

## SECTION I: Focus on Your Current Disciple Making Strategy

### What is Your Biblical Understanding of Discipleship?

**“Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you your life.”**

**-Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

When you hear the word, *discipleship* what thoughts come to your mind? Like other words that are often used, it may have lost the significance of its real meaning. In your church, do believers tend to think of discipleship as knowledge about Jesus rather than following him? Many discipleship courses consist primarily of reading a workbook and filling in the blanks. Biblically, discipleship is not a program, but a process of becoming Christlike and being zealous to see others become disciples also.

In the Gospels and the Book of Acts, 260 references are made to the word, “disciple.” Every time the word is used, it refers to a declared relationship, not a level of spiritual or religious achievement. Becoming a Christian in New Testament understanding was the same as becoming a disciple of Christ. Based on the use of the word, *disciple* in the New Testament, it is understood primarily as a reference to *any* Christians, not to a subdivision of the Christian community. According to Dr. Clarence Drummond, a Georgia pastor, in remarks given during a Georgia Baptist Convention conference, to be a Christian is to be a disciple.

Scripture teaches three stages of the Christian’s life. The first stage is *justification*. It is initiated by God whereby one comes into right standing with God. He becomes justified in God’s sight (Rom. 5:1). One confesses and repents of his sin and asks God to atone for it with the blood sacrifice of Christ Jesus. Inherent in this declaration of need for God to redeem him from the penalty of sin is also a *profession of desire to follow Jesus* as the lord of his life. This profession begins the second stage and it comprises the journey of faith from *justification* to the end of the Christian’s earthly life. It is termed *sanctification* and is the process of becoming mature or more Christlike in one’s faith. The Christian is intended to learn how to live, as God wants him to, as long as he humanly lives (Phil. 2:12). The last stage is *glorification*. One day when the Christian’s earthly life is over he will be glorified (be like Jesus)(I Jn 3:2). One’s discipleship is now complete (Phil. 1:6).

Christian discipleship is a lifelong journey of obedience to Christ, which transforms a person’s values and behavior, and results in ministry in one’s home, church, and world. Dallas Willard, author, professor, and an outspoken follower of Christ said. “. . . we progressively learn to lead our lives as he would if he were we.” (*The Great Omission*, 2006, p. 166)

After one becomes a Christian, becoming like Jesus in character and being obedient to Him should be the main objectives in His life (Gal. 5:22-23). John the apostle wrote, “The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” without keeping His commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly in him the love of God is perfected. This is how we know we are in Him: *the one who says he remains in Him should walk just as He walked.* (I Jn 2:4-6, HCSB). The Christian life ought to be more distinctive than any other type of life. Whether or not it is depends on the one who is living it.

## Jesus Defines Discipleship

Luke 14 records an encounter that Jesus had with a crowd of people who were following him. Perhaps this passage is the most definitive and clearest teaching that we have from Jesus concerning discipleship in the New Testament.

Now great crowds were traveling with Him. So He turned and said to them: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. "For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation and cannot finish it, all the onlookers will begin to make fun of him, saying, 'This man started to build and wasn't able to finish.' "Or what king, going to war against another king, will not first sit down and decide if he is able with 10,000 to oppose the one who comes against him with 20,000? If not, while the other is still far off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. In the same way, therefore, every one of you who does not say good-bye to all his possessions cannot be My disciple. "Now, salt is good, but if salt should lose its taste, how will it be made salty? It isn't fit for the soil or for the manure pile; they throw it out. Anyone who has ears to hear should listen!" Luke 14:25-35

Jesus stated at least four conditions for becoming his disciple. First, He talked about the priority of a relationship with Him. Second, He discussed having the right purpose. Third, Jesus tells prospective disciples that their commitment is to be long-term. Lastly, He states that they must be willing to give up material possessions. Let's look at each of these conditions and make appropriate application for those deciding to follow Jesus today.

### 1. Discipleship Is Rooted in Relationship

**"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be My disciple." (Lk 14:26)**

Jesus uses strange language to describe the priority of a relationship with Him. He lists the most intimate of human relationships and tells the would-be follower that he must hate those people if he is to be His disciple. What did Jesus mean by that? It would be inconsistent with the teaching of Scripture if Jesus meant for His followers to begin despising their families. Jesus used the word *hate* to indicate a lesser degree of devotion. The disciple of Jesus must love Him more than he loves any other person, including his immediate family. The disciple's love must be a *passionate* love for that is the kind of love that reveals itself in daily life. It is the kind of love that will enable the meeting of the other requirements of followship.

How do we grow in our love for Christ so that it is described as *passion*? That type of love is born out of time spent together. Jesus modeled for us the intimacy He had with the Father while on earth by making time to be alone with Him. His days were as full as anyone's, yet time with His Father was the focal point of His life each day. For us, it means that our daily schedules will be centered on planned and spontaneous times of prayer, meditation, and Bible study.

Time with God results in changed thinking and changed behavior. Jesus said that his disciples were to be salt and light. Salt and light makes a difference when they are applied. Disciples of Jesus are to be distinctive in how they live. When circumstances are at their worst, Christians ought to be at their best. There is no substitute for time intentionally spent with Jesus to develop intimacy with Him as well as passion and worship for Him.

## 2. Discipleship Expresses Itself in Purpose

**“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” (Lk 14:27)**

Jesus used this illustration before He experienced His physical death by being crucified on a cross, but He certainly was aware that the Romans used the cross as a means of execution. He was also aware that the cross would be the means of His death in the near future. The cross for Jesus was the means for Him to accomplish the purpose for which He had been humanly born. His incarnation was for the *purpose* of the redemption of humankind to make possible the restoration of a relationship between God and His human creation. While Jesus modeled such a life and taught followers how to live in such a relationship, his overarching *purpose* was to redeem mankind by satisfying a penalty for rebellion against God.

The cross should mean the same thing for us today. It is symbolic of our *purpose* as disciples of Jesus to not die for mankind as Jesus did, but to live for the *purpose* of enabling people to enter into right relationship with their heavenly Father. It does not matter what one's livelihood might be, if he is a disciple of Jesus, his *purpose* is to help people know their God and to live in fellowship with Him through Christ. Christian disciples should be eager to share their faith experience with others.

This discipline of the Christian life is perhaps the most difficult, because it speaks to the core issue of lordship. We may be willing to do any number of things for Christ, to sacrifice a great deal, but we want to do it on our own terms. When His purpose becomes our purpose it means that we also are willing to forego personal freedoms to allow God's purpose to become a reality in our lives (Jn 3:30).

## 3. The Call to Follow Jesus Is Life Long

**“For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation and cannot finish it, all the onlookers will begin to make fun of him, saying, 'This man started to build and wasn't able to finish.' “Or what king, going to war against another king, will not first sit down and decide if he is able with 10,000 to oppose the one who comes against him with 20,000? If not, while the other is still far off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. (Lk. 14:28-32)**

Jesus' call to follow Him is never meant for an interim period of time, but it is always an invitation for one to commit the whole of life for all of life. The problem so often is that one fails to maintain the intimacy with Jesus that enables the continuation of the commitment. As Matthew records, we can lose our saltiness (Matthew 5:13). Such spiritual sensitivity can keep us from becoming ineffective in our faith practice.

We may be willing to follow Jesus. We just want to choose the conditions of our doing so. We have secularized our faith. That is, we have carved out specific times and places for it to be practiced. It is far too dangerous to allow Jesus to set the parameters. He will ask for more of us and for a much longer period of time than what we have in mind. In the illustrations that Jesus used in Luke 14, he wanted prospective disciples not to make an emotional decision and follow Him that they might renege on after giving it thought. Rather He wanted them to consider the cost first, and then choose to follow Him knowing that the cost was great. It was for the rest of their earthly lives, even though there might be extenuating circumstances or events they had not anticipated.

#### **4. Following Jesus Is More Important Than Material Gain**

**“In the same way, therefore, every one of you who does not say good-bye to<sup>61</sup>all his possessions cannot be My disciple.” (Lk. 14:33)**

It would seem that anyone who would make relationship with Jesus a priority and commit to His purpose for his or her life for a lifetime would not have difficulty in also letting go of material wealth. Jesus declares that nothing can take the place in one's life that is designed for Him. Things can become a god as much as people can. If Jesus does not allow people to assume that place then He certainly will not allow material possessions to either. (Matthew 6:24)

Scripture teaches that God is the owner of all possessions. (Psalm 24:1) Mankind is but a steward charged with its care. Even the church's teaching on tithing can sometimes be misunderstood. One can believe that if he gives a tithe of his income back to God, then the remaining 90% is available to him to be used anyway he chooses. The reality is that all belongs to God and the Christian is responsible for using all 100% in a way that glorifies God. The tithe is just the prompter.

Biblical discipleship has everything to do with following Jesus rather than adhering to a moral code. While the task looks daunting to those observing, it is life at its very finest. Jesus said, “A thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance.” (Jn 10:10) Jesus is not only the giver of abundant life. He desires that all people experience it (II Peter 3:9). However, it is only found in following Him in the right way. The good news is Jesus even enables the following if one will in faith choose to do so. That is the work of the Holy Spirit who comes to indwell the believer at the moment of expressed trust in Jesus' atoning death for him. God Himself is at work in the life of the believer to manifest his grace and goodness! (Phil. 2:13) He prompts us and even will arrange circumstances to enable us to do what He desires, but He will never force or manipulate us. The decision is always left to the believer.

#### **Seven Foundational Tenets of Christian Discipleship**

Listed below are some core foundations of biblical discipleship. This list is certainly not exhaustive, but can serve to help us to better understand what scripture teaches about what it means to be a follower of Christ.

- Christian discipleship is the on-going transformation of an individual becoming like Jesus in character and purpose as he grows in intimacy with him. (Matthew 5: 48; Ephesians 4:13-15; Philippians 2:5)
- Christian discipleship addresses every dimension of one's life. It is not only concerned with doing the right thing in every circumstance, but doing the right thing for the right reason. (Phil. 1:27)
- Christian discipleship is progressive in nature. When one ceases their growth in intimacy with Christ they cease to be healthy in their discipleship. (Jn 15:4)
- Christian discipleship is a work of grace. It is the Holy Spirit that transforms life, not one trying to be good. The term, *disciplined* grace, is descriptive of this process. While it is God that transforms, it is one's spiritual practice that creates the transforming environment that the Holy Spirit works in. (Phil. 2:13; I Tim. 4: 7-8)
- Christian discipleship always manifests itself in ministry to others. Every Christian has been spiritually gifted for the purpose of service. (I Peter 4:10)
- Christian discipleship was purposed by Christ to be reproductive. One who is following the life and teaching of Jesus will seek to be prepared to eagerly share his or her faith experience and invest themselves in the spiritual nurture of others. Matthew 28:18-20; II Timothy 2:2
- Christian discipleship will be centered in the life of a local church where the fellowship of other kindred disciples will encourage, teach, and safeguard his discipleship process. Hebrews 10:24-25

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Dr. Dennis Rogers is the Discipleship and Family Ministry Specialist for the Georgia Baptist Convention.

### **What does Disciple Making Look Like in Your Church?**

With a biblical understanding of disciple making, what does your church schedule and calendar say about your church's disciple making process? What takes place during each activity on the calendar?

- What do people get out of participating in each activity?
- Are people enjoying times of fellowship?
- Are they studying the Bible together?
- Are they learning from each other as they apply Bible truths to their everyday lives?
- Are parents using teachable moments to disciple their children?
- Are they serving God in meaningful ways in your church buildings, their workplaces, schools, homes, communities?
- Are they sharing their faith stories with people who have not accepted Jesus as their Lord and savior?

You will have other questions to consider in addition to these as you evaluate all that your church is doing in light of biblical disciple making.

## How does Your Church Make Disciples?

With the answers to the above "What?" question, how would you describe the way your church makes disciples?

- Platform or disciple making worship services
- Life application Bible study during Sunday School, through the week Bible studies, and other small groups
- Program on Sunday evenings
- Spiritual formation process
- Person to person process
- Missions
- Ministry opportunities
- Evangelism

Take another moment to write a few sentences answering how your church makes disciples.

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## Who Does Disciple Making in Your Church?

As you reflect on how your church makes disciples, who are the persons involved in your church's disciple making actions? Does the biblical view of disciple making affect who you list as disciple makers?

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## SECTION II: Focus on Your Future Disciple Making Strategy

With the answers to the above questions, you have a basic understanding of your current disciple making actions. Now let's consider what God wants you to do to develop an intentional disciple making strategy for your church. This guide is intended to be a tool you and others in your church can use to develop a disciple making strategy for your unique church family. What are you willing to do now? You may want to organize a disciple making ministry team to develop the process. The process you develop will fit the culture and needs of your people. It will be God's special plan for your church. Ultimately, your church process will involve everyone in your church and beyond in a personal process of maturing their faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Step 1: Conduct a prayer retreat with persons who will be developing your church's disciple making strategy and process.**

This retreat might be a day that the team would gather for focused prayer. Or, if a retreat is not possible, it might be a period of time when the team would pray for God's guidance in the development steps. Prayer preparation for the work to be done to develop your church's disciple making process will play a significant part in the results of your work.

## Step 2: Craft Your Intentional Disciple Making Strategy

Let's get started! How would you explain the big picture of disciple making through your church? Does your explanation identify the range of choices that fall under the disciple making umbrella? In some ways the range is extensive while in other ways it is limited. Your church's disciple making capacity is totally dependent on God's wisdom, guidance, and power. Prayerfully consider the following information to be a stepping stone to crafting your church's intentional disciple making strategy.

**What?** Disciple making is a partnership with God, the congregation, families, and individuals helping people become followers of Jesus Christ who are loving, kind, peaceful, good, gentle, faithful, controlled, patient, and joyful (Gal. 5:22).

- This partnership is driven by God's Holy Spirit who empowers the congregation and individuals to carry out His Great Commission and Great Commandment.
- God wants his disciples to become followers and to help others become followers of Jesus Christ.
- The fruit of their lives is seen in the way His followers live their lives— loving, kind, peaceful, good, gentle, faithful, controlled, patient, and joyful.

**Why?** Jesus clearly explained what He wanted His followers to do when He left His earthly ministry to them. The Great Commission continues to be the hub of everything believers do today.

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 everything I have commanded you. And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt. 28:19-20)

Jesus also challenged his followers to do everything through love for each other. The Great Commandment continues to set the environment for everything believers do today.

I give you a new commandment: love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

**Who?** All disciples are disciple makers including parents, Sunday School teachers, sports team coaches, choir leaders, small group facilitators, and so on.

- Disciples of Jesus Christ help others create a new identity in Christ, renew their minds to think like Jesus, and to glorify God (2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23; Col. 3:2; Matt. 22:37; Prov. 3:5-6; Matt. 28:20).
- A Disciple Making Ministry is recommended to coordinate and administer the intentional disciple making actions that go beyond Sunday School and worship actions. A ministry team representing the various age levels carries out this important role of equipping disciples to grow deeper in their relationship with Jesus and equipping themselves for serving Him.

**Where?** Everything a church does is disciple making.

- It takes place in the hearts and minds of believers as they live their lives in their homes, schools, workplaces, communities, churches, and on the Internet.
- Disciple making takes place in church buildings and beyond wherever believers allow God to work in their lives.

**When?** Every time believers come together for whatever reason, they are involved in helping each other and others become followers of Jesus Christ.

- Everydayô from the beginning of life through eternity when disciples see Jesus in Heaven.
- Disciple making is a lifelong endeavor for both believers and churches.

With these suggestions, prayerfully answer each of these questions for your church's intentional disciple making strategy. The answers to these questions will become an easy to understand description of your church's disciple making strategy.

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(Name of your church)

### **Disciple Making Strategy Description**

**What?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Why?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Who?** \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Step 3: Establish Guiding Principles for Developing Your Church's Disciple Making Strategy**

As you answer the "How" question, consider the following suggested principles for developing a disciple making strategy for your church. These principles will serve as a foundation for your disciple making process or course of action for your unique church.

**A. Salvation assumes personal surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and a transforming journey through out life. (Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; Rom. 10:9)**

Have believers in your church had a genuine experience of surrendering their lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ? Are they on a journey with Jesus that is changing every part of their lives? As you develop your disciple making process, observe the lives of believers. Ask them questions about their journeys. Talk with them about their relationship with the Lord.



Most likely, you will find believers who are maturing in their personal surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives but they continue to have their families or careers as the center of their lives. Sermons, Sunday School discussions and dialogues, mentoring and coaching, worship experiences and much more can be opportunities for God to draw individuals to an act of surrender and transformational experiences.

**As you think about your future disciple making strategy, discuss actions that God would use to draw believers to an act of surrender and transformation.**

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**B. Disciple making is an intentional and observable process of changing lives through worship, evangelism, fellowship, ministry, service, Bible study, and prayer. (Acts 2:42-47; 2 Cor. 5:17)**

Intentional means that everything your church does is focused on making disciples. The purpose of making disciples characterizes every action which results in changed lives.

The resulting changes can be observable when you know what to look for in the lives of people. These behavioral changes include being prepared for genuine worship and Bible study, sharing their faith stories as they cultivate authentic relationships with non-believers, mixing and mingling with people beyond their comfort zones or cliques, using their spiritual gifts, passions, and abilities in significant ways, and sharing their prayer experiences with each other.

**As you think about your future disciple making strategy, discuss actions that you would take to make disciple making an intentional and observable process in your church.**

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**C. The Holy Spirit initiates and provides power for transformation as believers practice spiritual disciplines. (John 6:63; John 16:13; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:7; Eph. 5:18)**

When disciples practice the spiritual disciplines, they open their lives to the work of the Holy Spirit which results in spiritual transformation.

By providing disciples with specific spiritual disciplines to focus on during their spiritual journeys, churches and families make disciple making concrete and possible. With their Sunday School classes, small groups, and mentoring partners, disciples can learn about the disciplines as well as practice the disciplines.

**As you think about your future disciple making strategy, discuss actions that you would take to engage believers in practicing the spiritual disciplines.**

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**D. Disciple making involves mutual accountability among disciples with a “come go with me” attitude. (Rom. 1:12)**

Do believers in your church need mutual accountability with others in order to move forward on their spiritual journeys? By having someone or a small group along to make the journey, a disciple is challenged to stay the course and become more and more like Christ. Sunday School classes and other small groups play a major role in fostering mutual accountability among disciples of all ages. Mentoring and coaching experiences reach deeper levels with a “come go with me” attitude.

**As you think about your future disciple making strategy, discuss actions that you would take to involve disciples in mutual accountability.**

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**E. Disciple making with children and students is primarily a responsibility of parents as churches purposefully equip parents to disciple their children. (Deut. 6:4-9; 11:19)**

Are parents in your church taking responsibility for discipling their children? Or do they bring them to the church for you to disciple their children? Biblically, both parents and teachers at church need to be equipped to disciple children and students. They need your church to engage their interest to take action by equipping them. Both parents and teachers need to understand the learning styles, characteristics, and needs of today’s children and students. Teaching methods for church and for home are important tools for all teachers and parents. Some equipping actions might have parents and teachers together that will foster church and home partnerships; while other equipping actions will target parents only and teachers only. Both need effective models to observe as they develop their discipling approaches with children and students.

**As you think about your future disciple making strategy, discuss actions that you would take to equip parents to disciple their children and students.**

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**F. Disciple making intersects all of life and applies to every personal experience in every context—personal and corporate.**

In your church family, are families and individuals experiencing personal difficulties? God has wired human beings of all ages with a desire to learn throughout life. This desire is manifested when they face a life crisis or have a need. The intersection of God’s love and everyday life is the context for personal and corporate disciple making.

Church leaders and parents can capitalize on these teachable moments with all age levels. For example, emerging adults are establishing their personal identity. They will be drawn to church opportunities that will guide them in setting this identity. The same sort of teachable moments can be identified for each age level.

**As you think about your future disciple making strategy, discuss the teachable moments in the lives of families, adults, students, and children. List these personal experiences and identify ways your church can help their spiritual maturity through these experiences.**

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**G. Disciple making results in new disciples, transformed lives, and new disciple makers. (Acts 11:19-30)**

The results of all disciple making strategies and efforts are the target of all that a church does every day. Literally, the salvation experience is the new birth where a seeker becomes a new disciple of Jesus Christ. Therefore, evangelism plays a strategic role in making new disciples. In addition, God uses disciple making processes and strategies to transform the lives of His disciples throughout their lives. Each step and experience on the journey brings His disciples closer to Him when someday they will fully know Him and see Him in Heaven. It is only at that time that His disciples are fully mature in Him.

**As you think about your future disciple making strategy, seek out faith stories of how God has transformed the lives of people in your church. Discuss a list of disciples in your church to ask to tell their stories.**

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These suggested principles and the description of your disciple making strategy are designed to help you and your team set the stage for an intentional disciple making process. What principles will your church include in your disciple making strategy? These suggested principles here may not all fit the needs of your church family. You may have other principles. What would you identify as the basic principles for your disciple making strategy?

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## **Step 5: Develop Your Church's Disciple Making Process—Suggested Process Elements to set the stage for the disciple—making.**

Now, what about your church's process for making disciples? Based on your disciple making strategy description, the principles for your strategy, you are ready to put together a church disciple making process. The following suggested process is merely a stepping stone for you to discuss as you and your team develop a process that all ministries of your church will align to and focus on as your church takes action in the future to set the stage for individuals to grow spiritually.

This suggested process framework involves five elements that you can use to bring the strategic principles to life and set the stage for spiritual growth. These elements serve as beams on your disciple making framework that you can use to construct your own disciple making process that will give your church the opportunity to intentionally make new disciples and equip disciples to become followers of Jesus Christ. Your church will craft its own way of assembling these elements and plan the actions to take to launch your process elements. These elements are not linear in that you have to do them in a certain order. Use them in ways that make sense for your church family. You will have terms that will communicate with your believers. As always, pray that God will be the draftsman and the power behind your process.

Suggested ways to construct your disciple making process:

- ❖ For smaller churches, have one team develop the five elements. For larger churches, set up a team to be responsible for each process element—five teams. Include a sixth team made up of the five leaders that would bring the five strategies into an overall process.
- ❖ Each team builds a strategy for their assigned element including a variety of approaches—i.e. conferences, on going classes, other learning opportunities.
- ❖ Each team studies all the principles as well as the elements to understand the process as a whole and then begin their respective work.
- ❖ Each team considers the following—What is the current status of our disciple making in regard to our assigned element? What do we need to do to show progress? What resources do we need? How inclusive should our promotion be to continuously inform the church about the disciple making process?
- ❖ To test your disciple making process, develop a way to target the elements toward individuals.
- ❖ Annually review where your disciple making process is taking your church.

## Five Church Process Elements

### A. Evaluate the spiritual environment for supporting life transformation and disciple making.

(Luke 4:28-30; 4:44; 5:17; 5:27; 6:1, 6, 12; 7:1, 11-12, 36; 8:1, 4, 26; 9:51; 10:1; 3:31; 15:1; 17:11; 18:9, 15, 18, 35; 19:45; 20:27)

For many church families, life transformation and disciple making are hindered by unspoken and ignored church issues as well as open conflict within the fellowship of believers. You may want to involve a special taskforce to conduct the evaluation and assessment. The following actions are suggested to help your church family identify the barriers to life transformation and disciple making and deal with them through the grace of God. These actions include internal and external investigations.

The **internal investigation** begins with corporate prayer. The entire church family will be participating in the internal actions, so everyone will need to be informed about the assessment that will be happening over a period of time. Ask them to pray for God's guidance in the assessment. The internal investigation may include the following suggested areas of assessment and questions:

#### ❖ Assess the spiritual maturity of church members

- Where is character shaped and correction given?
- What are the expectations of new members to the church and from the church?
- How do you hold people accountable for their spiritual growth?

#### ❖ Evaluate the mission, vision, and goals

- How do we reach people for Christ?
- How do we develop people spiritually?
- What is the primary focus of the Sunday morning worship service?
- What is the primary purpose of small groups?
- How is our ministry process clearly defined by leaders and members of the church?
- Does our ministry process have sequential steps that cause people to move to greater areas of commitment?
- Are all the ministries and staff members aligned to our ministry process?
- Are church leaders willing to focus every ministry on the ministry process in such a way that they abandon ministries that do not align themselves to the ministry process?
- What is God calling us to do?
- How do we plan to get there? (vision)

#### ❖ Analyze the spiritual life of church leaders

#### ❖ Study the history of the church

- How do we make decisions? And who makes them?
- Where do people receive primary pastoral care?

❖ **Assess the spiritual strongholds in the church family**

If needed, heal the heart of your church through relationship building actions. You may discover barriers that are truly keeping your church from effectively making disciples. Here, you are analyzing the culture of your church which is your unique identity and style for being God's family in your community.

The **external investigation** needs to be bathed in prayer by your church family. The same taskforce or a related taskforce might carry out these actions. These include demographics, geo-coding, reputation of your church, and other information from the outside looking in to the fellowship of your church. Possible questions include:

- ❖ How do we equip disciples for ministry inside and outside the walls of our building?
- ❖ How do we relate to and multiply our influence in our community and in the world?
- ❖ What specific social and spiritual darkness issues seem to be a stronghold in your community?
- ❖ What conditions exist in your community that contribute to spiritual darkness?
- ❖ What truth unlocks and frees the people who exist in spiritual darkness in your community?

The combination of the internal and external investigation results will give your church family a comprehensive view of their spiritual condition. To prevent overwhelming your church leaders and members, gradually interpret the assessment results by reporting useable bits of information over a period of time.

As conclusions are drawn about the spiritual environment of your church, you will want to encourage your church family to accept the realities of your church. To put feet to the realities of the church, your pastor and ministry leaders need to examine their own hearts to determine if they are ready to lead the church from current to future state. Through sermons and church family gatherings, paint the positives and the negatives. With these realities and the spiritual environment of the church in mind, involve various teams in defining and interpreting anticipated ministry results including people coming to Christ and serving Him. Most likely, you will find various ministries need retooling to implement your new intentional disciple making strategy.

**B. Create environments for non-believers (adults, students, and children) to understand and respond to truth that will change their lives. (Matt 9:13; Rom. 5:8; John 14:6; John 8:31-32)**

What are the entry points in to the life of your church for the lost and unchurched? Do your worship services, Sunday School classes and departments, and small groups play strategic roles in creating an environment that enables non-believers to understand and respond to the

truth about Jesus Christ? Are they open for unchurched persons to participate at any time? Is there an accepting and loving environment that is attractive to those far from God and the unchurched? A church has many touch points, places to connect with unsaved persons. Do all these touch points lead people to an opportunity to accept Christ and into the disciple making process? Is every effort to get people to come to the church or to reach out and connect with them where they live? A suggested second element for your disciple making process is found in the answers to these questions. That element is evangelism. Here are a few suggestions for creating an environment for non-believers to understand and respond to Jesus Christ.

❖ **Demonstrating Loving, Nurturing, and Accepting Attitudes**

Your church may already have an environment that welcomes and encourages non-believers to experience the good news and surrender their lives to the lordship of Jesus Christ through salvation. Does this environment demonstrate the loving, nurturing, and accepting relationships and attitudes? Lost people will be drawn to Jesus and your church family because of the way the believers love each other and God's eternal love expressed through Jesus Christ. When believers are growing in their faith in Jesus Christ, they will have a loving, nurturing, and accepting attitude toward non-believers. Everything you do to disciple believers will result in non-believers being drawn to Jesus and your church family.

❖ **Evangelism Tools and Venues**

Churches use a variety of evangelism tools and venues to attract unchurched people to their loving, nurturing and accepting environments. FAITH Evangelism is a dynamic process for Sunday School classes and small groups to use to bring lost persons in to their groups, cultivate relationships with them, and lead them to Jesus. *Share Jesus Without Fear* is a tool for equipping believers to openly share their faith stories with lost people as they go. Does every event and activity your church family conducts through the year offer open and ongoing opportunities for response to accept Jesus Christ as personal savior?

❖ **Reaching Children and Students of Believers**

Churches also have a responsibility to love, nurture, and accept the children and students who are members of families within the church. Age level ministries and parents play an important role in reaching children and students within your church. The role of teachers at church must be balanced by encouraging and equipping parents and families to create the same kind of environment in the home— loving, nurturing, and accepting relationships and attitudes. Does your church spend equal energy and effort on training both teachers and parents of preschoolers, children, and students?

As age-level ministries develop their ministry strategies, build age-appropriate and family friendly disciple making opportunities. Everything these ministries do needs to align with your church's disciples making process.

❖ **Parents are Disciple Makers**

Age level ministries need to collaborate and work together to support and train parents in their disciple making responsibilities. Together, encourage and develop strong emphases on family devotional time, training, worship, and ministry involvement. Through your equipping actions, parents learn and understand how their preschoolers, children, and students develop spiritually. They see how one age level ministry passes their children to the next age level. This continuity makes sense to parents as your church actions dovetail with what they are doing with their children at home.

**C. Welcome and nurture new believers. (Phil. 3:15; Heb. 6:1; Eph. 4:14-16)**

Do new believers in your church family find the help they need as they begin their spiritual journey with Jesus Christ? Do they have opportunities to study the Bible with mature believers in Sunday School and cell groups as well as in small groups during the week? Do they have the opportunity to engage a mature disciple as a mentor? Are they able to use their spiritual gifts, passions, talents, and abilities in meaningful ways to help them grow spiritually? These questions and others can help you evaluate your new believer strategies. Here are a few suggestions to help your church welcome and nurture new believers.

❖ **Shaping Opportunities for New Believers**

Once lost people make a profession of faith, immediate action begins the process of welcoming and nurturing new believers in their new relationship with Jesus Christ and their new church family. Individual actions including mentoring, spiritual direction, one-on-one study provide tools for shaping new believers. A mentoring relationship with a new believer and an experienced believer is an excellent way to immediately meet the needs of a new believer and put him or her on a transforming journey. Just as the first months of life for a newborn are crucial to the rest of his development, the first few months on a transforming journey are vital to the growth of a healthy disciple of Jesus Christ.

❖ **Small Group Learning Opportunities for New Believers**

New believers also need to build relationships with other believers in addition to his or her mentor. Small group learning opportunities for new believers along with experienced believers can set the stage for these nurturing relationships. Together they can study the Bible in Sunday School classes and enjoy fellowship with growing believers. Encourage new believers to participate in through-the-week small groups that enrich their transformation journey. These small groups intentionally deepen their understanding of God's Word and give them the opportunity to hold each other accountable for surrendering their lives to the lordship of Jesus Christ in their everyday lives. The mentoring partner, Sunday School classes, and through-the-week small groups all play a strategic roles in the disciple making journey for a new believer.

❖ **Evangelism Opportunities for New Believers**

While new believers have relationships with non-believers, they need opportunities to learn how to tell their personal faith stories with their friends and family who have not had a salvation experience with Jesus Christ. Their enthusiasm for their new Lord and



Savior will drive them to want their friends and family to know Jesus too. Your church family will want to prayerfully encourage them as they share what Jesus has done in their lives.

❖ **New Member Orientation**

New believers greatly benefit from your church's new member orientation process. Here, the church engages new believers with mentors, Sunday School classes, and small groups. They also identify their spiritual gifts, experiences, relationships, vocational skills, and enthusiasm for specific areas of ministry. Through new member orientation, mentoring, Sunday School, and small group experiences, the goal is 100% involvement of new believers in the ministry of your church and beyond.

**D. Encourage servanthood through the personal components of life. (1 Peter 4:10; Gal. 5:13; Matt. 20:26)**

Do believers have opportunities to grow and become followers of Jesus Christ through a sense of servanthood in every component of their lives? Are you challenging both new believers and growing believers to think of themselves as servants to Jesus Christ and other people? How do you hold yourself accountable for servanthood? How have you used your spiritual gifts, talents, passions? Here are some suggestions for encouraging servanthood.

❖ **Biblical Mandate of Servanthood and Character**

One form of encouragement comes by fostering an understanding of the biblical mandate of servanthood and character. A repeated study of 2 Peter 1:5-9 and Galatians 5 in sermons, Sunday School curriculum and small group equipping studies will deepen this understanding and cause believers to apply this mandate to their everyday lives.

❖ **Vision**

A strategic way to engage believers to be intentional about serving Christ is a God-given vision for your church family. This vision reflects movement toward deeper levels of commitment to God. A cruise through church web sites will give you many samples of vision statements.

❖ **Spiritual Disciplines**

When disciples are engaged and challenged in servanthood, disciples are given the opportunity to practice the spiritual disciplines. These disciplines are actions the disciples do to grow in Christlikeness. By providing disciples with specific spiritual disciplines to focus on during their spiritual formation, your church can make disciple-making concrete and doable. When disciples practice the spiritual disciplines, they open their lives to spiritual transformation.

❖ **Spiritual Gifts, Passions, Skills, Abilities**

Servanthood also involves disciples in identifying their spiritual gifts, passions, skills, and abilities. Small group learning opportunities guides them to discover and foster a sense of accountability for what all God has given them. An assessment of spiritual gifts, passions, skills, and abilities is a helpful tool for both the individual disciples to

understand themselves and your church to understand how God has gifted your church family for ministry.

**E. Guide believers to find balance in life marked by a “whole person” moving in the right direction. (Eph. 4:12; 2 Tim 2:15; Ps. 139:23-24; 2 Tim. 4:6-8; Heb. 12:1-2)**

Are believers in your church participating in closed groups where they participate with other believers in learning biblical truths for their lives and deepen their levels of spiritual maturity? Do they have daily quiet times or devotional times when they read the Bible and pray? Are they balancing their lives by both studying the Bible and praying with serving God in meaningful ways? As a follower of Christ, are they observably moving closer to being like Christ?

- ❖ Speaking of balance, is your church balancing actions that connect adults to God and other people, help them grow in their Biblical understandings, help them serve by using their God-given spiritual gifts, passions, abilities, and skills, and help them go beyond the church in sharing their faith stories with the lost and unchurched?
- ❖ Are you balancing your actions with students to help them know God, own their relationship with Christ, and be known by others?
- ❖ With children, are you helping them hear foundational Bible truths, know foundational biblical concepts, and become spiritually transformed?

Here are a few suggestions for guiding believers to find balance and wholeness.

❖ **The Journey**

In addition to guiding believers to servanthood, guiding believers to balance, wholeness and a journey in the right direction is an important element of your disciple making strategy. That journey is maturing to the day when each believer meets Jesus Christ in Heaven. Spiritual markers of the journey become the stories believers tell when sharing their faith with someone as well as stories about their quiet time experiences. Consider ways believers can tell their stories with each other as well as those who have not started their journey with Jesus yet.

❖ **Spiritual Assessment**

To help believers identify their journey, provide them with spiritual assessment tools. These tools help believers identify where they are on the journey, not necessarily how mature they are at certain points. This spiritual status information can be useful in developing a set of spiritual goals which determine what actions are needed. This assessment helps them consider a resource to study or an opportunity to serve God in your church, in the community, or on the mission field.

❖ **Accountability**

Churches also create opportunities for believers to engage in relationships where they hold each other accountable for a life that is moving in the right direction. Some churches use a cyclical discipleship process to focus these accountability relationships. For example, T.W. Hunt and Mark Harrison are using one in their church that involves four

elements— knowing God, exalting God, transforming into the image of Christ, and obeying Christ. For ideas, go to [www.lifeway.com/discipleship](http://www.lifeway.com/discipleship).

❖ **Small Group and Mentoring/Coaching Opportunities**

Through small group and mentoring/coaching opportunities, believers engage in relationships that give themselves permission to allow God to empower them to find balance and live wholistically for Christ. As you plan and organize small groups, consider the balance of types of studies you are offering. Encourage people to participate in a variety of types of studies.

❖ **Spiritual Disciplines**

This balance and wholeness are also results of believers practicing the spiritual disciplines. Guide believers to practice more than one spiritual discipline. To engage believers in practicing new spiritual disciplines, you may want to have those practicing certain disciplines to share their experiences. Small group opportunities focused on the disciplines is also another way to encourage the practice of the many spiritual disciplines that are mentioned in the Bible.

❖ **Spiritual Transformation**

The ultimate result of Disciple Making for Changed Lives is exactly that— changed lives. Spiritual transformation is God at work in the lives of His followers. Here, your church challenges disciples to let God guide them to grow in their understanding of who they are and who they are becoming in Christ (be), expand their knowledge of biblical truth (know), and apply daily what they learn (do). In addition, your church involves believers in significant acts of service that glorify God and God uses to transform the lives of people. Your church can encourage believers of all ages to invite God to work in their lives through spiritual transformation.

**As you develop your church's disciple making strategy, be reminded of God's presence and guidance in all that you do.**

**Make Your ways known to me, Lord;  
teach me Your paths.**

**Guide me in Your truth and teach me,  
for You are the God of my salvation;  
I wait for You all day long.**

**Psalm 25:4-5 (HCSB)**

**CP3:**

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