

GROWING TRUE DISCIPLES

By George Barna

5 Effective Models of Biblical Discipleship – all 5 models emphasize enabling people to think and act like Christians. All 5 focus on character development, thinking and decision making and building affirming relationships. All 5 models have great potential to produce zealots for Christ – people who “get it” and who live it.

- 1 – The Competencies Model used by Pantego Bible Church
- 2 – The Missional Model practiced at Fellowship bible Church
- 3 – The Neighborhood Model created by Perimeter Church
- 4 – The Worldview Model by Fellowship bible Church North
- 5 – The Lecture Lab Model developed by North Coast Church

I propose we borrow great ideas from each of the following models that would align with our mission, values and strategies.

1 – The Competencies Model

Each individual is expected to not only engage with the congregation through the worship service, but also to commit to personal development in specific competencies. The church emphasizes 30 different competencies, based on the Great Commission. They are their 10 Core Beliefs, their 10 Core Practices, and 10 Core Virtues (see page 135 of book). Their assessment tool is the Christian Life Profile (Liz has one). In addition the church offers a range of topical classes that deal with the competencies. No one is required to take the classes, but individuals who wish to develop in specific areas and who need more focused instruction may take advantage.

Every week it is possible for an individual to have 5 different church-based experiences that focus on the core competencies. The first is the sermon; the second is the midsized learning community; the third is the small group; the fourth is a weekly study guide that contains a daily reading, study and application component; and the fifth is a specialized class available during the week at the church. Few people exploit all of these opportunities every week but the concept of typing together so many interwoven elements to guide an individual along an intentional development path with a similarly integrated and focused assessment instrument is unique and effective.

This model does not use events. It also minimizes other church programs and specialized ministries in favor of accomplishing all ministries through these existing avenues.

Model Pros & Cons –

Pros – major benefit is its use of an objective and focused measurement strategy that is the total responsibility of the individual believer. It takes the tangible measures of the 30 Core competencies also make something that feels amorphous (i.e., biblical truth, spiritual development, life transformation) tangible and addressable. The measurement process and the 30 things provide congregants with a more extensive sense of belonging and purposeful community. The integration of content also provides a built-in incentive to track with the worship services: missing a weekend makes it difficult to keep up with the process.

Cons – The primary concern related to this model emanates from the foundational tool, the Christian Life Profile. There is tremendous value in being able to examine personal maturity specifically and quantitatively, but you have to wonder if the instrument is sufficiently comprehensive or sensitive to do justice to a person's development.

The problems of Assessment – The more mature people become the more aware they are of their frailties in a particular area of development. Consequently their self-assessment scores may decline at the very same time that their maturity is increasing. This could be discouraging to a believer or even cause them to focus on a spiritual dimension of their life that is not as underdeveloped as a dimension that achieved a higher score precisely because the person was too underdeveloped in that dimension to realize the extent of his or her weakness.

2 – The Missional Model

This model reflects a mixture of components found in the other models described in this chapter, specifically the Competencies and Worldview Models. It is called the Missional Model because the approach is so closely tied to the Church's mission. Their mission is to help people become spiritually mature as manifested in six core qualities or competencies:

1. Being passionately committed to Jesus Christ
2. Evaluating everything in their lives according to biblical standards

3. Being deeply committed to having a healthy family
4. Being morally pure
5. Being evangelistically bold
6. Being socially responsible and impactful

To facilitate such disciples, this model begins by introducing people to the fundamentals of the faith through a class that meets at the church for 8 consecutive Sunday evenings. During the class, participants form various small groups consisting of 10 to 14 people. They are also introduced to the Personal Development Plan (PDP), a tool that helps them determine which of the six outcomes they want to focus on, what they will do during the coming year to achieve those outcomes, and how the results can be measured. (The church calendar is developed a year in advance to enable people to create a stable plan of activity.) Once the personal plan is developed, the individual shares it with the others in his or her small group. The group then encourages and prays for one another throughout the year in their efforts to grow in their areas of emphasis.

In the Missional Model, small groups are the focal point of personal growth. As such, every person who becomes a member/adherent of the church is required to be in a small group. (???) The groups meet every other week. Every individual in each group is responsible for developing and implementing a PDP. Groups typically are formed around common life stages or “seasons of life,” such as groups for singles, young marrieds without children, parents with young families, and empty nesters.

To address the issue of burnout, the model incorporates two types of groups; standard small groups geared to personal development and ministry groups geared to external service and outreach. The model thus far has found that people stay in the personal growth groups approximately 3 years before gravitating to the service driven groups. It is in the outreach-oriented groups that people use their spiritual gifts to serve within the church or community or to address social issues from a faith perspective.

In addition to the small groups, the church provides a menu of specialty classes that are intimately related to the six core, Missional qualities. Some of the classes consist of expositional teaching, some are theological in nature, and some are practical or skill-oriented. There are no Sunday school classes or midsized groups involved in this model. Special events are occasionally used to supplement the content and experiences people receive in their small groups or from special classes. By the way, every specialized ministry within the church is linked to the

Missional objectives. The preaching on weekends is worldview oriented but not particularly tied to the activities of groups.

The Missional Model is implemented starting in the first grade. Teachers identify objectives drawn from the Missional outcomes that will be accomplished by each student during the year. Classroom and youth group activities are then developed around those objectives. As the kids enter their teen years they are encouraged to become involved in small groups and to become plan-directed.

Pros & Cons – One of the most appealing aspects of the Missional Model is its simplicity. It takes planning, anticipation, resources and a clear mission, but the process itself is easy for everyone to understand and implement.

PROS

Another pro is this approach is self-directed. Once people have been walked through the process of developing their PDP and have become involved in a small group, they are essentially responsible for their own growth. There are small group leaders and other process managers who track progress and keep the momentum flowing, but the burden is mostly on the shoulders of the church members to make this process work. The PDP itself is a very positive tool for focusing people's attention on measurable outcomes to which they are committed.

A substantial benefit of this model is that it is very responsive to the needs of the congregation. Once congregants have taken a measure of where they stand in relation to the Missional objectives and have then crafted a personal plan for growth, that information forms the basis of the church's programming for the coming year. In other words, once the church identifies the desired outcomes through the mission statement and the people describe what they need to manifest those behaviors, then the church provides the resources required to facilitate such outcomes.

The other advantage of this model is the fact that the Missional objectives permeate everything within the ministry. Those six outcomes are few enough in number to be manageable, specific enough to be measurable, and compelling enough to be marketable to congregants.

CONS

This model does not place as much weight on exposing everyone to core theological foundations as do some other models. The introduction disciples receive is solid but brief; they will be exposed to additional related insights over time through courses, sermons, and discussions, but that process is not as central

as in a few of the other models. And even though there is great freedom and wisdom in having people responsible for their personal growth evaluation, there will be a tendency for some people to exploit the subjective nature of those assessments to get by without truly pushing themselves.

3 – The Neighborhood Model – takes both a systematic & practical approach

People new to the church might attend an inquirer's class to gain a general overview of the church. Once they decide they want to get serious about involvement, they join a neighborhood congregation, which is a group of 15 to 20 people from the same general geographic location. That group will meet twice each month. One meeting focuses on worship, teaching, and fellowship; the other meeting focuses mainly on fellowship, with members encouraged to invite guests (Members can invite guests to either meeting). The group is led by a lay pastor who has received extensive preparation via a pastoral training process complete with qualifying tests, classroom teaching, textbooks, written tests, and oral examinations. The neighborhood congregation is the church's primary delivery point for spiritual nurture and care. It is also the main launching pad for outreach opportunities. Multiple neighborhood congregations are linked together for outreach activities, such as concerts, at the church.

Members of the geographic units are then encouraged to get involved in a more intensive Discipling environment by joining a discipleship team. Each discipler leads 5 to 9 individuals of the same gender through the developmental process. The focus of those efforts is twofold. First, each participant begins the year by creating a personal life plan. The plan defines the person's mission, vision, values, goals, and schedule for pursuing desired growth outcomes. That plan also identifies how the individual will strive to mature in five specific areas:

- 1 – Bible Knowledge
- 2 – practical ministry skills
- 3 – outreach
- 4 – prayer
- 5 – accountability

The disciples are led through a church authored discipleship curriculum, which runs on a three year cycle divided into 6 six week modules per year. The ministry year coincides with the academic year: September thru May. The disciplers are trained in how to lead the curriculum on a week-by-week basis, with leadership training occurring Sunday mornings at the main campus prior to the worship services. Consequently every discipleship group is covering the same material in a

given week. At the end of each ministry season, disciplined individuals reevaluate their growth in accordance with their preset goals.

Individuals sign a covenant committing to one year of participation. They may choose to return after the year expires but their disciplers must approve their return based on how well they satisfied their commitment. Once a person has gone through the three year curriculum cycle he or she is expected to graduate from being disciplined to becoming a discipler of others. A key component of the Neighborhood Model is that it takes both a systematic and a practical approach to theology, alternating between the two every six weeks. A heavy emphasis is placed on modeling evangelism.

Generally speaking, the sermons in the weekend worship services provide people with biblical content but are not aligned with the small group content. This model makes no use of Sunday school classes, although any classes that exist may be used to move people into the discipleship process. Special classes are typically offered throughout the year, giving people a chance to take highly focused courses on specialized theological topics. In-house events are also scheduled throughout the year to both recruit more disciples and to provide ministry skills such as evangelism training.

Pros & Cons

Pros - This model covers the bases of both inreach and outreach. The standardized three-year curriculum guarantees that the church can manage the flow of content and deliver an intentional biblical worldview tableau for people to examine. The inclusion of the personal life plan at the front end of the discipleship process appropriately places the responsibility for growth on the shoulders of the laity. That plan helps narrow each participant's focus to the specific outcomes that the model embraces. The Neighborhood Model also provides excellent front-end and ongoing training of leaders to perform their duties.

Cons - A disadvantage of this model includes the time commitment required for it to work. In addition to the weekend worship service, there are at least two additional meetings during the week plus time needed to complete related tasks and homework. The curriculum essentially assumes a fairly hefty rewrite every three years – which is a significant drain on church resources.

The Neighborhood Model also assumes that anyone who has completed the three year cycle is ready to disciple other people. Given the variety of gifts, life stages,

and temperaments resident within the church, maturity may not always mean that a person who is competent at understanding and living the Christian Faith will also be proficient at teaching and coaching others.

The Worldview Model – approach that confronts learners with dissonance (a clash of tension between two disharmonious or unsuitable elements).

The primary thrust of the Worldview Model is the impartation of biblical wisdom that leads to personal transformation. This model is designed to increase people's participation in the church, to upgrade their level of service to other people, and to improve their ability to understand issues and make decisions from a biblical perspective. The primary objective of this process is to encourage people to think and behave biblically – In other words, to adopt a truly biblical worldview.

The model relies upon a two-year process that gives groups of people a thorough grounding in the foundational truths of Christianity. These groups are open to anyone who wants to grow in spiritual maturity. (A significant proportion of those involved are nonbelievers who often accept Christ as their Savior during the initial phase of the process). Because the establishing process is so central in the aggregate ministry and life of the church, sermons often encourage people to take spiritual maturity seriously and to enroll in the discipleship process.

The discipleship curriculum, known as The Discovery Series, encompasses four topical books requiring an average of sixty to ninety minutes per week in personal reading, study, and reflection in addition to the time spent in the Discovery Class. This curriculum covers an exhaustive spectrum of basic theological and doctrinal issues that includes conversion, baptism, the work of the Holy Spirit, prayer, church involvement, Satan, the nature of God, community, service, world impact, evangelism, and apologetics. The class is dialogical rather than lecture driven, and the precepts are embraced through a combination of Bible Study and guided group discussion rather than accepting authoritative claims made by an expert teacher. Group members are given the opportunity to work out their questions and applications in the presence of others who are struggling with similar issues.

The Worldview Model asks people to:

- identify the issue at hand
- study the Bible in relation to that issue
- gather wisdom from other sources
- make a personal response to the accumulated information
- discuss that response with the other members of the group
- develop personal strategies for living out the truth discovered

The Worldview approach is based on confronting learners with dissonance – asking them to wrestle with real-world problems and apply biblical principles to these problems. Dissonance is achieved through case studies, group discussions, and service projects. This is akin to what Christian parents do with their children; Establish them in principles that will shape their values, beliefs and behaviors, then release them to refine these principles in the real world – always with a strong support base (a small group) as their touchstone.

While students are completing the Discovery courses over a two-year period, they are also encouraged to deepen their spiritual maturity in the context of a small group. The purpose of these small groups is to continue to use the Bible study and life-learning skills developed in Discovery to experience the encouragement and accountability of intimate relationships and to engage in community service projects. Each small group has a trained lay leader and there are also peer mentors who provide spiritual care for up to three individuals in the group.

The Worldview Model also uses special events, such as Walk Thru the Bible seminars, as feeder activities for the Discovery process. Advanced Christian education classes, such as book studies, topical studies, and leadership training are offered throughout the year, but these serve as addenda to the main thrust of the process.

This model does not use a traditional Sunday school structure and does not integrate the Internet into the process.

Pros & Cons of the Worldview Model

The major benefit of this model is that it insures that each individual has gone through a thorough process of learning fundamental spiritual truths and principles and received ample instruction in how to think and act biblically. The Discovery curriculum is well conceived and practical. The process of shifting Discovery graduates from a larger learning group to a smaller, more intimate group for continual application, encouragement and accountability also works well.

The dominant weakness in the Worldview Model is the absence of effective assessment tools and measures at various points along the way. Another consideration is the necessity of the individuals devoting two years to the front end of the process before moving on. The conflict, of course, is this: On the one hand, peoples lives often do not accommodate an intensive, two-year

commitment, and on the other hand, providing a complete introduction to worldview thinking and the spectrum of core biblical doctrines is not likely to be adequately accomplished in less time.

The Lecture-Lab Model

This model focuses on delivering content through sermons (that is, lecture) and using small groups as the means of exploring the content further to follow through on applications (that is, the laboratory). The Lecture-Lab Model's bottom line is gleaning knowledge and building faith-based relationships that lead to godly character and Christian service. In this approach the purpose of biblical knowledge is not to pass tests but to motivate people to live obedient lives, bear spiritual fruit, and persevere through the trials and tests of life. While Biblical knowledge is not disparaged, it is not the primary building block in this approach. Rather it is the launching point of a multifaceted, coordinated developmental process.

The sermons are expository but arranged in 4 to 12 week themed series. The pastor delivers each message in two major sections (1) the background and principals imparted in the selected passage, and (2) challenges as to how to live a Christian life. The ultimate goal is to cover enough Biblical principles so that, over the course of several years, people have been provided with sufficient content to grasp a biblical worldview and to understand how to make decisions on the basis of scriptural principles.

Each week people receive an outline to follow in the service along with "homework" related to the sermon presentation – related passages to read, specific verses to study, and questions to ponder – and an outline for the topic-related discussion that might take place in the small group. Within the small groups, trained leaders facilitate discussions, prayer, and accountability to help people use their gifts to serve others. One of the benefits of the Lecture-Lab Model is that questions that arise in response to the sermon can be dealt with among caring peers; the utility of the information taught in the weekend services can be scrutinized more deeply and more practically in small groups than in a general presentation to hundreds of people in an auditorium. The Lab portion of the model is designed to encourage learners to personalize the insights and get feedback from group members on the personal application of the teaching.

The model requires that everything be Word-centered; the teaching, the relationships, the accountability process, and the service emphasis. Once the

relationships take root and the group finds its stride in grappling with the teaching content, then the focus on application and accountability kicks in. Sunday school is not part of this strategy among the adults; for them, the small groups constitute the primary learning forum. Adolescents and teenagers tend to be integrated into the worship service and are also encouraged to be active in small groups (as well as midweek age-based youth groups). For the younger children, Sunday school classes remain a crucial part of the growth experience.

The small groups each have a leader who acts as facilitator but answers to a small-group supervisor. Each group has between ten and sixteen people and meets for a 10-week period. After the 10 weeks, there is a brief hiatus after which people may rejoin their group or join another group that has openings. Upon entering a group, people sign a covenant to remain actively involved for the full 10-week period.

Group leaders are assigned by the church, based on their training and qualifications. There are different responsibilities for leaders and hosts, freeing the leader to focus on facilitating group interaction and growth. Leaders are responsible for submitting regular reports regarding attendance, major issues being addressed, and other key insights into the life and direction of the group. There are two levels of supervisors: those who oversee five group leaders and those who oversee twenty-five leaders. The most successful churches using this model have a regular reporting regimen, holding regular meetings and conversations between the various leaders, and offer scheduled training events.

Pros & Cons

From both a theological and service standpoint, the Lecture-Lab Model is the “loosest” or most casual of the five spiritual development approaches. That has many benefits as well as a few potential problems.

Pros - Among the benefits of this model are that the sermon becomes more than a warm-fuzzy-but-soon-forgotten message. Because the sermon material forms the substantive foundation of a second go-round for small group participants, the biblical principles imparted are hammered home at least twice. Similarly, by making the sermon core content from which personal learning and applications spring, the church can ensure that over a limited time period everyone receives exposure to the basic components of a biblical worldview. Further, the emphasis upon the sermon content within small groups means that regular worship service attendance becomes more important. It is harder to be inconsistent in attending

when your peers, who hold you accountable for growth, might confront you for your lax commitment to sharing the basic worship and teaching experience.

By using the sermon as the lecture content, the small group leader need not be a strong Bible teacher, but he or she must be a skilled facilitator of conversation around a theme and the ancillary content provided by the church staff. This provides for a more relational experience and one not so utterly dependent upon the teaching preparation and gifts of the facilitator. This permits a large church to have more than a handful of well-led groups.

The small group emphasis makes relationships much more significant in the life of the church – which is a definite plus. It is those relationships that lead people to integrate spiritual growth into their lives in ways that make the process less intrusive and less overwhelming than might be experienced through a more overt process. The accountability process is more natural in the small-group environment, and the Lecture-Lab Model also fosters the expectation that people will identify their gifts and serve in connection with those gifts.

Cons - Clearly the major downside of the model – but one that could be overcome without much difficulty – is the absence of any objective, broad-based evaluation system. The church does make some effort to determine the spiritual health of believers through head counts, ease of recruiting participants for ministry opportunities, and the usual anecdotal evidence. But a more reliable method of assessing spiritual development would enhance this model. A better evaluation method would be especially useful in gauging how well people understand and embrace a biblical worldview that drives their relationships, thinking, and behavior.

Another potential shortcoming of the Lecture-Lab Model is that it does not incorporate any type of broad-based introduction to basic knowledge about theology or doctrine. Such insights are available through occasional classes, but these are optional components that are not integral to the model. The danger, of course, is that people may enter the system without much background or comprehension of the Christian Faith and have to play theological catch-up without systematic or intentional guidance in that effort.

A Potential “Best of” Model

A suggested Supermodel Model, taking the stellar parts of the five models.

We must start with the realization that producing zealous and mature disciples of Jesus Christ requires a church culture in which the concepts and practice of discipleship permeate everything we do. What would that look like?

- The Senior Pastor of the church is an irrepressible advocate of discipleship
- Church membership is granted only when a person covenants to participate in a focused, demanding discipleship process.
- All ministry programs are intimately tied to discipleship outcomes
- The number of programs is minimized in order to focus the church's ministry on the through the discipleship process.
- All teaching in the church, from Sunday morning classes for elementary school children through the worship service and other adult teaching venues, is substantively coordinated.
- The church mission statement serves as a practical tool for identifying necessary ministry outcomes that are tied to an annually updated series of goals that directly relate to the mission statement and to the spiritual state of the congregation.

The process itself would begin with the use of personal evaluation tools (found in the Competencies Model) (Engage) and church outcomes assessment (Missional Model). The aggregate discipleship experience would be tied to the use of those tools.

After participating in a self-evaluation and goal setting effort, individuals would be required to complete an intensive interactive course designed to ensure that they grasp the fundamentals of the faith (as delivered within the Worldview Model).

Upon completion of that activity, they would sign a short-term covenant with the church regarding their Personal Development Plan for that term. Ideally, covenant terms would last for an academic year (Sept to May).

As part of the covenant, participants would agree to engage in several activities. Among those would be a small group that meets in someone's home during the week, or perhaps every other week. These meetings would be primarily for prayer, fellowship, accountability, and community service. Each small group would belong to a mid-sized congregation within the larger congregation, akin to the Adult Bible Fellowship Structure. These mid-sized groups would meet every Sunday morning and provide both an expanded relational network as well as exposure to interactive teaching related to the week's sermon topic.

Every disciple would also be expected to regularly participate in the church's worship services and in community service options offered by the church. These options would facilitate people's spiritual development as well as the ministry impact of the church. In addition, each disciple would have a mature mentor who works with him or her on a regular basis, helping the disciple remain focused on personal developmental objectives. At the end of each year, disciples would evaluate how they have done in relation to their predetermined spiritual goals for the year. Believers would develop their personal plan for the coming year in light of where they stand spiritually and what they have learned about their spiritual development capacity.

For the process to work best, all sermons preached throughout the year would relate to a planned schedule of worldview components. The idea would be to expose all disciples in the church to the building blocks of a Christian worldview within a two- or three- year window.

By the way, the same process that is utilized among adults would be used among children and teenagers. The underlying idea is to build a lifestyle of discipleship as soon as possible in a person's life. In addition, when everyone in the family is on the same spiritual developmental track, it becomes easier for the family to have a shared spiritual experience outside the church. Because it is the parents responsibility to foster the spiritual maturity of their children, coordinating the church's discipleship track across all age groups would help parents be more effective in fulfilling this spiritual obligation.

You can fill in the cracks around this basic synthesis of ideas. Such a model, implemented as the foundation of your church's ministry, could work well regardless of the size of your church or its doctrinal leanings. If you don't particularly care for this model, perhaps it will stimulate you to develop your own approach to discipleship based on the strengths of the models we have explored.

When Jesus began His public ministry, what was His choice of priorities? His top priority was to recruit and train disciples. Although a variety of ministry components were important to Him – worship, evangelism, stewardship, passing on spiritual truths, building community, serving people – each of these was folded into His Discipling process.

Marks of a true disciple:

- The passion of Stephen

- The joy of the post-Pentecost apostles
- The integrity of Nathanael
- The availability of Mary
- The perseverance of Paul
- The transformation of Peter
- The wisdom of James
- The servant hood of Martha
- The love of John
- The generosity of Joseph
- The seriousness of John the Baptist
- The studiousness of Luke
- The humility and reverent faith of the centurion
- The evangelistic sharing of Andrew
- The character of Jesus

The real obstacles to becoming fully devoted, zealous Disciples of Christ are not money, time, methods, or knowledge. The major obstacle is the human heart. When that changes, all else changes. Jesus frequently reminded His disciples that the problem was not one of knowledge but of character. The Pharisees had more religious knowledge than they knew what to do with, but they lacked the character to apply it in ways that transformed themselves and their world. Judas spent many months living with Jesus, observing His ways and His miracles, learning timeless and transforming principles directly from the lips of the Master, and yet all of His knowledge and experience could not compensate for a wicked heart. A disciple is a person of Christian character. Just as Paul instructed young Timothy, if you develop appropriate character, the rest will follow.

Be a true disciple. Go and make disciples. What will this look like, when it works?

- True discipleship produces holistic personal transformation, not mere assimilation into a community of church members.
- True discipleship is witnessed by people who are determined to be a blessing to others, – people who are never content to simply accept and enjoy God’s blessings.
- True discipleship creates Christians who aggressively pursue spiritual growth rather than passively experience spiritual evolution.
- True discipleship spans individuals who develop renewed lifestyles instead of believers who mechanically check off completed assignments on a developmental agenda.
- True discipleship results in people who are more concerned about the quality of their character than the extent of their knowledge.

- True discipleship builds churches known for their culture of love, commitment, and service rather than for their events, information, and programs.
- True discipleship facilitates people devoted to a lifelong journey to imitate Jesus Christ rather than the completion of a short-term regimen of tasks and responsibilities.

The “Best of” model

Each of these models has something unique and valuable to offer our study of what makes a discipleship process effective. Each of these models is more sophisticated and productive than the discipleship process existing in most churches. Adapting any of these models would significantly boost the overall discipleship in the typical church in America.

One of the practices that highly effective churches is that they borrow great ideas from every place they find them. Highly effective churches have less of a sense of pride of ownership in their ideas and practices than a sense of pride in the quality of their ministry. They would rather borrow an idea from another ministry and adapt and refine it to their own unique circumstances than insist upon developing new ideas in isolation and ignorance.

This model is from taking the stellar parts of the 5 models to create a new “supermodel”. We must start with the realization that producing zealous and mature disciples of Jesus Christ requires a church culture in which the concepts and practice of discipleship permeate everything we do. What would that look like?

- The Senior Pastor of the church is an irrepressible advocate of discipleship.
- Church membership is granted only when a person covenants to participate in a focused, demanding discipleship process.
- All ministry programs are intimately tied to discipleship outcomes.
- The number of programs is minimized in order to focus the church’s ministry on and through the discipleship process.
- All teaching in the church, from Sunday morning classes for elementary school children through the worship service and other adult teaching venues, is substantively coordinated.
- The church mission statement serves as a practical tool for identifying necessary ministry outcomes that are tied to an annually updated series of goals that directly relate to the mission statement and to the spiritual state of the congregation.

The process itself would begin with the use of the personal evaluation tools (as found in the Competencies Model) and the church outcomes assessment (as found in the Missional Model). The aggregate discipleship experience would be tied to the use of those tools.

After participating in a self-evaluation and goal-setting effort, individuals would be required to complete an intensive interactive course to ensure that they grasp the fundamentals of the faith (as delivered within the Worldview Model).

Upon completion of that activity, they would sign a short-term covenant with the church regarding their Personal Development Plan for that term. Ideally, covenant terms would last for an academic year (Sept thru May).

As part of the covenant, participants would agree to engage in several activities. Among those would be a small group that meets in someone's home during the week, perhaps every other week. These meetings would be primarily for prayer, fellowship, accountability, and community service. Each small group would belong to a midsized congregation within the larger congregation, akin to the Adult Bible Fellowship structure. These mid-sized groups would meet every Sunday morning and provide both an expanded relational network as well as exposure to interactive teaching related to the week's sermon topic.

Every disciple would also be expected to regularly participate in the church's worship services and in community service options offered by the church. These options would facilitate people's spiritual development as well as the ministry impact of the church. In addition, each disciple would have a mature mentor who works with him or her on a regular basis, helping to remain focus on personal development objectives. At the end of each year, disciples would evaluate how they have done in relation to their predetermined spiritual goals for the year. Believers would develop their personal plan for the coming year in light of where they stand spiritually and what they have learned about their spiritual development capacity.

For the process to work best, all sermons preached throughout the year would relate to a planned schedule of worldview components. The idea would be to expose all disciples in the church to the building blocks of a Christian worldview within two or three year window

By the way, the same process that is utilized among adults would be used among children and teenagers. The underlying idea is to build a lifestyle of discipleship as

soon as possible in a person's life. In addition, when everyone in a family is on the same spiritual development track, it becomes easier for the family to have a shared spiritual experience outside of the church. Because it is the parents responsibility to foster the spiritual maturity of their children, coordinating the church's discipleship track across all age groups would help parents be more effective in fulfilling this spiritual obligation.

Discipleship is about complete obedience to the Word of God, driven by a heart that can stand to do nothing less and a mind that knows it pays to focus on nothing else. Can we fulfill this mammoth challenge? Jesus, our mentor, says we can. "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these" (John 14:12).

It isn't enough to just have discipleship as one of the many endeavors of the church. It must be "THE" endeavor of the church. When Jesus began His public ministry His top priority was to recruit and train disciples.

Marks of a true Disciple

The Passion of Stephen

The joy of the post-Pentecost apostles

The integrity of Nathanael

The availability of Mary

The perseverance of Paul

The transformation of Peter

The wisdom of James

The servanthood of Martha

The love of John

The generosity of Joseph (of Arimathea)

The seriousness of John the Baptist

The studiousness of Luke

The humility and reverent faith of the centurion

The evangelistic sharing of Andrew

The character of Jesus

What True Discipleship Looks Like

- True Discipleship produces holistic personal transformation, not merely assimilation into a community of church members.
- True Discipleship is witnessed by people who are determined to be a blessing to others – people who are never content to simply accept and enjoy God’s blessings.
- True Discipleship creates Christians who aggressively pursue spiritual growth rather than passively experience spiritual evolution.
- True discipleship spans individuals who develop renewed lifestyles instead of believers who mechanically check off completed assignments on a developmental agenda.
- True Discipleship results in people who are more concerned about the quality of their character than the extent of their knowledge.
- True Discipleship builds churches known for their culture of love, commitment, and service rather than for their events, information and programs.
- True Discipleship facilitates people devoted to a lifelong journey to imitate Jesus Christ rather than the completion of a short-term regimen of tasks and responsibilities.