has been involved in youth work for 21 years (go on say it...she doesn't look old enough...thank you!) She is passionate about seeing young people and young adults come to know Jesus, learn to walk with him, serve him within their culture and amongst their peers. She also wants to see them being an active part of God's family in the local and wider church.

Sandra is married to Tony (also a Baptist Minister), and they have two children, Abbie and Luke.