

LIVING AN AUTHENTIC LIFE

A five-session study course exploring
discipleship with the world church.



† UNITED SOCIETY
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LIVING AN AUTHENTIC LIFE

A five-session study course exploring discipleship with the world church.

The aim of this study course is to explore what it means to be a disciple of Christ. We will be looking at the Bible and reading about the experiences of Christians around the world.

We do not intend to offer definitive answers, but rather encourage you or your study group to investigate what discipleship means to you personally and collectively.

We hope the result will be that we feel more able to live an authentic life, being true to ourselves, true to those we meet, and true to God.

We have allocated a space as part of each study for you to note down something you have learned that you could incorporate into your practice of discipleship.

Some thoughts on discipleship

- According to the Oxford Dictionary, a disciple is 'a follower or pupil of a teacher, leader or philosopher.'
- The word disciple is derived from the Latin *discipulus*, meaning pupil, from *discere*, to learn.
- The Greek term for 'disciple' in the New Testament is *mathetes*, which means more than just 'student' or 'learner': a disciple is a 'follower', someone who adheres to the teachings of another, making them their model for life.
- Jesus' followers were called disciples long before they were ever called Christians. Their discipleship began with Jesus' call and required them to respond by following him, and resulted in following him through his ministry, death and resurrection. The word 'disciples' is found 233 times in the Gospels.



Cover: Otillia Soares, a participant in a USPG-funded Theological Education by Extension course, Lichinga, Mozambique. (USPG/Leah Gordon)

Some thoughts on authenticity

- Christ calls us to be authentic. We are not called to be perfect, but to turn to God as we seek to become more Christ-like in our discipleship.
- A disciple is not required to live the Christian life in isolation. Instead, we are encouraged to seek the support of our brothers and sisters, locally and globally.
- According to the Oxford Dictionary, authentic means 'of undisputed origin, not a copy, genuine, faithfully resembling the original, based on facts, accurate, reliable.'

How to use this course

- Give space for everyone to speak who wants to.
- Let your group be a safe and confidential space in which people feel able to share.
- Allow for differences of opinion. One of the important qualities of the Anglican Communion is that it seeks to hold unity in diversity: we can disagree, or hold different perspectives, but still be one in Christ.
- Be willing to think differently. Rather than trying to find the 'right' answer to a question, instead be curious and interested in the many different perspectives and points of view that people have to offer.
- There is a lot of material in this course. You may wish to pick and choose which questions you would like to answer.

All bible references: NRSV



STUDY 1

INTRODUCING DISCIPLESHIP

Discipleship means different things to different people. One of the aims of this course is to explore more deeply what discipleship means to you and your church community.



Jothi and her baby in Kannirajapuram village,
Tamil Nadu State, India. (USPG/Leah Gordon)

Opening reflection

What does discipleship mean to you? Was there a moment when you decided to become a disciple or was there a more gradual process involved? Share briefly in the group.

Bible reading

John 1:43-51 - Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

- ⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."
- ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.
- ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth."
- ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."
- ⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!"
- ⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you."
- ⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"
- ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Questions

- Having spent time with Jesus, Philip wanted to talk about him to his friend Nathanael. What do you imagine had happened to Philip to prompt this show of enthusiasm about Jesus?
- Drawing upon this passage, how would you describe Nathanael's character? What is Jesus' attitude to Nathanael?
- Discuss how your understanding of discipleship differs when you think of it in terms of a) rule-keeping; b) relationships.

A story from India

Susy Putnam, from Totnes, and husband James, spent six months with the church in Kerala, India, on our short-term mission programme. While there, she had an encounter with God.

Today I had a light bulb moment. The church we attend holds services in the local language of Malayalam (we attend because this is the service our host leads). James enjoys it and knows it is where God wants him. As for me, I have struggled in every way to sit through these services. But then I read something in Henri Nouwen's book *The Road to Daybreak* which really helped me.

Reflecting on his experience of people with profound disabilities, Nouwen writes: 'It is a profound experience to be in the presence of someone who I can hardly understand, but who nevertheless communicates deeply the mystery of God's presence among us. It is an especially profound experience since it unites me so intimately with the so-called [learning disabled] men and women and lets me hear as they do, with the heart.'

So, I decided to go to church and listen with my heart. On this particular morning, I opened up my spirit and let God's heart and spirit connect with my heart and spirit. Instead of striving in any way to make sense of the service, I just let go and received. I received from the pastor's heart and from my Father's heart. I was listening without filters. All judgments I had been making - perhaps unconsciously - were gone. This was the nature of my 90-minute encounter with God.

Surrounded by local women to my left and right, I had no escape route. It was just me, God and the Malayalam words that I let wash over me.

I realised I had not only been striving in church here in India, but also at church back home in England. Striving to connect, striving to worship, striving to listen... Today the striving ceased.

Questions

- Share in the group your understanding of what happened to Susy during the church service in India.
- Nathanael and Susy both had a light bulb moment. Do you think light bulb moments are necessary in the journey of discipleship?

- Describe your own relationship with God. (Be assured there is no right or wrong answers – every person’s relationship with God is unique.) What helps and what doesn’t help you to develop this relationship?
- We each might have a different understanding and experience of God. How might these differences: 1) challenge us in our journey of discipleship; 2) enrich our church community?
- 1 Corinthians 13:12 reads: ‘For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.’ Given that God is in many ways beyond our understanding, what is the role of learning in our Christian journey? What do you find blocks your learning, and what helps?

Closing prayer

Holy God, you know us just as you knew Nathanael.
Open our hearts and spirits to yours,
that we might hear your call
and our response be as wholehearted as his.

Life principles

In the light of this study, what learning might you adopt to help you grow in your discipleship?

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How your donations will help

‘Let my people go’ is a programme set up by the Church in North India, with funding from USPG, to support the marginalised Dalit and Adivasi communities. In Amritsar Diocese, for example, the church is training women to run income generation projects so they no longer need to work as farm labourers on minimal wages for exploitative landlords.



STUDY 2

HOW SHALL WE LIVE?

A challenge for many Christians is working out how to put their faith into practice in a world that is often at odds with the practice of Christian discipleship.



Nursing a premature baby at the USPG-supported St Lukes Hospital, Malosa, Malawi. (USPG/Leah Gordon)

Opening reflection

What do you consider to be the purpose of being a disciple? Why do we think it is important to live out the Christian life?

Bible reading

Luke 19:1-10 - Jesus and Zacchaeus

¹ He entered Jericho and was passing through it.

² A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.

When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, ⁵ hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today."

So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.

⁶ All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of ⁷ one who is a sinner."

Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, ⁸ Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much."

Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because ⁹ he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

Questions

- The passage begins with Zacchaeus keen 'to see who Jesus was' (v2) and ends with his life transformed (v8). What do you imagine happened during this encounter that prompted Zacchaeus to change his life?
- Reflect on the changes that Zacchaeus did and did not make to his life. Does anything about his response surprise you?
- What might this passage be telling us about the nature of discipleship?

A story from Malawi

USPG is working with the Church of Malawi to tackle poverty, illiteracy and HIV/AIDS, as well as managing the environment to tackle the impact of climate change.

Malawi faces many challenges. It is ranked 173 out of 188 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index (2015). With a high density population of 16.8 million, farmland is being depleted of nutrients and forest land is being decimated for fuel.

People have limited access to economic opportunities, education and transport. A recent survey conducted by USPG and the Church of Malawi in four rural parishes found that 22 per cent of respondents had never attended school (80 per cent women); income stood at 50p per day or less; and 82 per cent of families had no toilets or washing facilities.

In response, a church programme is promoting literacy for girls, supporting income generation schemes, managing the environment, addressing sanitation practices, and improving access to HIV care.

Girls in St Joseph's Parish, Chinthече, are benefiting from the programme. Judith, aged 14, told us about an ingenious initiative: 'The school has installed new toilets for girls [funded by the church], which are very important. Previously, girls had to go to a borehole and use toilets that were also used by the whole community. The water was often dirty and there were no doors. But now the school has these new toilets, we have privacy, so this encourages more girls to come to school.'

Judith added: 'Girls also receive counselling on why we should keep coming to school because lots of girls drop out. Also, boys want us to be their girlfriends, but we are told to be careful so we can avoid HIV, other illnesses and pregnancy.'

Fr Hannex Kamenya, of St Joseph's Church in Chinthече, said: 'The Anglican Church is very important. We visit people wherever they live, even over the mountains. We know all the people in our parishes, which means we can have an impact.'

Questions

- Zacchaeus and Judith differ enormously in status, power and wealth. How might they differ in the challenges they face to be a disciple? What challenges do you face?

- The girls' education programme is an example of how the church in Malawi is addressing both practical and spiritual needs in communities. What might these aims tell us about discipleship?
- Think of a situation or aspect of life that you find particularly challenging in terms of being a disciple – it could be a situation at work, at home, with friends, in the community or something else. (Be careful to choose something you feel comfortable to share in the group.) Take it in turns to share, and practise listening without judgement.
- Given that we all face challenges in the Christian life, consider how we might support each other to pursue the path of discipleship.

Closing prayer

Holy God, in whose presence Zacchaeus was transformed,
enable us to respond ever more fully to your love,
that you might become a priority in our lives,
and we might share your transforming love with others.

Life principles

In the light of this study, what learning might you adopt to help you grow in your discipleship?

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How your donations will help

Many rural communities in Malawi do not have access to safe drinking water. We are supporting a programme run by the Diocese of Southern Malawi to provide households with easy-to-build sand-based water filters. Materials to build a filter cost around £50 and a filter is expected to last 50 years. The church aims to provide 3,000 filters in three years.



STUDY 3

LIVING WITH DIFFERENCE

Inevitably, as we go out into the world as disciples, we will encounter people with different attitudes, different beliefs and different ways of expressing themselves.



Badshahi Mosque, Lahore, Pakistan.
(USPG/Richard Sewell)

Opening reflection

The philosopher Francis Bacon (1561–1626) said: ‘Human understanding when it has once adopted an opinion... draws all things else to support and agree with it. And though there be a greater number and weight of instances to be found on the other side, yet these it either neglects and despises or else by some distinction sets aside and rejects...’ Reflect on this quote and share your thoughts with the group.

Bible reading

Acts 10:9-16 - Peter’s Vision

- ⁹ About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance.
- ¹¹ He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. ¹² In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air.
- ¹³ Then he heard a voice saying, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.”
- ¹⁴ But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.”
- ¹⁵ The voice said to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.”
- ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

Questions

- Peter held strict Jewish dietary laws which prohibited him from eating the animals he saw in his vision; by contrast, Paul said all animals were clean. Imagine yourself in Peter’s shoes: what might you be thinking and feeling during this experience?
- Consider how you have formed your own beliefs. (You might like to consider culture, class, upbringing, life experiences, encounters with other cultures, peer pressure, and so forth.) Briefly share your thoughts with the group.
- Like Peter, have you ever had an experience where you significantly changed your opinion on a theological issue? Share with the group.

A story from Pakistan

Raheel Sharoon, development officer in the Diocese of Raiwind, in the Church of Pakistan, explores how Christians are living with difference and conflict in their communities.

The Church of Pakistan finds itself in a challenging situation, with political and religious conflict between and among different faith groups.

Yet we seek peace and make the most of limited options. We run community programmes to help people of different faiths realise that working together is the way forward. We work primarily with religious leaders, women and young people.

Religious leaders are particularly important because, on the one hand, they can easily divide communities for political ends – but on the other hand they possess the potential to help mend society.

Peace-building is a dangerous activity, but we do not stop. We even work with extremists and fundamentalist groups to try and build links. And there is hope – there are those in all communities who oppose violence and seek peace.

In 2015, in Lahore, a drug addict from a Christian family was accused of burning the Quran. A case was filed against him under the Blasphemy Laws. Some extremists wanted to attack local Christians and burn the church. But several Muslim clerics worked with my diocese to help clergymen and security personnel to diffuse the situation and save lives.

At times, Muslim leaders have been helpful in hiding or relocating Christians falsely accused of blasphemy. This is a major change. Through a continuous campaign of the church, an increasing number of Muslims have come to understand how Blasphemy Laws are being misused to try and steal land or carry out personal vendettas. Indeed, it is interesting to note that Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws are mostly commonly used by Muslims against Muslims, often motivated by personal grievances.

Looking at my country, it is fundamentalism that is the overarching problem – and I must mention that there are Christians who are fundamentalist in their attitudes to other faiths and even other Christian denominations. Indeed, a serious concern of the church is how to shield young Christians from hateful propaganda.

Questions

- What struck you most about this article?
- Compare and contrast this article with the bible passage about Peter's vision. What do you notice, and how does this inform your understanding of discipleship?
- We all encounter people with different world views. Which views do you find particularly difficult, and how do you tend to respond when you encounter them? Share your ideas for what you find helpful and unhelpful to do in such situations.
- What is the relationship between discipleship and evangelism in a multi-faith context?

Closing prayer

Holy God, you call us to be disciples in a complex world.

Thank you for the diversity which surrounds us.

Help us to widen our vision to see your image in all people and to respond with your love to everyone in need.

Life principles

In the light of this study, what learning might you adopt to help you grow in your discipleship?

How your donations will help

USPG has been working in close partnership with the church in the Indian subcontinent since 1821. The Church of Pakistan was established in 1970, and since that time we have supported many church activities, including education, healthcare, leadership training for women, peace and reconciliation, and support for families made homeless by flooding.



STUDY 4

A WORLD OF INJUSTICE

Disciples are not only called to reach out to the vulnerable and marginalised, but also to challenge political and cultural structures that lead to war, poverty and persecution.



Cibini community, South Africa.
(USPG/Leah Gordon)

Opening reflection

What does injustice mean to you? Make a list of words and phrases that describe what you understand by injustice. It might help to recall a time when you were on the receiving end of an injustice? How did this affect you? (This is sensitive material; be supportive in the group.)

Bible reading

Luke 10:25-37 - The Parable of the Good Samaritan

- ²⁵ Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
- ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" ²⁷ He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself."
- ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."
- ²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"
- ³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'
- ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"
- ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy."
Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Questions

- It has been said: 'We've been so caught up with binding the wounds of the man on the road, but have we considered transforming the Jericho road so it is no longer dangerous?' Share your responses to this comment.
- We are familiar with this story from the point of view of the Samaritan and the wounded man. But imagine you are someone who lives along a road like this or who uses the road a lot: list the problems and your concerns about the road. What could be done about it, and how could this be achieved?
- What situations in your local community are in need of transformation and how might we respond as disciples?

A story from South Africa

Article by the Revd Canon Dr Vicentia Kgabe, Rector of the College of the Transfiguration, Grahamstown, South Africa.

There are many sayings from South Africa's spoken languages that reveal traditional attitudes to our neighbour. In Sesotho, the people say: 'When your house is on fire mine is automatically on fire too.' And in IsiZulu, the saying goes: 'A person is a person because of other people.'

So, in my context, the parable of the Good Samaritan is a story of neighbourly love, not care for a stranger, but care for a fellow human being.

When a group of rural women, in the region of Kwa-Zulu Natal, looked at this parable during a community bible study, they were not surprised by the generosity of the Samaritan. These women believe that every person shares an obligation to care for all people. They also recognise that such acts of compassion are more commonly something done by women than by men.

Too often, cultural and church tradition places responsibility for neighbourly care solely upon women – and this responsibility often comes at great personal cost as women endeavour to reach out in love with meagre resources.

More than this, it is often women themselves who are the ones in need of care. Women in South Africa are vulnerable, marginalised and often abused, by their families, government institutions and even the church.

Women have fallen into the hands of robbers who have left them stripped, beaten and half-dead. And those they hoped might offer help have passed them by on the other side, even blaming them, calling them names and

accusing them of bringing this calamity upon themselves.

The church is called to bandage wounds and feed the hungry. The church should be a place where faith is restored, neighbourly love is felt, and equality is practised – and where women and girl children are not treated like second-class citizens or worse.

Questions

- What struck you most about this article? Share your responses in the group.
- Women in every country experience discrimination. What is your own understanding of the issue – and what can be done about it?
- What is an issue of justice that is of particular concern to you? As disciples, consider how we might respond to these issues: a) as individuals; b) as a local church; c) as part of the wider church family?

Closing prayer

Holy God, you cast down the mighty and lift up the lowly, transforming the world into your kingdom.

Help us, your disciples, to continue to challenge injustice and so be your hands, your feet, your voice today.

Life principles

In the light of this study, what learning might you adopt to help you grow in your discipleship?

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How your donations will help

We are working with Hope Africa (the development arm of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa) to tackle gender based violence and support survivors of abuse. As well as giving a voice to survivors, we are encouraging communities to address the underlying causes of gender based violence. This includes helping men and boys to become positive role models.



STUDY 5

COUNTING THE COST

Discipleship carries a cost. We are challenged in how we live and serve others, and we may even face attack on account of our faith.



Christos Abbasi and Sofia Hashemi, with their son Alexander, Athens, Greece. (USPG/Leah Gordon)

Opening reflection

Describe a time when you felt you suffered because of your faith, perhaps due to personal challenges or due to attack from others (inside or outside of the church). How did the experience change you?

Bible reading

Matthew 4:18-22 - Jesus Calls the First Disciples

¹⁸ As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea – for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As ²¹ he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Questions

- Peter, Andrew, James and John left their lifestyles and livelihoods to follow Jesus; they left behind a sense of security (of being in control) and embraced the unknown. How does this description fit with your own understanding of discipleship?
- It is said that when knights of old were being baptised they would hold their sword arm out of the water so they could continue to use it for fighting – they were withholding a part of themselves from God. It has been said that today we might hold our wallets out of the water! What would you hold out of the water and why? What would help you to give this part to God?

A story from England

Nadine Daniel works with asylum seekers through Hope+, a programme started at Liverpool Cathedral. She describes the impact of meeting Iranian Christians.

In 2008, in Liverpool, the local Iranian congregation had to vacate the garage they'd been using as a meeting place.

The Dean of Liverpool at the time, Justin Welby, invited them to use the space in the cathedral – which, after all, has plenty of space being the biggest Anglican cathedral in the world.

So the Iranians came, about 30 of them, many of whom were asylum seekers, having fled the persecution of Christians by extremists in Iran. I learned so much about the bravery of the Iranian Christians.

Imagine what can happen. An Iranian stands up in church to give his testimony, the local bishop baptises or confirms him, it's all caught on video, and that video gets back to Iran. Then the UK government says: 'Your asylum claim has failed because we don't believe you're a Christian.' And that Christian is then deported back to the country where he had faced persecution.

In standing up and saying 'I believe and accept the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ', these Iranian Christians are effectively passing a death sentence on themselves. Yet they do it willingly and they do it gladly.

It is most humbling and a privilege to witness their depth of faith. In fact, one Iranian said to me: 'The only trouble with being a Christian in the UK is that you've taken a way of life and replaced it with a weekly meeting.'

Questions

- Read again the last paragraph in the article. Do you agree with this criticism? What in our church life hinders our authentic discipleship and what helps us?
- Share in the group any other responses to this article about Iranian Christians. What stands out for you and why?
- Consider how we can respond, as individuals and as a church, when we hear about Christians facing persecution around the world.

In conclusion: reviewing the course

- How has your understanding of discipleship changed while studying this course?
- What have you found most challenging about this course?
- What happens next? How will you put what you have learned into practice?

Closing prayer

Holy God, whose Son Jesus called his disciples to follow him, and warned them that discipleship would be costly, help us to live lives of more authentic discipleship as we seek to follow the example he set for us.

Life principles

In the light of this study, what learning might you adopt to help you grow in your discipleship?

How your donations will help

USPG is working with the Diocese in Europe as it responds to the ongoing refugee crisis in Greece and other parts of Europe. Your donations support vital work on the ground, providing legal advice and Greek lessons for refugees in Athens and serving 400 hot meals a week at Petrou Ralli and Amygdaleza pre-deportation centres. We are also providing medical aid, family-friendly spaces and support for vulnerable minors.



YOUR DONATIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The articles in this study course have been prepared by our world church partners.

Each contributor belongs to a church that receives direct support from USPG. Our financial assistance to them helps to fund vital work that has a huge impact on the lives of ordinary people. Your donations help to make this happen.

Within each study we have included an indication of how your financial support could enable our global partners to put the gospel into action among the communities they serve.

Now you have explored in this course how the world church is supporting discipleship, please consider how you will respond.

**For more details, email info@uspg.org.uk,
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LIFE PRINCIPLES

I pledge to adopt the following life principles to help me grow in my discipleship, by God's grace:

† **We are USPG.** We are an Anglican mission agency working in partnership with local churches around the world. Together, we work with local communities to improve health, put children in school, tackle discrimination, nurture leaders, give a voice to women, and much more. Founded 1701.

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