

Maize Plant Discipleship Facilitators' Handbook

Maize Plant Discipleship Handbook

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Contents

1	In this Handbook	1
2	Discipleship and MPD	3
2.1	What is discipleship?	3
2.2	Discipleship movements	6
2.3	The heart of discipleship	9
2.4	Questions for Reflection and Discussion	10
3	Africa and MPD	11
3.1	Introduction	11
3.2	Doctoral research	12
3.3	Questions for Reflection and Discussion	16
4	MPD Syllabus	17
4.1	Maize Plant Metaphor	17
4.2	MPD Handbooks	24
4.3	Terms and translations	25
4.4	Questions for Reflection and Discussion	25
5	Facilitating MPD	27
5.1	Discipleship group format	27
5.2	Facilitating role	37
5.3	Practical considerations	39
6	Republishing MPD	43
6.1	Books for African contexts	43
6.2	A new publishing philosophy	44
6.3	License	45

7	Further information	47
7.1	Translation	47
7.2	Internet	47
7.3	Author	48

In this Handbook

Maize Plant Discipleship has been designed in consultation with missional leaders and learners in Burkina Faso, to be a practical, relevant and accessible learning resource, appropriate for use in African contexts.

It is being published as a series of low-cost, short, modular textbooks that incorporate reflective learning and group discussions, suitable for formal and informal modes of study.

Its goal is to facilitate biblical learning that moves constantly outwards, drawing whole communities into patterns of scripturally-based discipleship, in living dialogue with contextual culture.

This *Facilitators' Handbook* provides guidelines for people facilitating *Maize Plant Discipleship*.

- **Discipleship and MPD** (chapter 2) explores biblical and missional perspectives of Messianic discipleship.
- **Africa and MPD** (chapter 3) explains the background to the development of Maize Plant Discipleship as a resource for use in African contexts.
- **MPD Syllabus** (chapter 4) introduces the metaphor of the maize plant and the sixteen modules of the *MPD Syllabus*.
- **Facilitating MPD** (chapter 5) provides practical insights and suggestions for facilitating group learning.

Publishing MPD examines practical issues relating to publication, including licensing, translation, printing and distribution.

CHAPTER 2

Discipleship and MPD

Go and make people from all nations into disciples, immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I commanded you—*Jesus, Matthew 28:19-20*

Discipleship is the process of making disciples who themselves will also make other disciples. In a family where there is no birth there will be no continuity, so a church without disciples will not live for a long time. However, all church members are not disciples...a mere believer is far from a disciple—*Pastor Ayoro, Léo, 2010*

2.1 What is discipleship?

Messianic discipleship is a dynamic, generational process, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

To fully illustrate what is involved in this process, I want to link together two crucial statements made by the apostle, Paul, in his second letter to his disciple, Timothy:¹

Keep safe the great treasure that has been entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit, who lives in us... and the things you heard from me, which were supported by many witnesses, these commit to faithful people, such as will be competent to teach others—2 *Timothy* 1.14 and 2.2

Together they reveal three vital components of messianic discipleship.

1. The “great treasure” of the knowledge of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

The personal, experiential knowledge of the Messiah is more than human knowledge or philosophy: it is “a great treasure,” a spiritual reality, a divine relationship, mediated by the Holy Spirit...

2. The vitality of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit provides an intimate source of divine help to messianic disciples.² It is he who mediates the reality of the Gospel and the Presence of the Messiah amongst his people—and it is he who helps them to safekeep this reality...

3. The necessity of generational formation.

Timothy has received an impartation of the reality of the Messiah through Paul—something of great worth that he must now safe-guard by *committing it to the stewardship and safekeeping of other faithful people*. This is generational discipleship (see Figure 2.1).

In the kingdom of God, treasure is kept safe, kept from becoming un-productive,³ by sharing it with others. Let's try to understand this a little more.

¹There is good reason to link these two statements, separated as they are only by Paul's emotional description of two disciples who failed to “keep the treasure safe,” by not standing with Paul at a critical time.

²John 16:7-15

³Matthew 25:14-30

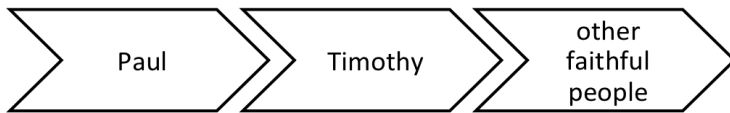


Figure 2.1: Generational discipleship

Seed and harvest

In farming contexts, seeds are a form of wealth—a type of treasure. Yet seed is generally stored only for a short time before being used. Whatever is not required for food—for *daily bread*—must soon be sown to produce another harvest.⁴

In the same way, we discover that God is able to supply spiritual life to us: the *treasure* of knowing the Messiah. This experience of being alive to God, experiencing the grace of the Messiah and the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control of the Holy Spirit,⁵ is the spiritual equivalent of receiving daily sustenance—*daily bread*.

Enjoying God's life ourselves, however, is not the whole purpose of our relationship with him. In fact, as we will explore in this resource, the Messianic, New Covenant Community (the whole body of the Messiah's people) has been called to know God in order to become his *Servant Community*. This means that we are called to give ourselves, our lives to *serve his purposes*. This requires discipline and sacrifice—that is what it means to be a disciple.

This sacrificial, disciplined giving of ourselves in service to God is the equivalent of taking precious seed that could be used for food, for ourselves, and instead sowing it into the ground to produce another harvest.

Sharing treasure

This is one of the secrets to living a truly *messianic* life, which many people seem never to properly discover or experience: it is not in hoarding the treasure of our knowledge, relationship and communion with God,

⁴see 2 Corinthians 9:6–12

⁵Galatians 5:22

but in sharing and *sowing* it with others, both within and beyond our own communities, that we discover and realise our vocation.⁶

Our spiritual treasure, however, is not to be wasted or cast away carelessly. Even though some seeds inevitably fall onto unreceptive ground,⁷ like a farmer who never intentionally wastes his seed, our treasure is too precious to be deliberately squandered on people who spurn its value.⁸ It must be shared with people who recognise its worth and who make room for its transformative power to change them.

This is what the parable calls *good soil*. People willing to be transformed through a personal knowledge and experience of the Messiah, who will share it with other faithful people... who share it with other faithful people... and so on and so forth.

2.2 Discipleship movements

The formation of faithful disciples was at the heart of the Messiah Jesus' life and work. The entire historical and now-worldwide Christian movement began with one small, core group of disciples, formed around Jesus.

Discipling movements have significant potential to impact and transform. Leaders, money, books and power all have their places within radical, popular movements. But, people-movements are most capable of producing deep, wide, enduring change.

Two things are essential to transformative people movements: *vision* and *the formation of disciples*. Visionary leaders must impart a hope that is powerful, challenging and instrumental. A vision capable of gripping the hearts of others and forming them into faithful, active disciples:

- committed to significant transformation;
- persistent and determined to turn vision into reality;
- operating as co-workers—not selfishly-ambitious individuals;
- actively forming other faithful disciples.

In this way a visionary, discipling movement is developed. A movement of focussed, inspired, dynamic people. People deeply and profoundly allied to a vision, a cause and a purpose larger than themselves.

⁶Matthew 10:38–39

⁷Matthew 13:1–23

⁸Matthew 7:6

Intercultural movement

During the past two-thousand years, the messianic, new-covenant community has grown and developed through precisely this sort of dynamism. From its origins as an obscure, tiny, Jewish sect it has grown into an international, intercultural, multi-ethnic community, now existing, in some form or another, in practically every nation of the world.

The scripture citations below, from the book of Acts, illustrate a pattern. It is worth examining the context of these verses in your own Bibles, reflecting upon how each statement represents a conclusion to a significant period of church expansion.

- 2:46–47 – day after day, the Lord adding to them
- 6:7 – the word of God continued to spread
- 9:31 – their numbers kept multiplying
- 12:24 – word of the Lord went on growing and being multiplied
- 16:5 – the congregations...increased in number day by day
- 19:20 – the message about the Lord continued in a powerful way to grow in influence

This dynamic movement then spreads geographically and, more importantly, across ethnic and cultural boundaries. From its beginnings in Jerusalem, the movement expands throughout Palestine, Asia Minor, Greece and, finally, on to Rome—the very centre and seat of worldly power, at that time.

Sh'aul remained two whole years in a place he rented for himself and continued receiving all who came to see him, openly and without hindrance proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Yeshua the Messiah—Acts 28.30–31

Since then, it has continued to grow and to effect and impact many new ethnicities and peoples, stories and cultures, throughout the world. It will surely effect many more in the days and years that are ahead.

This *dynamism* can be traced to the Messianic Community operating as a *movement of disciples*, continually spreading out, across geographical, social, ethnic, linguistic and cultural boundaries. It is this kind of dynamism that I hope will be stimulated by Maize Plant Discipleship, wherever it is adopted and utilised.

Renewal of movement

Any messianic movement or community—national, regional or local—that earnestly desires spiritual revival or renewal must place visionary, messianic discipleship at the core of its spirituality and its practical formation.

Disciples must be invited, formed and sent forth as part of a *world-facing* movement. The goal is much more than the maintenance of the church-as-an-organisation, greater even than serving-one-another, as part of messianic community. The goal is to be part of a movement of disciples called to serve God's eternal purpose, amongst a world of lost, hurting, confused, oppressed, fear-filled, idol-bound populations.

Amongst the corruption in society, besides its filthy gutters and behind its social, political, economic and religious walls, the Messiah is at work by his Spirit. That is where he calls his co-workers to come alongside him in his work of redemption and transformation of individuals, families, marriages, partnerships, communities, organisations, structures, workplaces and working practices.

Anointed community

To make possible such an otherwise impossibly-high calling, messianic discipleship provides a unique ingredient that no other philosophy, ideology or faith can provide: the dynamic of the indwelling Spirit of the Messiah.

Through the Spirit, the new-covenant community is transformed into a charismatic community. A group of people endowed with spiritual gifts that are profoundly shaped to liberate human beings from idolatry and every other allegiance and falsehood that competes and sets itself against God and the knowledge of him⁹.

⁹2 Corinthians 10:3-5

The term *charismatic* derives from *charism* (Greek), meaning *gift*. The *charisma* of the Christian community comes from its spiritual anointing. *Messiah* essentially means *Anointed One*: the One Anointed with the Spirit.¹⁰

Thus, the Messianic Community is a body of people anointed with the fragrant oil, or presence, of the Holy Spirit, having been brought under God's authority, through baptism into the Messiah. It is a body learning to walk in the footsteps of Jesus: learning to exercise its God-appointed mediatory, intercessory role, under the direction of the Spirit of God.¹¹

This community of disciples is a messianic, charismatic people called into covenant relationship with the Father, through the Son and sent into the world to bless the nations in the power of the Spirit!

Life... through death

God's intention is that this messianic, charismatic, covenant community co-works in partnership with him, using the strength, the power, the spiritual life, the anointing that he provides.

Too often though, that power, that anointed-life-of-Christ-within-us, seems to elude us. It seems out of our reach. Beyond our grasp. Indeed, it is not something that can be *grasped*. Instead, the pathway to life is through dying. Yielding ourselves to God the Father, through the Messiah, by the Spirit. That is the message of the cross. As we *die to self*, we become *alive to God*.¹²

2.3 The heart of discipleship

Thus we end where we began. With the foundational principle of transformative discipleship: seed sown into the ground, in order to produce a harvest.

¹⁰Matthew 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:32–34

¹¹Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–29; Hebrews 6:4

¹²Romans 6:4–13

I tell you that unless a grain of wheat that falls to the ground dies, it stays just a grain; but if it dies, it produces a big harvest—*John 12.24*

This life-giving spiritual reality is at the heart of Jesus' own life, mission, ministry and pain-filled death. And this same principle forms the foundation and wellspring of Maize Plant Discipleship:

As we embrace a practical form of discipleship, incorporating a daily dying-to-self, we learn how to truly become alive-to-God and equipped to serve his eternal purpose.

That is the heart of Maize Plant Discipleship.

2.4 Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- How is discipleship valued in your context?
- How faithfully is it practised?

If there is a gap between what is believed and valued and what is practised, discuss why you think that is.

CHAPTER 3

Africa and MPD

Africanness and (theological) correctness should not be measured in either dissimilarity or similarity to the West. The way forward is to measure the Africanness of any theology purporting to be African by the degree to which it speaks to the needs of African's in their total context. Quite naturally, the needs of African Christians should be taken seriously when determining these needs – *Tite Tienou, The Uphill Road: Indigenous African Christian Theologies, 1990*

3.1 Introduction

Tite Tienou, a Malian who grew up in Burkina Faso, encapsulates (above) a highly significant aspect of the philosophy that has driven the development of Maize Plant Discipleship: African voices must determine the theology that is of practical relevance to African contexts.

The Africa connection

The origins of Maize Plant Discipleship are rooted in my personal experiences amongst an international, Pentecostal missionary community. Over time, a stream of African leaders, training or studying in the UK, joined with our prayer fellowship, reporting how spiritually *at home* they

felt with us. On returning to Africa, memories of shared experiences in prayer prompted them to invite me to visit and teach in their contexts.

The first opportunity to do so came in 2000, through a former prayer team member, then working in Nakuru, Kenya. There, I presented five days of seminars on prayer, intercession and mission. The considerable enthusiasm and appreciation expressed by the attendants encouraged me to continue investing in the seminal training resource, which has since developed into Maize Plant Discipleship.

Burkina Faso

The next stage of development came through a series of visits to Burkina Faso, between 2003 and 2008, during which I taught various conferences of leaders and learners:

- In Léo: Bible school students, pastors, church-planters and trainees, many of whom were living in missionary contexts, within Muslim-dominant villages.
- In Ouagadougou: associates of a vibrant, national youth movement, incorporating university students, graduates, post-graduates, office workers and other young people.

At each point, the feedback of participants and organisers was sought. It became clear from their responses that a significant spiritual dynamic was taking place. The teaching was reported to be motivational and spiritually challenging. To understand this better, I asked Burkinabé associates: how could the discipleship teaching be made more accessible and useful within Burkinabé contexts?

Their response was to propose the development of a “Train the Trainers” program, incorporating Maize Plant Discipleship teaching in a series of accessible handbooks. The books would be designed to accompany teaching presentations *and* to be studied and used by trainees in their own contexts.

3.2 Doctoral research

In order to maximise effectiveness, from an intercultural perspective, I took the opportunity incorporate further development of the books within a program of doctoral research, directed by *Fuller School of Intercultural Studies*, between 2009 and 2013.

This enabled me to consult Burkinabé leaders and learners on a wide range of concerns and questions relating to the appropriate biblical and practical formulation of discipleship and leadership training resources.

In total, over seventy Burkinabé participants were consulted, drawn from members of the *Assemblée Évangélique de Pentecôte*, *Assemblée de Deus*, *Association Nationale pour la Traduction de la Bible et de l'Alphabétisation*, *Mouvement des Jeunes Serviteurs de Dieu* and *SIL*.

The research involved collecting data—opinions, perspectives, information and insight—following prototypical seminars delivered to conferences in Léo and Ouagadougou. This was done through multiple survey questionnaires and group interviews and a number in-depth interviews, conducted with national and, or denominational leaders—most of whom held responsibility for leadership training and development. This allowed a rich seam of data to be gathered for analysis.

Findings

Applying qualitative data-analysis to the collected data revealed a number of significant *findings*, or themes, relating to issues of discipleship, leadership training, theology, culture, intercultural relations and literacy. In particular, participants:

- identified strongly with the concept of discipleship and a need to freshly embrace *holistic, disciple-forming practices*;
- consistently validated the missiological content (section 3.2) of a prototype MPD training resource as *appropriate to Burkinabé contexts*, highlighting the value in terms of biblical content, practical focus and cultural sensitivity;
- affirmed the importance of incorporating graphical and analogical *illustrations* and allotted time for *reflection and discussion*;
- expressed desire for appropriate *literature*, tailored to facilitate leaders working in oral contexts;
- identified the value of translating appropriate textbooks into minority African languages;
- highlighted significant logistical challenges relating to publication—e.g. licensing, promotion, cost and distribution.

These analytical conclusions were used to define a set of *practical, relevant and accessible* attributes that could be applied to the formulation of training resources appropriate to Burkinabé leaders and learners.¹

Practical

Encouraging and facilitating a focus upon purposeful actions—rather than classroom theorising.

- Awaken or strengthen contextual ownership of the call to serve God's eternal purpose amongst their generation.
- Promoting lifelong commitment to missional discipline and action.
- Envisioning personal, communal, cultural transformation.
- Emphasising generational formation of disciples.

Relevant

An incorporation of qualities and characteristics appropriate to contextual culture.

- Providing a biblically faithful missiology, integrated with Pentecostal spirituality.
- Publishing short, topical, illustrative handbooks.
- Facilitating group discussion and reflective learning.
- Encouraging contextual adaption.

Accessible

Lowering or removing barriers that could hinder access to the curriculum.

- Linguistically and conceptually comprehensible.
- Facilitating vernacular language translation.

¹Visit: <http://jbclements.wordpress.com/missiology> for further details of doctoral dissertation, *Facilitating A Renewal of Discipleship Praxis Amongst Burkinabé Leaders and Learners*.

- Licencing republication and redistribution.
- Distribution models that favour the economically poor.

Missiological content

My research concluded that a biblically faithful missiology, integrated with Pentecostal spirituality and appropriate to African contexts, should encompass not less than the following content or characteristics:

1. A holistic worldview;
2. A communal orientation;
3. An historical, covenantal, missionary interpretation of Scripture;
4. A missiology of
 - biblical discipleship;
 - suffering and overcoming;
 - spiritual revival;
 - intercessory prayer and spiritual power;
 - poverty and prosperity;
 - personal and corporate vocation;
 - Christ-centred servant-leadership;
 - cultural transformation.

Continuous improvement

These *practical*, *relevant* and *accessible* attributes, extracted from data gathered from Burkinabé participants, are those which have defined the Maize Plant Discipleship Resource.

After you have examined and used MPD resources, if you think we can improve upon these attributes, or the application of them, please contact us with your ideas, via the MPD website:

- <http://maizeplantdiscipleship.wordpress.com/contact>

3.3 Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- Do you think it's important that African Christians decide upon what is theologically appropriate to African contexts?
- Has this happened historically in your contexts? If not, why not? If so, what has changed?
- What theological issues are important to you and others in your context?
- If they are not covered by this syllabus, what will you do?

CHAPTER 4

MPD Syllabus

I tell you that unless a grain of wheat that falls to the ground dies, it stays just a grain; but if it dies, it produces a big harvest – *Jesus, John 12:24*

May he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness – *Paul, 2 Corinthians 9:10*

4.1 Maize Plant Metaphor

In the gospel of John, Jesus refers to his own mission using the metaphor of a seed that enters the ground and dies, in order to produce a large harvest. Grown throughout sub-Saharan Africa, the maize plant provides a similar, highly recognisable metaphor.

The Maize Plant Discipleship Syllabus is structured to symbolically reflect the metaphor of a maize plant. There are three main components to the metaphor (see Figure 4.1).

1. Soil and roots

Representing the biblical, covenantal community, context and vocation of Israel.

2. Maize plant

Representing the dynamic spiritual growth and multiplication of messianic community.

3. Sunlight and rainfall

Representing essential spiritual disciplines that stimulate and sustain the growth of messianic community.

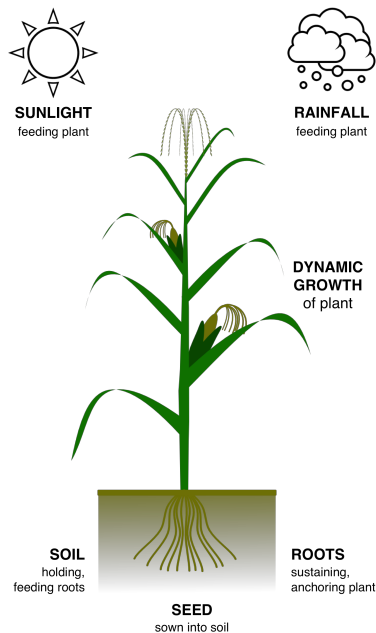


Figure 4.1: Maize Plant Metaphor

Maize produce effectively represents *daily bread* for millions of African people. The messianic community is called, like the Messiah, to become a kind of *life-giving bread* to the peoples of the world—see John 6 & 20:21.

Soil and roots

Module MPD-M1¹ provides a study of the biblical, Hebraic soil and messianic roots of new-covenant faith, in order to unfold a panoramic overview of the whole story of scripture, representing God's unchanging, eternal purpose.

Only seed sown into good soil produces a good harvest. Discipleship communities also need to be rooted in good soil, allowing us to draw on essential, spiritual nutrients and the living water of the Messiah's Spirit, anchoring us against winds of false teaching and sustaining us amidst the heat of trials, temptations and vocational responsibility.

MPD-M1-Eternal Purpose

In this foundational teaching (see Figure 4.2), the Messiah represent *the Seed* that enters the soil—of the biblical, covenantal history of the people of Israel—to die and ultimately produce a rich harvest of people—a messianic covenant community—from amongst all the peoples of the earth.

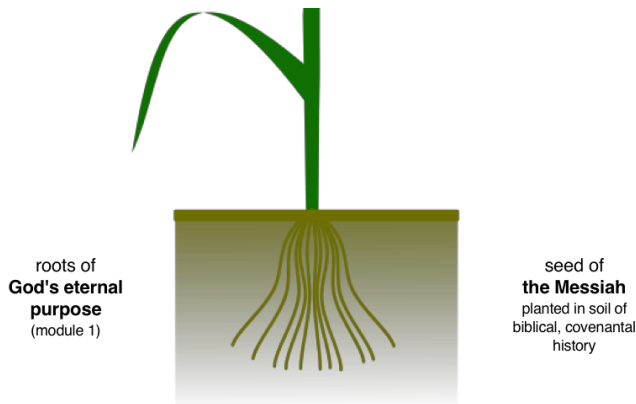


Figure 4.2: Roots

¹MPD-Mn refers to *Maize Plant Discipleship-Module n*, where n = module number.

Maize plant

Modules MPD-M2 to MPD-M9 explore eight characteristic *dynamics* of messianic community (see Figure 4.3). These dynamics refer to the unique, spiritual forces² that stimulate the characteristic development, growth, structure, shape and fruit of messianic community.

MPD-M2-Dynamics of Vocation-The Nations

Examines the historical development the Messianic Community's vocational mission to bless the nations of the world.

MPD-M3-Dynamics of Vocation-The Jews

Examines the significant responsibilities of the Messianic Community towards the Jewish people.

MPD-M4-Dynamics of Commissioning

Explores the dynamic of messianic commissioning, including a focus upon strategy, structures and expansion.

MPD-M5-Dynamics of Body Membership

Explores basic patterns of membership, commitment and spiritual maturity within the body of the Messiah.

MPD-M6-Dynamics of Revival

Reveals a cycle of spiritual activities representing the dynamics of revival, leading to a spiritual harvest.

MPD-M7-Dynamics of Truth

Explores our encounter with truth, as we learn to walk in practical, covenantal faithfulness towards God's revelation, wisdom and direction.

²*Dynamic* derives from a Greek word, *dunamis*, meaning power and refers to forces stimulating change or progress within a system or process.

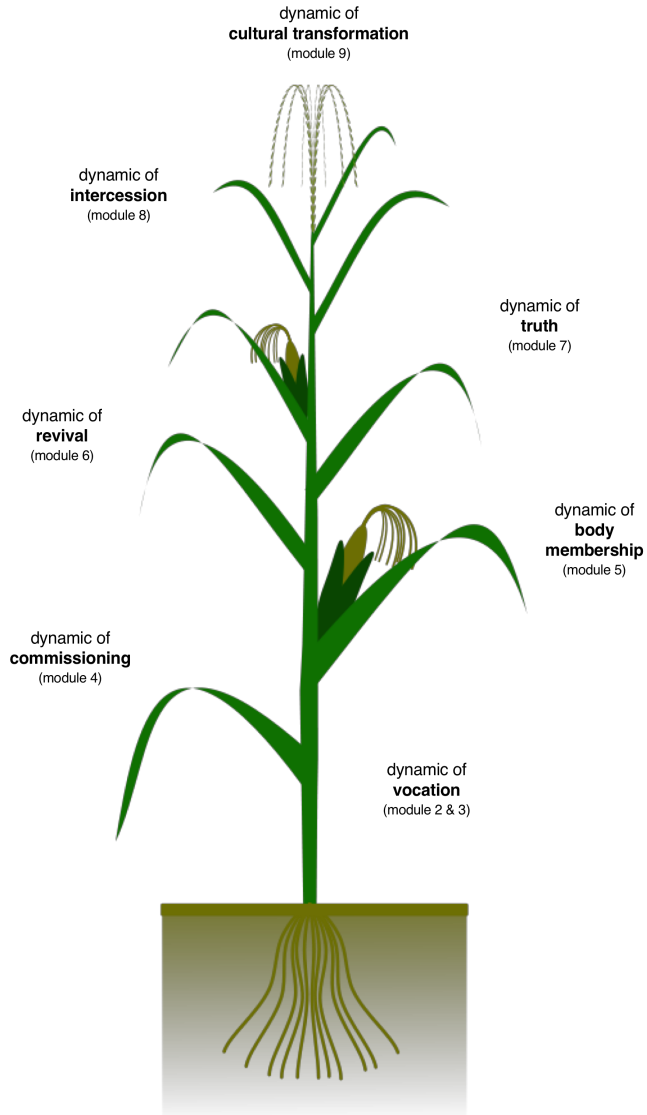


Figure 4.3: Maize plant

MPD-M8-Dynamics of Intercession

Explores the priestly vocation of the Messianic Community to be *a house of prayer for all nations*.

MPD-M9-Dynamics of Cultural Transformation

Examines our call to work amongst and on behalf of the nations, towards cultural transformations that signal the presence of God's kingdom.

Sunlight and rainfall

Modules MPD-M10 to MPD-M16 examine seven characteristic *disciplines* of messianic community (see Figure 4.4). In the metaphor of the maize plant, sunlight and rainfall are representative of messianic disciplines, which open us to receive the revelatory Light and sustaining Living Water of God's Spirit—without which we become spiritually weak and unable to produce good fruit or a plentiful harvest.

MPD-M10-Disciplines of Spiritual Maturity

Reviews three stages of encounter, discovery and growth in spiritual maturity: pastoral–devotional; missional–vocational and apostolic–intercessory.

MPD-M11-Disciplines of Running the Race

Uses the metaphor of an athlete to examine motivations, qualities and disciplines for living an enduring life of service—*completing the race marked out for us*.

MPD-M12-Disciplines of Pressing Toward Our Vocation

Explores how we can be sustained us in our personal vocations through a deepening of our relationship with the Messiah, including *prayer without ceasing*.

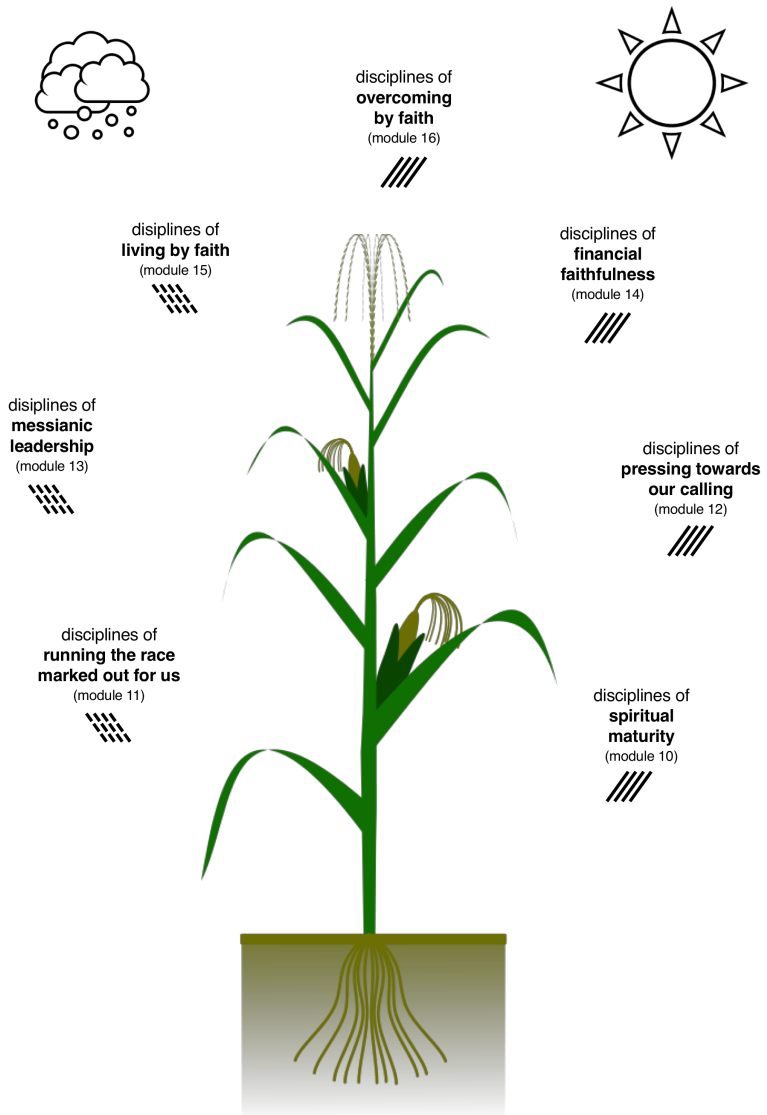


Figure 4.4: Sunlight and rainfall

MPD-M13-Disciplines of Economic Faithfulness

Explores economic faithfulness, highlighting biblical perspectives of wealth and poverty radically different to those of the world.

MPD-M14-Disciplines of Messianic Leadership

Explores qualifications, motivations and characteristics of faithful messianic leadership *and* the balancing of task, team and individual.

MPD-M15-Disciplines of Living by Faith

Explores the testing and purification of messianic faith, seeing with eyes of faith and embracing challenges as opportunities to experience God's faithfulness.

MPD-M16-Disciplines of Overcoming

Employs the analogy of a sporting arena to represent spiritual confrontation and conflict with cultural idols and strongholds, discerning strategies that make room for a transformative encounter with God's overcoming power.

4.2 MPD Handbooks

Each MPD module *Handbook* contains four interrelated *Studies*, each of which incorporates:

- Scripture Readings
- Topical Sections and Summary
- Questions for Group Discussion

The format is designed to facilitate reflective group learning—so that Maize Plant Discipleship resources rely not upon the presence of a qualified leader, teacher or theologian, but simply upon facilitators willing to co-ordinate study groups and discussions (see Facilitating MPD (chapter 5)).

4.3 Terms and translations

A number of significant terms are used throughout the MPD syllabus. They are defined here, so that Facilitators can refer to them at any time.

Messiah

the promised Jewish deliverer... Jesus, the Christ... the Messiah

Messianic

- Messianic Cf. “Christian”
- Messianic Community
- Messianic, New-Covenant Community
- messianic community or communities

Bible translation

Wherever possible facilitators should use and encourage the use of mother-tongue translations of Scripture. Throughout the MPD Syllabus Handbooks, scripture references—rather than quotations—are generally provided with this in mind.

Where a quotation is incorporated within the teaching, the following abbreviations are used to indicate the version:

- CJB – The Complete Jewish Bible
- NIV – The New International Version
- TAB – The Amplified Bible

4.4 Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- How would you describe the significance of the maize plant to this syllabus and learning resource?
- How would you describe a dynamic?

CHAPTER 5

Facilitating MPD

...the word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith—*Acts 1.6–7*

I have received a valuable teaching which I would like to use to impact the life of people in my neighbourhood and in my church. I would like to see this teaching be the flame of the Spirit of God which will help the ministry to grow more—*Pastor Benao, 2010*

5.1 Discipleship group format

MPD modules are structured to provide a *reflective learning process*, which incorporates practical, educational principles married to practical, spiritual principles, drawn from Scripture.

Reflective Learning

Figure 5.1 illustrates a reflective learning process of the kind that might be encountered within progressive educational or training contexts, including these four elements: Hear – Reflect – Discuss – Act.

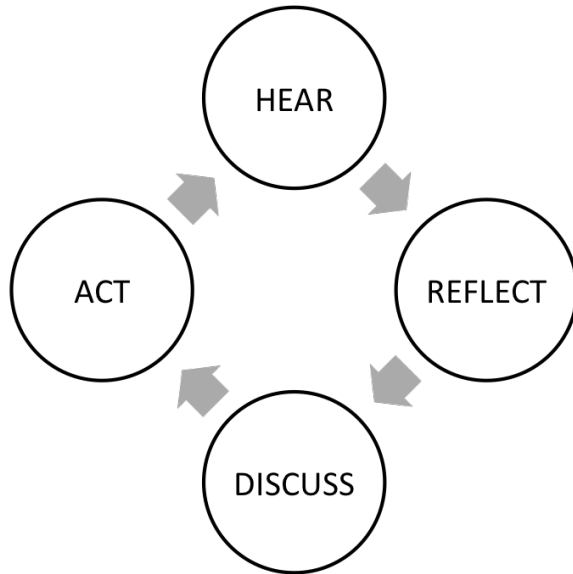


Figure 5.1: Reflective Learning Process

- We learn by *hearing* about other's experiences: practice informing theory and theory informing practice.
- As we listen, we *reflect* upon both fresh ideas and current understanding: old and new sometimes conflicting, sometimes harmonising.
- In *discussion* with others, we broaden and deepen our understanding and sharpen our convictions about the most appropriate way to...
- *act*, when we disperse and return to our contexts of work and vocation. Later, we gather again, so the reflective learning process can be repeated ... again and again.

Adapting the learning cycle

I want to suggest how this reflective learning process, or cycle, may be adapted and applied to Maize Plant Discipleship groups, by combining

it with a simple pattern, drawn from the example of the early church, which reports how

They continued faithfully in the teaching of the apostles, in fellowship, in breaking bread and in prayer—Acts 2.42

The combined *MPD learning process* that I am proposing thus incorporates six elements: Hear – Receive – Open – Share – Pray – Act

Hear... what the Spirit is saying

When we gather together as disciples of the Messiah, to hear biblical teaching, we are opening ourselves not only to human ideas or wisdom, as Paul explains to the Corinthians:

Now we have not received spirit that belongs to the world, But the Holy Spirit Who is from God, given to us that we might realise and comprehend and appreciate the gifts of divine favour blessing so freely and lavishly bestowed on us by God. And we're setting these truths forth in words not taught by human Wisdom but taught by the Holy Spirit, combining and interpreting spiritual truths with spiritual language to those who possess the Holy Spirit. – 1 Corinthians 2:12-13
TAB



Figure 5.2: Hear

Our goal, therefore, is not only to listen with our minds, but also with our spirit—our heart; not to become 'puffed up' with knowledge, but to

*hear what the Spirit is saying to his people.*¹ And we listen in order to live more faithfully. This kind of listening is called *heeding*: listening with the intention to learn and follow, or obey.

¹Revelation 2:29, 3:6,13,23; Matthew 11:15, Mark 4:9 etc.

Receive... God's message inwardly

Hearing God's message to us, either as a body of people, or as individuals and families, is a start. However, it is not enough only to *hear*, we must learn to *receive* God's message.

The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time... The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

The seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word and retain it, and by persevering produce a crop... yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown – *Matthew 13:18-23; Luke 8:15*



Figure 5.3: Receive

The key is receiving God's word inwardly, allowing the word to begin to "*dwell richly within us*" (Colossians 3:16). Think about how we receive food: chewing, enjoying the taste, swallowing and digesting, enabling the body to receive the food's vitality and goodness. *It's the same with God's word.* We must chew it over, meditating and reflecting upon its meaning and application to our lives. Then we allow it to settle in our spirit, forming and shaping our convictions, or holding it in our hearts, even before we fully understand all that it means to us.

Open...heart to other's perspectives

In messianic community, we must learn to open our hearts to the perspectives and experiences of those around us and those who see things differently to ourselves.

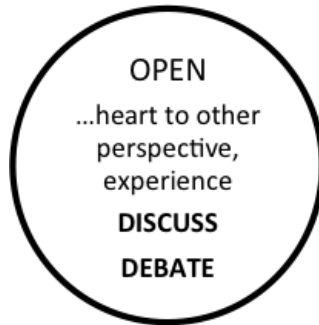


Figure 5.4: Open

The following suggestions may help group discussions to be lively and spiritually satisfying.

- **Invite free-moving debate relating to the study topic.**

Ensure women and both young and old people are included. Allow discussions to ebb and flow, as people consider their responses and return to earlier discussions (*see also: Facilitating openness (section 5.2)*).

- **Discuss traditional proverbs that relate to study topics.**

Use of the *sweet talk* of proverbs will provide fresh insight. This can also help to provide opportunities to discuss aspects of the teaching with elders and others, including non-believers.

- **Discuss practical, vocational applications of the topical study.**

Vocation is more than simply our job, or employment: it incorporates all the responsibilities towards which God calls us, including workplaces and practices, families, communities and networks, as well as personal vision and service.

Share...break bread together

The celebratory breaking of bread, in order to remember the Lord Jesus and his sacrificial obedience, is a sign and symbol of the new covenant and a profound way for discipleship groups to visibly proclaim their shared devotion to the Messiah.



Figure 5.5: Share

Although breaking and sharing bread has typically become ceremonial in modern Christianity, it is possible to incorporate a simple meal into times of meeting together and to identify this prayerfully as a form of breaking bread together.

Breaking bread was originally fashioned, by the early church, upon the weekly Sh'bat (Sabbath) meal of the Jews – a time of thanksgiving for God's deliverance of Israel from the oppression of Egypt.

Sharing food together is a vital part of human fellowship and a practical way of celebrating and proclaiming God's daily provision and blessing. Where a meal is not practical or possible, consider sharing a small amount of bread together, in a symbolic act of shared hospitality and commitment to membership of the body of the Messiah.

Pray...let God's kingdom come

After discussion has taken place, invite the group to pray together, including intercession on behalf of neighbours, networks and communities and local and national rulers and governors.



Figure 5.6: Pray

Use MPD teaching to infuse prayer with fresh confidence concerning God's will and purpose, including personal and vocational concerns and challenges faced by group members.

- **Pray for the gospel** to deeply impact and transform individuals, communities, cultures and societies throughout your nation, Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas; pray for unreached people groups.
- **Pray for the Maize Plant Discipleship Project:** that it will be used by God to edify and strengthen and bless the Messianic Community, within Africa ... and beyond!
- **Bless one another** with a blessing from Scripture, or as led by the Holy Spirit; speak a blessing over your community or nation, or with regards to a specific problem.
- **Expect the power of God** and the blessing of his life in us will overcome all opposition!

Act...in light of God's message

The purpose of our gathering to hear God's message is not simply to hear it, but to act upon it. As the epistle of Ya'akov (James) explains, we deceive ourselves when we listen to God's word, but do not do what it says:

Don't deceive yourselves by only hearing what the Word says, but do it! For whoever hears the Word but doesn't do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror, who looks as himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

But if a person looks closely into the perfect *Torah*, which gives freedom, and continues, becoming not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work it requires, then he will be blessed in what he does – *James 1:22-25*



Figure 5.7: Act

The goal of discipleship is to be transformed ourselves and to become a transforming influence in our homes and workplaces and communities. As we learn to do this as part of a growing, dynamic movement of disciples, we begin to fulfil our corporate vocation: *a messianic community blessed...to be a blessing!*

MPD learning cycle

Bringing together the six elements of reflective learning and messianic community together – Hear, Receive, Open, Share, Pray, Act – provides us with the MPD learning cycle (Figure 5.8)

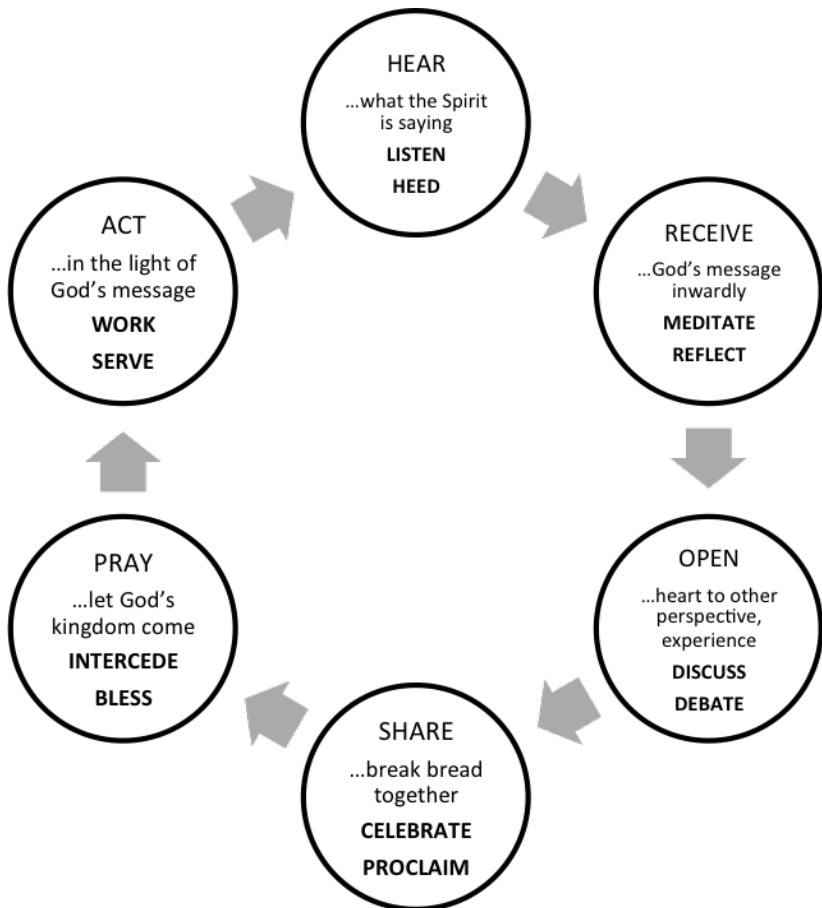


Figure 5.8: MPD Learning Cycle

5.2 Facilitating role

MPD is an intentionally open, reflective, group-orientated learning process, in which all kinds of leaders and learners are invited to participate together in discovering what the Spirit is saying.

Facilitating Spirit-led discipleship

Holy Spirit-led discipleship is about participating in a process through which the Spirit of Christ is able to lead, warn, direct, encourage, teach, challenge and exhort us personally and corporately.

- Discipleship is never a matter of pouring out information from a teacher or from text books, in order to fill others with the same knowledge. This may be how we learned in school, but Spirit-led discipleship is different.
- The goal of discipleship is not to establish shared dogmatic belief or conformity to the convictions of a leader, mentor or facilitator, nor to church traditions—and certainly not to every aspect of MPD.
- The goal is conformity to the Spirit of the Messiah, Jesus, and obedience to the will of the Father.
- Since, every person differs in gift and personality and stage of development, each needs be empowered to learn in their own particular way and at their own pace.
- The aim therefore is to allow MPD to be a vehicle for God's Spirit to speak to, educate and disciple people – recognising that MPD itself represents only one part of a whole-life process through which the Messiah may be guiding and directing his people.

Facilitating openness

The aim is to foster an environment of learning and discovery, where debate and discussion is lively, yet relaxed and uncompetitive. An environment in which all members, even the youngest and least experienced, are comfortable to openly contribute their views, burdens and questions.

- Openness, difference and diversity of views will not stifle the true unity of the Spirit, which is based upon love and mutual respect.

- Forced conformity, will however, typically erupt, sooner or later, because people need to feel that they have been heard and listened to—especially those with a different perspective.

By encouraging open debate, it is possible for members to learn how to express and assert strong and diverse views, without creating conflict or forcing conformity. However, openness can be particularly challenging to foster in cultures where traditional authority flows downwards from the top and conformity is highly valued.

Here are some practical suggestions that may help establish openness and diversity of opinion.

- Facilitators should contribute to discussions as regular group members; they should never abuse their position by dominating a discussion or belittling other views—indeed, they should encourage them.
- A facilitator should normally resist the temptation to rehearse teaching, affirm particular views or summarise discussions. Doing these things can undermine the discovery and learning taking place.
- If discussion becomes harsh or factious, facilitators should resist furthering the confrontation. Instead, quieten the group and then consider inviting a member with a harmonious or gentle personality to summarise (rather than resolve) the tension.

Facilitating relationship

Discipleship represents a form of learning that is *called out* of students or disciples, under the guidance and direction of a facilitator, mentor, educator or teacher. People in these roles come alongside motivated learners, not to direct them forcefully, but to assist, encourage, facilitate and draw out the *learning-through-living* that is continuously taking place within those being disciplined.

Regular discipleship groups are a good way to begin fermenting interpersonal interaction, however they usually need to be supplemented by informal exchanges that allow mutual encounter, openness and listening. Time for companionship and friendship, during which it is possible to share both painful realities stretching or testing our faith and hopes and dreams sustaining us.

Without this, learning groups may risk feeling too impersonal, theoretical or removed from daily life. However, unlike formal, classroom learning, this sort of practical, interpersonal, *open-to-Others* kind of learning is rarely neat and tidy and may even seem chaotic at times. It is, though, potentially highly effective.

Who can facilitate?

A facilitator needs to be someone who senses a calling to help others become faithful Christian disciples. This must motivate them to be humble, patient, flexible, warm, open and secure enough to allow others to explore personal boundaries of vocational understanding, experience and creativity, at their own pace.

A facilitator, or mentor, does not hold a position of authority over people. They simply facilitate the gathering of people into groups, for learning and discussion. Accordingly, a facilitator:

- may be a lay-leader;
- may be relatively young;
- may be a woman;
- need not have gone to bible college;
- need not be an established church leader;
- need not be an experienced mentor.

Of course, MPD can be facilitated by established leaders, mentors or disciples—providing they are willing and comfortable to facilitate group discussions that are genuinely reflective and exploratory.

5.3 Practical considerations

Facilitating a discipleship group will be most effective when practicalities are considered and appropriate planning takes place. This should be done in advance, in order to gain the most from group interaction.

Getting started

Maize Plant Discipleship is probably ideal for discipleship groups of between eight to ten people. This is small enough to grow together with a degree of intimacy; large enough for group members to explore discipleship commitment at their own pace.

- *More than ten?* Consider forming more than one group and begin forming disciples right away, by helping others to facilitate a group.

Involving others

Although a facilitator is responsible for convening gatherings, they may delegate responsibility for hosting, presenting the teaching, or moderating group discussions. Sharing responsibilities avoids one person dominating or carrying too much responsibility. Ideally, as many group members as possible should be employed, over time, in sharing responsibilities.

Whoever is presenting the topical study should read through it carefully, in advance: absorbing, familiarising and reflecting upon the teaching and its lessons. If areas are unfamiliar or unclear, don't ignore them. Instead, allow a lively discussion about that area of the study, encouraging others to bring forward their interpretation of the topic.

Timetable

Plan a timetable for the whole syllabus of – approximately 64 – studies to be completed, taking into consideration the nature of the group and availability of time. For example, are members affected by the agricultural or academic calendar?

Location

Meeting together can take place in any appropriate location that can comfortably accommodate a group. A large room in someone's home, or a community hall is ideal.

Consider how the seating can be used to form a more intimate space for the group. It is important that people are able to see one another, in order to provide a practical forum for discussions and a more intimate space in general.

Experiment with a change of location occasionally. Outside environments may be helpful in producing a liberating interaction; find out what works well for your group.

Adaption

Be prepared to adapt both the teaching and the method of presentation, to create a helpful and culturally-appropriate learning environment. Take into account the abilities and capacities of each particular discipleship group. Here are some suggestions to consider.

- Ensure literature is a helpful servant, not a hard task-master, to oral learners in particular.
- Avoid overcomplicating matters; try to keep things simple and light-hearted.
- Consider inviting creative people to contribute by interpreting or celebrating the message of the teaching using drama, art or song.
- What other ways might it be appropriate to organise the time and the group in order to ensure the learning is culturally appropriate, relevant and practical?

Think about these things as you progress throughout this discipleship experience.

Republishing MPD

I THINK you are touching something that is not already existing... If we talk about evangelism, it may well be a new way of approaching evangelism, but we already have many methods of evangelism. But discipleship is something that is really (an) innovative thing. –*Burkinabé theological educator, 2010*

6.1 Books for African contexts

Over the past three-to-four decades, the African Christian community has multiplied and expanded massively, such that the global Christian community's statistical centre of gravity is now located in Africa.

While this extraordinary numerical growth has taken place, there has been a relative shortage of book publishing within Africa. Resources serving to edify, disciple and inspire Christian communities have been particularly sparse within Francophone Africa.

Furthermore, many books are imports or translations of books written for Christians in different, generally Western, cultural contexts—wherein quite different questions, cultural values and theological imperatives are considered significant. In short, many Christian textbooks used in African leadership training are contextually inappropriate.

Added to this, books are published and distributed in a manner principally designed to protect the commercial interests of authors, publishers, distributors and retailers. Consequently, many books are practically unattainable to those who are economically poor—including many leaders hungry for resources to enrich their vocational work of making Christian disciples. These leaders typically mediate between the two cultural worlds of orality and literacy respectively and consequently need textbooks that

- facilitate, rather than hinder, mediation between these cultures;
- are readily translatable into mother-tongue languages;
- can be republished in a low-cost way that energises mission.

6.2 A new publishing philosophy

Maize Plant Discipleship has been formulated and published to meet these kind of contextual needs. With a missional, rather than commercial, philosophy, intended to practically foster and facilitate a widespread adoption of Christian discipleship praxis, led by African leaders and learners.

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Assuming textbooks of 25 A4 pages, double-sided printing, folded to produce 50 page-length, A5-size booklets, stapled and trimmed, with a single-colour printed cover, estimated production costs suggests a cost per book of \$2 is achievable. An agency that organises printing and distribution on behalf of a number of other organisations may be the most appropriate way to economise on cost.

6.3 License

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Further information

7.1 Translation

The text books of the Maize Plant Discipleship Curriculum have been intentionally formulated to be readily translatable.

If you would like to discuss translating MPD resources, for printing and distribution in another language, please get in touch with the author, or via the MPD website.

7.2 Internet

Additional information about *Maize Plant Discipleship* is available via the project website and twitter feed:

- <http://maizeplantdiscipleship.wordpress.com/>
- @MPDResource

7.3 Author

Dr John B Clements is a missiological educator, having received a doctorate from Fuller Theological Seminary School of Intercultural Studies, in 2012.

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John is married to Sarah; they have three boys and one girl and presently live in a delightful corner of South West Wales, UK. John is an avid bird-watcher and casual photographer, pastimes that he combines with his enjoyment of countryside and coastal walking.

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