

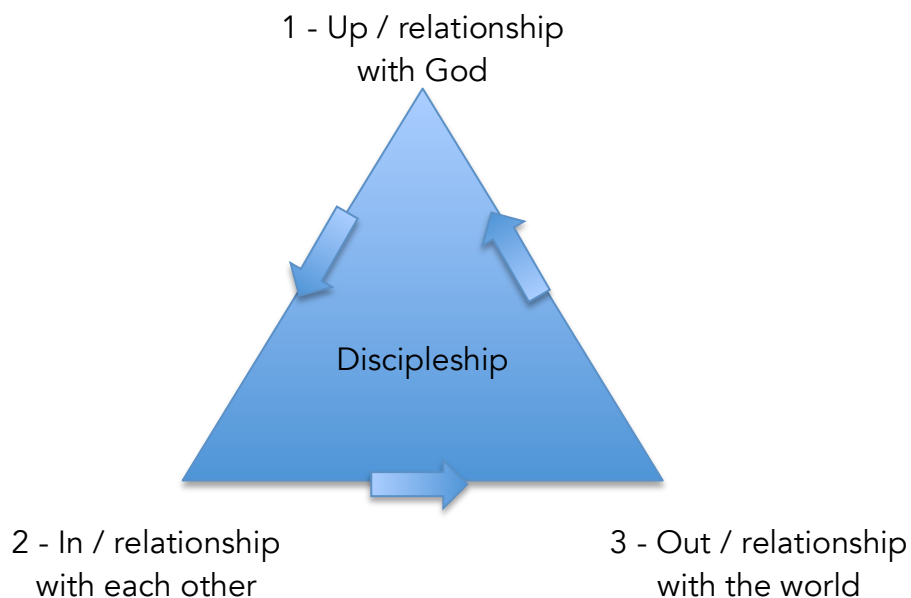


Developing our Church Vision – part 3

(September 2016)

A Toblerone model of the Christian life

A helpful model of Christian life looks at three sets of relationships: our relationship with God, with other Christians, and with the wider world.



The Christian life has to be rooted in our relationship with God (1). As Christians, God has placed us in his family, the church (2). Jesus' love compels us and his word commands us to go to all nations (3). Being involved in mission (3) is exciting and rewarding, but it is also nerve-wracking and exhausting, so we are driven back to God (1).

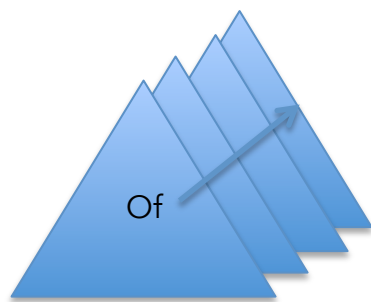
If we are to be effective, maturing disciples, we need to keep working at all three sets of relationships.

- If we are strong at Up and In, but not Out – we will be a holy huddle, making no discernible difference in God's world. And we'll rarely be pushed out of our comfort zones, so we won't be maturing as disciples

- If we are strong at In and Out, but not Up – we will burn out, because we won't be filled with God's compassion for the lost or serving in his strength. And our lack of prayer and engagement with God will mean we're not growing as disciples
- If we are strong at Up and Out, but not In – we will wear out, because we won't have the support, encouragement and insight of other Christians. And without a sense of community, our discipleship will be severely stunted
- If we are strong in all three areas of discipleship, our faith will have deep roots able to withstand stormy gales (Eph 4.14)

Every part of our church life should reflect something of these three sets of relationships, although it's right that some areas of church life will focus on one more than the others.

What about the Toblerone?!



It is helpful to think of another dimension in church life – 'Of' – because we are part **of** the bigger body of Christ.

This is helpful when thinking about where our particular 'bit' of St James' by the Park fits in to the rest. Each slice of the Toblerone (eg the seniors ministry, or youth ministry, or the Beacon, or a cell group) will have elements of Up, In and Out. But because we are a large enough church community that it's impossible to know everyone, we can sometimes feel on the edge. It's better to think of ourselves as an integral part **of** the whole Toblerone – there are just lots of other slices!

This is also helpful when thinking about our wider relationships – we are part **of** Churches Together in Shirley, Southampton Christian Network, the Diocese of Winchester – and the worldwide church! Together, we are all seeking to build the Kingdom of God. Our discipleship is deepened as we learn from and relate to our Christian brothers and sisters from other churches, cultures and eras.