

Copyright © 2022 Timothy Lance Wiebe

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including without limitation, preservation, or instruction.

ESTABLISHING A DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY FOR MINISTRY  
PROGRAMMING AT BROOKSIDE CHURCH, OMAHA,  
NEBRASKA

---

A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

---

by  
Timothy Lance Wiebe  
December 2022

**APPROVAL SHEET**

ESTABLISHING A DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY FOR MINISTRY  
PROGRAMMING AT BROOKSIDE CHURCH, OMAHA,  
NEBRASKA

Timothy Lance Wiebe

Read and Approved by:

Faculty Supervisor: Justin D. Irving

Second Reader: Matthew D. Haste

Defense Date: October 3, 2022

For the glory of God, the healthy growth of the local church, and in loving gratitude to  
my wife and four boys.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	viii
LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES .....	x
PREFACE.....	xi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Context.....	1
Rationale .....	5
Purpose .....	7
Goals .....	7
Research Methodology .....	7
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations .....	9
Conclusion .....	11
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR A DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY .....	12
The Picture of Discipleship: A 4C Portrait .....	13
Discipleship-Centric Emphases in Matthew’s Five Discourses: An Analysis .....	16
Matthew 5-7 .....	18
Matthew 10 .....	22
Matthew 13 .....	23
Matthew 18 .....	26
Matthew 23-25 .....	27

Chapter	Page
Summary .....	30
Bringing It All Together: A 4C Portrait of Discipleship in Matthew's Discourses .....	30
The 4C Portrait of Discipleship and the People of God across the Bible's Storyline.....	32
Creation.....	32
The Fall .....	33
Redemption .....	34
Restoration .....	36
Summary .....	37
The Priorities of Discipleship .....	37
Six Priorities for Discipleship in Acts 1-2: A Proposal .....	37
The Priority of the Holy Spirit .....	39
The Priority of Apostolic Teaching.....	41
The Priority of Community.....	42
The Priority of the Ordinances.....	45
The Priority of God-Centeredness .....	49
The Priority of Mission.....	49
Summary .....	52
Six Priorities for Discipleship in the Rest of the New Testament: A Survey .....	52
The Priority of the Holy Spirit .....	53
The Priority of Apostolic Teaching.....	54
The Priority of Community.....	56
The Priority of the Ordinances.....	57
The Priority of God-Centeredness .....	59
The Priority of Mission.....	61
Summary .....	62

Chapter	Page
Six Priorities for Discipleship in the Church Today:	
Theological Validity .....	62
The Six Priorities and the Trinity .....	63
The Six Priorities and the Gospel .....	64
Summary .....	66
Conclusion .....	67
<b>3. CONSTRUCTING A DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY: MOVING FROM CLEAR PICTURE TO CONCRETE PRACTICE.....</b>	<b>69</b>
Connecting the Priorities and Picture of Discipleship .....	70
Identifying Local Church Programs That Embody the Biblical Priorities.....	75
Input Goals and the Six Priorities of Discipleship .....	77
Worship Services.....	77
Small Classes or Groups .....	77
Serving God and Others.....	78
Reading the Bible.....	78
From Input Goals to Programs .....	79
Gathered Worship .....	80
Small Groups and Classes.....	81
Opportunities for Missional Engagement .....	85
The Pieces Are in Place, But . . . ..	87
Structuring Programs for Access and Movement .....	88
Access.....	89
Movement.....	91
Putting It All Together .....	94
Conclusion .....	98
<b>4. DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT.....</b>	<b>99</b>
Preparation.....	99

Chapter	Page
Implementation .....	104
Content Overview .....	107
Conclusion .....	113
5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT .....	114
Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose .....	114
Evaluation of the Project’s Goals .....	115
Strengths of the Project.....	120
Weaknesses of the Project.....	123
What I Would Do Differently .....	125
Theological Reflections .....	127
Personal Reflections .....	130
Conclusion .....	132
 Appendix	
1. BROOKSIDE CHURCH—STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK .....	133
2. DISCIPLESHIP—CONFORMITY TO CHRIST IN SIX C’S.....	134
3. SURVEY ON THE UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF DISCIPLESHIP (SUPD).....	135
4. DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY CURRICULUM—TEACHING OUTLINE .....	142
5. DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY EVALUATION TOOL .....	174
6. OVERVIEW OF SUPD RESULTS.....	176
7. SUBMITTED DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY PLANS BY MINISTRY DEPARTMENT .....	179
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	187



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BDAG	Bauer, Walter, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, eds. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>CEJ</i>	<i>Christian Education Journal</i>
DJG	Green, Joel B., Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds. <i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship</i> . Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992
DTIB	Vanhoozer, Kevin J., ed. <i>Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible</i> . Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
NDBT	Alexander, T. Desmond, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy, eds. <i>New Dictionary of Biblical Theology</i> . Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	The NIV Application Commentary
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. The 4C portrait of discipleship in Matthew’s discourses.....	31
2. Connecting the priorities and picture of discipleship.....	72
3. Input goals and the six priorities of discipleship.....	79
4. Gallaty and Swain’s “consumers vs. coworkers” .....	86
5. Example schedule—discipleship pathway intensive seminar.....	103
6. Alignment between the 6C picture of discipleship and the TDA .....	110
7. t-test analysis of pre- and post-SUPD results.....	118

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Discipleship pathway sample framework .....	95
2. Discipleship pathway bird's-eye view .....	108

## PREFACE

I have often read prefatory remarks in other books, noting how the material depends on the big and small, formal and informal contributions of many others. I now *feel* the truth of these statements. The influence of many is “baked into the batter” of this project, and I’m grateful for the relationships, knowledge, and wisdom that have shaped who I am and are reflected in how I think. While many more could be listed, a few names deserve special note.

Mom and Dad, thanks for raising me in a home where the gospel was clearly valued—both in your personal examples and in the practices you nurtured in our family. I’m grateful to John Alford and Greg Carlson for the passion you stirred in me for discipleship, and especially for teaching and the life of the mind. I’m grateful to the formal educational institutions that shaped my thinking and gave me opportunity to express ideas: Grace University (Omaha, Nebraska), Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Chicago, Illinois), and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Louisville, Kentucky). My doctoral supervisor, Dr. Justin Irving, deserves appreciation for his prompt feedback, his helpful questions, and the multiple ways he’s made this paper better through his input. Thanks to Brookside Church for the support and encouragement for further studies. I love this church! Jeff Dart—without your encouragement, friendship, and partnership I wouldn’t have started this program.

And then of course a big and special thanks to Carrie and our four boys: Carston, Jadon, Sawyer, and Keller. You were never far from my mind as I’ve worked on this project. Indeed, even as I’ve thought long and hard about discipleship in the local church, my prayer is that these ideas continue to take root in increasing ways in your own lives—and that you would see the beautiful, integral ways the local church and

discipleship go hand-in-hand. You've each been a constant source of encouragement in your own unique ways, and I'm aware of the many sacrifices you have made so I could pursue this degree. You know I've loved this process. But even when I'm busy studying or writing, know that I always look forward to our time together more.

Tim Wiebe

Omaha, Nebraska

December 2022

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Even a casual reading of the Gospels will quickly reveal the significance of discipleship in Jesus's ministry. Jesus called disciples (e.g., Matt 4:18-22). He spent time with and trained them (e.g., Matt 5:1-2; 10:1-5). He commissioned them to carry on his work in the power of the Holy Spirit before he ascended (Matt 28:19-20). Further study only more deeply reveals the integral role discipleship plays in understanding the New Testament and faithfully continuing the work Jesus has inaugurated (e.g., Acts 1:8; 14:21-22; 2 Tim 2:2). Clearly, discipleship mattered deeply to Jesus and his earliest followers. Discipleship must still matter deeply for Jesus's followers today, and discipleship deserves vigilant attention in the life of the local church. In what follows, this driving priority of discipleship will serve as the impetus to establish a discipleship pathway for use in ministry programming at Brookside Church.

#### **Context**

Brookside Church's mission is "helping people find and follow Jesus," flowing directly out of Jesus's Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. Numerous strengths have helped Brookside advance this mission in noticeable ways, as the church has grown both in impact and in numbers.

One clear strength is a long history of health. Since its founding in 1981, Brookside has consistently elevated a small number of priorities in the life of the church: biblical teaching, community, and "mission-beyond-ourselves." The priority of biblical teaching is most clearly manifested in expository sermons and in highlighting resources that help people engage Scripture individually and in groups. The priority of community

shows itself in an emphasis on getting people meaningfully connected in small groups (i.e., “Community Groups”) where biblical one-anothering can happen, and in a general church ethos of welcoming hospitality. The priority of mission emphasizes the importance of people living beyond themselves—engaging people to serve others within the church, around the community, across generations, and spanning the globe.

A second strength that is related to the first is a clearly defined strategy, laying out the church’s mission and values. This strategy includes areas such as mission, driving imperatives, core values, and team behaviors. When seen in a single-page document (Brookside’s “Strategic Framework”<sup>1</sup>), this strategy helps clarify direction, it provides cohesion as a staff team, and it establishes common language and values. Additionally, this Strategic Framework articulates certain unique values that characterize Brookside with its specific leadership make-up, community context, and resources to steward.

A third strength of Brookside is how firmly the church has remained committed to mission and (by God’s grace) has accommodated growth. Since 2019, the church has grown from one campus to multiple campuses, including a multisite location in the greater Omaha area, a bilingual campus reaching the growing Hispanic population in the city, a campus in the County Correctional Center (reaching five housing units within that Center), and an engaged online presence. This growth has resulted in greater staff numbers and fresh approaches to how ministry teams interact. The church has accommodated this growth well, and is poised for continued growth.

Brookside should be grateful to God for these blessings and strengths. At the same time, each of these strengths (a history of health, a clear Strategic Framework, and recent growth) can also introduce potential or real areas of weakness. As these threats are exposed, the need for a healthy discipleship pathway—as a means of staying on mission

---

<sup>1</sup> See appendix 1 for a visual of Brookside’s Strategic Framework.

in faithful and intentional ways—becomes increasingly evident. These threats are exposed and elaborated upon below.

A first threat emerges related to Brookside’s strong history. A history of faithfulness can lead to forgetfulness, familiarity, or a simple lack of awareness. For those who have attended the church for decades, this healthy history can be forgotten or taken for granted. When this occurs, the intentionality that has contributed to the health of the church can instead be replaced with drift, apathy, or casual familiarity. For those who are new to Brookside, the factors that have led to a healthy history may be foreign to them simply through ignorance, if the “basic building blocks” of the church (e.g., the biblical mission of the church and what it means to be a disciple) are not consistently highlighted and reinforced.

A second threat involves Brookside’s Strategic Framework. A clearly-developed and simple Strategic Framework—as valuable as it is—still has insufficiencies that need to be addressed in other ways. For example, Brookside’s Strategic Framework states the church’s mission as “helping people find and follow Jesus.” However, if a definition of what it means to “follow Jesus” is not somewhere clarified, then confusion or incongruency can creep in. As the Strategic Framework is explained, ministry leaders can hear that the church’s two driving imperatives are (1) to “do what it takes to engage the unchurched,” and (2) to “lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus.”<sup>2</sup> But if there is not further explanation given to *how* these imperatives happen in a biblically-faithful way, then the church can slip into a damaging pragmatism or into ministries trying to fulfill these imperatives in misaligned ways. In other words, what can otherwise be a strength of the Strategic Framework—namely, its simplicity—can contribute to a

---

<sup>2</sup> While these imperatives are not an explicit part of the current version of the Strategic Framework, these two imperatives are often mentioned in explaining how Brookside fulfills her mission.



potential weakness if left by itself, by failing to define key terms or assuming that the more basic elements of discipleship are understood.

A third threat stems from growth. The addition of campuses and accompanying growth introduce a number of areas that need attention if church health is to be sustained. One such area is pursuing an appropriate balance among church programs—such that there are access points for skeptics and seekers, along with opportunities for continued growth among people who have been following Jesus for decades. Another area that warrants attention is establishing clear movement-toward-maturity, pointing others toward Christlike growth at whatever point of spiritual growth they engage the local church. Additionally, a vivid, biblical picture of Christian maturity must be in place, providing direction and alignment for a growing number of staff and volunteers. If these issues—and others like them—are not addressed, the various ministries of the church can grow dangerously imbalanced, confused, or complex as Brookside continues to grow.

Finally, other broad threats or concerns deserve attention as well. The rampant biblical illiteracy, the lack of theological formation, and the American absorption with self, convenience, and entertainment must not be overlooked.<sup>3</sup> These concerns are not specific to Brookside, but they certainly include Brookside—situated as it is within the American cultural context.

A common thread that weaves its way through each of these concerns outlined above is a lack of clarity about discipleship and how Brookside *as a local church* develops disciples. Brookside’s history, its Strategic Framework, and its recent growth all contribute to a trajectory of health. For that trajectory to continue in light of these

---

<sup>3</sup> Numerous books and surveys draw attention to these cultural and ecclesial trends. For example, on the American absorption with self, see esp. Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020). On the effects of entertainment, see Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, 20th anniv. ed. (New York: Penguin, 2005); also Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010). On biblical and theological illiteracy, see Ligonier Ministries, “State of Theology,” accessed April 23, 2021, <https://thestateoftheology.com>.

aforementioned threats, a discipleship pathway must be developed for the current life of the church and intentionally implemented.

### **Rationale**

Two dominant reasons support establishing a discipleship pathway at Brookside Church. A first and primary reason is the clear biblical priority of discipleship. This priority is evidenced in the words and ministry of Jesus Himself. The driving imperative of Jesus’s final charge to his followers—his “Great Commission”—is the command to make disciples (Matt 28:19-20). This command flows consistently out of the strong emphasis on discipleship already apparent in his ministry prior to the ascension: calling disciples (e.g., Matt 4:18-22; 9:9; Luke 6:12-16; John 1:35-51), teaching them (e.g., Matt 5:1-2; 13:36-43), and including them closely in significant ministry and personal events (e.g., Matt 10:1-5; see also Matt 17:1-9; 26:36-46; Luke 10:1; John 13-17).

The biblical priority of discipleship is also clear from the way Jesus’s earliest followers carried his Great Commission forward after Jesus’s ascension, evidenced both linguistically and conceptually in the recorded life of the early church. Linguistically, the Greek noun μαθητής (“disciple”) occurs throughout the book of Acts (e.g., 6:1-2; 9:10; 14:21-22; 16:1). Conceptually, aspects of discipleship such as Christian commitment, formation, and obedience are strongly present in the rest of the New Testament (e.g., Rom 12:1-2; Gal 4:19; Eph 4:20-24; 2 Tim 2:2; 1 Pet 1:13-16; 1 John 5:1-2).<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Much more will be said about these aspects of discipleship in chapter 2. For now, it can be noted that while the noun μαθητής disappears after the book of Acts, the topic of discipleship is still found through the remainder of the New Testament. Michael J. Wilkins’s work on this point is helpful here. After noting the disappearance of the noun “disciple” in the letters and Revelation, Wilkins nevertheless makes a clear case that discipleship remains a consistent theme after Acts. “The consensus in the history of the church—ancient and modern—is that the concept of discipleship is apparent everywhere in the New Testament, from Matthew through Revelation. While scholars’ emphases and methods of inquiry vary, virtually all scholars agree that the concept of discipleship is present everywhere in the New Testament in related terminology, teachings, and metaphors” (Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992], 293). See also Wilkins’s chs. 14 and 15 for fuller explanation.

A second, practical reason for supporting a discipleship pathway at Brookside flows directly from the first. Because of the biblical priority of discipleship, discipleship must be valued enough that there is a clear process to promote the value and facilitate the progress of discipleship in local churches today. Discipleship is not *a* ministry program of the church; discipleship is *the* principle under which all that the local church does finds purpose and organization. Because of this, the high value of discipleship must not be either assumed or relegated to a position of secondary importance.

Specifically, establishing a discipleship pathway at Brookside Church will enhance and reinforce the church's mission ("helping people find and follow Jesus") by proactively addressing each of the potential weaknesses that have been identified: casual familiarity or ignorance (which threatens the healthy history of the church), assumed definitions (which threaten what the Strategic Framework offers), and a lack of alignment (which can undermine growth). The trajectory of health within the life of the church can continue, as renewed intentionality is applied to championing the biblical values of discipleship that have sustained the church to this point—now freshly applied in specific situations the church is currently facing. This intentionality can help ensure that the healthy direction the church has been moving is the direction firmly laid out for the road ahead. Brookside's "Strategic Framework" will be reinforced with language that clarifies definitions on discipleship, and various ministry areas will be served as they are aligned with a flexible structure that advances these biblical priorities. The church will be poised for healthy growth, equipped with a pathway that can be applied as campuses are added and as reach is extended. In all of this, Brooksidiers will shine brightly in a world that needs to see people who are committed to Jesus, who commune deeply with him, who mirror his character and advance his commission.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to establish a discipleship pathway for use in ministry programming (providing a framework for adults, youth, and children) at Brookside Church in Omaha, Nebraska.

## **Goals**

The accomplishment of any project as large as this depends on articulating clear goals that can keep the project moving in the right direction. Four goals needed to be met to successfully establish this discipleship pathway at Brookside.

1. The first goal was to assess current discipleship practices among the various ministry departments at Brookside Church.
2. The second goal was to develop a five-session curriculum that would train participating ministry leaders to understand and champion the discipleship pathway.
3. The third goal was to increase knowledge and demonstrate applicability of this pathway among ministry leaders.
4. The fourth and final goal was to establish an initial framework for the pathway that can be further implemented across various ministry departments at Brookside.

A specific research methodology was created to measure the successful completion of these four goals.<sup>5</sup> This methodology is described in the following section.

## **Research Methodology**

Successful completion of these goals was measured and assessed in the following ways. The first goal was to assess current discipleship practices among the various ministry departments at Brookside Church. This goal was measured by administering the Survey on the Understanding and Practice of Discipleship (SUPD),<sup>6</sup> gauging how discipleship was both understood and facilitated in these ministry

---

<sup>5</sup> All of the research instruments used in this project will be performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

<sup>6</sup> See appendix 3.

departments. This goal would be considered successfully met when thirty participating ministry leaders<sup>7</sup> submitted a completed SUPD, yielding a clearer picture of how discipleship is understood and practiced in relation to ministry programming at Brookside Church.

The second goal was to develop a five-session curriculum that would train participating ministry leaders to understand and champion the discipleship pathway. This goal was measured by soliciting feedback from an expert panel of at least three others (e.g., elder board members, professors, and/or pastors in other local churches) who used a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, scope, and practical application of this pathway at Brookside.<sup>8</sup> This goal would be considered successfully met when a minimum of ninety percent of the rubric criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to increase knowledge and demonstrate applicability of this pathway among ministry leaders. This goal was measured by presenting the discipleship pathway curriculum to the Brookside ministry leaders participating in the project,<sup>9</sup> and having them fill out the SUPD after the material had been presented. This goal would be considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-SUPD.

The fourth and final goal was to establish an initial framework for the pathway that can be further implemented across various ministry departments at Brookside. This goal was measured by asking Brookside ministry leaders to create an actionable plan for their area(s) of ministry, in which the discipleship pathway takes shape. This goal would

---

<sup>7</sup> “Ministry leader” is here understood in a broad sense, including both paid ministry staff and volunteers serving within various ministries of the church. This larger group of ministry leaders should include at least twelve Brookside staff members (approximately one third of the total staff).

<sup>8</sup> See appendix 5.

<sup>9</sup> See appendix 4.

be successfully met when one hundred percent of the participating ministry departments have submitted their ministry-specific plan.

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

The following definitions of key terms will be used in the ministry project:

*Discipleship.* While much more definition will be provided for discipleship in chapter 2, an initial understanding of how this term is being used is in order. Broadly speaking, the Apostle Paul sets the trajectory for understanding discipleship in his explicitly stated ministry goal in Colossians: to “present everyone fully mature in Christ” (Col 1:28).<sup>10</sup> Discipleship, then, is the lifelong process by which this spiritual maturity is increasingly realized, as Christians follow Jesus. In line with this, Colin Marshall and Tony Payne provide this summary definition of “disciple” in *The Vine Project*: “a ‘disciple’ is someone engaged in transformative learning . . . where the student’s understanding of reality is changed and keeps changing, leading to a transformed experience and life.”<sup>11</sup>

*Discipleship pathway.* A discipleship pathway is simply the process by which discipleship happens. Ideally, this process should be clearly articulated and organized with intention. While Daniel Im includes some of his own specific vocabulary in the following definition, his overview of a discipleship pathway remains helpful: “‘Discipleship pathway’ is just a fancy phrase for the intentional route, steps, and paths in your church to develop missionary disciples for Kingdom impact.”<sup>12</sup>

*Ministry programming.* Ministry programming will refer to specific, organized activities endorsed by local church leadership and often warranting some level of

---

<sup>10</sup> ESV, used throughout unless otherwise noted.

<sup>11</sup> Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Vine Project: Shaping Your Ministry Culture around Disciple-Making* (Sydney, Australia: Matthias Media, 2016), 69.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Im, *No Silver Bullets: 5 Small Shifts That Will Transform Your Ministry* (Nashville: B&H, 2017), 183.

resources (e.g., staff attention, finances) and scheduled time. Additionally, these programs will also often be designed with specific sub-groups within the local church in mind (e.g., groups designed around age). Eric Geiger succinctly captures the goal of such programs: “At their best, programs are environments that put people in a place for transformation.”<sup>13</sup>

One limitation will apply to this project. The author and director of the project is not the lead pastor of the local church where the project will be administered. While every attempt was made to ensure alignment and good communication around project goals, there may have been times his leadership (or the leadership of the elder board) influenced direction and implementation.

Three delimitations will apply to this project. First, the focused biblical analysis of discipleship was largely limited to the Gospel of Matthew (for the “picture” of discipleship) and the early chapters of Acts (for the “priorities” of discipleship). The breadth of available material on this topic necessitated limiting focused attention to these areas. Second, this project focused on how discipleship is facilitated by ministry programming—the intentional environments endorsed and resourced by the leadership of the local church. While much could be said about spiritual disciplines practiced privately and the organic nature of discipleship,<sup>14</sup> this project focused on how ministry programs at Brookside Church serve the goals of discipleship. Third, the implementation of this project was limited to ten weeks. This timeframe required advanced planning of curriculum and a clearly laid out approach.

---

<sup>13</sup> Eric Geiger, “Three Thoughts on Developing a Theology of Programming,” EricGeiger.com (blog), March 7, 2016, <https://ericgeiger.com/2016/03/three-thoughts-on-developing-a-theology-of-programming/>.

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, much that is worthwhile has already been said promoting the value of individual spiritual disciplines. E.g., Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014); also, Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012); David Mathis, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

Discipleship matters. It mattered to Jesus. It mattered to the early church. Discipleship must matter to the church still today. A discipleship pathway that facilitates this biblical emphasis must be established. The first step in establishing this pathway is laying necessary groundwork—looking to God’s Word to discover both the picture of a healthy disciple and priorities that provide shape for the pathway.



## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR A DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus provides his followers with a “Great Commission” that gives them direction for what he intends they prioritize after his ascension: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The driving command of this Great Commission is that they are to make disciples.<sup>1</sup> As helpful as this clear direction is, important follow-up questions emerge quickly—questions like “What does it mean to be a disciple?” and “How does the church contribute to the making and maturing of disciples?” If the church is to faithfully advance Jesus’s Great Commission, these follow-up questions deserve close attention.

In this chapter, biblical answers to these key questions will be presented. This chapter will proceed in two primary stages. First, a study of the five discourses in Matthew’s Gospel will demonstrate a clear picture of discipleship that can be practically helpful for churches today, thus answering the question “What does it mean to be a disciple?” After demonstrating the viability of this picture from Matthew, a survey of the biblical storyline will further confirm the validity of this picture of what it means to follow God across the sweep of Scripture.

---

<sup>1</sup> See D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 595. Importantly, Carson maintains the force of the single imperative verb of “make disciples,” while also including helpful qualifications that must be kept in mind to guard against misunderstanding the passage.

The second stage of this chapter will answer the “How?” question—that is, “How can the church contribute to the making and maturing of disciples?” In this section, an examination of Acts 1-2 (with special, but not exclusive, emphasis on Acts 2:42-47) will lead to a proposal of six priorities which provided practical shape and structure to how the earliest church advanced its commission to make disciples. These priorities gleaned from the study of Acts 1-2 will then be carried forward into the rest of the New Testament: a brief survey will demonstrate that the priorities present in the earliest Jerusalem church hold their value, and provide a structure within which the first century church continued to develop and grow. And then to prove that these priorities are not time-bound to the first century, this second major section of the chapter will also make the case that these same priorities—by now clearly evident in the New Testament church—also align with fountainhead, timeless theological truths related to the triune God and the gospel. The accumulated weight of this biblical and theological study demonstrates that these same six discipleship priorities must continue to serve as a primary guide for how the local church helps make disciples and honors the Great Commission today.

### **The Picture of Discipleship: A 4C Portrait**

The Greek word for “make disciples” is μαθητεύω (or the noun μαθητής, “disciple”) which carries the notion of “learner” or “adherent.”<sup>2</sup> At its most fundamental level, then, a disciple of Jesus Christ is someone who “learns Christ.” As lexically accurate as this definition may be, admittedly it is also broad; providing more nuance about the specific ways that (or areas of life in which) a follower of Jesus “learns Christ” is surely of great practical value. To be sure, attempts have been made to provide more clarity. For example, Michael J. Wilkins offers this fuller definition of discipleship in his magisterial work on biblical discipleship: “[W]hen we speak of Christian discipleship and discipling

---

<sup>2</sup> BDAG, s.v. μαθητεύω 2. See also definitions of the noun form, provided in BDAG s.v. μαθητής.

we are speaking of what it means to grow as a Christian in every area of life. . . . Discipleship and discipling mean living a fully human life in this world in union with Jesus Christ and growing in conformity to his image.”<sup>3</sup> Or again, Dallas Willard helpfully expands on the idea of a disciple being a learner by adding clarifying words like “practitioner” and “apprentice.”<sup>4</sup> Additionally, he expands a bit further: “In the heart of a disciple there is a *desire*, and there is a *decision* or settled intent. . . . [T]he disciple of Christ desires above all else to be like him.”<sup>5</sup> The concern remains, however, that these succinct definitions or summaries of the essence of discipleship are still too broad. What is involved in growing in conformity to Christ? Yes—every area of life is affected. But can particular areas be named, so nothing is overlooked and an appropriate balance is facilitated? More specificity in these definitions would be practically helpful, as the church moves forward in obedience to Jesus’s command to “make disciples of all nations.”

This section will seek to provide additional clarity to a biblical portrait of discipleship, making the case that a vibrant picture of discipleship must include at least four major components. One such component is *commitment*, indicating an intentional and decisive resolve to follow Jesus. Importantly, this commitment is rooted in and motivated by God’s amazing grace (Eph 2:8-9).<sup>6</sup> Another necessary component of discipleship is *communion*, both with God and with others. This communion highlights the relational reality of following Jesus in both vertical relationships (intimacy with the triune God) and horizontal relationships with others in human community. Then there is the essential

---

<sup>3</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 41-42.

<sup>4</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teaching on Discipleship* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), xi.

<sup>5</sup> Willard, *Great Omission*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, this dependence on grace is vitally true for each of the four components mentioned here. It also deserves mention that this commitment includes both the initial action of repentance and faith expressed in conversion, *and* the ongoing life of faith and repentance expressed in perseverance.

component of *character*, an understanding that following Jesus is not simply an external feature of one's life. Following Jesus should transform disciples in the deepest parts of their lives, and this change works from the inside out. A fourth component of biblical discipleship is *commission*, which points to the practical difference following Jesus makes on a disciple's conduct and his or her life of mission—both of which generate from Christ's commands.<sup>7</sup>

The argument demonstrating the necessity of these components for holistic discipleship will proceed in three steps. First, a brief analysis of the five discourses in the Gospel of Matthew will confirm discipleship-centric emphases that are consistent with the “4C” picture of discipleship. This first step will proceed inductively, surveying the particular discourse under consideration and drawing attention to textual observations and patterns that clearly point in the direction of one or more of the core components of discipleship in the 4C model. Next, these emphases—collected across the five discourses—will be explicitly brought together under the 4C model, confirming the viability of this framework for understanding discipleship. Third and finally, the 4C portrait of discipleship will be briefly considered across the storyline of Scripture, looking at how the story of creation, the fall, redemption, and restoration influences an understanding of what it means to be the people of God in each of these areas.<sup>8</sup> The clear

---

<sup>7</sup> One may ask why two of these categories (i.e., communion and commission) subsume the subcategories included in the explanation of each. Why not simply break these subcategories out, and present a six-sided picture of discipleship? While that could be done and will indeed be adopted in due time, the goal here is to present a framework with as few constituent pieces as possible. Also, it should be noted that these inclusive categories of communion and commission find biblical precedent: Jesus closely connected love for God and love for others (communion) in Matt 22:36-40 (see also 1 John 3:16-18). Similarly, Jesus closely connected conduct and mission (commission) in Matt 28:19-20 (see also 1 Pet 2:11-12). Any of these categories could be broken down into smaller parts; what is presented here is intended as a biblically faithful articulation of four major areas of life that are greatly impacted as a believer follows Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> With this approach, attentive readers will notice the desire to honor the disciplines of exegesis, biblical theology, and systematic theology. For more on the (inter)relationship of these disciplines, see Oren R. Martin, “How Does Biblical Theology Compare to Other Theological Disciplines?” in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2020), 119-29; also D. A. Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” in *NDBT*, 89-104; Jeremy R. Treat, *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 33-36.

thrusts of discipleship in Jesus’s Matthean discourses, together with a biblical-theological picture of what it looks like to follow God across the Bible’s storyline, combine to validate the 4C picture of discipleship as a viable—and compelling—model of discipleship for the church today.

### **Discipleship-Centric Emphases in Matthew’s Five Discourses: An Analysis**

Before analyzing each of Jesus’s five extended teaching blocks in the Gospel of Matthew, the questions “Why Matthew?” and “Why this focus on the discourses in Matthew?” deserve attention in a chapter focusing on a biblical picture of discipleship. First, “Why Matthew?” One reason Matthew warrants close attention when focusing on discipleship is the simple fact of how frequently Matthew uses “discipleship” language. Indeed, “[t]he word for ‘disciple’ (*mathētēs*) occurs far more often in Matthew (73 times) than in the other Synoptic Gospels, and the verb ‘to make disciples/be disciplined’ (*mathēteuō*) is found only in Matthew among the four Gospels (13:52; 27:57; 28:19). This underlines the importance of discipleship for Matthew.”<sup>9</sup> Additionally, scholars have long-noticed Matthew’s carefully-structured contents that facilitate a catechetical function for the life and health of the church.<sup>10</sup> This emphasis on discipleship in Matthew has led scholars to describe the Gospel as a “manual for discipleship,”<sup>11</sup> “a handy resource of

---

<sup>9</sup> D. A. Hagner, “Matthew,” in *NDBT*, 266.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 105-11; also R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 251-60. For more on the theme of discipleship throughout the entire Gospel, see Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 174-93, and Terrence L. Donaldson, “Guiding Readers—Making Disciples: Discipleship in Matthew’s Narrative Strategy,” in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 42-47.

<sup>11</sup> N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 589.

discipleship teaching,”<sup>12</sup> and a “mould to the pattern established by [Jesus’s] life and teaching” designed for those who wish to follow Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

Second, “Why focus on the five discourses in Matthew?” In Matthew, these five discourses refer to extended teaching blocks delivered by Jesus, each of which conclude with the phrase *καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς* (“when Jesus had finished . . .”).<sup>14</sup> Following the lead of Jonathan Pennington, the scope of the five discourses is as follows: (1) Matthew 5-7; (2) Matthew 10; (3) Matthew 13; (4) Matthew 18; (5) Matthew 23-25.<sup>15</sup> While closer analysis of each discourse follows below, two simple (but not-to-be-missed) observations about these discourses further clarify the reason they warrant attention in establishing a portrait of discipleship. One observation is that “all of the major discourses are directed to the disciples.”<sup>16</sup> As a portrait of discipleship is painted for today, surely the right place to begin is with that which Jesus taught his disciples during his earthly ministry. Next, the actual content of these teaching blocks warrants mention: the content of these discourses is filled with “carefully structured teaching *on the nature and demands of discipleship*.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, these discourses are directed to the disciples, and they are about discipleship.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 190.

<sup>13</sup> France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 256.

<sup>14</sup> This phrase occurs in Matthew at 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1. See David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 9.

<sup>15</sup> See Pennington, *Sermon on the Mount*, 108. The reader should note there is a substantial lack of consensus especially on the boundaries of the fifth discourse—whether it begins at ch. 23 or ch. 24 of Matthew. See Pennington, *Sermon on the Mount*, 108, n. 10 for mention of this. For a fuller defense of seeing Matt 23-25 as one discourse, see especially Jason Hood, “Matthew 23-25: The Extent of Jesus’s Fifth Discourse,” *JBL* 128, no. 3 (2009): 527-43. It should also be noted that the adoption of Pennington’s boundaries of each discourse does not necessitate one must fully agree with his proposed discourse + narrative framework (suggested in Pennington, *Sermon the Mount*, 109-10). For more on the structure in Matthew, see esp. Dale C. Allison Jr., *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 135-42; also S. McKnight, “Matthew, Gospel of,” in *DJG*, 529-32; France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 141-53.

<sup>16</sup> Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 190.

<sup>17</sup> R. T. France, *Matthew*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1985), 23; italics added.

<sup>18</sup> For more on Jesus’s Matthean discourses and discipleship, see Brian David McCrorie, “It Is

In summary, then, Matthew’s teaching blocks are discipleship-oriented words from Christ to his followers, located in a Gospel that is highly focused on discipleship. The Gospel of Matthew—and even more specifically, Matthew’s five discourses—therefore deserve close attention in formulating a compelling portrait of discipleship. Each of Matthew’s five discourses will now be examined in what follows.

**Matthew 5-7.** Matthew 5-7, or Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount (SM), is the longest and most well-known of Jesus’s five discourses.<sup>19</sup> While a more thorough study of the SM has been done by many others<sup>20</sup> and is well beyond the scope of this chapter, even brief analysis of the SM will yield valuable insights for a portrait of discipleship. Jesus begins the SM with the Beatitudes, a series of proclamations that highlight “the happiness which is the result of God-given salvation.”<sup>21</sup> Upon closer inspection, each of these Beatitudes deeply involves the interior life of the follower of Jesus, or their character.<sup>22</sup>

Moving into the next major section of the SM (Matt 5:13-7:12, or the central section<sup>23</sup>), a number of discipleship emphases come to the surface. Jesus speaks to the disciples’ relationship to the world (5:13-16), indicating both “responsibility” and

---

Written: Matthean Discourse and Its Implications for Contemporary Discipleship” (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> According to G. N. Stanton, “No other short section of the Bible has been more prominent in theological discussion and in the general life of the church. Even in our modern secular societies the Sermon’s influence continues” (G. N. Stanton, “The Sermon on the Mount/Plain,” in *DJG*, 735). Because of this significance of the SM, more space will be devoted to this discourse than the others.

<sup>20</sup> In addition to the relevant commentaries, readers interested in book-length treatments of Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount are directed to, for example, Pennington, *Sermon on the Mount*; also D. A. Carson, *Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: A Study of Matthew 5-10* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987); William W. Klein, *Become What You Are: Spiritual Formation According to the Sermon on the Mount* (Tyrone, GA: Authentic, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Stanton, “The Sermon on the Mount/Plain,” 741.

<sup>22</sup> Turner explicitly draws attention to this emphasis on character: “The Beatitudes reveal key character traits that God approves in his people. These character traits are gracious gifts indicating God’s approval, not requirements for works that merit God’s approval. Those who repent receive these character traits in principle but must cultivate them in the process of discipleship” (Turner, *Matthew*, 147). For much more on character in the Beatitudes, see especially Klein, *Become What You Are*, 53-76.

<sup>23</sup> This analysis follows the simple structure of the sermon proposed in Stanton, “The Sermon on the Mount/Plain,” 740: prologue (5:3-12); central section (5:13-7:12); epilogue (7:13-27).

“impact” in terms of how they relate to those around them.<sup>24</sup> This missional impact is a part of the commission Jesus expects of his followers. This central section also touches on a radical, inside-out obedience to God’s Word that touches on relationships, or community (e.g., 5:21-26, 31-32, 38-42, 43-48; 7:1-6), and practical conduct in such areas as speech (5:33-37), giving and finances (6:1-4, see also 6:19-24), and fasting (6:16-18). This practical conduct is the other part of Jesus’s commission to his followers. Also embedded within this central section of the SM is an emphasis on communion with God that followers of Jesus can experience. The jaw-dropping privilege of addressing God as “Our Father” must not be overlooked (6:5-14; see also 7:7-11). J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays point this out powerfully: “At the very heart of the Sermon on the Mount, both structurally and theologically, lies the model prayer—Jesus’s teachings on how disciples should commune with their Father (6:9-13). The form of address (‘our Father’) and the individual elements within the prayer bear a distinctly relational tone.”<sup>25</sup>

Matthew 7:13-14 then introduces the final section (7:13-27) of the SM by “stress[ing] the need for decision,”<sup>26</sup> or commitment to the way of Jesus. This commitment includes conduct, (7:15-20, 24-27), but with a warning—conduct by itself is not sufficient (7:22). Ultimately what Jesus has in mind is commitment to himself in the form of personal relationship (7:23), overlapping significantly with an emphasis on communion with God.<sup>27</sup> By way of summary, then, an analysis of Matthew 5-7 provides a picture of discipleship from which the 4C portrait can be strongly deduced: discipleship

---

<sup>24</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 212.

<sup>25</sup> J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *God’s Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 182.

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Bryan, “Sermon on the Mount,” in *DTIB*, 739.

<sup>27</sup> John Owen’s succinct definition of communion with God is helpful to note here: “Our communion, then, with God consists in (1) his communication of himself unto us, (2) with our return unto him of that which he requires and accepts, and (3) flowing from that union which in Jesus Christ we have with him” (John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, ed. Kelly M. Kopic and Justin Taylor [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007], 94).



includes commitment to Jesus, communion (with God and others), character, and commission (both conduct and mission).

This portrait of discipleship is further reinforced as the work of other scholars is considered. Two of these other scholars will be considered here. R. T. France, in his work on Matthew in the New International Commentary on the New Testament, prefers to label Matthew 5-7 “The Discourse on Discipleship” because of the “distinctive focus” on discipleship found in this discourse.<sup>28</sup> In an earlier work, France spells out this distinctive focus even more clearly by structuring the entire SM around the emphasis on discipleship:

The wide range of material included in that magnificent collection of teaching which we call the Sermon on the Mount is united by its focus on the nature and demands of discipleship. It deals with the true character and rewards of discipleship (5:3-10), the distinctiveness of the disciple (5:11-16), the ethics of discipleship in relation to current understanding of the ethical demands of the law (5:17-48), the disciple’s religious observance (6:1-18) and his choice of priorities between the claims of God and of earthly concerns (6:19-34), his attitude to fellow-disciples (7:1-6, 12) and to God as his Father (7:7-11); it then concludes with four contrasts between true and false discipleship (7:13-27), which serve to challenge the readers to examine their own standing as followers of Jesus as well as to discern the genuine and spurious among those who are attached to the church.<sup>29</sup>

Elsewhere, Klaus Issler has identified the following six themes to guide spiritual formation (i.e., discipleship) from Matthew 5-7: (1) inner heart formation, (2) missional participation, (3) scriptural saturation, (4) seeking/loving/depending on God above all, (5) relational attachment as Jesus’s church, and (6) two kingdoms discernment.<sup>30</sup>

While not identical to the 4C portrait of discipleship outlined above, there is clear “family similarity” between the proposals mentioned by France and Issler, and the 4C model. In each, there is emphasis on commitment. France brings up the four contrasts

---

<sup>28</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 153.

<sup>29</sup> France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 253.

<sup>30</sup> Klaus Issler, “Six Themes to Guide Spiritual Formation Based on Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount,” *CEJ* series 3, vol. 7, no. 2 (2010): 366-88.

in 7:13-27 “which serve to challenge the readers to examine their own standing as followers of Jesus.”<sup>31</sup> Or within Issler’s “Two Kingdoms Discernment” theme, the author begins with this explanation, “Jesus clarifies that there are but two paths to follow in life.”<sup>32</sup> Both France and Issler are inviting readers to examine their commitment. There is also emphasis on communion with God and others. This emphasis is clear in Issler’s categories of “Seeking/Loving/Depending on God (Above All)” and “Relational Attachment as Jesus’s Church.”<sup>33</sup> Similarly, France draws attention to the disciple’s “attitude to fellow-disciples (7:1-6, 12) and to God as his Father (7:7-11).”<sup>34</sup> There is emphasis on character, as another of Issler’s themes is “Inner Heart Transformation”<sup>35</sup> and as France explicitly mentions character in his organization of 5:3-10.<sup>36</sup> Finally, there is emphasis on commission in terms of both conduct (e.g., France’s mention of ethics<sup>37</sup>, as well as the way Issler explains his “Scriptural Saturation” theme<sup>38</sup>) and mission (see especially Issler’s “Missional Participation” theme<sup>39</sup>). Taking the time to demonstrate the overlap of the 4C picture of discipleship with these other scholars adds additional strength to the viability of the 4C portrait—a viability that is further reinforced as certain of these same four “Cs” appear in each of the other discourses in Matthew.

---

<sup>31</sup> France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 253.

<sup>32</sup> Issler, “Six Themes to Guide Spiritual Formation,” 373.

<sup>33</sup> Issler, “Six Themes to Guide Spiritual Formation,” 372-73.

<sup>34</sup> France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 253.

<sup>35</sup> Issler, “Six Themes to Guide Spiritual Formation,” 370-71.

<sup>36</sup> France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 253.

<sup>37</sup> France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 253.

<sup>38</sup> According to Issler, “It was important for [Jesus’s] disciples to know Scripture and interpret it correctly *to be able to follow its genuine teaching* . . . . Jesus concludes his first discipleship discourse with an important promise for those who hear these words of mine” and “*put them into practice*” (Issler, “Six Themes to Guide Spiritual Formation,” 371-72; italics added).

<sup>39</sup> Issler, “Six Themes to Guide Spiritual Formation,” 371.

**Matthew 10.** The driving emphasis of Jesus’s second discourse in Matthew 10 is mission—Jesus now extends the impact of his ministry by multiplying his work in the sending of his twelve disciples (Matt 10:1-5). “The Mission Mandate develops what it means to be ‘mission-driven disciples.’ Jesus commissions all his disciples to go out to share and live the gospel of the kingdom of God to an alien and often hostile world until his return.”<sup>40</sup> This missional emphasis is evident from Jesus’s opening words, in the command to “go [from the imperative form of the Gk. πορεύομαι] . . . to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”<sup>41</sup> Wilkins then helpfully threads this missional thrust throughout the way he organizes Matthew 10: (1) missionary instructions for that particular historical context (10:5-15), (2) a preview of the disciples’ role as missionaries in the future (10:16-42), and principles of discipleship for disciple-missionaries in every era (10:24-42).<sup>42</sup> As Jesus’s discourses are mined for a picture of discipleship, the importance of “commission” thus finds additional momentum in Matt 10.

But can more be said? What of the other elements of the 4C picture of discipleship—do any of these find expression in Matt 10? While the driving emphasis of this discourse is surely mission (an essential element of commission in the 4C model), closer inspection of this teaching block reveals the presence of certain other of the four Cs as well. Commitment to Jesus is evident in the allegiance one must show to Jesus—even above familial allegiances—and the cost involved in following him (10:34-39).<sup>43</sup> This commitment also overlaps with communion with God. Jesus explicitly compares *love* for

---

<sup>40</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 32.

<sup>41</sup> Prior to this command to go to the lost sheep in Israel, Jesus commands the Twelve not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans. See esp. Carson, *Matthew*, 244-45; also Turner, *Matthew*, 268-69 for helpful comments on this issue.

<sup>42</sup> See Wilkins, *Matthew*, 389ff.

<sup>43</sup> This cost of following Jesus can be too easily minimized or overlooked in a culture more concerned with comfort and convenience. For more on this important topic, see, for example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1959); also Paul Tanner, “The Cost of Discipleship: Losing One’s Life for Jesus’s Sake,” *JETS* 56, no. 1 (March 2013): 43-61.

himself with the love a disciple has for family members (10:37). The commitment a disciple shows Jesus is not simply a blind allegiance, or an allegiance based only on authority and deference. Commitment to Jesus finds fuel in ongoing communion with the Lord. “Love for Jesus should be superior to love for a parent, or even the love one has for a spouse. These loves are temporal, but a relationship with Christ is eternal.”<sup>44</sup> Character finds expression in the confidence Jesus’s followers should exhibit in the face of persecution (“do not be anxious” and “have no fear” in 10:19, 26 respectively). Character is also revealed in the faithful endurance that Jesus’s followers show (10:22). Jesus’s discourse in Matt 10 thus further validates the 4C picture of discipleship under examination, having now seen how this discourse emphasizes the commission, commitment, and character that should be true of Jesus’s followers.

**Matthew 13.** Matthew’s third discourse in chapter 13 of his Gospel is full of Jesus teaching in parables, and others have noted that these parables “are grouped specifically to provide insight into the kingdom.”<sup>45</sup> Matthew 13, then, is focused on the kingdom of God. While the topic of God’s kingdom has received thorough treatment elsewhere,<sup>46</sup> it is sufficient here to understand the kingdom of God as follows: The kingdom of God “is both the reign and the realm of God for, although in the present age the locus of the kingdom in the world is diffuse, it is defined by the presence of Jesus at the right hand of the Father. It is both present and future until its consummation at Jesus’s

---

<sup>44</sup> David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 140.

<sup>45</sup> K. R. Snodgrass, “Parable,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 599. See also France, *Matthew*, 219.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Treat, *Crucified King*; also Nicholas Perrin, *The Kingdom of God: A Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019); Patrick Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

return.”<sup>47</sup> R. T. France also emphasizes this idea of the reign of God and provides further clarification:

the ‘reign’ has no meaning unless it is stated whose reign is in view. In other words, ‘the kingdom of God’ is . . . about *God*, that he is king. Thus, ‘the kingdom of God has come near’ [see Jesus’s proclamation at the beginning of his public ministry in Mark 1:15] means ‘God is taking over as king,’ and to ‘enter the kingdom of God’ is to come under his rule, to accept him as king.<sup>48</sup>

Matthew 13 provides more than simple description of the kingdom, however. In this discourse Jesus answers the question

How can God’s kingship be resisted by his own people? The parables provide a variety of models for understanding this conundrum, by highlighting sometimes the varied nature of the hearers (vv. 3-9), sometimes the unexpected nature of the message (vv. 31-33, 44-45), and sometimes the division which is an empirical reality of human society in relation to God (vv. 24-30, 47-50).<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, “the theme of division runs through these parables: unproductive and productive soil, good grain and weeds, good fish and bad. Those who find the treasure and the pearl stand out from other people in the extravagance of their response, and the householder of v. 52 is distinguished from others by his ability to produce the new as well as the old.”<sup>50</sup>

In all of these varied, divided responses to God’s reign, then, Jesus is calling his followers to commitment. This commitment is demonstrated, for example, in Jesus’s opening Parable of the Sower (13:1-23). Only the seed sown on good soil bears fruit (13:23); all other seed either never takes root or ultimately withers and perishes. What causes the other seed to fail? It may be because “the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown” (13:19). Or it may be because of an unwillingness to persevere through difficulty (13:20-21) or because the hearers are enticed by other things (13:22).

---

<sup>47</sup> G. Goldsworthy, “Kingdom of God,” in *NDBT*, 620.

<sup>48</sup> R. T. France, “Kingdom of God,” in *DTIB*, 420.

<sup>49</sup> France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 499.

<sup>50</sup> France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 500.

Especially in the case of the rocky and thorny soils, a key issue distinguishing these hearers from the good seems to be commitment—the good soil is steadfastly committed; the rocky soil abandons this commitment and the thorny soil has other temptations choke it out.<sup>51</sup>

While Matthew 13 carries a certain emphasis on commitment, other components of the 4C picture of discipleship also have a presence. Character is strongly implied, in the parabolic teaching that the kingdom’s manifestation is seemingly “insignificant”<sup>52</sup> (13:31-32), “inconspicuous”<sup>53</sup> (13:33), and present alongside the continuing reality of evil (13:47-50). These kingdom realities highlight the need for patience, faithfulness, and endurance—all character qualities needed in Jesus’s disciples.

Communion with God finds expression in Matthew 13:44-46, where Jesus tells two parables that each speak of the all-surpassing value of the kingdom. Here again France’s words are helpful, “‘the kingdom of God’ is not making a statement about a ‘thing’ called ‘the kingdom,’ but about *God*, that he is king.”<sup>54</sup> In other words, the all-surpassing value of the kingdom is more about *who* than about *what* (see also Phil 3:7-11). Wilkins similarly draws out the relational nature of what Jesus is talking about here in Matthew 13, “Jesus’s parables reveal [the kingdom’s] surpassing value to the disciples (13:11-12, 16-17). No sacrifice is too great to live in God’s will and *experience a discipleship relationship with Jesus as Master.*”<sup>55</sup> Once again, the 4C model finds support

---

<sup>51</sup> Much more discussion is worthwhile on the implications of this parable for pastoral ministry—for example, does the thorny soil represent false believers or unfruitful believers? What is the role of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility in these issues? For commentaries that touch on one or more of these issues, see esp. Turner, *Matthew*, 341-43; also Wilkins, *Matthew*, 474-81, 497-503.

<sup>52</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 483.

<sup>53</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 484.

<sup>54</sup> France, “Kingdom of God,” 420.

<sup>55</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 488; italics added.

in Matthew 13 and the ways commitment, character, and communion with God find expression there.

**Matthew 18.** France highlights the theme of Matthew 18 clearly: “The fourth major collection of Jesus’s teaching [i.e., Matt 18:1-35] . . . is concerned with relationships among Jesus’s followers.”<sup>56</sup> David L. Turner provides further specificity: the fourth discourse is “a sermon on the values of the kingdom and how these guide the community in handling interpersonal relationships.”<sup>57</sup> In Matthew 18, then, Jesus emphasizes the community-with-others side of “communion” that has already appeared in the 4C portrait of discipleship being considered.

The topic of community is threaded throughout the entire chapter, from Jesus’s response to his disciples’ question in Matthew 18:1 about “Who is the greatest in the kingdom?” (surely a question stemming from community-eroding jostling and pride among Jesus’s followers<sup>58</sup>), all the way through Jesus’s parable in Matthew 18:21-35 in response to Peter’s question about forgiveness (another issue that is core to community life). Between these bookends, community-centric values repeatedly surface in Jesus’s teaching about being sensitive to others and not doing anything that would cause others to stumble into sin (18:5-9), about a concern for wayward sheep (18:10-14), and about addressing sin within the community (18:15-20). In addition, Jesus’s use of familial language (e.g., “children” and “brother”) further reinforces the emphasis on community in Matthew 18.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> France, *Matthew*, 272. See also Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 139.

<sup>57</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 431.

<sup>58</sup> See Carson, *Matthew*, 396.

<sup>59</sup> Turner in particular draws attention to this family language: “This use of family and household imagery for the community of disciples is the most prominent motif of the discourse” (Turner, *Matthew*, 432).

Closely related to the broader topic of community are the character and conduct (a key part of Jesus’s commission for his followers) of the disciple—further reinforcing other elements of the 4C discipleship portrait. The importance of character is clear in Jesus’s response to his disciples’ initial question in the chapter—Jesus calls them not to positions of greatness but of humility (18:3-4).<sup>60</sup> And surely character and conduct both find expression in the calls to holy living (18:5-9), the care shown to others who are straying (18:10-14), and the ways sin is addressed (18:15-20) and forgiveness is extended (18:21-35). Wilkins summarizes Jesus’s teaching here nicely: “This discourse clarifies how discipleship to Jesus is expressed through a church that is characterized by humility, responsibility, purity, accountability, discipline, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration.”<sup>61</sup> Or, to put this summary in the language of the 4C portrait of discipleship, the interconnected themes of community, character, and conduct are all represented in Matthew 18.

**Matthew 23-25.**<sup>62</sup> Jesus’s final discourse focuses on judgment—Jesus pronounces woes on the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23), and he foretells both the judgment of Jerusalem (Matt 24) and final judgment (Matt 25).<sup>63</sup> In all of this, “Matthew

---

<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, France says that when Jesus calls his followers to humble themselves, “[i]t is the status of the child that is the point, rather than any supposedly characteristic quality of children, such as humility, innocence, receptiveness, or trustfulness” (France, *Matthew*, 274). Or even more strongly, he adds that “*Humbles himself* . . . does not describe a character-trait . . . but the acceptance of an inferior position” (France, *Matthew*, 274; italics original). One wonders if France is creating a false and unnecessary separation between a position of humility and the character behind it—emphasizing the former and overlooking the latter. Even France himself seems to struggle with this point, saying in the same section that “[t]o turn and become like children is therefore a radical reorientation from the mentality of the rat-race to an acceptance of insignificance” (France, *Matthew*, 274; italics original). Surely a “radical reorientation . . . to an acceptance of insignificance” requires the transformation of character. See also Mary Kate Birge, “Guide to Right Relationships in the Church: Matthew 18,” *The Bible Today* 51, no. 6 (November-December 2013): 369-73; Turner, *Matthew*, 433-36.

<sup>61</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 33.

<sup>62</sup> See n. 15 above for comments about approaching Matt 23-25 as one cohesive discourse.

<sup>63</sup> See Hood, “Matthew 23-25,” 536.



does not cease to speak on judgment on God’s people and on Jerusalem.”<sup>64</sup> As will be seen more fully below, this discourse on judgment carries tremendous implications for a picture of discipleship in the Gospel of Matthew: “Matthew wishes his audience to take ch. 23 and the following chapters both as teaching on the nature and judgment of their religious opponents, *and as instruction relating expectations for Jesus’s disciples* in light of their certain judgment.”<sup>65</sup>

In pronouncing his woes on the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus draws attention to qualities and characteristics that will invite judgment. The practices of the religious leaders are woe-worthy (e.g., Matt 23:3b, 23-24), demonstrated by their lack of concern for others and evident self-centeredness (e.g., Matt 23:4-5), along with their warped mission (Matt 23:13-15). They are hypocrites and their interior lives are spiritually lifeless (Matt 23:27-28). They have resisted the initiative God has taken to restore a fractured relationship with his people (Matt 23:29-39). In all of these ways, the scribes and Pharisees oppose each category of the 4C portrait of discipleship that Matthew is painting—they are anti-commitment to Jesus, anti-communion (resisting both relationship with God and others), anti-character (in their selfishness and hypocrisy), and anti-commission (both in terms of their polluted conduct and their warped mission). Jesus’s “scathing denunciation” of the religious leaders here “contains some teaching . . . about the contrasting nature of the community of the Messiah.”<sup>66</sup> In other words, as he condemns the scribes and Pharisees in each of these ways, Jesus is implicitly calling his disciples to live differently in each of these areas—in their commitment to him, in their communion with God and others, in their character, and in their commission.

---

<sup>64</sup> Hood, “Matthew 23-25,” 531. Scot McKnight also sees this theme of judgment as dominant in Matt 23-25, apparent in his title of the discourse: “The Messiah Predicts the Judgment of Unbelieving Israel (23:1-26:2)” (McKnight, “Matthew, Gospel of,” 531).

<sup>65</sup> Hood, “Matthew 23-25,” 542; italics added.

<sup>66</sup> Donaldson, “Guiding Readers—Making Disciples,” 39.

These same characteristics continue to find expression as the discourse continues in Matt 24-25, as demonstrated in the following brief survey. The importance of commitment to Jesus stands out in the fact that Jesus's disciples face persecution *for his name's sake* (Matt 24:9, italics added). Additionally, as T. J. Geddert notes, "Matthew characteristically holds out the threat of eschatological woe for those who are disobedient or refuse to accept to Jesus (cf. 24:51; 25:30, 41)."<sup>67</sup> If eschatological woe awaits those who refuse to accept Jesus, then surely Jesus is calling his disciples to the opposite, namely commitment to him.

Communion with God finds expression in the parables of Matt 25. In the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30), the faithful servants are invited to enter in the joy of their master (25:21, 23)—an invitation that displays meaningful relationship. In the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31-46), Jesus commands those identified as goats to "Depart from me," indicating the removal and separation from a loving relationship with Jesus (Matt 25:41; see also Matt 25:12). The importance of community with other believers is clear in 25:34-40, where Jesus commends the care shown "to one of the least of these my brothers" (24:40).<sup>68</sup>

The importance of character is surely a part of what is needed for a disciple to endure through suffering to the end (Matt 24:13; cf. Rom 5:3-5; Jas 1:2-4). Similarly, character is also a necessary ingredient for the readiness required of Jesus's followers in Matt 24:45-51; 25:1-13 (note especially the mentions of "wise" and "faithful" versus "wicked" and "foolish" in these passages). The importance of commission finds expression in both the emphasis on practical conduct (e.g., Matt 24:13; 25:14-30, 31-46) and in a life of mission implied in Matt 24:14, where Jesus highlights "the gospel of the

---

<sup>67</sup> T. J. Geddert, "Apocalyptic Teaching," in *DJG*, 25.

<sup>68</sup> An explanation of the view that this particular passage primarily has in mind care shown to other believers (and not humanity broadly) is laid out in Turner, *Matthew*, 604-7; see also Carson, *Matthew*, 519-20.

kingdom” that “will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations.” The importance of mission is clear in the assignment of eternal destiny for those who do not know Jesus; the reality that “eternal fire” (Matt 25:41) and “eternal punishment” (Matt 25:46) awaits non-believers further propels the disciples of Jesus to proclaim Jesus’s identity and work, and to advance the mission Jesus gave them (see also Matt 28:18-20). In Matthew 23-25 as in the other discourses, the 4C portrait of discipleship is confirmed through these discipleship-centric emphases of commitment, communion, character, and commission.

**Summary.** This analysis of the Matthean discourses proves that a compelling picture of discipleship is painted by Jesus in these five teaching blocks. The resulting picture of discipleship includes the following components: commitment to Jesus, communion (with God, and community with others), character, and commission (both conduct and evangelistic mission). This preceding analysis, therefore, demonstrates the viability of the 4C portrait of discipleship as a biblically-informed and balanced picture of what it means to follow Jesus, and the 4C framework’s alliterated simplicity makes it a valuable mnemonic device for painting a picture of biblical discipleship.

### **Bringing It All Together: A 4C Portrait of Discipleship in Matthew’s Discourses**

See table 1 below for a summary of the 4C portrait of discipleship in Matthew’s five discourses. Two prefatory comments deserve mention. First, the following table captures the highlights mentioned in the preceding content and is not meant to be an exhaustive summary. For explanation on any of the table’s sections, see corresponding passages above. Second, some of the categories overlap; this overlap reminds the reader that these categories are not hermetically sealed off from each other in the life of discipleship; rather there is a dynamic interplay and interconnectedness across these categories that is to be expected in a holistic picture of discipleship.

Table 1. The 4C portrait of discipleship in Matthew's discourses

	<b>Commitment</b>	<b>Communion (with God and others)</b>	<b>Character</b>	<b>Commission (conduct and mission)</b>
<b>Matt 5-7</b>	- Call to decision: 7:13-27	- With God: 6:5-14; 7:7-11; also 7:23 - With others: 5:21-26, 31-32, 38-42, 43-48; 7:1-6	- Beatitudes: 5:1-12	- Mission: 5:13-16 - Conduct: speech: 5:33-37; giving and finances: 6:1-4, 19-24; fasting: 6:16-18; see also 7:15-20, 24-27
<b>Matt 10</b>	- Allegiance and cost: 10:34-39	- With God: 10:37	- Confidence: 10:19, 26 - Faithful endurance: 10:22	- Mission: 10:1-42
<b>Matt 13</b>	- Right response to sown message: 13:1-23	- With God: 13:44-46	- Need for patient endurance: 13:31-33, 47-50	
<b>Matt 18</b>		- With others: 18:1-35	- Humility: 18:1-4 - Concern for others: 18:5-14 - Addressing sin and forgiveness: 18:15-35	- Concern for others: 18:5-14, - Addressing sin and forgiveness: 18:15-35
<b>Matt 23-25</b>	- Persecution for sake of Jesus: 24:9 - Consequences for not accepting Jesus: 24:51; 25:30, 41	- With God: 25:21, 23; cf. 25:12, 41 - With others: Matt 25:34-40	- Endurance: 24:13 - "Anti-example": 23:25-28 - Readiness: 24:45-51; 25:1-13	- Conduct: 24:13; 25:14-30, 31-46 - Mission: 24:14; cf. 25:41, 46

## **The 4C Portrait of Discipleship and the People of God across the Bible's Storyline**

Having demonstrated the 4C portrait of discipleship in the Gospel of Matthew, this fourfold portrait of discipleship will now be briefly considered across the storyline of Scripture—looking specifically at how the biblical story of creation, the fall, redemption, and restoration influences an understanding of what it means to be the people of God in each of these areas. Space constraints prevent a thorough examination; what follows is intended (1) to show that the 4C Portrait of Discipleship is broadly consistent with the picture of what it means to be the people of God across Scripture, and (2) to invite additional study into a fertile and important topic.<sup>69</sup>

**Creation.** The beginning chapters of Genesis recount God's creation of a world that is thoroughly good. The apex of God's creation is man and woman, created in his image (Gen 1:26-27) and for his purposes (Gen 1:28). Though this segment of the storyline is short, even here qualities regarding what it means to be the people of God are evident. There is obvious commitment to God—God is introduced as the only sovereign Creator, and Adam and Eve receive his commands when instructed (Gen 1:28-30; 2:15-17). J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays powerfully highlight communion with God in the garden, pointing out God's personal involvement in the very act of creation, how God would walk with Adam and Eve in the garden, and how humanity's creation in the image of God seems to indicate "the concepts of presence, rule, power, and relationship."<sup>70</sup> The value of community with others becomes clear in God's own pre-fall declaration that "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen 2:18) and his subsequent creation of Eve.

---

<sup>69</sup> Two book-length studies already pave the way for this fertile topic, without exhausting its depths. See Wilkins, *Following the Master*, and Jonathan Lunde, *Following Jesus, the Servant King: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship*, Biblical Theology for Life (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

<sup>70</sup> Duvall and Hays, *God's Relational Presence*, 19. See Duvall and Hays, *God's Relational Presence*, 14-19 for their fuller comments on the presence of God in the pre-Fall state of creation.

Character can easily be implied from the reality that sin had not yet entered the world and corrupted the human heart. And commission is clear in God’s command to Adam and Eve: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion” over God’s creation as his image bearers (Gen 1:28). This command expects obedient conduct and the missional advance of God’s gracious rule throughout creation.<sup>71</sup>

**The fall.** When Eve and Adam both chose to partake of fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:1-6), sin entered the world and each dimension of what it means to follow God was terminally corrupted. Commitment to God was exchanged for listening to the serpent and Adam and Eve’s own self-interest. Communion with God was severed, in that Adam and Eve now hid from God’s presence, experiencing alienation from their Creator and ultimately leading to exile from the garden (Gen 3:6-10, 22-24).<sup>72</sup> Community with each other was polluted, as blame-shifting and hostility are introduced into relationships (Gen 3:10-12, 16).

Character is warped as sin mis-aligns the human heart—self-interest (Gen 3:1-5) and anger (Gen 4:1-7) are ready examples from the early chapters of Genesis. Indeed, only shortly later in the narrative of Scripture the reader discovers that “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that *every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*” (Gen 6:5, italics added). The commission which God gave Adam and Eve is likewise distorted—obedient conduct is exchanged for murder (Gen 4:8) and wickedness (Gen 6:5), and the mission of advancing God’s gracious

---

<sup>71</sup> According to Beale, “The intention seems to be that Adam would widen the boundaries of the Garden in ever increasing circles by expanding the order of the garden sanctuary into the inhospitable outer spaces” (G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004], 85).

<sup>72</sup> For much more on the important biblical theme of exile and alienation from God that sin creates, see Matthew S. Harmon, *Rebels and Exiles: A Biblical Theology of Sin and Restoration* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020).

rule throughout the earth was traded for humanity resisting dispersal and desiring to make their own name great (Gen 11:1-4).<sup>73</sup>

**Redemption.** Even after the fall into sin, God graciously persists in relationship with his people. In Genesis a premiere example of this “gracious persistence” is the initiative God takes in the call and commission of Abram (or hereafter, Abraham) in Genesis 12:1-3, continuing the line of a series of covenants between God and humanity. Each covenant depends on the initiative of God, and each covenant involves both God and humanity in some way.<sup>74</sup> Upon God’s call of Abraham, the covenants that follow in Scripture are as follows: Abrahamic (Gen 15:1-21; 17:1-14), Mosaic (Exod 19-24), Davidic (2 Sam 7:12-16; cf. Ps 89:3-4), and New (Jer 31:31-34).<sup>75</sup> In each of these covenants, there is continuity between what it means to live as God’s people and the 4C portrait of discipleship under consideration in this paper.

Each covenant includes commitment to God. Abraham shows commitment to God in his obedience to “Go from your land and your country and your kindred to the land I will show you” (Gen 12:1), before he knows precisely where he will end up. Likewise Abraham shows commitment in the faith he displays in God’s promises (Gen 15:1-6). Moses and the Israelites are called to commitment as they leave the land of Egypt and go toward the land God had promised, agreeing to have no other gods beside Yahweh (Exod

---

<sup>73</sup> See Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 51.

<sup>74</sup> For much more on biblical covenants, see, for example, Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God’s Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021); Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 72-73; Jason S. DeRouchie, “What Is a Biblical Theology of the Covenants?” in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2020), 215-26; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 647-62; Bruce K. Waltke, *Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 148-49; P. R. Williamson, “Covenant,” in *NDBT*, 419-29.

<sup>75</sup> Two covenants deserve mention, that precede the four mentioned here and that are often addressed. These preceding covenants that are often addressed are the Adamic and Noahic Covenants.

20:3; cf. Exod 24:3-4). Regarding commitment to God in the Davidic Covenant, “[i]t is significant that the choice of David comes in the wake of God’s directives through Samuel. God rejects Saul because he is not ‘a man after his own heart’ (1 Sam. 13:14b). It is clear, therefore, that God desires faithfulness from the kings, subservient as they are to God’s own sovereign rulership (2 Sam. 7:26; Ps. 2:6).”<sup>76</sup> The New Covenant portrays this commitment in straightforward-but-strong language, where God says “I will be their God, and they will be my people” (Jer 31:33). While Scripture is full of ways God’s people fall short of this commitment to God, it does not change the reality that commitment is intended as a fundamental ingredient by which God’s people should be characterized.

Each covenant includes communion—both communion with God and community with others. Only a few highlights can be mentioned here. God’s personal presence with Abraham is evident in Genesis 12:1-3 (notice how personally involved God is in this calling, displayed in the numerous “I” statements where God is the one acting), as is God’s desire to bless not just Abraham individually, but “all families of the earth.” God’s presence with Moses and the Israelites is displayed boldly in Exodus 33—between the golden calf idolatry in Exodus 32 and the renewal of the covenant in Exodus 34. In Exodus 33:14 God promises that his presence will go with his people, indicating communion and relationship with his people. In the Davidic Covenant, communion finds expression in the “father-son” relationship that God mentions in 2 Samuel 7:14-15. And communion and community again are displayed in the New Covenant, both in the personal relationship each individual has with the Lord (Jer 31:34) and in the communal thrust that runs throughout all of Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Character and commission are also a part of the covenants. As a sampling of character throughout the covenants, Abraham displays radical trust (Gen 22) and Joseph shows integrity (e.g., Gen 39:7-10). Moses prohibits coveting (Exod 20:17). David models

---

<sup>76</sup> Lunde, *Following Jesus, the Servant King*, 80.



conviction and repentance in response to sin (2 Sam 11-12; Ps 51). The New Covenant promises a law written on the hearts of individuals (Jer 31:33). In all of these snapshots, following God impacts not simply external actions but internal dispositions and desires.<sup>77</sup>

As a sampling of commission (conduct and mission), the scope of the Abrahamic blessing is “all the families of the earth” (Gen 12:3), demonstrating God’s heart for the world and expanding the parameters of the mission of God’s people to include all nations (cf. Matt 28:19). Moses commanded the people to distinct, obedient conduct (see, for example, Lev 19:2). God’s promises (ultimately culminating in New Covenant fulfillment) continue to look beyond the nation of Israel alone, when God says, “I will make you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isa 49:6).

**Restoration.** In the final “act” of God’s storyline in Scripture, God’s promises come to full realization and the portrait of what it is to be God’s people bursts forth with vivid color. This portrait is on display most readily in Revelation 21-22. In that section of Scripture, commitment to God is no longer threatened by Satan and his demons (for they have been vanquished, Rev 20:10; see also 21:27) or personal sin (for “[n]o longer is there any curse” [Rev 22:3, NIV]). Indeed, “they [i.e., those whose names are written in the book of life, who are with God in the New Heaven and Earth] will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Rev 21:3). Communion with God is fully realized again as it was in the original garden, as God dwells with his people (Rev 21:3). Community with others from “every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” will be a reality (Rev 7:9). Character will be perfected, since there is no longer any curse

---

<sup>77</sup> While the examples listed here are all positive, the numerous sinful dispositions throughout the storyline of the Bible and the ways godly character is lacking could also be highlighted. Adding negative examples would not change the conclusion drawn here: character matters.

(Rev 22:3; cf. 1 John 3:2). The commission is worship and service in the fully restored New Heavens and New Earth (Rev 22:3).

**Summary.** A survey of the biblical storyline adds further credence to the 4C portrait of discipleship under consideration. From Genesis to Revelation, God’s people should be characterized by commitment to him, by communion (with God, and community with others), by transformed, God-honoring character, and by commission (conduct and mission). May this biblical, balanced picture of discipleship continue to inform the church’s approach to discipleship still today.

### **The Priorities of Discipleship**

With a vivid picture of discipleship now in view, the “How?” question deserves consideration next. The best place to begin answering this question is by studying the earliest history of the church in the first chapters of Acts.<sup>78</sup> Acts 1-2 confirms clear priorities for discipleship in the life of the local church. These priorities present in the earliest church helped set direction and provide shape for the church as it continued to grow in the first century; these priorities must continue to guide the life and practice of churches today.

#### **Six Priorities for Discipleship in Acts 1-2: A Proposal**

Acts 2 provides fertile soil for those wanting to understand the church community that emerges after the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). In particular, Acts 2:42 receives special attention: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” A review of select literature on this passage quickly reveals a tendency to hone in on these four

---

<sup>78</sup> See esp. Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 273-74. For reading Acts as history, see Wright and Bird, *The New Testament in Its World*, 50-59; also Craig S. Keener, *Acts*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 14-16.

activities to which the first church devoted themselves: teaching (τῆ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων), fellowship (τῆ κοινωνίᾳ), the breaking of bread (κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου), and the prayers (ταῖς προσευχαῖς). For example, these four activities are described by others using various headings: “four marks,”<sup>79</sup> “four key areas,”<sup>80</sup> four “essentials,”<sup>81</sup> or four “practices.”<sup>82</sup> Whatever the label, focused discussion is then often given to these activities mentioned in Acts 2:42.

To be sure, this focused discussion is warranted. Luke specifically says the early church “devoted themselves” to these activities. Darrell L. Bock provides the additional insight that the specific Greek construction for “devoted” (προσκαρτεροῦντες) here points to “ongoing devotion” and carries the idea of “persistence or perseverance in something.”<sup>83</sup> Any study of the organized life of the church must give attention to these practices.

However, one can ask whether—by focusing on these four practices—other areas are perhaps overlooked or inadvertently left out of the discussion. To address this question, another look at the larger section in which Acts 2:42 is embedded is worthwhile. Following the lead of Craig Keener regarding summaries in Acts, the first summary section appears in Acts 2:42-47.<sup>84</sup> As a summary, this material at the end of Acts 2 concludes the first two chapters, thus identifying Acts 1-2 as a section (or subsection) that

---

<sup>79</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, in *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. XVIII, ed. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 126.

<sup>80</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 149.

<sup>81</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 175.

<sup>82</sup> Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 273-78.

<sup>83</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 149. The specific Greek construction he notes here is an imperfect periphrastic construction.

<sup>84</sup> See esp. Keener, *Acts*, 169-70. Helpfully, Keener distinguishes between “summary sections” and “summary statements.” Keener identifies Acts 2:42-47 as the first summary *section*, “depicting schematically the life of the community, surveying and connecting material where he has less detailed narrative to recount” (169). For more on summaries in Acts, see Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 74, 157-59; also Schnabel, *Acts*, 172-75.

deserves consideration as such. When this larger context (i.e., Acts 1-2) is examined, at least two other important features of the early church become evident—namely, the essential role of the Holy Spirit in and for the life of the church, and the theme of mission. While these additional features are noted in the literature, they are all too often separated from the “traditional four emphases” of Acts 2:42, thus implicitly creating distance between them.<sup>85</sup> The potential danger, then, is that as local churches look to Acts for guidance in their own community formation and are drawn especially to Acts 2:42, only a limited perspective of healthy discipleship in the life of the early church will be in view.

This potential danger can be avoided by explicitly listing a fuller range of emphases gleaned from Acts 1-2. The proposal suggested here offers six interlocking priorities that are clearly evident in the life of the early church: namely, the priorities of the Holy Spirit, apostolic teaching, community, the ordinances, God-centeredness, and mission. In what follows, each priority is identified, rooted in the text of Acts 1-2, and briefly described.

**The priority of the Holy Spirit.** Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he ordered (from παραγγέλλω) his disciples to stay in Jerusalem and “wait for the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4) which is then clearly identified as the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5).<sup>86</sup> To fully appreciate the significance of the promised Holy Spirit in Acts 1, an all-too-brief survey of select biblical material related to the Spirit is in order.<sup>87</sup> In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus shares

---

<sup>85</sup> Exceptions to this include John Stott’s framework in his *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), 19-33, and comments in Gary A. Parrett and S. Steve Kang, *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful: A Biblical Vision for Education in the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 82.

<sup>86</sup> Acts 1:5 mentions “baptism with the Holy Spirit.” While this topic is ancillary to the simple priority of the Spirit that is the focus here, for an orientation to the discussion interested readers are referred to Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 945-53.

<sup>87</sup> For what follows on summarizing select biblical material regarding the Spirit, see esp. David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 106-7. For a thorough development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the biblical narrative prior to Acts, see Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), chs. 4-8.

that his followers will be “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49) referencing the empowering work of the Holy Spirit that is reinforced in Acts 1:8 and displayed in Acts 2:1-41. Alongside this empowering work of the Spirit, mention must also be made of the renewing, energizing work of the Spirit; this energizing work is clear in such Old Testament passages as Isaiah 32:14-15; 44:3-5; Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:25-27; 37:14. While much more could be said about the promised Holy Spirit,<sup>88</sup> the priority of the Spirit and a strong glimpse of what he adds to the church is clear: the Holy Spirit energizes and empowers.

Moving on from Acts 1, the anticipated promise becomes the realized promise in the sending of the Spirit in Acts 2. The presence of the Spirit makes a noticeable, supernatural impact in the lives of Jesus’s first disciples: the descent of the Spirit in “tongues as of fire” (2:3), accompanied by the public proclamation of “the mighty works of God” in other tongues (2:4, 11). Indeed, this promised Spirit that has now been realized in their own lives is a promise extended to all who respond appropriately to the message of Jesus (2:38). Commenting on the response to Peter’s message in Acts 2:41, Peterson notes that “[t]he flow of the narrative suggests that every aspect of their new life was then brought about by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>89</sup> It is fitting, then, to see this energizing influence of the Spirit not only in the conversion of the three thousand (2:41) but also in the community that forms immediately following Pentecost in Acts 2:42-47.<sup>90</sup>

The takeaway is clear. Acts 1-2 abounds with the priority of the Holy Spirit in the life of the early church. While discussions about how precisely this priority takes

---

<sup>88</sup> See esp. Cole, *He Who Gives Life*.

<sup>89</sup> Peterson, *Acts*, 159. Thiselton’s comments also deserve mention: “from the start the Church comes into existence only by receiving the creative life of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:1-36)” (Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Holy Spirit—In Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013], 51).

<sup>90</sup> As Thompson notes, “It seems unlikely that the two portraits of Christian community (2:42-47; 4:32-47) . . . which are placed immediately after references to the ‘filling of the Holy Spirit’, are meant to be read in isolation from that activity of the Spirit” (Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke’s Account of God’s Unfolding Plan*, NSBT [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011], 135).

shape will continue among professional theologians, those holding pastoral office, and congregational laity, finding appropriate ways to value and embody this priority is essential.

**The priority of apostolic teaching.** The priority of apostolic teaching is self-evident from Acts 2:42, “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.”<sup>91</sup> However, the context of Acts 1-2 builds significant meaning into the phrase τῆ διδασχῆ τῶν ἀποστόλων. First, Acts 1:12-26 reinforces the significance of the office of apostle. As the believers gathered in Jerusalem and awaited the sending of the Spirit, they knew they needed to fill the vacancy left by Judas in the number of apostles. This appointment was no historical accident; nor was it an example of the early church “jumping the gun” prior to the calling and commission of Paul in Acts 9.<sup>92</sup> Rather, this appointment of Matthias as the twelfth apostle (1:26) is “presumably related to the fact that Jesus intended them to be leaders of a restored Israel.”<sup>93</sup>

The apostolic office is further identified as intended for men who had accompanied Jesus during his entire earthly ministry and were witnesses of his resurrection (1:21-22). The significance of these truths regarding apostolic identity should not be missed. The apostles, whose teaching directed the early church, served in continuity with the story of the Old Testament Scriptures and in line with the message and ministry of Jesus Christ. Surely these truths about their identity shaped their role in the community and the content of their teaching.

---

<sup>91</sup> Indeed, this activity is apparently so self-evident that some otherwise notable commentaries make proportionally very little mention of this particular priority in their comments on the text. See, for e.g., Keener, *Acts*, 169-73; also Witherington, *Acts*, 159-63.

<sup>92</sup> F. F. Bruce mentions this theory, then quickly dismisses the view that this decision by the apostles was wrong: “This [i.e., the view that the apostles were wrong in adding Matthias] is a complete mistake. Paul did not possess the qualifications set out in vv. 21 f. Besides, his apostleship was unique in character, as he himself maintains; he would certainly have dismissed as preposterous the idea that he was rightfully the twelfth apostle on the same footing as the rest of the eleven” (F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 52).

<sup>93</sup> Peterson, *Acts*, 126. See also Bruce, *Acts*, 49-50.

Second, the content of Peter’s message in Acts 2:14-36 provides a window into the content of the apostolic teaching. Peter’s Pentecost sermon centers around the person and work of Christ, which itself is firmly tethered to (and the fulfillment of, see Matt 5:17) the story of the Old Testament. Surely this message that characterized Peter’s public proclamation would also inform the apostles’ teaching in other environments. The way Eckhard Schnabel describes the apostolic teaching aptly summarizes what has been seen thus far: “The apostles’ teaching focused on Jesus’s life, ministry, death, and resurrection, and on his significance in God’s plan.”<sup>94</sup> These insights about the office of apostle and the content of their teaching combine to imbue the apostolic teaching of Acts 2:42 with added value.

**The priority of community.** It is noteworthy that the “fellowship” to which the early church devoted themselves (Acts 2:42) marks the only time the Greek *κοινωνία* is used in Luke-Acts, “though the idea is common.”<sup>95</sup> A review of how this word is described in the literature on Acts 2 helps reveal its rich meaning. Here is a sampling of glosses provided for *κοινωνία* in select linguistic, biblical, and theological works: “close association involving mutual interests and sharing,”<sup>96</sup> “unique sharing,”<sup>97</sup> “close bond,”<sup>98</sup> “mutuality,”<sup>99</sup> “the personal, fraternal coherence of the individual members of the congregation”<sup>100</sup> and simply “communion.”<sup>101</sup> The similarities between these various

---

<sup>94</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 178.

<sup>95</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 160. Also Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 120.

<sup>96</sup> BDAG, s.v. *κοινωνία* 1.

<sup>97</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 120.

<sup>98</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 120 n. 6.

<sup>99</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 150. Bock also notes that this mutuality “can have overtones of mutual material support.”

<sup>100</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 178.

<sup>101</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Hope and Community: A Constructive Theology for the Pluralistic*

renderings drive home the deeply shared life of the early church in an interactive<sup>102</sup> and voluntary<sup>103</sup> way. Harper and Metzger capture the implications of this: “While relationship with Jesus is truly personal, it is by no means private, individualistic, and consumerist. It is public and interpersonal or communal.”<sup>104</sup>

The fuller context of Acts 1-2 sheds additional light on how to understand this shared and interactive life of the early church. Attention will be given here to how this shared life is (1) marked by sacrificial generosity, (2) gathered under leadership, and (3) manifested in both larger and smaller gatherings.

First, the community is marked by sacrificial generosity. In his commentary on Acts, Craig Keener suggests a chiasmic structure for Acts 2:41-47, locating the shared possessions in verses 44-45 as the central feature of the chiasm. Keener then highlights the conclusion that follows, if this chiasmic structure is correct: “the sharing of possessions is a central (perhaps because so distinctive) feature of Luke’s vision of the early Christian community formed by the Spirit.”<sup>105</sup> Regardless of whether there is truly a chiasm here or not, Keener’s observation deserves consideration—if for no other reason than the amount of space this generosity is given in the summary section. A characteristic of *κοινωνία* in the early church is that it was marked by sacrificial generosity.

Second, the community is gathered under leadership. While attention has already been given to the apostolic teaching, the implications of this for the priority of community deserve further mention. The early community of Jesus followers was not

---

*World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 318.

<sup>102</sup> According to Bock, “Luke points to fellowship to underscore the personal interactive character of relationships in the early church at all levels” (Bock, *Acts*, 150).

<sup>103</sup> Numerous commentaries specifically counter any notions that the shared life in Acts 2 approaches a required communism. See, for e.g., Bock, *Acts*, 152; Peterson, *Acts*, 163; Keener, *Acts*, 175.

<sup>104</sup> Bruce Harper and Paul Louis Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 41.

<sup>105</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 170.



entirely “flat” or egalitarian organizationally. The continuing role of leaders has already been established in the selection of Matthias to replace Judas (Acts 1:15-26). The role of leadership also appears in Acts 2:14ff, when “Peter, standing with the eleven” addressed the crowd of onlookers at Pentecost. And then there is the role that the teaching of the apostles played in the community, noted in Acts 2:42<sup>106</sup>—again directing attention to the role of leadership in the early church.

Third, community is manifested in both larger and smaller gatherings. The early church community gathered frequently both in the temple and in individual homes (see Acts 2:46).<sup>107</sup> While gathering in the temple may stem from the Jewish background of the believers,<sup>108</sup> Luke nowhere indicates any impropriety of this large gathering in his summary section. Instead, the point is simply to reinforce that the believers understood the value of corporate gathering, likely embodying the priorities of Acts 2:42-47 in a large group. Schnabel points out that the complex of the temple (specifically Solomon’s Colonnade, see Acts 3:11; 5:12) could accommodate even the three thousand converts from Acts 2:41, were everyone present all at once.<sup>109</sup> The early church also met in smaller homes, perhaps with ten to fifteen attending most commonly, though the most spacious homes could hold approximately fifty.<sup>110</sup> The strength of these smaller gatherings in homes helped cement the shared, interactive nature of *κοινωνία*: “As basic observation

---

<sup>106</sup> Schnabel draws this out explicitly: “The phrase ‘teaching of the apostles’ (διδασχὴ τῶν ἀποστόλων) is a subjective genitive: it is the apostles who were teaching the new converts.” Schnabel goes on to add that “The believers continuously listened to the apostles” and “The believers practiced what they heard the apostles teach.” All of this indicates an appropriate submission to the leadership structure in place. See Schnabel, *Acts*, 177.

<sup>107</sup> Schnabel notes that what Luke says here “does not necessarily mean that every believer meets every single day.” See Schnabel, *Acts*, 183.

<sup>108</sup> The gathering of the early church at the temple “is an indication of the Jewish character of their faith in this early period” (Bock, *Acts*, 153).

<sup>109</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 183.

<sup>110</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 178.

confirms, . . . smaller groups tend to invite more interaction. It also allowed a more familial setting, ideal in view of Jesus’s teaching (Luke 8:21; 18:29-30).”<sup>111</sup>

**The priority of the ordinances.**<sup>112</sup> A priority on the ordinances is another characteristic of the early church that stands out in Acts 1-2. This priority stems from the gospel-centric nature and design of the ordinances. In his book *Recovering the Real Lost Gospel*, Darrell Bock says, “The church has two means by which it illustrates participation in the gospel for its members: the Lord’s Table and baptism. . . . By looking at how the gospel is portrayed through the rites of the church, we can gain more insight into what the gospel is.”<sup>113</sup> The language Bock uses here points to the priority of these two ordinances: they “illustrate participation in the gospel,” and through them “we can gain more insight into what the gospel is.” In his *Evangelical Theology*, Michael Bird uses the language “gospel freighted” in discussing these ordinances, and highlights their “christocentric” nature.<sup>114</sup>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer likewise explicitly draws connections between the ordinances<sup>115</sup> and gospel truths. Speaking of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, he says, “Both proclaim the death of Christ for us (Rom. 6.3ff; 1 Cor. 11.26). In both we receive the Body of Christ. Baptism makes us members of the Body, and the Lord’s Supper confers bodily fellowship and communion (κοινωνία) with the body of the Lord whom we receive, and through it the bodily fellowship with the other members of his

---

<sup>111</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 178.

<sup>112</sup> While evangelicals use both “sacraments” and “ordinances” to refer to baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the language of “ordinance” will be used here. For more on this, see Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 321-22.

<sup>113</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Recovering the Real Lost Gospel: Reclaiming the Gospel as Good News* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 23.

<sup>114</sup> Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 758.

<sup>115</sup> To be fair, Bonhoeffer would use the word “sacrament” here.

Body.”<sup>116</sup> The take-away from all of this is evident: churches that prioritize the gospel will need to prioritize the ordinances.

This prioritization is consistent with the pattern displayed in Acts 1-2. These two chapters reveal both a strong emphasis on baptism and a devotion to celebrating the Lord’s Supper. Each of these two ordinances will now be considered in turn.

A strong emphasis on baptism is displayed in Acts 2:38. Following his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:14-36), Peter responds to the conviction of those listening (Acts 2:37) with this: “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). This command to be baptized is then realized in “about three thousand souls” being baptized in response (Acts 2:41). Commenting on this verse, Robert Stein connects the act of baptism with other gospel-centric truths: “repentance, faith, baptism, and the reception of the Spirit are integrally related components in the conversion-initiatory rite of water baptism.”<sup>117</sup>

Some see in Acts 2:38 support for baptismal regeneration. However, Gregg Allison helpfully points out the distinction between the “ground” of the believer’s salvation and the “instrumental cause, or the means” of salvation. On the one hand, “[t]he efficient cause, or the only ground, of salvation, is God’s gracious, redemptive work in Jesus Christ; his death and resurrection accomplished salvation for sinful human beings.”<sup>118</sup> On the other hand, “[t]he instrumental cause, or the means, of salvation, is (according to [Acts 2:38]) repentance and baptism; turning from sin and expressing this act by submitting to baptism is the way of appropriating the salvation accomplished for

---

<sup>116</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 251. One does not need to fully embrace all of Bonhoeffer’s views of baptism or the Lord’s Supper to appreciate the point he is making.

<sup>117</sup> Robert H. Stein, “Baptism in Luke-Acts,” in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, edited by Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology, (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 41.

<sup>118</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 359.

sinful beings by Jesus Christ.”<sup>119</sup> If one were to nuance this point further, it could perhaps be stated thus: The believer’s salvation is *accomplished* through Jesus’s work, *appropriated* through repentance-faith, and *expressed* in baptism. In Acts 2 these latter two components were essentially concurrent, combined with the reception of the Spirit as Peter promised in verse 38.<sup>120</sup>

While baptism does not effect salvation, it is nevertheless important in the broader embrace and appreciation of salvation.<sup>121</sup> Timothy George highlights the meaning of baptism that must be prioritized: “the decisive transition from an old way of life to a new way of life, as an act of radical obedience in which a specific renunciation is made and a specific promise is given.”<sup>122</sup>

Attention now turns to the Lord’s Supper: While baptism clearly stands out as a priority in Acts 2, the presence of the Lord’s Supper in this passage is more debated. Of interest here is the reference to “the breaking of bread” (κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου) in Acts 2:42. Some see in this passage a reference to table fellowship<sup>123</sup> or a common meal,<sup>124</sup> without any overt indication of the Lord’s Supper. A strong case can be made, however, that the “breaking of bread” in Acts 2:42 does indeed refer to the Lord’s Supper.

---

<sup>119</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 359.

<sup>120</sup> As stated by Stein, “It is a repentance-faith-confession-baptism that brings the gift of the Spirit. . . . The separation of these components in time in the subsequent history of the church . . . has resulted in much misunderstanding, confusion, and debate.” (Stein, “Baptism in Luke-Acts,” 65). For further insight into some of the reasoning behind the “separation of these components in time” see Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 326-27.

<sup>121</sup> This broader understanding of salvation includes not only justification, but also sanctification and glorification. For more on this broader understanding of salvation, see M. J. Harris, “Salvation” in *NDBT*, 762-67.

<sup>122</sup> Timothy George, foreword to *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, edited by Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), xv.

<sup>123</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 150-51—though admittedly Bock says the issue is “hard to decide” (150).

<sup>124</sup> Peterson, *Acts*, 161.

Three supporting points for this stance deserve mention. First, it is widely understood that in the early church the Lord's Supper was often celebrated alongside a larger meal shared by the believers.<sup>125</sup> So instead of seeing this passage as *either* an ordinary meal *or* a reference to the Lord's Supper, it is perhaps better to frame this passage as *both* an ordinary meal *and* (as part of that larger meal) a reference to the Lord's Supper.

Second, the book of Acts is Luke's second volume written to Theophilus (cf. Acts 1:1). In Luke's first volume, Luke 24:30 includes mention of Jesus breaking bread (using forms of both ἄρτος and κλάω, the same Gk. words used in Acts 2:42). It is then in this act that Jesus's two accompanying, unaware disciples have their eyes opened and recognize their Lord (Luke 24:31). Witherington draws attention to these passages in Luke 24 and Acts 2: "Luke emphasizes the connection between Jesus's presence and such meals."<sup>126</sup> In other words, with his mind still full of the connection between Jesus's presence and the meal in Luke 24, Luke may have wanted Theophilus to see this same connection in the meal referenced in Acts 2:42.

Third, an ordinary meal would seem out of place alongside the list of things that Luke is drawing attention to in this passage. Indeed, it may even be asked if an ordinary meal would already be subsumed under the "shared life" (κοινωνία) mentioned earlier in Acts 2:42. Additionally, Bruce comments that a reference to a simple meal would be "a circumstance wholly trivial in itself"<sup>127</sup> unless it pointed to something else (namely, the Lord's Supper).

When these supporting points are considered together, a strong case is made for seeing the presence of the Lord's Supper in Acts 2:42. Alongside baptism, this ordinance

---

<sup>125</sup> See 1 Cor 11:17-26; also Schnabel, *Acts*, 179; Fernando, *Acts*, 121; Bruce, *Acts*, 79.

<sup>126</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 160.

<sup>127</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 79.

rose to the level of clear priority. In summary, then, the ordinances helped illustrate the gospel of Jesus Christ and were emphasized in the earliest church.

**The priority of God-centeredness.** Another characteristic of the early church in Acts 2:42 was their devotion to “the prayers” (ταῖς προσευχαῖς). The plural with the article could either “suggest that set prayers were used” or “refer to an entire range of praying, both set and more spontaneous.”<sup>128</sup> Regardless, the first Christian community was defined deeply by prayer.

In addition to this life defined by prayer, other indicators of a strong Godward orientation are evident in the immediate context. For example, Acts 2:43 mentions that “awe [or fear, from Gk. φόβος] came upon every soul [ψυχῆ].” Michael Reeves proposes that for the believer, a right fear is trembling in wonder at who God is.<sup>129</sup> The “souls” (ψυχῆ) mentioned here likely refer back to the converts from Acts 2:41, where the same word, ψυχῆ, is used for those who believed and were baptized.

The Christian community is also described in Acts 2:47 as “praising God” (αἰνοῦντες τὸν θεὸν). The fellowship described in Acts 2 “focuses on God and helps people to remember the good things he has done, which in turn, cause praise.”<sup>130</sup> In all of these ways, then—in prayer, awe, and praise—the community of Acts 2 is marked by a deep God-centeredness.

**The priority of mission.** A sixth priority of the early church that warrants attention is their missional orientation. The term “missional orientation” is intended to be understood as an others-centeredness,<sup>131</sup> where the local church offers especially (though

---

<sup>128</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 151.

<sup>129</sup> Michael Reeves, “Should Christians Fear God?” Crossway Podcast. Podcast audio, January 18, 2021. <https://www.crossway.org/articles/podcast-should-christians-fear-god-michael-reeves/>.

<sup>130</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 123.

<sup>131</sup> The community of Acts 2 “is not an isolated, private club, or a hermetically sealed

not exclusively)<sup>132</sup> the proclamation of the gospel and the welcoming of diverse peoples into the community created by the gospel. Peter displays this missional orientation in his Pentecost sermon in Acts 2:14-40, where there is a clear emphasis on the person and work of Christ, along with a call to repentance and salvation (see esp. vv. 38-40). The proclamation of the gospel is clear.

The welcoming of diverse peoples into the community created by the gospel is also clear. When three thousand converts were added to the believing community in a single day, one can only wonder at how that would have challenged the preferences and methods that had been in place when the church numbered 120 (see Acts 2:41; cf 1:15). If an others-centeredness and willingness to welcome had not described the early church, this sort of expansion and inclusion would have been impossible.<sup>133</sup> Indeed, this sort of expansion and inclusion remained a defining feature of the early church: after describing the community life of the believers in Acts 2:42-47, Luke concludes by stating that “the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

Some apparently see a reference to active outreach in Acts 2:46-47. Commenting on Acts 2:46-47, McClendon and Lockhart say, “The early church was still going to the temple . . . to engage people where they were. They leveraged this location and the events surrounding it to engage people with the good news of Jesus Christ. They took advantage of the opportunity they had to speak about Jesus and share the new hope

---

community. Their reputation with outsiders is also good” (Bock, *Acts*, 154).

<sup>132</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*, Biblical Theology for Life (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 265-87. See also Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011); Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

<sup>133</sup> As Bruce helpfully says, “It is the Lord whose prerogative it is to add members to His own community; *it is the joyful duty of the community to welcome to their ranks* those whom Christ has accepted” (Bruce, *Acts*, 81; italics added). This sort of joyful welcoming depends upon a missional, others-centered orientation.

they had.”<sup>134</sup> While Witherington is much more tentative, he includes Acts 2:47 when mentioning the “public face” of the early church that was perhaps “at least in part for witnessing.”<sup>135</sup>

While the evangelistic fervor of the early church is not to be denied (the proclamation of the gospel has already been highlighted from Peter’s sermon), one must be careful about over-reading this active outreach into the passage in Acts 2:46-47. By assuming too quickly that the early believers strategically “leveraged this [temple] location” to “engage people with the good news of Jesus Christ,” the reader may too quickly jump past the more likely reasons for their temple attendance—namely, the rhythms of temple attendance that had shaped their patterns of living over the course of their lives,<sup>136</sup> and also the pragmatic benefit of a location large enough to accommodate a large group.<sup>137</sup> Acts 3:1-6 is instructive on this point. Peter and John were going to the temple at the hour of prayer (v. 1)—most apparently, to pray as would be their custom as observant Jews. Furthermore, they are approached themselves by a man lame from birth (vv. 2-3); this other man initiated the conversation, not Peter or John. All of this strongly indicates that a reading of Acts 2:46-47 which emphasizes an active outreach is more of an assumption than a reading that is rooted in the text.

The reason this point is worth belaboring is this: If an active outreach is too quickly assumed in Acts 2:46-47, the reader can fail to appreciate the attractive power of compelling community. The simpler way to read Acts 2:46-47 is that “people continue to join Jesus’s movement apparently because they are drawn by the radical lifestyle of

---

<sup>134</sup> P. Adam McClendon and Jared E. Lockhart, *Timeless Church: Five Lessons from Acts* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), 101.

<sup>135</sup> Witherington, *Acts*, 163.

<sup>136</sup> See Witherington, *Acts*, 163; also Bock, *Acts*, 153.

<sup>137</sup> See Schnabel, *Acts*, 183.



Jesus's followers."<sup>138</sup> Wright clarifies even further: "In caring for one another and ensuring that there were no needy people among them, the early believers demonstrated a new quality of living that was appealing. And it was that quality of life that reinforced the evangelistic preaching of the apostles, so the people joined the church in great numbers."<sup>139</sup> Both gospel proclamation and the community life of the church in Acts 1-2 provide strong evidence of missional orientation that served the progress of the gospel in their midst.

**Summary.** There is more to be learned about the priorities of the early church than the traditional four emphases often mentioned from Acts 2:42. When Acts 1-2 is considered as a section of Scripture, these traditional four emphases are imbued with additional meaning. Two other characteristics also manifest themselves as priorities that deeply mark the life of the earliest church. As contemporary local churches look to Acts for guidance in how to proceed with making disciples, then, a fully orbed vision for discipleship must include at least the following six priorities: (1) the Holy Spirit, (2) apostolic teaching, (3) community, (4) the ordinances, (5) God-centeredness, and (6) mission. These same six priorities continue to regulate the life of the early church even beyond Acts 1-2, as a survey of the New Testament makes clear.

### **Six Priorities for Discipleship in the Rest of the New Testament: A Survey**

Having established the validity of the six aforementioned priorities in the life of the church in Acts 1-2, a survey of the New Testament demonstrates that these same six priorities hold their value beyond the earliest church community of Acts 1-2. These priorities remain essential emphases in the life of the early church, and provide categories

---

<sup>138</sup> Craig S. Keener, "The Spirit and the Mission of the Church in Acts 1-2," *JETS* 62, no. 1 (March 2019): 43.

<sup>139</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 145.

by which one can effectively understand the continued growth and development of the church. In what follows, the same six priorities will be reviewed, this time with an eye on how these priorities are manifest in the New Testament, beyond Acts 1-2. Admittedly, this section is a survey and will therefore be brief. The purpose is not to be exhaustive, but simply to confirm that these six priorities are sustained as the church grows and develops.

**The priority of the Holy Spirit.** The presence and work of the Spirit is everywhere in the life of the New Testament church. The church is created and continues through the work of the Spirit (John 3:1-8; Gal 3:2-3). The Spirit inspired human authors to write the Scriptures that would form the church (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21). The church is empowered for ministry and mission through the Holy Spirit, who distributes spiritual gifts for the building up of the church (1 Cor 12:4-11; 14:26) and directs people into mission (Acts 13:2). The Spirit transforms the very identity of believers from slaves and orphans to sons and daughters, brothers and sisters who are to live together in unity (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6-7; Eph 4:1-4). The work of the Spirit shapes the character of the church (Gal 5:22-23) and he seals the future for the church (Eph 1:13-14). Nor should it be overlooked that one of the significant identifiers of the church in the New Testament is that she is the temple *of the Holy Spirit* (1 Cor 3:16-17).

The Spirit who energized and empowered the church in Acts 2 is the same Spirit who energizes and empowers the church throughout the New Testament. Allison is surely right in including the “pneumadynamic” nature of the church as one of the few characteristics that define the “origin and orientation” of the church.<sup>140</sup> To briefly expand on these categories of “origin” and “orientation,” the origin of the church depends upon the regenerating, life-bestowing work of the Spirit. The New Testament survey above indicates that the orientation of the church includes a directedness toward that which the

---

<sup>140</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 103.

Spirit values, in constant dependence on the Spirit. This directedness toward that which the Spirit values includes at least an establishment of Christian identity (Rom 8:15; 1 Cor 3:16-17; Gal 4:6-7) and the formation of character (Gal 5:22-23), the building up of the church through spiritual gifts and mission (1 Cor 12:4-11), unity (Eph 4:1-4), and maintaining an eschatological vision of reality (Eph 1:13-14; Rev 22:17).<sup>141</sup>

**The priority of apostolic teaching.** The priority of apostolic teaching remains strong throughout the New Testament. This priority manifests itself in a number of ways. First, the apostles themselves clearly prioritized teaching in their ministry. In Acts 6:1-3, a food distribution issue arises that needs the attention of the believing community. Rather than diverting their own ongoing attention toward this issue, the apostles have others appointed who can address the situation. The reason is clearly stated by the apostles: “we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4).<sup>142</sup> The priority the early church leaders placed on teaching remains evident as Acts includes numerous instances of proclamation in a variety of settings (e.g., 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 7:2-53; 8:4-5, 30-35; 10:34-43; 11:1-18, 19-20; 13:16-41; 17:22-31; 20:20-21; 28:31; etc.). The priority of teaching in the ministry of the apostles is also affirmed in their writing of letters as authoritative Scripture (e.g., 2 Tim 3:16-17; cf. 2 Pet 3:15-16).

Second, the New Testament affirms a body of content that is to be protected and passed down. That this body of content is to be protected is clear from the warnings about false teachers who “distort the truth” and “turn away from listening to the truth” (Acts 20:30 NIV; 2 Tim 4:3-4). That there is a body of content to be passed down is clearly

---

<sup>141</sup> While this survey is predominately concerned with the life of the church after Acts 2, one cannot forget the value of the Spirit we hear from Christ Himself, that the Spirit directs people to Christ (John 15:26).

<sup>142</sup> It should not be overlooked that the Gk. word for “devote” (from προσκαρτερέω) here in Acts 6:4 is the same word used earlier in Acts 2:42, where the community was “devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching.” One wonders if Luke was stylistically intentional here, showing that everyone—believing community and apostolic leadership—was devoted to the Word.

intended from such passages as 1 Cor 15:3-8; 2 Tim 2:2; and Jude 3. This authoritative body of content is to be passed down and explained formally through the teaching ministry of elders in the church (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9). And surely this body of content is what informs and shapes even the more informal, “one-another” teaching found in the New Testament (e.g., Acts 18:24-26; Rom 15:14; Col 3:16).

Now that the ongoing priority of apostolic teaching has been demonstrated throughout the New Testament, it is important to provide further understanding of what that body of content includes.<sup>143</sup> Bonhoeffer is helpful here: “The teaching of the apostles is the witness to the physical event of God revealing himself in Christ. Hence the apostles and prophets are the foundation on which the church is built, where the corner-stone is Jesus Christ (Eph. 2.20). Since the days of the apostles the preaching of the Church has always had to be ‘apostolic,’ in the sense of being based on the same foundation.”<sup>144</sup> John Stott speaks to how this content is accessible to those who could not be in the immediate audience of the apostles’ teaching: “The teaching of the apostles is found in the New Testament. It is here that their teaching has been bequeathed to us in its definitive form. This is the true ‘apostolic succession,’ namely *a continuity of apostolic doctrine, made possible by the New Testament.*”<sup>145</sup>

Apostolic teaching—God revealing himself to us in Christ, protected in and passed down through the writings of the New Testament—is a clear priority of the early church in its ongoing life together.

---

<sup>143</sup> This identification of “apostolic teaching” with a specific body of content assumes that the office of apostle (i.e., those listed among the Twelve who meet the requirements outlined in Acts 1:21-22 and have a special authority) is no longer operative today. For more on this, see Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 205-11; also Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1116-17, 1121-22.

<sup>144</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 249-50. Bonhoeffer’s comments are consistent with what was noted above regarding the content of apostolic teaching—see n. 94 above and corresponding reference in the body of the paper.

<sup>145</sup> Stott, *Living Church*, 24-25; italics added.

**The priority of community.** The continuing priority of a deep community life, or *κοινωνία*, is evident throughout the New Testament in two broad senses. First, the strong familial language used of church relationships indicates the “interactivity” and “mutuality” characteristic of *κοινωνία*.<sup>146</sup> Benjamin L. Merkle focuses on the Pastoral Epistles and suggests that “the church is at the very center of Paul’s message in 1 Timothy and perhaps also in 2 Timothy and Titus.”<sup>147</sup> In these same letters where the church is central, “[t]he metaphor that is mostly used . . . is that of the family or household.”<sup>148</sup> In other words, when Paul wants to speak to the church about church, the idea of church as “family” is emphasized. This New Testament familial language is clear from the identification of believers as “brothers” (or “brothers and sisters”;<sup>149</sup> e.g., 1 Thess 1:4; 2:1; James 1:2; 1 John 3:17; etc.). The church is called “the household of God” (1 Tim 3:15) and there are passages that clearly rely on familial language when speaking of church relationships (e.g., 1 Tim 5:1-2; 1 John 2:12-14).

A second broad sense in which the priority of community is threaded throughout the New Testament is the many “one another” commands addressed to the church. Tim Challies provides insight on the significance of these commands, specifically for community:

The Bible, and the New Testament in particular, have many teachings on the importance of community. By studying two simple phrases that appear time and again in the New Testament, we can learn of the requirements and beauty of true Christian community. The phrases “each other” and “one another” speak to relationships. They do not address a relationship to God or a relationship to oneself.

---

<sup>146</sup> See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1052; also Krish Kandiah, “Church is a Family, Not an Event,” *Christianity Today*, December 28, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/january-february/church-as-family-not-event-kandiah.html>.

<sup>147</sup> Benjamin L. Merkle, “Ecclesiology in the Pastoral Epistles” in *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul’s Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, eds. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 173.

<sup>148</sup> Merkle, “Ecclesiology,” 174.

<sup>149</sup> So NIV; see also ESV footnote at 1 Thess 1:4, for example.

Neither do they speak to a relationship with the universal church. Rather, they address interpersonal relationships within a community of believers.<sup>150</sup>

Challies goes on to provide a list of references to the New Testament “one another” commands.<sup>151</sup> He also breaks these commands down into four larger categories: unity, hospitality, devotion, and edification.<sup>152</sup> The connection of these categories (and the “one anothers” within each) to *κοινωνία* is obvious—the value of community remains a driving priority in and for the life of the church throughout the New Testament.<sup>153</sup>

**The priority of the ordinances.** As the church continued to grow and expand in the first century, it continued to prioritize the gospel as that which is “of first importance” (1 Cor 15:3-8). Two very tangible means (or “virtual realities”<sup>154</sup>) by which the church emphasized Christ’s saving work were through the ordinances—namely, baptism and the Lord’s Supper.<sup>155</sup> The priority of the ordinances is established in the first place by the command of Christ regarding each. Regarding the Lord’s Supper, on the night before his crucifixion Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples and then transformed the meal moving forward—directing them no longer to think of the exodus from Egypt but to “do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19; cf. 1 Cor 11:23-25).<sup>156</sup> Regarding

---

<sup>150</sup> Tim Challies, “One Another—The Bible and Community,” Challies.com, July 10, 2004, <https://www.challies.com/articles/one-another-the-bible-community/>.

<sup>151</sup> Listed here in canonical order: Mark 9:50; John 13:14, 34; Rom 12:10, 16; 13:8; 14:13; 15:7, 14; 16:16; 1 Cor 1:10; 12:25; 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; Gal 5:13, 26; 6:2; Eph 4:2, 32; 5:19, 21; Phil 4:2; Col 3:13, 16; 1 Thess 3:12; 4:18; 5:11, 13, 15; Heb 3:13; 10:24, 25; 13:1; James 4:11; 5:9, 16; 1 Pet 1:22; 3:8; 4:9; 5:5, 14; 1 John 1:7; 3:11. See Challies, “One Another.”

<sup>152</sup> Challies, “One Another.”

<sup>153</sup> While space will not allow a further explanation of this point, an astute reader of the NT will note that even the three subcategories of *κοινωνία* seen above from Acts 1-2 are reinforced and developed throughout the rest of the New Testament as well: marked by sacrificial generosity (e.g., Acts 4:32-26; 1 Cor 16:1-4; 1 John 3:17-18); gathered under leadership (e.g., Acts 6:1-7; 14:23; 20:17-38; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9); and assembling in both larger and smaller groups (e.g., Acts 5:42; 20:20; Rom 16:3-5; Col 4:15; Heb 10:24-25).

<sup>154</sup> Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 758.

<sup>155</sup> Bock, *Real Lost Gospel*, 23.

<sup>156</sup> Bock, *Real Lost Gospel*, 26.

baptism, Jesus’s final command before his ascension in Matthew is to make disciples, which includes the practice of “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19).<sup>157</sup>

The priority of the ordinances is then reinforced in the life and practice of the early church. In the book of Acts, baptism plays a prominent role (e.g., 2:38-41; 8:36-38; 10:47; 16:15, 31-33).<sup>158</sup> The epistles then draw further attention to baptism in texts that “emphasize the centrality of baptism (1 Pet 3:21; Eph 4:5; 1 Cor 12:13; 1 Cor 15:29; Gal 3:27)” and texts that prove this topic to be “theologically weighty” (Rom 6:3-4; Col 2:11-12).<sup>159</sup> While evangelicals rightly deny that baptism is necessary for salvation, this biblical material confirms the ordinance is still of high importance.<sup>160</sup>

The ongoing priority of the Lord’s Supper gets clear attention in 1 Cor 10:14-22 and 11:17-34. While this section of 1 Corinthians is the only place outside of the Gospels that treats this ordinance in detail,<sup>161</sup> the sheer theological freight that the Apostle Paul packs into his discussion of the Lord’s Supper confirms its ongoing priority for the health of the church. Indeed, Darrell Bock says that in the Lord’s Supper we have a meal that “illustrates what the gospel’s core is.”<sup>162</sup>

In the Lord’s Supper, those who partake should reflect on Christ’s sacrifice on the cross (1 Cor 10:16; 11:24-25). This reflection is not a simple act of memory recall;

---

<sup>157</sup> According to Turner, “One sometimes hears preaching that stresses that the imperative *μαθητεύσατε* is the only command in the passage. But surely the activities described by the three participles [one of which is ‘baptizing’], though not grammatically imperatives, are not optional” (Turner, *Matthew*, 689 n. 3).

<sup>158</sup> See esp. Stein, “Baptism in Luke-Acts,” 35-66. Here Stein also addresses some of the more controversial baptism passages (e.g., in Acts 8:14-17 and 19:1-7).

<sup>159</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles: An Initiation Rite for Believers,” in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, edited by Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology, (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 68.

<sup>160</sup> See Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles,” 96; also Allison, *Sojourners*, 357-60.

<sup>161</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 365.

<sup>162</sup> Bock, *Real Lost Gospel*, 28.

rather, in this reflection the Christian remembers his desperate need for grace, and the reality of Christ's accomplishment of salvation in history is brought into the "heuristic service of the present."<sup>163</sup> In the Lord's Supper, those who partake anticipate the Lord's return (1 Cor 11:26). An eschatological reality and the presence of hope are involved. In the Lord's Supper, those who partake reflect not just on the fellowship they have with God, but also on the fellowship they have with other believers (1 Cor 11:17-22, 27-29). The Lord's Supper is a chance to celebrate and pursue reconciled relationships and the otherworldly unity believers share because of Jesus Christ.<sup>164</sup> With all of these "gospel core" layers of meaning associated with the Lord's Supper, clearly this ordinance is of significance in the ongoing life of the church.<sup>165</sup>

**The priority of God-centeredness.** While God-centeredness may seem (and indeed is) obvious throughout the New Testament, the tendency to quickly and simplistically affirm the priority may lead the reader to miss the many ways this obvious value actually takes shape in the life of the early church. This misstep in turn can lead to what J. I. Packer warns of in his now classic book, *Knowing God*: "ignorance of God—ignorance of both his ways and of the practice of communion with him—lies at the root of much of the church's weakness today."<sup>166</sup> The God-centeredness of the church must not be taken for granted.

Close attention to the New Testament will not allow the God-centeredness of the church to be either neglected or taken for granted. The church continues to be

---

<sup>163</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, "Remembering: A Central Theme in Biblical Worship," in *JETS* 43, no. 1 (March 2000): 28. While Merrill is primarily addressing OT worship in this article, he advocates remembrance as a "core theological principle" (28) and also specifically addresses the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11 later on in the article (35-36).

<sup>164</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 406-08.

<sup>165</sup> For further discussion of the many meanings layered together in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, see also Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1221-23.

<sup>166</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 12.



characterized by prayer in the book of Acts (e.g., 4:23-31; 7:60; 10:9; 13:1-3; 20:36) and throughout the epistles<sup>167</sup> (e.g., Rom 15:30-33; Eph 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Phil 1:9-11; Col 1:9-14; 1 Thess 3:9-13; 2 Thess 1:3-12). God-centeredness remains on display in other eruptions of praise (e.g., Rom 11:33-36) and in the doxological benedictions that conclude certain letters (e.g., Rom 16:25-27; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 6:23-24; 2 Tim 4:22; Heb 13:20-21; Jude 24-25).

Perhaps no other passage includes such a robust understanding of God-centeredness in such a short space as 1 Thess 5:16-18, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” As Charles Wanamaker notes, “Each of the three actions that [Paul] commands in vv. 16-18 either has its source in God, as in the case of the first one, or is directed toward God, as in the case of the last two.”<sup>168</sup> In his thorough treatment of thanksgiving in Paul, David Pao adds this insight regarding the third command in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (i.e., “give thanks in all circumstances”): “In the constant act of thanksgiving, the relationship with God is nurtured. Through thanksgiving, the gracious acts are remembered and the life of a person is thereby changed. Thanksgiving then becomes an act of submission when the performance of such an act is not aimed at coercing God to act, *but is a way to acknowledge him as Lord of all.*”<sup>169</sup> First Thessalonians 5:16-18, then, simply reinforces what is true throughout the New Testament: the church prioritizes a robust sense of God-centeredness.

---

<sup>167</sup> The following sampling of prayers from the epistles are all from the Apostle Paul. For an excellent resource working through the prayers of Paul, see D. A. Carson, *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

<sup>168</sup> Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 199.

<sup>169</sup> David W. Pao, *Thanksgiving: An Investigation of a Pauline Theme*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 37; italics added.

**The priority of mission.** Jesus commissions his followers with clear purpose before he ascends to heaven (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 1:8), and this mission to “make disciples” of all nations (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) is clearly a driving priority of the church in the New Testament. Acts recounts the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem (ch. 2) into Samaria (8:4-5), to the Gentiles (10:1-48) and to the ends of the earth (13:1-3). This growth of the church included gospel proclamation (e.g., 8:4-5, 35; 10:34-43; 13:16-41; 17:22-31) and the inclusion of others (i.e., Samaritans and Gentiles into the people of God).

The rest of the New Testament continues in line with this missional trajectory. Besides the overarching observation that many of the epistles are written records of the proclamation and implications of the gospel, specific references to gospel proclamation occur throughout the letters as well (e.g., Rom 1:16; 10:14-15; Eph 6:18-20; Col 4:3-6; 2 Tim 1:8-14; 4:1-2, 5; 1 Pet 3:15). It must not be missed that there will be times the compelling lifestyle of the believer results in a situation where such gospel proclamation—whether formal or informal—is invited and received favorably (e.g., 1 Pet 2:11-12; cf. Matt 5:16; also 1 Thess 4:11-12). A missional inclusion of others is clear from such passages as Galatians 3:27-29; Ephesians 2:11-3:6; James 2:1-5.

The “missional orientation” of the church is also manifest in the New Testament as an others-centeredness, where the local church offers especially (though not exclusively) the proclamation of the gospel and the welcoming of diverse peoples into the community created by the gospel (see Gal 2:11-21). The conclusion of Andreas Köstenberger and Peter O’Brien’s study on mission in the epistles keeps the tremendous importance of this priority in mind, “the Christian mission is firmly based upon the conviction that Jesus Christ is the unique Saviour of all those who receive the gospel. The nature of believers’ witness may differ, . . . but the belief undergirding such witness is

that, unless people hear the gospel and believe in Christ, they will spend eternity separated from God and Christ.”<sup>170</sup>

**Summary.** The priorities that initially marked the church in Acts 1-2 continue to define the church throughout the New Testament. While the rest of Acts and the epistles add layers of meaning to each, these priorities nevertheless remain helpful categories by which to understand values that the early church held and embodied. The continuity and dominance of these priorities in the life of the New Testament church deserve attention as Jesus’s followers consider how to make disciples still today.<sup>171</sup>

### **Six Priorities for Discipleship in the Church Today: Theological Validity**

In addition to this clear New Testament case for the six priorities of the church, theological reasons further cement the validity of these emphases for the ongoing life of the church. Brief attention will be given to two such theological connections: (1) the six priorities and the Trinity, and (2) the six priorities and the gospel. The value of considering these two areas of theology flows from the derivative nature of the church: the church is not simply a social organization, but derives its existence and purpose from the triune God and the gospel.<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>170</sup> Köstenberger and O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 249.

<sup>171</sup> These patterns or continuities across the New Testament make a very strong case that these priorities are not simply descriptive of the early church, but are indeed prescriptive for the health of the church as God intends. See J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 273-79; also Thompson, *Acts*, 25-27.

<sup>172</sup> Few articulate this derivative nature of the church as well as John Webster: The Christian faith’s “ecclesial character derives solely from and is wholly dependent on the gospel’s manifestation of God’s sovereign purpose for his creatures. The church is because God is and acts *thus*. It is, consequently, an especial concern for evangelical theology to demonstrate not only that the church is a necessary implicate of the gospel but also that the gospel and the church exist in a strict and irreversible order, one in which the gospel precedes and the church follows” (John Webster, “The Church and the Perfection of God,” in *The Community of the Word: Toward an Ecclesial Theology*, eds. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005], 76; italics original).

**The six priorities and the Trinity.** The alignment of the six priorities with the Trinity is most simply seen in the emphases on the Holy Spirit, on God-centeredness, and on the ordinances (the ordinances being “christocentric and gospel-freighted,”<sup>173</sup> fixing the church’s attention firmly and repeatedly on the Lord Jesus Christ). These priorities drive the church back to the triune God again and again. The remaining three priorities—while perhaps not as overt as those already mentioned—nevertheless show strong alignment with God’s trinitarian nature and work.

The priority of apostolic teaching reverberates with trinitarian chords, in that the content of apostolic teaching as mentioned previously is “God revealing Himself in Christ.”<sup>174</sup> The Spirit is the one who inspires this teaching (John 14:26; 16:13-15; cf. 2 Pet 1:20-21) and awakens hearts to receive it (1 Cor 2:6-16, esp. v. 12).<sup>175</sup> The priority of community is a reflection of the interpersonal relations within the triune Godhead. Drawing on insights from the Anabaptist theologian Robert Muthiah, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen then expands on certain “connecting points between the triune God as community and the church as community on earth.”<sup>176</sup> The “connecting points” between the triune community and the church community are as follows: (1) relationality, (2) presence-for-the-other, (3) equality, (4) nondomination, (5) unity, and (6) difference.<sup>177</sup> These community characteristics displayed in the Trinity then set the trajectory for the community that the church is to model and pursue.

Lastly, the priority of mission is an extension of the triune God’s mission. The Father sent the Son, who willingly came (see John 3:16; 10:17-18). The Father and Son

---

<sup>173</sup> Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 758.

<sup>174</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 249.

<sup>175</sup> See esp. Cole, *He Who Gives Life*, 259. Cole has much more to say on this point as his argument proceeds; see 259-77.

<sup>176</sup> Kärkkäinen, *Hope and Community*, 286.

<sup>177</sup> Kärkkäinen, *Hope and Community*, 286-91.

sent the Spirit (cf. John 15:26), who continues to empower and send on mission (e.g., Acts 1:8; 13:1-3).<sup>178</sup> Michael F. Bird captures this missional thrust of the Trinity well: “The quintessential example of mission derives from the Trinity. . . . The sending of the church is a continuation of the sending of the Son and the giving of the Spirit, where God’s salvific purposes are realized. . . . Ultimately the church can only comprehend its missionary purpose within a Trinitarian framework of sending and being sent.”<sup>179</sup> One cannot help but see the ways the trinitarian nature and work of God find expression in the six priorities under consideration.

**The six priorities and the gospel.** John Webster says that “[t]he church is the form of common human life and action *which is generated by the gospel* to bear witness to the perfect word and work of the triune God.”<sup>180</sup> The relationship between the six priorities and the triune God has been examined above; what now of the relationship between the six priorities and the gospel? Below each priority will be briefly considered in the form of a question, reflecting especially on the relationship of that priority to the gospel. Much of what follows will be drawing from insights already gleaned, now specifically applied to the relationship between the six priorities and the gospel.

First, how does the gospel relate to the priority of the Spirit? The Spirit energizes response to the gospel, making the proclamation of Jesus come alive in believers’ hearts. The Spirit provides new life in regeneration (see John 3:1-8).<sup>181</sup> The

---

<sup>178</sup> See esp. Keener, “Spirit and Mission,” 25-45.

<sup>179</sup> Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 123.

<sup>180</sup> John Webster, “The Visible Attests the Invisible,” in *The Community of the Word: Toward an Ecclesial Theology*, eds. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 96; italics added.

<sup>181</sup> While it is “especially the Holy Spirit who produces regeneration” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 850), this affirmation is not to deny that the Father and the Son play a role in this as well. See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 850-51. Graham Cole also draws attention to the central role of the Spirit in energizing the gospel: “the Holy Spirit plays the pivotal role in making God knowable and known” (Cole, *He Who Gives Life*, 259).

Spirit is the one who so works in believers' hearts that they respond to the gospel with appreciation, rather than indifference or rejection (cf. 1 Cor 2:6-16).<sup>182</sup>

Second, how does the gospel relate to the priority of apostolic teaching? The content of the apostolic teaching centers around and proclaims the gospel, that is, "Jesus's life, ministry, death, and resurrection, and . . . his significance in God's plan."<sup>183</sup> The connection between the gospel and the apostolic message is made explicit in 1 Cor 15:1-8, where Paul reminds the Corinthians of the "gospel I preached to you" (v. 1) that is "of first importance" (v. 3).

Third, how does the gospel relate to the priority of community? The gospel creates a community that in turn embodies the gospel that energized it. Ray Ortlund says, "The doctrine of grace creates a culture of grace where good things happen to bad people."<sup>184</sup> Ortlund then encapsulates what this reality looks like in practice: "A gracious church culture proves that Jesus is the Holy One who forgives sinners, the King who befriends his enemies, the Genius who counsels failures."<sup>185</sup> A church that embodies the gospel is a community that extends and embodies what it has undeservedly received: grace.

Fourth, how does the gospel relate to the priority of the ordinances? The ordinances provide a tangible and vivid picture of the gospel. Baptism depicts the "decisive transition" made by placing one's faith in Christ's finished work (Rom 6:1-4).<sup>186</sup> The Lord's Supper portrays Christ's body and blood given for His church (1 Cor 11:23-

---

<sup>182</sup> Cole's words bear repeating: "The Spirit does not infuse new brain power into an individual's life in regenerating him or her. In fact, unbelief can rehearse the propositional content of the gospel heard or the Scripture read. . . . But without the Spirit there is no affection for the message. There are no faith, hope, and love in response" (Cole, *He Who Gives Life*, 264).

<sup>183</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 178.

<sup>184</sup> Ray Ortlund, *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ*, 9Marks (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 39.

<sup>185</sup> Ortlund, *Gospel*, 39.

<sup>186</sup> See George, foreword to *Believer's Baptism*, xv.

25), offering eschatological anticipation (1 Cor 11:26) and otherworldly unity (1 Cor 11:17-22, 27-34).

Fifth, how does the gospel relate to the priority of God-centeredness? The gospel fuels prayer and praise that are characteristic of God-centeredness. In terms of prayer, the good news that is the gospel invites believers to come to God as Father (Matt 6:9; Gal 4:4-6), approaching him with confidence because of what Jesus has accomplished (Heb 4:14-16). In terms of praise, the gracious work of Christ prompts worship and adoration (e.g., Eph 3:14-21; Col 1:13-20; Heb 13:20-21; 1 Pet 1:3-4).

Sixth, how does the gospel relate to the priority of mission? The gospel motivates mission that extends the gospel to others. Timothy Keller notes how the gospel motivates mission:

[T]he gospel produces a constellation of traits in us. We are compelled to share the gospel out of generosity and love, not guilt. We are freed from the fear of being ridiculed or hurt by others, since we have already received the favor of God by grace. Our dealings with others reflect humility because we know we are saved only by grace alone, not because of our superior insight or character. We are hopeful about everyone, even the “hard cases,” because we were saved only because of grace, not because we were people likely to become Christians. We are courteous and careful with people. We don’t have to push or coerce them, for it is only God’s grace that opens hearts, not our eloquence or persistence or even their openness (Exod 4:10-12). Together, these traits create not only an excellent neighbor in a multicultural society but also a winsome evangelist.<sup>187</sup>

A life transformed by the gospel thus (super)naturally overflows in mission as followers of Jesus extend the gospel to others, proclaiming the good news of Jesus to those who do not yet know him (e.g., Matt 28:19-20; Acts 4:12; Col 4:3-6; 1 Pet 3:15).

**Summary.** Following Webster, the church is derivative of both the triune God and the gospel;<sup>188</sup> any priorities of the church must therefore be rooted in and align with these two antecedent categories of theology. Brief theological reflection confirms that this

---

<sup>187</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 49-50.

<sup>188</sup> Webster, “Church and the Perfection of God,” 76.

rootedness is indeed the case—the priorities of the church are rooted in and flow from both (1) the triune nature and work of God, and (2) the gospel. This theological validation further cements the value of these priorities as a guiding framework for discipleship in the life of the local church. Having demonstrated the validity of six primary discipleship priorities in Acts 1-2, in the remainder of Acts and the epistles, and in fountainhead categories of theology, it is now abundantly clear that these six priorities have continuing value for how the local church helps make and mature disciples today.

### **Conclusion**

Thankfully, the local church is not left to guesswork regarding the details of Jesus's Great Commission. Jesus's own teaching in his discipleship-heavy discourses provide clarity on what it means to be a disciple. These discourses provide a picture of discipleship that includes the following key components: a disciple is someone who is committed to Jesus, who lives in communion with God and others, whose character is being transformed by the gospel, and who lives with a compelling commission—both in terms of conduct and mission. The presence of these same components in the people of God across the biblical storyline only reinforces the 4C portrait of discipleship evident in Matthew's discourses.

In addition to providing clarity to the picture of discipleship, the New Testament also articulates how the church advances this Great Commission she's been given. Acts 1-2 outlines six priorities that provide shape to the practical life of the early church: (1) the Holy Spirit, (2) apostolic teaching, (3) community, (4) the ordinances, (5) God-centeredness, and (6) mission. A survey of the New Testament demonstrates that the first century church continued—well beyond Acts 1-2—to value and embody these same six priorities. Furthermore, these priorities are rooted in both the triune God and the gospel—thus cementing the importance of these priorities for the practical shape of the local church as she obeys Jesus's command to make disciples.



This study of the Scriptures (focusing on Matthean discourses and Acts 1-2) provides a vivid clarity regarding what discipleship looks like and must prioritize. Attention will now turn to considering how local churches in the twenty-first century can apply these insights.

CHAPTER 3  
CONSTRUCTING A DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY:  
MOVING FROM CLEAR PICTURE TO  
CONCRETE PRACTICE

Jesus’s Great Commission for his followers to “make disciples” is now much more clear. The Lord’s own discipleship-centric teaching has painted a vivid picture of what following him as a disciple must include. And the first two chapters of Acts have demonstrated what Jesus’s earliest followers prioritized as they advanced this Commission, while Jesus’s words were still ringing in their ears. If the primary question driving the previous chapter was “what?” (i.e., what is a robust picture of biblical discipleship?), the primary question driving the current chapter is “how?” (i.e., how can the local church of the twenty-first century make progress toward the biblical picture of discipleship?). How can the local church take the *clear* teaching on discipleship and make it *concrete*?

This chapter will outline a concrete pathway, or framework, by which the local church can advance the picture of discipleship promoted in the New Testament, in a way that is aligned with the priorities advocated in the New Testament. This pathway will be constructed by way of answering three subsidiary questions that deserve attention. First, “How do the six biblical priorities of discipleship that have been discovered in Acts 1-2 actually advance the picture of discipleship that emerges from Jesus’s teaching?” The connections between the priorities and the picture must be made explicit. The goal here will be to establish that the priorities are not ends-in-themselves; they must be tethered to the formative outcomes they can facilitate. Neither can the picture of discipleship be dissociated from the priorities; rather, the priorities contribute to the picture in essential ways. These connections will make it increasingly evident that a robust view of

discipleship must be closely linked to a healthy and fully-orbed ecclesiology. Similarly, a healthy ecclesiology cannot be abstract or only academic; a healthy ecclesiology will lead to a noticeable difference—evident growth in discipleship—in the lives of believers.

A second subsidiary question is this: “What programs of the local church can best facilitate these priorities?”<sup>1</sup> If the New Testament priorities are essential ingredients for the formation of disciples, what programs faithfully embody these priorities today? While a strict rigidity in implementation must be avoided, the following programs embody these priorities: (1) gathered worship, (2) groups and classes, and (3) serving and mission opportunities. The third subsidiary question that deserves attention is “How can a local church structure its ministry programs allowing for access and movement?” “Access” points to the need for multiple entry points available to people at different stages of spiritual life and growth. “Movement” identifies the importance of progress instead of plateauing, as the church helps people grow into ever-increasing conformity to Christ.

### **Connecting the Priorities and Picture of Discipleship**

“How do the biblical priorities of discipleship actually advance the picture of discipleship?” The value of asking this question cannot be overlooked. On the one hand, when the priorities of discipleship are uncoupled from the picture of discipleship, the priorities will quickly become ends-in-themselves—the *what* (i.e., the priority itself) will be separated from the *why* and the *where* (i.e., why the priority matters, and where it should lead in terms of formation). Churches will be full of busy people, but the activity is sapped of meaning and direction. Dallas Willard’s comments on programs that are disconnected from a larger goal (namely, spiritual formation) are easily transferable to

---

<sup>1</sup> Recall the definition for ministry programming from chapter 1: “Ministry programming will refer to specific, organized activities endorsed by local church leadership and often warranting some level of resources and scheduled time.”

the danger of the biblical priorities becoming ends-in-themselves: “Spiritual formation doesn’t happen in a program at the church. It happens by living your life. We really need to stay away from creating programs as our goal. Programs have their place, but *they must be subordinated to the spiritual life.*”<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, when the picture of discipleship is divorced from the priorities, a danger arises that pursuing the picture will become largely individualistic, subjective, and uncoupled from biblical emphases. In a worst-case scenario, the picture of discipleship itself becomes warped and caricatured, since it is separated from priorities such as apostolic teaching, community, and God-centeredness. The biblical priorities help protect the picture from becoming vague, imbalanced, or out-of-focus.

To address these dangers, explicit connection must be made between the biblical picture of discipleship and the biblical priorities of discipleship. A robust view of formation must be closely linked to a healthy and fully-orbed ecclesiology. This connection then becomes a foundation for everything that follows in a discipleship pathway—ensuring that the practical embodiment of the priorities stays focused on advancing a vibrant picture of biblical discipleship.

Table 2 below depicts the connection between the priorities and the picture of discipleship, spelling out how each of the priorities can contribute to a biblical picture of discipleship. Two explanatory notes should be mentioned. First, the reader will observe that the 4C Portrait of Discipleship has been expanded to include six categories: (1) commitment, (2) communion with God, (3) community with others, (4) character, (5)

---

<sup>2</sup> Dallas Willard and Dieter Zander, “The Apprentices,” interview by Christianity Today, *Christianity Today*, July 2005, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2005/summer/2.20.html>; italics added. While Willard appropriately sounds the alarm on programs becoming an end-in-themselves, it should not be missed that in the quote he also says “Programs have their place.” Much more will be said about church programming later in this chapter. For additional material on the importance of connecting programs to formation—and not becoming ends-in-themselves, see also Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Jesus* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 36; Will Mancini, *Future Church: Seven Laws of Real Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2020), 44; Brandon Guindon, *Disciple Making Culture: Cultivate Thriving Disciple-Makers Throughout Your Church* (Brentwood, TN: HIM, 2020), 85.

conduct, and (6) commission. This expansion remains entirely consistent with the study in chapter 2,<sup>3</sup> and the expansion serves the practical nature of this chapter by allowing for more careful consideration of how each of the priorities relates to each part of a biblical picture of discipleship. Second, the connections between these priorities and the biblical picture are merely intended as samples—additional connections could be further multiplied. Select Scripture passages are included in a representative fashion and could be added to as well.

Table 2. Connecting the priorities and picture of discipleship

	Commitment	Communion with God	Community with others	Character formation	Conduct	Commission
Priority of Holy Spirit	Regenerates hearts so people can respond to gospel with commitment. E.g., John 3:3-8	Enables true intimacy with God as adopted children. E.g., Gal 4:6-7	Unity and spiritual gifts as body of Christ. E.g., 1 Cor 12:4-7; Eph 4:3	Empowers character formation. E.g., Gal 5:22-23	Provides conviction, perseverance, and hope.	Sends on mission and empowers for mission. E.g., Acts 13:1-3
Priority of apostolic teaching	Defines commitment: need for it, rooted in grace, demonstrated in worship.	Reveals who God is and the whole-Bible priority of communion with God.	Defines biblical community: its benefits, intentions, and dangers to it. E.g., Heb 10:24-25	Identifies how sin has warped character and establishes what character formation looks like.	Establishes pattern of conduct befitting life under God’s good rule. E.g., 2 Tim 3:10-17	Reveals need for mission (sin and lostness) and parameters of mission. E.g., Rom 10:14-15

---

<sup>3</sup> See esp. note 7 in chapter 2 above. Specifically, two of the categories in the 4C portrait have now been expanded here. “Communion” in the 4C model becomes “communion with God” and “community with others.” Additionally, “commission” is expanded into both “conduct” and “commission.” For a simple graphic depicting this expanded picture of discipleship, see appendix 2.

Table 2 continued

	Commitment	Communion with God	Community with others	Character formation	Conduct	Commission
Priority of community	Without negating individual commitment, community provides support in sustaining commitment. E.g., Heb 3:13; 10:24-25	Models the truths that communion with God is not just an individual experience but invites us into the family of God.	The priority of community must be expressed in the actual (and messy) life of real community.	Because other people often test character, community gives chance to express character in relationship. E.g., Rom 12:9-21	Opportunity to actually apply the “one anothers” and benefit from modeling and accountability.	Lends plausibility to the Christian faith; it is a compelling witness to a needy world. E.g., Acts 2:42-47
Priority of ordinances	Express initial (baptism) and ongoing (Lord’s Supper) commitment to God. E.g., Rom 6:1-4; 1 Cor 11:23-26	Ordinances point back to the gospel, through which communion with God made possible.	Baptized into the local church. Lord’s Supper opportunity to display reconciliation and unity. E.g., 1 Cor 11:33-34	Invite faith, gratitude, hope, and humility as they point to Jesus’s work on the cross and future return. E.g., 1 Cor 11:17-34	Point back to the gospel, reminding the believer that good works are not cause of salvation but an overflow of it.	Picture of the gospel; displays the experiential nature of the faith to unbelievers.
Priority of God-centeredness	Prayers and praise not meaningless or self-centered. Directed to God.	Discovery of a God who is both transcendent and personal, inviting faith, trust, and intimacy.	God-centeredness not individualistic but must include a corporate aspect. E.g., Acts 4:23-31	Facilitates humility, dependence, and wonder/awe.	Motivates the believer to live a life that honors the one on whom they are centering their life.	Motivates the believer to share God’s heart for the world and care for things he cares about. E.g., John 3:16; 20:21
Priority of mission	Steps of sacrificial mission motivated by commitment to God. See 2 Cor 5:14-21.	Discovery of God’s presence and nearness as steps of sacrificial obedience are taken. See 2 Tim 4:16-17.	Biblical mission assumes team-mentality. See Luke 10:1; Phil 2:19-30.	Biblical mission requires courage, love, wisdom, grace, and more. See Col 4:3-4.	As Jesus’s ambassadors, believers represent their Lord and live honorably among unbelievers. E.g., Matt 5:14-16; 1 Pet 2:11-12	The priority of mission must be expressed in actual mission and service.

One significant conclusion from this table bears repeating: healthy ecclesiology (applying the biblical priorities of discipleship) should lead to real transformation (growth in the biblical picture of discipleship). And real transformation is facilitated by healthy and fully-orbed church life. The church and discipleship go hand-in-hand.

This conclusion requires that individual believers place renewed value on the organized life of the church as a necessary part of their spiritual formation. Rather than seeing the church as “unnecessary or counterproductive for their spiritual quest,”<sup>4</sup> Brett McCracken encourages adults (especially young adults) in another direction: “the reality is [the church] can be an indispensable source of stability and growth; a treasure trove of communal and Spirit-infused wisdom that we’d be foolish to neglect.”<sup>5</sup>

In their helpful book, *Rediscover Church: Why the Body of Christ is Essential*, authors Colin Hansen and Jonathan Leeman spotlight the formative power that the local church can have on followers of Christ:

The church isn’t just another institution we use to build a resume and enhance our self-identity. The church forms us into men and women of God. We grow stronger together. At the same time, we learn more about who God intended us to be as individuals—our unique abilities and passions. It enhances them by connecting us to the Creator who made us as we are and to others who call forth love and strength we never knew we had.<sup>6</sup>

Hansen and Leeman go on to vividly illustrate how this formative power happens:

Think of the church as something like waves rolling over rocks. The waves are the church. You and other church members are the rocks. Day after day, year after year, the waves flow without ceasing. They rush over each rock and jostle the rocks against one another. From month to month, you probably won’t notice much difference. But over years, even decades, you’ll observe the change. As the waves crash and the rocks tumble over one another, their rough edges become smooth.

---

<sup>4</sup> Brett McCracken, *The Wisdom Pyramid: Feeding Your Soul in a Post-Truth World* (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 2021), 87.

<sup>5</sup> McCracken, *Wisdom Pyramid*, 88.

<sup>6</sup> Colin Hansen and Jonathan Leeman, *Rediscover Church: Why the Body of Christ Is Essential* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 144.

They take on a polished glint in the sun. No two rocks emerge from the process with the same size or shape. But in its own way, each becomes beautiful.<sup>7</sup>

The church and discipleship go hand-in-hand. This conclusion also requires that churches and church leaders take seriously the truth that the local church plays a necessary and important role in facilitating discipleship. This realization provides fresh meaning and focus to what the church does, and how the church organizes its life as a church family. Once again, Willard provides an important perspective: “*local congregations, the places where Christians gather on a regular basis, must resume the practice of making the spiritual formation of their members into Christlikeness their primary goal, the aim which every one of its activities serves.*”<sup>8</sup> James C. Wilhoit puts an even finer point on the seriousness with which church leaders should approach discipleship for their congregations: “Spiritual formation is *the* task of the church. Period. It represents neither an interesting, optional pursuit by the church nor an insignificant category in the job description of the body of Christ. Spiritual formation is at the heart of its whole purpose for existence. The church was formed to form.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Identifying Local Church Programs That Embody the Biblical Priorities**

Knowing, then, how important the biblical priorities are for facilitating robust transformation and discipleship—and the seriousness with which church leaders should approach discipleship for their congregations—what programs express these priorities and establish “environments that put people in a place for transformation”?<sup>10</sup> To answer

---

<sup>7</sup> Hansen and Leeman, *Rediscover Church*, 145.

<sup>8</sup> Dallas Willard, foreword to *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community*, by James C. Wilhoit (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 10; italics in original.

<sup>9</sup> James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 15; italics in original.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Geiger, “Three Thoughts on Developing a Theology of Programming,” EricGeiger.com (blog), March 7, 2016, <https://ericgeiger.com/2016/03/three-thoughts-on-developing-a-theology-of-programming/>.



this question, help comes from the results of and reflection upon a recent, large-scale study by Lifeway Research—their “Transformational Discipleship Assessment” (TDA).<sup>11</sup>

In this quantitative study of thousands of church attenders, the following eight “signposts” mark “the lives of believers who are progressing in spiritual maturity”: (1) Engaging the Bible; (2) Obeying God and Denying Self; (3) Serving God and Others; (4) Sharing Christ; (5) Exercising Faith; (6) Seeking God; (7) Building Relationships; and (8) Living Unashamed.<sup>12</sup> Daniel Im identifies these eight signposts as “output goals,” with output goals defined as “the results you want, or the future you envision.”<sup>13</sup> Following Im’s approach, these signposts are pictures of what disciples want to increasingly develop—areas in which to keep progressing and to keep pursuing. (As an aside, the reader should not miss the clear overlap between these TDA “signposts” and the biblical picture of discipleship from Jesus’s teaching already discovered.)

But how can the believer grow in these areas? To address this question, Im highlights “input goals,” “the things that you can do today that will produce the results you want tomorrow (output goals). In other words, input goals are the levers you can pull to influence output goals.”<sup>14</sup> Im then proceeds to identify a small number of input goals that “pull the lever” to influence output goals; these disproportionately-influential input goals include (1) reading the Bible; (2) worship services; (3) small classes or groups; and (4) serving God and others.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> For an overview of the Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA), see “Discipleship Pathway Assessment,” Lifeway Christian Resources, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://discipleshippathwayassessment.com/about/>. For a helpful summary of the TDA results and research, see Daniel Im, *No Silver Bullets: Five Small Shifts That Will Transform Your Ministry* (Nashville: B&H, 2017), 48-49.

<sup>12</sup> “8 Biblical Signposts,” Lifeway Christian Resources, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://discipleshippathwayassessment.com/signposts/>.

<sup>13</sup> Im, *No Silver Bullets*, 50.

<sup>14</sup> Im, *No Silver Bullets*, 50-51.

<sup>15</sup> Im, *No Silver Bullets*, 64-68, 219-24. While Im initially (pp. 64-68) identifies just the first three of these as especially influential input goals, later in the book when he is helping church leaders

Further reflection on these four input goals confirms that they embody the six priorities of biblical discipleship. While there is not a direct one-to-one correspondence between each input goal and each priority, considering the input goals through the lens of the six priorities demonstrates unmistakable cohesion between the two. One suggested way to understand the relationship between the four input goals and the six priorities is described below.

### **Input Goals and the Six Priorities of Discipleship**

**Worship services.** Gathered worship provides clear opportunity for the teaching of God's Word (the priority of apostolic teaching). Dependence on the Spirit and an evident Godward orientation should characterize corporate prayer and singing (the priorities of the Holy Spirit and God-centeredness). The gathered church is a primary context in which both baptisms and the Lord's Supper should be celebrated (the priority of the ordinances). While church size dynamics will influence the precise way community takes shape in a worship service, the gathered church (even large churches) should nevertheless still find ways to communicate welcome, show hospitality, and practice the one-anothers in appropriate ways (the priority of community). Even mission finds expression, as the church gathers with an awareness that unbelievers are in their midst (see 1 Cor 14:23-25; the priority of mission).

**Small classes or groups.** Classes provide equipping environments where people can receive teaching in key areas such as Christian theology, the storyline of the Bible, the Lord's Supper and baptism, and evangelism (touching on the priorities of apostolic teaching, the Holy Spirit, God-centeredness, the ordinances, and mission).

---

construct a discipleship pathway and the ongoing programs that significantly facilitate this path, he mentions all four of these input goals (pp. 219-24). This latter, culminating presentation is what is followed here.

Small groups offer a premiere opportunity for community (the priority of community), and also should encourage prayer and dependence on God (the priorities of the Holy Spirit and God-centeredness). Additionally, some small groups facilitate mission—either through non-believers who are part of the group, or as the group interacts in public spaces or serves together (the priority of mission).

**Serving God and others.** Steps of service and mission often push people out of their comfort zones and away from a preoccupation with self, as they depend on God and place his desires over their own (the priorities of the Holy Spirit and God-centeredness). Serving with others is also a way to reinforce and add value to relationships (the priority of community) and serving contributes to the mission in practical ways (the priority of mission).

**Reading the Bible.** Most directly, reading the Bible introduces people to and further roots them in God’s Word (the priority of apostolic teaching). Appropriate reading also includes a dependence on the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit (the priority of the Holy Spirit) and directs the reader to God’s character, his ways, and his plan (the priority of God-centeredness). Properly understood, reading the Bible will increasingly orient people to the gospel (to which the ordinances tangibly point), to God’s intentions for relationships (the priority of community) and to God’s heart for the world (the priority of mission).

In summary, table 3 below depicts this suggested proposal—showing how the four input goals cumulatively “check off the boxes” of each biblical priority for discipleship.

Table 3. Input goals and the six priorities of discipleship

	Priority of the Holy Spirit	Priority of Apostolic Teaching	Priority of Community	Priority of the Ordinances	Priority of God-centeredness	Priority of Mission
Worship service	X	X	X	X	X	X
Classes and groups	X	X	X		X	X
Serving God and others	X		X		X	X
Reading the Bible	X	X	X	X	X	X

Approached responsibly and intentionally, the four input goals thus provide crucial and strategic insight that should be factored into the core programs of the local church.

### **From Input Goals to Programs**

The path from input goals to core programs for the local church is now straightforward. Based on the preceding material, the following three ministry environments are presented as core programs of the local church: (1) gathered worship, (2) small groups (including what will be introduced as “discipleship huddles”) and classes, and (3) opportunities for missional engagement (or serving opportunities). These core programs form the “paver stones” for a healthy discipleship pathway—essential elements that provide structure, footing, and stability.

Before expanding on each of these three core programs, the reader may be asking where the input goal of “reading the Bible” is represented. The answer is short, but deserves specific mention: Reading and engaging the Bible should deeply mark each of the programs. Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson shed more light on this emphasis,

in a chapter titled “Embed the Bible in Everything”: “This best practice [i.e., embedding Scripture in everything a church does] qualifies as a paradigm shift—from viewing the Bible primarily as a resource tool *to positioning it as the DNA of the church*, the thing that defines the identity of its very heart and soul.”<sup>16</sup> William R. Yount reinforces the importance of Scripture in local church programming: “Christian Education is the intentional programming of regular encounters of learners of all ages within a community of believers with God *and His Word* for the purpose of spiritual, rational, emotional, and relational growth in the Lord.”<sup>17</sup>

With this in mind, then, each of the three core programs of the local church is briefly described in what follows.

**Gathered worship.** As has been demonstrated (e.g., see table 3 above and the description preceding the table), the gathered worship of a local church should be a premiere environment where the church embodies the priorities of discipleship. Colin Marshall and Tony Payne say that Sunday (i.e., gathered worship) should be a “flagship”:

it sets the tone and direction for everything we do as a church community. Sunday is the rallying point, the flagship, the heartland—or whatever other metaphor you’d like to use to describe that regular event which constitutes and defines and glues together a community of people. Sunday is where we are most ‘us’ as a church—where our character and purposes and ‘culture’ as a congregation are most clearly expressed. It’s where we communicate most often and most clearly what we’re on about. . . . The ‘whole way we do things’ on Sunday has to teach and express and reinforce and embody the convictions we have about making disciples.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 219-20; italics added.

<sup>17</sup> William R. Yount, “The Role of Scripture in Christian Education, Session 1: Scripture as the Structural Steel of Christian Education,” special supplement, *CEJ* series 3, vol. 9 (Spring 2012): 33; italics added. See also Mark A. Maddix and Richard P. Thompson, “Scripture as Formation: The Role of Scripture in Christian Formation,” special supplement, *CEJ* series 3, vol. 9 (Spring 2012): 79-93.

<sup>18</sup> Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Vine Project: Shaping Your Ministry Culture around Disciple-Making* (Sydney, Australia: Matthias Media, 2016), 206.

In other words, if churches value discipleship and want to create a vision for growing as disciples, the gathered worship service must intentionally champion this value and vision. Church leaders cannot overlook the formative power of gathered worship services.

**Small groups and classes.** Various kinds of small groups and classes present the opportunity for people to develop a closer-knit network of relationships with others, and to digest and interact with content in ways that go beyond what is often conducive in a gathered worship setting. This category of small groups and classes can be further divided into three subsections of its own—with each subsection being important enough that it warrants individual explanation. The subsections of “small groups and classes” presented here include small groups, discipleship huddles, and classes.

Small groups are usually groups of approximately ten to fourteen people, with the flexibility to meet at times other than gathered worship and in a more informal setting for an extended season of time.<sup>19</sup> A primary contribution of small groups to discipleship is in the area of relationships. Bobby Harrington and Alex Absalom draw attention to this contribution in describing what they call “the Personal Context” (which is basically synonymous with how the term “small groups” is being used here): “this is the real beauty of small groups—we have time to focus on building these [close] relationships. The Personal Context is characterized by a relational focus where we share our lives, and God uses that focus to enable us to make disciples. The context also gives us an

---

<sup>19</sup> Much has been written on small groups in recent years. The following resources can serve as an introduction to the value, shape, and structure of community (including small group ministry) in local church life: Bobby Harrington and Alex Absalom, *Discipleship That Fits: The Five Kinds of Relationships God Uses to Help Us Grow* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016); Jeremy Linneman, *Life-Giving Groups: How to Grow Healthy, Multiplying Community Groups* (Louisville: Sojourn Network Press, 2018); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (New York: HarperOne, 1954); Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger, *Transformational Groups: Creating a New Scorecard for Groups* (Nashville: B&H Books, 2014). Mid-sized groups can also fit into this discussion, and are another way to cultivate breadth of relationships in groups that are commonly composed of twenty to forty participants. These mid-sized groups are often topical or based on life stage, though an emphasis on community and relationships is still a primary factor in the make-up of the group.

opportunity to know people who may be quite different from us in background, personality, gifts, and skills.”<sup>20</sup>

Another subsection of small groups includes discipleship huddles, and these huddles are often what first comes to mind when people think of discipleship. These discipleship huddles are very small groups (either one-on-one or perhaps three to five) that focus on areas such as Bible reading, memorization, the practice of prayer, and deep personal knowledge of a few others.<sup>21</sup> However important these huddles may be, they should not be conceived of as the only or even the purest expression of biblical discipleship. Rather, they are one valuable ingredient in a larger discipleship pathway facilitating conformity to Christ. At the same time, the importance of these huddles should not be overlooked, as their unique strengths cultivate depth-of-relationship, ownership, engagement, and growth in ways that may not come as naturally (or at least not as quickly) in the other components of the pathway. In what follows, one way to approach these discipleship huddles is proposed.

While there is no universal agreement on a precise number of people that is ideal for a discipleship huddle,<sup>22</sup> Gallaty and Swain make a convincing case for composing these smaller groups of three to five people, suggesting eight reasons for this number as opposed to one-on-one relationships.<sup>23</sup> Three of the more noteworthy reasons

---

<sup>20</sup> Harrington and Absalom, *Discipleship That Fits*, 131.

<sup>21</sup> For more on the value, shape, and structure of these smaller “discipleship huddles” (though various names are used for them) in local church life, see Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2003); Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches that Make Disciples* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010); Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 2nd ed. (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2014); Randy Pope, *Insourcing: Bringing Discipleship Back to the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013); Guindon, *Disciple Making Culture*; Harrington and Absalom, *Discipleship That Fits*.

<sup>22</sup> William Edward Ashpern Mofield briefly describes a few models. See William Edward Ashpern Mofield, “Developing a Discipleship Program at White House First Baptist Church in White House, Tennessee.” (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 47-48.

<sup>23</sup> Robby Gallaty and Chris Swain, *Replicate: How to Create a Culture of Disciple-Making Right Where You Are* (Chicago: Moody, 2020), 166-69.

are listed here: (1) “You avoid the ping-pong match”—that is, the group becomes more interactive and dialogical, rather than a simple back-and-forth that can put more pressure on both leader and learner;<sup>24</sup> (2) “You steer away from counseling sessions” and the group avoids becoming a “one-on-one problem solving session;<sup>25</sup> and (3) “Your productivity multiplies.”<sup>26</sup> Rather than simply discipling one other person, the influence grows exponentially as a few others benefit from (and can someday begin) a discipleship huddle.

What distinguishes these huddles of three to five from a small group of ten to fourteen others? Again, Gallaty and Swain offer a clear reason why these smaller huddles have a place: “Small groups provide the opportunity for real accountability, but you’d be hard-pressed to find a man who is willing to ask for help with his porn addiction in a group with his wife and the wives of others.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, small groups cultivate *breadth* of relationship; discipleship huddles cultivate *depth* of relationship. Discipleship huddles provide a highly relational, same-gender environment well suited for transparency, encouragement, and accountability. (One feasible way to consider approaching these huddles is to form organic, same-gender huddles that are composed of a subset of people already in a small group or on a serving team together.)

In terms of how these huddles can structure their time, core components of the huddle meeting should include a discussion of Bible reading that was done throughout the prior week (ideally coupled with an expectation of journaling), memorization, an option to dig more deeply into topics important for the group (e.g., a biblical view of finances or business, evangelism, categories of Christian theology, spiritual disciplines,

---

<sup>24</sup> Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 166.

<sup>25</sup> Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 167.

<sup>26</sup> Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 168.

<sup>27</sup> Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 147-48.



godly parenting, etc.), personal sharing and accountability, and the actual practice of prayer during the group.<sup>28</sup> A rhythm of periodic (even if infrequent) additional gathering adds extra value and should be considered at least one to two times a year (e.g., social events, serving together, a two-day retreat, or the like.). These additional gatherings can help forge and solidify relationships in a setting much less controlled than a regular meeting.

Whereas small groups and huddles are uniquely able to accentuate relationships, classes afford the opportunity both (1) to dig more deeply into learning and digesting information (e.g., Christian theology, how to study the Bible), and (2) to receive training that revolves around certain skills (e.g., evangelism, spiritual disciplines, parenting, stewardship, and the like). These classes are more time-bound (e.g., 6-10 weeks in length, or an intensive weekend seminar) and are more specifically outcome-based (with identifiable objectives by which success can be more exactly measured).<sup>29</sup> In his important book *Deep Discipleship*, J. T. English champions the value of environments where “the highest stated value is learning.”<sup>30</sup> While these learning environments can

---

<sup>28</sup> Numerous books suggest some variation on many of these same core components. See for example, Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 149-55; Harrington and Absalom, *Discipleship That Fits*, 159-89; Ogden *Transforming Discipleship*, 153-84; Pope, *Insourcing*.

<sup>29</sup> For more on the value, shape, and structure of instructional environments in local church life, see Gary A. Parrett and S. Steve Kang, *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful: A Biblical Vision for Education in the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009); J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010); J. T. English, *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus* (Nashville: B&H, 2020); Jonathan Leeman and Trevin Wax (eds), “Don’t Be Too Cool for Sunday School,” *9Marks Journal* 9, no. 1 (January/February 2012), <https://www.9marks.org/journal/dont-be-too-cool-sunday-school/>; Gregory C. Carlson, “Adult Development and Christian Formation,” in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 209-36.

<sup>30</sup> J. T. English, *Deep Discipleship*, 77. Importantly, English acknowledges the value of environments that are committed to community as well. The church needs *both* spaces: “We need to retrieve spaces that are dedicated to learning and implement them alongside, not in place of, our spaces that are committed to community. . . . It is time for us to admit that we need two tools, not one. . . . A culture of deep discipleship is birthed in a local church that has spaces where learning is the highest stated value and spaces where community is the highest stated value” (English, *Deep Discipleship*, 86). For more on the value of both groups and classes, see also Jen Wilken, “Classes and Home Groups: Complementary not Competitive,” *The Village Church Resources*, April 6, 2018, <https://www.tvresources.net/resource-library/articles/classes-and-home-groups-complementary-not-competitive/>.

take a variety of creative shapes,<sup>31</sup> every primarily learning environment should be both “transformational and active.” By transformational, English means that “even though learning is the highest stated goal, we are not merely aiming at the mind but the whole person. . . . The goal is not simply to create smarter Christians but holy people.”<sup>32</sup> By active learning spaces, English means learning that resists passivity by including at least four elements: (1) individual pre-work before the class session(s); (2) discussion of pre-work in smaller groups; (3) an interactive and dialogical teaching environment; and (4) participants identifying and sharing what they have learned.<sup>33</sup>

When these small groups and classes are intentionally and carefully designed within a larger discipleship pathway, another key “paver” is in place: “small groups or classes are one of the best environments for discipleship to happen and the most reproducible for growth.”<sup>34</sup> Church leaders cannot overlook the formative power of small groups and classes.

### **Opportunities for missional engagement (or serving opportunities).**

“Missional engagement” is here understood broadly, indicating both service within the church and service beyond the walls of the church building. Well-rounded discipleship requires that the church develops “people who see their primary vocation as being sent on God’s mission, rather than their own. I’m talking specifically about helping ordinary people understand that all of their life is about mission.”<sup>35</sup> Robby Gallaty and Chris Swain present this concept in the following way: “Every church has two types of people:

---

<sup>31</sup> In his *Deep Discipleship*, English outlines the shape this took at The Village Church (TX) when he was there. These “learning spaces” included men’s and women’s Bible studies, core classes, a more formalized one-year Training Program, and a one-year residency. See English, *Deep Discipleship*, 88-90.

<sup>32</sup> English, *Deep Discipleship*, 93.

<sup>33</sup> English, *Deep Discipleship*, 93-95.

<sup>34</sup> Im, *No Silver Bullets*, 68.

<sup>35</sup> Im, *No Silver Bullets*, 133.

consumers and coworkers. Our goal as leaders is to move people from the first category to the second.”<sup>36</sup> Gallaty and Swain then go on to contrast the mindset of the consumer versus the mindset of the coworkers, represented in table 4:

Table 4. Gallaty and Swain’s “consumers vs. coworkers”<sup>37</sup>

<b>Consumer</b>	<b>Coworker</b>
spectator	participant
shows up late to the service	arrives early to help
criticizes everything that doesn’t line up with his or her preferences	appreciates what God is doing in the church
comes to sit and get	looks to go and serve
asks: “What’s in it for me?”	asks: “What’s in it for you?”
only takes in for themselves	pours out to others
sees himself as a cistern to store truth	sees himself as a channel to bestow blessing

Elsewhere Gallaty and Swain summarize their point in this way: “The heart of discipleship, as Christ modeled it and instituted it, is that you are not learning only for yourself.”<sup>38</sup>

So what might this missional engagement look like? It can look like anything from regular commitments to serving within the church or in the larger community in which a church is located, to periodically serving in order to meet a particular need (e.g., unscheduled hospital visits, cross-cultural mission trips, or calendar-specific serving opportunities around holidays). It can look like participating in formal programs, or

---

<sup>36</sup> Gallaty Swain, *Replicate*, 31.

<sup>37</sup> Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 31.

<sup>38</sup> Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 19.

informally (yet purposefully) interacting with a neighbor over a shared fence or a fellow student across the hall in the dorm.

Importantly, this missional engagement is not an “elite status” for only a few especially saintly disciples. This missional engagement is for “ordinary people,”<sup>39</sup> a summons that “every effective disciple”<sup>40</sup> must confront in whatever context God has placed them.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, this missional engagement is not a stage into which one graduates, leaving behind other commitments such as gathered worship or participation in groups and classes. Rich Villodas puts his finger on this ongoing dynamic:

We are not called to remain within cloistered walls, giving ourselves to prayer apart from social engagement with the world [and therefore neglecting missional engagement]. Nor are we called to perpetually and indiscriminately be consumed with being active in the world [by exclusively and lopsidedly focusing on missional engagement]. We are called to hold this dynamic tension before God. Why? Very simply, unless we do so, we have nothing to offer the world.<sup>42</sup>

A third paver is now in place for a discipleship pathway. Serving—both within the church and in the larger community or global context—multiplies disciples as more people engage and respond to the gospel, and serving effectively shapes the character of those participating as servants. Church leaders cannot overlook the formative power of providing opportunities for and championing missional engagement.

### **The Pieces Are in Place, But . . .**

The main pavers are now in place for a discipleship pathway, but the pathway is not done yet. How can these pavers—these important ministry programs of a local church—be organized and leveraged in such a way as to facilitate access and movement, so that people at various stages of spiritual maturity can enter into the pathway and

---

<sup>39</sup> Im, *No Silver Bullets*, 133.

<sup>40</sup> Mancini, *Future Church*, 27.

<sup>41</sup> Marshall and Payne, *Vine Project*, 274.

<sup>42</sup> Rich Villodas, *The Deeply Formed Life: Five Transformative Values to Root Us in the Way of Jesus* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2020), 171.

benefit from it, while at the same time being called to keep making progress toward ever-increasing conformity to Christ?

### **Structuring Programs for Access and Movement**

Too many churches can simply institute or offer these programs, and wrongly think that the task of creating a discipleship pathway is complete. As vital as these programs are, churches must organize them so they are accessible to people entering at various stages of spiritual maturity (access), and so that the programs encourage progress (or movement) toward increasing Christlikeness: commitment, communion with God, community with others, character transformation, conduct, and commission. Daniel Im highlights the value of connecting these programs of a church into an organized system: “Just like there are different layers of systems in the human body, so it is with the church. The systems in your church are designed to work together, like they do in the human body, to help your church function as God intends it to.”<sup>43</sup>

Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck make a similar point using the language of “constructs.” While they are focusing on leadership development in this quote, their comments apply equally to the value of an intentional system for discipleship: “Wise leaders implement *constructs* to help unlock the full potential of a church that seeks to be a center for developing leaders [or forming disciples]. By constructs, we mean the systems, processes, and programs developed to help develop leaders [or form disciples]. Constructs provide necessary implementation and execution to the vision and passion of

---

<sup>43</sup> Im, *No Silver Bullets*, 182.

culture and conviction.”<sup>44</sup> In what follows, a simple system<sup>45</sup> for encouraging access and movement within the discipleship pathway is described.

## Access

Access to the pathway is important in providing entry points for those who engage a local church’s programs from any one of many stages of spiritual interest or maturity. Numerous schemas label these different stages in their own ways,<sup>46</sup> the categories that will be used here are skeptic, seeker, consumer, contributor, and owner/multiplier.<sup>47</sup> Skeptics are those who have genuine questions about Christianity, and are willing to engage these questions respectfully. Seekers are those who are actively interested in spiritual matters, but may not have made a personal profession of faith in Jesus. Consumers are people who see Christianity as something that can give them more of what they want and need; the focus is primarily on what they get out of it. Contributors understand they have gifts that can serve the church, and approach the local church with a mindset that is ready to help as needed when they are asked. Owner/multipliers grasp the truth that they are uniquely placed to advance Jesus’s Great Commission in their context; they feel a strong sense of personal ownership in representing Christ as his ambassadors. Owner/multipliers go further than acknowledging they have gifts that *can* serve the church when asked; owners feel a burden that they *should* use their gifts in appropriate

---

<sup>44</sup> Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 15.

<sup>45</sup> As Michael Kelly cautions, “In the church, we seem to have a great capacity to complicate discipleship” (Michael Kelly, *Creating a Discipleship Pathway* [Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2019], 25). Systems can easily grow cumbersome, and so simplicity must be pursued.

<sup>46</sup> Bill Hull identifies the stages as “seeker, starter, struggler, stagnant, or stable” (Hull, *Complete Book of Discipleship*, 256-60). Will Mancini labels the various groups in which people can fall as “stowaway, pirate, passenger, or crew” (cited in Gally and Swain, *Replicate*, 181-83). Collin Marshall and Tony Payne suggest these categories for how to think about people: “engage, evangelize, establish, equip” (Marshall and Payne, *Vine Project*, 183-84).

<sup>47</sup> The author’s staff colleague at Brookside Church, Jason Rasmussen, deserves mention here, for helpfully pushing the author to include “multiplier” as part of the label for this stage (instead of just “owner”) because of the valuable elements a multiplying mindset adds to the model.

ways and proactively look for opportunities to humbly and sacrificially operate as servant-leaders, multiplying their influence and establishing a legacy that outlasts them.

In order to organize a discipleship pathway such that access to people at these various stages is encouraged, church leaders must think through the different core programs and ask of each one, “How can I best serve people at each various stage through this ministry environment?” There is also another important question that should be asked as part of this discussion: “Where along this spectrum are the people in my ministry or sphere of influence?”<sup>48</sup> By asking these questions, church leaders are better able to genuinely serve those in their ministries and create an on-ramp into the discipleship pathway, providing access at the points from which people are actually entering.

A couple of examples may help clarify what this looks like. A first example relates to the gathered worship services. While the gathered worship of the church should not be designed primarily around the interests of the skeptic or the seeker, it is appropriate and wise for the worship leader to explain what is happening in the service for those who may be brand new to church services; similarly, it is appropriate and wise for the teaching pastor to explain things in ways that are intelligible and often winsome to unbelievers.<sup>49</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, “owner/multipliers” can be actively engaged in serving throughout the church building during the gathered services, and they should be both encouraged and equipped from the preaching. Or another example related to missional engagement and serving: Skeptics and seekers can be invited to serve in appropriate ways—perhaps on the church’s production team by helping with the soundboard, or by joining others once a month to serve food at a homeless shelter. Consumers should be graciously challenged to serve in a way that utilizes their gifts.

---

<sup>48</sup> See especially Marshall and Payne, *Vine Project*, 183-86.

<sup>49</sup> See also Marshall and Payne, *Vine Project*, 208-15.

Owner/multipliers can spearhead serving teams and look for proactive ways to provide extra care for the members of those teams.

Admittedly, intentionally thinking about how to allow for accessibility by people at various stages of spiritual maturity is not always “clean” and “neat.” People will not always fit into categories that church leaders have established, and leaders must be sensitive to genuinely avoid any sense of labeling. This exercise must be done in humility and care.<sup>50</sup> The value of this intentional thought, however, is that it shows care for the individuals in local churches and considers how they might enter the discipleship pathway—where they can be introduced to and grow in a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. This sort of intentional thinking also addresses a legitimate concern voiced by Peter Scazzero in his *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship*: “We standardize discipleship and make it scalable. Our approach resembles more of a conveyer belt in a manufacturing plant than the kind of relational discipleship Jesus modeled for us. *We like standardization. Jesus preferred customization.*”<sup>51</sup> By prayerfully and carefully considering how to facilitate access for individuals at various stages of spiritual maturity, church leaders resist an unhealthy standardization and pursue a needed customization for those engaging the discipleship pathway. They show a caring understanding that those engaging the pathway are individuals—each coming from a different place spiritually.

## **Movement**

As important as facilitating access is for those engaging congregational life from a variety of entry points, this consideration is still not the end-point. Rather, a vibrant discipleship pathway must also encourage and structure itself for movement. If someone enters a local church as a skeptic or seeker, the goal is not to accept them at that

---

<sup>50</sup> See Marshall and Payne, *Vine Project*, 183-86.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship: Moving from Shallow Christianity to Deep Transformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2021), 23; italics added. See also Marshall and Payne, *Vine Project*, 97.



point and be satisfied with keeping them there. Instead, the goal is to move them along the pathway such that she grows in spiritual maturity (i.e., embodying and growing in the six Cs of biblical discipleship discussed previously) and becomes a contributor and ultimately an owner/multiplier—a mature disciple herself who is in turn making disciples who make disciples.<sup>52</sup> At least four things are needed for churches to successfully facilitate movement into increasing spiritual maturity with the programs they offer.

First, churches must provide clear direction—there must be a vision for growth in discipleship. Churches do not exist primarily to satisfy felt needs. Church leaders must point people ultimately towards Jesus’s call to discipleship, to “deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow [Christ]” (Luke 9:23). Churches must align with Paul’s own driving mission, to “present everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1:28-29). This vision for growing as disciples must be clear from the pulpit, it must be evident in other intentional ways through church life (e.g., ministry philosophies and church communications), and it should find expression in informal conversations and one-anothering.

Second, there needs to be opportunity for growth across the programs of a church.<sup>53</sup> Some programs will be intentionally designed with the skeptic or seeker in mind. Other programs will be designed for the consumer and the contributor. Owners must also have places where they can continue growing and use their gifts to serve others.<sup>54</sup> The key is to identify next steps and encourage progress along the pathway. As

---

<sup>52</sup> According to Marshall and Payne, “[T]he goal of every form of Christian ministry could be summarized simply as seeking to help each person, wherever they happen to be, to take a step to the right—to come closer towards hearing the gospel and being transferred out of the domain of darkness into the kingdom; and then to press forward towards maturity in Christ in every aspect of their lives” (Marshall and Payne, *Vine Project*, 96-97).

<sup>53</sup> Admittedly, there will be some programs that include the whole spectrum of where people are starting from. These may include the Sunday morning worship service or certain all-church events. In these cases with representation across the spectrum of spiritual interest, church leaders would do well to factor in the presence of this diversity as they communicate and plan (and address or have something that can engage each group), without sacrificing the primary purpose of the particular program under consideration.

<sup>54</sup> While “owners” should certainly be encouraged to actively serve in the discipling of others, James Wilhoit mentions the value of “spiral curriculum” that can be included as another important way to

church leaders examine where there is opportunity for next steps and where there are gaps, they are also conducting an audit of their church programs. For example, if church leaders discover there are nine opportunities on weeknights for those in the consumer and contributor stages and zero opportunities for those seeking or asking questions, this insight helps church leaders discuss what a healthy recalibration could look like as they seek to offer access and movement in their church programming.

Third, churches must celebrate progress. Often this celebration will be informal and interpersonal: the one-on-one encouragement that comes as a small group leader sees a small group member grow to the point of leading his own small group, or as a non-Christian decides to finally sign up for a group where he can ask his questions and learn more about who Jesus is. However, churches should also consider ways to celebrate certain steps of growth publicly. For example, this could be a “graduation celebration” for all who successfully complete a guided ten-week course, or the formal acknowledgement of new members into the life of the church family. In all the ways that it can take shape, this celebration will reinforce the value of spiritual growth (i.e., movement) and encourage the entire church to continue growing in Christlikeness.

Fourth, churches that value movement must have patience and allow for flexibility. People often grow more slowly than desired. Movement cannot be rushed or forced. There should be clarity on the direction of discipleship, with an appropriate flexibility for how people get there.<sup>55</sup> A discipleship pathway that is too rigid can feel like

---

encourage the continuing growth of owners: “A spiral curriculum has the student constantly revisiting topics and truths, with the aim of working these truths deeper into the fabric of our lives. In the early twentieth century, the field of religious education adopted the linear acquisition curriculum model used in math and science instruction. Educators thought that students mastered basic material and then moved on to more and more complex learning. A linear curriculum has much to commend it in many areas of study, but the wisdom of the ages saw the circular curriculum, analogous to the church year, as far more appropriate for spiritual formation. The circular curriculum re-presents subjects again and again and provides opportunities to go deeper into these subjects” (Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 119).

<sup>55</sup> This flexibility of course must not be taken too far, to embrace a “choose one’s own spirituality”—whatever that looks like to the individual. Rather, the flexibility must embrace the biblical picture and priorities of discipleship discovered in ch. 2, while allowing for a certain creativity in

a hurried guided tour, where the tour guide is leading people from point to point in a rushed manner without allowing them time to explore, linger, and move ahead at a pace that is fitting to them.<sup>56</sup>

### **Putting It All Together**

So how can church leaders put all these essential aspects of a discipleship pathway together in such a way that (1) key programs are in place (i.e., the “pavers”), (2) people can meaningfully engage the pathway at whatever level of spiritual interest from which they first enter (“access”), and (3) ever-maturing discipleship is an intentional and explicit feature (“movement”)? Figure 1 below (see next page) presents a suggested framework that assembles these aspects of the discipleship pathway all together into one place for accessible viewing at-a-glance.<sup>57</sup> Following the graphic, brief explanation is provided.

---

implementing these things.

<sup>56</sup> On this fourth point see also Brian Bowman, “I Was Discipled by . . . the Church,” The Gospel Coalition, October 29, 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/discipled-church/>. Bowman recounts his own experience of not being formally discipled by any one single person or program. Instead, he reflects on how his aggregate experience of all the ins and outs of church life helped him grow as a disciple. Bowman’s story is a reminder that discipleship often happens informally. While programs are important, they must not be rigidly forced. Programs must help facilitate the organic nature of discipleship, rather than being a too-narrow pathway with a limited view of what growing in Christlikeness involves.

<sup>57</sup> Readers should note the particular influence of two books on the development of this pathway. See esp. Marshall and Payne, *Vine Project*, 288; Im, *No Silver Bullets*, 213-45. What seems to be unique with this pathway is lining up the (1) access and movement intended in the top two rows with (2) the “core programs” that facilitate discipleship pictured by the left-most column. This pathway thus helps depict the value of movement specifically in discipleship-centric programs.

	Skeptic	Seeker	Consumer	Contributor	Owner/Mult.
	Discover	Develop		Deploy	
Gathered worship					
Small groups, huddles, and classes					
Serving opportunities					

Figure 1. Discipleship pathway sample framework

The left-most column in figure 1 establishes the key programs for a basic discipleship pathway.<sup>58</sup> The top-most horizontal row lists the stages of spiritual interest—where people are starting as they engage in the local church. (The gradual change in shading indicates the move from spiritual darkness to living in the light.)

Directly underneath this top row of spiritual interest, the next horizontal row indicates how church programs can purposefully come alongside (i.e., disciple) those in a corresponding area of spiritual interest and move into increasing spiritual maturity. For those who would best qualify as skeptics or seekers, the church should offer opportunity for these people to *discover* who Jesus is, why they need him, and how they can know

---

<sup>58</sup> These three programs provide a healthy “core” for what churches should offer. Additional ideas that could fit in this column include, for example, (1) events and (2) resources to stimulate personal study/growth. Some churches may choose to approach the left-most vertical column more by ministry department—considering, for example, what youth ministry or children’s ministry is doing to help kids and youth have access and find movement as they consider discipleship specifically through the lens of the ministry department. Children’s ministry may select to focus on how families are prime expressions of “discipleship huddles.” The freedom to flex and adapt in ways that fit individual churches is built into this system.

him personally. Consumers and contributors should *develop* in their understanding of God’s Word, the spiritual disciplines, and a life of discipleship. And contributors and owner/multipliers should have opportunity to *deploy*, realizing that a healthy life of discipleship includes willingly and sacrificially serving others.<sup>59</sup> To be sure, as one moves to the right in the graphic they continue to value and grow in what remains to their left. For example, “owner/multipliers”—even as they deploy into areas of meaningful service—continue to discover new things about Jesus Christ and develop their relationship with him; they do not “graduate” and move past either of these essential elements of vibrant discipleship.

A swimming pool illustration may provide further clarity to this progression across the categories of discover, develop, and deploy. For those who are brand new to the water or who have had bad experiences in the water previously, a “zero-depth entry” pool cultivates trust in the water and an enjoyment of what it can offer. This zero-depth entry pool corresponds to the *discover* category of ministry programs—providing opportunity for people to “get their feet wet” in a safe place. They realize how great the water is and are invited into a deeper experience of it. There is also a place to “swim laps,” corresponding to the *develop* category of the pathway. Swimming laps develops strength and cultivates health for the whole body, and is something that even strong swimmers never move past. Finally, there is “lifeguard training,” which corresponds to the *deploy* category of the pathway. Lifeguards are trained and equipped for their role, and they are not at the pool primarily to enjoy themselves. They have a bigger view of what is going on and supposed to happen, and they are thinking actively about others. The point of the illustration deserves emphasis: As churches intentionally seek to help

---

<sup>59</sup> Minor variations of this “discover,” “develop,” “deploy” language appears in Hull, *Complete Book of Discipleship*, 34 (where Hull uses the language of “deliverance,” “development,” “deployment”); also Im, *No Silver Bullets*, 227-34 (where Im uses the language of “discover,” “deepen,” “deploy”).

people grow in spiritual maturity, they must offer “zero-depth entry” programs, programs where people can “swim laps,” and opportunities for “lifeguard training.”

Now back to the graphic itself. The empty, dotted-line boxes<sup>60</sup> that complete the graphic provide space for church leaders to list what they are doing in each program or ministry department to facilitate access and movement across the pathway, in that particular program or department. For example, the small group ministry of a church could fill out this graphic by answering questions like the following: What groups do we offer that are designed primarily for the skeptic or the seeker? What groups do we offer that are designed for the maturing believer? How do we equip and launch out new leaders? Alternatively, a small group ministry that encourages blended groups composed of both non-Christians and believers could still benefit from this exercise. Rather than having different group environments designed for people at various stages of spiritual interest, this small group ministry would instead ask questions like this: In our small group environments, how do we listen to and engage non-Christians? How we do develop Christians into increasing spiritual maturity? How do we deploy people into meaningful service? Regardless of the particular approach churches take, this discipleship pathway helps church leaders think through access (“Who is coming?” and “How can healthy programs engage them meaningfully where they are?”) and movement (“How can healthy programs point them in the right direction and facilitate growth as disciples?”).

A number of benefits emerge by completing this discipleship pathway. One benefit is that church leaders will have a clarified view of what they are doing within these categories of program, access, and movement. Some boxes will overflow with listings—prompting healthy discussion about whether the church is doing too much in one particular area, or about how to offer these programs in an unconfused, cooperative

---

<sup>60</sup> The dotted lines around the boxes demonstrate that the lines separating how programs function (i.e., whether they are “discover,” “develop,” or “deploy” programs) are not usually hard and fast.

way. Other boxes may be noticeably sparse or altogether blank—prompting discussion about what programs need to begin in order to address the gap that the box represents. Another related benefit is that church leaders will be able to see “church programs at a glance” for the whole local church, with greater awareness of what other ministries are doing that advances the mission of discipleship. In every church, this exercise will help those serving in one ministry area know what is going on in other ministries related to discipleship. A third benefit is that by completing this pathway, fresh conversations will take place that tether everything the local church is doing to the priority of discipleship.

### **Conclusion**

The clear picture of discipleship and priorities for discipleship that were discovered in the New Testament now find concrete expression in this discipleship pathway. With intentionality, local churches can leverage the strengths of key programs that embody biblical priorities, and that serve as important avenues for spiritual formation. These programs must allow access for those coming from numerous stages of spiritual interest and encourage movement toward increasing conformity to Christ. As local churches implement a discipleship pathway such as this one—in dependence on and motivated by God’s powerful, transforming grace—they can know with confidence that they are faithfully advancing Christ’s Great Commission to make disciples.

## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Local churches in the twenty-first century must continue to take Jesus’s command to “make disciples” seriously (Matt 28:19-20). The study thus far has provided (1) a clear picture of what following Jesus includes and (2) a concrete pathway that can facilitate growth in Christlikeness through church programming that is at once both biblically-aligned and practically helpful. The essential groundwork for a robust discipleship pathway is therefore in place; the final step is now to establish this pathway in a specific local church and “test the theory” that has been put forth.

The current chapter will explain how this discipleship pathway was presented at Brookside Church, seeking to establish it there.<sup>1</sup> The material that immediately follows will include (1) preparatory steps leading up implementation of the pathway, (2) the various elements included with actually implementing the pathway and seeking to establish it at Brookside, and (3) a high-level overview of the content that was presented and integral to the discipleship pathway project. Looking further ahead, the next (and final) chapter of this study will then evaluate this project and consider lessons learned.

#### **Preparation**

The purpose of this project was to establish a discipleship pathway for use in ministry programming at Brookside Church. To accomplish this purpose, clear goals and an accompanying research methodology were laid out in chapter 1.<sup>2</sup> In this section these

---

<sup>1</sup> Because this project was implemented directly by the author of this study, first person pronouns will be used in this chapter and the next to maintain an appropriately clear and simple style.

<sup>2</sup> See esp. pp. 7-9.



goals and methods will be briefly reviewed with a special focus on steps taken in advance to prepare for the implementation of the project.

The first goal was to assess the current understanding of and practices related to discipleship among the various ministry departments at Brookside Church. The key measure of this goal was administering the Survey on the Understanding and Practice of Discipleship (SUPD) to thirty ministry leaders. To prepare for this assessment, a useful survey needed to be developed that could gauge ministry leaders' understandings of discipleship generally and their understandings of how discipleship happens through church programming.<sup>3</sup>

The second goal was to develop a five-session curriculum that would train participating ministry leaders to understand and champion the discipleship pathway. I prepared for this goal by sifting through the research sections of the current work (see especially chapters 2 and 3) and identifying key emphases that would need to be taught in order for a healthy discipleship pathway to take shape at Brookside. While more substance is provided below in the “Content Overview” section, the five sessions I decided to teach on and emphasize are as follows: (1) Session 1: The Importance of Discipleship (and a Discipleship Pathway); (2) Session 2: What is a Disciple? Toward a Comprehensive, Clear, and Compelling Biblical Picture; (3) Session 3: How Do We Make Disciples as a Local Church? Three “Pavers” that Provide Structure and Footing; (4) Session 4: The Value of Access and Movement for a Healthy Discipleship Pathway; (5) Session 5: Putting It All Together—A Discipleship Pathway for Brookside Church. For each session I designed a curriculum that includes the primary learning objective for that particular session, a general teaching outline containing key points and sample illustrations, and learning exercises that facilitate discussion and/or provide opportunities

---

<sup>3</sup> See appendix 3 for the “Survey on the Understanding and Practice of Discipleship” that was created and used in the project.

for participants to begin workshopping some of the ideas in their respective ministry departments.

This second goal also included a review of the teaching curriculum by at least three others who are engaged deeply in local church ministry at Brookside or other churches. To prepare for this review, I developed a rubric by which the teaching curriculum could be evaluated in light of its biblical faithfulness, scope, and practical application in a local church setting.<sup>4</sup> I also began “seeding” certain conversations with glimpses into what I had been working on—at the same time discerning who I could formally approach to review the teaching curriculum based on their role, interest level, and availability.

The third goal in the larger project was to increase knowledge and applicability of the discipleship pathway among the thirty participating ministry leaders, which was primarily accomplished through presenting the discipleship pathway teaching curriculum. A number of important factors needed attention in the preparation phase for this goal. The one most important factor around which other decisions would be made was the date(s) of the presentation. I made the decision to present the five sessions of material in an intensive format, or a single three-and-a-half-hour “mega-session.” This decision was made in light of the fact that the presentation would happen in the summer months of the year and in light of the number of people needed for participation. To put it another way: An intensive format on one day would be most likely to succeed, given the number of people participating and the time of year at which the material would be offered.

Another factor needed to prepare for the presentation was to identify the thirty ministry leaders who would be participating. I worked with Brookside’s Executive Pastor and other select staff leaders to develop a list of who to invite. Because of the nature of the project, this list had a significant number of paid staff included in these thirty

---

<sup>4</sup> See appendix 5.

participants, while still allowing for a healthy amount of volunteers to be engaged. I also worked to ensure the participants included strong representation of both males and females, ethnic diversity, and a variety of ages. In terms of specific numbers and percentages, the desired study population for this project included the following: twenty staff members and ten laypeople (staff made up 67% of the group), no more than 60% representation by any one gender, no single ethnic group making up more than 80% of the participants, and age-representation from every decade from the twenties to the sixties (i.e., twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, and sixties).

With these demographic factors in mind, as we considered who to ask into this intensive session the following two questions helped us further identify who to approach: (1) “What volunteers may be best served by taking a deeper dive into *what* discipleship is and *how* we approach it through our programs at Brookside?” and (2) “Who can help us effectively identify what we are currently doing in various ministry departments to cultivate disciples and brainstorm what else can serve this emphasis in that same department?” All these considerations then led to a list of names—some of whom have been engaged in serving for a while, others who are much newer to the life of our church family—that I could approach and invite into the intensive seminar.

I then made formal invites to secure commitment. These asks were done via email where I let the invited participants know *what we would be doing* (i.e., engaging material about a discipleship pathway across ministry programs, that is a culminating part of my doctoral work and has potential to serve the culture of discipleship we want to create at Brookside), *why this project is important* (i.e., to help us think intentionally about discipleship and benefit from what engaging this material as a community can offer), *and other important details* (e.g., time and location, making them aware of the anonymous survey they would be taking, asking for a commitment, and a high-level overview of the session topics).

A final factor needed to prepare for the presentation involved the logistics of room set up and planning out the schedule for the intensive format. This step required attending to the simple (but important) administrative details such as reserving a room in the church building conducive to the intensive session and ensuring that materials were ready (e.g., enough SUPD copies for everyone to fill it out twice [once before the training, and once after the training, compiled in numbered stacks so anonymously-completed surveys could be analyzed], handouts for participants to take notes, and pens). Additionally, I requested video equipment so a recording of the presentation could be captured and utilized as-needed in the future. Finally, the planned schedule I prepared looks like the following:

Table 5. Example schedule—discipleship pathway intensive seminar

<b>Time-frame</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Components</b>
1:30-2:20pm	50 minutes	Welcome + Initial SUPD + Session #1
2:20-3:00pm	40 minutes	Session #2
3:00-3:10pm	10 minutes	Break
3:10-3:40pm	30 minutes	Session #3
3:40-4:10pm	30 minutes	Session #4
4:10-4:15pm	5 minutes	Break
4:15-4:50pm	35 minutes	Session #5
4:50-5:00pm	10 minutes	Re-administer SUPD, participants free to depart when completed

## **Implementation**

With these preparatory pieces in place, I was now ready to begin the implementation of the project in a more visible way. This implementation consisted of three major components—soliciting feedback from an expert panel of reviewers, presenting the discipleship pathway teaching material to a group of at least thirty ministry leaders, and collecting an initial overview of discipleship pathway plans for each major area of ministry represented in the intensive seminar.

Implementation of the expert panel of reviewers looked like the following: I invited three others to review the discipleship pathway teaching curriculum in light of the rubric in appendix 5. I invited the following people to review the teaching curriculum: one Brookside elder, a Brooksider who works as an educational administrator, and a friend who pastors at a local church outside of the area and who used to teach in the Christian Education department of a nearby college. Since their feedback was an important part of this project, I was intentional in the steps I followed to invite and include them. My first step was a simple conversation in person or via email, asking if they would be interested in reviewing the teaching curriculum of the discipleship pathway on which I had been working. I let them know I would be supplying them with the materials they would need along with the rubric by which they would evaluate it. Additionally, I asked them to devote at least sixty to ninety minutes to their evaluation, and asked that it be completed within three weeks of their receipt of the materials. (Each of these leaders is busy, and so I knew that making it manageable was important.) I then asked them to let me know within three to five days if they were available to serve me in this way, so that timelines would be kept moving.

Step two in the review process involved simply passing along the materials that the reviewers needed to evaluate the discipleship pathway teaching material. I emailed each participating reviewer a brief (no more than two pages) overview of the purpose of the project—including a statement of the project's purpose, a brief summary

of what would be covered, a schedule of the intensive seminar, and a list of prospective ministry departments I would be inviting. Additionally, the overview included a short list of potential obstacles that could hinder the implementation of this plan. My email also included the full content of the teaching curriculum in appendix 4 along with the rubric in appendix 5 (unless they requested a hard copy, which I could print for them).<sup>5</sup> In the email I reinforced my gratitude for the time they were giving to this review, I instilled vision in the value of their service (“you are serving Brookside in tremendous ways, in such a valuable area!”), and I repeated the deadline of three weeks and the expectation that they would devote at least sixty to ninety minutes to the review. In addition to the overview, curriculum, and rubric I also included a draft of chapters 1-4 of the project for any reviewers who wanted to (optionally) dive more deeply into the research and study that gave shape to the curriculum.

Furthermore, I made myself available for questions if any clarity was needed that could help the reviewers with their task. Once I had received completed rubrics from the reviewers, I carefully reviewed their feedback and made note especially of their comments, questions, or concerns that could help me enhance the content included in the presentation.

Successful implementation of the intensive teaching session through the discipleship pathway content included a number of factors worth mentioning. First, the room was set up in a comfortable classroom environment with round tables and a sufficient number of chairs around each. Accessible sightlines from the seating to the lectern, screen(s), and whiteboard were ensured. Necessary materials (SUPD copies, handouts on which people could follow along and take notes, and pens) were available.

Second, the welcome and introduction to the first session were carefully considered. Prior to the seminar, I assigned everyone attending to one of the following

---

<sup>5</sup> Reflections on rubric results will be discussed in chapter 5.

ministry teams: (1) Sunday morning services; (2) Groups ministry; (3) Next Generation ministries; (4) Serving/Impact ministries; or (5) Bilingual Campus. When participants arrived, I asked them to sit in groups by these pre-assigned ministry departments—as these groupings would be valuable for discussion throughout the seminar. I also made sure every participant had *two* copies of the SUPD, one for the very beginning of the seminar, and one for the end. Each set of two was marked by a number the two SUPDs shared, with the letter “A” following the number on one copy, and the letter “B” following the number on the second copy. For example, one participant had two SUPDs marked separately as “1A” and “1B,” another participant had SUPDs marked “2A” and “2B” and so on, with the numeral equaling the number of participants involved (e.g., “30A” and “30B”). After welcoming everyone at the very beginning of the time together, I clearly explained the SUPD and asked them to fill out the “A” copy of their SUPD and then turn it in to someone who collected them and placed them in a sealed envelope.

Third, I taught through the discipleship pathway teaching material following the schedule listed above. My goal was to stick with these time-frames—even cutting conversation off a bit as some groups were still discussing—to keep everyone moving through the material. This seminar was designed as a thorough *introduction* to establishing a discipleship pathway (additional and ongoing conversations are assumed to continue happening after the seminar and into the future). It was also important to honor breaks as “breathers” over the course of a long seminar. Other helpful practices to make the most of the teaching time included walking around to answer questions and listen in on conversation as participants were discussing in groups for some of the learning exercises, and keeping a pen by my teaching notes to jot down questions or points that came up during the large-group presentation.

Fourth, intentionally thinking through the re-administration of the SUPD at the end of the seminar was necessary. Participants were instructed to complete the “B” version of their SUPD set at this time, and to once again turn it in to someone who

collected them and placed them in a sealed envelope. This careful attention to the administration of the SUPD—both at the beginning and at the close of the intensive seminar—deserves emphasis, since only this high level of intentionality will produce two stacks of SUPD results that can be analyzed after the seminar.<sup>6</sup>

A final important step in implementing this pathway across ministry programs at Brookside Church was collecting an initial plan from the ministry departments involved in the seminar—a plan where they show how this discipleship pathway takes practical shape in their ministry areas. Ministry departments were already given time during session 5 of the seminar and accompanying learning exercises to begin formulating this plan. For those ministries that needed additional time, I gave department leaders seven to ten days from the date of the intensive to put any finishing touches on their plan as they continued to reflect on it and plan ahead.<sup>7</sup> With this collection of discipleship pathways for each ministry area—aligned across categories and helping people grow in Christlikeness—Brookside can continue to help people find and follow Jesus, knowing that church programs are organized, aligned, and intentional.

### **Content Overview**

A description of the project also requires a high-level overview of the content that was taught.<sup>8</sup> In this section, each of the five sessions of the discipleship pathway teaching curriculum is briefly introduced—orienting the reader to primary learning objectives, major points, and learning exercises.

---

<sup>6</sup> The analysis of these SUPDs will be discussed in chapter 5 and are available to view in appendix 6.

<sup>7</sup> These plans provided by ministry leaders will of course be initial and subject-to-change. A discipleship pathway is a living document that deserves frequent revisiting and updating as needed. Nevertheless, even a draft that is subject to change reflects intentionality, helps ministry leaders assess ministry areas, and provides alignment.

<sup>8</sup> For a fuller presentation of the discipleship pathway teaching curriculum, see appendix 4.



Session 1 had as its primary learning objective the goal of orienting participants to the importance of discipleship biblically, and to the value a discipleship pathway adds to a healthy church. This objective then set the framework for the rest of the seminar. The importance of discipleship biblically was emphasized especially through drawing attention to Matthew 28:19-20, ensuring that everyone in the seminar saw the value that Jesus Christ placed on discipleship and what this means for the local church. Session 1 also oriented people to what a discipleship pathway is: a beautiful pathway is directed by a clear picture, is reinforced by a healthy structure, and invites access and movement. Figure 2 below provides a bird’s-eye graphic of the pathway that was fleshed out over the course of the intensive seminar. Session 1 also highlighted what a discipleship pathway offers—namely clarity, intentionality, alignment, and ownership. The learning exercises for this session included general discussion questions that drew out interaction on the value of discipleship and a discipleship pathway.

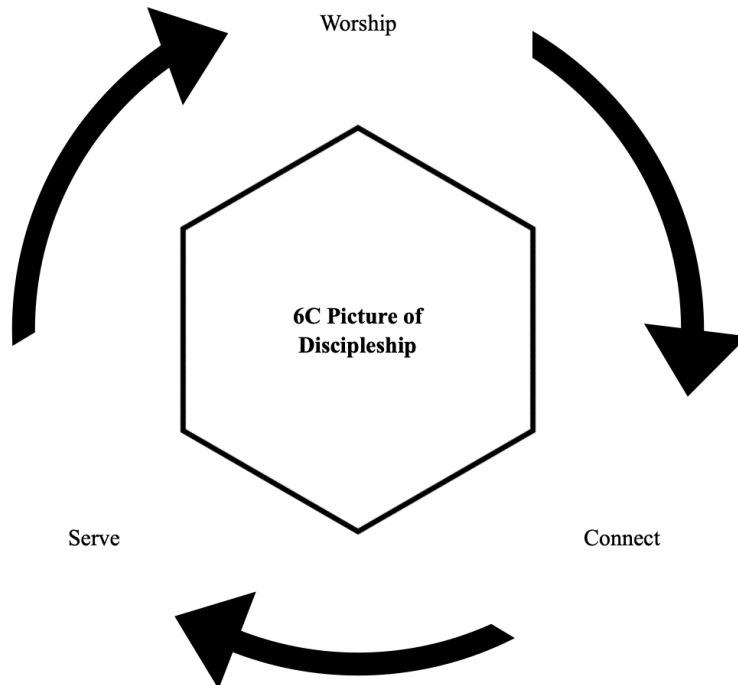


Figure 2. Discipleship pathway bird’s-eye view

The primary learning objective of Session 2 was to paint a clear biblical picture of discipleship, providing a healthy (and helpful) specificity about what it means to be a disciple. The bulk of the teaching material focused on conformity to Christ in six Cs: commitment, communion with God, community with others, character, conduct, and commission. For each of these points, a brief statement summarizing the particular “C” was included, along with biblical passages anchoring the characteristic in Scripture. After teaching through these six Cs, four take-aways received special mention: (1) this six-sided picture is more directional than destination-based; (2) the combination of these six areas helps us cultivate holistic discipleship; (3) these characteristics have application for everyone participating in the seminar; and (4) each of these components is motivated by and empowered by God’s grace. These take-aways provided a valuable opportunity to drive home the personal implications of discipleship and the beauty of grace—before focusing on ministry programs in the upcoming sessions. Session 2 learning exercises included discussion on the value of a clear picture of discipleship and a workshop opportunity for ministry leaders to begin considering how these specific characteristics of disciples could be championed in their area of ministry.

The primary learning objective of session 3 focused on *how* the local church can make progress toward this 6C picture of discipleship. This session answered the question, “What biblical truths and practical research lead to the three ‘pavers’ identified, namely ‘worship, connect, and serve’?” This larger goal was achieved in two important steps. First, biblical priorities that cultivate discipleship were gleaned from Acts 1-2 (with a special focus on Acts 2:42-47). With Jesus’s call to make disciples still ringing in their ears, how did Jesus’s earliest followers advance the Lord’s Great Commission? In other words, what did they do as a community of believers to help make disciples? Six practical and transferable priorities were emphasized in Acts 1-2: the priority of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4, 8; 2:1-47), of apostolic teaching (Acts 2:42), of community (2:42, 46), of

the ordinances (the Lord’s Supper in 2:42 and baptism in 2:38, 41), of God-centeredness (2:42, 43, 47), and of mission (1:8: 2:39, 47).

The second step was connecting these biblical priorities with practical church programs. For help with this, I benefited from the Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA) conducted by Lifeway Research.<sup>9</sup> The TDA identified eight signposts that mark the lives of those progressing in spiritual maturity. See table 6 below for a demonstration of how the TDA signposts align with the 6C picture of discipleship presented from Jesus’s teachings:

Table 6. Alignment between the 6C picture of discipleship and the TDA<sup>10</sup>

<b>6C Picture of Discipleship</b>	<b>TDA Signposts</b>
Commitment	Obeying God and Denying Self; Exercising Faith; Living Unashamed
Communion with God	Engaging the Bible; Seeking God
Community with others	Building Relationships
Character	Obeying God and Denying Self; Exercising Faith; Living Unashamed
Conduct	Obeying God and Denying Self
Commission	Serving God and Others; Sharing Christ

---

<sup>9</sup> For an overview of the Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA), see “Discipleship Pathway Assessment,” Lifeway Christian Resources, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://discipleshippathwayassessment.com/about/>.

<sup>10</sup> Note that some of the TDA signposts “bleed” across categories and apply to more than one aspect of the 6C Picture. Nevertheless, the clear alignment between the two frameworks is evident.

Returning specifically to the TDA, Daniel Im highlights four input goals that disproportionately influence progress in the TDA signposts: reading the Bible, worship services, small classes or groups, and serving God and others.<sup>11</sup> Notably, these input goals also combine to fulfill the priorities of discipleship discovered in Acts 1-2.<sup>12</sup> This second step (i.e., connecting biblical priorities with practical church programs) was completed by identifying three key programs that can practically advance these input goals—these key programs that were highlighted are (1) gathered worship (fulfilling the “worship services” input goal); (2) small groups—including huddles—and classes (fulfilling the “small classes or groups” input goal); and (3) serving opportunities (fulfilling the “serving God and others” input goal).<sup>13</sup>

Session 3 learning exercises drove home points already made above. One learning exercise helped participants see the connection between the priorities of discipleship and the picture of discipleship—thus emphasizing the value of connecting programs to purpose (and protecting programs from becoming incomplete ends-in-themselves). A second learning exercise allowed for discussion where participants could articulate the valuable role these pavers play in the life of a local church, and how to keep them as meaningful steppingstones on the path of increasing discipleship—rather than becoming mechanical “ends-in-themselves” or a weekly process of going through the motions.

---

<sup>11</sup> Im, *No Silver Bullets*, 64-68, 219-24. While Im initially (pp. 64-68) identifies just the first three of these as especially influential input goals, later in the book when he is helping church leaders construct a discipleship pathway and the ongoing programs that significantly facilitate this path, he mentions all four of these input goals (pp. 219-24). This latter, culminating presentation is what is followed here.

<sup>12</sup> See table 3 on p. 79.

<sup>13</sup> A few clarifications deserve mention: First, the input goal of “reading the Bible” should be threaded in some way through each of these key programs. Second, small groups (of approximately ten to fourteen people) and discipleship huddles (three to five individuals) have overlap in that they are group environments focusing on community; however, they should be distinguished from each other. Succinctly stated, small groups provide breadth of relationship, while discipleship huddles provide depth of relationship.

With key programs now identified, the goal of session 4 was to advocate for (1) access to these programs by those entering from various stages of spiritual maturity, and (2) movement across these programs—facilitating growth in spiritual maturity. Access is important because of the reality that people will engage local churches from a variety of levels of spiritual maturity. Access is also important in that it treats people as individuals and is sensitive to where they are coming from, rather than rigidly approaching a discipleship pathway as a pre-programmed conveyer belt.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, a biblical case for the value of understanding where people are coming from can be made from comparing Paul’s message in Acts 13:13-42 with that in Acts 17:22-34, or from Jude’s awareness of engaging people based on where they are coming from in Jude 20-23. With these reasons for access in place, the five “stages” from which people may engage the pathway were highlighted: skeptic, seeker, consumer, contributor, and owner/multiplier.

Movement is important from the straightforward observation that numerous New Testament authors call for growth (or movement) in spiritual maturity (e.g., Gal 4:19; Col 1:28-29; Heb 5:11-14; 2 Pet 1:3-8). A discipleship pathway should therefore intentionally be structured to facilitate and encourage movement—with opportunities for some to *discover* who Jesus is and how they can know him personally, with opportunities for believers to *develop* in their understanding of God’s Word and a life of gospel-driven discipleship, and with opportunities to *deploy* into a life of willing and sacrificial service that includes a multiplication mindset. Necessary ingredients in a pathway that encourages movement are the following: (1) clear direction, (2) an opportunity for growth within (or across) programs, (3) the celebration of progress, and (4) patience with

---

<sup>14</sup> See Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship: Moving from Shallow Christianity to Deep Transformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2021), 23.

the process of a long obedience in the same direction.<sup>15</sup> Learning exercises for session 4 focused on group discussion encouraging personal reflection and initial reactions to the themes of access and movement.

The objective of session 5 was to take this foundational content (i.e., sessions 1 through 4) and use it to create a discipleship pathway for ministry programming at Brookside Church, fleshing out the “bird’s-eye view” presented above in figure 2. This session presented the discipleship pathway graphic,<sup>16</sup> taking the time to explain the column listing key programs, and the two horizontal rows along the top where access and movement are depicted. The bulk of this session, then, was a learning exercise allowing ministry teams to create a strong initial draft of a discipleship pathway for their ministry department. If time had allowed (which it did not in this case, more on that point in the next chapter), the session could have culminated with a brief presentation by ministry teams sharing how they had begun filling out the pathway—thus increasing whole-church awareness of what the various ministry departments are doing to champion and encourage discipleship.

### **Conclusion**

The details and description of this project aimed at establishing a discipleship pathway for ministry programming at Brookside Church are in place. Other pastors and ministry leaders now have a template they can follow—including preparatory work that needs to be done, a guide through implementation, and an overview of the content that was taught. The final step that remains is evaluating the project and considering lessons learned.

---

<sup>15</sup> See Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 2000.

<sup>16</sup> See figure 1 on p. 95.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

We are now ready to evaluate the project that has taken place. This chapter begins by evaluating the project in light of its stated purpose and goals. Strengths and weakness of the project are then discussed, culminating in a consideration of what I would do differently were I to conduct the project again. The chapter then moves into both theological and personal reflections on the project before concluding.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to establish a discipleship pathway for use in ministry programming at Brookside Church. The value of this purpose is clear. In the first place, this purpose champions the importance discipleship played in Jesus's own earthly ministry (e.g., Matt 4:19; 28:19-20) as well as the continuing importance discipleship and disciple-making play in the early church (e.g., Acts 14:21-22; 2 Tim 2:2). Additionally, accomplishing this purpose helps advance Brookside Church's trajectory of health—ensuring that its mission of “helping people find and follow Jesus” continues moving forward strongly as the church faithfully fulfills her calling, and as the Lord brings further growth in numbers and impact.

Two further comments on the project's purpose are in order by way of evaluation. First, the driving verb in the purpose statement is that this project will *establish* a discipleship pathway. In its definition of “establish,” the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary includes these glosses: “to bring into existence,” and “to put on a firm basis.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “establish,” accessed July 15, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/establish>.

The focused nature of this purpose was helpful at instituting a discipleship pathway on a stable foundation, without looking further ahead—which would be beyond the scope of what this project could successfully accomplish. Second, the practical nature of this project is conveyed in that it is a discipleship pathway for *ministry programming*. Every local church will have programming of some sort, and this project aims at orienting and organizing that programming around the biblical emphasis of discipleship.

In light of the cumulative weight of these considerations (i.e., the biblical value driving the purpose, its healthy focus, and its practical nature), I conclude that the purpose of this project was both important and needed. The validity of the project’s purpose is further affirmed as I consider the specific goals of the project—each of which contributes to the larger purpose.

### **Evaluation of the Project’s Goals**

Four goals needed to be met to successfully establish a discipleship pathway for ministry programming at Brookside Church. Each goal will be considered individually here, with comments related to the accomplishment of the goal and initial insights gleaned.

The first goal was to assess current discipleship practices among the various ministry departments at Brookside Church. These ministry departments included (1) Sunday morning services, (2) Next Generation ministries (including Kids, Youth, and College), (3) Groups, and (4) Serving/Impact ministries. This goal was measured by administering the Survey on the Understanding and Practice of Discipleship (SUPD),<sup>2</sup> and would be considered successfully met when thirty participating ministry leaders submitted a completed SUPD before the discipleship pathway seminar. Much was learned through administering this pre-seminar SUPD. Thirty-four ministry leaders participated

---

<sup>2</sup> See appendix 3.



in the survey—with healthy representation from each ministry department mentioned above, plus a group representing Brookside’s Bilingual Campus.<sup>3</sup> This strong, balanced representation provided a healthy diversity that offered insight into how discipleship was understood and practiced across important ministries and demographics of the Brookside Church family.

An overview of SUPD results is included in appendix 6. Analyzing the pre-seminar results reveals that the two lowest scoring questions (i.e., where participants felt least in agreement) were question 28 (“I have criteria that can help me evaluate ministry programs I oversee or in which I am involved, helping me discern whether we are helping people grow as disciples”) and question 26 (“I can clearly articulate how our ministry programming intentionally facilitates discipleship to volunteers in my ministry”). In other words, two areas of perceived weakness or lack included (1) criteria by which ministry leaders can assess growth in discipleship, and (2) the ability to articulate how ministry programs advance the goal of growing discipleship. These insights further confirm the value of (and need for) establishing a discipleship pathway at Brookside.

A second goal was to develop a five-session curriculum that would train participating ministry leaders to understand and champion the discipleship pathway. This goal was measured by soliciting feedback from an expert panel of three others who used a rubric to evaluate this discipleship pathway at Brookside.<sup>4</sup> The goal was successfully met, with a minimum of 90% of the rubric criterion meeting or exceeding the sufficient level. Feedback from the reviewers—prior to the presentation of the discipleship

---

<sup>3</sup> A fuller explanation of the diversity is provided here: Of the 34 participants who took the survey, sixteen were female (47%) and eighteen were male (53%). Six ethnic minorities were represented (18%). Eight volunteers were among the participants (24%). Additionally, of the five ministry departments represented (Next Gen, Groups, Bilingual Campus, Serving, and Sunday Morning Services) there was fairly balanced representation of each: Next Gen had nine participants, Groups had seven participants, the Bilingual Campus had six participants, Serving had seven participants, and Sunday Morning Services had five participants. With the exception of the Next Gen group, every other ministry department also had both staff and volunteers participating.

<sup>4</sup> The rubric is available in appendix 5.

pathway—was helpful in a number of ways. My remarks here will focus on areas where the reviewers helped me improve.

First, while each reviewer noted the strong organization of the material, two reviewers commented on the amount of content I was trying to cover in the time allotted. Specifically, they recommended that I increase the amount of time devoted to the seminar. While the length of the seminar remained the same, these comments helped me (1) stay tight in my presentation and (2) preface the seminar as an introduction to a conversation about important matters that would be continuing. As an introduction, I let the participants know in advance that there would be times I may cut the discussion short to honor the time allotted. These adjustments helped me stay within the time allotted and set the table for continued conversations as ministry leaders in the future.

Second, two of the reviewers expressed uncertainty in knowing which ministry leaders or departments were included. In my preparatory work before the seminar, these comments led me to spell out in much more detail what the “major groupings” of departments would be, and where various ministry departments fit within these groupings. I landed on five major groupings that correspond to the discipleship pathway grid: (1) Sunday morning services (including our music team, production, teaching pastors, and guest services); (2) Groups ministry (including couple’s, men’s, and women’s groups, along with classes); (3) Next Generation ministry (kids, middle school, high school, and college); (4) Serving (including our local and global impact ministries, along with our security team); and (5) Bilingual Campus. As participants let me know they would be attending the seminar, I assigned them to one of these groups before the seminar itself. These assigned groups were indicated on the attendance form people saw when they arrived for the seminar, and table groups had already been set up—allowing for people to sit with their ministry department and discuss together throughout the seminar.

The third goal of the larger project was to increase knowledge of this pathway and demonstrate its applicability among ministry leaders. Achieving this goal depended on successfully presenting the five-session discipleship pathway material, and then re-administering the SUPD at the end to demonstrate a statistically significant increase in the pre- and post-SUPDs. This goal also was successfully met. This success was displayed through administering a t-test which analyzed the results of the pre- and post-SUPDs. In summary, there was a statistically significant difference in post-SUPDs ( $M = 5.191$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ) and pre-SUPDs ( $M = 4.688$ ,  $SD = 0.549$ );  $t(33) = -7.944$ ,  $p = <0.001$  (see table 7).

Table 7. t-test analysis of pre- and post-SUPD results<sup>5</sup>

	<i>Pre-SUPD</i>	<i>Post-SUPD</i>
Mean	4.688	5.191
Standard Deviation	0.549	0.39
Observations	34	34
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	33	
t Stat	-7.944	
P(T<=t) one-tail	<0.001	
t Critical one-tail	1.692	
P(T<=t) two-tail	<0.001	
t Critical two-tail	2.035	

---

<sup>5</sup> This table reflects a hybrid of noteworthy selections from the analysis generated through Microsoft Excel (“Paired Two Sample for Means”) with the addition of a row conveying “Standard Deviation.” Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousandth. The range of SUPD results that were analyzed is found in appendix 6. Special thanks to Dr. Justin Irving for the guidance he provided in helping me capture and articulate the relevant data that highlights statistical significance.

When comparing individual questions in the pre- and post-SUPDs,<sup>6</sup> numerous indicators further reinforce a noticeable difference the presentation made. Twelve of the twenty-eight measured questions (43%) saw a variance of +0.50 or higher between the pre- and post-SUPD testing. Across the 34 individual surveys, the average difference between pre- and post-SUPDs was +14.06; with the mean difference at +13. These increases add to the conclusion that the discipleship pathway curriculum made a difference in the understanding and practice of discipleship for Brookside leaders in noticeable ways.

The fourth and final goal was to establish an initial framework for the pathway that can be further implemented across various ministry departments at Brookside. I consider this goal partially met. I will first address the part of this goal that was met. During the final workshop session of the seminar, ministry departments were given substantial time to discuss what they were currently doing that “fills in the grid” of the discipleship pathway in their area(s). This exercise facilitated great discussion among teams, and I did get a completed ministry-specific plan of what was currently happening in each ministry department (i.e., Sunday morning worship, Groups ministry, Next Generation ministries, Serving, and the Bilingual Campus). When seen as an accumulated group, these plans give Brookside both (1) a valuable thirty-thousand-foot view of what is happening to facilitate discipleship, and (2) a tool by which ministry programming can be audited.<sup>7</sup>

As helpful as it is to have these plans articulated within each ministry department, two pieces are still missing. One missing piece is hearing from the ministry leaders themselves regarding what action steps they would suggest in light of seeing their discipleship pathway laid out in the grid. While these “next step” questions were part of

---

<sup>6</sup> See appendix 6.

<sup>7</sup> See appendix 7.

their team interactions informally during discussion in the final session, I did not require them to submit any of these “ideas for next steps” that would prove so valuable. A second missing piece was having ministry leaders share their team-specific discipleship pathways with everyone else as a part of the seminar—so that there was awareness *across ministry departments* of what is happening to facilitate discipleship in the larger church. While each of these missing pieces can certainly be filled in later, by not including them formally during the actual presentation this fourth goal can only be said to be partially accomplished.

Having evaluated the project’s stated goals, specific attention can now be given to identifying strengths and weaknesses of the project. The strengths of the project will be considered first.

### **Strengths of the Project**

At least five strengths readily emerge from conducting this project of establishing a discipleship pathway at Brookside Church. Three of these strengths are directly tied to insights from the SUPD results. One evident strength of the project was that it gave Brookside ministry leaders criteria by which to measure and assess the practice of discipleship in their ministries. Question 28 (Q28) was stated thus: “I have criteria that can help me evaluate ministry programs I oversee or in which I am involved, helping me discern whether we are helping people grow as disciples.” In the pre-seminar SUPD, this question was ranked the lowest, with an average value of 3.32. The post-seminar SUPD placed a value of 4.79 on this same question—a variance of +1.47. Notably, this variance was the highest increase across the pre- and post-SUPDs—revealing that the teaching curriculum gave ministry leaders clear criteria by which they could evaluate discipleship within their programming. Surely, the 6C picture of discipleship and the exercise of having leaders record what they are currently doing to

help people “discover,” “develop” and “deploy” as disciples were significant factors in providing a framework for assessment.

A second strength of the project was that it instilled a greater confidence in understanding discipleship biblically and talking about it with key volunteers. Questions 25 and 26 of the SUPD both dealt with ministry leaders discussing discipleship with others—asking about how recently they had discussed discipleship with others (Q25) and how confident they were in articulating how ministry programming facilitates discipleship (Q26). Both questions ranked toward the bottom (the second- and third-lowest rankings of the survey) in the pre-seminar SUPD. Both questions also saw significant increases in the post-seminar SUPD: Q25 increased by 0.73 and Q26 increased by 1.17. Additionally, Q5 asked whether ministry leaders were able to support an understanding of discipleship with two to three Bible passages. The pre-seminar SUPD average value for this question was 4.24—the fourth lowest ranking on the pre-seminar survey. The post-seminar SUPD revealed a variance of +1.02 for this question. When all of these insights are considered together, it confirms that the discipleship pathway curriculum instilled confidence—both personally, and in talking with others—about discipleship.

Third, and related to the previous strength, the project instilled confidence in the ministry leaders that Brookside—as a local church—cares deeply about discipleship. Question 10 of the SUPD was stated thus: “I believe Brookside deeply values promoting a life of discipleship.” The pre-seminar SUPD values for this question averaged in at 4.68—the tenth lowest ranking of the measured questions. For this question to be ranked firmly in the bottom half of the survey, by committed ministry leaders, in a church whose mission is “helping people find and follow Jesus” is noteworthy. Many reasons could be given for a low ranking on this question. Perhaps ministry leaders had a very narrow definition of discipleship that did not factor in church programming. Perhaps they simply needed to hear us champion the importance of discipleship more explicitly. Regardless,

the pre-seminar SUPD exposed an issue that the discipleship pathway seminar addressed. The post-seminar SUPD revealed a value of 5.38 for Q10—an increase of 0.70, or the fifth-highest positive variance among the SUPDs. The reasons for this growth can be attributed to providing a vivid, holistic picture of discipleship that explicitly connects growing as disciples to the programming and ministries of the local church. Seeing how the discipleship pathway instilled confidence among key ministry leaders that Brookside cares deeply about discipleship was one of the more personally gratifying results of this project.

The final two strengths of the project relate to its format and the “buzz” or excitement it has created among the participating ministry leaders. Regarding the project’s format, the intensive seminar was a strength. This intensive format allowed a large staff of busy people to more ably commit to one “mega-session” of material, rather than to find time each week over a series of five to six weeks. The format was also conducive to volunteer leaders who were invited in—rather than requiring them to take time off work or to miss more evenings away from family, a “one-and-done” intensive seminar fit much more easily into their schedule. Also related to format, numerous participants provided unsolicited positive feedback regarding the time management and the balance between teaching and discussion. Providing snacks and planning for breaks were also appreciated over the course of an extended seminar.

A fifth and final strength that I will mention here is the excitement that the seminar has stirred. Ministry department leaders have approached me, letting me know the discipleship pathway curriculum has helped set a healthy trajectory for continued conversations about facilitating discipleship within their ministry departments. For example, in Brookside’s Next Generation department, two brand new hires were able to be a part of the training—this material will help them “hit the ground running” as they continue to interact with the larger Next Gen team about discipleship in their ministry

areas. In this example and others, the material equips and empowers ministry leaders to advance Jesus's Great Commission in our specific context.

Excitement is evident in hallway conversations that have popped up since the seminar—where ministry leaders and volunteers are using shared language and common goals in casual conversations and across ministry departments. Excitement is also expressed in other ministry leaders—including Brookside's lead pastor—asking me about and encouraging me toward “what is next?” Rather than diluting or fully satisfying an interest in discipleship, these expressions of excitement reveal that the project instead has stirred a thirst for being intentional with continuing to advance Jesus's final command to “make disciples.”

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

While the strengths of the project highlight the value that establishing a discipleship pathway offers, the project was not without weaknesses as well. Three weaknesses will be mentioned here. First, fitting the discipleship pathway curriculum into the scheduled three-and-a-half hours decreased what could optimally be done if a little more time had been planned. Due to the tight timeframe, table discussion and workshopping were cut short. Never was there a time when tables had finished working through the interactive exercises before I cut them off and led into what was next. Additionally, the tight timeframe led me to hurry a bit through one session of the material (session 3), where more time explaining how discipleship happens through programming in the local church would have created a better learning experience. This session delved into some important research (Lifeway Research's “Transformational Discipleship Assessment”) and the session builds a case for how a church's practical programming depends on biblical priorities of discipleship in Act 1-2. These elements of the session require focused thought and it would have been valuable to be able to “linger” in these topics for a while longer. Schedule constraints also prevented me from allowing time for



ministry departments to present the discipleship pathway for their area(s) to the larger group at the end of the seminar—a feature that may not be necessary but would clearly offer many benefits. While the participants themselves did not “feel” these limitations (indeed, numerous participants thanked me for managing time well and keeping it to one half of the day), as an instructor I wonder if exploring a moderately-extended seminar is warranted by these noted weaknesses.<sup>8</sup>

A second weakness related to the final workshop on which ministry teams spent time—where they were asked to identify how their current ministry programming fits into the discipleship pathway grid that had been taught.<sup>9</sup> While I attempted to explain the exercise before giving teams time to discuss together, two of the ministry teams in particular had some clarifying questions they asked me about as I walked around the room and checked in on the groups—indicating that I perhaps could have been more clear in my initial explanation. Furthermore, the completed discipleship pathway grids revealed a mixed understanding of how specific programming lines up in the grid. For example, Brookside’s college ministry included “large group teaching” in each of the three columns (“discover,” “develop,” and “deploy”) along the “gathered worship” row. (Other select ministry departments also extended programming broadly across categories.) To be sure, faithfully teaching the Bible in large groups should certainly be accessible to and have application for people coming from various entry points of spiritual maturity. However, responses like this one revealed that I could have been even more explicit in pressing for *how* programs that span across categories apply to each column in the pathway. Broad answers make it difficult to evaluate specific effectiveness.

A third weakness was exposed after the seminar, in the hunger I sense for “next steps” in a formal sense. While I mentioned how this material should empower ministries

---

<sup>8</sup> More on this possibility below under “What I Would Do Differently.”

<sup>9</sup> See appendix 7 for the submitted ministry plans that I received after the seminar.

to own this material within their respective areas and advance discipleship there, a desire remained for how this topic would stay important at a “strategic planning” level and remain an anchor—not just within ministries but also across ministries and the life of the Brookside Church family. The value of discipleship was effectively stirred, but the “drop off” at the end felt abrupt to some ministry leaders. More attention should have been given to effectively spelling out potential next steps and answering the question, “Where do we go from here?”

### **What I Would Do Differently**

Each of the three weaknesses mentioned above offers an opportunity to learn and approach parts of the project differently, were I to lead a similar seminar again. First, I would explore the merits of extending the seminar—from three-and-a-half hours to six hours. I would not add any significant amount of material to the individual sessions, nor would I increase the total number of sessions; rather, this extended time would allow for a more comfortable time teaching (instead of feeling rushed through sections of the content). Slightly extending the time would also provide groups more time to discuss and interact, and (most importantly), provide the opportunity for ministry departments to present their initially-drafted discipleship pathways as a culminating part of the seminar. This culminating presentation would be an encouraging environment where ministry leaders benefit by articulating what they are doing, and it would also increase awareness among other church leaders regarding what is happening throughout the church to facilitate discipleship. A six-hour seminar would also maintain the flexibility of being offered either as a “mega-session” intensive (though a full day would need to be scheduled, and lunch would need to be factored in) or spread out over the course of five to six weeks, with each session scheduled for sixty to ninety minutes.

Second, I would bring more intentionality into how I led into the final workshop—where ministry teams spent time crafting an initial discipleship pathway for

their area(s) of ministry. One way to explain this portion of the seminar more effectively is to simply help the ministry leaders drive toward specificity. In the example mentioned above, Brookside's college ministry included "large group teaching" in each of the three columns ("discover," "develop," and "deploy") along the "gathered worship" row. To help them get more specific, I could have asked them to think about how elements of their large group teaching may be approached in light of the "discover," "develop," and "deploy" columns. For example, I could have encouraged the leaders to think through *how* their large group teaching addresses those who are discovering Jesus. (An answer may be that they clearly present the gospel at least two times each month, or they specifically engage skeptics by including questions our culture is asking in the introduction to the teaching.) Or I could have pressed the college leaders to clarify *how* their large group teaching deploys owners/multipliers. (An answer may be that they instill vision for reaching others through multiplied relationships, or that they equip with tools that college students can employ on their campuses and in their dorm rooms.) In other words, for programs that span across the columns of the discipleship pathway, ministry leaders should be directed to think about how the specific elements of the program address the particular columns under consideration.

Another way I would help maximize the time that ministry teams spend workshopping their discipleship pathways at the end of the seminar is by preparing a "point leader" (e.g., the director of the particular ministry department) in advance. This preparation could include a simple paper (or electronic) description of the goals of this final workshop, and how to navigate discussion. Or it could include a brief meeting with them in advance—orienting them to the workshop, clarifying expectations, and helping them know how to make the most of that time. By having a better-prepared point leader at each table the ministry departments would not be solely dependent on me with any questions that may arise, and each table would have someone already aware (at least at a high level) of the goals and expectations for that exercise.

A third adjustment I would make is to conclude the seminar by providing some forecast of next steps, answering the question, “Where do we go from there?” Two layers of next steps would be presented. One layer of next steps would be directly addressed to the specific ministry departments. I would ask them to let this material continue to percolate in their minds and discussions as a ministry team, and that I would follow up with each ministry leader three to four weeks after the seminar to see what other ideas, questions, comments, or concerns are rising to the surface. After this initial follow-up with ministry leaders, I would arrange a brief check-in at least two other times each year with ministry leaders to sustain the trajectory of the discipleship pathway and address issues that may be arising.

Another layer of next steps would be to invite interested leaders into a rhythm of meetings and intentional learning to think, share, and grow in a focused way around the topic of discipleship in and for the local church, with this discipleship pathway as a guiding framework. The choice to be involved would be entirely optional, and a rhythm of meetings would be set once participants have demonstrated interest. In healthy communication with church elders and key staff, this “discipleship focus group” could serve as a valuable resource for the local church. We do not want this discipleship pathway to simply gather dust in a file cabinet; these sustainable next steps can help galvanize and harness a healthy interest in discipleship as the local church continues to advance the Great Commission Jesus gave us.

Having examined the project’s goals, strengths, and weaknesses, reflections of both a theological and personal nature are considered next.

### **Theological Reflections**

Numerous theological reflections emerge when I look back over the entire project. In terms of anthropology, insight is provided into humanity’s created design in relationship with God. The 6C picture of discipleship that was discovered in Matthew and

that is consistent with what it means to follow God throughout Scripture carries tremendous implications for how we view ourselves as man and woman, created in God's image. We are created for commitment to God—He alone is our Lord and deserves our allegiance. This commitment is much more than a blind allegiance, however; this commitment is informed by a rich communion with the triune God, made possible through the reconciling work of Jesus Christ (e.g., Rom 5:1-2) and the adopting work of the Holy Spirit (e.g., Gal 4:4-7). We are created for community with others. Our character should reflect God's own heart, with desires that honor his commands. Our conduct similarly should align with his will, and our commission—that is, lives of purpose and self-giving, others-oriented mission—is set and shaped by God and his Word.

While the Bible gives us a clear and compelling vision for this holistic, God-honoring anthropology, sin (i.e., hamartiology) helps us understand how each component of this six-sided picture of discipleship has been warped, polluted, and falls short of God's design (Rom 3:23). In one short passage, Romans 3:10-18 dismantles each of these "Cs" of discipleship: our commitment is corrupt and our communion with God is severed ("no one seeks for God" and "[t]here is no fear of God before their eyes," vv. 11, 18); community-eroding practices are evident in ungodly speech and hostile action (e.g., "they use their tongues to deceive" and "[t]heir feet are swift to shed blood"). Character is warped in wrong pursuits and an ignorance of peace (e.g., vv. 11-12, 17). Conduct is sinful instead of righteous, evil instead of good (e.g., vv. 12-15). Instead of advancing God's commission, sinful humanity is "swift to shed blood" (v. 15) and their paths are characterized by "ruin and misery" (v. 16).

And yet God, in his mercy, provides a way to make us right with God and experience true and eternal life with him. An understanding of Christology and soteriology demonstrates that in his perfect humanity (e.g., Heb 4:15), Christ was the perfect embodiment of 6C life. Through his work on the cross, he made it possible for sinful humanity to be reconciled to God (see Rom 5:1), experience his grace, and—

transformed and motivated by God’s powerful grace—walk in the good works God has prepared for us (Eph 2:4-10). Christ’s work makes it possible for believers to experience a genuine transformation into the image for which we were created (2 Cor 3:18; also Col 3:10)—which surely includes an increasing realization of the six-sided portrait of discipleship. The ultimate realization of this transformation is included in an eschatological orientation of reality, where—because of Christ’s renewing work and his ultimate victory over sin and Satan—Jesus’s followers will experience the culmination of commitment to God, communion with him, community with others, transformed character, conduct, and commission (see esp. Rev 21-22).

Two more theological reflections also deserve mention as I look back over this project. First, the project has reinforced the irreplaceable relationship that exists between ecclesiology and discipleship. In Acts 2 we discovered six priorities of the earliest church that were integral to the formation of disciples in the first century: (1) dependence on and empowerment by the Holy Spirit; (2) apostolic teaching; (3) community; (4) ordinances that keep the church tethered to the gospel; (5) God-centeredness; and (6) mission. These same six priorities remain essential for the formation of disciples still today. What was said earlier is worth repeating: A robust view of discipleship must be closely linked to a healthy and fully-orbed ecclesiology. Similarly, a healthy ecclesiology cannot be abstract or only academic; a healthy ecclesiology will lead to a noticeable difference—evident growth in discipleship—in the lives of believers.<sup>10</sup>

Second, this project is an example demonstrating the clarity and sufficiency of Scripture. The sufficiency of Scripture teaches that “God’s Word provides all that his people need to gain eternal life and to live godly lives.”<sup>11</sup> The clarity of Scripture holds

---

<sup>10</sup> See pp. 69-70 above.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher W. Morgan with Robert A. Peterson, *Christian Theology: The Biblical Story and Our Faith* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), 79.

that “God so reveals himself in Scripture that, as God’s people, we are able to understand its basic message.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, Scripture provides what we need to live godly lives, and it does so in a clear, understandable way. This project has demonstrated how the sufficiency and clarity of Scripture are manifest in its presentation of discipleship. “Discipleship” does not have to remain some broad, vague topic that is hard to understand in its particulars. Through a study of the teaching blocks in Matthew, aligned with what it means to follow God across the storyline of the Bible, a vivid picture of discipleship emerges that offers us categories by which we can pursue a growing and holistic discipleship in specific areas—namely our commitment, communion with God, community with others, character, conduct, and commission. This specificity reveals that God’s Word is sufficient and clear not only in pointing us toward a lifetime of discipleship broadly; God’s Word also provides a sufficient clarity so we discover what is included in following God in specific ways that have bearing on our particular lives still today.

### **Personal Reflections**

My personal reflections on this project will focus on areas of significance that the topics of “discipleship” or “discipleship pathway” carry for myself personally, for other church leaders, and for the local church itself. For me personally, this project has helped me appreciate Jesus’s call to “follow him” more deeply and holistically. Before I create programs that facilitate discipleship, I must internalize and align myself personally with the implications of what it means to follow Jesus. This “followership” is something I never move past—only more deeply into. With this reality in mind, revisiting the depth and beauty of what it means to follow Jesus has invigorated my own ongoing faith. This invigoration has been true for each of the six Cs of discipleship, but perhaps especially so

---

<sup>12</sup> Morgan, *Christian Theology*, 80.

with “communion with God.” Commitment is not blind allegiance, nor are conduct and commission severed from relationship. A rich understanding of communion with God adds vibrancy to each of the other Cs in the 6C picture. Pastor Tom Nelson’s words bear repeating: “Spending much time with Jesus is not an option for pastors; it is essential and the fountainhead of sustained and effective servant leadership. Those who serve with us will recognize that the most distinctive and persuasive quality of our lives and leadership is that we have been with Jesus.”<sup>13</sup>

For other church leaders, this same emphasis on ongoing personal discipleship applies. Pastors must never substitute working *for* Jesus for following Jesus themselves. With this anchor in place, more can be said to church leaders as well. As shepherds and ministers in the church, we must care deeply about helping those in our care grow as disciples through the local church. Pastoral leaders and ministry directors must not settle for ministry activity that is separated from growing in Christlikeness. Church programs must point to discipleship. This important point underlines the value of a discipleship pathway—where a clear picture of discipleship is in view, programs (or “pavers”) are in place to provide structure, and both access and movement are valued as we help people grow as disciples through the programs of a local church.

For the local church as a whole, the values of discipleship and a discipleship pathway are important for reinforcing the church’s foundations and establishing the means through which God works powerfully. By valuing discipleship and establishing a discipleship pathway, the church’s foundation is reinforced. Discipleship is a foundational priority of the church (e.g., Matt 28:19-20; Acts 14:21-22). Certain eroding soils of culture, the storms of opposition, and the sinful drift of the human heart require that this foundation be revisited frequently and maintained—so it remains strong and intact. And

---

<sup>13</sup> Tom Nelson, *The Flourishing Pastor: Recovering the Lost Art of Shepherd Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 91.



with this foundation strong, means are established through which God works powerfully. Acts 1-2 revealed key priorities the early church pursued in its making of disciples; these same priorities were the divinely-ordained means in which God's presence and power were manifestly evident. The valuing of discipleship and the establishment of a discipleship pathway that has Acts 1-2 as its blueprint continues to invite God's presence and power today.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus's final command to his followers in Matthew was to "make disciples" (Matt 28:19-20). Discipleship was a priority to Jesus, and discipleship was a priority to the earliest church. Discipleship must remain a priority still today. Thankfully, we are not left to guesswork about what that looks like or about how to make progress in the right direction. A careful reading of Matthew's teaching blocks unveils a vivid picture of discipleship that includes commitment to God, communion with God, community with others, character, conduct, and commission. A close reading of Acts 1-2 reveals how the early church made disciples—through prioritizing dependence on the Holy Spirit, biblical teaching, community, ordinances anchored in the gospel, God-centeredness, and mission.

As we continue to value discipleship and establish discipleship pathways aligned with this clear biblical material, may we do so confidently as we remember that Jesus is with us always (Matt 28:20). And may we do so in hope of the life-changing, difference-making power of the gospel (Acts 2:42-47).

## APPENDIX 1

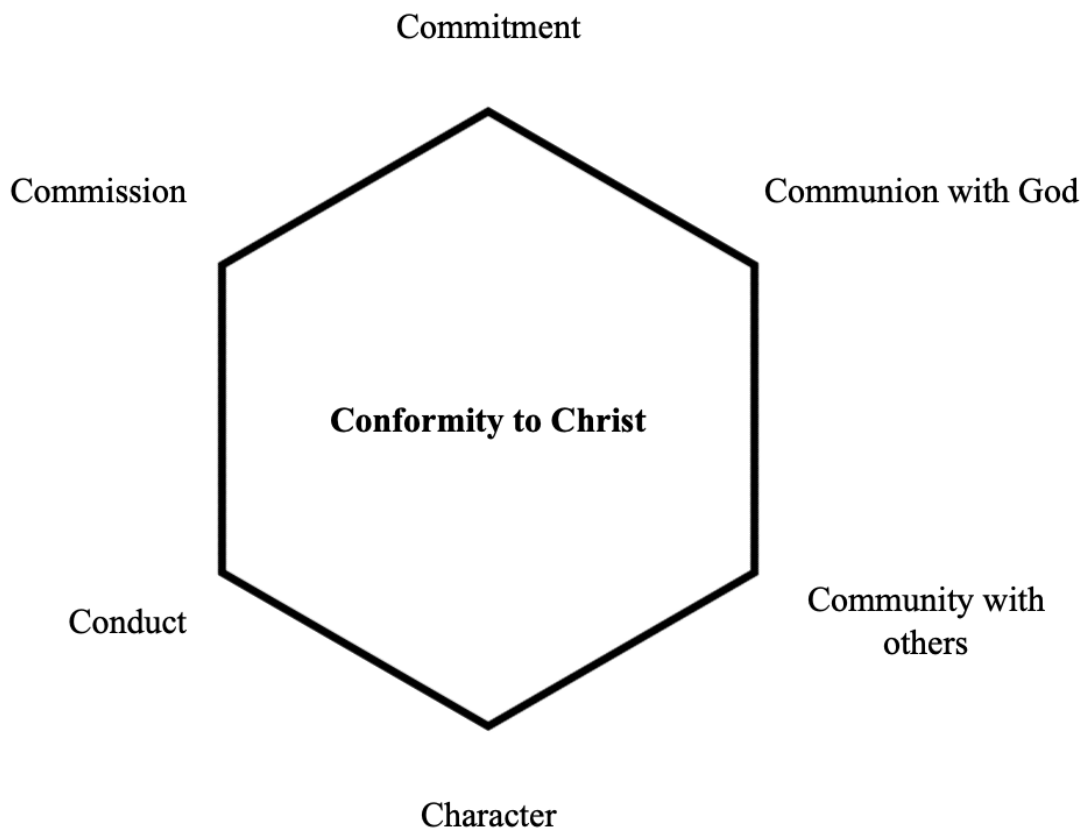
### BROOKSIDE CHURCH—STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Brookside’s Strategic Framework is designed to provide a simple, clear visual overview of the church’s mission, values and priorities.



APPENDIX 2

DISCIPLESHIP—CONFORMITY TO CHRIST IN 6 C'S



APPENDIX 3  
SURVEY ON THE UNDERSTANDING AND  
PRACTICE OF DISCIPLESHIP (SUPD)

This survey<sup>1</sup> is designed to assess the current level of understanding about discipleship among respondents. Additionally, the survey will gauge how discipleship affects practice within ministry programs.

---

<sup>1</sup> Appreciation should be noted for William Edward Ashpern Mofield, “Developing a Discipleship Program at White House First Baptist Church in White House, Tennessee.” (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 96-100. His own “Discipleship Knowledge and Practice Survey” served as a springboard for this SUPD survey.

SURVEY ON THE UNDERSTANDING AND  
PRACTICE OF DISCIPLESHIP (SUPD)

**Agreement to participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding of biblical discipleship and the discipleship practices of the participant, within ministry programming contexts at Brookside Church. This research is being conducted by Tim Wiebe for purposes of collecting data for a doctoral ministry project.

In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

**Part 1: Getting to Know You**

The first part of this survey will obtain some simple demographic information.

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing an “X” next to the appropriate answer.

1. What best describes your role in the church?
  - A. \_\_\_\_\_ I am on staff in some capacity with the church.
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_ I am currently volunteering in some capacity (e.g., Community Groups, Kids Ministry, Youth Ministry, Production Team, Guest Services, etc.).
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_ I attend on Sunday mornings.
  - D. \_\_\_\_\_ Other:

2. How long has it been since you first placed your faith in Jesus?
- A. \_\_\_\_\_ 0-5 years
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_ 6-10 years
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_ 11-15 years
  - D. \_\_\_\_\_ 16-20 years
  - E. \_\_\_\_\_ 20+ years
  - F. \_\_\_\_\_ I have not placed my faith in Jesus nor do I consider myself a follower of Jesus.

3. What is your age in years?

- A. \_\_\_\_\_ 18-24
- B. \_\_\_\_\_ 25-34
- C. \_\_\_\_\_ 35-44
- D. \_\_\_\_\_ 45-54
- E. \_\_\_\_\_ 55-64
- F. \_\_\_\_\_ 65+

## **Part 2: Understanding Discipleship**

Directions: Based on the following scale, circle the option that best represents your agreement with the corresponding statement:

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat,  
AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

4. If asked right now, I would be able to confidently articulate a brief biblical definition of what it means to be a disciple (expanding beyond “following Jesus”).

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

5. If asked right now, I would be able to support my understanding of discipleship with at least two to three Bible passages.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

6. I know what Jesus's Great Commission is and can quickly find it in the Bible.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

7. I have a clear understanding of *why* discipleship is important.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

8. I believe the organized life of the local church plays a key role in facilitating discipleship.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

9. I can explain to someone else *how* the local church plays a role in facilitating discipleship.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

10. I believe Brookside Church deeply values promoting a life of discipleship.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

11. I'm striving to continue growing in discipleship myself.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

12. I think intentionally about how I can disciple others in a multiplying sense (i.e., discipling others who will be equipped and motivated to disciple others themselves).

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

**Part 2: Practicing Discipleship as Leaders within Ministry Programming Contexts**

13. There are clear ways that programs I oversee or in which I am directly involved teach and promote strong biblical content.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

14. There are clear ways that programs I oversee or in which I am directly involved teach and promote the gospel of Jesus Christ.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

15. There are clear ways that programs I oversee or in which I am directly involved teach and promote worship of and obedience to the triune God.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

16. There are clear ways that programs I oversee or in which I am directly involved encourage community (gathering in groups and practicing the biblical “one anothers”).

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

17. There are clear ways that programs I oversee or in which I am directly involved promote mission (i.e., opportunities for service and evangelism)

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

18. Within the ministry department(s) I oversee or in which I am involved, there are clear opportunities for participants at varying levels of spiritual maturity (from non-Christian to devoted follower of Jesus) to engage in meaningful programming.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

19. Within the ministry department(s) I oversee or in which I am involved, there are clearly established programs toward which I can direct interested seekers.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA



20. Within the ministry department(s) I oversee or in which I am involved, there are clearly established programs toward which I can direct new Christians.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

21. Within the ministry department(s) I oversee or in which I am involved, there are clearly established programs toward which I can direct mature followers of Jesus.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

22. For ministry areas with which I am not directly involved, I am aware of the appropriate programs at Brookside to direct interested seekers toward.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

23. For ministry areas with which I am not directly involved, I am aware of the appropriate programs at Brookside to direct new Christians toward.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

24. For ministry areas with which I am not directly involved, I am aware of the appropriate programs at Brookside to direct mature followers of Jesus toward.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

25. Within the last six weeks, I have discussed the practice of discipleship with volunteers or others who are involved in my ministry area(s).

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

26. I can clearly articulate how our ministry programming intentionally facilitates discipleship to volunteers in my ministry.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

27. I talk with other ministry leaders and volunteers about the priority of discipleship in ministry.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

28. I have criteria that can help me evaluate ministry programs I oversee or in which I am involved, helping me discern whether we are helping people grow as disciples.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

29. I feel a healthy responsibility not just to promote discipleship in ministry programming, but to grow in discipleship as a leader myself.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

30. I am listening for stories of how people in my ministry area(s) are growing in spiritual maturity.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

31. Within the last three weeks, I have shared a story (either publicly in a ministry environment or informally with someone else) of how people are growing spiritually because of how God is working in and through the local church.

SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA

APPENDIX 4  
DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY CURRICULUM—  
TEACHING OUTLINE

The discipleship pathway developed in chapters 2 and 3 of this work is now presented in an accessible way, providing orientation and direction for local churches wanting to implement a pathway that is (1) rooted in the biblical picture and practices of discipleship, and (2) offers balanced structure, access, and movement.

In the pages that follow, five sessions are outlined at a high level—providing a helpful teaching guide that can be picked up and utilized by others. As a teaching guide conducive for use in the local church, what follows will be noticeably more personal, conversational, and informal in style. (While this curriculum is specifically designed for use at Brookside Church in Omaha, NE, the material can be easily translated into other local church contexts.) Each session includes a primary objective, teaching points (with selective examples of illustrations or creative teaching ideas), and learning exercises that accompany the session. The layout of this curriculum is designed to be flexible enough that it can be presented either across five separate sessions (each session approximately 30-45 minutes in length) or within an “intensive” format (i.e., a longer block of time of one morning or one afternoon, for example).

DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY CURRICULUM—  
TEACHING OUTLINE

**Session 1: The Importance of Discipleship (and a  
Discipleship Pathway)**

**Primary Learning Objective**

The first session orients participants to the importance of discipleship biblically, and to the value that a discipleship pathway adds to the life of a healthy church.

**Teaching Outline**

\*\* Special note: For those utilizing the Survey on the Understanding and Practice of Discipleship (SUPD),<sup>1</sup> the survey should be administered at the very beginning of the time together, prior to other instruction in the Discipleship Pathway curriculum

- I. Why is Discipleship So Important?
  - a. The biblical priority:
    - i. Jesus’s final command in Matthew 28:19-20: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
    - ii. See also Acts 14:21-22; Galatians 4:19; Colossians 1:28-29.
  - b. Brookside’s mission as a church: “Helping people find and follow Jesus.”

---

<sup>1</sup> See appendix 3.

- c. While the priority of discipleship is clear, these biblical texts and Brookside’s mission invite important follow-up questions that deserve clarity:
- i. Questions like: “What does it mean to follow Jesus?” and “What does ‘finding Jesus’s involve, and mean for our lives?’”<sup>2</sup> How do we make sure “finding” is *connected* to “following,” so the former genuinely leads to the latter?
  - ii. These questions drive attention to a larger question: “What does it mean to be a disciple?” We’ll answer this soon, but for now I simply want to help you feel the importance of the question.
  - iii. Illus:
    - Teenage “day job” laying underground sprinkler system—I was given a broad understanding of the task but zero specifics. I knew broadly what I was supposed to be doing but had zero direction on how to do it or what details I needed to keep in mind. The experience was discouraging, frustrating, and it ended up making more work for everyone.
    - The point: Specificity matters! I needed help not only in knowing what to do (the big goal) but also how to do it (the steps).
- d. Transition: So we now know *that* discipleship is a priority, and clarity is valuable regarding *how* we facilitate disciples as a local church. All of

---

<sup>2</sup> This language of “finding Jesus” must not be mistaken to indicate either that “Jesus is hiding” or that the initiative for people finding Jesus is one’s own. Rather, the phrase is intended more simply in the sense of individuals—who have been called and whose hearts have been opened—discovering who Jesus is and placing their faith in him for the first time. Important cross references for digging into this point include John 6:44; Acts 16:14; Gal 1:6 (esp. note the language demonstrating that God is “the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ”); Gal 4:9; see also Matt 13:44-46; Luke 19:1-10; Rom 10:9-13.

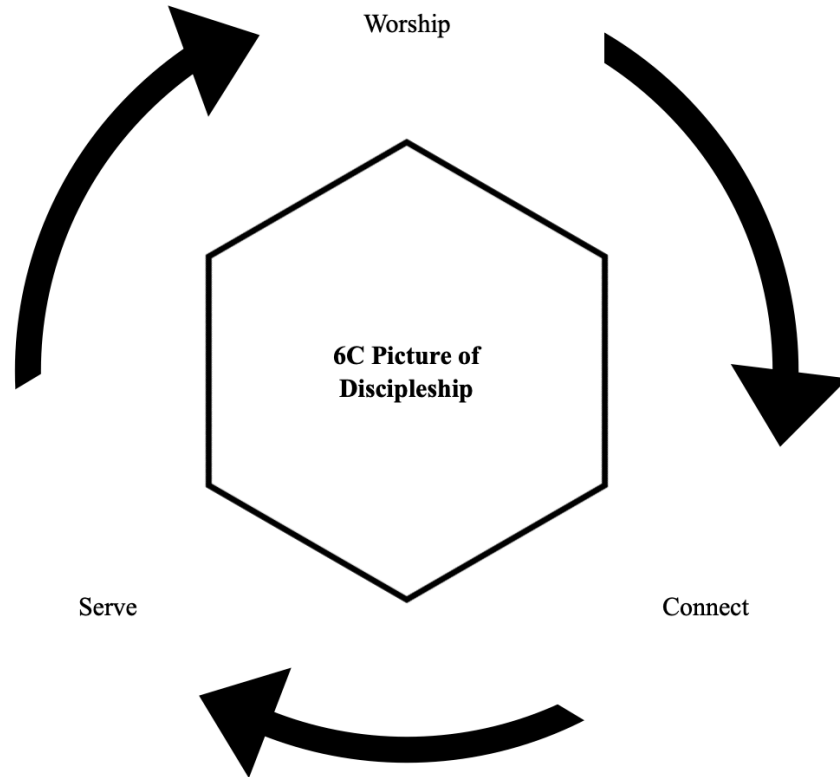
these points thus far bring us right up to the concept of a discipleship pathway.

- II. What is a Discipleship Pathway?
- a. Defining “discipleship pathway”: “Most simply, a discipleship pathway is the process by which discipleship happens. ‘Discipleship pathway’ is just a fancy phrase for the intentional route, steps, and paths in your church to develop missionary disciples of Jesus for Kingdom impact.”<sup>3</sup>
  - b. Three main components of a healthy discipleship pathway:
    - i. Illus: Think of a landscape architect. When laying a beautiful, functioning pathway he needs to have a picture in mind, the pieces in place (i.e., structure, “the pavers”), and he needs to facilitate access and movement (so it’s inviting and goes somewhere). These same components are essential for a discipleship pathway in the local church.
    - ii. Component #1: Picture/direction—What is the picture of a disciple? Is that picture clear and comprehensive?
    - iii. Component #2: Structure (“the pavers”)—What local church practices help facilitate discipleship in a balanced way? What programs embody these practices?
      - Clarify here that we’re focusing on what the church *as a local church* does to cultivate disciples. As important as individual disciplines are, that’s not the focus of this material.

---

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Im, *No Silver Bullets: 5 Small Shifts That Will Transform Your Ministry* (Nashville: B&H, 2017), 183.

- iv. Component #3: Access and movement—Are we taking people somewhere? And are there various and accessible entry points?
- v. Bird’s-eye view of a Discipleship Pathway:



- vi. Early comments:
- Point out “picture” (6C picture), “pavers” (worship, connect, serve), and “access and movement” (arrows, with on-ramps into each).
  - As important as these components are, we can go deeper into any of them. What specifically are we doing as we worship, connect, and serve? How do these priorities take practical shape? How are they moving people toward greater maturity

(and not just serving as ends-in-themselves)?

- Optional illus: Roundabout illus vs flywheel — a roundabout goes nowhere, whereas a flywheel generates momentum and propels movement.
- All of this reinforces the importance of a discipleship pathway!

c. The value of a discipleship pathway

i. Clarity: Knowing where we are going, what we have for people at various entry points, and how we'll be getting there.

- Not just good for your own ministry, but also good across ministries. So you know where/how to direct others, and what else is going on in the life the church. Preventive measure against ministry silos.
- Illus: “Call before you dig” commercials—the value of understanding the larger infrastructure and knowing that digging a hole may have bigger implications than you think.

ii. Intentionality: Getting where we want to go on purpose.

- The sobering reality is that we *are* cultivating and creating something. Formation of some sort is happening. A pathway like this one helps us be intentional with where we're pointing people and how we are getting there.
- What are the best ways of cultivating disciples in our various ministries? What things do we need to revisit? Are there gaps that exist in helping form disciples? A healthy discipleship pathway helps us answer these questions.



- iii. Alignment: Working together toward a worthy goal.
  - Illus: *Boys in the Boat* story of “swing”<sup>4</sup>—the multiplied power of everyone working in the same direction.
  - Illus: Contrast this “swing” with bumper cars at an amusement park (or a crash derby at a fair). Lots of movement—but no one is getting anywhere and if you don’t watch out you can get hurt!
- iv. Ownership: This takes all of us. I want you to see yourselves as owners of this. Empowered to pass this along and bring it to life.

### **Learning Exercises**

1. Discussion question: Why is highlighting the importance of discipleship as a local church important? What realities can distract us from this primary goal?
2. Discussion question: Review the value of a discipleship pathway covered in the session. Does one value stand out to you more than the others? Why?

---

<sup>4</sup> See Daniel James Brown, *The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 161-62.

## Session 2: What is a Disciple? Toward a Comprehensive, Clear, and Compelling Biblical Picture

### Primary Learning Objective

The second session paints a biblical picture of discipleship, providing a healthy specificity about what it means to be a disciple.

### Teaching Outline

- I. Introductory comments and general overview:
  - a. Personal exercise: On a piece of paper, write down briefly how you would define “disciple.” How did you come up with this definition? (Compare and contrast answers. Draw special attention to differences that may be present. It’s important for us to be on the same page with this definition.)
  - b. At its most basic level, “disciple” means learner or follower. A disciple is someone who follows Jesus.
  - c. Michael J. Wilkins adds this robust definition in his valuable book, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship*: “[W]hen we speak of Christian discipleship and discipling we are speaking of what it means to grow as a Christian in every area of life. . . . Discipleship and discipling mean living a fully human life in this world in union with Jesus Christ and growing in conformity to his image.”<sup>5</sup>
  - d. Dallas Willard quote: “A disciple is a learner, a student, an apprentice—a *practitioner*, even if only a beginner. The New Testament literature, which must be allowed to define our terms if we are ever to get our bearings in the way of Christ, makes this clear. In that context, disciples of Jesus are people who do not just profess certain views as their own but apply their

---

<sup>5</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 41-42.

growing understanding of life in the Kingdom of the Heavens to every aspect of their life on earth.”<sup>6</sup>

- e. Transition: But can we get more specific? A study of the Bible (esp. the teaching blocks in Matthew—expand on the relevance of learning from Matthew’s Gospel here) spotlights six areas of life that deserve our attention as we grow in discipleship. Keeping all of these areas in mind helps us pursue discipleship in a balanced, holistic way.

## II. A Biblical Picture of Discipleship<sup>7</sup>

### a. Commitment

- i. “Following Jesus changes my allegiance.” (This is not consumerism or another piece of a self-actualization project you control.)
- ii. See Matt 10:38-39; Luke 9:23-24; also Rom 10:9-10
- iii. Situate this point in a context of justification by grace through faith. This commitment is not a way to earn favor with God but reflects a heart that has been changed by grace.
- iv. Illus: Bonhoeffer’s cheap grace vs. costly grace<sup>8</sup>

### b. Communion with God

- i. “Following Jesus opens up intimacy with God, through the Spirit.” (It’s a relationship!)
- ii. See Matt 28:20; John 17:3; also Gen 3:8; Matt 7:23; Matt 22:36-40; John 15:15; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6-7; Phil 3:7-11; Rev 21:3

---

<sup>6</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), p. xi.

<sup>7</sup> See also appendix 2. Teachers are recommended to “build” this graphic point-by-point while presenting the notes in this section.

<sup>8</sup> See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1959), 43-46. (Especially pp. 44-45.)

iii. Expand on richness of “communion with God” language here. Can include one or more of these:

- “...ignorance of God — ignorance both of his ways *and the practice of communion with him* — lies at the root of much of the church’s weakness today.”<sup>9</sup>
- “Spending much time with Jesus is not an option for pastors [or any who serve in a church]; it is essential and the fountainhead of sustained and effective servant leadership. Those who serve with us will recognize that the most distinctive and persuasive quality of our lives and leadership is that we have been with Jesus [see Acts 4:13].”<sup>10</sup>
- For much more on this see esp John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*.<sup>11</sup>
- Not a superficial relationship but a deep knowing and being known! A relationship where you are seen, safe, and valued.

iv. Illus: *Return of the King* (Lord of the Rings) movie segment:<sup>12</sup>  
When Frodo sees Sam after awakening at very end of movie. Their gaze and what’s communicated in that moment carries so much weight—of knowing each other deeply, and of having been through so much together! [Alternate illustration: Vulcan

---

<sup>9</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 12; italics added.

<sup>10</sup> Tom Nelson, *The Flourishing Pastor: Recovering the Lost Art of Shepherd Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 91.

<sup>11</sup> John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, directed by Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2003).

mindmeld—feeling what they’re feeling, seeing things through their eyes.]

c. Community with others

- i. Following Jesus means belonging and transformed relationships.
- ii. See Matt 22:36-40 (loving others); also Mark 3:35; Rom 12:9-21; Heb 10:24-25
- iii. Also: “one anothers” throughout NT
- iv. Challenge isolation and individualism of current culture

d. Character

- i. “Following Jesus will change me from the inside out.” (Character matters! Not simply external obedience.)
- ii. See Matt 5-7 (esp Beatitude in 5:3-11); 1 Cor 13:1-7; also Gal 5:22-23; Jas 3:17-18; 2 Pet 1:5-9
- iii. Illus: Spiderman movies—“With great power comes great responsibility.” Gifts separated from character are dangerous!

e. Conduct

- i. “Following Jesus transforms the way I live and what I do.”
- ii. See Matt 7:15-20; 28:20 (“teaching them to *obey*,” [NIV] emphasis added); 1 Cor 6:18-20; Eph 4:17ff; Phil 1:27; Col 3:1ff; 1 Tim 4:12
- iii. Illus: Gardening—when you plant something you want to see fruit! (But note the order: fruit is the result of the seed. So too conduct is a result of a changed heart.)
- iv. Pastoral comments here: Sometimes fruit takes longer to bear than you want, and it looks differently than you had in mind (or pops up in different places). So too with life change!

f. Commission

- i. “Following Jesus gives me purpose and sends me out on mission.”
- ii. See Matt 4:19; 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; also Matt 25:14-30 (“stewards” not “owners” of our lives)
- iii. See also Phil 1:21-26 and interweave with my own story  
(switching focus in seminary from professorship to pastoring):  
Paul’s primary desire was to depart, but his decision was to stay on mission. Not what he wanted but what Christ wanted! (Mission!)

### III. Don’t-Miss Take-aways from this Picture of Discipleship

- a. This six-sided picture is more directional than destination-based. We never fully arrive at any of these things in such a way that we can “check off the box” and move past them. We move more deeply into these things!
- b. The combination of these six areas helps us cultivate holistic discipleship.
- c. This picture isn’t just for ministry programs. This starts with you.
  - i. Illus: Airplane oxygen mask. To save others don’t overlook yourself! (See also 1 Tim 4:16.)
  - ii. And these things are important regardless of our job or where we’re volunteering. These qualities are important for who we are, and who we are becoming. (Danger of hypocrisy, duplicity, or manufactured spirituality—see Prov 11:3; Luke 20:23; also Matt 23:25-28.)
- d. All of this is motivated by and empowered by God’s grace!

### Learning Exercises

1. Large group discussion question: Why is having this clarity on the picture of discipleship valuable personally? Why is it valuable as people who work on staff or volunteer in big ways in a church?

2. Large group discussion question: Why is having this clarity on the picture of discipleship important as a ministry team? How can this clarity help you practically in your planning and where you're taking people?
3. Workshopping the session:
  - a. **Question to focus on:** What does it look like for someone involved in a ministry area you oversee to be growing in these areas in their everyday life? (See table below.)
  - b. **Further explanation/clarification (if/as needed):**
    - i. We want to articulate what it looks like to grow in these areas (i.e., picture of discipleship) as a first grader, a middle- or high-schooler, a young professional, a mom of four, etc.
    - ii. In your ministry area, what words, pictures, concepts, or illustrations would you use to make these areas of discipleship "vivid" and help this picture "come alive" for people?
    - iii. Here's why this exercise is important: If we can't paint a picture of vivid discipleship for those in our areas of ministry, they likely won't know what direction they should be moving!
    - iv. The goal with this exercise is not for this language to become something you need to put on the wall in a room or on the header of a website. Rather, the goal is to jumpstart thinking about what it looks like for you to talk about these things with the people you serve in natural ways. Think more "informal" and natural.
    - v. You can respond with things you already say. Or this exercise might pinpoint areas you don't talk about a lot over the course of a season in ministry. (In which case this could identify something you want to start talking about more as we cultivate holistic disciples.)

**c. Exercise nuts and bolts**

- i. Break up into ministry teams for this.
- ii. Allow 10 min. (Groups likely won't finish this exercise in that time. The goal is to give them a good head start.)
- iii. Workshop sheet (sample)

Discipleship picture	Explanation tailored to those in your area of ministry (i.e., how can you make this picture “come alive” to those you’re talking with in your ministry area?)
Commitment	
Communion with God	
Community with others	
Character	
Conduct	
Commission	

**4. Key take-aways**

- a. What are your big take-aways from this “workshop” time? What was helpful?
- b. Anyone have any examples of ways you’ve used this language in the last two to three weeks?
- c. Anybody realize a priority (one of the “Cs”) that’s underrepresented in ministry you’ve been leading? What can you do about this?



## **Session 3: How Do We Make Disciples as a Local Church? Three “Pavers” that Provide Structure and Footing**

### **Primary Learning Objective**

With a picture of discipleship firmly in mind, Session 3 is designed to begin clarifying *how* progress can be made by connecting the picture of discipleship to biblical priorities. Attention will also be given to how these priorities find expression in key programs offered by a local church.

### **Teaching Outline**

- I. Question: What biblical truths and practical research lead to the three “pavers” that have been identified—namely ‘worship, connect, and serve’?
- II. Answer #1: These pavers embody biblical priorities that we discover in Acts 1-2 (with special focus on Acts 2:42-47)
  - a. The reason Acts 1-2 deserves our attention: How did the disciples apply Jesus’s final command in Matt 28? From this passage, what do we learn that they prioritize?
  - b. Six priorities from Acts 1-2
    - i. The priority of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4, 8; 2:1-4ff)—Spirit-dependence and Spirit-empowerment
    - ii. The priority of apostolic teaching (i.e., biblical authority) (Acts 2:42)
    - iii. The priority of community (Acts 2:42, 46)
    - iv. The priority of the ordinances (i.e., the gospel)
      - The Lord’s Supper: Acts 2:42 (“the breaking of bread”)
      - Baptism: Acts 2:38, 41
    - v. The priority of God-centeredness (Acts 2:42, 43, 47)
    - vi. The priority of mission (Acts 1:8; 2:39, 47)

- c. Let's make sure we stay clear that these priorities are not ends-in-themselves. Purposefully understood, they help advance the picture of discipleship. Let's connect the dots. **Lead through learning exercise number 1 here (“Exercise connecting the priorities and picture of discipleship”—included below).**
- d. And let's not miss that these priorities find practical (and simple, straightforward) expression in the three pavers. It's easy to find connections between these priorities and the three pavers we're looking at.

III. Answer #2: These pavers are consistent with recent research on what churches can do—practically speaking—to advance discipleship.

- a. Help from the Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA)<sup>13</sup>
- i. Overview of TDA: The Transformational Discipleship Assessment is an in-depth study of discipleship “on the ground”—through interviews with experts and surveys of both Protestant pastors and 4000+ laity in North America.<sup>14</sup>
  - ii. Eight signposts that mark the lives of believers who are progressing in spiritual maturity<sup>15</sup> (don't miss the overlap between this list and our picture of discipleship!<sup>16</sup>):
    - Engaging the Bible
    - Obeying God and Denying Self

---

<sup>13</sup> For an overview of the Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA), see “Discipleship Pathway Assessment,” Lifeway Christian Resources, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://discipleshippathwayassessment.com/about/>. For a helpful summary of the TDA results and research, see Daniel Im, *No Silver Bullets: Five Small Shifts That Will Transform Your Ministry* (Nashville: B&H, 2017), 48-49.

<sup>14</sup> See again sources in n. 13.

<sup>15</sup> “8 Biblical Signposts,” Lifeway Christian Resources, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://discipleshippathwayassessment.com/signposts/>.

<sup>16</sup> See esp. table 6 on p. 110, where this overlap or alignment is spelled out clearly.

- Serving God and Others
- Sharing Christ
- Exercising Faith
- Seeking God
- Building Relationships
- Living Unashamed

iii. Daniel Im highlights four input goals that disproportionately influence progress in the signposts listed above: “[T]he research revealed that doing certain actions (input goals) would actually predict a higher score in each of the discipleship attributes.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, there are “certain things” we can be doing that cultivates progress in our 6C Picture of Discipleship. What are these “certain things” Im draws attention to?

- Reading the Bible
- Worship services
- Small classes or groups
- Serving God and others

iv. The goal in all of this must be stated: I’m trying to help you see and feel the connection between the clear, practical priorities of the Bible regarding discipleship and the programs the church spends time and resources on. The biblical priorities are embodied in these programs, and these programs are tethered to biblical priorities. Research confirms what the Bible has pointed us toward.

---

<sup>17</sup> Im, *No Silver Bullets*, 59. See also Im pp. 64-68, 219-24. While Im initially (pp. 64-68) identifies just the first three of these as especially influential input goals, later in the book when he is helping church leaders construct a discipleship pathway and the ongoing programs that significantly facilitate this path, he mentions all four of these input goals (pp. 219-24). This latter, culminating presentation is what is followed here.

- b. There's one more step to include in this session—clearly identifying the key programs that align with these input goals. These are the “pavers” (or provide structure) for the discipleship pathway. I'll list the three key programs and then provide a couple of comments by way of clarification.
- i. Three key programs (“the pavers”):
    - Gathered worship
    - Small groups, huddles, and classes
    - Serving opportunities
  - ii. It's pretty easy to see the overlap between the input goals and these programs, but let me provide three clarifications (“in case you're wondering”):
    - Q: What happened to “reading the Bible”? (A: It should be in *all* of these.)
    - Q: What's the difference between small groups and discipleship huddles, and why do each have value? (A: Difference is size; value is focus—groups allow for greater diversity in relationships; huddles better for life-on-life transparency and transformation. Brookside doesn't have a formal approach to these huddles yet, but we'll be thinking about and working toward this.)
    - Q: Small groups *and* classes? Do we need both? (A: Yes, when properly differentiated and intentionally crafted. See esp. J. T. English, *Deep Discipleship*.)
- c. We can start to pull some threads together by now, before moving on. By this point it's clear that a church that leans into these programs in a proper way (embodying biblical priorities and advancing the biblical picture) has

a strong start toward effectively making disciples as a local church, in obedience to Jesus's command.

### **Learning Exercises**

1. Exercise #1: Connecting the priorities and picture of discipleship
  - a. **Question to focus on:** How does each priority in Acts 1-2 advance the picture of discipleship already discovered?
  - b. **Further explanation/clarification (if/as needed):**
    - i. For each priority, consider how the pursuit and application of this priority transforms people in each area of the picture of discipleship. For example:
      - If a church is pursuing dependence on and empowerment by the Holy Spirit (“the priority of the Spirit”), how will that influence their commitment? Their character?
      - How does the priority of community shape character? Conduct?
      - Do 2-3 examples together as a large group.<sup>18</sup>
    - v. Why is this important to spend time on? The goal in this exercise is to help us see that these early church practices are not ends-in-themselves; they should lead to life change. Conversely, authentic growth in discipleship should not be left as a “choose your own adventure” but be rooted in these biblical priorities.
  - c. **Exercise nuts and bolts**
    - i. Large group exercise or ministry groups—depends on size of group.

---

<sup>18</sup> See table 2 on pp. 72-73 for a sampling of ways this worksheet can be filled out.

- ii. Allow 10-15 min. (Groups may not finish this exercise in that time. The goal is to give them a good head start and reinforce the idea that the priorities of discipleship should cultivate the picture of discipleship.)
- iii. Workshop sheet (sample)

**Exercise Connecting the Priorities and Picture of Discipleship**

	Commitment	Communion with God	Community with others	Character formation	Conduct	Commission
Priority of Holy Spirit						
Priority of apostolic teaching						
Priority of community						
Priority of ordinances						
Priority of God-centeredness						
Priority of mission						

- 2. Learning exercise #2: Discussion questions to be worked through as table groups (8-10 min)
  - a. Small group discussion: In your own words, how has this session helped you better understand the importance and value of the three “pavers”—worship, connect, and serve?

- b. Small group discussion: How can you help make sure these pavers don't become "ends-in-themselves," but instead are meaningful ways for people to grow as disciples?

## **Session 4: The Value of Access and Movement for a Healthy Discipleship Pathway**

### **Primary Learning Objective**

This session will take the key programs that are now established and advocate for both (1) access to these programs by those entering from various stages of spiritual maturity, and (2) movement across these programs—facilitating increasing spiritual maturity.

### **Teaching Outline**

- I. Introductory comments
  - a. Key programs are now in place but there's still work to do on the pathway. Why? A pathway isn't just a pile of pavers. It's arranged to invite access and facilitate movement.
  - b. These are the two areas (access and movement) we'll focus on here.
- II. Access
  - a. The importance of access:
    - i. Access is important because of the reality that people will engage your church from a variety of levels of spiritual interest or maturity.
    - ii. Understanding the value of access also prevents a discipleship pathway from simply being a conveyer belt. Access helps keep the focus on where individuals are rather than rigidly imposing a "one size fits all" approach to discipleship.
  - b. Biblical support
    - i. Notice how Paul contextualized his ministry (compare Acts 13:13-42 with Acts 17:22-34).
    - ii. See also Jude's awareness of engaging people based on where they're coming from (Jude 20-23).



- c. Various stages from which people will engage the pathway
  - i. Skeptic
  - ii. Seeker
  - iii. Consumer
  - iv. Contributor
  - v. Owner/Multiplier

### III. Movement

- a. The importance of movement: See Gal 4:19; Col 1:28-29; Heb 5:11-14; 2 Pet 1:3-8
- b. Application for ministry
  - i. Discover: Opportunities for skeptics and seekers to discover who Jesus is, why they need him, and how they can know him personally.
  - ii. Develop: Opportunities for consumers and contributors to grow in their understanding of God's Word, the implications of the gospel, spiritual disciplines, and a life of discipleship.
  - iii. Deploy: A life of ownership leads to willing and sacrificial service for others.
  - iv. Admittedly, these categories are not hermetically sealed off from each other—there is interplay and overlap. Nevertheless, these categories provide a simple way to think intentionally through programs we're offering that can serve different people.
  - v. Swimming pool illus:
    - Zero-depth entry corresponds to “discover” category. For those who are learning to swim or have had bad experiences in the water. Provides a chance to get their feet

wet in a secure place and invite them into all the water offers.

- Swimming laps corresponds to “develop” category. Develops strength and cultivates health. Something even healthy swimmers never move past.
- Lifeguard training corresponds to “deploy” category. Not at the pool only for themselves. Have a bigger view of what’s going on and supposed to be happening. Actively thinking about others and constantly training for their role.

c. Four ingredients necessary to facilitate movement:

- i. Clear direction: Is there a vision and call for growth in discipleship?
- ii. Opportunity for growth within (or across) programs: Do we have clearly laid out next steps?
- iii. Progress is celebrated: How are we sharing stories and celebrating growth?
- iv. Patience: Am I patient and do I allow flexibility?

### **Learning Exercises**

1. Large group discussion: Reflect on your own discipleship journey. Where did you first meaningfully engage in programming at a local church? What was it that drew you in? And why?
2. Small group discussion: Choose one of the “stages of spiritual maturity” and look at your ministry area(s) through that lens. What does this person want from the church? What does this person need (whether they feel it or not)? (If time allows, keep working through the various stages of spiritual maturity.)

3. Small group discussion: In your own words, summarize what is meant by the importance of “movement” in a discipleship pathway. Do you see movement happening at Brookside, either within or across ministries? If so, share any stories that come to mind. If not, why do you think this (i.e., absence of movement) is the case?

## Session 5: Putting It All Together—A Discipleship Pathway for Brookside Church

### Primary Learning Objective

This session will now take the foundation of sessions 1-4 and apply them specifically to ministry departments and programs at Brookside Church.

### Teaching Outline

- I. Putting It All Together: Orientation to Discipleship Pathway chart<sup>19</sup>

	Skeptic	Seeker	Consumer	Contributor	Owner/Mult.
	Discover	Develop		Deploy	
Gathered worship					
Small groups, huddles, and classes					
Serving opportunities					
Special events					
Resources for individual growth					

---

<sup>19</sup> See pp. 95-98 for further explanation. Attentive readers will notice the addition to two rows to this graphic, “Special events” and “Resources for individual growth.” See p. 95 n. 58 for a brief explanation of this addition.

## II. Explanation

- a. Key ministry programs in left column. (With one “blank box” in case other ideas of key programs are generated or are appropriate for a ministry area.)
- b. Top horizontal row lists the stages of spiritual interest
- c. Next horizontal row demarcates “discover,” “develop,” and “deploy” columns.
- d. Dotted boxes in “main section” of grid allow space for participants to write down what they are actually doing in a corresponding program to help people discover, develop, and deploy as disciples of Jesus.
  - i. Dotted boxes indicate these are somewhat porous—there may be “bleed” across categories, but the goal is to start identifying what the local church is doing that is accomplishing the intent of the particular box.
  - ii. If one program could fall into multiple boxes, leaders are encouraged to “break things down further” and identify what specific elements of the program fall into the best corresponding box.
- e. Important clarifications if questions come up (for group exercise):
  - i. If you’re asking: Who goes where to discuss this grid together?
    - People should already be seated in ministry teams: (1) Sunday morning services; (2) Next Generation ministries (kids, youth, college); (3) Groups ministry; (4) Serving/Impact ministries; (5) Bilingual Campus
    - For anyone who may trickle in without having signed up: If you’re here and you don’t fall neatly into any of these teams (e.g., Communications people? Facilities people? Et

al?) go to an area where you volunteer or the department that seems like the closest fit and help contribute there.

ii. If you're asking: Which rows should I focus on?

- Some ministries areas offer a broad spectrum of opportunities (large group programming, small groups, and serving opportunities). Feel free to fill out this whole thing. But just remember that our goal is not to silo ministries. Even as you offer the broad range in your ministry area, keep in mind how you can connect kids, youth, etc. to the larger church. (For this issue I have mostly in mind Kids, Youth, College.)
- Other ministries will focus on just one line. For example, the SunAM services group spends most of their time focusing on gathered worship. Impact ministries focuses primarily on serving opportunities. Guest services may be a hybrid of gathered worship (you're a big part of "discover" and "deploy" there). But also some service.
- Know this going to be a little messy. That's OK. Church work always is. (Ha!) Focus on what comes easiest first. As questions arise, please record those on the back and come find me later, or catch me while I'm walking around now.
- Keep the value of this exercise in mind: Becoming aware of what we're doing (or not doing) is a valuable piece of helping people find and follow Jesus in the ways we've been discussing.

iii. If you're asking: What do we do about huddles? (Since this isn't currently a program or formal emphasis at Brookside?)

- Option #1: Can consider ways the concept of huddles may already be happening. (E.g., families for Kids Ministry? “Groups within groups” that are already doing this? Etc.)
  - Option #2: Can consider what this *could* look like to implement, and see if that creates fresh ideas that can get traction.
  - Option #3: Can skip this piece of things in the current exercise.
- f. Bulk of remaining time is working on your area(s) of ministry with your ministry department. (See learning exercise below.)
- III. Conclude Session with Presentation(s) and Highlights or Take-aways? (If time allows.)

### Learning Exercises

1. Constructing a discipleship pathway (by ministry department).
  - a. **Area to focus on:** Have ministry departments work together as a group to fill in the appropriate boxes of the discipleship pathway, for their ministry department.
  - b. **Further explanation/clarification (if/as needed):** See especially explanation and clarifications above under “Teaching Outline” for Session 5.
  - c. **Exercise nuts and bolts**
    - i. Do this exercise as ministry teams.
    - ii. Allow as much time as possible for this. (Aim for at least 30 min.)
2. Reflection questions (to be discussed as a ministry team after the discipleship pathway has a strong head start):

- a. What are your general (i.e., knee jerk) observations and reflections from this exercise?
  - b. For the areas of ministry where you are most strongly represented:
    - i. Are there any areas where you have too many similar programs going on? (Does something need to be backed away from or simplified over the course of time?)
    - ii. Are these programs presented to Brooksidiers in a clear, cooperative way? Or is the large number of similar programs confusing or overwhelming?
  - c. For any areas that are blank or sparsely represented—do any new programs need to begin to address a gap in ministry? (Or is it better to point to something else within the life of the larger church? The goal is not to be an entirely self-contained ministry!)
  - d. As you look at the programs you offer, are each of these explicitly connected to finding and following Jesus (i.e., discipleship)? Or have some become ends-in-themselves? How can you anchor these programs in mission and movement?
  - e. Imagine that you were in a discipleship relationship with someone where you knew you'd be encouraging them across the entire spectrum of the discipleship pathway (from “discover” all the way through “deploy”). What are the primary programs you'd highlight for them in your area of ministry? Why?
3. Large group discussion: What are your biggest take-aways from this material—perhaps . . .
- a. something broad from the five sessions overall?
  - b. a take-away from a previous session?



- c. a take-away from this exercise of crafting a discipleship pathway for your area of ministry?
4. Large group discussion: What is one “next step” you can take in your area of ministry in light of this discipleship pathway study?

## **Concluding Matters and Final Remarks of the Intensive Seminar**

- This “provisional” pathway will be tweaked and worked on by ministry department leaders so we can put together a working draft across all our ministries. My goal is to have something from every department within ten days, for anyone who has not yet turned something in.
- Thank you for participating and helping us value discipleship as a local church! Your investment today gives us a great head start on making this pathway actionable.
  
- → → → **Re-take SUPD. (Free to leave when completed and turned in.)**

## APPENDIX 5

### DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY EVALUATION TOOL

This evaluation tool is designed as a rubric to be used by the expert panel that reviews the curriculum.

Name of Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Discipleship Pathway Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
The goal of the ministry plan to establish a discipleship pathway is clearly stated.					
The role of the local church in facilitating discipleship is clearly stated in the ministry plan.					
The material presented in the ministry plan is faithful to the Bible.					
The material presented in the ministry plan is theologically sound.					
The components of the ministry plan are well-organized and concise.					
A timeline for implementing the discipleship pathway is clearly stated.					
The ministry leaders and/or departments necessary for implementing the pathway have been stated.					
Obstacles that may hinder implementing the ministry plan have been stated.					
Overall, I believe the plan, when executed, will promote the implementation of a discipleship pathway across various ministries at Brookside Church.					

Other Comments

## APPENDIX 6

### OVERVIEW OF SUPD RESULTS

This summary provides an overview of the pre- and post-seminar results of the Survey on the Understanding and Practice of Discipleship (SUPD) administered to the 34 participants. This overview is approached from two angles. First, the data set used to run the t-test analysis is included (p. 177). This data set was generated from calculating the mean scores across each pre- and post-SUPD (N=34), according to the values assigned to each response (SD = 1; D = 2; DS = 3; AS = 4; A = 5; SA = 6).

Second, the responses to each question (in both pre- and post-SUPD) are averaged out across the 34 participants (p. 178), also according to the assigned values to each response. The “variance” column along the right side of the table calculates the simple value difference between the individual questions (across pre- and post-SUPD), to further indicate any difference made by the Discipleship Pathway curriculum.

Data set (N=34) used to generate the t-test analysis<sup>1</sup>

Respondent	Pre-SUPD	Post-SUPD
1	5.18	5.61
2	3.57	4.46
3	4.18	4.68
4	5.11	5.11
5	4.82	5.11
6	5.11	5.54
7	4.75	5.04
8	5	5.43
9	5.29	5.54
10	4.71	5.21
11	4.93	5.29
12	4.14	5.11
13	4.32	4.86
14	4.96	5.61
15	3.79	4.93
16	4.64	5.68
17	4.25	5.11
18	5.21	5.61
19	4.21	4.96
20	3.89	5.07
21	5.04	4.96
22	5.89	5.71
23	4.46	5.43
24	4.96	5.32
25	4.29	4.54
26	5.18	5.04
27	4.32	4.43
28	3.96	4.54
29	5.46	5.43
30	4.14	4.89
31	4.96	5.57
32	5.61	6
33	4.43	5.43
34	4.64	5.25

---

<sup>1</sup> See table 7 on p. 118 for the results of the t-test analysis, confirming a statistically-significant difference.

Overview of the average pre- and post-seminar SUPD results, arranged by question

Question	Summary of Question <sup>2</sup>	Pre-SUPD	Post-SUPD	Variance
<b>Part 1: Understanding Discipleship</b>				
4	Ability to articulate biblical def. of discipleship (disc.)	5.09	5.59	0.50
5	Support understanding of disc. w 2-3 Bible passages	4.24	5.26	1.02
6	I know what the GC is and can find it in NT	5.26	5.62	0.36
7	I understand why disc. is important	5.38	5.68	0.30
8	I believe the church plays a key role in disc.	5.41	5.71	0.30
9	I can explain how the church facilitates disc.	4.91	5.47	0.56
10	I believe Brookside deeply values disc.	4.68	5.38	0.70
11	I am striving to grow as a disciple myself	5.21	5.32	0.11
12	I think about disc. in a multiplying sense	4.71	5.18	0.47
<b>Part 2: Practicing Discipleship as Leaders within Ministry Programming Contexts</b>				
13	Programs I oversee are strong in biblical content	5.03	5.24	0.21
14	Programs I oversee are strong in the gospel	5.15	5.35	0.20
15	Programs I oversee encourage worship & obedience	4.91	5.09	0.18
16	Programs I oversee encourage community	5.29	5.50	0.21
17	Programs I oversee promote mission	4.71	5.24	0.53
18	My programs offer access to var levels of sp maturity	4.74	4.97	0.23
19	My min dept has a place for the seeker	4.32	4.82	0.50
20	My min dept has a place for the new believer	4.5	4.85	0.35
21	My min dept has a place for the spiritually mature	4.82	5.12	0.30
22	Outside my min dept, I know where to direct seekers	4.38	4.85	0.47
23	Outside my min dept, I know where to point new bel.	4.32	4.76	0.44
24	Outside my min dept, I know where to point sp mat.	4.53	4.97	0.44
25	I have recently discussed disc. with min volunteers	4.21	4.94	0.73
26	I can articulate how our min programs facilitate disc.	3.74	4.91	1.17
27	I talk with others about the priority of disc.	4.24	4.97	0.73
28	I have criteria that can help me assess growth in disc.	3.32	4.79	1.47
29	I feel a responsibility to grow as a disciple myself	4.94	5.50	0.56
30	I am listening for stories of growth in sp maturity	4.79	5.35	0.56
31	I have recently shared a story of growth in sp maturity	4.47	4.88	0.41

---

<sup>2</sup> The reader is directed to appendix 3 for the full survey questions.

APPENDIX 7

SUBMITTED DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY PLANS BY  
MINISTRY DEPARTMENT

Following the Discipleship Pathway intensive seminar, each participating ministry department was asked to complete and submit a ministry plan for their particular department, reflecting how the ministry organizes their programming through the lens of the discipleship pathway. The goal with these examples is to give the reader a glimpse into one way discipleship pathway ministry plans can be approached in a local church context.

The following pages include the submitted plans, with minor adaptations made by the author of this project. These minor adaptations were largely limited to selectivity (so the submitted content fit into the boxes on the grid), and rearranging content in one or two boxes so the content of the boxes best aligns with the rows and columns they fall within. The following pages included submitted ministry plans from these departments: (1) Gathered worship; (2) Small groups; (3) Kids Ministry; (4) Youth—including both middle school and high school; (5) College Ministry; (6) Brookside’s Bilingual Campus; and (7) Local Impact.



Ministry Department: Gathered Worship<sup>1</sup>

	Skeptic	Seeker	Consumer	Contributor	Owner/Mult.
	Discover	Develop		Deploy	
Gathered worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guest services and parking lot team</li> <li>• Use of “regular” language</li> <li>• Online mention of 3 priorities and our physical environment(s)</li> <li>• Stories of change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching the Word</li> <li>• Ordinances</li> <li>• Being around physical expressions of faith</li> <li>• Celebrating generosity</li> <li>• Challenged to serve</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inviting people to services</li> <li>• Asking “who’s your one?”</li> <li>• Honesty and practical application in teaching</li> <li>• Serving/ownership</li> </ul>	
Small groups, huddles, and classes					
Serving opportunities					
Special events					
Resources for individual growth					

---

<sup>1</sup> In this example, “Gathered Worship” is a ministry department that largely stays focused on one row of the discipleship pathway.

Ministry Department: Small Groups<sup>2</sup>

	Skeptic	Seeker	Consumer	Contributor	Owner/Mult.
	Discover		Develop		Deploy
Gathered worship					
Small groups, huddles, and classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alpha</li> <li>Grief Share</li> <li>FPU</li> <li>No Shame</li> <li>Celebrate Recovery</li> <li>Community Groups and mid-size groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Groups</li> <li>Women's Bible study</li> <li>Men's mid-size groups</li> <li>Institute classes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group leader onboarding and training</li> <li>4D Church Leadership Program</li> </ul>		
Serving opportunities					
Special events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marriage event</li> <li>Men's/Women's</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marriage event</li> <li>Men's/Women's</li> </ul>			
Resources for individual growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Who is Jesus?" online resource</li> <li>365 Bible reading</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sermon series booklets</li> <li>365 Bible reading</li> <li>Right Now Media</li> </ul>			

<sup>2</sup> In this example, "Small Groups" is a ministry department that largely stays focused on one row of the discipleship pathway, but has also included ways it connects to or overlaps with other areas of the pathway.

Ministry Department: Kids Ministry

	Skeptic	Seeker	Consumer	Contributor	Owner/Mult.
	Discover		Develop		Deploy
Gathered worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intro/develop main ideas</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large group Bible story</li> <li>Worship music/singing</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broad application</li> </ul>
Small groups, huddles, and classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retelling story in age-specific way</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Age-specific breakdown and questions</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Living out lesson</li> <li>Challenges</li> </ul>
Serving opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Families serving together opportunities</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Serving in line with the Bible lesson</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parent-ownership alongside kids to actively serve</li> </ul>
Special events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safe environments where trust can be built</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build relationships outside of normal programming</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Renewed focus on relationship with God and others</li> <li>“Go and do”</li> </ul>
Resources for individual growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equipping parents to be spiritual leaders</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take-home resources</li> <li>Conversations at home</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resources and encouragement to make faith their own</li> </ul>

Ministry Department: Youth Ministry (Middle School and High School)<sup>3</sup>

	Skeptic	Seeker	Consumer	Contributor	Owner/Mult.
	Discover		Develop		Deploy
Gathered worship (i.e., large group programming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic gospel presentation</li> <li>• Foundational truths</li> <li>• Simple lyric songs</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life application</li> <li>• Foundational truths</li> <li>• Practicing spiritual disciplines</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action steps</li> <li>• Leadership opportunities</li> <li>• Engaged worship</li> </ul>
Small groups, huddles, and classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen, allow questions/dialogue</li> <li>• Seek to build trust</li> <li>• Display grace</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenging questions</li> <li>• Call out new levels of growth</li> <li>• Display grace</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SLT classes</li> <li>• Older students leading younger</li> </ul>
Serving opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tech vol</li> <li>• Clean up help</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kids Min vol</li> <li>• Tech vol</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abide vol</li> <li>• Worship team</li> <li>• RFKC helpers</li> </ul>
Special events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fun events</li> <li>• Father/son and mother/daughter</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fall retreat</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missions trips</li> <li>• e.g., join men's events, Local Impact opps.</li> </ul>
Resources for individual growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connections with small group leader</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connections with small group leader</li> <li>• Bible App group studies</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bible reading plan</li> <li>• Attending a leadership conf.</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> In this example, “Youth” is a ministry department that clearly touches every row of the discipleship pathway. Even while embracing this comprehensive approach, intentionality must be shown so that ministry departments where this comprehensive approach applies do not become siloed from the larger church family. This example cultivates that interconnectedness in terms of intergenerational opportunities (e.g., events with parents or mentors, clear valuing of connection with adult leaders, and opportunities to join larger-church events such as men’s events and Impact service projects).

Ministry Department: College Ministry<sup>4</sup>

	Skeptic	Seeker	Consumer	Contributor	Owner/Mult.
	Discover		Develop		Deploy
Gathered worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thursday night large group</li> <li>Sunday morning worship</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thursday night large group</li> <li>Sunday morning worship</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thursday night large group</li> <li>Sunday morning worship</li> </ul>
Small groups, huddles, and classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcoming</li> <li>Genuine community</li> <li>Point to Alpha</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Solid teaching</li> <li>Both challenging and encouraging</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and call out leaders for small groups</li> </ul>
Serving opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Come along and experience”</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging in serving opportunities</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leading serving opportunities</li> </ul>
Special events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invite and welcome</li> <li>Get connected</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dive deeper</li> <li>Movement and growth</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning and leading</li> </ul>
Resources for individual growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Point to Alpha</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guided study through discipleship</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leading others through disciple-ship resource(s)</li> </ul>

---

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that at the time of the Discipleship Pathway seminar, Brookside’s college ministry was in its “initial launch phase.” The ministry was brand new—staff resources had been devoted to building and developing a ministry to college-aged students, but programming had not yet begun. The ideas generated here therefore are understandably vague and will be further developed as programming gets underway and as more information is available about the size of the group, its unique make-up, as ministry rhythms get established, etc.

Ministry Department: Bilingual Campus

	Skeptic	Seeker	Consumer	Contributor	Owner/Mult.
	Discover		Develop		Deploy
Gathered worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connection corner</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biblical preaching (translated)</li> <li>• Musical worship</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Translators for the preaching</li> <li>• Teaching team</li> </ul>
Small groups, huddles, and classes			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Men's and women's Bible study groups</li> </ul>		
Serving opportunities			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media and tech</li> <li>• Host team</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bilingual Dominican Republic team</li> </ul>
Special events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hispanic Heritage</li> <li>• Cinco de Mayo</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One year anniversary</li> <li>• Bilingual picnic</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning committee</li> </ul>
Resources for individual growth			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 365 Bible reading plan</li> <li>• Right Now Media</li> </ul>		

Ministry Department: Local Impact Ministries<sup>5</sup>

	Skeptic	Seeker	Consumer	Contributor	Owner/Mult.
	Discover	Develop		Deploy	
Gathered worship					
Small groups, huddles, and classes					
Serving opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cars ministry vol</li> <li>• Care Center vol</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Security</li> <li>• Cars ministry vol</li> <li>• Care Center vol</li> <li>• Intentional Relationships—schools and sites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Impressions team</li> <li>• Security</li> <li>• Corrections Center vols and leaders</li> <li>• School Liaison team</li> </ul>		
Special events					
Resources for individual growth					

---

<sup>5</sup> While every ministry is engaged in serving opportunities, the “Local Impact” ministry department devotes its attention to serving and interacting with the larger Omaha community outside the walls of Brookside. For the purposes of this particular seminar, “security” was included at this table group and is therefore reflected in this ministry plan. Upon further reflection, “security” could instead have joined the “Gathered Worship” table group in the seminar, since the security team focuses a large part of its service on Sunday morning worship and other large group events.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allison, Dale C., Jr. *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.
- Allison, Gregg R. *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*. Foundations of Evangelical Theology. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.
- Bartholomew, Craig G., and Michael W. Goheen. *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014.
- Bauer, Walter. *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Edited by Frederick William Danker. Translated by William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and F. W. Danker. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Beale, G. K. *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*. New Studies in Biblical Theology. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- Bird, Michael F. *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.
- Birge, Mary Kate. "Guide to Right Relationships in the Church: Matthew 18." *The Bible Today* 51, no. 6 (November-December 2013): 369-73.
- Block, Daniel I. *Covenant: The Framework of God's Plan of Redemption*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Acts*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Recovering the Real Lost Gospel: Reclaiming the Gospel as Good News*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York: Touchstone, 1959.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*. New York: HarperOne, 1954.
- Bowman, Brian. "I Was Discipled by . . . the Church." The Gospel Coalition, October 29, 2021. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/discipled-church/>.
- Breen, Mike. *Building a Discipling Culture*. 2nd ed. Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2011.



- Brown, Daniel James. *The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics*. New York: Penguin Books, 2014.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Book of the Acts*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.
- Bryan, Christopher. "Sermon on the Mount." In *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 737-39. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.
- Calvin, John. *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*. In *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. XVIII, edited by Henry Beveridge. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009.
- Carlson, Gregory C. "Adult Development and Christian Formation." In *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, edited by James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim, 209-36. Nashville, B&H Academic, 2010.
- Carr, Nicholas. *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2010.
- Carson, D. A. *Jesus's Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: A Study of Matthew 5-10*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Matthew*. In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin, 3-599. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology." In *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy, 89-104. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000.
- Challies, Tim. "One Another—The Bible and Community." Challies.com, July 10, 2004, <https://www.challies.com/articles/one-another-the-bible-community/>.
- Cole, Graham A. *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*. Foundations of Evangelical Theology. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007.
- Dempster, Stephen G. *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*. New Studies in Biblical Theology. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- DeRouchie, Jason S. "What Is a Biblical Theology of the Covenants?" In *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, edited by Benjamin J. Merkle, 215-26. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2020.
- DeYoung, Kevin, and Greg Gilbert. *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011.
- Donaldson, Terrence L. "Guiding Readers—Making Disciples: Discipleship in Matthew's Narrative Strategy." In *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, edited by Richard N. Longenecker, 30-49. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 1996.

- Duvall, J. Scott, and J. Daniel Hays. *God's Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- English, J. T. *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus*. B&H, 2020.
- Fernando, Ajith. *Acts*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
- France, R. T. *The Gospel of Matthew*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Kingdom of God." In *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 420-22. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1989.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Matthew*. Tyndale New Testament Commentary. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1985.
- Gallaty, Robby, and Chris Swain. *Replicate: How to Create a Culture of Disciple-Making Right Where You Are*. Chicago: Moody, 2020.
- Geddert, T. J. "Apocalyptic Teaching." In *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, edited by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, 20-27. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.
- Geiger, Eric. "Three Thoughts on Developing a Theology of Programming." EricGeiger.com (blog), March 7, 2016. <https://ericgeiger.com/2016/03/three-thoughts-on-developing-a-theology-of-programming/>.
- Geiger, Eric, and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development*. Nashville: B&H, 2016.
- Gentry, Peter J., and Stephen J. Wellum. *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.
- George, Timothy. Foreword to *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, edited by Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, xv-xix. NAC Studies in Bible and Theology. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006.
- Goldsworthy, G. "Kingdom of God." In *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy, 615-20. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020.
- Guindon, Brandon. *Disciple Making Culture: Cultivate Thriving Disciple-Makers Throughout Your Church*. Brentwood, TN: HIM, 2020.

- Hagner, D. A. "Matthew." In *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy, 262-67. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000.
- Hansen, Colin, and Jonathan Leeman. *Rediscover Church: Why the Body of Christ Is Essential*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021.
- Harmon, Matthew S. *Rebels and Exiles: A Biblical Theology of Sin and Restoration*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020.
- Harper, Bruce, and Paul Louis Metzger. *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009.
- Harrington, Bobby, and Alex Absalom. *Discipleship That Fits: The Five Kinds of Relationships God Uses to Help Us Grow*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016.
- Harris, M. J. "Salvation." In *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy, 762-67. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000.
- Hawkins, Greg L., and Cally Parkinson. *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- Hood, Jason. "Matthew 23-25: The Extent of Jesus's Fifth Discourse." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 3 (2009): 527-43.
- Hull, Bill. *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006.
- Im, Daniel. *No Silver Bullets: 5 Small Shifts That Will Transform Your Ministry*. Nashville: B&H, 2017.
- Issler, Klaus. "Six Themes to Guide Spiritual Formation Based on Jesus's Sermon on the Mount." *Christian Education Journal* series 3, vol. 7, no. 2 (2010): 366-88.
- Jackson, Peter. *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. New Line Cinema, 2003. 3 hr., 21 min.
- Kandiah, Krish. "Church is a Family, Not an Event." *Christianity Today*, December 28, 2018. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/january-february/church-as-family-not-event-kandiah.html>.
- Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. *Hope and Community: A Constructive Theology for the Pluralistic World*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017.
- Keener, Craig S. *Acts*. New Cambridge Bible Commentary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Spirit and the Mission of the Church in Acts 1-2." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62, no. 1 (March 2019): 25-45.
- Keller, Timothy. *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

- Kelly, Michael. *Creating a Discipleship Pathway*. Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2019.
- Klein, William W. *Become What You Are: Spiritual Formation According to the Sermon on the Mount*. Tyrone, GA: Authentic, 2006.
- Köstenberger, Andreas J., and Peter T. O'Brien. *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*. New Studies in Biblical Theology. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- Leeman, Jonathan, and Trevin Wax, eds. "Don't Be Too Cool for Sunday School." *9Marks Journal* 9, no. 1 (January/February 2012), <https://www.9marks.org/journal/dont-be-too-cool-sunday-school/>.
- Lifeway Christian Resources. "Discipleship Pathway Assessment." Accessed January 6, 2022. <https://discipleshippathwayassessment.com/about/>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "8 Biblical Signposts." Accessed January 6, 2022. <https://discipleshippathwayassessment.com/signposts/>.
- Ligonier Ministries. "State of Theology—2020." Accessed April 23, 2021. <https://thestateoftheology.com>.
- Linneman, Jeremy. *Life-Giving Groups: How to Grow Healthy, Multiplying Community Groups*. Louisville: Sojourn Network Press, 2018.
- Lunde, Jonathan. *Following Jesus, the Servant King: A Biblical Theology of Covenantal Discipleship*. Biblical Theology for Life. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- Maddix, Mark A., and Robert P. Thompson. "Scripture as Formation: The Role of Scripture in Christian Formation." Special supplement, *Christian Education Journal* series 3, vol. 9 (Spring 2012): 79-93.
- Mancini, Will. *Future Church: Seven Laws of Real Church Growth*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2020.
- Marshall, Colin, and Tony Payne. *The Vine Project: Shaping Your Ministry Culture around Disciple-Making*. Sydney, Australia: Matthias Media, 2016.
- Martin, Oren R. "How Does Biblical Theology Compare to Other Theological Disciplines?" In *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, edited by Benjamin J. Merkle, 119-29. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2020.
- Mathis, David. *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.
- McClendon, P. Adam, and Jared E. Lockhart. *Timeless Church: Five Lessons from Acts*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020.
- McCracken, Brett. *The Wisdom Pyramid: Feeding Your Soul in a Post-Truth World*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021.

- McCrorie, Brian David. "It Is Written: Matthean Discourse and Its Implications for Contemporary Discipleship." DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019.
- McKnight, Scot. "Matthew, Gospel of." In *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, edited by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, 526-41. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.
- Merkle, Benjamin J. "Ecclesiology in the Pastoral Epistles." In *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, edited by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder, 173-98. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010.
- Merrill, Eugene H. "Remembering: A Central Theme in Biblical Worship." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 1 (March 2000): 27-36.
- Mofield, William Edward Ashpern. "Developing a Discipleship Program at White House First Baptist Church in White House, Tennessee." DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018.
- Morgan, Christopher W., with Robert A. Peterson. *Christian Theology: The Biblical Story and Our Faith*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020.
- Nelson, Tom. *The Flourishing Pastor: Recovering the Lost Art of Shepherd Leadership*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021.
- Ogden, Greg. *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2003.
- Ortlund, Ray. *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ*. 9Marks. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014.
- Owen, John. *Communion with the Triune God*. Edited by Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007.
- Packer, J. I. *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973.
- Packer, J. I., and Gary A. Parrett. *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010.
- Pao, David W. *Thanksgiving: An Investigation of a Pauline Theme*. New Studies in Biblical Theology. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.
- Parrett, Gary A., and S. Steve Kang. *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful: A Biblical Vision for Education in the Church*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009.
- Pennington, Jonathan T. *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Perrin, Nicholas. *The Kingdom of God: A Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019.

- Peterson, David G. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.
- Peterson, Eugene H. *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- Platt, David. *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*. Christ-Centered Exposition. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013.
- Pope, Randy. *Insourcing: Bringing Discipleship Back to the Local Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.
- Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. 20th anniv. ed. New York: Penguin, 2005.
- Putman, Jim. *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches that Make Disciples*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010.
- Reeves, Michael. "Should Christians Fear God?" Crossway Podcast. Podcast audio, January 18, 2021. <https://www.crossway.org/articles/podcast-should-christians-fear-god-michael-reeves/>.
- Scazzero, Peter. *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship: Moving from Shallow Christianity to Deep Transformation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2021.
- Schnabel, Eckhard J. *Acts*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.
- Schreiner, Patrick. *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross*. Short Studies in Biblical Theology. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. "Baptism in the Epistles: An Initiation Rite for Believers." In *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, edited by Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, 67-96. NAC Studies in Bible and Theology, Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006.
- Snodgrass, K. R. "Parable." In *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, edited by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, 591-601. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.
- Stanton, G. N. "The Sermon on the Mount/Plain." In *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, edited by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, 735-44. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.
- Stein, Robert H. "Baptism in Luke-Acts." In *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, edited by Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, 35-66. NAC Studies in Bible and Theology, Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006.
- Stetzer, Ed, and Eric Geiger. *Transformational Groups: Creating a New Scorecard for Groups*. Nashville: B&H Books, 2014.

- Stott, John. *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007.
- Tanner, Paul. "The Cost of Discipleship: Losing One's Life for Jesus's Sake." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no. 1 (March 2013): 43-61.
- Thistelton, Anthony C. *The Holy Spirit—In Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013.
- Thompson, Alan J. *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan*. New Studies in Biblical Theology. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011.
- Treat, Jeremy R. *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.
- Trueman, Carl R. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020.
- Turner, David L. *Matthew*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Villodas, Rich. *The Deeply Formed Life: Five Transformative Values to Root Us in the Way of Jesus*. Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2020.
- Waltke, Bruce K. *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.
- Wanamaker, Charles A. *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.
- Webster, John. "The Church and the Perfection of God." In *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology*, edited by Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier, 75-95. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Visible Attests the Invisible." In *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology*, edited by Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier, 96-113. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Rev. ed. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014.
- Wilhoit, James C. *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Wilkin, Jen. "Classes and Home Groups: Complementary not Competitive." The Village Church Resources, April 6, 2018. <https://www.tvcreources.net/resource-library/articles/classes-and-home-groups-complementary-not-competitive/>.
- Wilkins, Michael J. *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Matthew*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.
- Willard, Dallas. Foreword to *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community*, by James C. Wilhoit, 9-11. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2008.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*. New York: HarperOne, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012.
- Willard, Dallas, and Dieter Zander. "The Apprentices." Interview *Christianity Today*, July 2005. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2005/summer/2.20.html>.
- Williamson, P. R. "Covenant." In *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy, 419-29. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- Witherington, Ben, III. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*. Biblical Theology for Life. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- Wright, N. T., and Michael F. Bird. *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019.
- Yount, William R. "The Role of Scripture in Christian Education, Session 1: Scripture as the Structural Steel of Christian Education." Special supplement, *Christian Education Journal* series 3, vol. 9 (Spring 2012): 30-44.



## ABSTRACT

### ESTABLISHING A DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY FOR MINISTRY PROGRAMMING AT BROOKSIDE CHURCH, OMAHA, NEBRASKA

Timothy Lance Wiebe, DMin  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022  
Faculty Supervisor: Justin A. Irving

This project establishes a discipleship pathway for ministry programming at Brookside Church in Omaha, Nebraska. Chapter 1 presents the ministry context of Brookside Church and the goals of this project. Chapter 2 focuses on the biblical emphasis on discipleship, demonstrating a holistic picture of discipleship from Matthew and clear priorities for discipleship from Acts 1-2. Chapter 3 makes this biblical picture of discipleship concrete—identifying programs aligned with the biblical picture and advocating for access to and movement across these programs. Chapter 4 describes the project itself, outlining the content of the discipleship pathway curriculum and its implementation at Brookside. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project in relation to the specified goals. Ultimately, this project seeks to establish a discipleship pathway so the organized life of the church intentionally contributes to “presenting everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1:28).

VITA

TIMOTHY LANCE WIEBE

EDUCATION

BS, Grace University (Omaha, Nebraska), 2002  
MDiv, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2006

ORGANIZATIONS

The Evangelical Theological Society

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Adjunct Faculty, Grace University, Omaha, Nebraska, 2015-2017

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

High School Ministry Intern, Brookside Church, Omaha, Nebraska, 2000-2002  
Associate Pastor, Brookside Church, Omaha, Nebraska, 2006-2018  
Pastor of Spiritual Formation, Brookside Church, Omaha, Nebraska, 2018-