

Discipleship on an estate

Baptist minister Tom Grant is the head of Proximity, a new, free resource hub for churches, leaders and anyone working in urban ministry and mission. Proximity will begin 2025 with an in-depth focus on discipleship



Jesus said, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). How do people on estates become more like Jesus? What helps spiritual growth? Church attendance, Bible reading, praying... yes, yes, yes, we all know the pat answers.

Discipleship on estates leads us to bigger questions, though. In middle-class settings we might measure growth through subtle behavioural changes. Correcting profanity. Integrity in the workplace. Tithing. In areas long-affected by poverty, addiction and unemployment, tracing change isn't so simple. It's unfair to expect a family struggling on Universal Credit to consistently tithe. Encouraging somebody with literacy issues to read their Bible is plain cruel. Even attending a Sunday service regularly isn't so simple if you feel more at home elsewhere than church.

Thankfully, discipleship is more than making a few tweaks to appear middle-class. We need to remove literacy, appearance, employability and fruity language from our ideas about spiritual growth.

Jesus chose 12 disciples from working class backgrounds. He didn't choose a single rabbi. Nor a scribe. Nor a priest. Not one of the men he chose came

from a comfortable or educated background. Instead, he trained fishermen, tax collectors, and zealots. Common men with fighting talk and four-letter words.

The Master worked with people whose lives looked closer to estate living than leafy suburb life. Urban ministry presents unique discipleship challenges, but the core of following Jesus remains the same as it was two thousand years ago: to take up our cross and deny ourselves. It's that straightforward. Simple, but not easy. So, how do we lead people to self-denial and cross-carrying on our estates?

In early 2025 we will be focussing on 'discipleship.'

What do you think is foundational for discipleship? How have you overcome cultural challenges? What's helped you develop spiritual maturity in an urban context?

Baptist minister Tom Grant is the head of Proximity, a new, free resource hub by urban missionaries, for urban missionaries.

It features blogs, podcasts, prayers, teaching, stories, audio, video and more, at proximityhub.org – and is planning to release discipleship resources in early 2025.

Join the conversation by emailing info@proximityhub.org

Tom leads Emmanuel, a Baptist church in Bootle, and has lived there for the last decade with his wife Emma, and three children.

Proximity is part of the Message Trust

