

Discipleship: Follow

As Christians we are called to live as disciples of the risen Christ. Here Mo Baldwin, Editor of ROOTS, reflects with Ronni, an Anglican priest and Elaine, one of the ROOTS story writers, on some questions that look at who and what it is that we are following, as we strive to be Christian disciples.

If you are part of a team, you might use the same questions here to help you reflect on your practice. Whether you are with others or alone, make a cuppa, sit down and reflect on the questions raised.



Who do we follow?

As Christians, we are called to follow Jesus, but in reality that sometimes feels very difficult.

'Absolutely,' says Elaine, 'it is difficult. The idea of following makes me think of mimicking and I am not able to mimic Jesus. What I feel more able to do, though, is to follow him in the sense of taking on the yoke that he talks about, taking on the identity of being a child of God, taking on his ways, that are light.'

'For me,' says Ronni, 'we are called to follow God through Jesus. Sometimes the Church seems to be doing something a little bit different, and our task is to see how the two relate! We can't do this on our own, though; we need the Church to be with us as we walk. At some times, it is easier to follow Jesus than at others. Sometimes he seems to be on holiday and out of reach; sometimes he's right beside me.'

We all agree that we discover the person of Jesus through the pages of the Bible. As we read, we begin to understand the person who calls each of us to live in the light of his message.

During Lent, the ROOTS resources help us to become more familiar with the Scriptures, opening up to us the person of Jesus in the context of the expectation of the Old Testament.

Q Who do you follow?

Q What part have the Scriptures played in your journey in discipleship?

Q What is your favourite verse from the Bible?

Why do we follow?

Sometimes we lose sight of the person of Jesus and we might walk down paths of self-interest or doubt. We know that Jesus calls us to follow him, we know that our journey is shared by him and we are called to live lives according to his way. Yet sometimes we think we know better.

'I'm not very good at following someone else,' reflects Elaine, 'but I don't see discipleship as a "blind following my leader – do what I do". It is more like Jesus showing us how to be a child of God, totally loved by the Father. We don't know how to accept that, and we need to be shown that in Jesus' life and to start walking in his shoes!'

'Exactly', says Ronni, 'because life wouldn't make sense otherwise. I sometimes say being a Christian is like getting an HD colour TV version of life, while no God makes for black and white. I'm a great believer in life in all its fullness.'

I react against having to follow someone else, too. I'm not very good at doing what is expected of me, but I also realise that it is much easier to walk through snow in someone else's footsteps, or down a muddy track in the furrow created by a tractor. Knowing that Jesus has 'been there, done that' means there is someone who has made the footprints or created the path for me. Sometimes I'm not sure why I follow Jesus, but I simply know, without a doubt, that I don't have another option. It is who I am called to be.

Q Why do you follow Jesus?

Q How do you follow – how do you walk in Jesus' shoes (or sandals)?

Who helps us to follow?

So many people are part of our journeys to faith. Sometimes we may think we are alone. But Jesus clearly reminded us that he gave his Spirit to support and guide us.

'For me,' says Elaine, 'God's Holy Spirit, through the diverse Body of Christ, and all of creation, is the power which keeps me following.'

'Absolutely,' says Ronni 'The Holy Spirit is my inspirer, but usually through other people, often not the ones that I expected!'

I never fail to be amazed by the people who have helped me on my journey of faith. For many years I went to church because my family went to church. We were involved, it was expected of me. As I became older I spent time finding ways to try to make sense of it. A friend, John, was on a separate journey of faith and was determined to get answers to his questions. Gradually through his pushing and asking, his searching and demanding, I found a desire to do the same. Faith became something I wanted. I had thought it was a 'family matter' but I discovered it was personal. The people who have been part of my life have been the people who have kept me going on the often-winding road of faith and trust, in the way Jesus calls me to follow.



'I love the way being a ROOTS user brings us into a family group,' says Elaine. 'If I am feeling isolated or unsure, it is a great feeling to know there are others sharing a journey, finding their way through the Scriptures and committed to helping their children's discovery of faith. The magazine and the website really help, and it is great to know there are churches all over the country doing the same thing as we are trying to do'.

The ROOTS resources are written by ordinary people trying to follow a Christian path. The materials derive from a diverse range of contributors from across the country and denominational spread, but they all share a common desire to help people in their ministry with others. The support and encouragement we feel from knowing that other people are using the same material that has been tried and tested in different situations, is what can help us when we are demoralised or uncertain.

- Q Who has been part of your journey?
- Q Who has challenged, inspired, encouraged or pushed you in your continued following of Jesus?

How do we follow?

Ronni, Elaine and I love the idea of faith being a journey of discovery, one that offers never-ending excitement and new opportunities. In a recent television programme someone was challenged to follow Route 66 across America. The programme filmed his discoveries and frustrations, the repetition of diners and stores. He recognised that 'it's not really a journey if all I do is follow the tarmac, the route that has been planned out. For it to be a journey there should be twists and unexpected detours.' I know my faith development has most definitely been a journey of the unexpected.

'Ooh, yes,' says Elaine, 'Mine has been a stumbling, tripping-up, whoops-gone-the-wrong-way kind of journey'. We all know what she means.

Ronni replies, 'I try to live life in all its fullness, to see Christ in other people and to look out for angels in the street where I live, using the Bible and other resources to help me work out my relationship with God, taking time to help it to grow. This is what I strive for, and it is what I come back to when I need to regain focus.'

Sometimes I lose sight of the path I am so clearly meant to be on, I set out into my own little world, drifting off to places of my own choosing.

'Yes,' agrees Elaine, 'but then God has an amazing knack of calling us back and reminding us where we were.' We laugh at the memory of a time when I was convinced I should go to work in Pakistan. Everyone told me it was the wrong move for me but I knew better! The day before I was to fly out, I slipped on ice and got hit by a car! I came round from the surgery on my smashed arm to a very clear 'Now will you listen to me?' from God!

In ROOTS we have often used the old Spanish proverb 'God writes straight in crooked lines', recognising that we sometimes get to where we need to be despite ourselves!

- Q How has your journey been a crooked line?
- Q What helps you follow the calling of God?
- Q What makes it difficult for you to follow God's path?
- Q What joy has your journey brought to you and others?

How do we encourage others to follow?

Remember that you are wonderful. You are gifted. You are a revelation of God for others. As someone who is called to work with children and young people, you are indeed called to be a disciple, and in so being, you have the capacity to enable others.

'I don't feel all that gifted,' says Elaine, 'I'm ordinary. I just try to do what I can do, but I think we always have to help tilt people's chins and say, "Look at Him! He is for you!".'

'I think we can do little things to help others,' says Ronni, 'I'm trying five good deeds a day, along with the fruit and veg! For example, remembering to bless people in the queue for whatever, thinking good thoughts and opening up to God whenever I remember; sharing good books and resources and gently challenging people when I really have to; being positive whenever I can; praying for people, asking God to bless them. ROOTS is a great resource because, not only does it offer ideas for our groups, faithfully drawn from the Scriptures yet usable within the real world, it also looks after us. The magazine recognises that the group leaders need feeding on their journey of faith, and its writers cajole us into taking that seriously.'

Who we are, what we say, how we live, are the things which will draw others on their journey of faith.

- Q How do we encourage those with whom we work to follow a path of discipleship?
- Q What feeds you on your journey of faith?
- Q What else do you think you need to encourage and support you?

We do hope this has given you food for thought. If you have any reflections on the questions that you would like to share with others, contact me via www.rootsontheweb.com.