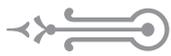


Steps for Developing a Discipleship Strategy

The following steps provide a comprehensive process for developing a discipleship strategy in your church. If this is your initial attempt to build an intentional plan of discipleship, accomplishing every step may be difficult. Review the list and choose steps best suited to your situation. Establish a goal of getting started rather than getting it all completed. Refuse to be overwhelmed by this list of sixteen steps. Build from year-to-year as you set your sights on an ongoing process of discipleship.

	Step	Completed
1	Establish the pastor as the primary discipleship leader	
2	Organize a discipleship leadership team.	
3	Know the purpose of discipleship and use that purpose to create a vision statement for discipleship in your church.	
4	Determine the specific spiritual disciplines that will form the foundation for the discipleship strategy.	
5	Determine the people groups in your church and community in need of discipleship.	
6	Discover the discipleship/ministry needs of the identified people groups.	
7	Establish discipleship study approaches relevant to the needs of the identified people groups.	
8	Assimilate new church members into the life of the church.	
9	Provide opportunities for disciples to develop leadership and ministry skills.	
10	Choose resources for disciples to study in a closed group setting.	
11	Provide personal enrichment and devotional resources.	
12	Guide all disciples to develop an annual spiritual growth plan and create a process to track and evaluate the plan annually.	
13	Communicate the vision and complete strategy to the church. Set a date to launch the study element of the strategy and begin promotion.	
14	Enlist and train leaders for your small group studies.	
15	Launch the strategy.	
16	Evaluate the plan regularly and make necessary adjustments to improve effectiveness.	



Step 1: Establish the pastor as the primary discipleship leader. The pastor can delegate the administration of the discipleship strategy to another leader, but he should personally model discipleship and be the ongoing champion and cheerleader. Without his consistent leadership and support effective discipleship has little chance of success.

Step 2: Organize a discipleship leadership team. In many churches, planning an intentional process for discipleship is led by a discipleship director who plans internally with discipleship leaders and externally with leaders of other areas of ministry in the church. Selected discipleship leaders serve on the discipleship leadership team. Together, team members plan and promote discipleship experiences, enlist leaders, and evaluate the effectiveness of the experiences. Members of the leadership team include the discipleship director, the pastor, and the church's educational staff. Beyond that, the team can include representatives who will champion a particular area of discipleship or special study. Some churches find that having discipleship leaders as part of their Sunday School organization strengthens their discipleship ministry. Discipleship leaders can be a part of a Sunday School class or department, or both. Their work consists of identifying the discipleship needs of their class or department and planning discipleship experiences to meet those needs. Some churches include the Sunday School director on the discipleship leadership team, and the Discipleship director on the Sunday School council. This highlights the foundational discipleship function of Sunday School while strategically connecting disciples to growth opportunities beyond Sunday School.

List leadership team information on page 1 of the *Intentional Discipleship Planner*.

Step 3: Know the purpose of discipleship and use that purpose to create a vision statement for discipleship in your church. Simply stated the purpose of discipleship is to make disciples. Communicating that purpose to the church will be vital to the success of your discipleship strategy. Many churches are discovering the importance of thinking through and having a written vision statement. The discipleship vision statement must connect with the church's overall vision. A vision statement (sometimes called a mission statement or a purpose statement) provides a focal point for identifying the reason for existence. A vision statement develops out of a common vision with which all people associated can identify. Sometimes trying to put your vision into words is harder than it seems. Present it to the church body for approval. Including the church as a whole will insure a greater sense of ownership in the statement. As you are thinking about a vision statement for a growing discipleship strategy consider the following questions:

- What is God calling us to do?
- How do we plan to get there?

Write your discipleship vision on page 1 of the *Intentional Discipleship Planner*.

Step 4: Determine the specific spiritual disciplines that will form the foundation for the discipleship strategy. Do you remember that "focused" is one of the characteristics of effective discipleship? Deciding on specific spiritual disciplines provides the consistent focus needed. As you think about the disciplines your team wants to recommend, consider actions that you believe help disciples grow in Christlikeness. Keep your list simple, short enough to memorize yet complete enough to cover the bases. The following disciplines are provided to give you some ideas. Discipleship experiences presented later use these disciplines as the framework.



Adult Spiritual Disciplines

- 1. Abide in Christ
- 2. Live by God’s Word
- 3. Pray in faith
- 4. Build godly relationships
- 5. Minister to others
- 6. Witness to the world

Student Spiritual Disciplines

- 1. Understand the cost of discipleship
- 2. Build accountable relationships
- 3. Set godly priorities
- 4. Dig into God’s Word
- 5. Develop deeper prayer lives
- 6. Minister to/evangelize others
- 7. Follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit
- 8. Demonstrate godly character

Childhood Spiritual Disciplines

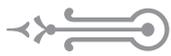
- 1. Learn and love God’s Word
- 2. Live godly lives
- 3. Prepare to lead the next generation

After reviewing these lists, determine disciplines on which your discipleship strategy will focus. Put a check by the disciplines above that match your discipleship goals for the year. You may decide on different or additional ideas. List those ideas in the space provided.

Our adult spiritual disciplines: _____

Our student spiritual disciplines: _____

Our childhood spiritual disciplines: _____



Step 5: Determine the people groups in your church and community in need of discipleship. One way of approaching planning your discipleship strategy is to identify the people-groups in your church membership and in your community. People-groups represent categories of people who share life-situations with others. Each individual in a people-group is unique, but they share many of the same needs with others in the group. The most basic people-groups are adults, youth, children, and preschoolers. Married couples is another example of a people-group. All married couples have some of the same needs, such as knowing how to communicate effectively with each other, learning to honor God in their marriage, and knowing how to show their love to each other. On the other hand, due to differences in the ages of couples and the length of time they have been married, the needs of some couples can differ from the needs of others.

There are two types of people-groups: inside people-groups and outside people-groups. Inside people-groups are those within your church, including church members and their families, and regular attenders. Outside people-groups are made up of people in your community who, though they don't belong to your church, are reachable for some of the discipleship experiences your church might offer. For instance, a church in Indiana is reaching a large number of neighborhood children through TeamKID Clubs. Also, a church in Texas consistently reaches a large number of non-members through the many support groups it offers. TeamKID Clubs, DiscipleNow youth events, parenting courses, marriage enrichment events, and support groups are but a few of the ways churches can minister to people outside the church. Because of its foundational discipleship function an effective connecting point for these people-groups would be Sunday School. Guiding them to a small group where needs are met, relationships are built, and God's Word is taught is the key for reaching them for the long-term. Churches with an outward focus are constantly seeking to meet the needs of all persons. Knowing your people-groups is a good way to sharpen your focus. Your discipleship strategy can't do everything for everyone at all times, so this will help you determine where to put your time and energy.

People-Groups Inside the Church Who Need to Be Discipled

Adults

Caregivers	Senior adults	Senior adults
Church leadership	Shift workers	Shift workers
College students	Mothers working outside the home	Single adults
Divorced	Newly married couples	Single parents
Expectant mothers	Parents of children	Stay-at-home moms
Grandparents	Parents of preschoolers	Young adults
Married couples	Parents of teenagers	Widows/widowers
Median adults	Retirees	Women
Men		



Youth

- High school dropouts
- Junior high youth
- Middle school youth
- Pregnant teens
- Senior high youth
- Teenage parents

Children/Preschool

- Children of single parents
- Latchkey children
- Older children
- Older preschoolers
- Younger children
- Younger preschoolers

Multi-generational

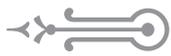
- | | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Abused | Gifted | New church members |
| Alcoholic | Handicapped | Non-members who attend |
| Battered | Hearing impaired | Overweight |
| Bereaved | Homebound | People with AIDS |
| Blended families | Homeless | Substance/drug abusers |
| Children of divorced parents | Homosexuals | Terminally ill |
| Codependent | Inactive church members | Underweight |
| Dysfunctional families | Internationals | Unemployed |
| Ethnic | Learning disabled | Visually impaired |
| Families of people with AIDS | New believers | |

People-Groups Outside the Church Who Need to Be Reached

Many of the people-groups identified inside the church are the same as people-groups outside the church. Additional people-groups include:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Church dropouts | Nursing home residents |
| Families of nursing home residents | People in group homes |
| Gang members | People in prison |
| Juvenile offenders | Transient workers |
| Migrant workers | |

After you have identified your people-groups you can begin looking at specific discipleship/ministry needs within each group.



Step 6: Discover the discipleship/ministry needs of the identified people groups. What kinds of discipleship needs do believers have? Easy. Just think of yourself. What kinds of needs do you have? Do you need to know and use your spiritual gifts, develop a closer walk with God, become a more supportive parent or a more loving spouse? How about your devotional life; could it use a boost? Think of your own needs, and then multiply them a hundred-fold to begin to understand the scope of the discipleship needs of believers today. Each year adults buy millions of self-help publications, attend thousands of special-interest workshops and seminars, and seek the help of an army of trained counselors, therapists, and mentors. Adults may not always know how to meet their needs, but they certainly are in touch with what those needs are. This presents the church with a tremendous opportunity. Adults are searching for someone or something to help them make sense of their lives, find something to belong to, and learn how to make a contribution to their families and friends.

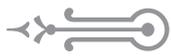
Now that you have identified the people-groups you want to help and some specific discipleship needs within these groups, you're ready to look at ways to meet those needs.

Step 7: Establish discipleship study approaches relevant to the needs of the identified people groups. The approaches used most often for discipling are:

- **Ongoing groups** in which the same core group of people meet together on a weekly basis.
- **Short-term groups** that study a variety of subjects. People belong to such a group only while a particular study is being conducted.
- **Support groups** which are formed to help people deal with personal or emotional needs in a confidential and supportive setting.
- **Individual study** which is used mostly by people who cannot or do not wish to participate in a group study. Online studies provide a convenient opportunity for study at any time.
- **Retreats** which are especially good for people wanting to learn a lot in a short period of time.
- **Events**, both training and enrichment.

Most discipleship experiences today are not locked to any particular time in the weekly schedule. These experiences can be as effective on Sunday, Monday, or Wednesday night as Sunday or Tuesday morning. In one sense, this makes discipleship easier than ever to accomplish. If adult discipleship experiences are planned, remember to plan similar experiences for students and children. Use the time wisely. The challenge for today's discipleship leaders is to plan the appropriate discipleship experiences that meet people's needs, help transform lives, and enable the church to carry out its mission. It's a big challenge, but worth the effort!

Step 8: Assimilate new church members into the life of the church. Through an effective discipleship process, churches can help new Christians and other new members become part of the life of the church. This assimilation process is accomplished in many ways, and actually begins before a commitment to church membership. The key to assimilation is involvement that builds relationships and causes new members to bond with others in the church. The small group environment of Sunday School provides an excellent arena for assimilation. As people develop meaningful relationships, experience spiritual growth, and are involved in



ministry, they will be assimilated into the life of the church. Some churches have discovered that in addition to the ongoing connection through Sunday School, new disciples and other new members should be encouraged to complete a basic study curriculum. Such a curriculum builds an environment for high expectation discipleship. Bill came to Christ as a young adult. His pastor required him to complete two years of specific study in a mentoring relationship. Today, this disciple is a champion for discipleship and a world changer. When asked why he completed those two years of study he answered simply, “I didn’t know I had a choice.” New disciples are eager to grow. Starting them with the right expectations can benefit both the disciple and the church in years to come. The following resources focus on helping new disciples begin their journey of faith and other new members begin a lasting connection with the church.

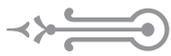
- Basics for Baptists – Adults
- Body Life Journey – Adults and Students
- Survival Kit for New Christians – All ages
- Taking the Next Step: A Guide for New Church Members - Adult
- Welcome to God’s Family (Tract)
- Your Life and Your Church - Adult
- Living Your Christian Values - Adult
- Redefining Church Membership - Adult
- I’m a Christian Now – Younger Children
- I’m a Christian Now – Older Children

Record your plans for new disciples on pages 2-4 of the *Intentional Discipleship Planner*. Consider providing each new adult disciple a copy of the “New Disciple” growth plan (page 6 of the planner). Assign a mentor to encourage the disciple’s progress through these initial stages of growth.

Step 9: Provide opportunities for disciples to develop leadership and ministry skills.

Effective leadership and ministry is important to a church that is seeking to carry out the Great Commission. Servant leaders use their spiritual gifts to teach people, coordinate ministries, and equip others for ministry. The discipleship strategy of a church can equip Christians to become strong, biblical servant leaders. Recommended resources to focus on this action are:

- Body Life Journey
- Drawing Men to God: Men’s Ministry Manual
- Forward Together: A New Vision for Senior-Adult Ministry
- Spiritual Gifts: A Practical Guide to How God Works Through You
- Jesus on Leadership
- Paul on Leadership
- Serving God: Discovering and Using Your Spiritual Gifts
- Every Christian a Minister
- Single Adult Ministry Solution
- Transformed Lives
- Woman to Woman Mentoring
- Women Reaching Women
- Leadership Magazines:



LeaderLife
 Leading Adults
 Leading Student Ministry
 in mINstry with Kids
 Let's Worship
 Special Education Today
 The Deacon

Record your leadership and ministry skills development plans on page 5 of the *Intentional Discipleship Planner*.

Step 10: Choose resources for disciples to study in a closed group setting. Disciples need opportunities to learn what God expects from believers and how they can grow to be more like Christ. Foundational discipleship is provided through the open groups of Sunday School where the primary intent is getting people connected. Unlike these open groups, the closed group studies provide an accountable setting for growth. Disciples must be helped to remember that study alone does not develop spiritual maturity. These recommended studies must be connected with obedience and regular attitude evaluations. Use the resources listed on pages 18-25 to chart age group choices for the year. Place those choices on pages 2-4 of the *Intentional Discipleship Planner*. Save the planner each year to help in determining courses and ministry actions to offer in the future.

Step 11: Provide personal enrichment and devotional resources. LifeWay offers helpful resources for each age group. Select and list your choices on pages 2-4 of the *Intentional Discipleship Planner*.

Adult	Student	Children
BabyLife	ec:essential connection	More (1 st -2 nd Grades)
Christian Single		Adventure ((3 rd -4 th Grades)
Home Life		Bible Express (5 th -6 th Grades)
Journey		
Living with Teenagers		
Mature Living		
Open Windows		
ParentLife		

Step 12: Guide all disciples to develop an annual spiritual growth plan and create a process to track and evaluate the plan annually. An effective discipleship strategy helps disciples intentionally plan spiritual growth. Annually, consider providing growing disciples with a growth plan similar to the one on page 7 of the *Intentional Discipleship Planner*. Notice the accountability section on the plan sheet. Encourage every disciple to enlist an accountability partner to pray with them throughout the year and to challenge them in the completion of their plan. An additional part of the growth plan is an annual evaluation. Disciples benefit from answering some questions related to personal attitude and behavior changes throughout the year. The Christian Growth Study Plan is also an excellent tool



to track the growth of disciples. This electronic database provides transcripts of study for individual disciples as well as recommended courses of study for personal spiritual growth and leadership development. You can find this tool at www.lifeway.com/cgsp.

Step 13: Communicate the vision and complete strategy to the church. Set a date to launch the study element of the strategy and begin promotion. There are numerous ways discipleship can be promoted and publicized, but none is as effective as transformed disciples. People who experience positive change in their lives through your transformational discipleship process are the best promoters you will ever have. However, promotion and publicity are still important. Effective publicity will pass the test of the three “C’s” when it:

- Captures people’s attention
- Communicates value, and
- Convinces people to participate.

A key element of the discipleship strategy will be the ongoing and short-term small group studies provided. A number of methods can be used to publicize these discipleship studies. Among them are verbal and written announcements, newsletters and brochures, catalogs, posters, letters and cards, phone calls, personal encouragement, email, and Web pages on the Internet. Desktop publishing programs make it easy. You don’t have to be a computer genius to turn out great-looking brochures, newsletters, and posters. A church in California produces a catalog that describes the discipleship experiences it offers. A copy of the catalog is given to each church family along with an encouragement to participate. Some churches use their own Web site on the Internet. Among the information these sites provide is a list of available church-sponsored ministries, including discipleship study experiences. A description of these experiences and enrollment information can easily be provided on a Web site. In your promotion, help disciples understand that the study element is only part of their growth plan as disciples. Encourage participation in worship, ministry, and evangelism as vital ingredients in a growing disciple’s life plan.

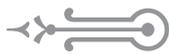
Step 14: Enlist and train leaders for your small group studies. Now that you have a plan, you need leaders. Champions for discipleship make the most effective discipleship leaders. Discipleship champions are persons who:

- love God deeply.
- grow in their relationship with God.
- want to see others’ lives transformed.
- use personal giftedness for the work they do.
- demonstrate patience, kindness, and nonjudgmental attitudes.
- commit to doing their best.
- enjoy working with people.
- have a positive attitude.
- are trainable and flexible.

Enlisting Leaders

Finding discipleship champions is a challenge. Make a list of persons who you feel would make good leaders. As you begin enlisting, make an appointment to meet with each person. Avoid enlisting someone while they are taking a drink from the water fountain in a hallway at church. Take time to share the church’s vision for discipleship. Explain what is expected of each leader and review a job description if available for the position you’re asking the person to take. Be open and honest. Provide a copy of





the resource they would be using and tell what leadership training would be provided. Suggest that both of you take time to pray and set a time to get back together for an answer.

Training Leaders

When you enlist the very best, be sure to equip them to do their best. There is no substitute for trained, skilled, and spiritually transformed leaders. Leadership training opportunities include: individual study, mentoring by experienced leaders, and training courses provided in your church, association, and state. Every church leader needs to understand the concept of servant leadership as taught and practiced by Jesus. *Jesus on Leadership: Becoming a Servant Leader* is an excellent five-week study that helps people become true servant leaders. Two video-driven courses for training leaders are *Serving God: Discovering and Using Your Spiritual Gifts*, and *Teaching the Jesus Way*. Another resource *Paul on Leadership* provides help to understand effective leadership qualities. For ongoing leadership help and ministry ideas several leadership magazines are available.

- LeaderLife – pastor and staff
- Leading Adults – adult ministry leaders
- Leading Student Ministry – student ministry leaders
- in mINistry – childhood ministry leaders

The Christian Growth Study Plan (CGSP) provides a systematic approach to developing leaders who want to increase their knowledge and skills. The CGSP provides diploma plans for general and age-group discipleship leaders. Diploma requirements can be found online at www.lifeway.com/cgsp or available by calling (615) 251-2525.

Training conferences for discipleship leaders are held each summer at Glorieta Conference Center in Glorieta, New Mexico and Ridgecrest Conference Center in Ridgecrest, North Carolina. **Discipleship Week** is a week-long opportunity for discipleship leadership training that is perfect for: pastors, ministers of education, associational leaders, church discipleship directors, and age-group discipleship directors. Special track conferences include ministries to children, family, men, preschoolers, seniors, singles, TeamKID, and women. Converge provides special conferences for teenagers. Additional track conferences include Christian health, criminal justice, prayer ministry, and support groups. (For registration information, call toll free (800) 797-4222 for Glorieta and for Ridgecrest (800) 588-7222.)

Step 15: Launch the strategy. When trained leaders are in place, promotional emphases are completed, and resources ordered, launch your discipleship strategy. Keep the plan moving. Don't give up the effort if only a small number of disciples participate at the outset. Be consistent and prepared to grow the process over the years. Making disciples is a long-term commitment and requires consistent, focused, and patient leaders.

Step 16: Evaluate the plan regularly and make necessary adjustments to improve effectiveness. Periodically provide opportunities for participants to give feedback on the process. Ask for suggestions for new studies and approaches.