

# The Emmaus narrative and contemporary Christian followership – An empirical case study



## Authors:

Pierre B. Engelbrecht<sup>1</sup>   
Willem J. Schoeman<sup>1</sup> 

## Affiliations:

<sup>1</sup>Department of Practical Theology and Missional Theology, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

## Corresponding author:

Willem Schoeman,  
schoemanw@ufs.ac.za

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This article aims to explore a 'lived discipleship' by determining whether and how contemporary communities of faith could implement the norms and principles reflected in the Emmaus narrative of Luke 24:13–35 within a plausible epistemological framework that might facilitate a fresh understanding of Christian followership as discipleship. This was done through an empirical case study using two focus groups as co-researchers, in order to actively listen to their respective understandings of lived theology in their unique South African contexts. The two focus groups consisted of (1) a contemporary Christian grouping of Afrikaans-speaking, active churchgoers situated in Hazeldean, a suburb in Pretoria East, Tshwane, Gauteng and (2) a contemporary Christian grouping of African, active churchgoers situated in Ivory Park, a suburb in Tembisa, Ekurhuleni, Gauteng. This article concluded that Luke 24:13–35 nudged the co-researchers to re-evaluate their contemporary understanding of discipleship and moved them to additional and new perspectives in terms of practical expressions thereof that can be best described as 'lived followership'. A shift from perceiving Jesus in terms of an 'act to follow' by gaining the correct knowledge, to following Jesus as 'a performative act', a shift from 'theoretical knowledge' to 'heart knowledge'.

**Contribution:** This article is a part of the Festschrift for Prof. Stephan Joubert. This article plays into similar creative interdisciplinary relationship as seen in the work of Prof. Joubert, by looking at the relationship between New Testament and Practical Theology in order to improve practices of faith that is rooted in a biblical understanding of Jesus.

**Keywords:** Emmaus narrative; discipleship; lived religion; empirical case study; Luke 24:13–35; contemporary faith communities.

## Introduction

The theme of discipleship is of importance in the Synoptic Gospels and it 'lies at the heart of all Christian thought, life, and ministry' (Longenecker 1996:ix). Discipleship can be seen as 'een kernbegrip' for the church (Van der Beek 2015:8). However, as many studies indicate, discipleship, as practically adhering to and imitating the teachings of Jesus, is either lacking or at an all-time low in congregations across South Africa and elsewhere across the globe (Kgatla 2016:57–75; Light 2012:259, 389). 'Discipleship has almost disappeared from everyday discussions in faith communities' (Nel & Schoeman 2019:1). This article aims to explore a 'lived discipleship' by determining whether and how contemporary communities of faith could implement the norms and principles reflected in the Emmaus narrative of Luke 24:13–35 within a plausible epistemological framework that might facilitate a fresh understanding of Christian followership as discipleship. This essay intends to 'develop knowledge about the improvement of practices' (Hermans & Schoeman 2015:26) where the Emmaus narrative will serve as the normative source in this regard. It is our contention that the Bible, and more precisely Jesus, plays a central role in the shaping of faith (Joubert 2020:38), the development of 'lived theology' and practices. In the words of Joubert (2020:25): 'the Church needs to be reintroduced to Jesus' in order to kindle a 'vibrant faith' that is 'rooted in a biblical understanding' of Jesus. This article will approach this above-mentioned aim by a qualitative study and using two focus groups as part of the empirical case study.

## Research method and design

In this article, the two focus groups are part of two contemporary communities of faith which is approached as a socio-religious community. Our interest is in the 'lived theology' of individuals who belong to different communities of faith and who embody their faith in their respective

**Note:** Special Collection: From timely exegesis to contemporary ecclesiology: Relevant hermeneutics and provocative embodiment of faith in a Corona-defined world – Festschrift for Stephan Joubert, sub-edited by Willem Oliver (University of South Africa).

contexts. Lived theology is understood as being part of, and practised in the 'embodied and performed cultural environment' (Ward 2017:62) of the everyday, examining practices and beliefs of people, in order to understand God's presence in human experience (Marsh 2017:7). This article aims to concentrate on theology as it is lived, expressed and experienced in everyday realities in terms of Luke's understanding of discipleship.

This is done through an empirical case study using two focus groups as co-researchers, in order to actively listen to their respective understandings of lived theology in their contexts, with the emphasis on lived theology, expressed as discipleship (lived discipleship).

To best measure the implementation of the norms and principles reflected in the Emmaus narrative as part of the co-researchers' interpretative framework of discipleship, the two focus groups selected for the purpose of this study met once and separately as an introductory session. The ensuing discussion with each focus group was guided towards their current (epistemological) understanding(s) of discipleship (i.e. the so-called actual as a first understanding of discipleship, which is used as dataset 1 [D1]). The interpretative question in this regard was: How do the co-researchers express their understanding of discipleship, and how do they act out their understanding of discipleship in their respective context?

Once this 'base' or 'actual' understanding of discipleship was duly vocalised in the two focus groups, Luke 24:13–35 was then discussed with each group. The challenge for them was to embody the various markers of discipleship in Luke 24:13–35. They proceeded to 'live' the text as a precursor to the study's measurement of the shift in their own understanding of discipleship in terms of their 'lived theology'.

After a time interval of 1 month, the two focus groups met separately once again to ascertain and, consequently, also measure the shifts in discipleship that manifested (or did not manifest) in their lives. To accurately measure the expected impact of this new understanding of followership as expressed in Luke 24:13–35, this part of the study also applied the indicators, as indicated below, to plot their so-called revised as a second understanding (i.e. their understanding of discipleship after they discussed the text, used in this instance as dataset 2 [D2] and named the revised understanding). The aim of this essay could be answered once the co-researchers' understanding and expressions of discipleship pre-Luke 24:13–35 and post-Luke 24:13–35 were finally measured against each other.

## The choice of respondents

The two focus groups consisted of:

1. A contemporary Christian grouping of Afrikaans-speaking, active churchgoers who echo their local congregation's expressions of faith. The local congregation, of which they

are part, is situated in Hazeldean, a suburb in Pretoria East, Tshwane, Gauteng.<sup>1</sup> The people in this focus group, called 'focus group A' or 'community A', all lived in and around this area at the time of the interactions. The local congregation to which they belong is Afrikaans and non-denominational.

2. A contemporary Christian grouping of African,<sup>2</sup> active churchgoers that echo their local congregation's expressions of faith. The local congregation, of which they form part, is situated in Ivory Park, a suburb in Tembisa, Ekurhuleni, Gauteng.<sup>3</sup> The people in this focus group, called 'focus group B' or 'community B', all lived in and around this area at the time of the interactions. The local congregation is English and part of a Pentecostal expression of faith within the framework of an international denomination.

We base our choice for the two different groups on Dreyer's (2012) remark:

Practical theologians from all institutional contexts will have to be more representative of the South African context in terms of race, gender and religious orientation. (p. 513)

Mburu (2019:396–397) also stresses this approach when she opts for a 'contextualized hermeneutics', a hermeneutic that makes concepts or ideas relevant in a given situation and thus to 'draw on aspects of African culture that facilitate our understanding of the practical implications of the Bible' (Mburu 2019:18).

Together with the purposeful sampling of the two contexts researched in this study (see Morgan 2019:51), purposeful sampling of the number of participants inside each group was also an important aspect in this study. The sample size was required to reach saturation of data in the coding process (Niewenhuis 2019:91–92) and to allow for the question of this case study to be properly answered (Bryman 2012:418). Each homogeneous group consisted of four to six people. In order to help create a further segmentation of gender and age, the groups were divided into two to four males and two to four females; one to two people between the ages of 20 and 30 years, one to two people between the ages of 30–50 years and one to two people older than 50 years

1. Hazeldean is part of the larger Shere suburb in Pretoria East, with this local congregation focusing on ministering to people living predominantly in Silver Lakes Golf Estate, in Pretoria East. The focus-group meeting was also held in the estate at one participant's home. This suburb is located within the City of Tshwane Ward 101. The population of the ward is 30 368. The median age in the ward is 31 years. The language most spoken at home is Afrikaans, and 84.3% of the residents were born in South Africa. The median annual employee income is R117 000 (median annual household income R230 700), with an employment rate of 73.4% and an educational level of Grade 12 or higher of 71.6% (Wazimap 2017).

2. We are aware of the pitfalls of grouping all the various cultures and ethnic groups in South Africa under the rubric 'African', but this study follows Mburu (2019:642–643) who states: 'I would argue that certain underlying commonalities make it possible to examine the African worldview as a single entity'.

3. The co-researchers in the focus group view Ivory Park as part of Tembisa, Ekurhuleni, Gauteng, even though it falls under the City of Johannesburg Ward 78. The local congregation focuses on ministering to people living in and around the congregation that falls within Ivory Park. The focus-group meeting was also held at the local congregation's building. The ward has a population of 40 980 people. The median age in the ward is 26 years. The language most spoken at home is isiZulu, whilst 80% of the residents were born in South Africa. The median annual employee income is R30 000 (median annual household income R14 600), with an employment rate of 45.7% and an educational level of Grade 12 or higher of 36.6% (Wazimap 2017).

of age. A total of 10 persons participated in these focus-group discussions.<sup>4</sup>

## The markers of the Emmaus narrative

In terms of the case study design, our first step was to come to terms on how the various co-researchers understand discipleship as part of their lived theology (stated above as the first focus-group meetings or the actual understanding of discipleship). The second research concept to be clarified is that of followership, as expressed in Luke 24:13–35 as seen in a recent study published by Engelbrecht (2020).

The author of Luke's Gospel wrote a 'narrative' (διήγησις; Lk 1:1). Approaching Luke 24:13–35 and focusing on the story-as-discoursed helps this article to come to grips with the function of Luke 24:13–35 within the overarching narrative framework of the Gospel (Dicken 2014:23). The codes and symbols embedded in this text explicitly and implicitly guide the implied reader towards a performative understanding thereof (see Jipp 2014:28, especially 40ff.).

The implied author of Luke's Gospel presents God as the primary actor in the Gospel (Squires 1993:2). It is through Jesus that God *directs* his overarching plan, and that this overarching plan of God is *realised* (Bock 2012:128; Cosgrove 1984:168–190). This insight into the role of Jesus in the Gospel will enable us to determine his function as *sender* and *protagonist* in conveying and performing the ideological point of view of the implied author (Greimas 1983:202–207; Tolmie 1999:56).

Focusing more closely on our text at hand, Jesus is held up in Luke 24:13–35 as the normative model for his disciples (Engelbrecht 2020:97). While journeying (πορεύομαι; 24:15) on the road (or *hodos*) as an 'unknown traveler', the resurrected Christ walks with the two disillusioned travellers who lost hope (Engelbrecht 2020:70). Jesus as the 'unknown traveler' asks them what they are discussing (Lk 24:17). He listens to their actual understanding of the things that have taken place in Jerusalem (Lk 24:18). After he listens, he educates them and corrects their actual understanding to the desired understanding found in 'Moses and all the prophets' (καὶ ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως καὶ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν προφητῶν; Lk 24:27). It is at the hospitality scene where he breaks bread with them, where their misunderstanding is finally corrected. Their blind eyes open as a sign of their new and correct understanding and Jesus is revealed (Wolter 2008:785). They finally move from misunderstanding, to the correct understanding (see Kurz 1993:143–144; Van Tilborg & Counet 2000:85), from their actual to the desired understanding. By means of his explanation of the true meaning of the prophets and Moses (or Scripture as used in this essay), these two 'ex-disciples',<sup>5</sup> as role models of all would-be disciples, move

4.The purpose is not to draw conclusions beyond the two groups but to give to reliable and trustworthy voice to their perspectives from an not-knowing position.

5.The travel away from Jerusalem to Emmaus can thus be regarded as a sign of lost hope on the part of the two 'ex-disciples' as well as the end of Jesus' ministry, a route fraught with misunderstanding and even lost belief in God's purpose attested to in Scripture, and now realised in Jesus' death and resurrection! (Breitenberg 2010:75–76).

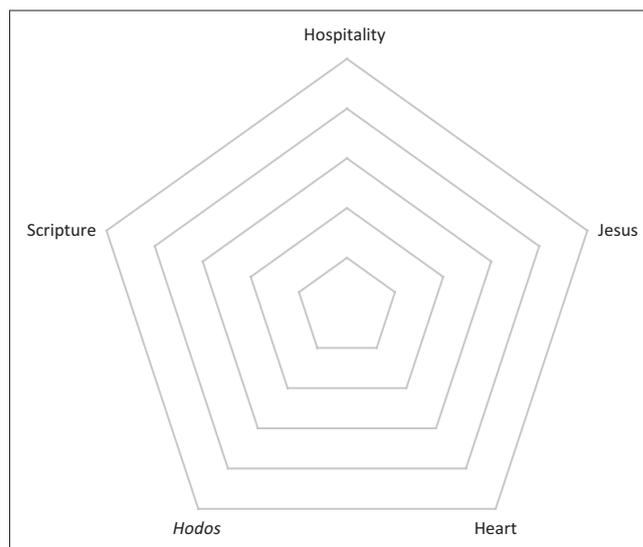


FIGURE 1: Plotting of indicators – actual and revised.

from misunderstanding to understanding (a new Christology, see Bucur 2014:688). Through participation in the breaking of the bread in Emmaus and extending hospitality to the 'unknown traveler', their eyes are finally opened and they shift from 'ex-disciples' to fully fledged followers<sup>6</sup> travelling back to Jerusalem with burning heart<sup>7</sup> (ἡ καρδία ἡμῶν καιομένη), which initiates the process of recognition of the true identity of Jesus (24:32; see Jipp 2013:196) and to be part of Christ's new *koinonia* (Schweizer 1982:284). Jesus is the role model for the intended readers whose behaviour must be emulated in terms of what concrete discipleship should be about and look like – that is, discipleship as expressed in terms of followership. In following the resurrected Christ, post-resurrection discipleship becomes followership (Engelbrecht 2020:96–98).

Based on the text of Luke 24:13–35 and Jesus as the initiator of this new post-resurrection followership, the five indicators<sup>8</sup> are proposed: the *hodos*, the use of Scripture, table fellowship and hospitality, a new understanding of Jesus (a new Christology) and one's heart (*koinonia*).

## How to measure

The above-mentioned indicators serve as indicators of the presence (or absence!) of the concept of operationalisation as shown in Figure 1.

It is our assumption that, when readers of Luke 24:13–35 are hermeneutically assisted and sensitised to envisage Jesus in

6.Prior to the resurrection, discipleship is seen in the imperative of Jesus asking people to 'follow him' (ἀκολουθεῖν; Lk 5:27, 9:23, 18:22) or people 'following him' (Lk 5:11, 18:42). Even though the typical Lukan markers of discipleship, as seen earlier in the Gospel, is not found in the Emmaus pericopy, becoming a disciple or follower of Jesus is an active choice and the two travelers in the Emmaus pericopy becomes followers of Christ in choosing to journey back to Jerusalem and be a part of Christ's new *koinonia* (see Engelbrecht 2020:99–105).

7.The resurrected Christ facilitates shifts towards a Christ-like state of mind and heart expressed as: a *hopeful* future following Christ, *heart-fastness* and a *heart-burn* propelling them to be part of Christ's new *koinonia* in Jerusalem (see Spencer 2019:619).

8.There are more themes located in Luke 24:13–35. However, the focus will be on the main themes as indicated on a narrative level by the sender (or initiator) of these themes. The implied author uses Jesus as sender (or initiator) to communicate his ideological perspective.

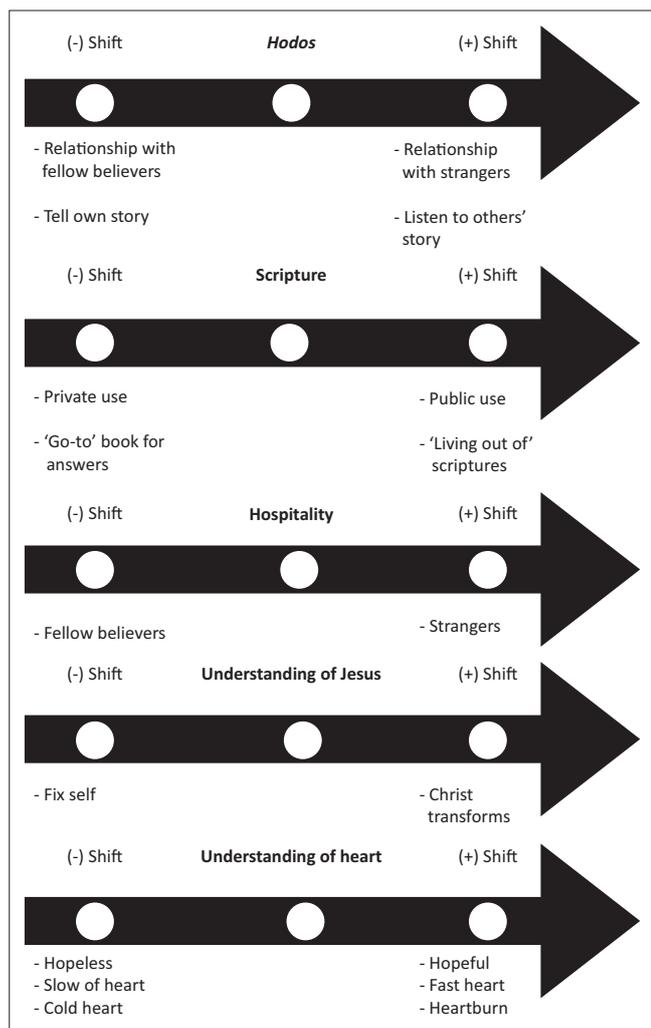


FIGURE 2: Measuring shifts of five indicators.

terms of these textual indicators, they would also become aware of the promptings of the implied author towards a performative act of followership, one that is moulded on the life and actions of the resurrected Christ (Engelbrecht 2020:154–158).

This process of measuring a shift in discipleship was done by searching for the presence or absence of the above-mentioned indicators in the focus-group meetings that could point to or indicate definite shifts, as expressed in the Emmaus pericope or not. These shifts was measured in terms of Babbie's (2013:169–170) understanding of 'a sign of the *presence* or *absence* of the concept' we are studying [*emphasis ours*] and a dimension is a 'specifiable aspect of a concept'.

Extent evaluation was based on the effect, in degrees of binary positions (–) or (+), of observable movements or shifts within each indicator, in terms of the relationship between them, and between the two focus-group meetings (actual and revised). The five indicators with their variables should indicate whether the co-researchers in each individual focus group did undergo a shift in discipleship from their current understanding and expression of discipleship to a followership facilitated by the markers embedded in Luke

24:13–35. On the continuum, the (+) value indicates the expression of followership. The (–) value does not imply that the variable indicated is a negative form and that any positioning towards the negative variable is *per se* wrong or negative, but within the co-researchers' epistemological understanding of lived theology and expression of discipleship, positioning towards the (–) variables indicates that Luke 24:13–35 did not facilitate a broadening of their discipleship horizons towards followership. This process could be schematically illustrated as follows (see Figure 2).

## Findings

### Community A/Focus Group A

#### Dataset 1: Actual understanding of discipleship

The case study measured community A's base understanding (actual understanding) of discipleship through the interpretative lens of the indicators identified in Luke 24:13–35 above. This can be illustrated as follows (see Figure 3).

**The *hodos*:** In terms of community A's actual understanding of discipleship, the emphasis was on telling *their own* story (–) (4:42; 4:42; 4:51; 4:100; 4:101; 4:103; 4:105; 4:107),<sup>9</sup> instead of asking the people, with whom they interacted, to share *their* story, or to purposefully listen to strangers they met and with whom they had interactions. The dimension of intentionally engaging in people's lives and to 'listen in the conversations' was lacking (–). Another absence of the *hodos* indicator (–) was that the co-researchers only engaged in conversations with people they know and with whom they are familiar, such as family, friends, fellow Christians at work and at church (4:62; 4:52; 4:55; 4:151; 4:143; 4:148; 4:149), and not with strangers whom they met on their own *hodos* (4:18). Similar to the two travellers in Luke 24:13–35 who walked back to a safe space they knew, the 'co-researchers' in community A expressed their understanding of discipleship in terms of a safe and reliable context with people familiar to them.

They were not open to interact with others outside of their community of faith or as individuals in their own right within their specific contexts. People outside of their own circle of family and friends were regarded as 'human objects' whom they had to bring to faith without confronting or offending them with the truths of the Gospel. This community's actual understanding of discipleship could thus be expressed as a 'self-discipleship', that is, a form of discipleship focused primarily on themselves. They did not give too much consideration to 'doing life with people' who did not believe as they did at this stage. They focused inwards towards the self and a self-discipleship life.

**The use of Scripture:** From the outset, the second indicator of Scripture was important (+) for the co-researchers in terms of their self-understanding of discipleship (4:47; 4:56; 4:82; 4:86; 4:104; 4:157). Scripture was focused on their self-discipleship.

<sup>9</sup>The quotations used are from the transcriptions of the individual focus group meetings. It was imported into ATLAS.ti as follows: Focus group A, dataset 1 = document 4. Focus group A, dataset 2 = document 3. Focus group B, dataset 1 = document 2. Focus group B, dataset 2 = document 1.

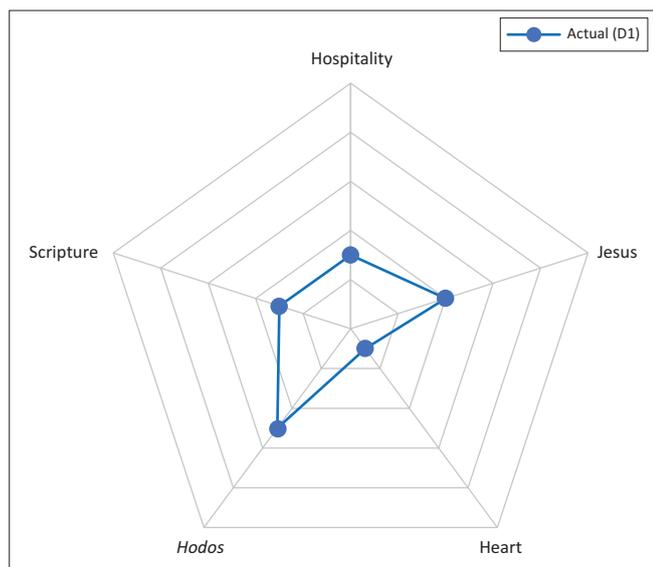


FIGURE 3: Community A's plotting of actual understanding of discipleship.

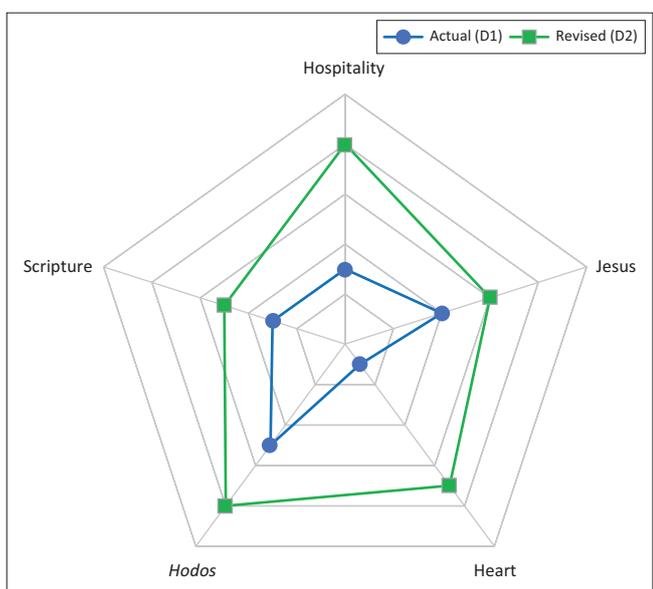


FIGURE 4: Community A's plotting of revised understanding of discipleship.

It was viewed mainly as an instrument to improve their spiritual lives (4:47; 4:86; 4:104; 4:157) and was used primarily in their private spaces (-). They neither fully embraced nor 'lived the Scripture' as modelled by Jesus on the road towards Emmaus. There was no space to effectively open up Scripture to strangers as part of discipleship (-). They regarded Scripture mainly as a source from which to obtain the correct knowledge (4:47), in order to say the correct things if, accidentally, they had to meet up with strangers (-) (4:16). They had to study the Bible with the purpose of their spiritual growth (4:3; 4:16; 4:86; 4:104) and of discovering the correct instructions for life. The Bible is used as a 'go-to' book (Joubert 2020:38), in order to obtain answers and, as a normative source, to obtain 'proof' for their current, 'safe' expressions of discipleship (-).

In the narrative of Luke 24:13–35, the two Emmaus travellers were disillusioned because they did not have a correct

understanding of the Scriptures (and of Jesus). Similarly, community A did not have a well-rounded understanding of Scripture at this stage, because they applied it only in their own safe spaces, familiar relationships and contexts. It was removed from their day-to-day realities. From this perspective, they do not 'live the Bible'.

**Hospitality:** The indicator of hospitality was rarely (-) reflected on in the co-researchers' actual understanding of discipleship (4:52; 4:54). From a discipleship perspective, there were numerous instances of interaction and contact between the co-researchers and non-believers (+) (4:59; 4:18; 4:156), but it was not understood in terms of, or deliberately set up or planned as expressions of discipleship (-). They did not include hospitality towards strangers or non-believers as part of their understanding of discipleship, nor did they recognise Christ as being part of such acts of hospitality (-). They viewed hospitality towards *fellow believers* also as part of fixing the self (-) (4:54). They did not include hospitality under the rubric of discipleship. They were not in deliberate contact with strangers; hence, table fellowship with such strangers was out of the question.

**An understanding of Jesus:** The indicator of a new understanding of Jesus (a new Christology) was also absent (-). The co-researchers knew 'the narrative' of Jesus well (4:2; 4:3; 4:26), but this was more or less intellectual or theoretical knowledge, and not so much part of their identity as followers of Jesus. Because they knew Jesus as Lord and Saviour, they wanted to obtain more knowledge about him (+) (4:45; 4:46), but the concrete impact of this knowledge in terms of their understanding of discipleship was still lacking. At this stage, the co-researchers in community A were focused on knowledge of what Jesus did, but this knowledge did not really prompt or enable them towards a 'performative act' of following Jesus (-), a 'burning heart'. Perhaps it would be fair to say that they did not really see Jesus as being deeply involved in their daily realities. He was somewhat impersonal and considered a 'fixer' (-).

**An understanding of the heart and *koinonia*:** Lastly, the understanding of the heart (*koinonia*) was also lacking in the co-researchers' actual understanding of discipleship. Maybe this is understandable, because of the absence of the previous indicators in their actual understanding of discipleship. They were primarily inwardly focused in terms of what we described as a form of self-discipleship. Their focus was mainly on how they could obtain more knowledge about Jesus and build their personal relationship with him (-) (4:3; 4:16; 4:86; 4:104). Because they were not really open to do life with strangers on the *hodos*, it was difficult for them to open the Scriptures and to let Christ 'set their hearts alight', in order to come to a new understanding of him as expressed in the Scriptures (-). When there is 'heartburn', hospitality becomes an expression of one's identity as a Christ follower. Because this was still absent, their understanding of self-discipleship was flawed. They do not come in contact with

non-believers, because of their understanding of self-discipleship (-).

### Dataset 2: Revised understanding of discipleship

The case study measured community A's shift in discipleship, after they 'lived' the text a month, through the lens of the indicators in Luke 24:13–35 (see Figure 4).

**The *hodos*:** For community A's revised understanding of discipleship, the emphasis shifted to hearing the stories of other people who now crossed their path (3:15; 3:93; 3:127). A shift occurred from the co-researchers only creating space for people they know on their *hodos* (-), to their being open and creating space for strangers as well (+) [3:7; 3:12; 3:26; 3:28; 3:29; 3:93; 3:147]. PA\_6 stated: '*Jy het ingestap as 'n vreemdeling en dit voel of jy uitgestap het as familie*' (3:51). [You walked in as a stranger and it felt as if you were walking out as family.]

Another shift occurred in the indicator of the *hodos* from telling their own story (-) (focused on the self) to asking people they met to share their own story (focus on other people) (+) [3:51; 3:60; 3:93; 3:96; 3:100; 3:105; 3:127]. They started to intentionally engage with others (strangers) and to listen to them, to be open and to create space for strangers to journey together on the *hodos*. This community's understanding of discipleship shifted from acting as a witness (-) to meeting others in their own contexts and to becoming more sensitive to God's assistance in helping them say the correct things at the correct time (+) (3:68; 3:70; 3:124; 3:144). Their engagement with and understanding of Luke 24:13–35 helped these co-researchers move from seeing others as 'strangers' (-), to interacting with other people, regardless of their faith. They were now prepared to 'walk' with them, to meet them in their respective contexts and to ask them to tell them their story (+). A clear shift occurred from focusing on the self (-) to focusing on the other (+).

**The use of Scripture:** There was a shift to a better grasp of how to 'live the Scripture' similarly to that of Christ in Luke's narrative (+). For instance, PA\_3 mentioned that she now tried to imitate Christ's walking with the strangers to Emmaus for an entire day by expounding the Scripture (3:5). She and the others shifted from understanding the Bible mainly as a means to get to the correct knowledge (focused on the self and a 'go-to' book for answers) in order to say the correct things when they meet strangers (-), to a sense of applying the Bible more responsibly as an immersive narrative in terms of their own performative acts and expressions of discipleship (+), thus 'living out of' the Bible. They realised that they had to internalise and embody biblical narratives in their own lives, in order to be able to provide moral guidance whenever necessary (+). In other words, the shift was to embody and *live* out of the Bible, instead of merely *learn* and comprehend the Bible. It became evident that the co-researchers were creating space for the 'opening' of the Scriptures in their own lives. This shift was also more obvious in the public use of the Bible (+).

**Hospitality:** A positive revision took place from fellowship with fellow believers with the aim of obtaining knowledge (-), to table fellowship or hospitality, regardless of people's beliefs, as settings where Christ is also present (+) (3:2; 3:6; 3:10; 3:11; 3:100; 3:105). They now understood fellowship as being focused outwards towards other people (+) and were more open to creating space around the dining room table. They realised that, in creating space around the table, God himself is also present: '*En eet saam want, daar is beslis 'n proses waar God homself openbaar aan die mense wanneer mense hulle mees basiese behoefte bevredig*' (3:12) [and eat together, because this is surely a process where God reveals himself to people when they are satisfying their basic needs]. In the process of creating space for strangers on their *hodos*, it was now easier to open space for the Scriptures around the table and to be more open to God's presence. This shift enabled the co-researchers to view hospitality towards strangers as an integral part of discipleship (+). Strangers became family through acts of hospitality (3:51).

**An understanding of Jesus:** It did become clear that they morphed into a new understanding of Christ, one where he now acts as host in the settings of table fellowship and in acts of hospitality (+) (3:12; 3:15; 3:19; 3:41; 3:100). They realised more clearly that Christ facilitates transformation instead of all their own knowledge-driven efforts. '*Ek het ... vir hom gebid en vir die Here gevra "verander net sy hart"*' (3:9) [I prayed for him and I asked the Lord 'please just change his heart']. ... '*die Here is besig om met die ou se hart te werk*' (3:11) [... the Lord is working in this person's heart]. '*[Jy moet bly in jou verhouding met iemand. Jesus sal hul harte verander*' (3:12). [Y]ou must stay in a relationship with people. Jesus will change their hearts.] This is because of the fact that they grew from seeing Jesus as their Saviour (in terms of their acts of obtaining sufficient knowledge about him), to also seeing and experiencing him as Lord in everyday realities (+). They shifted from focusing on the self, 'what is in this for me?' (-), to focusing on the other and creating space for Christ to start the transformation of the heart (+). In terms of Luke 24:13–35, a shift occurred towards a new performative act of 'living Jesus' and towards the realisation of a new 'burning heart' within themselves, which culminated in the 'transformation of the heart'.

**An understanding of the heart and *koinonia*:** Lastly, the understanding of the heart (*koinonia*) also underwent a positive shift towards a new understanding of the co-researchers' identity in terms of what could be described as 'relationships through fellowship' (+). A shift in *koinonia* took place, in that the co-researchers now understood their role and identity as being more grounded in a biblical Christology in terms of being expressed in a new understanding of the need for relationships with others (+). A transformation of the heart took place because a new understanding of Jesus was realised through the act of inviting strangers on their *hodos* and around their tables. This created space for the Scriptures to be opened and to come to a more correct

understanding of Jesus. A clear shift from hopelessness (–) to a hopeful heart (+) was also expressed:

*dat ons die een aand daar sit en dat ons so praat oor die hopeloosheid wat in hierdie een dorp is, né. Van werkloosheid en ... 80% van die kinders is op drugs in die dorp en sulke goed ... En weet jy, tot op die punt toe sê die een ou, 'Kom ons stop dit nou, kom ons begin bid vir hierdie dorp'. Né ... En dat ons daar sit en ons begin bid vir die dorp en tree in vir die dorp ... Dan besef ek dit is daai gemeenskap né wat 'n mens moet hê, daai fellowship wat ons met mekaar deel, né en dan dink ek dan gebeur dissipelskap [that we sit there one night and we talked about the hopelessness that is in this one town. Of unemployment and ... 80% of the children are on drugs in the village and stuff ... And you know, up to one point one guy says, 'Let's stop it now, let's start praying for this town'. And that we sit there, and we start praying for the village and intervening for the village ... Then I realise that community one should have, that fellowship that we share with each other and then I think, then discipleship happens.] (3.65, [author's own translation])*

## Community B/Focus Group B

### Dataset 1: Actual understanding of discipleship

The case study measured community B's base understanding (actual understanding) of discipleship through the interpretative lens of the indicators identified in Luke 24:13–35 (see Figure 5).

**The *hodos*:** In terms of community B's actual views of discipleship, their emphasis was on a relationship with God obtained through knowledge. This relationship was expressed in relationships (community) with fellow believers from their church (2:28; 2:44; 2:48; 2:79) and, thus, the *hodos* indicator was absent (–) in their actual understanding of discipleship. It can be said that, as the Emmaus travellers travelled back to a familiar context (Emmaus, their home), community B 'lived and expressed their discipleship' in a safe and familiar context (their Church) [-]. This was illustrated when PA\_8 stated: 'Like, I like the way we are doing it here at home' (2:79), where 'We call this home [their congregation], and the people we call it our family'.

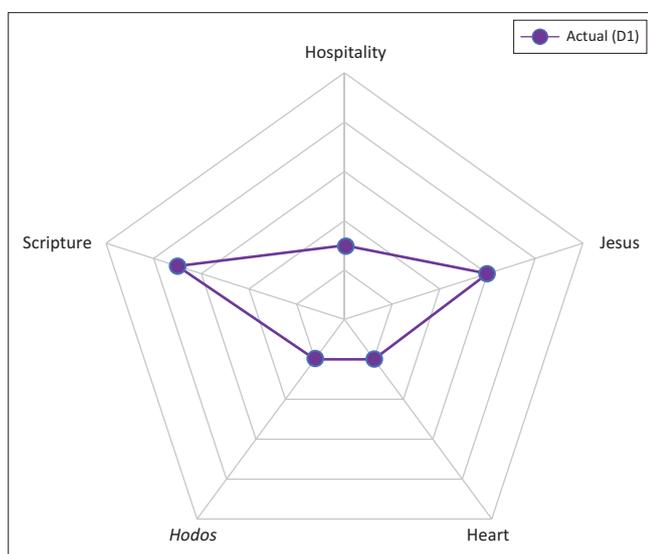


FIGURE 5: Community B's plotting of actual understanding of discipleship.

**The Scripture:** The second indicator of Scripture was an important aspect of the co-researchers' foundation of discipleship (+) (2:40; 2:43; 2:48; 2:77; 2:80). Their emphasis was on a relationship with God obtained through knowledge:

Knowledge of God is taken from the Word [Bible], nothing else. The more you read the Word of God, the more you know, more about him, and the closer you come to him. Ja. The closer you bond that relationship between God and you, through the Word. (2:40; see 2:18; 2:26; 2:28; 2:30; 2:34, 2:36; 2:43; 2:62)

They 'lived the Scripture'. They understood the Bible as a living Book, one that was part of their lifestyle and their foundational understanding of discipleship. This is evident from a quote by PA\_8:

[L]ike the Bible says you are not going to say you love God unless you love the brothers that you are with, so that is how we practice discipleship amongst each other as Christians. (2:12)

She later stated it as:

[Y]ou hear of many people actually speaking of being disciples of Jesus Christ, but when you actually know what the Word [Bible] says you realise that this is not how you supposed to actually portray being a disciple. That is not how you portray it, because you know the truth. So you can call yourself a disciple of Jesus Christ while you are not. Because of theory, because now ... uhm. Discipleship is not just about theory; it is about practical. You have to be actually a living Word [Bible]. Because now in most cases, most people can actually, they actually, they are good in quoting Scriptures [Bible], they know what the Word [Bible] says, however it is not easy for people to live the Word [Bible]. (2:18)

PA\_7 also stated the importance of living the Scriptures as:

[T]here's a thin line here between what is actually obedience and the knowledge that you have concerning the Scripture. What is it what Christ says about being a disciple? He says now 'If you love Me, follow My commandment and you truly believe, you'll be my disciple'. So that is, so it is knowledge. So if you, know okay, this is what Christ want[s] for a person to qualify to be a disciple. Then if you partake in that I believe you are truly disciples. Because uhm ... lack of knowledge, people perish. So basically, many, many, many, many of us might not even understand what is the meaning of being a disciple. So meaning I might be faithful to my Church but to [be a] disciple of Christ. So the thin line is obedience. (2:34)

**Hospitality:** Table fellowship or hospitality was lacking in the co-researchers' understanding of discipleship (–). They had fellowship with fellow believers (–) as an important indicator of discipleship (2:1; 2:37; 2:44; 2:48; 2:79; 2:80), but the purpose thereof was to obtain knowledge and not so much to forge meaningful relationships. They were not prepared to open space on their own *hodos* for strangers. This entailed that hospitality towards and with strangers was of no importance (–). Fellowship for community B was focused inwardly towards themselves (–) (2:44; 2:48; 2:79). 'Discipleship embrace[s] relationship[s] where we know one another' (2:5).

**An understanding of Jesus:** The indicator of an understanding of Jesus, expressed as a new Christology, was present, because they 'knew the theory' of discipleship and of following Jesus (+). However, it was not just theoretical knowledge, as this formed part of their identity as disciples as a lived experience (+) (see 2:18 quoted above).

They believed in Jesus as 'Lord and Saviour' (2:35) and they understood that to obtain 'knowledge of him' (2:34; 2:38; 2:40) was the basis of their relationship with him. This was an important building block in their efforts to 'live Jesus':

From my point of view I understand being a disciple, because now being a disciple is being actually a word that is used for Christians, followers of Christ. So being able to practice what Christianity is all about that is how I understand being a disciple. (2:9)

There was, however, still room for a shift within this indicator, because they were lacking relationships with non-believers (-). They were 'acting' out Jesus, but it was still not a performative act that encapsulated their entire life and identity. There was still space for broadening their understanding and application of Jesus Christ in their 'lived theology'. Community B was not open to 'open space' on their *hodos* and to invite strangers to journey with them. This made the opening of Scriptures somewhat more difficult as well as to come to a new understanding of Jesus that is expressed in a 'transformation of the heart'.

**An understanding of the heart and *koinonia*:** An understanding of the heart as expressed in *koinonia* as an indicator was lacking (-) in the co-researchers' understanding of discipleship. They were primarily focused inward in their search for more knowledge about Jesus (-). They saw discipleship as expressed in and through the church, discipleship focused on the self in the church (church discipleship). The co-researchers focused mainly on building their *own* relationship with him. For them at this stage, the purpose of knowledge was to have the correct information to say the correct things at the correct time in the presence of non-believers, in order to bring them to faith. Community B found their identity in the safety of their church. They did not yet have 'heartburn' (-) that culminated in a transformation of the heart to propel them towards an unknown and unsafe future in their following of Christ. These co-researchers regarded their identity as being part of a very narrow body of followers of Christ in their church (-), instead of a bigger body of followers, with a focus on the missional expression of discipleship.

#### Dataset 2: Revised understanding of discipleship

The case study measured community B's shift in discipleship after 'living' the text, through the lens of the indicators identified in Luke 24:13–35 (Figure 6).

**The *hodos*:** A clear shift (+) occurred in the co-researchers' revised understanding from 'church-discipleship' towards

intentional relationships as a 'doorway to discipleship' (+). These relationships shifted away from interactions primarily with fellow believers (-), to others outside the church, to everybody (+). Thus, in terms of Luke 24:13–35, the co-researchers realised that a journey home (Emmaus and church) was not the direction to which Christ invited them.

Another shift (+) took place in this regard: the co-researchers now emphasised the importance of the act of listening in conversations, as Christ did on the road to Emmaus, instead of providing the 'correct answers' in interactions:

I think it changed a bit of my understanding pertaining discipleship. Sometimes you just need to be involved in other people's conversation. (1:25)

Thus, to be open to create space on the *hodos* and to listen to the other on the *hodos* so that they can shift from being a stranger (other) to being a non-stranger.

**Scripture:** In terms of community B's revised understanding of discipleship, the emphasis was now even stronger on applying the Bible as part of their daily lifestyle (+). There was a shift towards a better grasp 'to live and apply the Scripture', as Christ did on the road towards Emmaus (+). Maybe it became somewhat easier for the Scripture to be 'opened' for them, because they were open to create space on the *hodos*. The application of Scripture turned into a fundamental part of their understanding of discipleship. Applying the Bible now formed part of the transformation process of discipleship (+) and became a living Book instead of a dead Book talking about a living Christ. The Bible became a Book to 'live out of'.

**Hospitality:** In the second focus-group discussion, it became clear that they were already 'living hospitality' as part of their lifestyle and culture. It can, however, be said that a shift (+)

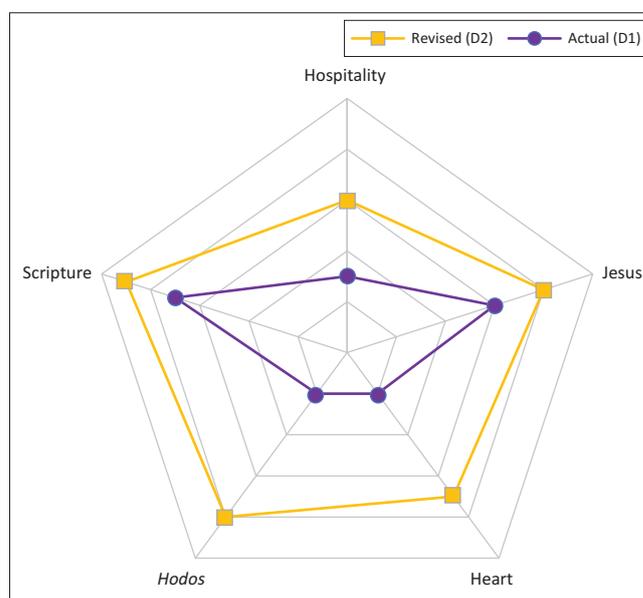


FIGURE 6: Community B's plotting of revised understanding of discipleship.

took place in their revised understanding because they now regarded hospitality very intentionally as a biblical instruction and as part of their mission and purpose as disciples (+). Hospitality towards strangers is a 'doorway to discipleship'. Because they were open to journey with strangers in the *hodos*, it became easier to create space for the Bible to be opened and to open their understanding of hospitality. As PA\_8 stated:

That [*hospitality*] is something we learnt even as a young girl; we were learnt that the people will not walk out of the house even without giving them a glass of water. You know. If you don't have anything, at least give them a glass of water, to give them something to drink before they go. So, but when you grow up you realise that this is actually Biblical. (1:91)

**An understanding of Jesus:** The understanding of Jesus as an indicator (a new Christology) underwent a clear shift (+) in terms of broadening their understanding of discipleship through relationships with non-believers, as modelled by Christ in Luke 24:13–35. Another presence of this indicator (+) was the co-researchers' new, broadened, Scriptural understanding of their mission and purpose, as modelled in Christ's actions in Luke 24. They made this part of their 'lived theology' and applied it to their understanding of discipleship as a lifestyle. The co-researchers saw, with new spiritual eyes, the working of God in and around them and how they are part of God's mission to transform (+). It can be stated that an opening of space on the *hodos* and around the table also enabled a fresh opening of the Scripture, in order to facilitate their 'burning hearts'.

**An understanding of the heart and *koinonia*:** A clear shift (+) took place in this aspect of the co-researchers' revised understanding of discipleship, one that encapsulated a new identity as noted and performed through Christ in Luke 24:13–35:

I believe when God help us to do more, and talk less, you know, that's when lives change. That is what change is! Not to speak about something, but to live in Something [*Jesus*]. I believe so. (1:61)

With this transformation of the heart, new eyes are also present in observing the work of God: 'So what also happens, but I believe it's God's doing' (1:77). A new identity is discovered and expressed in the new eyes and the burning heart (+). This new understanding of identity nudged the co-researchers towards a performative act of followership (a new identity as disciples of Christ) by paying 'attention to the mission of God in their lives' (Sweet 2010:300). This entailed modelling Christ through journeying with strangers on the *hodos* as well as the application of Scripture and a new understanding of relationships as an inherent part of God's kingdom.

## Observed shifts in contemporary understanding of discipleship

As anticipated, there was a variance in the understandings of actual and revised discipleship amongst the individual

participants in community A and community B. Our observations of the data in this regard, as measured against the markers of followership in Luke 24:13–35, served as the compass for the question as to whether there was any correlation between the changes that did, or did not, take place in the two communities' contemporary understanding of discipleship.

Broadly speaking, their initial understanding of discipleship shifted from only perceiving Jesus in terms of an 'act to follow' by gaining the correct knowledge, to following Jesus as 'a performative act'. Hence, the shift from an actual to a revised understanding could be described as a shift from 'theoretical knowledge' to 'heart knowledge', like the Emmaus travellers in the narrative. In the words of Hermans (2020:21): 'Transformation of the heart implies not only a transformation of practices ... but also a change of context'. Both community A and community B underwent a similar shift in their 'lived discipleship' to a 'transformation of practices' and 'change of context' because of a 'transformation of the heart'.

Community A and community B underwent a transformation of the heart that could be expressed in their shift to new journey partners on the *hodos*: a change from an exclusively solo travel (for community A) and travelling mainly with fellow church attendees (for community B) towards their safe contexts', to travelling with strangers. They no longer regarded their journey as unsafe or unfamiliar, because they obtained new spiritual eyes to also see Christ on their journey.

Another shift was noted in terms of applying and embodying the Scripture in the presence of others (as an active deed), instead of merely using the Bible as a static text or a religious manual to 'obtain theoretical knowledge'. The co-researchers' understanding thus shifted decisively to an act of followership, one that included being more open towards strangers and non-believers, and thus, also more missional. Openness towards strangers on the *hodos* became a 'doorway to discipleship'. It created the necessary space for the Scripture to be opened to them and others.

Community A and community B also came to a different theological understanding of the role and function of hospitality as part of Christ followership. Within this broadened Christological understanding ('burning heart that opens eyes to come to a new understanding of Christ'), they now found their new, post-resurrection identity in terms of also being part of a broader missional movement of followers of Christ (a transformation of the heart).

## Conclusion

Luke 24:13–35 nudged the co-researchers to re-evaluate their contemporary understanding of discipleship and moved them from their actual understanding of discipleship to additional and new revised perspectives in terms of practical expressions thereof, which can be best described as followership as seen in Luke 24:13–35. A shift from perceiving Jesus in terms of an 'act to follow' by gaining the correct

knowledge, to following Jesus as ‘a performative act’, a shift from ‘theoretical knowledge’ to ‘heart knowledge’. They underwent what Joubert (2013:120) calls “The ‘‘cardiology’’ of *metanoia*’, a radical change of heart which is the imitation of Jesus through the retelling and remodelling of his stories which is contagious when ‘breaking bread with fellow disciples, and extending hospitality to strangers’ (Joubert 2013:124). Luke 24:13–35 clearly extended the co-researchers’ theological understanding and existing expression of discipleship to a new theological interpretation of ‘lived followership’.

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P.B.E. and W.J.S. contributed equally to the article.

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### Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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