

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

DISCIPLESHIP:

STEPPING STONES TO DEVELOPING YOUR CHURCH'S STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

DISCIPLESHIP: STEPPING STONES TO DEVELOPING YOUR CHURCH'S STRATEGY

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The purpose of this project is to guide a church to develop a biblically based discipleship strategy that is intentional and ongoing. This will be done by focusing on current and future plans of developing a discipleship strategy of a local church. This project is influenced by my experiences in a discipling process, observations and visits I conducted with hundreds of church leaders over the past twenty years, and my work to develop a church's discipling ministry. This project proposes five steps toward developing a discipleship strategy that will encourage a lifelong journey of obedience that spiritually transforms values and behaviors in one's home, church, and the world.

Abstract length: 109 words.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful that Jesus Christ saved me from my sinful self and that I have a personal relationship with Him. I am thankful for the work of the Holy Spirit in my life to move me along to become more like Christ. It is because of the work of the Holy Spirit that I submit this work and give all praise and glory to God.

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May the dedication and commitment of Thomas Road Baptist Church, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and Liberty University continue to challenge men and women, boys and girls to be champions for Jesus Christ! Thanks for allowing God to work through all of you to equip me to run the race in this phase of my life.

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INTRODUCTION

Dedicated! Devoted! Disciplined! Diligent! Daring! Dynamic! What difference would disciples demonstrating these characteristics make in churches and communities? One such group described in Acts 17:6 turned their part of the world upside down: “When they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city officials, shouting, ‘These men who have turned the world upside down have come here too.’”¹

From that point on, courageous followers of Christ have participated valiantly in this world-changing mission. Today, the world we face could use a little upheaval. If upside down means opposite of the worldly mess seen on the evening news or heard in office conversations, bring it on!

When listening carefully, one can hear the challenge of those who have walked before us: “Turn it upside down!” The challenge comes not with harsh criticism but with a hint of anticipation. They know something many of us have yet to discover. As a parent encourages a child who hesitates to do something that will bring certain joy, these voices of the past encourage us to plunge into the deep water, to be disciples who make a difference in observable ways. Excitement awaits those who choose to be different.

Most contemporary Christians probably like the thought of making a difference. Even in local coffee shops, people speak of being weary of the wickedness of the world and the onslaught of evil ripping individuals and families unmercifully. Many hunger to

¹ All scripture quotations are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).

take a stand and challenge the status quo but aren't quite sure how to become disciples equipped with necessary qualities.

“Turn the world upside down!” stirs the hearts of Jesus’ followers. A vast army of world changers fills the churches weekend after weekend. When the people hear the truth of God’s Word, their hearts burn with anticipation. Unfortunately for many who feel unable to meet the challenge, the fire fades as they walk away from their churches. Disappointment moves to the head of the line. Joy and blessing fall to the rear.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

How can the disciple’s heart retain the fire of inspiration? Maybe the incredible response to *The Purpose Driven Life*² reveals the answer or at least provides some pretty good hints. People want to know why they exist and God’s intentions for them personally. Sure, they may have some interest in the big picture, but the prevailing questions continue to be, What does God want for me? How will the local church help me be a lifelong follower of Jesus Christ and retain the fire?

Sadly, churches are often focused on the week to week activities and miss out on helping a person or persons develop a lifelong plan that will challenge growth in their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. In recent years churches have attempted many methods to connect and move people along on their journey with Christ. As an employee for a denominational publishing company for twenty years, I saw churches jump on the newest book or seminar, set aside a room for new believers, provide a one day seminar,

² Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Life*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2002).

and build extravagant displays with the hope of moving people along in their relationship with Christ. While these are all good activities to do and to be involved with, I continually observed the missing element was connecting disciples with disciplinators. As a result of this missing connection, unregenerate Christians fill churches that have not taken the time to lay a foundation for a new believer and then to match them up with a fruit-bearing Christian. It appears that the evangelical church in America has been satisfied with a person accepting Christ but not concerned with them growing in that new found relationship. This project aims to provide a biblical and practical plan that when implemented and worked, will help churches see regenerate church members.

STATEMENT OF SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This project incorporates general research from books and periodicals, surveys, personnel correspondence and from a broad base of knowledge and experience of the author.

Chapter one introduces a remarkable purpose driven by biblical motivation for developing a discipleship ministry within the church.

Chapter two focuses on an understanding of Biblical discipleship. At this point the ministry is analyzed in light of scripture.

Chapter three describes a fruitful process for discipleship.

Chapter four examines questions and responses of what discipleship currently looks like at First Baptist Church of Covington, Louisiana.

Chapter five establishes five steps to develop a discipleship strategy at First Baptist Church of Covington.

Chapter six provides a calendar of actions for the church to follow as they implement the discipleship strategy.

The project does provide the reader with a final evaluation or assessment of the steps being used to develop a discipling strategy at First Baptist Church of Covington. This process is ongoing, and the church is committed to the long term investment of discipling.

CHAPTER I

A REMARKABLE PURPOSE

How can the disciple's heart retain the fire of inspiration? This question is answered in scripture. According to 2 Corinthians 3:18, "We all, with unveiled faces, are reflecting the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit." Then in Philippians 2:15, we are to show our salvation "[s]o that [we] may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom [we] shine like stars in the world." And in Ephesians 4:13, Paul speaks of the grace Christ gives us "[u]ntil we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness." Finally, our purpose is punctuated in Colossians 3:10 where Paul writes we are to be as new people in Christ "[who] have put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of his Creator."

What a remarkable purpose! We are to be reflections of the Lord shining like stars on a crystal clear night. We are the image of the Creator measuring maturity by the fullness of Christ. Shining stars, Creator images, and Christlike reflections describe God's intentions for His followers. God uses disciples who reflect and shine like Christ to change the world, to turn it upside down. In order to be this reflection, Philippians 2:13-16 gives us the blueprint:

For it is God who is working in you, enabling you both to will and to act for His good purpose. Do everything without grumbling and arguing, so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted

generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world. Hold firmly the message of life. Then I can boast in the day of Christ that I didn't run in vain or labor for nothing.

How in this world does such a heavenly transformation occur? Fortunately, becoming like Christ centers on His work in us and not our work for Him. Peter, one of those early shining star world changers explained this in 2 Peter 1:3-4: “For His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. By these He has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desires.”

Every disciple already possesses the necessary qualities to become like Christ. The moment we trust Christ for forgiveness, the divine transformation begins. The blood of Christ covers our sin, and the power of the resurrected Lord surges through our dead spirit raising it to eternal life. That initial stage of transformation stands completed at conversion. However, additional work remains before disciples clearly reflect His glory and shine like stars. Though that additional transformation remains an activity of God and not man, He clearly gives each disciple personal responsibility for growth. God changes us as we learn more about His ways and follow Him in obedience. John 13:17 establishes this truth: “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.” And in Romans 14:19, we are instructed to “. . . pursue what promotes peace and builds up one another.” Philippians 4:9 gives us even further instructions for following Him in obedience as well as resultant reward: “Do what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.” There is a similar message of instruction and reward in James 1:25: “But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom

and preserves in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who acts-this person will be blessed in what he does.” 2 Peter 1:5-8 speaks to one’s following God’s instruction as actions that “supplement” faith:

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they will keep you from being useless or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And 1 Timothy 4:7 implores the reader to “. . . have nothing to do with irreverent and silly myths. Rather, train yourself in godliness.”

In these verses we find verbs like do, pursue, train, perseveres, and acts that describe the disciple’s responsibility in this transformation process. Without question, God does the renewing, the empowering, and the recreating, but disciples must do the yielding, the submitting, and the obeying. Such is the nature of this man-God relationship.

Discipleship is the process God uses to accomplish His transforming work in us. Some define discipleship as the lifelong journey of obedience to Christ that transforms a person’s values and behavior and results in ministry in one’s home, church and the world. Regardless of how it is defined or approached, it must be measured by its fruit. Christ intends for each one who follows Him to “deny Himself, take up his cross, and follow [Him]” (Mark 8:34). He expects followship to be demonstrated by obedience: “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24). Furthermore, He

commissions all his disciples to reproduce themselves in others: “Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19).

CHAPTER II

BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP

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. I know people who have great influence with church practice that would like to see the word discipleship not used at all because they feel it is an old world. However, because Jesus has commissioned believers to make disciples, it is time for us to quit hiding both the word and the practice in our churches today. It is biblical for us to make disciples, and that is why I want to lift up the biblical basis for discipleship in this chapter. It is the commission of Christ that motivates me personally to be His disciple and to be a disciplemaker. I also understand that the biblical word “disciple” is being used by churches today to describe their many actions. I agree with Allen Hadidian in communicating three desires God has for each individual as they walk through a discipling process. He communicates these desires in his book *Discipleship Helping Other Christians Grow*, and these desires are evangelization, edifying men and equipping men³. In your church, do believers tend to think of discipleship as knowledge about Jesus rather than following him? Because many discipleship courses consist primarily of reading a workbook and filling in the blanks, many might answer the preceding question in the affirmative. Yet, biblically, discipleship is not a program, but a process of becoming Christ-like and being zealous to see others become disciples also.

³ Hadidian, Allen, *Discipleship Helping Other Christians Grow* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979).

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.⁴

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 (Romans. 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 Christ-like in one’s faith. The Christian is intended to learn how to live, as God wants him to, as long as he humanly lives (Philippians 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 John 3:2). One’s discipleship is now complete (Philippians 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,

⁴ Clarence Drummond, in remarks given during a Georgia Baptist Convention Conference.

and world. Dallas Willard, author, professor, and an outspoken follower of Christ, wrote about this journey of obedience in *The Great Omission*: “We progressively learn to lead our lives as he would if he were we.”⁵ To Willard, Christ is our perfect example of living in obedience.

After one becomes a Christian, becoming like Jesus in character and being obedient to Him should be the main objectives in one’s life (Galatians 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 walks.*” (I John 2:4-6). 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.

Luke 14:25-35 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

⁵ Willard, Dallas *The Great Omission* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 166.

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!

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 told prospective disciples that their commitment was to be long-term. Lastly, He stated 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” (Luke 14:26).

Jesus used strange language to describe the priority of a relationship with Him. He listed 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. According to many Biblical Scholars and Commentaries Jesus used the word “hate” to indicate a lesser degree of devotion or an all-consuming passion to express our commitment to God. 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 two spend 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 make 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” (Luke 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—not to die for mankind as Jesus did, but to live for the purpose of enabling people to enter into a 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 (John 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. (Luke 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 effective 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 all his possessions cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33).

It would seem that anyone who would make a 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 declared that nothing can take His 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 stresses this truth: “No one can be a slave of two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot be slaves of God and money.”

Scripture teaches that God is the owner of all possessions: “The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the Lord” (Psalm 24:1). Mankind is but a steward charged with all that is within this world’s 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” (John 10:10). Jesus is not only the giver of abundant life. He desires that all people experience it. However, this full life is only found in following Him 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! “For it is God who is working in you, enabling you both to will and to act for His good purpose” (Philippians 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 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.⁶

1. 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).
2. Christian discipleship addresses every dimension of one's life. It is not only concerned with doing what is right in every circumstance, but doing what is right for the right reason (Philippians 1:27).
3. Christian discipleship is progressive in nature. When one ceases their growth in intimacy with Christ they cease to be healthy in their discipleship (John 15:4).
4. Christian discipleship is a work of grace. The Holy Spirit transforms life, not one trying to be good. The phrase, "disciplined grace" is descriptive of this process. While it is God who transforms, it is one's spiritual practice that creates the transforming environment wherein the Holy Spirit works (Philippians 2:13; I Timothy 4:7-8).

⁶ Jay Johnston and State Discipleship Directors identified these tenets in March 2007. Dennis Rogers Georgia Baptist Convention polished the original ideas.

5. Christian discipleship always manifests itself in ministry to others. Every Christian has been spiritually gifted for the purpose of service (I Peter 4:10).

6. 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 in the spiritual nurture of others (Matthew 28:18-20; II Timothy 2:2).

7. 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).

The church must wash its hands of the past years with being satisfied that sharing only knowledge leads to transformational discipleship. The church must go back to the biblical instruction and models to lead Christians to develop a lifelong relationship with Christ that includes knowledge while incorporating behavior.

CHAPTER III

A FRUITFUL PROCESS

How can a church develop a discipleship strategy that demonstrates effectiveness by empowering disciples to be world changers? Churches implementing a discipleship strategy identified by the following characteristics produce disciples who make a difference that includes bearing fruit through multiplication and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. Approaches will vary from church to church but these characteristics form a unifying connection.

- Effective discipleship must be intentional and ongoing. A hit-and-miss, part-time, seasonal effort produces little fruit.
- Effective discipleship must be comprehensive in church practice.
 - a. Every action of the church should be connected with the strategy to disciple believers. For example, Bible Fellowships and other ongoing open-group Bible Studies provide foundational discipleship and a lab environment to practice leadership and ministry skills learned in other discipleship experiences. Closed groups provide short-term experiences that demonstrate a deep degree of accountability for attendance, preparation, participation, transparency, and confidentiality.

- b. Every stage of a believer's development should be given intentional focus.
 - i. New Disciple- How does the church help the new disciple begin the journey of discipleship?
 - ii. Growing Disciple- How does the church help all disciples grow spiritually, develop skills for ministry, and learn to disciple others?
- c. Every age or target group of disciples is included in the strategy: adult, student, and child.
- Effective discipleship must be transformational. Disciples should be more like Christ in attitudes and actions as a result of discipleship. This transformation process follows a biblical pattern described with three simple words. This concept grew out of a collaboration of LifeWay employees and church leaders.
 - a. **Be**-Who the disciple becomes at conversion as a child of God and who he is becoming through the ongoing renewal work of personal transformation. In attitudes of the heart and actions of daily living does the disciple look more like Christ?
 - b. **Know**-What the disciple learns about God. This learning comes through studying His Word, seeing His work, hearing His voice. Knowing God more completely provides fuel for the ongoing transformation.

- c. **Do**-What the disciple does in response to what he knows about God and who He is. Christ expects obedience action!

These three transformational elements exist as interdependent actions. In isolation, none has the ability to produce a Christ-like reflection in a disciple. Together, they serve as catalysts for a God-work that change the disciple from the inside. A world-changing mission results from the interaction of these transformational elements.

- Effective discipleship must be accountable and relational. Disciples cannot grow in isolation from the fellowship of others. “Lone Ranger” disciples become ineffective and unproductive. Iron does sharpen iron. “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17).
- Effective discipleship must be focused. Providing disciples specific spiritual disciplines to target for their growth and evaluation makes discipleship more concrete. A caution here about spiritual disciplines is for the disciples and the disciplinators to ensure balance in the disciples’ life when it comes to spiritual disciplines. Growth in Christ-likeness becomes more of a “can do now” than an “ought to someday.”
- Effective discipleship must use relevant methods to implement strategy. Home-based small groups, church-based short-term and ongoing groups, One-on-one or one-on-three or one-to-twelve, self-directed studies, on-line opportunities, leader-equipping training, personal enrichment opportunities, twenty-four seven opportunities, and many other approaches form a resource pool for effective discipleship methods. Church leaders need to discover what

works best in their specific situations through surveys and personal interviews that are lead by God.

Remember these words: intentional, comprehensive, transformational, accountable, focus, and relevant. This process helps the Discipleship Pastor and the discipleship ministry team evaluates its ongoing discipleship strategy within and outside the walls of the church.

In the next chapter we will get a current view of discipleship ministry at First Baptist Church of Covington through a survey that was emailed to church members and regular attendees yet not all are currently participating in a discipleship group.

CHAPTER IV
SURVEY RESPONSES TO WHAT DISCIPLESHIP CURRENTLY LOOKS LIKE AT
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF COVINGTON

We have an average attendance in Sunday Morning Bible Fellowship of 1200 which is the entry point into our current discipleship strategy. We have on average one-thousand-nine-hundred in Worship Services every weekend. We have six-hundred and sixteen men, women, students, boys and girls currently enrolled in short-term discipleship groups that are currently driven by topical or popular studies. This approach, while effective in putting people into studies, does not appear to be bearing much fruit for the Kingdom of God.

To establish stepping stones for First Baptist Church of Covington to implement an intentional discipleship process, I emailed nineteen questions to fifty-six people who are active at First Baptist Church of Covington yet are not all in a current discipleship group. This group of fifty-six people includes Christians who have been professing Christ from one week to fifty plus years.

The questions will lead to responses that we believe will help us move forward with providing an honest assessment of how the “people in the pew” view the current work of discipleship. Before a solution to the current discipleship strategy could be

offered, the current perspective must be studied. It is natural and common to just keep doing the same type of program without giving serious evaluation to the end result. With great expectation, a correction can occur when the opportunity permits itself to gain a full evaluation of the current work and results.

I received immediate notice that two of the email addresses were disabled. I received within minutes of sending out the email one phone call asking if I wanted them to be brutally honest or just give “Sunday School” answers.

I received thirty-six written responses from those who were asked to provide feedback, and I received calls from two people who chose to talk through their responses.

The ongoing conversations since the survey was sent have been as rich if not richer than the initial response. It has become obvious that people of God have a desire to grow in their relationship with Christ.

This group of Christians received the following email in September 2009:

I am requesting your assistance with a writing project I am working to complete. I ask that you please take a moment and respond to these questions about Discipleship with a **response back by September 7, 2009.**

Thank you in advance for your help. You can simply hit reply and complete your response or I have also attached the questions in a word document if you prefer to complete your answers and return the document back to me.

Jay Johnston

Associate Pastor

FBC Covington

In your opinion what does Discipleship look like at FBC Covington?

In your opinion what does the church schedule and calendar say about our church's discipleship process?

In your opinion what takes place during each activity on the calendar?

In your opinion what do people get out of participating in each activity?

In your opinion how does FBC Covington Make Disciples?

CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

- Life application Bible study during Sunday School, through the week Bible studies, and other small groups
- Program on Sunday and Wednesday evenings
- Discipleship process
- Person to person process
- Missions
- Ministry opportunities
- Evangelism
- Other; list or Describe _____

In your opinion who does Discipleship at FBC Covington?

Can you be a fully devoted follower of Christ and not regularly engage in evangelism?

Yes _____ No _____

Can there be real discipleship without multiplication? Yes _____ No _____

Have you ever been discipled in a one to one or one to three discipleship processes?

Yes _____ No _____

Have you been interviewed by a church leader in the past twelve months about your personal growth with Jesus Christ? Yes _____ No _____ If no, would you be willing to talk about an intentional plan for growing in your relationship with Christ? Yes _____

No _____

Have you personally talked with another person about becoming a Christian? (Check all that apply) In the last week? Yes ___ No ___. In the last month? Yes ___ No ___. In the last two to three months: Yes ___ No ___. In the last six to twelve months? Yes ___ No ___.

Are you enjoying times of fellowship with others at church?

Yes _____ No _____

Are you studying the Bible with others? Yes _____ No _____

Are you learning from others as you apply Bible truths to your everyday life? Yes _____

No _____

Are parents using teachable moments to disciple their children?

Yes _____ No _____

Are you serving God in meaningful ways in through your church, your workplace, your school, your home, your community? Yes _____ No _____

Are you sharing how God is working in your life with people who have not accepted Jesus as their Lord and savior? Yes _____ No _____

Are you personally involved in a discipleship group? Yes _____ No _____

Are you personally involved in discipling others? Yes _____ No _____

I am grateful for the thirty-six written responses and for the two phone interviews that resulted from fifty-six people receiving this survey. The summary of survey responses to the nineteen questions follow:

1. In your opinion what does Discipleship look like at FBC Covington?

The thirty-eight responses communicate a very clear picture that the people's view of discipleship is very foggy. The responses were all over the place, and the attitude expressed in the responses communicates lack of intentionality, accountability and concern for spiritual transformation among the people. The response of one individual might sum up the overall view "If it is about a number of people being in classes then Discipleship looks pretty healthy, but if it is about fruit-bearing, soul winning and multiplication than we have an unhealthy picture of discipleship."

2. In your opinion what does the church schedule and calendar say about our church's discipleship process?

The opinions of those surveyed communicate that a majority of them see the people have a lot of opportunities to take advantage of from Sunday to Sunday, but the activities give little if any guidance as to how it might help them and their families grow in their relationship with Christ. One of the responses said "that if being busy brings us closer to God than we must have a pretty tight relationship."

3. In your opinion what takes place during each activity on the calendar?

The following words were mentioned by most of those surveyed: Bible Study, Fellowship, Learning, Fun, Worship, and Support. Those surveyed, while not asked what was missing, identified that they felt direction, practical application and guidance, equipping, and prayer were often missing from the ongoing activities that take place at First Baptist Church of Covington.

4. In your opinion what do people get out of participating in each activity?

The opinion of the people surveyed was that they get knowledge, fellowship, encouragement, love, care and support from those that open themselves up to other believers in the group.

The responders also communicated that people tend to get a false sense of security, a buzz or warm sensation because they showed up for a class or activity because they fulfilled their duties for the week.

5. In your opinion how does FBC Covington Make Disciples?

The people had the following list to check off to register their response.

CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

- Life application Bible study during Sunday School, through the week Bible studies, and other small groups
 - Program on Sunday and Wednesday evenings
 - Discipleship process
 - Person to person process
 - Missions
 - Ministry opportunities
 - Evangelism
 - Other; list or Describe _____
-

The majority of responders checked Bible Study, Programs on Sunday and Wednesday evenings, and ministry opportunities. In the other column it was often mentioned by the responders that support groups provided a vehicle to make disciples.

6. In your opinion who does Discipleship at FBC Covington?

The majority of responders communicated that it is everyone or should be everyone. Once they made this statement they then expressed that they see some pastors leading classes but no clear corporate direction for equipping the people to be disciples.

7. Can you be a fully devoted follower of Christ and not regularly engage in evangelism?

The overall response to this question was no. More than half expressed that this question brought personal conviction to them.

8. Can there be real discipleship without multiplication?

The overall response to this question was no. I had half of the people also say that this is not even something they have given consideration to as a Christian.

9. Have you ever been discipled in a one to one or one to three discipleship processes?

Five of the thirty-eight people did respond yes to this question. Many of the responders wrote in this area of the survey that they would like to see this approach

offered through the ministry of the church and that they personally would commit to go through the process of discipling.

10. Have you ever been interviewed by a church leader in the past twelve months about your personal growth with Christ? If no, would you be willing to talk about an intentional plan for growing in your relationship with Christ?

The overall response to part one of these questions was no with only three people saying yes. In receiving the responses many people expressed that they would find great joy in being interviewed about an intentional plan for growing in their personal relationship with Christ. In fact since this idea has surfaced many people are asking when we will get started on this process because in their own words “we know there is more to the Christian life than what we have been experiencing.”

11. Have you personally talked with another person about becoming a Christian? (Check all that apply) In the last week? Yes__No___. In the last month? Yes__No___. In the last two to three months: Yes__No___. In the last six to twelve months? Yes__No___.

The overall response here was no to all responses. The comments that people shared were that they do not feel confident or they have never been equipped to share their faith. For some others they were very transparent in saying they just do not take time to share their faith or get involved in the lives of people who they know are without Christ. I think the response here is not limited to those who responded but opens our eyes to where churches have failed in the area of discipleship for many years.

12. Are you enjoying times of fellowship with others at church?

The overall response was yes. While the overall response was yes, more than half expressed a concern that this time is superficial because they leave church and often do not see members of their Bible Fellowship until the next time they are in church.

13. Are you studying the Bible with others?

The response overall was yes in a Bible Fellowship or some other weekday study but not much personal study with family or others outside of the church family.

14. Are you learning from others as you apply Bible truths to your everyday life?

One half of the responders answered yes and the other left it blank or wrote in that they were not sure whether or not they were applying Bible truth to everyday life. They also expressed that they need greater emphasis on biblical application that is relevant to where they are in life.

15. Are parents using teachable moments to disciple their children?

The responders were very transparent with their response by saying they feel this is their greatest weakness. The people expressed that they lack the confidence, training, and modeling of this as a child and young adult and have not yet made it a way of life in their family. Many of the responders expressed that they would like to be matched up with another set of parents, grandparents, or husband or wife that can pray with them about this important part of living out the Christian life.

16. Are you serving God in meaningful ways in through your church, your workplace, your school, your home, your community?

The responders were split on this by half saying yes and the other half responding no. Some of the responders went on to express that while they are serving they question if the service is meaningful and eternally focused. The overall opinion is that the people are busy and will volunteer out of guilt and not because of it being where they are gifted or committed to serve.

17. Are you sharing how God is working in your life with people who have not accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior?

The overall response was no, and some of the responders expressed that they need equipping in this area of their life. Some of the other responders expressed that they simply need to do it and their not sharing comes from lack of personal conviction.

18. Are you personally involved in a discipleship group?

More than half of the responders said they base their definition of discipleship on the one I shared with them of what a discipleship group is all about. The responders said that while the groups fit the definition, they do not see discipleship happening in their groups. The responders acknowledged a lack of multiplication, prayer, evangelism and ministry taking place as a result of people spending time in groups.

19. Are you personally involved in discipling others?

The overall response to this question was no, but the people expressed they would like to be equipped to disciple others. In fact, the overall response of the people was that

they would like to be, and they said they would commit to being equipped and held accountable as disciplinators. I believe we are seeing God raise up a core base with whom we will work with over the coming months so we can multiply disciplinators.

CHAPTER V

DEVELOPING A FUTURE STRATEGY OF DISCIPLEMAKING

AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF COVINGTON

Now that we have a view of what Discipleship currently looks like at First Baptist Church of Covington, it is time to look at steps toward developing a future strategy. While no one person holds the keys to discipleship, it must be considered an essential responsibility of the pastoral staff of First Baptist Church of Covington. It must begin with them being personally involved in the discipling process and being committed to equip and multiply for the purpose of obedience to the Great Commission. The discipleship process is recognized by the people of First Baptist Church of Covington to be a partnership between God, the congregation, families, and individuals helping people become obedient followers of Jesus Christ.

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 recognize that they are His followers and to help others become followers of Jesus Christ. The fruit of His followers' lives is seen in the way they live: loving, kind, peaceful, good, gentle, faithful, controlled, patient, and joyful (Galatians 5:22).

One of the obstacles that the staff will face will be their tradition, or the lack of discipline and communication to coordinate a comprehensive discipleship strategy for the

church. This is not a deal breaker to prohibit transformational discipleship from occurring, but it will hinder the process if the pastoral staff is not unified with the approach. We know this is not a new problem because it was addressed by Jesus in the Gospel of Mark: "Disregarding the command of God, you keep the tradition of men." He also said to them, "You completely invalidate God's command in order to maintain your tradition! You revoke God's word by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many other similar things" (Mark 7:8-9, 13).

We have allowed our preferred method of offering courses year after year to continue even when it is not producing fruit. While a method might have merit, it is time for our church to step up its commitment to help fulfill the Great Commission. The conducted survey has challenged the thinking of the people and has moved them to examine and declare that they do not want to just settle for the familiar but be committed to their own growth in Christ and to ensure that an opportunity is afforded to others to grow in their personal relationships with Christ.

In order to develop our discipleship strategy that fits the culture and expressed needs of the people of First Baptist Church of Covington, our Associate Pastor will work with our Discipleship Pastor and other target group pastors and a spiritually mature group of church members to answer the following questions as it relates to the big picture of discipleship at First Baptist Church of Covington. The questions are: What?, Why?, Who?, Where? and When?.

The Scripture is clear about discipleship and the desired outcome. The development of discipleship into the church must be a Stepping Stones Process because

we have not taken serious the Great Commission; therefore, we must engage in conversation that enables the discipleship ministry leader and team members the opportunity to pray, study scripture, and develop a new discipleship ministry that will encourage and support First Baptist Church of Covington to set the stage for individuals to be held accountable as they seek to grow and mature in their life-long relationship with Christ.

Another reason that I call this process a Stepping Stones Process is because of what I read in scripture. Look with me at this passage from Acts 16:9-10: “During the night a vision appeared to Paul: a Macedonian man was standing and pleading with him, ‘Cross over to Macedonia and help us!’ After he had seen the vision, we immediately made efforts to set out for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to evangelize them.” Here Paul was asked to cross over and help. I believe that a biblical discipleship process will require each individual to take steps as they become spiritually transformed. In other words we must be aware even today that people are pleading with us to cross over (or get out of our comfort zone) and help people who are looking to grow in Christ.

The process for setting up this future strategy will require a minimum of six months to one year in order to identify, enlist, and equip disciplemakers that the Holy Spirit has revealed to the pastors and leaders. The implementation schedule will be addressed in the next chapter.

While First Baptist Church of Covington has a person designated with the responsibility for Discipleship, the focus is primarily on adults. As we work toward developing a future strategy, we will be asking the Discipleship Pastor along with other

staff members to play a vital role in organizing and implementing the discipleship process that will engage the entire body of the church.

As we move forward to enhance this work of discipleship we will be establishing the formation of a discipling prayer band. This prayer band will have the primary responsibility of interceding in prayer for the discipleship ministry and will serve as encouragers toward the discipling process.

This prayer band will be selected by appropriate leadership and will consist of seven to ten adults who are demonstrating a passion for spiritual growth of their church. This prayer band will come together to pray for the spiritual health of the church.

It is important to be reminded that this is not the group charged with the responsibility of developing or working on the programming of a discipleship ministry. This is a group of people that will become a prayer band of members who demonstrate a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and have been involved in personal discipleship that includes being active in regularly sharing their faith in Christ. This prayer band will come together for the sole purpose of praying for the spiritual growth and health of the church.

Enlisting the Discipleship Prayer Band:

- The Associate Pastor will enlist this team.
- The enlistment of this prayer band will be done by scheduling a personal appointment with the potential candidate.
- The purpose of the prayer band will be communicated during the appointment, and the prospective band member will be invited to pray about his involvement before giving a response.

- The Associate Pastor will follow-up on the fifth day seeking a response from the potential band member.
- If the person accepts, then a letter with further instructions should be sent within one week of confirmation.
- If the person does not accept, a letter should be sent thanking the person for giving consideration to serving on this prayer band.
- Because it will be important that this team stay focused on praying for the spiritual health/growth of the church and it is rare that teams are enlisted for the sole purpose of praying, the Associate Pastor will remind them that the work is in the praying.

Once a prayer band is enlisted to pray, it will be time for those who will have responsibility for a discipleship ministry to come together. It is assumed that this team will be led by the pastor who has responsibility for discipleship, and the Associate Pastor will work with the Discipleship Pastor to coach him and serve as an accountability partner to ensure that the work is done. The responsibility of this team will be to develop, plan, and promote discipleship experiences, equip leaders, enlist leaders, and evaluate the effectiveness of the experiences. This team will also carry the responsibility of equipping disciplemakers to conduct annual interviews of church members in order to assess where they are in their journey with Christ and provide “GO” maps for their continued journey.

STEP ONE: PRAYING WITH THE DISCIPLESHIP TEAM

The Associate Pastor and Discipleship Pastor will enlist the discipleship ministry team to join them in a forty-eight hour prayer retreat for the purpose of seeking team unity through Christ and seeking God's guidance in the discipleship development steps.

The retreat agenda will include the following:

- Private prayer time
- Corporate prayer time
- Scripture reading
- Fasting one meal
- Fellowship
- Completing "Spiritual Assessment"⁷
- Discussing spiritual gifts among team members

⁷ "Spiritual Assessment" is an assessment that was adapted from *MasterLife* and put together by Jay Johnston and Roger Crew. The "Spiritual Assessment" is appendix number one.

STEP TWO: CRAFTING AN INTENTIONAL STRATEGY FOR FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF COVINGTON

The work of the discipleship ministry team crafting the intentional discipleship strategy for First Baptist Church of Covington will follow an intentional time of prayer.

This work will help the people of the church answer questions like this:

- How would you explain the big picture of discipling through First Baptist Church of Covington?

We must continually acknowledge that First Baptist Church of Covington's discipling capacity totally depends on God's wisdom, guidance, and power. The team will work through the following points to craft the church's intentional discipleship strategy.

WHAT?

Discipleship is a partnership between God and the congregation, families, and individuals helping people become obedient followers of Jesus Christ.

- 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 recognize that they are His followers and to help others become followers of Jesus Christ.
- The fruit of His followers' lives is seen in the way they live – loving, kind, peaceful, good, gentle, faithful, controlled, patient, and joyful (Galatians 5:22).

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” (Matthew 28: 19-20).

Jesus also challenged His followers to do everything through love for one another. 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 disciplemakers, including parents, Bible Fellowship Leaders, sports-team coaches, choir leaders, small-group facilitators, missions leaders, prayer band leaders, deacons, and others.

Disciples of Jesus Christ help others create a new identity in Christ (be); renew their minds to think like Jesus (know); and empower a lifelong relationship of love, trust, and obedience (do) to glorify God. Scriptures supporting this include but are not limited to the following:

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; think about Him in all your ways, and He will guide you on the right paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

“He said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).

“[Teach] them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

“Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2).

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

“[Y]ou are being renewed in the spirit of your minds” (Ephesians 4:23).

“Set your minds on what is above, not on what is on the earth” (Colossians 3:2).

The discipleship ministry team will be responsible to coordinate and administer intentional discipleship actions. This team having representation from all age levels and target groups will carry out the important role of equipping disciples to grow deeper in their relationship with Jesus and of equipping themselves to serve Him. The discipleship ministry team will be responsible for spiritual assessments of church members including all new members taking place on an annual basis for the purpose of then putting together

a plan that we will call our “Go Map.” The team will work to enlist church members who are actively following Christ to assist with interviewing and tracking spiritual maturity among the church members. Interviewers may also include pastors, educational staff, deacons and spouses, and Bible Fellowship Leaders who are actively following Christ and demonstrating a life of personal obedience to Jesus Christ.

First Baptist Church of Covington will add where appropriate a leadership position in our Bible Fellowships for persons who would be part of the ongoing spiritual maturity process so they might identify spiritual growth needs of class members for the discipleship ministry to consider as they work out plans, content and schedules for a discipleship ministry.

WHERE?

First Baptist Church of Covington will promote and acknowledge that discipleship takes place in the hearts and minds of believers as they live their lives in homes, in schools, in workplaces, in communities, in churches, and on the internet. Discipleship takes place in church buildings and beyond--wherever believers allow God to work in their lives.

WHEN?

Our strategy recognizes that discipleship happens every day--from the beginning of life through eternity, when disciples see Jesus in heaven. Disciplemaking is a lifelong endeavor for individual believers and churches.

The Discipleship Ministry will meet no later than Month 5 to craft out the intentional plan for First Baptist Church of Covington. As they come together during this training period, they will be asked to prayerfully answer each of the previous questions for the church's intentional discipleship strategy. The team members' responses to these questions will become an easy to understand description of First Baptist Church of Covington's discipleship strategy.

STEP THREE: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following seven principles serve as foundation for the discipleship process at First Baptist Church of Covington.

1. Salvation assumes personal surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ and a transforming journey throughout life. Christ beckons his followers: “Summoning the crowd along with His disciples, He said to them, "If anyone wants to be My follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me” (Mark 8:34). In Luke 9:23, Christ adds to this call: “Then He said to [them] all, ‘If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’” Romans 10:9 shows the believer the end result of following Christ: “[I]f you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

We will conduct interviews with every church member who desires to enter into the discipleship process for the purpose of giving each member the opportunity to acknowledge that they have personally invited Jesus Christ into their life.

2. Discipleship is an intentional, observable process of changing lives through worship, evangelism, fellowship, ministry, service, Bible study, and prayer. This definition of discipleship is taken from scripture:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayers. Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. Now all the believers were together and had everything in common. So they sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as

anyone had a need. And every day they devoted themselves [to meeting] together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

For those who are saved, scripture points to a “new creation.” “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

First Baptist Church of Covington exists to help people know and accept Jesus Christ and through Him experience life-changing relationships. To see that this mission is carried out, we will work toward ensuring that our discipleship strategy results in changed lives. The resulting life changes can be observed. Behavioral changes in believers’ lives include but are not limited to the following:

- Believers are prepared for genuine worship and Bible study.
- Believers share their faith stories as they cultivate authentic relationships with nonbelievers.
- Believers associate with people beyond their comfort zones or cliques.
- Believers use their spiritual gifts, passions, and abilities in significant ways.
- Believers share their prayer experiences with one another.

As we implement our future discipleship strategy at First Baptist Church of Covington, we will take the following actions to make discipleship an intentional, observable process in the church:

- We will conduct interviews with every believer to assess where they are in their spiritual journey.
 - We will establish a plan of growth for every believer to carry out one year at a time.
 - We will assign every person to a Disciplemaking Group.
 - We will check for updates from the group leader on attendance, scripture memorization, and lifestyle witnessing opportunities.
3. The Holy Spirit initiates and provides power for transformation as believers practice spiritual disciplines: “The Spirit is the One who gives life. The flesh doesn't help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (John 6:63). So then, the Holy Spirit gives life as well as guidance in truth as seen in John 16:63: “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak whatever He hears. He will also declare to you what is to come.” Ephesians 5:18 advises believers to not “. . . get drunk with wine, which [leads to] reckless actions, but be filled with the Spirit.”

Believers are also sanctified by the Spirit: “But we must always thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God has chosen you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). God has given believers other gifts of the Spirit: “For God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love, and sound judgment” (2 Timothy 1:7).

When disciples practice spiritual disciplines, they open their lives to the work of the Holy Spirit and the result is spiritual transformation. Transformation follows a biblical pattern that can be described in three simple words: be, know, and do.

This concept was addressed in earlier chapters.

THE BIBLICAL PATTERN OF TRANSFORMATION

Be

Be refers to who a disciple becomes at conversion as a child of God and who he or she is becoming through the indwelling Spirit's work of dynamic renewal. A disciple needs help to evaluate the progress of personal transformation. The process will include addressing the attitudes of the heart and actions of daily living by asking the question: Does the disciple look more like Christ?

Know

Know focuses on what the disciple learns about God. This learning comes through studying His word, seeing His Work, and hearing His voice. Knowing God more completely provides fuel for ongoing transformation. As the disciple studies God's Word, sees His Work, and hears His voice, a question will be asked of each person: Is knowing God all there is to the experience of transformation?

Do

Do describes what the disciple does in response to what he knows about God and who He is. God expects obedient actions. In this process the question will be asked: Is servanthood done with a serving heart?

As we work this strategy, we must be mindful that these three transformational elements are interdependent actions. In isolation, no single action has the ability to produce Christlikeness in a disciple. Together they serve as catalysts for a work

of God that changes the disciple from the inside. The interaction of these transformational elements results in a world-changing mission.

Spiritual disciplines are simply actions that disciples take to grow in Christlikeness. Some of the disciplines we will focus on include but are not limited to Bible Reading, Prayer, Worship, Fasting, Evangelism, Serving, Scripture Memorization, Fellowship, Stewardship and Resting. As we go through the interview process, we will provide disciples with specific spiritual disciplines to focus on during their spiritual journeys; churches and families make discipleship concrete and possible. Disciples will be able to both learn about and practice spiritual disciplines through discipleship groups and with the help of a disciplemaker.

4. Discipleship involves mutual accountability among disciples, encouraging a “Come go with me” attitude, “that is, to be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine” (Romans 1:12).

We continue to learn that mutual accountability with other followers of Christ helps us move forward in our spiritual journey; therefore, by having an individual or small group partner, a disciple is challenged to stay the course and become more and more like Christ. A small group plays a major role in nurturing mutual accountability among disciples. We recognize that our life experiences are richer and deeper with a “Come go with me” attitude.

As we implement this strategy we will work toward the following goals:

- every person having an individual or small group coming along side them to make the journey
 - every person taking an annual or bi-annual assessment to discuss where they are in their journey with Christ
5. Discipleship with children and students will be the primary responsibility of parents as First Baptist Church of Covington will purposefully equip them to disciple their children. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 instructs those who would disciple children:

Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is One. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Parents are further instructed to “Teach [the words] to your children, talking about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 11:19).

We have identified that parents at First Baptist Church of Covington are expecting the church to have a larger responsibility of discipling their children than themselves. We know this must be a balance between the church and the parents, so we are committing ourselves to equip parents with methods they can use to disciple their children. As we think about our future discipleship strategy, we will take the following actions to equip parents and teachers to disciple children and students:

- Communicate with parents that discipleship is a commitment between the parents and the church.
 - Equip parents and teachers with an understanding of children's and students' needs.
 - Equip parents and teachers with an understanding of learning styles and how they might incorporate them in the home and classroom.
 - Equip parents and teachers with Bible Reading and memorization skills to help encourage this discipline among the children and students.
6. Discipleship intersects all of life, applying to every experience in every context- personal and corporate.

We know that each day brings a fresh challenge or new opportunity for the people of First Baptist Church of Covington to be intentional in connecting with individuals and families. Our Lord Jesus has wired all human beings with a desire to learn throughout life. This desire is often heightened when a person faces a crisis or personal family need. Because they will be equipped to, our disciplemakers will be able to capitalize on life's teachable moments such as death, divorce, financial issues, family issues, job loss, health issues and many other circumstances that life brings, and they will be able to assist all age levels all the while helping the people of God grow in their spiritual maturity through these life experiences.

7. According to scripture, discipleship results in new disciples, transformed lives, and new disciplemakers:

Those who had been scattered as a result of the persecution that started because of Stephen made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the message to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, Cypriot and Cyrenian men, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Hellenists, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. Then the report about them reached the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to travel as far as Antioch. When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with a firm resolve of the heart for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith—and large numbers of people were added to the Lord. Then he went to Tarsus to search for Saul, and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught large numbers, and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. In those days some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine throughout the Roman world. This took place during the time of Claudius. So each of the disciples, according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brothers who lived in Judea. This they did, sending it to the elders by means of Barnabas and Saul. Acts 11:19-30

The salvation experience is a new birth by which a seeker becomes a new disciple of Jesus Christ. Therefore, evangelism plays a strategic role in making new disciples. In addition, God uses discipleship processes and strategies to transform His disciples throughout their lives. Each step and each experience on the journey brings His disciples closer to Him until the day when they fully know Him and see Him in Heaven. Only at that point are Jesus' disciples fully mature in Him. As a way of bringing reality to this we will:

- Identify people who can be ready to share their faith stories of ways God has transformed their lives.
- Focus on multiplication of disciplemakers.
- Be intentional in equipping every believer to be intentional in life witness.

STEP FOUR: SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

As I have previously mentioned, Discipleship is an intentional, observable process of changing lives. The process we will focus on with adults is the use of spiritual disciplines as a developmental process. The disciplines include but are not limited to Bible Reading, Prayer, Worship, Fasting, Evangelism, Serving, Scripture Memorization, Fellowship, Stewardship and Resting. This process will allow First Baptist Church of Covington an opportunity for individuals to follow a disciple strategy. The process will engage individuals in actively changing their lives to be more Christlike.

While working with our student leaders and parents, our intent will be to continue to build upon spiritual disciplines that provide a Christian World View. Our desire is to help junior high and senior high students develop and practice spiritual disciplines that will encourage them now and prepare them for the Christian Life as adults. We will incorporate the spiritual disciplines identified for adults but with a student bend. These disciplines will include but are not limited to students becoming aware of the cost of discipleship, encouraging accountability within the home, church and school, establishing and living out godly priorities, digging deep into God's Word, developing a lifestyle of prayer, meeting needs and sharing Christ, living a life of obedience – the work of the Holy Spirit, and reflecting Christ in everyday life more than morality.

We will utilize for our children the Life-Span Process adapted by LifeWay Christian Resources often referred to as *Levels of Biblical Learning*.⁸ This simple but important ministry tool was developed by experts to provide visible milestones as a church works to guide children in their spiritual growth as they hear, know, and do God’s Word. This tool helps parents, teachers, and pastoral staff with milestones related to biblical knowledge, skills, and attitudes at the designated levels from birth through the preteen years. *Levels of Biblical Learning* gives a coordinated approach by using ten concept areas—God, Jesus, the Bible, Creation, Family, Self, Church, Community & World, Holy Spirit, and Salvation. In developing *Levels of Biblical Learning*, Tommy Sanders and Gary Cook had four basic assumptions:

“The Bible as Our Textbook—The Bible is the basis for everything taught in Bible study settings. Bible content is also the basis for the development of all teaching procedures.

The Child as Learner—Preschoolers and children are the focus of our teaching. Their understanding, needs, and interests are important considerations in determining how to approach Bible content. Bible study resources must touch the head, the heart, and the hands (body) of the child to create life-changing experiences.

The Teacher as Guide—The teacher, whether teaching in an open or closed group Bible study, must focus on the five functions of the church—evangelism, discipleship, ministry, fellowship, and worship. The teacher must provide activities that will involve children in learning, will guide children to correct information, and will share the biblical revelation. In addition to teaching Bible truths, teachers must live out the biblical message in front of children and parents.

Parents as Primary Teachers—The primary responsibility for religious instruction of preschoolers and children belongs to parents. The Holy Spirit works through Christian parents as they teach biblical truths in word and action. The church and its ministries must assist and support parents as spiritual leaders by training them and teaching their children.”⁹

⁸ Adapted from the original introduction to the *Levels of Biblical Learning* written by Thomas L. Sanders, Director of the Master of Arts in Christian Education: Childhood Ministry, and Gary Cook Graduate School of Leadership at Dallas Baptist University. Appendix number two.

⁹ *Levels of Biblical Learning* written by Thomas L. Sanders, Director of the Master of Arts in Christian Education: Childhood Ministry, and Gary Cook Graduate School of Leadership at Dallas Baptist University. [3].

The ten concept areas that are addressed through LifeWay's resource, *Level of Biblical Learning* does assist First Baptist Church of Covington in providing a broad biblical framework for guiding parents and teachers in teaching children from birth through sixth grade. While this tool was developed by former LifeWay employees and is used today by LifeWay, it does not limit our church to using only LifeWay Resources.

The tool is a resource that provides a comprehensive picture as we minister to children and parents. It is a tool that does help us think through the overall learning process, and it ensures that we keep looking at both a micro and macro level as we work with children and parents to help them grow and mature in their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is important for us as a church to see the correlation and connectivity of the concept areas. It is equally important to help parents see this correlation. We recognize and respect the teachings about God and Jesus in the early years play an important role in helping the child understand salvation later in life. The concept areas provide a biblical framework for laying a foundation that becomes the pathway to conversion, spiritual growth, and a biblical worldview. Eight of the concepts are foundational and/or prerequisite to the more advanced concepts of Holy Spirit and Salvation which are distinctive to first through sixth grade students.

What I have not addressed here and will guard the team from addressing is curriculum or resources. I believe the Spiritual Development Process needs to remain the focus as we work through the Stepping Stones to developing our Discipleship Strategy at First Baptist Church of Covington. I believe by staying focused on the Spiritual Development Process we will begin to see spiritual transformation take place in the lives of the people.

STEP FIVE: THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Once the discipleship ministry team has crafted a strategy, identified guiding principles, and established a process for planning and assessing spiritual development, we will be ready to put together a procedure for discipleship at First Baptist Church of Covington which is the fifth step in the stepping–stone progression of developing a church discipleship strategy. This fifth step will help to bring alignment to the discipleship strategy as we get set for individuals to grow spiritually.

As the development process begins, it is vital to the discipling course of action that we keep these scriptures in mind because they provide the church with an understanding of the desired Biblical outcome:

- “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” (Matthew 28: 19-20).
- “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).

It is important to consider questions by the team as they explore, develop, and implement these elements so they build a foundation that allows the implementation to move forward within the church environment.

Four questions to consider:

- What is the current status of our discipleship process in regard to our elements?
- What do we need to do to make progress?
- What resources do we need?
- How inclusive should our promotion be to continually inform the church about the discipleship process?

This team will explore, develop, and implement five elements that will bring the guiding principles to life and set the stage for believers to grow in their journey with Christ. These elements assist First Baptist Church of Covington with intentionally making and equipping new disciples to become lifelong followers of Jesus Christ. These elements do serve as Stepping Stones along the discipleship path being established by our Church so we can construct, evaluate, and adjust our discipleship process to maintain an intentionality of making new disciples and equipping disciples to become followers of Jesus Christ. The discipleship ministry team will continually craft its way to assembling these elements and plan these actions as they assess the people each year. We must remember that these elements are not linear. Each element will need to be developed by the team and evaluated annually to benefit the overall strategy of discipling at First Baptist Church of Covington. This is a good place to always remind the discipleship team to ask the discipleship prayer band to pray for them as they work through the process and ask God to be the draftsman and the power behind the process.

Five Elements for Developing Spiritual Growth:

1. Evaluate the spiritual environment for supporting life transformation and disciple making!

The team will begin by reading Luke 4:28-30; 4:44; 5:17, 5:27; 6:1,12; 7:1,11-12,36; 8:1,4,26; 9:51; 10:1; 15:1; 17:11; 18:9,15,18,35; 19:45; 20:27. After reading these scriptures, the team should seek out the following response: What did God say ? What did the team say? How will the team respond?

For many church families, life transformation and discipling are hindered by unspoken and ignored church issues as well as by open conflict in the fellowship of believers. The discipleship team will enlist a task force to conduct the evaluation and assessment. Internal and external assessments will be administered to help the discipleship team of First Baptist Church of Covington identify barriers to life transformation and discipling and deal with them through God's grace.

The internal assessment will begin with corporate prayer. The entire church family will participate in the internal actions; our communication plan will inform the church members and attendees about the assessment that will be conducted over a period of time. Our pastor will preach about the mission of First Baptist Church of Covington and the responsibility she has for discipling as we launch this internal assessment. We are calling upon the church to dedicate a day

to pray for God's guidance in the assessment. Ultimately, the internal assessment will analyze the culture of the church which identifies our unique identity and style for being God's family on the Northshore.

Assessing the Internal Spiritual Environment

1. Assess the spiritual maturity of church members.

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

2. Evaluate the church's mission, vision and goals.

- How do we reach people for Christ?
- How do we develop people spiritually?
- What is the primary purpose of Bible Fellowships?
- How is our discipleship process clearly defined by leaders and members of the church?
- Does our discipleship process have sequential steps that cause people to move to greater areas of commitment?
- Are all the ministries and staff members aligned with our discipleship process?
- What is God calling us to do?

- How do we plan to get there? First Baptist Church of Covington asserts in its *Vision* that “We exist to help people know and accept Jesus Christ and through Him experience life-changing relationships.”

3. Analyze the spiritual lives of church leaders.

- This is done in an open fashion with team members conducting interviews with church leaders.

An external assessment will reveal what people outside of First Baptist Church of Covington think about our church. We will need to bathe the external assessment in prayer as will be the internal assessment. The same team that carried out the internal assessment can carry out the external assessment. This will include identifying demographics, assessing the church’s reputation in the community, and acquiring other information.

Assessing the External View of Your Church Environment

- 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 forms of social and spiritual darkness seem to be strongholds in our community?
- What conditions contribute to spiritual darkness in our community?

- What truth unlocks and frees people who exist in spiritual darkness in our community?

The combined results of the internal and external assessment will provide First Baptist Church of Covington with a comprehensive view of its spiritual condition. The information will be used by the team to establish a plan of discipleship and to help the church family to accept the realities and for sure the perceptions about the current condition of the church. To act on what is learned, the pastoral team and ministry leaders must examine their own hearts to determine whether they are ready to lead the church from its current state to future growth. This should be done through sermons, congregational meetings, and other forums to communicate the positive and the negatives discovered through the assessment.

Now having the realities and the spiritual environment of the church in mind, the discipleship team will move to involve various other teams in defining and interpreting anticipated ministry results, including people coming to Christ and serving Him. As this work is done and ministry areas are found to be in need of retooling, we will establish a plan to begin that process with the appropriate pastors and church leaders.

2. Create Environments for Nonbelievers to Understand and Respond to Truth that Will Change Their Lives

The team will read Matthew 9:13; John 14:6; 8:31-32; and Romans 5:8 and answer the following questions: What did God say? What did the team say? How will the team respond?

If we are to see First Baptist Church of Covington implement a discipling process that can influence the entire church body, then we need to ask the following questions.

- What are the entry points into the life of First Baptist Church of Covington for the lost and unchurched?
- Do our worship services, Bible Fellowships, and current small groups play strategic roles in creating an environment that enables nonbelievers to understand and respond to the truth about Jesus Christ?
- Are our ministry areas open for unchurched persons to participate at any time?
- Do we provide an accepting and loving environment that is attractive to the unchurched and those who are prodigals from God?
- Do all of our touch points/ministry areas lead people to opportunities to accept Christ and to enter the discipleship process?
- Does the effort of the church reveal we are trying to get people to come to the church, or does it reflect an attitude that we are reaching out and attempting to connect with them where they live?

The second element in our discipleship process is found in the answers to these questions. That element is **evangelism**. In order to create an environment where nonbelievers can understand and respond to Jesus Christ, we will take action to begin implementing the following steps:

- First Baptist Church of Covington will attempt to create an environment for nonbelievers, unchurched and those far from God by demonstrating a loving, nurturing spirit and accepting attitudes of others.
- First Baptist Church of Covington will use evangelism tools and venues to carry out this part of the discipling process. While we have a variety of evangelism tools and venues to attract people, we follow two primary paths to equip and practice. We equip the people by using the *Christian Life and Witness Course* from the Billy Graham Organization, and we practice this through our open groups that are called Bible Fellowships.
- First Baptist Church of Covington will be committed to reaching church members' children by providing an environment that encourages us to love, nurture and accept children and students who are members of families in the church.
- First Baptist Church of Covington will move forward to be intentional about equipping parents as disciplers.

3. Welcome and nurture new believers.

The team will read Ephesians 4:14-16, Philippians 3:15, and Hebrews 6:1 and answer these questions: What did God say? What did the team say? How will the team respond?

Here are other guiding questions for the team to answer as they seek the Lord through scripture reading and prayer about this third element of welcoming and nurturing new believers.

- Do new believers at First Baptist Church of Covington find the help they need to begin their spiritual journey with Jesus Christ?
- Do they have opportunities to study the Bible with mature believers in Bible Fellowships and small groups?
- Do they have the opportunity to be mentored by a mature disciple?
- Are they able to use their spiritual gifts, passions, talents, and abilities in meaningful ways to minister and grow?

With the team's answers, we can evaluate our effectiveness with a new believers strategy. Here are suggestions to help the team move forward with a plan to develop this element:

- First Baptist Church of Covington can give new believers a good start. When lost people make professions of faith, we will develop a plan that immediately begins the process of welcoming and nurturing them in their new relationships with Jesus Christ and their new church family. This may include individual actions, small group study, mentoring, spiritual direction, and one-on-one or one-on-three studies along with providing tools and resources for shaping new believers. The team will need to consider options for mentoring relationships between a new believer and an experienced believer.
- First Baptist Church of Covington can provide small group learning opportunities for new believers. In addition to relating to a mentor, new believers need to build relationships with other believers in group setting. Small-group learning opportunities that involve new believers and experienced

believers can set the stage for these nurturing relationships. Together they can study the Bible in Bible Fellowship Classes and enjoy fellowship with growing believers. We can also encourage new believers to participate through the week in small groups that enrich and strengthen their journey of spiritual transformation. These small groups intentionally deepen new members' understanding of God's Word and give them opportunities to hold one another accountable for surrendering their lives to the lordship of Jesus Christ in their everyday lives.

- First Baptist Church of Covington can equip new believers to share their faith. New believers usually have many relationships with nonbelievers, so they need to learn how to tell their personal faith stories with friends and family members who have not been saved. Their enthusiasm for their new Savior and Lord will drive their desire for their friends and family to know Jesus too. The Discipleship Prayer Band can make this one of their priorities in prayer as well as encourage the church at large to pray for new believers who are actively sharing their story with others.
- First Baptist Church of Covington can provide a new member orientation. We must remember that the church is a foreign field with a different language. Thus, new believers will greatly benefit from a new member-orientation process. This is where the church can engage the new member in the process to connect them with spiritually mature church members who can conduct an

interview that includes a spiritual assessment for the purpose of establishing a plan for the new member to be given a “Go” map to begin his spiritual journey. The new member can also be provided a mentor, a Bible Fellowship Class, and other key spiritual direction including a lesson on tithing. The new believer can also gain a biblical understanding of basic Christian beliefs and spiritual disciplines that prepares him or her to begin living and growing as a Christian. This orientation might also provide an opportunity to identify spiritual gifts, experiences, relationships, vocational skills, and enthusiasm for specific ministry areas that the Lord may want the new member to be involved.

By establishing a new member orientation, mentoring, Bible Fellowships and small group experiences, the goal would be 80 percent involvement of new believers in the ministry of First Baptist Church of Covington and beyond.

4. Encourage a lifestyle of servanthood.

After the team reads Matthew 20:26; Galatians 5:13; and 1 Peter 4:10, they should answer the following questions: What did God say? What did the team say? How will the team respond?

As the discipleship leadership team will be challenged and motivated by this fourth element. The church today has walked into a briar patch when it comes to encouraging and equipping believers to think of them as servants. The church leaders today continue calling out for volunteers through a mass appeal that

typically starts in the early summer and goes into the fall. The church leaders including the pastoral staff must get back to being intentional about encouraging this lifestyle among both new believers and growing believers. If we are to be about fulfilling the Great Commission then we must be about equipping and multiplying the Saints. The church leaders and pastors must carry out Ephesians 4:1-16:

I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, accepting one another in love, (diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds [us]). There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope at your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of the Messiah's gift. For it says: When He ascended on high, He took prisoners into captivity; He gave gifts to people. But what does "He ascended" mean except that He descended to the lower parts of the earth? The One who descended is the same as the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, [growing] into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ. From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.

Here are questions the team should address and then identify where they are in this process:

- Are we challenging both new believers and growing believers to think of themselves as servants to Jesus Christ and other people?
- Do believers have opportunities to grow and become followers of Jesus Christ through a sense of servanthood in every component of their lives?
- How does the leadership team hold itself accountable for servanthood?
- How are we using the spiritual gifts, talents and passions of new and growing believers?
- Are we spending time equipping both new believers and growing believers in areas of service?

The discipleship leadership team and pastoral staff should teach the biblical mandate of servanthood and character. One way this can be encouraged is by fostering an understanding of the biblical mandate of servanthood and character. The team can also communicate through articles, sermons, and other means the studies of Galatians 5 and 2 Peter 1:5-9 which will deepen the understanding and lead believers to apply this mandate to their everyday lives.

The discipleship team should encourage growth through spiritual disciplines. We must remember that some of the best lessons will be caught and not taught so we must encourage disciples to be engaged and challenged to be servants. By providing a track for disciples to practice spiritual disciplines that include the practice of servanthood along their journey, they open their lives for spiritual transformation to take place.

The discipleship team must also work with the new believers and growing believers to identify their spiritual gifts, passions, skills, and abilities. This can be done during the annual interview process by conducting an assessment of spiritual gifts, passions, skills, and abilities that will help disciples understand themselves and see where they can help their church. While there are many different assessments available today, the team will utilize the survey resources located at *Churchgrowth.org* for individual and team assessments. Our team will also use a resource that is called “A Spiritual Assessment Survey” that was put together by me and a former co-worker, Roger Crew. This assessment is located in the appendix.

5. Guide believers to find balance in life, indicted by a whole person who is moving in the right direction.

The team should read Psalm 139:23-24; Ephesians 4:12; 2 Timothy 2:15, 4:6-8; and Hebrews 12:1-2 and answer the following questions: What did God say? What did the team say? How will the team respond?

After examining these passages of scripture and exploring how God is working to call the team out to a life of discipleship, the team will want to address current practices of the believers:

- Are believers at First Baptist Church of Covington participating in closed groups with other believers to learn biblical truths for their lives and deepen their levels of spiritual maturity?

- Are we providing opportunities for believers to be involved in Paul and Timothy Discipleship situations or just large topical groups?
- Do the believers that are currently involved in closed groups have a daily quiet time or devotional time where they read God's word and spend time praying?
- Are the believers who are currently involved in discipleship groups balancing their lives by studying God's word, praying, and serving God in meaningful ways?
- As a follower of Christ, are those currently involved in a discipleship/closed group being observed as disciples who are moving closer to being like Christ?

Speaking of balance, we are working to provide a balanced process for all age groups as the church comes together throughout the week. We are working to constantly answer these questions:

- Is First Baptist Church of Covington balancing actions that connect adults to God and other people; helping them grow in biblical understanding; helping them serve by using their God-given spiritual gifts, passions, abilities, and skills; and helping them go beyond the church in sharing their faith stories with the lost and unchurched?
- Is First Baptist Church of Covington balancing actions with students to help them know God, own their relationship with Christ, and be known by others?
- Is First Baptist Church of Covington helping children hear foundational Bible truths, know foundational biblical concepts, and become spiritually transformed?

At First Baptist Church of Covington we are renewing our commitment of guiding believers to find balance and wholeness on their life-long journey with Christ.

These six actions are intentional measures we are committed to in order to help believers find balance in their journey with Christ:

- **Starting the Journey** – Guiding believers on a journey to spiritual balance and wholeness is an important element for First Baptist Church of Covington. This journey begins when a person invites Jesus Christ into their life and is a process of maturing until the day that believer meets Jesus Christ in heaven. Here are practical ways we will help believers start, and in some cases revive, their journey with Christ:
 - a. Believers will write out their story of accepting Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior and share their story with a friend or family member.
 - b. Believers will be assigned to a Bible Fellowship Class which serves as an open group and will be encouraged to join in a closed group class.
 - c. Believers will be encouraged to journal their new life in Christ and identify their spiritual markers that describe experiences they are having during their quiet times.
- **Assessing a believer's spiritual placement** – Helping believers get started on their journey can be done by utilizing spiritual assessment tools. While these tools may be more subjective in nature, they provide the opportunity to discuss a person's path one or more years at a time. These tools help believers identify where they are on the journey, not necessarily how mature they are at certain points. This information will serve in helping a believer develop a set of

spiritual growth goals that determine where discipleship actions are needed, and this information will also serve as a way for keeping balance in the believer's life.

- **Accountability** – The accountability factor is a two-way street if we are going to see believers grow in their relationship with Christ while seeing the overall health of the church improve. We will work with believers to match them with other believers for the purpose of holding one another accountable with the intention that their lives are moving toward Christ. We will also ask the believers to hold the church accountable so that the church is encouraging while at the same time helping to implement accountability groups.
- **Providing balanced small groups** – The church will provide opportunities for believers to engage in relationships that help them find balance and live holistically for Jesus Christ. This opportunity to provide balance among small groups will include mentoring and coaching opportunities for every believer through the annual interview between church members and the disciplemakers ministry team.
- **Providing balance through the practice of spiritual disciplines** – This act of balance can be accomplished as believers are introduced to, taught and held accountable to practice one or more spiritual disciplines before moving on in their walk with Christ. As the disciplemakers meet and pray with believers they will guide believers to practice a variety of disciplines. As a way to engage and begin the equipping process we will have disciplemakers and

others sharing their experiences. We will also have small groups studying and practicing spiritual disciplines on a regular basis throughout each church year.

- **Emphasize spiritual transformation** – Our church’s ultimate goal of a balanced, intentional discipleship strategy is for lives to become spiritually transformed, for lives to be changed. Spiritual transformation is God at work in the lives of His followers. We will stay focused on challenging and equipping disciples to let God guide them to grow in their understanding of who they are and who they are becoming in Christ. This process will also expand the believers’ understanding of biblical truth and help them daily apply what they learn. Our church will also be moving to involve believers in significant acts of service that glorify God and transform the lives of people. As we launch our future Discipleship Strategy, we will be intentional to help parents and teachers fulfill the biblical responsibilities that will enable them to disciple children and students. This will include but is not limited to helping both parents and teachers understand learning styles, characteristics, and needs of today’s children and students. To help parents and teachers, we will utilize the *Levels of Biblical Learning* adopted by LifeWay Christian Resources addressed earlier in this paper.

Chapter VI

The Countdown Calendar: Steps in Developing a Discipleship Strategy

A successful discipleship strategy will be built on important elements:

- Prayer
- Intentional enlistment of leaders
- Preparation
- Execution of plans
- Enlistment of new and growing Christians
- Follow-through with new and growing Christians to assist them in becoming fully devoted followers of Christ

The Stepping Stones Process will be characterized in the following ways:

- Intentional/ongoing
- Comprehensive
- Transformational
- Accountable/relational
- Focused
- Relevant

This planning calendar view provides flexibility because First Baptist Church of Covington is committed to the long term process of making disciples and multiplying disciples. The initial process for First Baptist Church of Covington will take up to

eighteen months as we work through the steps for the purpose of giving the people a new vision of discipleship.

Month 1

- The Senior Pastor will communicate to the pastoral staff the intent to implement an intentional/ongoing process for discipleship.
- The Senior Pastor will position the Discipleship Pastor to execute and implement the discipleship process.

Month 2

- The Senior Pastor will communicate through a series of sermons the biblical relevance of the church equipping disciples to become fully devoted followers of Christ.
- The Discipleship Prayer Band will be enlisted to cover the pastor team and soon to be enlisted discipleship ministry team in prayer as they work through the stepping- stone process.
- The Senior Pastor along with the Associate Pastor and Discipleship Pastor will identify potential discipleship ministry team members.
- The Associate Pastor and Discipleship Pastor will begin the enlistment process for the discipleship ministry team by interviewing and praying with potential team members.

Month 3

- The Associate Pastor and Discipleship Pastor will meet with the Prayer Band.

- The Associate Pastor and Discipleship Pastor will communicate via telephone and in writing the selection of discipleship ministry team members.
- The Associate Pastor and Discipleship Pastor will communicate in person with church members interviewed but not selected to serve on the discipleship ministry team.
- The Associate Pastor and Discipleship Pastor will meet with the discipleship ministry team and appropriate pastoral team members for a time of prayer led by the prayer band.

Month 4

- The discipleship ministry team will go on a forty-eight hour retreat. The retreat agenda will include the following agenda:
 1. private prayer time
 2. corporate prayer time
 3. scripture reading
 4. fasting one meal
 5. fellowship
 6. completing spiritual assessment¹⁰
 7. discussing spiritual gifts among team members
- The Associate Pastor and Discipleship Pastor will set calendar dates with discipleship ministry team for future workouts.

¹⁰ *Spiritual Assessment* is an assessment that was adapted from MasterLife and put together by Jay Johnston and Roger Crew. The *Spiritual Assessment* is Appendix number one.

Month 5

- The discipleship ministry team will meet to address step two of the discipleship process which is crafting an intentional strategy. The strategy will be identified as the team answers the following questions as addressed fully in the project:
 1. What?
 2. Why?
 3. Who?
 4. Where?
 5. When?
- The team will communicate this strategy to the church as a working strategy for the purpose of keeping communication flowing.

Month 6

- The discipleship ministry team will meet to work through the guiding principles and the spiritual development process.
- The discipleship ministry team led in cooperation with the pastors, deacons and spouses will come together for a half-day retreat to take the spiritual assessment, spiritual gifts inventory, and discuss their findings.

Month 7

- The discipleship ministry team will meet to explore, develop, and implement five elements that will bring the guiding principles to life and set the stage for believers to grow in their journey with Christ.

- The discipleship ministry team will begin the enlistment and equipping of disciplemakers.
- The discipleship ministry team along with the Senior Pastor will communicate to the entire church family the strategy and what they can expect in the coming months.

Month 8 -12

- The discipleship ministry team will continue to enlist and equip disciplemakers that will serve in the initial phase of implementing the strategy. This time will be used to prepare disciplemakers through prayer, readings, teachings, discussions and witnessing so they are ready to lead in the coming months.
- The discipleship ministry team will take the spiritual development process and begin weighing it with small-group resources and resources that can be used in one-to-one, one-to-three and one-to-twelve discipleship groups. We will be using both small group and Paul and Timothy type approach to disciplmaking.

Month 12-14

- Promotion and communication of the Discipleship Strategy will take place during these months. This will include mass communication, personal contact and discovery sessions for people to come and learn firsthand about the discipleship strategy.
- The discipleship ministry team will continue to enlist and equip disciplemakers that will serve in the initial phase of implementing the strategy. This time will be

used to prepare disciplemakers through prayer, readings, teachings, discussions and witnessing so they are prepared to lead in the coming months.

Month 15

- The discipleship ministry team will continue to enlist and equip disciplemakers that will serve in the initial phase of implementing the strategy. This time will be used to prepare disciplemakers through prayer, readings, teachings, discussions and witnessing so they are ready to lead in the coming months.
- Assessments and Interviews will take place during this time frame for a selected group of people who have previously shown interest in discipleship opportunities.
- Sign-ups for those who have been through the interview process will occur.

Month 16

- Promotion and Sign-up for those interested in discipleship studies but have not yet gone through the interview process.
- Kick-off of the discipleship process.

The discipleship ministry team will continue the process and some members will rotate off after year two. The team along the way will be training and equipping a group of people who can join the ministry team in full swing.

The team will continue to evaluate the strategy, look for fruit, and continue the interview process with those they enlisted so every person will have an opportunity to be assessed, be interviewed, and be given a “Go Map”.

CONCLUSION

Dedicated! Devoted! Disciplined! Diligent! Daring! Dynamic! What difference would disciples demonstrating these characteristics make in your church and community? These words and this question appear in the beginning of this paper. These words and this question continue to motivate me to see a church implement a discipleship strategy that can help modern day disciples see the world turned upside down for Jesus.

As I work on the conclusion of this, I have reflected upon a time of prayer I had earlier this morning with eight other men. The reason for the prayer time is the people at First Baptist Church of Covington, who are like many others I have had the opportunity to come in contact with, really desire to make a difference in the church and community in which they live. I can see from this group of men a hunger for Christ to work and be Lord of All on the Northshore of New Orleans and for that matter Lord of All throughout the world. In fact, of this group of eight men, there is one heading out soon to assist in a church plant, another has become part of Campers on Mission, and another wants to be available to serve Christ through the reconstruction of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. One of the men is working on an early retirement plan so he can spend time discipling men through one to one, one to three or one to twelve approaches. The others simply want to live their life in obedience to Christ through their family, church, community and work.

I am not surprised that this group of men desires to be all that they can be in Christ. I do know that this group of eight is looking for more direction as they attempt to

live out the Christian life. For some they are looking for guidance as to how they can be the type of individual in Christ that really loves their wife as Christ loves the church. Some of the men have previously seen what discipleship can do for them and those they disciple and have expressed their commitment to be more involved in discipling and multiplying Christians to evangelize, disciple, and reach the world for Christ.

I believe that as First Baptist Church of Covington continues to work through the Stepping Stones Process to develop a discipleship strategy, we will experience a fruitful course that will bring about spiritual transformation. I also believe we will see the church gain focus in its ongoing mission of carrying out the Great Commission and Great Commandment. It will be exciting to see people come alive in their relationship with Christ as they are disciplined and cared for by fellow believers.

The Stepping Stones Process is about a development of disciple making and is not about what resources churches use in a discipleship ministry. I believe for many years church staff and church leaders have focused on a resource that someone believes will change the world and have failed to focus on the process for discipling. We have gotten the cart before the horse when we go looking for a resource and fail to work out a process for discipling, and that is why Stepping Stones is so vital to today's discipling making strategy.

The Stepping Stones Process will require the church to be committed to the prayer strategy along with the implementation strategy for discipling. This will not be a quick fix process but one that encourages prayer and conversation to take place among those in and outside the church walls. I believe that as the people work through this

process, God will lead First Baptist Church of Covington to be consumed with being a church that is all about discipling.

I am looking forward to the opportunity of First Baptist Church of Covington moving from developing the strategy to implementing an ongoing intentional discipling process. The time and energy is well worth the effort because we know we are focusing on what is important to God.

The commission has been given; therefore, the staff is ready to carry it out as is the laity so we will develop and implement the strategy because we really desire to turn the world upside down for Jesus.

Spiritual Growth Assessment Process

Your spiritual journey as a follower of Christ began the moment you admitted personal sin and placed your trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. From that point, until death or the return of Christ, your life's call is to grow in Christlikeness. Jesus summarizes the disciple's call in Mark 8:34, "If anyone wants to be My follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me" (Holman CSB). Accomplishing such a challenging assignment requires growing in your understanding of what it means to be a Christian, expanding your personal knowledge of biblical truth, and applying daily what you learn. Through the presence of His indwelling Spirit, God enables you to know, obey, and serve Him.

God expects His children to grow spiritually and His Word encourages personal examination as an element of growth.

- "Let us search out and examine our ways..." Lamentations 3:40
- "Now, the Lord of Hosts says this: 'Think carefully about your ways.'" Haggai 1:5
- "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way." Psalm 139:23-24
- "But each person should examine his own work, and then he will have a reason for boasting in himself alone, and not in respect to someone else." Galatians 6:4
- "Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people, but as wise." Ephesians 5:15

This assessment process can help you complete an examination and careful search of your spiritual growth. Follow these simple steps to complete the process.

- **Step One** - Complete the **Spiritual Growth Assessment**. The assessment helps you think carefully about your development related to six specific spiritual disciplines; abiding in Christ, living in the Word, praying in faith, fellowshiping with believers, witnessing to the world, ministering to others. Before completing your responses, ask the Lord to guide your evaluation. Since most of these statements require a subjective response, His guidance is the key to an accurate appraisal. Also, resist the urge to compare scores with others. Self-condemnation or pride could result from such comparisons. Trust God to help you grow spiritually by revealing heart issues and empowering you to take action.
- **Step Two** - Draw and evaluate your **Discipleship Wheel**.
- **Step Three** – Distribute copies of the **Spiritual Growth Observations Response Sheet** to at least three people. Follow the instructions before completing a personal growth plan.
- **Step Four** - Begin working on a personal growth plan. The **Annual Spiritual Growth Plan** worksheet helps you formulate an intentional plan for growth. Use the **Recommended Actions for Spiritual Growth Guide** to discover suggestions for actions to include in your plan. As you discuss your plan with an accountability partner, you may discover additional actions that more effectively meet your needs.

As you complete this assessment process the temptation might be to think your efforts are central to growing spiritually. **Remember, becoming like Christ centers on His work in us and not our work for Him. God desires heart change over religious actions.** Without question, God does the revealing, the renewing, the empowering, and the recreating. Your part as His disciple is to do the yielding, the submitting, and the obeying.

Spiritual Growth Assessment

As you complete the assessment, avoid rushing. Listen for God’s voice to encourage and challenge you. Consider this experience as one-on-one time with Him. Be intentional in your growth towards Christlikeness. Use the scale below to respond to each statement.

Never-1, Seldom-2, Occasionally-3, Frequent-4, Always-5

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES	RESPONSE
RESTING	
1. I practice a regular quiet time and look forward to that time with Christ.	
2. When making choices, I seek Christ’s guidance first.	
3. My relationship with Christ is motivated more by love than duty or fear.	
4. I experience life change as a result of my worship experiences.	
5. When God makes me aware of His specific will in an area of my life, I follow His leading.	
6. I believe Christ provides the only way for a relationship with God.	
7. My actions demonstrate a desire to build God’s kingdom rather than my own.	
8. Peace, contentment, and joy characterize my life rather than worry and anxiety.	
9. I trust Christ to help me through any problem or crisis I face.	
10. I remain confident of God’s love and provision during difficult times.	
Christ Total	Abide in
BIBLE READING	
1. I regularly read and study my Bible.	
2. I believe the Bible is God’s Word and provides His instructions for life.	
3. I evaluate cultural ideas and lifestyles by biblical standards.	
4. I can answer questions about life and faith from a biblical perspective.	
5. I replace impure or inappropriate thoughts with God’s truth.	
6. I demonstrate honesty in my actions and conversation.	
7. When the Bible exposes an area of my life needing change, I respond to make things right.	
8. Generally, my public and private self are the same	
9. I use the Bible as the guide for the way I think and act.	
10. I study the Bible for the purpose of discovering truth for daily living.	
Total	Live in the Word
PRAYING	
1. My prayers focus on discovering God’s will more than expressing my needs.	
2. I trust God to answer when I pray and wait patiently on His timing.	
3. My prayers include thanksgiving, praise, confession, and requests.	
4. I expect to grow in my prayer life and intentionally seek help to improve.	
5. I spend as much time listening to God as talking to Him.	
6. I pray because I am aware of my complete dependence on God for everything in my life.	
7. Regular participation in group prayer characterizes my prayer life.	

8. I maintain an attitude of prayer throughout each day.	
9. I believe my prayers impact my life and the lives of others.	
10. I engage in a daily prayer time.	
Faith Total	Pray In
FELLOWSHIP	
1. I forgive others when their actions harm me.	
2. I admit my errors in relationships and humbly seek forgiveness from the one I've hurt.	
3. I allow other Christians to hold me accountable for spiritual growth.	
4. I seek to live in harmony with other members of my family.	
5. I place the interest of others above my self-interest.	
6. I am gentle and kind in my interactions with others.	
7. I encourage and listen to feedback from others to help me discover areas for relationship growth.	
8. I show patience in my relationships with family and friends.	
9. I encourage others by pointing out their strengths rather than criticizing their weaknesses.	
10. My time commitments demonstrate that I value relationships over work/career/hobbies.	
Believers Total	Fellowship With
EVASNGELISM	
1. I share my faith in Christ with non-believers.	
2. I regularly pray for non-believers I know.	
3. I make my faith known to my neighbors and/or fellow employees.	
4. I intentionally maintain relationships with non-believers in order to share my testimony.	
5. When confronted about my faith, I remain consistent and firm in my testimony.	
6. I help others understand how to effectively share a personal testimony.	
7. I make sure the people I witness to get the follow-up and support needed to grow in Christ.	
8. I encourage my church and friends to support mission efforts.	
9. I am prepared to share my testimony at any time.	
10. My actions demonstrate a belief in and commitment to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).	
World Total	Witness To The
SERVING	
1. I understand my spiritual gifts and use those gifts to serve others.	
2. I serve others expecting nothing in return.	
3. I sacrificially contribute my finances to help others in my church and community.	
4. I go out of my way to show love to people I meet.	
5. Meeting the needs of others provides a sense of purpose in my life.	
6. I share biblical truth with those I serve as God gives opportunity.	
7. I act as if other's needs are as important as my own.	
8. I expect God to use me every day in His kingdom work.	
9. I regularly contribute time to a ministry at my church.	
10. I help others identify ministry gifts and become involved in ministry.	
Others Total	Minister To

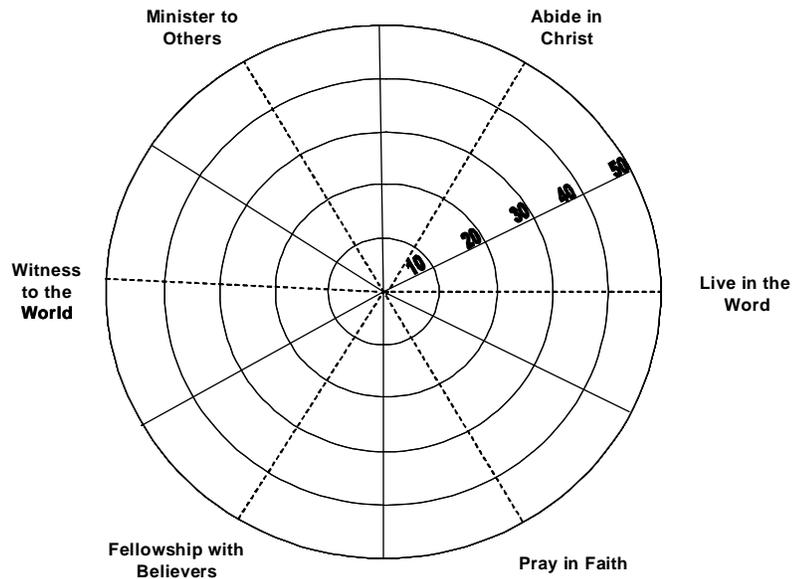
Your Discipleship Wheel

For a visual representation of your spiritual assessment complete the following steps.

Step One: On the dotted line in each discipline section of the circle plot a point corresponding to your total score for that discipline. Place similar points on the solid lines to the immediate right and left of each dotted line.

Step Two: Connect the plotted points with curved lines similar to the lines of the circle.

Step Three: Using a pencil or marker shade the areas in each section between the lines you drew and the center of the circle. The shaded areas reveal your personal discipleship wheel at this point in your spiritual journey.



Step Four: Ask yourself these questions:

1. Which areas have the most shading? At this point in your spiritual journey, you see these as the strongest elements of your spiritual growth. List below one benefit these strengths bring to

- a. You personally:

- b. Your family:

- c. Your church:

- d. Your community:

2. Which areas have the least shading? At this point in your spiritual journey you see these as the elements needing the most improvement. List below one reward growth in these disciplines would bring to:

- a. You personally:

- b. Your family:

- c. Your church:

- d. Your community:

Step Five: Make specific plans to grow spiritually this next year. Complete the **Annual Spiritual Growth Plan**.

Spiritual Growth Observations

Instructions

- I. Enlist 3 people to complete a **Spiritual Growth Observation** for you. These should be Christians who regularly observe your life actions. Explain to those you enlist that you need their help to accurately assess your spiritual growth. Point out that you want to discover areas where growth is needed and without their input those discoveries might not be possible. Ask each person to return the completed observation in a sealed envelope. Explain that your accountability partner will open the envelope and tabulate the scores without revealing to you specific responses.

- II. After receiving the completed observations, follow these simple steps:
 1. Send each person who completed the observation a thank you note.

 2. Deliver the sealed observations to your accountability partner with a copy of this sheet. Ask your partner to average the scores and write the averages below. If a discipline average appears unusually low, check the number of "NO" (not observed) responses. Remember, those responses will lower the average. In those cases, simply ask your accountability partner to check the specific action statements for any consistently lower responses. Discuss those in your meeting.

Abide in Christ	
Live in the Word	
Pray in Faith	
Fellowship with Believers	
Witness to the World	
Minister to Others	

3. Meet with your accountability partner to compare the scores with your personal assessment totals. Be sure to receive the input from the observations with humility. Never ask those who completed observations

to explain their responses to you. Ask yourself these questions and discuss your answers with your accountability partner:

- a) Where do the observer scores agree with my personal scores?
- b) Where do the observer scores disagree with my personal scores? If the observer scores disagree with my scores, do they agree with each other? If so, could this be a blind spot for me that needs attention?
- c) Review any “NO” (not observed) responses. Should the people closest to me be seeing more of these actions? If your answer is yes, consider addressing this on your **Annual Spiritual Growth Action Plan**.

III. Complete your **Annual Spiritual Growth Action Plan**.

Spiritual Growth Observations Response Sheet

You have been asked to give your observations of how a fellow believer demonstrates the following life actions. Your observations will be used to help develop a growth plan for the upcoming year. In order to provide helpful evaluations, ask the Lord for direction before completing this form. Even though these are subjective responses, God can use them to affirm

OBSERVED ACTIONS	RESPONSE
1. Peace, contentment, and joy characterize life rather than worry and anxiety.	
2. Demonstrates trust in Christ when facing life problems.	
3. Participates in church worship experiences.	
4. Expresses love for Christ.	
5. Engages in a personal quiet time.	
Abide in Christ Total (add lines 1-5)	
6. Teaches others biblical truth.	
7. Public and private self are the same.	
8. Biblical truth guides personal actions.	
9. Demonstrates self-control in stressful situations.	
10. Talks about biblical standards for life actions.	
Live in the Word Total (add lines 6-10)	
11. Engages in a daily prayer time.	
12. Talks about God's answers to personal prayers.	
13. Solicits prayer concerns from others.	
14. Encourages others to pray.	
15. Initiates times of prayer in group settings.	
Pray in Faith Total (add lines 11-15)	
16. Admits errors in relationships and seeks forgiveness.	
17. Demonstrates humility in relating to others.	
18. Seeks unity in relationships rather than creating division.	
19. Encourages others instead of criticizing.	
20. Gentle and kind in interactions with others.	
Fellowship with Believers Total (add lines 16-20)	
21. Participates in evangelistic mission efforts.	
22. Makes faith known to neighbors and/or fellow employees.	
23. Helps others understand how to effectively share a personal testimony.	
24. Shares a personal testimony with non-believers.	
25. Prays for non-believers by name.	
Witness to the World Total (add lines 21-25)	
26. Treats others needs as important as his/her own.	
27. Contributes time to a ministry at church.	
28. Demonstrates an attitude of servanthood.	
29. Contributes finances to help others in the church and community.	
30. Serves others expecting nothing in return.	
Minister to Others Total (add lines 26-30)	

and challenge this fellow traveler on the journey of discipleship. Authentic change occurs as the community of believer's helps one another grow spiritually. Use the following scale to respond to each statement. Your responses will not be viewed directly by the person being observed. His/her accountability partner will tabulate and discuss the responses with the individual without revealing the source for the specific response.

Never-1, Seldom-2, Occassionally-3, Frequent-4, Always-5, Not observed-NO

Annual Spiritual Growth Plan

Date Started _____

- I. Enlist an accountability partner who will agree to
1. Meet with me initially to overview my assessment and pray with me about this plan.
 2. Meet with me at least once each month to discuss my progress on this plan.
 3. Affirm my successes and challenge me to stay focused on achieving each part of the plan.
 4. Pray regularly for me.
 5. My accountability partner will be

- II. Decide on actions for spiritual growth. On the blanks following numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 write in the seasons of the year beginning with the coming season. For Example: You completed the assessment in November. Number 1 would be "Winter", number 2 would be "Spring" and so forth. Use your discipleship wheel to determine actions for each season. Actions should include looking at your low score disciplines and deciding ways to improve by knowing more about what God expects, building skills in this discipline, just doing it, or joining a group that does this discipline if available. In addition, actions may include looking at your high score areas and considering your next step for growth by leading others in knowing this discipline, leading others in doing this discipline, or building consistency in doing this discipline.

1. _____ During these months I will
- a. Improve my understanding of God's standard for the following discipline through individual and/or group study.
Discipline

Name of study

- b. Set an action goal. Use the **Recommended Actions Guide** for suggestions.

2. _____ During these months I will

- a. Improve my understanding of God’s standard for the following discipline through individual and/or group study.

Discipline

Name of study

- b. Set an action goal. Use the **Recommended Actions Guide** for suggestions.

- 3. _____ During these months I will

- a. Improve my understanding of God’s standard for the following discipline through individual and/or group study.

Discipline

Name of study

- b. Set an action goal. Use the **Recommended Actions Guide** for suggestions.

- 4. _____ During these months I will

- a. Improve my understanding of God’s standard for the following discipline through individual and/or group study.

Discipline

Name of study

- b. Set an action goal. Use the **Recommended Actions Guide** for suggestions.

Recommended Actions for Spiritual Growth Guide

The following actions can help you complete your annual intentional plan for your spiritual growth. See these as suggestions to get you started rather than as a list of the only possibilities. Trust God to guide you in your choices. The key to growth will be His work in you as you intentionally seek His kingdom first.

Abide in Christ

1. Attend a corporate worship experience weekly.
2. Set aside a specific time and location for a regular quiet time.
3. Establish a practice of worship preparation through prayer and confession.
4. Learn about biblical fasting.
5. Practice fasting as the Lord directs.
6. Learn about your identity in Christ.
7. Regularly thank God and give Him praise in all situations.
8. Make a list of things that hinder your spiritual growth and seek God's help to remove those hindrances.

Live in the Word

1. Memorize one Scripture verse each week.
2. Memorize passages of Scripture.
3. Take notes from the pastor's sermon and other Bible study experiences each week. Evaluate how the study applies to your life.
4. Establish a regular time for personal Bible study. Take notes from the study and evaluate how the biblical truth applies to your life.
5. Use commentaries and other study resources to enrich Bible study.
6. Read one chapter from the Bible each day. Discover one action required and do it.
7. Read one chapter from the Bible each day. Meditate on the character of God described in the chapter.
8. Participate in an ongoing small group Bible study.
9. Accept a Bible teaching position in your church.
10. Lead a small group study related to living by God's Word.

Pray in Faith

1. Participate in the prayer ministry of your church.
2. Enlist a prayer partner and meet regularly for prayer.
3. Journal your prayers and record God's answers.
4. Organize a prayer ministry for your church or small group.
5. Lead a small group study related to praying in faith.

6. Pray each day.

Fellowship with Believers

1. Ask family members to identify ways you can improve your relationships with each one.
2. Ask friends to identify ways you can improve your relationships with each one.
3. Make a list of people who have hurt you and ask God for help to forgive them.
4. Participate in an ongoing small group to build relationships with other believers.
5. Complete an individual study related to building godly relationships in your marriage.
Attend a retreat or workshop on parenting.
6. Attend a retreat or workshop on marriage.
7. Lead a small group study related to building godly relationships in marriage.
8. Lead a small group study related to building godly relationships as a parent.
9. Lead a small group study related to building godly relationships with others.

Witness to the World

1. Write your testimony and practice sharing it with another believer.
2. Secure several gospel tracts and distribute them as the Lord leads.
3. Learn to share your testimony without using printed support.
4. Make a list of non-believers you know and begin praying regularly for their salvation.
5. Begin building relationships with the non-believers on your street.
6. Begin building relationships with non-believers at work.
7. Invite an unchurched friend to worship or Bible study.
8. Include a specific missions focus in your prayers.
9. Share your testimony as God provides the opportunity.
10. Participate in an evangelistic missions experience.
11. Lead a small group study related to witnessing to the world.
12. With your accountability partner list places you visit in a normal week. Brainstorm creative ways of witnessing to the people you regularly see at these places.

Minister to Others

1. Complete a spiritual gifts inventory. Download a spiritual gifts inventory at www.lifeway.com.
2. Volunteer for a ministry in your church where you can use your spiritual gifts, interests, and natural abilities.
3. Send encouragement notes to your church staff.
4. Visit one homebound person each week.
5. Look for new baby bows on mailboxes in your neighborhood. Send a note of congratulations and drop off a gift or meal.
6. Volunteer to baby sit for a single parent in your church to give them a night out each month.
7. Volunteer to serve meals at a local shelter.
8. Volunteer to tutor students or help in a classroom at a local school.

9. Ask a member of your church staff to help you discover ways to minister to people on your street. For example, hold a small group meeting in your home quarterly to discuss topics such as marriage and parenting.
10. Lead a small group study related to ministering to others.

Appendix Two

Levels of Biblical Learning

At LifeWay, we work hard to know kids. We take time to understand how they play and how they learn. And we know you need resources you can count on to connect kids to God's Word—leading them toward knowing Christ and growing in relationship with Him. That's why LifeWay Kids promises to offer foundational resources that are biblically sound, age appropriate, fun and easy to use. These foundational resources help kids hear God's Word, know God's Word, and do God's Word by learning to apply it to their lives. All of the resources we offer are built on the information in this document called LifeWay's *Levels of Biblical Learning*. This simple but important ministry tool was developed by experts to provide you with visible milestones as you guide kids in their spiritual growth as they hear, know, and do God's Word. It provides teachers, parents, and ministers of preschoolers and children with milestones related to biblical knowledge, skills, and attitudes at the designated levels from birth through preteens. *Levels of Biblical Learning* gives a coordinated approach from birth through preteens by using ten concept areas—God, Jesus, the Bible, Creation, Family, Self, Church, Community & World, Holy Spirit, and Salvation.

In developing *Levels of Biblical Learning*, we had four basic assumptions.

The Bible as Our Textbook—The Bible is the basis for everything taught in Bible study settings. Bible content is also the basis for the development of all teaching procedures.

The Child as Learner—Preschoolers and children are the focus of our teaching. Their

understanding, needs, and interests are important considerations in determining how to approach Bible content. Bible study resources must touch the head, the heart, and the hands (body) of the child to create life-changing experiences.

The Teacher as Guide—The teacher, whether teaching in an open or closed group Bible study, must focus on the five functions of the church—evangelism, discipleship, ministry, fellowship, and worship. The teacher must provide activities that will involve children in learning, will guide children to correct information, and will share the biblical revelation. In addition to teaching Bible truths, teachers must live out the biblical message in front of children and parents.

Parents as Primary Teachers—The primary responsibility for religious instruction of preschoolers and children belongs to parents. The Holy Spirit works through Christian parents as they teach biblical truths in word and action. The church and its ministries must assist and support parents as spiritual leaders by training them and teaching their children.

The ten concept areas offer a broad biblical framework for guiding parents, teachers, and LifeWay curriculum developers in teaching children from birth through sixth grade. It is important to see the correlation and connectivity of the concept areas. Teaching about God and Jesus in the early years play an important role in helping the child understand salvation later in life. The concept areas provide a biblical framework for laying a foundation that becomes the pathway to conversion, spiritual growth, and a biblical worldview.

Eight of the concepts are foundational/prerequisite to the more advanced concepts of Holy Spirit and Salvation which are distinctive to first through sixth grade.

As you read the chart, it is good to remember that:

- **Although children develop spiritually in similar ways, the rate of that development will vary.** Some children may understand concepts at an earlier or later age than indicated on the chart.
- **Certain concepts are introduced later** when that concept and content are more useful and meaningful to the child.
- **While God nor His attributes change, a child's level of understanding and vocabulary does change.**

It is important to see that small nuances in words and slight changes in concepts are significant in the mind of a growing child. From an adult's perspective, it may seem minor, but these small steps are important for the child's understanding.

- **When teaching or developing resources for broad-age groupings of children, concepts may be combined or adapted** to meet the needs of the group.

We hope you'll find this ministry tool helpful. The *Levels of Biblical Learning* are another reason why you'll find that year after year, LifeWay Kids is the choice you can trust.

Preteen

God's care and concern exists regardless of people's circumstances.

1 Kings 17:1-16 God Helped Elijah God provides for His people.

I can trust God to provide for me each day.

EXPRESS YOURSELF

Choice 2: "God Will Meet My

Needs" Radio Commercial

Preteens will begin by using the learner guide to distinguish between some of their wants and needs as they work to learn that God's care and concern exist in spite of people's circumstances. Then they will look at the memory verse, Philippians 4:19. They will look at needs of preteens in general and will write a radio commercial script that identifies some needs that may not be common to all preteens, but are circumstances in which today's preteens need God's care. Preteens are encouraged to use the memory verse as part of their "hook" line at the end of the commercials.

Grades 3–4

God has concern and care for all people.

1 Kings 17:1-16 God Helped Elijah

God provides for His people. I can trust God to provide for me each day.

PERSONALIZE

Choice 2: "Thank-You Cube"

Boys and girls will work an activity in the learner guide to help them think about ways God has concern and care for all people. The examples involve children in everyday situations needing God's care. Then children will play a game in which they name ways God provides and cares for them. (Use the letters of the alphabet to begin each way.) With a cube pattern from the leader pack, children will make their own "Thank-You Cube" to identify ways God has cared for them and to thank God for His care and provision.

Grades 1–2

God has concern and care for all people.

1 Kings 17:1-16

God Helped Elijah

God provides for His people. I can trust God to provide for me each day.

PERSONALIZE

Choice 1: “How Does God Show Care?” Mobiles Girls and boys will work an activity in the learner guide to identify ways God has concern and care for all people. They will identify in a picture the items that show God’s care for them. They will use a compass activity to learn the words of 1 Peter 5:9, *He cares for you*. Teachers will guide children to think about their needs. The children will draw pictures of ways God cares for them and attach those pictures to a mobile on which teachers have taped the words of the memory verse.

Age – Group Concept Area:

God

Bible

Passage

and Story

Bible Truth

Life

Application

Bible- Learning Experience

The following information will help you see how the concept areas of *Levels of Biblical Learning* can relate to individual sessions and specific activities in preschool and children’s curriculum materials.

Babies–2s

God cares for me.

1 Kings 17:7-16

God Helped Elijah

God gives me what I need.

Babies–twos will learn that God gives them what they need.

BIBLE STORY PLUS:

Invite twos near you to sit in a circle on the floor. Give each a small paper cup. Walk around the circle pouring a small amount of water into each cup. Say: “God cares for you. God gives us water to drink when we are thirsty.” Say a brief thank-you prayer for the water. Introduce and tell the Bible story. Sing the song “God Gives Food to Us.” Play a guessing game, describing food and other items familiar to children.

3s–Pre-K

God cares for people.

1 Kings 17:1-16

God Helped Elijah

God gives me what I need.

Threes–pre-kindergartners will learn that God gives them what they need.

HOMELIVING:

“Play Restaurant”

Provide props for 3s– pre-kindergartners to use as they play out the roles of cooks, servers, hostesses, and patrons. Without interrupting their play, look for opportunities to comment naturally:

“Thank You, God, for giving us good food to eat. This makes me think of Elijah.

God cared for him and helped him find food to eat. In the Bible we read, ‘God is good to us.’”

Kindergarten

God cares and provides for people.

1 Kings 17:1-16

God Helped Elijah

God gives me what I need. I can learn that God knows what I need.

DRAMATIC PLAY:

“Make Bread”

When kindergartners come to the dramatic play center, explain that today they are going to help make bread. Ask one of them to open the Bible to the marked verse, *God will always love me*. Help them “read” the verse. Briefly tell today’s Bible story. Say: “The woman made bread for Elijah. We are going to make bread, too.” Talk about other ways God took care of Elijah. Guide children to make bread, using refrigerated bread dough. As children eat the baked bread, read pages 7-8 of the book *I Can Choose*.

Talking to Children About Salvation

When talking to a child about salvation:

* **Ask follow-up questions.** When a child asks a question, often he does not know exactly what to ask. Get clarification before deciding how to answer a question. For example, you might say, “Tell me more about what you are thinking,” or “What made you ask that question? Where did you hear about this?” Remember, many times the question a child asks may not be the actual question for which he is needing an answer. Avoid asking questions that can be answered with “yes” or “no.”

* **Avoid giving more information than a child needs.** Adults can be tempted to tell all they know on a subject. When a child asks a question, only answer what the child is asking. If a child asks for more information, be more specific with your answers.

* **Don't jump to conclusions.** A child may ask, "Why did Andy get baptized?" This question may be only a request for information, not a request for the gospel presentation.

* **Speak in clear terms.** Avoid symbolic analogies that may distract from discussion and understanding.

* **Use simple wording.** Rather than using the phrase "accepting Jesus into your heart," say the words "becoming a Christian."

Steps in talking with a child about God's plan for salvation:

1. God loves you and has a great plan for you (Psalm 139:13-16). Talk about these truths: God made the world, God made people, God made you, God wants to have a relationship with people, and God wants to have a relationship with you. Say, "Tell me one way you know God loves you."

2. We have all sinned (Romans 3:23). Everyone must understand that he is separated from God. Sin is best understood as choosing to do things our way instead of God's way. (Give some examples of sin such as disobedience, ungratefulness, untruthfulness, etc.) Then ask the child: "Have you sinned? What does God think about sin?" Point out that everyone has sinned.

3. Even though we choose to sin, God still loves us and offers to forgive us (Romans 5:8). Ask, "How do you think it makes God feel when you sin?" Focus on the fact that God loves the child even when he sins. Say: "God promised that one day a Savior would

come and not sin and would die for all people. Do you know who that Savior is? Did you know that He died for you?"

4. Jesus died for us (John 3:16). Talk about John 3:16 and explain that because sin separates people from God, everyone needs a Savior. Ask, "Do you know why Jesus died?" Say, "Jesus loved you so much. He willingly died for you, so you could be with God forever." If the child is old enough to understand the resurrection, say, "Jesus rose from the dead, so we could have eternal life."

5. You can become a Christian by confessing that Jesus is your Savior and Lord (Romans 10:9).

Ask, "Would you like to be a Christian?" State that the word *confess* means to say that Jesus is your Savior and that you must:

Admit you have sinned

Believe that Jesus is God's Son

Confess that Jesus is Savior and Lord

6. Review and follow up. Encourage a child to tell you in his own words what he understands and believes. Either ask the child to repeat a prayer after you or help the child know what to say in his prayer. After the prayer, read Romans 10:13 and remind him that this verse is a promise. Jesus will be his Savior forever.

About Baptism:

*** Always make distinctions between baptism and becoming a Christian.** Point out that becoming a Christian comes first, and then baptism follows because it is a way of showing he has become a Christian.

*** Avoid emphasizing the emotional side of the baptism experience.** Keep in mind that public recognition should not become a motivating factor for making a decision.

God is eternal, holy, and perfect.

God the Creator is to be worshiped, not His creations.

God is omnipresent.

God knows the desires of my heart but still wants me to pray.

God's care and concern exist regardless of people's circumstances.

God's love is not limited by time, space, culture, or ethnicity.

God proved His unconditional love for people through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

God wants people to worship Him with all their hearts, souls, minds, and strength.

Because God deserves respect, obedience, and honor, God nurtures and disciplines Christians.

God is omnipotent. God is righteous. God is omniscient.

People believe in different gods, but there is only one true God. God is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (Trinity).

God is unique—no one and nothing can be compared to Him.

As Creator, God is to be praised.

God is everywhere at all times.

God hears people's prayers and communicates with them.

God loves and values all people.

God loves people enough to provide forgiveness for sin.

God is worthy of praise and worship.

God deserves respect, obedience, and honor.

God is almighty.

God is faithful and just.

God is all-knowing.

God is special—no one and nothing can be compared to God.

God is Creator.

God is everywhere.

God hears and answers prayer.

God has concern and care for all people.

God shows His love to all people in the same way.

God loves and forgives people.

God wants me to obey, respect, and honor Him.

God is powerful.

God is fair and can be trusted.

God is real, the only true God.

God is good.

God made me.

God loves me.

God hears me.

God cares for me.

God loves people.

God gives rules because He loves me.

God wants people to love Him.

God wants people to learn about Him

God is special.

God made everything.

God loves me and is with me.

God hears people talk to
Him when they pray.

God cares for people.

God loves all people.

God gives rules to help me know what to do.

God wants people to sing and pray to Him.

God wants people to do what He says.

God can do things people cannot do.

God does what He says He will do.

God is special. No one is like Him.

God created everything.

God is always with me.

God wants people to pray to Him.

God cares and provides for people.

God shows His love to all people.

God loves people even when they make wrong choices.

God wants people to worship Him.

God wants people to obey Him.

God can do all things.

God always keeps His promises.

God knows everything.

God is real.

Babies–2s 3s–Pre-K Kindergarten Grades 1–2 Grades 3–4 Preteen

God planned for Jesus from the beginning of time.

Jesus was born of a virgin.

Jesus was God in human form.

Jesus taught that true worshipers must worship in spirit and truth.

Jesus wants people to be transformed by Him.

Jesus' crucifixion, burial, and resurrection were a necessary part of God's plan for the forgiveness of sin.

Jesus is the Messiah and Savior, and God sent Him to fulfill His promise of redemption.

Jesus is holy and perfect.

Jesus will return to earth someday.

Old Testament prophets revealed God's plan for Jesus to be the Savior.

Jesus came to earth in human form.

Jesus understands what it means to be human.

Jesus taught that worship is focused on God alone.

Jesus taught about faith, trust, and obedience to God.

Jesus performed miracles because He is God's Son.

Jesus wants people to trust Him.

Jesus died to pay the penalty for sin.

Jesus is the only Son of God, and He was sent to be my Savior.

Jesus was tempted by Satan but did not sin.

The ascension describes Jesus' return to heaven.

Jesus promised His followers that He would come back to earth.

Prophets in the Old Testament told that Jesus would be born.

Jesus grew in mind, body, and in relationships with God and with others.

Jesus taught that God's house is a house of prayer.

Jesus shows me through His life and teachings what God is like.

Jesus performed miracles, healed the sick, and restored life.

Jesus wants people to follow Him.

Jesus died on the cross, and God raised Jesus from the dead.

Jesus is the only Son of God, and He was sent to be the Savior of all people.

God chose a family for Jesus.

Jesus was born.

Jesus grew and had a family.

Jesus went to church and learned about God.

Jesus told people about God.

Jesus helped people because He loved them.

Jesus wants me to love Him.

Jesus loves me.

Angels told Mary and Joseph that Jesus would be born.

Jesus was sent to earth by God.

Jesus grew like me.

Jesus read the Bible at church.

Jesus taught people about God.

Jesus did things that people cannot do.

Jesus wants people to love Him.

Jesus loves all people.

Jesus is God's Son.

Jesus did everything God told Him to do.

People in the Old Testament told that Jesus would be born.

God sent Jesus to earth because He loves us.

Jesus grew, learned, and had friends.

Jesus worshiped God in the synagogue/temple.

Jesus taught people about what God is like.

Jesus performed miracles and healed the sick.

Jesus wants people to love and obey Him.

Jesus died on the cross and is alive.

Jesus is God's one and only Son.

Jesus always obeyed God.

Jesus is in heaven.

Babies–2s 3s–Pre-K Kindergarten Grades 1–2 Grades 3–4 Preteen

The Bible is eternal.

The Bible is God's message about Himself.

The Bible is the only written Word of God.

The Bible tells me that salvation through Jesus is God's gift.

The Bible applies to personal and social issues.

The Bible is for people of all languages, ethnicities, and cultures.

The teachings in the Bible will last forever.

The Bible is God's message.

God inspired people who wrote the Bible.

The Bible tells me that Jesus died on a cross, was buried, and was raised from the dead.

The Bible tells me how to live the Christian life.

The Bible tells me how people's lives were affected by their responses to God.

Every person can find truth and meaning in God's Word.

Bible truths never change.

The Bible helps me know more about God and Jesus.

God helped people know what to write in the Bible.

The Bible tells what Jesus is like and how to be like Him.

The Bible helps me understand how God wants me to live.

The Bible tells me what God wants me to do through verses and stories about people and events.

The Bible has truth and meaning for me.

The Bible is a special Book.

The Bible tells about God and Jesus.

People in the Bible told about God.

The Bible has stories about Jesus.

The Bible helps me know what to do.

The stories in the Bible are real.

I can learn about God and Jesus from the Bible.

People in the Bible wrote about God.

The Bible tells what Jesus did.

The Bible helps me know the right things to do.

The people in the Bible were real people.

People at church use the Bible.

The stories in the Bible are true.

The Bible tells what God and Jesus are like.

People wrote God's words in the Bible.

The Bible tells what Jesus is like.

The Bible helps me know what God wants me to do.

The Bible has stories about God, Jesus, and people.

The Bible is for everyone.

Babies–2s 3s–Pre-K Kindergarten Grades 1–2 Grades 3–4 Preteen

Creation can be credited to God only.

God's created order is governed by His laws.

God helps people to discover, understand, and use His resources.

God wants me to feel secure because He made the world, is still at work in it, and cares what happens to me.

God created the world from nothing.

God created people in His own image.

God's world is orderly.

People can accept increasing responsibility for taking care of God's world.

Understanding what God is like comes by discovering the things He created.

God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day.

God created people able to think and solve problems.

God's creation follows His plan.

God tells people to take care of His world.

God wants me to feel a sense of wonder as I enjoy His creation.

God wants me to praise Him for His creation.

God made day, night, plants, sky, sun, moon, stars, animals, water, birds, and fish.

God made people.

God made food for people and animals.

God wants people to take care of the things He made.

God wants me to enjoy the things He made.

God wants me to thank Him for the things He made.

God made everything.

God made people different from the other things

He made. God planned for people, animals, and plants to grow.

God made the world for people to enjoy.

God wants me thank Him for people, animals, plants, and things in the world.

God created the earth and everything in it.

God created people able to make choices.

God provides for His creation.

God planned for people to care for the things He made.

God wants me to thank Him for His creation.

Babies–2s 3s–Pre-K Kindergarten Grades 1–2 Grades 3–4 Preteen

Families are part of God’s plan for providing my physical, spiritual, mental, social, and emotional needs.

Understanding that each family member is a person of significance and worth can help me relate to her.

God’s plan is for parents to lead families according to His Word and will.

Each person in my family has a contribution to make to the family.

God wants me to help lead my family in worship.

God wants me to show love, respect, cooperation, and consideration for all persons in my family.

My family can show God’s love and care to other people regardless of their circumstances by ministering to their needs.

The first responsibility of mothers and fathers to their children is to teach them about God.

God’s plan is for parents to lead families.

Each family member should make a contribution in a positive way.

Worshiping together can help families grow stronger.

God’s love helps me consider my family members before myself.

My family can show love and care to other people regardless of their circumstances.

Mothers and fathers are to love each other.

Each person in my family deserves love and respect.

God helps me know how to honor and obey my parents.

Each family member has his own work.

God wants me to treat family members fairly and with kindness.

God loves and cares for families in all kinds of situations.

My family can show God's love and care for other people.

God made my family.

My family loves me.

God gave me a mommy and a daddy.

Family members help me.

My family tells me about God.

My family is kind to me.

God loves my family.

My family helps.

God's plan for families is found in the Bible.

God wants family members to love one another.

I can do what my parents tell me to do.

Family members help one another.

God wants family members to be kind to one another.

God loves and cares for my family.

My family can help other people.

God's plan for a family is for mothers and fathers to raise children.

I can show my family

I love them.

I can obey my parents.

God wants families to worship together.

My family can love and care for other people.

Babies–2s 3s–Pre-K Kindergarten Grades 1–2 Grades 3–4 Preteen

Life is a gift from God.

I can appreciate my value as a person God loves.

I can take responsibility for my choices and their consequences.

God will help Christians know and use their spiritual gifts.

God wants me to communicate with Him and study the Bible daily.

I can take deliberate actions to grow in Christlikeness.

I am accountable to God for the way I treat other people.

I can live with joy regardless of my circumstances.

I can understand and follow God’s specific plan for my life.

I can acknowledge and follow God’s authority in my life.

My body is God’s temple.

My self-control and obedience to God can help me stand up to peer pressure.

My self-control honors God and benefits me.

I can take deliberate actions to ask for forgiveness and restore relationships.

God expects me to remain pure in all aspects of my life.

I am created in the image of God.

Each person is unique and of value to God.

I am responsible for my choices.

I can develop and use my abilities and talents in ways that please and honor God.

God wants me to communicate with Him through praying and reading the Bible.

I can follow the examples, teachings, and commandments of Jesus.

I can learn to love others as I love myself.

I am learning to respond in positive ways to what happens to me.

God's plan for my life is that I accept Jesus as Savior and Lord and obey Him.

I can learn about and recognize God's authority.

I need to take care of my body and mind to honor God.

I can recognize and reject wrong actions and wrong influences of others.

I am able to admit that I have hurt others and ask them to forgive me.

God wants me to have pure thoughts and actions.

My birth and growth are part of God's plan.

People are God's most important creation.

I can be trusted to make some good choices.

I can use my talents and abilities in ways that please and honor God.

God wants me to pray and read the Bible.

I follow Jesus' example when

I obey God.

I can be a good example for others.

Good and bad happen to me, but God still loves me.

God has a plan for my life.

God wants me to live every day in ways that please Him.

I need to take care of my body because God created me.

When I hurt others, I can ask them to forgive me.

God wants my actions, attitudes, and words to be good.

God made me.

I am special.

I can make choices.

I am learning.

I can talk to God.

I can grow like

Jesus grew.

I am learning to take turns.

God loves me.

I am growing.

I am special because God made me.

I can make right and wrong choices.

God made me so I can think, work, and play.

I can pray.

I can do some things like Jesus.

I can take turns and learn to share.

God will always love me.

God has a plan for people.

I can do what God wants me to do.

I am growing as God planned for me to grow.

People are special because

God made them.

My choices can make me happy or sad.

God has made me able to do many things well.

God wants me to pray.

I can try to be like Jesus.

Jesus is my example for how I treat other people.

No matter what happens, God loves me.

God has a plan for me.

I can show love for God by obeying Him.

God wants me to take care of my body.

I can say “No” to what I know is wrong.

I can begin to recognize when I hurt others.

Babies–2s 3s–Pre-K Kindergarten Grades 1–2 Grades 3–4 Preteen

The church is a fellowship of baptized believers where all people are welcomed and wanted.

The functions of the church are evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and worship.

Churches ordain people to do certain tasks.

Believers are to take God’s message into the world.

Corporate worship is the responsibility of all church members.

Each believer is given one or more spiritual gifts.

Believers use spiritual gifts to do God’s work.

The body and blood of Jesus are represented in the Lord’s Supper.

Baptism by immersion is a symbol of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection.

Churches today are part of the movement begun by Jesus and His followers.

A church is a group of baptized Christians who meet together to pray, to tell other people about Jesus, to worship God, to learn from the Bible, to meet needs of others, and to encourage one another.

Church leaders are called by God to do His work.

God uses the church to accomplish His purposes in the world today.

People have responsibilities to participate in worship services, to pray for their church, and to give money for the work of their church.

Being a church member involves responsibilities and privileges.

Church members are called by God to do His work.

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of the church. The Lord's Supper is a way to remind people about what Jesus did.

Christians participate in the Lord's Supper.

Baptism is an ordinance of the church that shows that people have accepted Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

The church is more than a building; it is Christians who do God's work. *Believer* is another word for a Christian.

Church leaders teach about God and Jesus.

My church meets the needs of other people in my community and around the world.

People worship at church and bring tithes and offerings.

Church members have different responsibilities.

The Lord's Supper is a special event at church.

People can remember Jesus when they see the Lord's Supper being observed.

Baptism is a special event at church.

Baptism shows that people have accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Becoming a Christian and being baptized is the way a person becomes a church member.

People at church love God and Jesus.

People at church love and teach me.

People at church help me.

People enjoy going to church.

They sing, talk to God, listen to Bible stories, and talk about God and Jesus at church.

God wants people to go to church.

People learn about God and Jesus at church.

People go to church in different kinds of places.

People at church love each other and teach about God and Jesus.

People at church help other people.

People thank God at church.

People give money at church.

People at church help in different ways.

Churches are a part of God's plan for people.

Church helpers teach about God and Jesus.

My church provides ways for me to help other people.

People at church worship, pray, give, sing, read the Bible, and listen to teaching and preaching.

At church people have different kinds of jobs.

The Lord's Supper is a special meal to remember Jesus.

A person is baptized after she becomes a Christian.

Babies–2s 3s–Pre-K Kindergarten Grades 1–2 Grades 3–4 Preteen

Because God values people of all nationalities and cultures, I will respect and value each person.

God wants people to join Him in what He is doing in the world.

All Christians are called to be on mission with God.

God wants people to pray consistently for missionaries and people groups and for their personal involvement in missions.

God wants people to look for opportunities to help people of all ethnicities, and cultures.

Stewardship of money, time, talents, and possessions helps others learn about God and Jesus.

God helps people to share their faith in Jesus with those who have different beliefs.

God values people of all nationalities and cultures.

God wants people to be involved in His work in their community and the world by participating in mission activities.

All Christians are called to tell the people of the world about Jesus.

God wants people to pray for specific needs of missionaries and people groups.

God wants people to respect the rights and property of others.

God wants people to treat others as they would want to be treated.

God wants people to give their time, talents, and possessions in addition to money so that others can learn about God and Jesus.

God wants people to tell others with different beliefs about Jesus and what He has done for them.

God's world is made up of people from different nationalities and cultures.

God wants people to be involved in His work in the world.

Missionaries are Christians who share the good news with people in this country and around the world.

God wants people to pray by name for missionaries and people groups.

God wants me to cooperate and work with others willingly.

God wants people to treat one another fairly and with kindness.

God wants people to give tithes and offerings so that people of all nations can learn about God and Jesus.

God wants people to tell others in their communities and schools about Jesus and invite them to church.

God wants people to give and accept forgiveness from others.

God made people.

I can help.

People tell about God and Jesus.

I can talk to God.

People work together.

God cares about other people and me.

God made people alike and different.

I can help others around me.

Missionaries are people who tell other people about God and Jesus.

I can ask God to help others.

God wants people to work together.

People have different kinds of work to do.

All people are important to God.

I can give money to help other people learn about God and Jesus.

I can tell others about Jesus.

God made people in my community and the world alike and different.

I can be a part of God's work.

Missionaries tell people about God and Jesus in my country and in other countries.

I can pray for people in my community and world and for missionaries.

God wants people in my community to work together.

People in my community have different jobs.

The Bible tells me to love others in my community and in the world.

My offerings help missionaries in my community and around the world.

I can tell people in my community that Jesus loves them.

Babies–2s 3s–Pre-K Kindergarten Grades 1–2 Grades 3–4 Preteen

Levels of Biblical Learning

Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is a special helper.

God showed His approval of Jesus by sending the dove at Jesus' baptism.

God's Spirit worked in Old Testament times.

Jesus promised the early believers that God would send the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit helps people know what to do.

The Holy Spirit can support people in times of trouble.

The Holy Spirit was present at Jesus' baptism.

God's Spirit has always existed.

The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost to give power to believers.

The Holy Spirit helps people understand God's plan of salvation.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit enters the Christian's life when he accepts Jesus as his Savior and Lord.

The Holy Spirit helped Bible writers know what to write.

The Holy Spirit helps believers grow as Christians.

The Holy Spirit helps believers tell others about Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is the comforter.

The Holy Spirit was present in Jesus' life and ministry.

God's Spirit was active in creation.

The Holy Spirit helps people know, understand, and remember all things about God.

The Holy Spirit urges people to accept God's salvation.

The Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity.

The Holy Spirit inspired Bible writers and breathed God's Word.

The Holy Spirit helps believers grow in their relationships with God and with others.

The Holy Spirit empowers believers to tell others about Jesus and His plan of salvation.

Levels of Biblical Learning Salvation

God provided a way for people to become Christians because He loves them.

The Bible tells that Jesus came to earth because God loves everyone.

God sent His only Son, Jesus, to be the one and only Savior of the world.

God is displeased when people choose to do what they want rather than what God wants.

When people choose to displease God, there are consequences.

God helps me know when it's time to become a Christian.

God will forgive me if I ask Him.

People become Christians by accepting Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

God provided a plan of salvation because He loves me.

The Bible tells of God's plan of salvation.

Jesus willingly died to provide salvation. Jesus' death and resurrection make my forgiveness possible.

Sin is choosing my way instead of God's way.

Sin separates people from God. People can choose to accept or to reject Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Jesus died to pay the penalty for my sins.

When the Holy Spirit convicts me of my sin, I can trust Jesus as my personal Savior.

Salvation is admitting sin, repenting of sin, believing that Jesus died and God raised Him from the dead, and confessing Jesus as personal Savior.

I need and can accept God's salvation.

God had a plan for salvation before the beginning of time because He loves me unconditionally.

The Bible tells me God sent Jesus, so I can have a personal relationship with God.

Salvation is a gift from God.

Without a Savior, the punishment for sin is eternal death and hell.

Jesus took the punishment for everyone's sin.

Christians can know that Jesus will be their personal Savior forever.

I can understand I need a personal and growing relationship with Jesus.

I can experience joy when I recognize God is at work in my life and in the lives of other people.

Certain stories are so important that they must be taught frequently during childhood so that the child will understand not only the facts of the story but the biblical principles that it communicates. Listed below are examples of foundational Bible stories that preschoolers and children will study. Boys and girls will learn biblical concepts through these and additional Bible stories.

Foundational Bible Stories

Babies–Kindergarten

God Made the World and Everything in It

Adam and Eve’s Choice*

God Made Families

Noah and the Ark

Joseph

Miriam and Baby Moses

Ruth’s Family

Hannah’s Prayer and Boy Samuel

David Helped His Family

David and Jonathan

Solomon and the Temple

God Helped Elijah

Elisha’s Friends Helped

Daniel Obeyed God and Chose Good Food

Jesus’ Birth and Related Events

Jesus Went to Church
Jesus Chose Special Helpers
Four Friends Who Helped
Jesus Fed the People
A Woman Gave Her Money
The Good Samaritan
Jesus Visited Mary and Martha
The Man Who Said Thank-You
Zacchaeus Met Jesus
Jesus and the Children
Jesus Talked to the Woman at the Well
Children Sang for Jesus
Jesus Is Alive! *
Breakfast with Jesus
Philip and the Ethiopian
Timothy Learned About God
Paul Taught Lydia About Jesus
Church Helpers

** Introduced in Kindergarten.*

Grades 1–6
All stories listed for babies—kindergarten
and the following:

Cain and Abel

Abram's Call

God's Covenant with Abraham **

The Sacrifice of Isaac ***

Isaac and the Wells

Jacob Tricked Esau

Joseph's Story

Moses and the Burning Bush

The Plagues and the Exodus

The Ten Commandments

Joshua and Caleb

The Fall of Jericho

Deborah, Gideon, or Samson

David and Goliath

Elijah and the Prophets of Baal

Naaman's Healing

Daniel's Friends in the Furnace

Daniel in the Lion's Den

Esther

Jesus' Birth and Related Events

Jesus' Baptism and Temptations

The Sermon on the Mount

Jesus Performed Miracles

Jesus and the Storm

The Transfiguration ***

The Prodigal Son

The Raising of Lazarus

Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection

Jesus' Post Resurrection Appearances

Jesus' Ascension **

The Jerusalem Church

Stephen **

Peter's Escape

Paul's Missionary Journeys

** *Introduced in Grades 3-4*

****Introduced in Grades 5-6*

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VITA

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Children: John Grady Johnston, born October 10, 1984, Jody Garrett Johnston, born October 18, 1990

EDUCATION

B.S., Louisiana College, 1979.

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MINISTERIAL

License: January 11, 1978, Parkview Baptist Church, Alexandria, Louisiana.

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PROFESSIONAL

Minister of Single and Senior Adults, Oak Park Baptist Church, 1979- 1982.

Minister of Evangelism, College/Single Adults and Recreation, FBC, Pensacola, Florida, Jan. 1982- Sept. 1984.

Associate Director, Family Life Department of the Florida Baptist Convention, Jacksonville, Florida Sept. 1984 – Aug. 1986.

Minister of Single Adults, Germantown Baptist Church, Germantown, Tennessee, Aug. 1986 – Aug. 1988.

LifeWay Christian Resources (formerly called Baptist Sunday School Board), Aug. 1988 – Sept. 30, 2008. Positions included Senior Adult Consultant, Manager for Adult Discipleship & Family, Director of Church Ministry Leadership, Director of General Sunday School & FAITH Evangelism, Director of Evangelism & Discipleship.

Associate Pastor, First Baptist Church, Covington, Louisiana, Jan. 2009 – present.