

DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

1. The Definition of Discipleship Pathway.

- a. A local church's discipleship pathway is:
 - (1) A clear, simple, memorable pathway or process for making disciples that church members know and understand.¹
 - (2) A process by which a church assists people in advancing along a continuum from unbeliever to seeker to believer to disciple to disciple-maker.²
 - (3) The "trellis" for the "vine" (Jn 15:1-11).
 - (4) The structure/system by which a church fulfils its mission of making disciples (Mt 28:19).
- b. The pathway consists of a church's primary ministries that members are expected to regularly engage in if they are to become disciple-makers.³
 - (1) It's the ministries that set members up for success in their: (a) advance to spiritual maturity; and (b) fulfilment of their life mission.

2. The Benefits of a Discipleship Pathway.

- a. A discipleship pathway:
 - (1) Reminds us to see the potential in ourselves and others.
 - (2) Identifies a clear, ultimate destination for us to strive for.
 - (3) Helps us honestly identify where we're at on our journey.
 - (4) Gives us our next marker to aim for.
 - (5) Encourages us to cheer one another on to the next level.
- b. Advancement is a biblical principle (Php 1:6, 9, 25; 3:13-16).
 - (1) See *Spiritual Progress* and *Spiritual Maturity*.
- c. Quotes.
 - (1) "Church leaders who have designed a simple biblical process to make disciples are effectively advancing the movement of the gospel."⁴

3. The Difficulty of Establishing a Discipleship Pathway.

- a. Churches often fail to multiply disciple-makers because:
 - (1) Leaders don't know what a disciple looks like.
 - (2) Leaders don't know how to make a disciple.
 - (3) Leaders haven't been personally discipled themselves.
 - (4) Leaders don't know how church programs contribute to making disciples.
 - (5) Leaders have no way to measure progress.
 - (6) Leaders aren't model disciples themselves.

¹ A. Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, Kindle Locations 2083-84.

² A. Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, Kindle Locations 2552-2553.

³ A. Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting* (Kindle Locations 2585-2586).

⁴ T. Rainer and E. Geiger, *Simple Church*, 14.

4. The Focus of the Discipleship Pathway: People.

- a. The object of the Great Commission is people, not church buildings, organisations, money, or name-recognition (Mt 28:19-20).
- b. A discipleship pathway reminds church leaders to pour effort, money, and time into building people, not buildings.
- c. Quotes.
 - (1) “He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata.”⁵
 - (2) Don’t run programs, build people. Don’t run events, train people. Don’t use people, grow people. Don’t fill gaps, train new workers. Don’t solve problems, help people make progress. Don’t rely on training institutions, establish local training. Don’t focus on immediate pressures, aim for long-term expansion.⁶
 - (3) Start with the people in your church, having no particular structures or programs in mind, and then ask how you can help them grow in Christian maturity and what form their gifts and opportunities might take. Build ministries around them.⁷

5. The Role of the Discipleship Pathway.

- a. A church’s discipleship pathway is important, but it is not the only means by which disciples are made.
- b. Church leaders set up the trellis and provide air, soil, sunlight, and water, but they cannot force the growth of the vine (Jn 15:1-11).
- c. Individual members are responsible to abide in the vine and grow along the trellis.
- d. Quotes.
 - (1) “...[T]he role of the church is to come alongside and help the Christian accomplish spiritual maturation. ...If the Christian is to become a mature disciple, he or she must be fully committed to the process. This is personal and individual, as each Christian takes responsibility for his or her individual spiritual growth and maturation. This means that the believer can never legitimately blame the church for his or her lack of growth. While the church may not help appreciably, the primary one to blame for lack of maturity is the believer.”⁸
 - (2) “Disciple making is both individual and corporate (meaning church-wide or ministry-wide). Disciples are made as individuals who impart their lives to others. However, the church must support the individual disciple making pathway. Churches must design events that help move people through the four-step disciple making pathway in cooperation with individual disciple makers’ efforts.”⁹

⁵ A Maori proverb, which means, “What is the most important thing in the world? It is the people, it is the people, it is the people.”

⁶ C. Marshall and T. Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 17-25.

⁷ C. Marshall and T. Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 18.

⁸ A. Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, Kindle Locations 2591-2600.

⁹ D. Spader, “Disciple-Making Metrics,” 10.

6. The Levels of the Discipleship Pathway.

DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

	1 Unbeliever	2 Seeker	3 Believer	4 Disciple	5 Disciple-Maker
Gospels	People	Crowds	The 5000 The 4000	The Twelve The 72	The Three
1 Jn 2:12-14	Unconceived	Unborn	Little child	Young man	Father
Heb 5:12-14	No food	Milk	Milk	Solid food	Solid food
Jn 15:1-8	No fruit	No fruit	Fruit	More fruit	Much fruit
Mt 25:16-18	No talents	No talents	One talent	Four talents	Ten talents
Mt 13:18-23 Lk 8:11-15	Seed on path	Seed on path	Seed on rock Seed among thorns	Seed on good soil	Seed that produces fruit

7. Designing a Discipleship Pathway.

a. Quotes.

- (1) “[D]oes or will your new church have a clear, simple, memorable pathway for making disciples?”¹⁰
- (2) “Determine what kind of disciple you wish to produce in your church. Describe your purpose as a process. Decide how each weekly program is part of the process.”¹¹
- (3) Although many persons teach and enable disciple-making in the congregation, the central role remains with the church planter. The planter is the person who must select and mentor the church’s first generation of leaders. The planter must choose the initial framework and system for disciple-making. The planter must also take the initiative in modelling and communicating the importance of ongoing discipleship. If the planter perform these functions properly, the new congregation should mature, develop young believers, and honour God through the lives of many persons that will impact the new congregation over the course of its lifetime.¹²

b. Step one: Articulate your church’s mission.

- (1) **Mt 28:19-20** 19 Go...and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

c. Step two: Determine the characteristics of a mature disciple.

- (1) Set up a simple table with the three Cs (conviction, character, competence) at each of the five stages of the discipleship pathway.

¹⁰ A. Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, Kindle Locations 2528-2529.

¹¹ T. Rainer and E. Geiger, *Simple Church*, 115.

¹² E. Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 288.

DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

	1 Unbeliever	2 Seeker	3 Believer	4 Disciple	5 Disciple-Maker
Conviction					
Character					
Competence					

- (2) Conviction.
 - (a) Milk (1 Co 3:2; Heb 5:12-13).
 - (b) Solid food (1 Co 3:2; Heb 5:12, 14).
- (3) Character (Ga 5:22-23).
 - (a) “One Anothers.”
 - (b) Faith, hope, and love (1 Co 13:4-7, 13).
 - (c) Fruit of the Spirit (Ga 5:22-23).
 - (d) The whole armour of God (Eph 6:10-20).
 - (e) Partaker of the divine nature (2 Pe 1:3-11).
 - (f) Excellent wife (Pr 31:10-31).
 - (g) Elder qualifications (1 Ti 3:1-7).
- (4) Competence (Ac 1-2).
 - (a) Worship (Ac 2:43, 46-47).
 - (b) Prayer (Ac 2:42).
 - (c) Giving (Ac 2:45).
 - (d) Preaching and teaching (Ac 2:42).
 - (e) Fellowship (Ac 2:42, 46).
 - (f) Evangelism (Ac 2:47).
- d. Step three: determine the primary ministries most important in disciple-making.
 - (1) “The church must determine which ministries best enable its people to internalise the characteristics of maturity.”¹³
 - (2) Determining primary ministries is important to:
 - (a) Clarify what members are expected to participate in.
 - (b) Gauge members’ spiritual momentum toward maturity as indicated by their authentic participation in the primary ministries.
 - (c) Focus ministry resources on what’s most important.

¹³ A. Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, Kindle Locations 2591-2600.

- (d) Clarify how people are expected to assimilate into the life of the church.
- (3) Secondary ministries often detract from primary ministries.
 - (a) “The church’s secondary ministries are electives. If properly designed, they can address particular problems that believers may be facing during certain seasons of their lives. Sometimes we need a temporary shot in the arm that secondary ministries can supply. ...A few examples of secondary ministries are...emotional and spiritual counselling, marital counselling, a child-raising seminar, courses on financial management, the annual Easter and Christmas programs, twelve-step programs, divorce recovery, Mother’s Day Out, a Christian school, choir, vacation Bible school, sports programs..., blood drives, health fairs, and food pantry. ...The secondary ministries have several disadvantages. One is that they can detract from the primary ministries. Also secondary ministries can increase the complexity of the church program. Another disadvantage is that these ministries diffuse ministry energy, often sapping energy from the primary ministries. And the church can get stuck, trying to do too many things for God rather than the few things it needs to do well.”¹⁴
 - (b) “The planted church has a real advantage over established ones because it doesn’t yet have secondary ministries that have become sacred cows for some in the church. My suggestion is that you be slow to start such ministries.”¹⁵
- e. Communicate your discipleship pathway and primary ministries.¹⁶
 - (1) Tips.
 - (a) Make it easy to remember.
 - (b) Use consistent terminology.
 - (c) Use visuals.
 - (2) Quotes.
 - (a) “If you want your people to become mature disciples, you need to communicate the role the church will play in seeing that this happens. Remember that good communication builds trust and this is vital in leadership.”¹⁷
 - (b) Church elders and other leaders should communicate the disciple-making strategy in sermons, on a website, in a brochure, in classes, in meetings, in worship services, in new members classes, and in church literature.
 - (c) “By the time your sick of saying it, they’re first hearing it.”
- f. Measure progress.¹⁸
 - (1) Sample metrics.
 - (a) Ministry to unbelievers.
 - 1) How many unbelievers have rejected our approach at spiritual CPR?
 - 2) How many unbelievers have accepted our approach at spiritual CPR?

¹⁴ A. Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, Kindle Locations 2658-2675.

¹⁵ A. Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, Kindle Locations 2679-2680.

¹⁶ A. Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, Kindle Locations 2720-2726.

¹⁷ A. Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, Kindle Locations 2720-2726.

¹⁸ A. Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, Kindle Location 2735.

- 3) How many people have we BLESSed in the past week?
 - 4) With how many people have we attempted to share the gospel?
 - 5) Ask members to light a candle during Sunday worship for every person they have intentionally made a spiritual CPR step.
 - 6) Ask members to write on a 3x5 card names of people they have engaged with or would like to engage with regarding spiritual CPR.
- (b) Ministry to seekers.
- 1) How many seeker small groups are we running?
 - 2) How many seekers are attending our seeker small groups?
 - 3) How many seekers are we discipling?
 - 4) How many seekers have believed in Jesus and been baptised?
- (c) Ministry to believers.
- 1) How many believer small groups are we running?
 - 2) How many believers are attending our believer small groups?
 - 3) How many believers are we discipling?
 - 4) What percentage of our members have advanced from believer to disciple?
- (d) Ministry to disciples.
- 1) How many disciple small groups are we running?
 - 2) How many disciples are we discipling?
 - 3) How many believers have advanced from believer to disciple?
- (e) Ministry to disciple-makers.
- 1) How many believers have advanced from disciple to disciple-maker?
 - 2) How many disciple-makers are discipling someone?
 - 3) How many spiritual grandchildren have been born?
- (2) Conduct regular spiritual inventories.
- (a) Overview.
- 1) I consider myself a(n): unbeliever, seeker, believer, disciple, disciple-maker.
 - 2) I am currently discipling someone.
 - 3) I am currently being disciplined.
 - 4) I would like to be disciplined by...
 - 5) I would like to disciple...
- (b) Conviction.
- (c) Character.
- (d) Competence.
- (e) Ministry to unbelievers.
- (f) Ministry to seekers.
- (g) Ministry to believers.
- (h) Ministry to disciples.
- (i) Ministry to disciple-makers.
- (3) Quotes.
- (a) "I...encourage ministries to set some faith goals for the future. It is fascinating to me that any church that sets 'faith goals' for the future tends to see a doubling of their conversion growth rate, without doing anything different

except for beginning to ask and pray for new converts. God delights in his children beginning to pray and trust him for new converts.”¹⁹

¹⁹ D. Spader, “Disciple-Making Metrics,” [].

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