

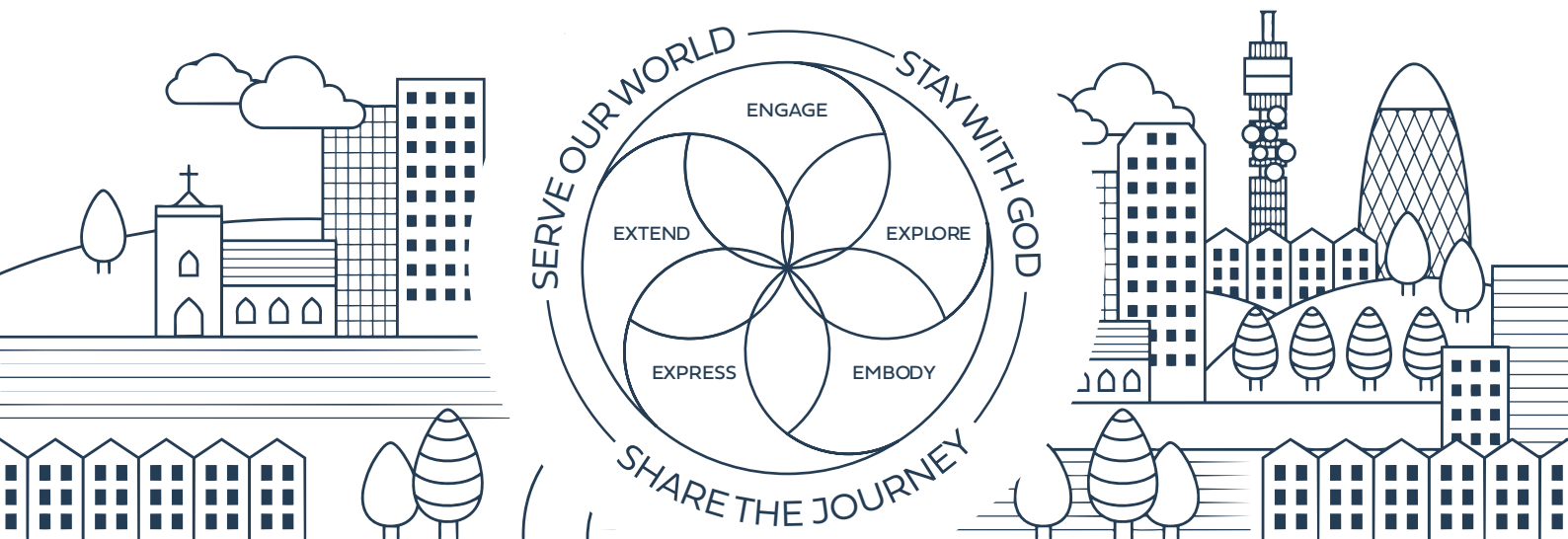


WAY OF LIFE

STAY ♦ SHARE ♦ SERVE

DISCIPLESHIP CYCLES [DIS-CYCLE-SHIP]

*A REFLECTIVE RESOURCE FOR
NURTURING COMMUNAL FORMATION*




— DIOCESE OF —
LONDON



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This resource is currently being developed and refined.
The latest version is available at <http://cycles.wayoflife.london>



DISCIPLESHIP CYCLES

INTRODUCTION

Why Discipleship Cycles?

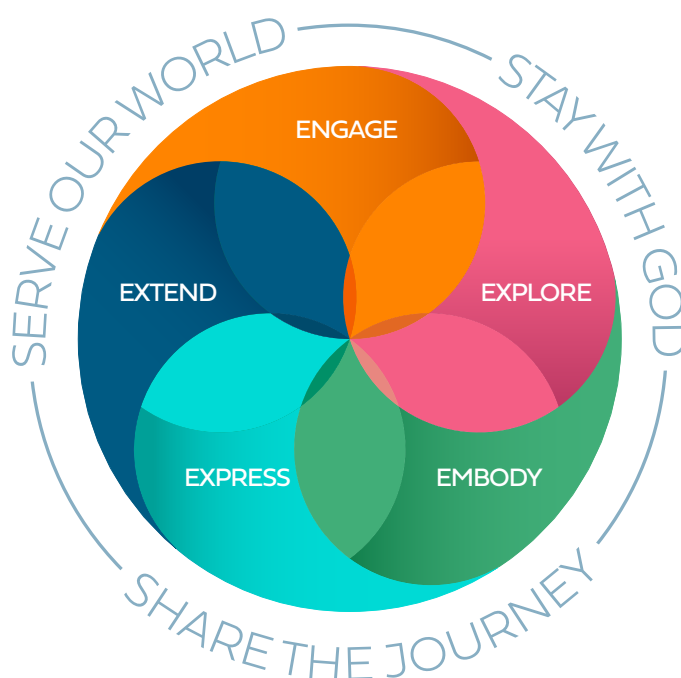
This resource helps churches reflect on and assess how they are nurturing an ongoing journey of encountering God and deepening life as disciples of Jesus together in community.

While the language of a “discipleship pathway” is familiar in many contexts, discipleship rarely unfolds in a straight line. Instead, it takes shape through recurring movements and shared rhythms of formation.

Discipleship Cycles identifies five interconnected cycles through which discipleship is nurtured within the life of the church: Engage, Explore, Embody, Express, and Extend, all rooted in and held together by encounter with God. These are not stages for individuals to complete, but cycles of discipleship that can be intentionally nurtured over time.

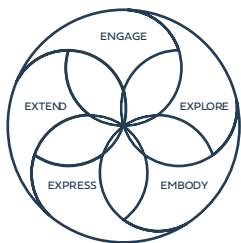
Churches are invited to reflect on how these cycles are sustained – through worship and prayer as we *Stay with God*, rooted in community as we *Share the Journey*, and expressed in daily life as we *Serve our World*.

Rather than offering a programme or fixed route, this resource provides a flexible framework for reflection and conversation. It offers a shared language for discerning how discipleship is being formed in ways that are intentional, Spirit-responsive, and grounded in everyday life.



Designed to work across traditions, it recognises that discipleship may look different depending on age, background, tradition, and life experience. A church attentive to discipleship will often find cycles overlapping: people may revisit areas, engage with more than one at a time, or move through them in different ways. Expressing and extending our faith are not the end of the journey, but part of how it deepens – just as vital as engaging, exploring, and embodying our faith.

This resource encourages churches to create spaces and practices that nurture discipleship across all aspects of the journey.



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◆ The 5 E's: Five Interwoven Cycles of Discipleship

The 5 E's describe recurring cycles within the ongoing journey of discipleship. Rather than linear steps, they are interconnected patterns of formation that overlap, repeat, and deepen across seasons of life and faith, all held together by encounter with God.



ENGAGE

Connecting with faith,
church and community

EXPLORE
Engaging with Scripture
and the story of faith



EMBODY

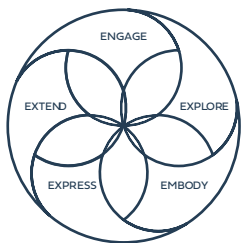
Living like Jesus

EXPRESS
Sharing gifts and
calling



EXTEND

Participating in God's
mission in the world



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ENGAGE

Connecting with faith, church, and community.

'Come and see.' John 1:39

We are drawn to engage with the Christian faith, discovering an invitation into relationship with Jesus and into community with others. For some, this begins with a conscious response to Christ's invitation; for others, it unfolds more gradually over time. Along the way, baptism or a returning to the significance of baptism becomes a sign of belonging, new life, and grace.



EXPLORE

Engaging with Scripture and the story of faith.

'Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly.' Colossians 3:16

We enter deeper conversations about faith, exploring the Christian story together and discovering how God's story intersects with our own. We are invited to dwell with Scripture and begin patterns of prayer, reflection, and study. This can bring joyful affirmation, but may also involve doubt, questioning, or rethinking belief. It may lead toward confirmation or a re-affirmation of faith as we continue walking the way of Jesus.



EMBODY

Living like Jesus.

'Christ is formed in you.' Galatians 4:19

As we are drawn into the life of God, Christ is formed in us. A shared Way of Life nurtures in us a posture of openness to God's transforming love. Personal and communal practices (like a trellis that

supports growth) help us stay rooted in grace and live out our faith day by day. Alongside rhythms of prayer and engagement with Scripture, the Eucharist is a shared practice that sustains us, orienting our lives around Christ's presence and self-giving love.



EXPRESS

Sharing gifts and calling.

'Each of you should use whatever gift you have received.' 1 Peter 4:10a

As faith takes root in our lives and community, we are equipped within the church community to live out our calling in the world. This is a time of growing confidence, as we discover and develop our God-given gifts and learn to follow Jesus in the everyday. It also includes encouraging others by walking alongside them and helping them grow as disciples. Generosity becomes a way of life, expressed in the joyful sharing of who we are and what we have for God's purposes.

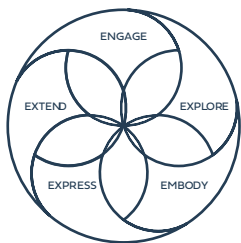


EXTEND

Participating in God's mission in the world.

'As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' John 20:21

The public nature of our faith comes into focus as we are called to engage with our communities and participate in God's mission of love, justice, and reconciliation. Discipleship nurtured within the church takes visible shape as we share the Good News, nurture faith in others, love our neighbours, confront injustice, and care for creation. This calling is often lived out with the help of a Mission Action Plan (or similar resources), which supports churches in discerning how best to join God's mission in their specific contexts.



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◆ The Encounter Thread



The 5 E's are held together by a thread of Encounter. In the London Diocese 2030 Vision, we speak of the desire for every Londoner to "Encounter the love of God in Christ." God beckons us to Engage, and continues to meet us as we Explore and Embody faith, Express our gifts, and Extend our faith – often beyond what we would recognise as the "journey" at all. Encounter both draws us in and sends us out. It is not simply an individual experience, but something the church learns to recognise and make space for in worship, pastoral care, mission, and everyday life.

Consolation

At times, Encounter is experienced as consolation: moments of light, joy, clarity, or a deep sense of God's nearness. These may come through worship, Scripture, community, or the sacraments, but also through everyday moments of beauty, love, and service. They strengthen us for the journey and root us more deeply in God's love.

Desolation

At other times, Encounter is experienced as desolation: seasons of absence, doubt, unravelling, or disorientation. These moments can arise within church life or far beyond it, in loss, injustice, unanswered prayer, or personal crisis. Desolation is not a sign that God has withdrawn, but often the place where faith is stretched and deepened. A church that offers support during these times becomes a place of trust and transformation. Even in questioning, we are held by the everlasting arms of God.

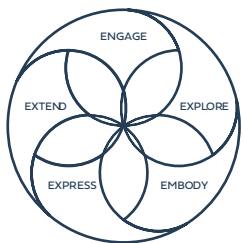
A church attentive to Encounter becomes a community that listens, accompanies, and trusts that God is already moving within and beyond its walls.

◆ Rhythms and Seasons

The cycles are ongoing rather than sequential, so different aspects of discipleship may come to the fore at different times in the life of a community.

The church year often provides natural opportunities for this. For example, Advent and Christmas can focus on the Engage cycle, extending invitations and welcoming new connections. Early in the year, communities may Explore faith through courses or conversation groups. Lent offers space to Embody faith more intentionally. The season from Easter to Pentecost can nurture people to Express their gifts and confidence in following Jesus, while Pentecost itself reminds all the baptised to Extend God's love and mission in the world. Some churches describe this rhythm as a pattern of making disciples, growing disciples, and sending disciples, sustained by seasons of abiding in Christ.

These are not fixed stages or programmes, but rhythms that support sustainability in church life. Communities may emphasise



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INTRODUCTION

these cycles differently, and individuals may engage with several at once. Over time, a healthy church will return to each cycle again and again.

Using this Resource

What follows are suggested tools and activities to help a congregation, leadership team or group of churches reflect on how the Discipleship Cycles are being nurtured within their context – noticing where life is flourishing and where further attention may be needed across the whole life of the church. This isn't about assessing individual maturity, but about cultivating a shared culture of discipleship across worship, teaching, pastoral care, and mission.

You can work through the activities in the suggested order, or adapt them as needed, returning to them as new insights emerge:

1. **Dwelling** in the Word
2. **Sharing** stories of Encounter
3. **Mapping** what is already present
4. **Noticing** where God is moving
5. **Listening** deeply to one another
6. **Discerning** possible next steps

As you use these activities, some cycles of discipleship may stand out as less developed in your context. This can be a helpful prompt to discern where God may be inviting your community to focus more intentionally.

We encourage prayerful attentiveness to be at the heart of the process. This resource includes activities such as Dwelling in the Word and deep listening, which can be returned to again and again, shaping the way we see, hear, and discern together.

Our Communal Practices sit alongside this resource as a companion set of practices that can be woven into meetings, services, and small groups. They include simple rhythms such as Breath Prayer, Community Examen, Listening Groups, and Prayer

Journeying, and are intended to support communal listening and discernment throughout the process. You can explore the Communal Practices and find guidance for using them at:

<http://practices.wayoflife.london>

Resources and support to help strengthen the cycles can be found through our online Discipleship Cycles Hub:

<http://cycles.wayoflife.london>



Throughout your journey with this resource, people may experience sacred moments where they encounter God – in beauty, in stillness, in prayer, in challenge, in doubt, or in one another. These moments can't be programmed but can be noticed, honoured, and gently held. Make space to name and nurture these moments, for they shape the heart of discipleship.



DISCIPLESHIP CYCLES

TOOLS AND ACTIVITIES

1. DWELLING IN THE WORD

Purpose: To ground the journey in God's Word and to listen together for where the Holy Spirit is drawing our attention.

◆ Instructions

Choose a short passage of Scripture to dwell in together. You might begin with a passage such as Acts 2:1–13 (Pentecost) or Luke 6:12–19 (Jesus calling the twelve), or another passage that feels appropriate for your context.

Read the passage aloud slowly.

Invite each person to notice a word or phrase that stands out to them.

Take a moment of silence.

Then, in pairs:

Share the word or phrase that drew your attention. Listen carefully to one another.

After this, each person briefly shares with the wider group what stood out to their partner.

Take time to discern together what God might be saying to the group.

Create space for listening without rushing or trying to interpret too quickly. Trust that God is at work through what is shared.

Return to this practice and passage again and again as you continue discerning the shape of discipleship in your church community.

Further Practices:

Our Communal Practices include fuller guidance on Dwelling in the Word and helpful printable handouts, along with other practices that can help shape how you gather and listen together.

See <http://practices.wayoflife.london>



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TOOLS AND ACTIVITIES

2. SHARING STORIES OF ENCOUNTER

Purpose: To ground the journey in lived experience and God's transforming presence.

◆ Instructions

Take time for people in your group or congregation to share stories of when they encountered God – moments of transformation, peace, challenge, calling, or awe. These stories can be dramatic or quiet, everyday or extraordinary.

Use open-ended prompts or wondering questions like:

- *Tell about a moment when you were deeply aware of God's presence.*
- *Tell about a time when something shifted in your faith or perspective.*
- *Tell about a time when someone revealed something of God to you, perhaps without even realising it.*
- *I wonder how God might be at work in the places you least expect.*
- *I wonder what part of God's story is speaking to your story right now.*
- *I wonder what gives you a sense of being part of something bigger than yourself.*

Create space for listening without interruption or judgement.

Further Practices:

- Our Listening Group practice gives guidance on how to best hold this space.
- Our Dwelling in Creation practice helps people notice delight and God at work in their surroundings.

See <http://practices.wayoflife.london>



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TOOLS AND ACTIVITIES

3. MAPPING WHAT IS ALREADY PRESENT

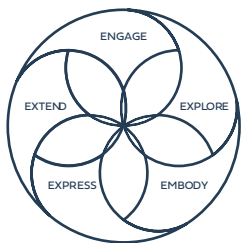
Purpose: To notice and name what our church already offers that supports the discipleship journey.

Instructions

Using the prompts below, note where in your church life each cycle – *Engage*, *Explore*, *Embody*, *Express*, and *Extend* – is currently supported.

- Where and how do we continually support people to *Engage* with faith and our church community?
- How do we create space for people to *Explore* their faith more deeply?
- How are we encouraging people to *Embody* the life of Jesus in their daily lives?
- How are we equipping people to *Express* their vocation, in daily life as well as within the life of the church?
- How are we enabling people to *Extend* their faith through mission, service, and sharing the gospel?

Use the table on the next page to name activities or patterns under each cycle, organised by how frequently they happen. You can leave space blank if nothing comes to mind yet – this is about gentle noticing, not judging. Use this as an opportunity to see the rhythms of discipleship in your context and where your community is most alive.

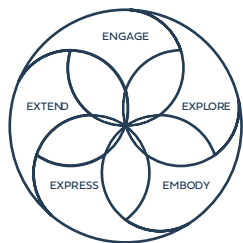


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TOOLS AND ACTIVITIES

MAPPING

	Regular (weekly)	Occasional (monthly/termly)	Seasonal (annually)
 Engage			
 Explore			
 Embody			
 Express			
 Extend			



DISCIPLESHIP CYCLES

TOOLS AND ACTIVITIES MAPPING **EXAMPLES**

	Regular (weekly)	Occasional (monthly/termly)	Seasonal (annually)
 Engage	<i>Sunday Worship, Daily Mass, Toddler group</i>	<i>Welcome lunch, Messy/Bubble Church, Baptism service</i>	<i>Carol services, Harvest celebration</i>
 Explore		<i>Alpha course, Being With course, Christianity Explored, Bible Study Group</i>	<i>Lent offering, Confirmation service</i>
 Embody	<i>Daily Office, Shared Silence, Dwelling in the Word</i>	<i>Prayer Journeying</i>	<i>Retreat, Pilgrimage</i>
 Express	<i>Read in church or lead intercessions, This Time Tomorrow slot</i>	<i>Faith in the Workplace course, Personal Discipleship Plan</i>	<i>Commission Service</i>
 Extend	<i>Warm space, Foodbank</i>	<i>Eco church, Forming public relationships</i>	<i>Activism, Evangelism</i>



DISCIPLESHIP CYCLES

TOOLS AND ACTIVITIES

4. NOTICING WHERE GOD IS MOVING

Purpose: To invite individual or shared reflection on how our church supports the journey of discipleship across the five cycles: Engage, Explore, Embody, Express, and Extend – as well as how moments of Encounter with God are nurtured throughout.

Instructions

Invite individuals to reflect on each statement and mark how much it fits their experience using the scale below. There is also space to add personal stories or observations.

Encourage people to be honest, there are no right or wrong answers.

Notice what surprises, encourages, or invites hope. If time allows, invite people to share insights or reflections with a partner.

Key



Yes – This is a strength for us: it's well-embedded in our life together.



Nearly – This is often true of us, though not yet consistent.



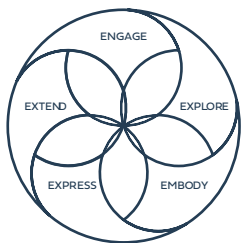
Somewhat – We're growing in this; it's becoming part of who we are.



Beginning – We've made a few steps, but it's still early days.



Not yet / Not sure – This doesn't feel true yet, or I'm unsure.



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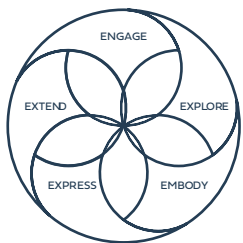
NOTICING – QUESTIONNAIRE

Reflect on each statement and mark how much it fits your experience using the scale below.



ENGAGE	NOT YET / NOT SURE	BEGINNING	SOMEWHAT	NEARLY	YES
Our church community is visible and welcoming in the neighbourhood, offering a gentle invitation to all.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
People can easily find ways to connect and belong to our church community.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other stories or examples of how our church helps people engage:					

EXPLORE	NOT YET / NOT SURE	BEGINNING	SOMEWHAT	NEARLY	YES
People are invited to join conversations, courses, or gatherings that introduce and explore faith.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Our church provides safe spaces to ask questions, wonder, and explore God's story together.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other stories or examples of how our church helps people explore:					



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TOOLS AND ACTIVITIES

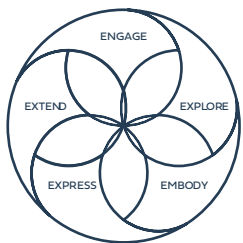
NOTICING – QUESTIONNAIRE

Reflect on each statement and mark how much it fits your experience using the scale below.



EMBODY	NOT YET / NOT SURE	BEGINNING	SOMEWHAT	NEARLY	YES
Our church encourages people to notice God's presence in everyday life.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
People are supported to live out Jesus' way through prayer and practices that help them stay rooted in God and walk in faith alongside each other.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other stories or examples of how our church helps people embody their faith:					

EXPRESS	NOT YET / NOT SURE	BEGINNING	SOMEWHAT	NEARLY	YES
Our church supports people to explore their calling and purpose in everyday life: at work, at home, and in their communities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
People are encouraged to discover and use their spiritual gifts to serve within the church and wider world.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other stories or examples of how our church helps people express their gifts and calling:					



DISCIPLESHIP CYCLES

TOOLS AND ACTIVITIES

NOTICING – QUESTIONNAIRE

Reflect on each statement and mark how much it fits your experience using the scale below.



EXTEND	NOT YET / NOT SURE	BEGINNING	SOMEWHAT	NEARLY	YES
People are encouraged and supported to live out their faith in the world through acts of service, justice, and care.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Our church fosters relationships across social and cultural boundaries and equips people to share the good news of Jesus in everyday ways.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other stories or examples of how our church helps people extend their faith in the world:					

ENCOUNTER THREAD	NOT YET / NOT SURE	BEGINNING	SOMEWHAT	NEARLY	YES
Our church creates space for ongoing encounters with God that deepen faith and transform lives.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Our community holds people with compassion and grace through all stages of faith, including doubt and questioning.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other stories or examples of how our church helps people encounter God:					



DISCIPLESHIP CYCLES

TOOLS AND ACTIVITIES

5. LISTENING DEEPLY TO ONE ANOTHER

Purpose: To listen to what God might be saying through the shared reflections of our community.

◆ Instructions

Gather in small groups (3–5 people) and invite people to reflect on what they noticed from the previous activities. Use these questions:

- *What strengths or signs of life did you notice?*
- *Was anything surprising or unexpected?*
- *What areas feel like gentle invitations to grow or change?*
- *How have you personally experienced God's presence on this journey?*

Tips for a safe and open conversation:

- *Listen fully without interrupting or trying to fix.*
- *Encourage honesty and curiosity.*
- *Close with a moment of prayer or silence.*

Further Practices:

- Our Listening Group practice gives guidance on how to best hold this space.

See <http://practices.wayoflife.london>



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TOOLS AND ACTIVITIES

6. DISCERNING POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

Purpose: To begin imagining practical next steps that support deeper discipleship in our church community.

Instructions

As a leadership team, PCC, or ministry group, look at what has emerged from using the tools and activities and ask:

- *What is already bearing fruit that we want to celebrate or strengthen?*
- *Where do we sense God's invitation to go deeper?*
- *Is there a small, do-able next step to try over the coming season?*
- *Who else could we listen to before we decide? (This might include people at the boundaries of our church community – those new to faith, infrequent attenders, those curious but not yet connected, or those who used to be involved but no longer are.)*

You might use sticky notes to map emerging ideas under these four headings:

- **Encourage** – what's growing and needs affirming
- **Adapt** – what could be reshaped or deepened
- **Start** – a small new step to try
- **Let go** – anything that no longer helps the journey

As you reflect, consider giving particular attention to the discipleship cycle that appears least developed in your context. Investing energy there can open fresh possibilities for transformation in your church's journey of discipleship.

Further Practices:

- Our Community Examen practice is a tool for ongoing prayerful discernment in the context of community.

See <http://practices.wayoflife.london>



Please share your reflections on the resource using our short feedback form:

<http://cyclesfeedback.wayoflife.london>

If you are part of a context where this resource is being piloted, please use this more detailed form to share your learning and reflections:

<http://cyclespilot.wayoflife.london>



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For resources to support each of the Discipleship Cycles, visit:

<http://cycles.wayoflife.london>

