



Disciples Path

by Lifeway



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WHAT CHURCH LEADERS ARE SAYING ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP

Lifeway Research conducted a nationwide survey of 2,620 Protestant pastors in late 2024. Each survey was completed by the senior pastor, minister, or priest of the church. Responses were weighted by region, church size, and denominational category. Here are some of the findings:

- Only **11%** of pastors described discipleship as their churches “best” activity.
- Discipleship was the second highest rated function that **needed improvement**.
- Only **52%** of pastors are satisfied with the state of discipleship and spiritual formation in their church.
- Less than half of pastors (**49%**) believe their church’s discipleship strategy is effective.
- Just **30%** say their church has specific methods for measuring discipleship.
- Only **52%** have an intentional plan for discipling individuals in their congregation and encouraging their spiritual growth.

The data reveals that many pastors feel discipleship is an area needing growth. However, it also highlights a powerful opportunity for renewal and impact. The fact that over half of churches already have an intentional plan in place shows that the foundation is there—ready to be built upon. Churches are well positioned to reimagine how they disciple their congregations. They are eager to grow and ready to improve. By refining strategies, embracing measurable goals, and fostering deeper spiritual formation, pastors can lead their churches into a season of transformation. The journey may be challenging, but the potential for lasting spiritual growth is within reach.

A CLEAR CALL TO THE CHURCH: Reclaim the Mission of Disciple-Making

Disciple-making is not one among many church activities—it is the core mission of the church, deeply rooted in the teachings of Scripture and the heart of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). In a time when church leaders are navigating cultural shifts, ministry challenges, and changing congregational dynamics, the need for a clear, dependable, and relatable discipleship pathway has never been greater. Churches long for a framework that goes beyond programs and attendance, one that fosters visible life change, is reproducible across generations, and is measurable in its impact.

REDISCOVERING THE CHURCH'S MISSION

The heart of the church's calling is a clear and compelling mission—to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Rooted in Matthew 28:18-20, this mission isn't merely a suggestion but a divine mandate to evangelize and teach disciples on their lifelong journey of transformation. More than transferring knowledge, disciple-making is shaping lives through three essential components:

- **Education:** Grounding believers in biblical truth and doctrine.
- **Relationships:** Building authentic, trust-filled connections that foster spiritual growth.
- **Experiences:** Creating intentional opportunities for believers to live out their faith in real-world contexts.

Lifelong Discipleship: A Journey, Not a Destination

Discipleship is not a one-time event or a short-term program—it's a lifelong process of becoming more like Christ. According to Deuteronomy 6:1-6, this process begins in the home. Later, it is nurtured in the church and is strengthened through community with Christians. Churches play a vital role in cultivating this journey through:

- Organized Bible studies that deepen scriptural understanding.
- Engaging programs that connect faith with everyday life.
- Church-led experiences to practice faith in action.
- Serving opportunities that allow believers to live out their faith.
- Mentorship relationships that model spiritual maturity and accountability.

This holistic approach ensures that discipleship is not confined to a classroom but is woven into the fabric of daily life.

THE POWER OF PROXIMITY: Discipleship Through Relationship

True discipleship flourishes in the context of trusting relationships. It's not just taught—it's caught. Imitation-based discipleship where believers walk together, is one of the most effective ways to model Christlike living. When people see faith in action, they begin to understand what it means to think, speak, and act like Jesus.

HOW CAN LIFEWAY HELP THE CHURCH IN ITS DISCIPLE-MAKING EFFORTS?

Lifeway is committed to walking alongside churches as a trusted partner in their disciple-making journey. Through *DisciplesPath*, Lifeway offers a thoughtful, biblically-grounded guide paired with practical tools and resources that are effective, adaptable, and easy to implement. Whether a church is just beginning to develop its discipleship strategy or refining an existing one, Lifeway provides scalable solutions to fit diverse ministry contexts—from small congregations to large multi-campus churches.

This partnership is more than resource delivery—it's about empowering leaders to cultivate a culture of spiritual growth, relational investment, and missional living. By equipping churches to develop intentional pathways and measure spiritual progress, Lifeway helps leaders move from uncertainty to clarity, from stagnation to transformation, and from attendance to active discipleship.

WHAT IS *DISCIPLESPATH*?

DisciplesPath is both a resource and a process developed by Lifeway to guide church leaders and their congregations to understand strengths and weaknesses of their church's disciple-making pathway. *DisciplesPath* is intentional and relational, providing a clear pathway for spiritual growth and maturity. *DisciplesPath* includes:

- The contents of this *DisciplesPath* guiding document
- Assessments
- Meeting guides
- Timelines
- Resources for your church's discipleship pathway

The goal is to create a cohesive plan for discipleship in your church that can be implemented to foster spiritual growth, multiplication, and community.

HOW WILL *DISCIPLESPATH* HELP MY CHURCH?

- **Clear Pathway for Growth:** *DisciplesPath* offers a guided journey that empowers church leaders to talk about their church's plan for making disciples. This discipleship pathway helps believers grow as disciples of Jesus.
- **Reproducible Model:** The pathway will be implemented in various settings, such as Bible study groups, special events, and other experiences, ensuring that discipleship can be multiplied throughout the church, creating a culture of spiritual growth and maturity.
- **Relational Focus:** *DisciplesPath* emphasizes the importance of relationships in the discipleship process. By fostering strong, supportive relationships, individuals are more likely to stay committed to their spiritual journey and help others along the way.
- **Equipping Leaders:** *DisciplesPath* equips church leaders with the tools and knowledge they need to effectively disciple others. The empowerment of leaders ensures that the church can sustain and expand its discipleship efforts over time.

- **Community Building:** Engaging in *DisciplesPath* fosters a sense of community and mutual support. This sense of belonging enhances the overall health and vitality of the Church.

Implementing *DisciplesPath* in your Church can lead to a more vibrant, spiritually-mature congregation that is equipped to fulfill the Great Commission and make a lasting impact in the world.

DISCIPLESHIP: The Church's Primary Purpose

Discipleship is not just a ministry program—it is the very heartbeat of the church's mission. Yet many pastors and church leaders find themselves wrestling with foundational questions: *What is a disciple? How are disciples truly formed? And how can we know if we're effectively making them?*

This guide is designed to help you explore those questions through the lens of Scripture. You'll examine what God's Word says about discipleship and how those truths should shape your church's definition, strategy, and culture of disciple-making.

Through carefully selected Bible passages, guided reflection questions, and thought-provoking prompts, you will clarify your understanding of what it means to be a disciple, how disciples are made, and what disciples are called to do. It's not just about gaining knowledge—it's about aligning your leadership and your church with the mission Jesus gave us.

As you and your *DisciplesPath* team read through this workbook, write down your insights. Compare perspectives. Engage in honest, Spirit-led conversations. The goal isn't just agreement—it's alignment with Scripture and a renewed vision for making disciples who make disciples.



THE FOUR STEPS IN THE *DISCIPLESPATH* PROCESS



1. **DISCOVER: Returning to the Biblical Blueprint**

Every disciple-making journey begins with Scripture. In this foundational phase, pastors and church leaders are invited to rediscover what the Bible says about discipleship—who a disciple is, what a disciple does, and how disciples are formed. Through guided study and reflection on key passages, leaders will explore the Old and New Testaments, life and teachings of Jesus, the practices of the early church, and the biblical vision for spiritual growth. View this as more than just an academic exercise—it’s a time of spiritual renewal and clarity. The goal is to uncover timeless truths that will anchor your church’s disciple-making efforts in biblical conviction and purpose.



2. **DISCERN: Evaluating the Present Reality**

With a biblical foundation in place, the next step is to take an honest and prayerful look at your church’s current disciple-making strategy. Many churches are rich in activity—programs, events, and ministries—but lack a cohesive, intentional pathway for spiritual formation across all age groups. In this phase, leaders will assess existing efforts, identify gaps, and discern whether current practices are truly forming disciples or simply maintaining engagement. This is a time for clarity and courage. Ask hard questions, reflect deeply, and seek alignment between your church’s mission and methods.



3. **DESIGN: Building a Pathway Forward**

Armed with biblical insight and a clear understanding of your church’s current reality, leaders will begin designing a discipleship pathway that is strategic and Spirit-led. This pathway may involve creating something new or refining what

already exists. Whether it's introducing fresh rhythms of spiritual formation, enhancing existing ministries, or creating intentional environments for growth, this phase helps churches build a roadmap that guides people from new believer to mature disciple. The design process is collaborative, contextual, and focused on creating a pathway that is visible, reproducible, and measurable, but that fits your church's unique culture and calling.



4. DEPLOY: Activating the Mission

The final step is deployment—putting the plan into motion and mobilizing the church to embrace a culture of disciple-making. This is where vision becomes reality. Churches will communicate the pathway clearly, equip leaders to guide others, and help every member understand their role in the mission. Think about deployment not as launching a new initiative, but cultivating a movement. It involves training, storytelling, celebration, and ongoing support. Most importantly, it empowers disciples to become disciple-makers, multiplying the impact of the church and fulfilling the Great Commission in everyday life.

DISCIPLES PATH TIMELINE

DisciplesPath is a strategic process for churches seeking to revitalize their disciple-making ministries, built around four essential steps: **Discover, Discern, Design, And Deploy.**

DisciplesPath is designed to be about a six-month journey, allowing time for thoughtful reflection, collaborative planning, and intentional implementation. However, the timeline is flexible and can be adjusted to fit the unique pace, rhythms, and availability of your church.

The goal is not speed, but clarity—ensuring that each phase is given the attention it deserves to produce lasting results.

STEP 1

DISCOVER (Month 1)

Goal: Establish a biblical foundation for discipleship.

Key Activities:

- The pastor and *DisciplesPath* team members engage in personal study and group conversations about discipleship.
- Old and New Testament passages will be examined personally and corporately.
- A shared theological understanding of discipleship will be developed.

STEP 2

DISCERN (Months 2-3)

Goal: Evaluate the current state of disciple-making in the church.

Key Activities:

- Complete informal leadership assessment of spiritual maturity.
- Invite the congregation to take part in Lifeway's online discipleship survey.
- Compare leader perceptions about discipleship with church members' self-assessments.
- Identify strengths, gaps, and areas of misalignment.
- Begin conversations about ministry effectiveness.

STEP 3

DESIGN (Months 4-5)

Goal: Create or refine a clear discipleship pathway.

Key Activities:

- Document the church's current discipleship slogan, programs, experiences, and ministry environments used to make disciples.
- Use a Decision Matrix to evaluate which ministries to continue, revise, or sunset.
- Develop a new or modified discipleship pathway for all age groups.

STEP 4

DEPLOY (Months 6+)

Goal: Launch the new discipleship strategy and mobilize the church.

Key Activities:

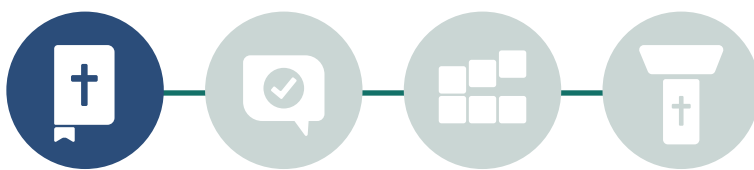
- Communicate the pathway clearly to the congregation.
- Select curriculum and resources that align with the pathway.
- Train Bible study leaders in teaching and relational skills.
- Begin implementation across ministries and age groups.
- Monitor engagement and spiritual growth through ongoing feedback.
- Evaluate the discipleship ministry regularly and adjust as needed.

WHERE DO WE START?

HOW TO BEGIN THE *DISCIPLES*PATH PROCESS AT YOUR CHURCH

1. Before you proceed, pray. Ask the Lord to give you insight and wisdom for leading your church to consider how it might become more effective in making disciples. Call upon the Lord to reveal the right people to help with this process.
2. Select people to work together as a *DisciplesPath* team to study, evaluate, and plan for your church's new or updated discipleship pathway. Involve staff, church leaders such as deacons and/or elders, and key lay people. Six to eight people are an optimal size group. Strive for a cross-section of generational representation.
3. Download this booklet and distribute copies to each person chosen in Step 1 who will help your church create or update its discipleship pathway.
4. Schedule meetings on your church calendar, reserving a meeting space at a frequency that fits everyone's schedules and desired pace. Ask *DisciplesPath* team members to place those meeting dates on their calendars and prioritize them. Every church will be different and go through the process at different paces, but a reasonable schedule would be meetings once or twice a month for six months. This is only a guide, and your team may take longer to formulate your church's pathway.
5. Ask *DisciplesPath* team members to read this workbook prior to the team's first meeting.
6. Conduct your meetings using the suggested Meeting Guides in the appendix.

You'll continue to meet until the work of the *DisciplesPath* team is complete. Again, adjust your timeline as needed, and feel free to add meetings or to extend the suggested six-month process. Remember, the goal isn't speed but clarity.



STEP 1: DISCOVER

Goal of this Step:

Discover what the Bible teaches about discipleship and the characteristics of a disciple.

Objectives:

1. Read this section of your *DisciplesPath* booklet and highlight key insights, responding to questions and prompts as you go.
2. Meet with your church's *DisciplesPath* team and discuss your insights. This may take multiple meetings—don't feel rushed. Use the suggested Discover Meeting Guide in this section of the booklet.
3. Create a definition of a disciple that your team agrees with. This will be shared with your church family later.

LET'S BEGIN THE *DISCIPLESPATH* JOURNEY!

An assignment without a means of gauging success normally ends with frustration or abandonment. In the church, our work is to see disciples made. But can you really “measure” discipleship? A strong case can be made that it is ludicrous to measure transformation in a person's life. Nevertheless, there are biblical injunctions that halt our progress into sin and prescriptions that lead us toward spiritual maturity. With *DisciplesPath*, Lifeway did not set out to randomly create objective measurements against which a person's life would be deemed infantile, growing, or mature. We did, however, explore biblical attributes of growth and the desire that growth is occurring.

The research revealed eight issues we named the “Eight Signposts of Discipleship.” They are not new ideas necessarily, but they stand out as key practices in the lives of Protestants in North America. These signposts help individuals and church leaders know if they are on the right pathway, the pathway to growing as disciples. These eight signposts are “markers” that reassure us we are heading in the right direction on our mission to grow spiritually.

As you reflect on your spiritual life and the lives of your congregation members, ask yourself whether you see these signposts there. If you do, you most likely have growing disciples. If not, you'll begin to see opportunities to help people grow in their walk with the Lord.

THE EIGHT SIGNPOSTS OF DISCIPLESHIP

1. **Bible Engagement.** It should go without saying that believers will be engaged in the study of the Scriptures. Leadership, however, must often begin with the restatement of the obvious. Transformation can be recognized in a person when their mind is sharpened by the Bible, their perspective is shaped by the Bible, and their actions are directed by the Bible.
2. **Obedying God and Denying Self.** Discipleship is the process of obedience to one who is in authority over you. In our study, we found that people progressing in their faith are the ones who prioritize God's desires over self-will. Transformation can be seen in them because they progressively set aside earthly delights for kingdom priorities.
3. **Serving God and Others.** Just as Jesus said that He had come to serve and not be served, so must believers. The choice to serve others is just that . . . a choice. Mature believers allow the needs of others to trump our own needs. Transformation is evident when personal needs, and even dreams, are set aside for the needs we see in others.
4. **Sharing Christ.** Inherent to being a disciple of Christ is the making of other disciple-makers for Christ. Even with the need to live out the the gospel, maturing believers know that speaking the message is a necessity. Transformation is evident when we talk about the source of it.
5. **Exercising Faith.** Can you measure a person's faith? Probably not. But you can see it when it is put into action. Believers participating in the research noted that they knew the importance of living by faith as opposed to personal strength. Transformation is seen in believers when risk aversion is set aside and our lives are characterized by faithful obedience to God's will.
6. **Seeking God.** A person becomes a disciple of Christ because they intend to follow Him and become like Him. A continuous hunger should arise from this life. Scripture references our "first love," and believers are commanded at times

to return to it. Transformation is seen when our desire is to know God more deeply and experience His work more fully.

7. **Building Relationships.** Our faith is personal, but it is not intended to be private. Jesus established the church for our collective good and growth. Human beings are relational by nature; spiritually, we are no different. As believers, our horizontal relationships should develop just as our vertical relationship with God does. Transformation occurs when relational maturity is evident in our lives.
8. **Living Unashamed.** From previous studies, “unashamed” was new to our list, but we were not surprised by its appearance in the research. A person following Christ speaks about Him freely and boldly. The research noted that believers felt it appropriate, and even necessary, for others to know them as Christians and be held accountable for a life exemplary of that name. Transformation is evident when a believer is unashamed in presenting their own life as being aligned with Christ.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT DISCIPLES & DISCIPLE-MAKING?

Now that you know about the Eight Signposts of Discipleship, these can serve as a foundation for your assessment of your church's members and their spiritual growth. What follows is a series of Bible passages, insights, and questions to help you reflect on what discipleship is and your congregation's overall maturity as disciples.

Reflect on the Eight Signposts of Discipleship and read each Scripture passage on the following pages.

Ultimately, this exercise will lead you to the point of defining what the Bible says a disciple is and does. It will be a definition that can guide your ministry and help you make important decisions that will propel your church's disciple-making efforts.

WALKING = FOLLOWING

In the Old Testament, the word “*walk*” is frequently used as a metaphor to describe the daily life and spiritual journey of a disciple. In the Old Testament, walking with God signified a life of obedience, fellowship, and covenant faithfulness. For example, Genesis describes Enoch and Noah as men who “walked with God,” indicating a close, consistent relationship marked by trust and righteousness. The psalms and proverbs often use the term to contrast the paths of the righteous and the wicked, urging believers to “walk in the way of the Lord.”

Genesis 5:24

“Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.”

Enoch is a prime example of someone who maintained a close relationship with God; he is the only person in this chapter of which it is said, “He walked with God.”

Genesis 6:9

“Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.”

Noah’s walk with God set him apart in a corrupt generation, leading to his role in preserving humanity through the flood.

Micah 6:8

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

This verse directly connects walking with God to a life of justice, mercy, and humility.

Deuteronomy 10:12-13

“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?”

Walking with God is equated with obeying His commands and loving Him fully.

Psalms 23:4

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

The psalmist’s metaphorical “walk” expresses faith in God’s presence and protection even in difficult times.

Isaiah 2:3-5

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD...He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths...Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.”

This passage portrays walking with God as living in accordance with His teachings and being guided by His light.

Other Old Testament Passages

Look up each verse and record your observations:

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Ezra 7:10

Nehemiah 8:5-8

Psalms 32:8

Psalms 119:9-16

Proverbs 27:17

Summarize what you believe the Old Testament conveys about a person who walks with God:

NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES

In the New Testament, the metaphor continues with even greater clarity. The apostle Paul frequently exhorts believers to “walk in the Spirit,” “walk in love,” and “walk worthy of the calling.” These phrases emphasize that discipleship is not merely about belief—it’s about behavior, lifestyle, and transformation.

What do the following verses convey about discipleship and being a disciple?

Write your observations below:

Matthew 28:18-20

Mark 1:16-18

Luke 9:23-25

John 13:12-17

John 15:5,8

Acts 1:8

Acts 2:42-47

2 Timothy 2:1-2

Summarize what these New Testament verses convey about a person who walks with God as a disciple:

FROM STUDY TO REFLECTION: Defining Discipleship

You've just explored a rich collection of Scripture passages that reveal what it means to walk with God and live as a disciple. These verses offer timeless truths about following God—truths that shape our identity, our actions, and our relationships.

Now it's time to move from study to reflection. In the next section, focused verses and guided questions will help you define what a disciple is and what a disciple does.

Take a moment to pause, pray, and allow God's Word to speak personally and practically.

As you reflect, consider how these truths apply to your life, your leadership, and your church's disciple-making mission. Let Scripture shape your convictions and clarify your vision for what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

QUESTION 1

What is a disciple?

KEY SCRIPTURES:

Matthew 4:19 – Follow me, he told them, and I will make you fish for people.

Luke 9:23 – If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.

John 8:31–32 – If you continue in my word, you really are my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

John 13:35 – By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Reflection Questions:

According to Jesus, what defines a true disciple?

What core characteristics emerge from these passages?

How does discipleship involve more than belief? How does it require transformation and action?

QUESTION 2

How will your church define a disciple?

Key Scriptures:

Matthew 28:18–20

Acts 1:8

2 Timothy 2:2

Reflection Questions:

What role does Jesus assign His followers in the disciple-making process?

How do these passages emphasize mentorship, multiplication, and Spirit-empowered witness?

In what ways does disciple-making involve both personal growth and intentional investment in others?

QUESTION 3

What do disciples do?

Key Scriptures:

Matthew 25:35–40

Luke 14:26–27

James 1:22–25

Reflection Questions:

How do love, service, and obedience define the life of a disciple?

What is the relationship between faith and works in the life of a believer?

How should discipleship be evident in everyday life, ministry, and relationships?

QUESTION 4

What are the challenges and rewards of discipleship?

Challenges of Discipleship:

Matthew 16:24–25

Luke 14:27

John 15:18–19

2 Timothy 3:12

Rewards of Discipleship:

Matthew 19:29

John 8:31–32

James 1:12

Romans 8:17

Reflection Questions:

What hardships does Jesus say His disciples will face?

How does Scripture encourage perseverance and faithfulness?

What eternal rewards and promises are given to those who follow Christ wholeheartedly?

QUESTION 5

How will you summarize what it means to be a disciple?

A clear, biblically-grounded definition of a disciple is foundational to shaping an effective disciple-making strategy in your church. Without it, efforts can become fragmented, inconsistent, or misaligned with the mission Jesus gave His followers. A well-defined understanding of what a disciple is—and what discipleship entails—serves as a guiding compass for evaluating spiritual maturity, shaping ministry priorities, and measuring progress over time.

Key Elements to Consider When Defining a Disciple

Biblical Identity: A disciple is someone who follows Jesus, submits to His teachings, and seeks to live like Him (Matthew 4:19; John 8:31-32).

Commitment & Surrender: Discipleship involves daily self-denial and wholehearted devotion (Luke 9:23).

Spiritual Growth: A disciple matures through the Word, prayer, and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit (John 15:7-8).

Love & Obedience: Disciples are known by their love for others and their obedience to Christ's commands (John 13:34-35).

Service & Sacrifice: Disciples serve others with humility and reflect Christ's compassion (Matthew 20:26-28).

Following Jesus: Discipleship is the ongoing process of learning from and becoming like Christ (Matthew 10:24-25).

Teaching & Mentorship: Discipleship is relational and intentional, involving guidance, accountability, and spiritual investment (2 Timothy 2:2).

Multiplication: Discipleship leads to making more disciples, fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

Spiritual Disciplines: Practices like prayer, Bible study, fasting, and worship sustain growth (Acts 2:42).

Cost & Reward: Discipleship requires sacrifice but leads to eternal joy and purpose (Matthew 19:29; Luke 14:27).

Write Your Definition of a Disciple

Based on the Word of God, the Eight Signposts of Discipleship, your study and reflection, and your team's conversations, write your definition of a disciple below.

Note that the definition doesn't have to be long! One example of a definition of a disciple might be: "A disciple is someone who walks with God through the power of the Holy Spirit." There is no right or wrong length—let God guide you in this part of the *DisciplesPath* process.

Be prepared to discuss your definition with the members of your church's *DisciplesPath* team the next time you meet. Use the suggested meeting agenda in the appendix, and use the notes pages that follow to record key insights made by fellow group members during that meeting.



STEP 2: DISCERN

Goal of this Step:

Determine the current spiritual maturity of your congregation through two different evaluations.

Objectives:

1. Read this section of your *DisciplesPath* booklet and highlight key insights, responding to questions and prompts as you go.
2. Meet with your church's *DisciplesPath* team and discuss your insights. This may take multiple meetings—don't feel rushed. Use the suggested Discern Meeting Guide in the appendix.
3. Evaluate your congregation's spiritual maturity and habits based on your firsthand knowledge using the assessment tool on the following pages.
4. Lead your congregation to participate in the online assessment by signing up for a free Ministry Grid account. Share the link to the online assessment with your congregation, giving them thirty days to complete the assessment.
5. Using the Interpreting the Assessment Results guide in the appendix, interpret the online assessment results. The assessment is based on the Eight Signposts of Discipleship identified by Lifeway as markers of growing disciples.

DISCERN THE SPIRITUAL MATURITY OF YOUR CONGREGATION

Before a church can effectively design or refine its disciple-making strategy, it must first understand where its people are spiritually. This begins with honest reflection. As a pastor or church leader, you have a unique vantage point: You see your congregation in worship, in service, in conversation, and in community. You observe their habits,

hear their questions, and witness their spiritual responses. Now is the time to pause and assess: **How spiritually mature are the members of my church?**

This section invites you to think deeply about the way your people live, think, and act. Are they engaging with Scripture regularly? Do they serve others with joy and humility? Are they growing in Christlikeness or simply attending church out of routine? These questions are not meant to discourage but to illuminate. By identifying both strengths and weaknesses, you'll gain clarity on where your church is thriving and where it needs intentional growth.

To guide this reflection, you'll walk through an informal assessment. This tool will prompt you to rate your congregation across several key areas of discipleship such as biblical engagement, prayer, community involvement, generosity, and evangelism. The goal is not to produce perfect data but to generate meaningful insights that will inform your next steps.

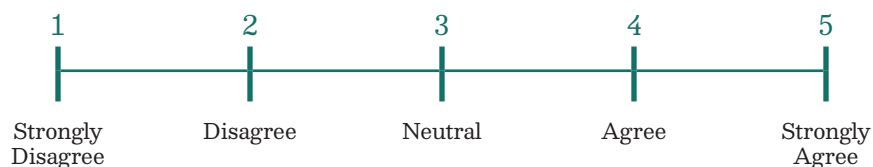
As you complete this assessment, be prayerful and honest. Each *DisciplesPath* team member will participate, compare perspectives, and discuss findings and conclusions together. This process will help you and fellow team members build a clearer picture of your church's current disciple-making reality and prepare you to lead with greater purpose and precision as you move forward in developing a comprehensive discipleship pathway.

DISCIPLESPATH TEAM ASSESSMENT OF THE CHURCH

Spiritual Maturity and Habits

For each of the statements on the following pages, select the response from the scale that best describes how you believe the members of your church think or act in relation to the statement.

In the blank space to the left of the statements, write the numerical response that corresponds to the degree to which you agree or disagree with the habits, practices, and attitudes of your congregation.



Once you have completed your evaluation, add up the total score and consult the Scoring and Interpretation section that follows the assessment. If more than one church leader is completing this evaluation, compare your responses and discuss your views to discern if you have accurately described the members of your church.

Relationship with God

- _____ 1. Church members experience God's presence in their lives.
- _____ 2. Church members understand the core message of the gospel, and it shapes their daily choices.
- _____ 3. Church members seek to know God more deeply and grow in their relationship with Him.

Bible Engagement

- _____ 4. Church members spend time reading or studying the Bible regularly.
- _____ 5. Church members are comfortable interpreting and explaining Scripture to others.
- _____ 6. Church members apply insights from Scripture to their decisions and actions.

Prayer Life

- _____ 7. Church members are praying specifically for things prioritized in Scripture.
- _____ 8. Church members spend time praying for others and see it as an essential part of their faith.
- _____ 9. Church members believe that God answers their prayers and see evidence of His responses in their lives.

Obedience and Transformation

- _____ 10. Church members strive to live according to the teachings of Jesus.

- _____ 11. Church members have recently made changes in their lives in response to conviction by the Holy Spirit.
- _____ 12. Church members handle difficult situations with faith, seeking God's guidance rather than relying only on themselves.

Personal Holiness and Integrity

- _____ 13. Church members strive to live with integrity, resisting temptation and turning away from sin.
- _____ 14. Church members are willing to confess their sins and seek forgiveness from others when necessary.
- _____ 15. Church members lifestyles reflect the attributes of a Christ-centered life.

Church Community and Fellowship

- _____ 16. Church members are actively involved in church fellowship or small groups.
- _____ 17. Church members intentionally seek out relationships with other believers for accountability and encouragement.
- _____ 18. Church members willingly serve others in our church community with their time and abilities.

Service and Ministry

- _____ 19. Church members are actively serving in a ministry.
- _____ 20. Church members respond positively to guidance or correction from church leaders.
- _____ 21. Church members demonstrate contribution to God's work through the church.

Sharing Faith

- _____ 22. Church members regularly engage in conversations with others about their faith.
- _____ 23. Church members are intentional about sharing the gospel with people who don't know Christ.
- _____ 24. Church members purposefully make friends with non-Christians to pray for and witness to them.

Perseverance and Faith in Trials

- _____ 25. Church members maintain their faith and find strength in God when facing personal trials.
- _____ 26. Church members trust in God's plan, even in difficult circumstances.
- _____ 27. Church members have responded to difficulties and challenges with increased faith in God.

Spiritual Growth and Accountability

- _____ 28. Church members are intentional about growing spiritually and regularly engage in accountability groups or short-term studies.
- _____ 29. Church members are currently mentoring or discipling someone in their spiritual journey.
- _____ 30. Church members welcome feedback and accountability from others to grow in their walk with Christ.

Financial Generosity

- _____ 31. Church members are committed to giving sacrificially.
- _____ 32. Church members delay personal spending so that they can financially support God's work.
- _____ 33. Church members can be described as "cheerful givers."

_____ **TOTAL**

Scoring and Interpretation

133-165	High Spiritual Maturity	Shows strong engagement in spiritual disciplines and displays Christian maturity.
100-132	Growing Spiritual Maturity	Demonstrates good spiritual habits and growth, with some areas for further development.
66-99	Developing Spiritual Maturity	Engages in some spiritual disciplines but may benefit from additional support and guidance in certain areas.
33-65	Beginning Spiritual Growth	Indicates a need for foundational discipleship and encouragement in spiritual disciplines.

Questions for Further Thought and Discussion

1. In which categories is the congregation showing signs of spiritual maturity?
2. Where is the congregation needing help in growth as disciples?
3. What current programs, ministries, and events are helping the congregation grow as disciples?
4. Finish this statement: I wish our congregation would...

THE ONLINE ASSESSMENT TOOL

MOVING FROM OBSERVATION TO INSIGHT

The informal survey you and your *DisciplesPath* team have just completed is a valuable starting point. It provides a snapshot of how you perceive the spiritual maturity and habits of your congregation. These impressions—based on your experience, observations, and pastoral insight—are essential for initiating honest conversations about the current state of discipleship in your church.

However, to gain a more complete and accurate picture, it's important to go beyond leadership perception and invite your congregation into the assessment process. Lifeway has developed a comprehensive online discipleship assessment designed specifically for this purpose. This tool allows church members to reflect on their own spiritual habits, beliefs, and growth, offering a broader and more nuanced understanding of where your people truly are in their journey as disciples.

Encouraging your congregation to participate in this online assessment is a significant next step. Once completed, you'll receive tabulated results that reveal patterns, strengths, and areas for growth across your church body. These results can then be compared to the informal survey you've already completed, helping you determine how closely your leadership's perceptions align with the self-assessments of your members.

This comparison is about gaining clarity. When both perspectives are brought together, you'll be equipped to make informed decisions about your church's disciple-making strategy. You'll be able to identify where alignment exists, where gaps need to be addressed, and how to move forward with intentionality and purpose. Leading your church through this process is a powerful act of stewardship and vision—one that can shape the future of your ministry and the spiritual growth of your people.

You can find the online assessment tool at **MinistryGrid.Lifeway.com**

FINALIZING YOUR EVALUATION

Comparing Perception with Reality

Now that you've completed the informal *DisciplesPath* assessment and invited your congregation to participate in Lifeway's online discipleship survey, it's time to bring both sets of data together.

This comparison is a critical step in understanding the current spiritual maturity of your church members. While your leadership team's observations offer valuable insight, the congregation's self-assessment provides a broader and more personal perspective. Together, these tools create a more complete and honest picture of your church's disciple-making health.

Gather your *DisciplesPath* team and review both their assessment insights and the tabulated data from the Lifeway survey. Look for patterns, consistency, and discrepancies. Where do the two assessments align? Where do they differ? These differences are not problems—they are opportunities to learn, grow, and lead with greater clarity.

This process is not about assigning blame or feeling discouraged; it's about gaining clarity and moving forward with purpose. By comparing both sets of data, you'll be equipped to lead your church with greater confidence, knowing where your people are and how to help them grow. This is the foundation for building a disciple-making culture that is intentional, biblical, and transformational.



STEP 3: DESIGN

Goal of this Step:

Design a discipleship pathway for your congregation based on your definition of a disciple, your discernment of your congregation's current discipleship maturity, and the preferred future you want them to have as disciples.

Objectives:

1. Read this section of the *DisciplesPath* booklet and highlight key insights, responding to questions and prompts as you go.
2. Meet with your church's *DisciplesPath* team and discuss your insights. This may take multiple meetings—don't feel rushed. Use the suggested DESIGN Meeting Guide in the appendix.
3. Evaluate your church's current disciple-making ministries and pathway. Decide which new elements should be added and others that should be sunset.

REMEMBER: Discipleship Begins Before Conversion

When we think about discipleship, our minds often go straight to the spiritual growth of those who have already begun following Jesus. We picture Bible studies, events, mentoring relationships, and intentional spiritual practices that help believers mature in their faith. But if we're going to build a truly effective discipleship pathway in our churches, we must begin with a broader, more biblical understanding: **Discipleship begins before someone makes a conscious decision to follow Christ.**

Jesus modeled this beautifully. He invited people to follow Him long before they understood who He was. His interactions with seekers, skeptics, and sinners were not accidental—they were intentional steps in a relational journey. He taught, healed, listened, and loved. He created space for people to belong before they believed. In

doing so, He laid the foundation for a discipleship pathway that starts with connection, curiosity, and community.

In our churches today, we have countless opportunities to walk alongside people who are not yet believers. These individuals—whether children, students, or adults—are already on a spiritual journey. They may not recognize it as discipleship, but every encounter with the gospel, every relationship with a believer, and every experience of God’s love through the church is a step toward Jesus.

THE PRE-CHRISTIAN JOURNEY

Before someone places their faith in Christ, they may:

- Attend a worship service and hear biblical truth for the first time.
- Join a Bible study group out of curiosity or friendship.
- Have their name added to a prayer list.
- Participate in a church-hosted event like a fall festival, sports camp, or parenting seminar.
- Receive help from a church ministry—food pantry, counseling, or grief support.
- Build relationships with believers who model Christ’s love in everyday life.

These moments matter. They are not peripheral to discipleship; they are foundational. They represent the early stages of spiritual formation, where seeds are planted, questions are asked, and hearts begin to soften. If our discipleship pathways only begin at conversion, we miss the opportunity to guide people through these critical early steps.

Children: Discipleship Before Belief

Beginning with newborns, every prayer, lesson, and experience helps shape understanding of God and His love for them. As they get older, these children will continue to discover more about God and His Word.

As children grow, we cannot assume every one of them has decided to follow Jesus. Many will be on a discipleship journey for a while as they discover biblical truths. During that time, they are being discipled toward membership into God’s “forever family.”

For children who come from non-Christian families, the church may be the only place they hear about Jesus. Their discipleship journey might begin with a Vacation Bible School invitation or friendship with a classmate who brings them to church. These early experiences are not just outreach—they are discipleship in its earliest form.

Students: On the Edge of Faith

Teenagers are often navigating complex questions about identity, purpose, and truth. Many are spiritually curious but hesitant to commit. Youth ministries have a unique opportunity to disciple students before they believe. Through retreats, small groups, service projects, and mentoring relationships, students can explore faith in a safe and supportive environment.

It's in these spaces that pre-Christian students begin to see what it means to follow Jesus. They observe the lives of leaders and peers who are living out their faith. They wrestle with Scripture. They ask hard questions. And slowly, they move closer to a decision to trust Christ.

Adults: In the Church's Flight Path

Adults who are not yet believers may be harder to identify, but they are present in every church. Some attend regularly with a believing spouse. Others come for the community or the music. Some are drawn by a crisis or a need for hope. These adults are often spiritually open, even if they haven't yet made a commitment.

Churches disciple these adults through hospitality, teaching, and relationships. A sermon might spark a new understanding. A small group might offer a sense of belonging. A conversation over coffee might lead to deeper questions. These are discipleship moments, even if they happen before conversion.

DESIGN A PATHWAY THAT WELCOMES ALL

As you begin to build a discipleship pathway for your church, it's essential to design it with pre-Christians in mind. This means creating entry points that are accessible, relational, and non-threatening. It means training leaders to recognize and nurture the discipleship journey of people in their groups. It means celebrating progress, not just decisions.

Your pathway should include:

- **Relational On-Ramps:** Opportunities for people to connect with believers in authentic ways—meals, interest groups, community service.
- **Low-Barrier Environments:** Events and gatherings that are welcoming to those unfamiliar with church culture.
- **Exploratory Spaces:** Classes or groups where foundations of the Christian faith are established and people can ask questions and explore faith without pressure.
- **Visible Witness:** A church culture where the gospel is lived out in everyday interactions, not just preached from the pulpit.

When we embrace the idea that discipleship begins before belief, we shift our focus from programs to people. We begin to see every interaction as a potential step on someone's journey toward Jesus. We become more patient, intentional, and prayerful. And we create a church environment where people can belong, explore, and eventually believe.

The Role of the Church

The church is not just a place for the spiritually mature—it's a spiritual greenhouse for seekers, skeptics, and new believers. Every ministry, every volunteer, and every sermon contributes to the discipleship journey of someone who may not yet know Christ.

This means our discipleship strategies must be holistic. They must account for the diversity of spiritual starting points. They must be flexible enough to meet people where they are, yet intentional enough to guide them forward. And they must be rooted in the belief that God is already at work in every heart, drawing people to Himself.

A Call to Intentionality

As you continue working through this *DisciplesPath* workbook, keep the pre-Christian in mind. Ask yourself:

- How does our church engage people before they believe?
- Are we creating spaces for biblical exploration?
- Do our leaders understand that discipleship begins before conversion?
- Are we celebrating the journey, not just the destination?

Discipleship is not a switch that flips at salvation—it's a journey that begins with curiosity, continues through commitment, and matures over a lifetime. By recognizing and embracing this truth, your church can build a pathway that reflects the heart of Jesus—one that welcomes, nurtures, and transforms.

CREATING A CLEAR AND ACTIONABLE DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

With a clearer understanding of your congregation's spiritual maturity—through leadership reflection and congregational assessment—you are now ready to move into the design phase, where vision becomes strategy. The goal of this section is to help you and your leadership team create a discipleship pathway that is:

- Clear
- Memorable
- Implementable

A discipleship pathway is more than a collection of programs; it's a strategic framework that guides people from spiritual infancy to maturity and ultimately to becoming disciple-makers themselves. It should be rooted in biblical principles and reflect your church's:

- Unique context
- Values
- Mission

Whether you're building a new pathway from the ground up or refining an existing one, this process will help you identify what's working, what's missing, and what needs to be aligned.

This step begins with an honest look at your current discipleship pathway design. You'll be asked to document what already exists—your church's discipleship slogan (if any), the environments where discipleship occurs, and the programs available for

each age group. From there, you'll evaluate how well these elements work together to form a cohesive journey of spiritual growth.

STEP 1

Identify the Current Discipleship Pathway Approach

Use the space below to describe your church's current approach to discipleship. In what ministries do you ask your members to participate? What is available to help them grow? Include any slogans or visual models you currently use to communicate the pathway to your congregation.

Visual Model (if applicable): Draw your visual model below.

Our church's current discipleship slogan is (if any):

Environments Where Discipleship Begins for Pre-Christians:

STEP 2**Identify Programs and Experiences by Age Group**

List all current programs, events, and ministry opportunities meant to contribute to discipleship in your church. Organize them by age group to help identify strengths, gaps, and areas for improvement.

KIDS MINISTRY

- Ongoing Groups (e.g., Sunday School, midweek programs)
- Short-Term Groups or Studies
- Special Events (e.g., VBS, camps, family nights)
- Service Opportunities
- Mission Experiences (local, state, national, international)

STUDENT MINISTRY

- Ongoing Groups (e.g., youth group, discipleship groups)
- Short-Term Studies or Retreats

- Special Events (e.g., DNOW, camps, conferences)
- Service Opportunities
- Mission Experiences

ADULT MINISTRY

- Ongoing Groups (e.g., Sunday School, life groups, small groups)
- D-Groups (same-sex groups of 3 to 5)
- Men's/Women's Ministries
- Short-Term Studies or Courses
- Special Events (e.g., retreats, seminars, workshops)

Service Opportunities:

Mission Experiences:

TAKING A HARD LOOK: Evaluating What's Working—and What's Not

Now that you've listed your church's discipleship slogan and mapped out the various programs offered across age groups, it's time to take a deeper, more honest look at what those ministries are actually producing. Every church has a range of activities designed to engage people, but not every activity contributes meaningfully to spiritual growth. This section invites you to ask hard questions about the effectiveness of your current discipleship efforts.

Not all ministries are created equal in their impact. Some are thriving—consistently helping people grow in their faith, build relationships, and live out the gospel. Others may be well-intentioned but lack clarity, purpose, or fruit. As stewards of your church's resources—time, finances, volunteers, and energy—it's essential to evaluate which ministries are truly helping people become disciples.

This process may lead to difficult but necessary decisions. Some ministries will need to continue and be strengthened. Others may need to be “sunset”—graciously ended—so that resources can be redirected toward more effective disciple-making environments. Ending a ministry doesn't mean it failed; it means you're choosing to focus on what will bear the most fruit in this season of your church's life.

To guide your evaluation, ask yourself these questions:

Which ministries are clearly contributing to spiritual growth and disciple-making?

Are there programs that are popular but lack spiritual depth or intentionality?

Do our ministries work together as part of a cohesive discipleship pathway, or are they disconnected?

Where are we investing significant resources with little measurable spiritual return?

Are there age groups or spiritual stages that are underserved or over-programmed?

What ministries need to be reimaged, refined, or retired to better serve our mission?

This is not just a strategic exercise—it's a spiritual one. It requires prayer, humility, and courage. By asking these questions and making intentional decisions, you'll be better equipped to design a discipleship pathway that is focused, fruitful, and faithful to the mission Jesus gave His church.

The Decision Matrix

Using a Decision Matrix offers church leaders a practical and insightful way to evaluate the effectiveness of their discipleship ministries. Rather than relying solely on intuition or tradition, the matrix provides a structured framework for assessing each ministry based on key criteria such as spiritual impact, alignment with discipleship goals, participation levels, and resource investment. This clarity helps leaders make informed decisions about which ministries should continue, which need refinement, and which may need to be sunset. By organizing this information in one place, the matrix:

- Encourages thoughtful discussion
- Promotes strategic stewardship of time and resources
- Supports the development of a more focused and fruitful disciple-making pathway

Use the Decision Matrix on the following pages to evaluate your church's current ministries. Let your observations and recommendations fuel additional conversations about your church's discipleship pathway as you move forward.

Ministry Name	Age Group (Kids, Students, Adults)	Alignment with Discipleship Goals (High, Medium, Low)	Participation Level (High, Medium, Low)	Spiritual Impact (High, Medium, Low)	Resource Investment (High, Medium, Low)	Recommendation (Continue, Revise, Sunset)

Ministry Name	Age Group (Kids, Students, Adults)	Alignment with Discipleship Goals (High, Medium, Low)	Participation Level (High, Medium, Low)	Spiritual Impact (High, Medium, Low)	Resource Investment (High, Medium, Low)	Recommendation (Continue, Revise, Sunset)

DESIGNING YOUR DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

From Evaluation to Intentional Strategy

Now that you've evaluated your current ministries, identified strengths and weaknesses, and considered which programs to continue, revise, or sunset, it's time to begin designing a discipleship pathway that is intentional, clear, and tailored to your church's context. This pathway should guide people from spiritual infancy to maturity, helping them grow in their relationship with Christ and equipping them to become disciple-makers themselves.

A well-designed discipleship pathway is not just a list of programs—it's a strategic journey. It should reflect your church's mission, values, and biblical convictions. It must be understandable to your congregation, accessible to people at different stages of spiritual growth, and flexible enough to adapt as your church evolves. Whether you're creating something new or refining what already exists, this section will help you build a pathway that is both visionary and practical.

Use the following pages to begin shaping your new or modified discipleship pathway. Start by identifying key stages of spiritual growth you want to guide people through. Then, you'll match those stages with environments, programs, and practices that support growth. Think about how each age group—kids, students, and adults—will engage with the pathway.

A Word of Caution: Don't Over-Program

As you design or refine your discipleship pathway, it can be tempting to fill the calendar with classes, events, and programs in hopes of reaching more people and covering more ground. **But more activity doesn't always mean more effectiveness.** In fact, overprogramming can lead to burnout—for leaders and members—and dilute the focus of your disciple-making efforts. The goal is not to be busy, but to be strategic. A well-designed pathway prioritizes clarity, intentionality, and spiritual depth over quantity. Less is sometimes more. By offering fewer, more focused environments for growth, you create space for deeper relationships, stronger engagement, and lasting transformation. Resist the urge to do everything; instead, do the right things well.

The Pathway Should Be Simple And Memorable

Here is one possibility for a discipleship pathway designed around the five functions of the church that can be communicated at a new members' class, in a sermon series, through visuals on the website, or on other elements placed around the church.

Anytown Baptist Church envisions these five steps for involvement and growth, and has ministries that are open to people who want to grow in their walk with God:

	Worship	Fellowship	Discipleship	Ministry	Evangelism
Primary Church Program	Weekend Worship Service	Bible Study Groups	Short-Term Studies & D-Groups	Service Teams (Greeters, Security, Fellowship, etc.)	Local, State, and International Missions

In this scenario, a church that adopted the above strategy as a discipleship pathway would share this five-step pathway where a person would:

- Step 1** Attend the weekend worship service
- Step 2** Belong to an ongoing Bible study group
- Step 3** Take more intensive discipleship classes and/or belong to a same-sex Discipleship Group (D-Group) for greater accountability
- Step 4** Volunteer to serve on one of the churches ministry teams
- Step 5** Participate in evangelism/missions opportunities

These five steps give the church a clear pathway of discipleship, helping people understand what is next.

Here is an example of a four-step process:

- **Connect:** Primary church program, weekend worship service
- **Grow:** Bible Study Groups
- **Serve:** Service teams (greeters, security, fellowship, etc.)
- **Go:** Local, state, and international missions

Remember, a person's pathway journey may not be linear! A person might visit and join an ongoing Bible study group as "step 1," followed by volunteering to serve at an outreach event, before ever attending a weekend worship service. The discipleship pathway is a general pattern for involvement and growth, but it is also flexible.

PROGRAMS AND EXPERIENCES BY AGE GROUP

Now that you have been exposed to some possible pathways, what programs and experiences will you recommend to your people?

List all programs, events, and ministry opportunities that will contribute to the new discipleship pathway in your church. Organize them by age group.

Refer to the DECISION MATRIX to remind yourself about ministries that are making disciples, and others that are struggling. What environments and experiences will you keep? Which ones will you sunset? Which new ones will you add?

On the pages that follow, list the ministries and experiences that will be a part of your new or updated discipleship pathway.

Kids Ministry

Environments and Experiences for Pre-Christians:

Bible Study Groups (e.g., Sunday School, small groups, etc)

Short-Term Groups

Special Events (e.g., VBS, camps, retreats, fall festival)

Service Opportunities

Mission Experiences (local, state, national, international)

Student Ministry

Environments and Experiences for Pre-Christians:

Ongoing Groups (e.g., youth group, discipleship groups)

Bible Study Groups

Short-Term Studies or Retreats

Special Events (e.g., DNOW, camps, conferences)

Service Opportunities

Mission Experiences

Adult Ministry

Environments and Experiences for Pre-Christians:

Ongoing Groups (e.g., Sunday School, life groups, small groups)

D-Groups (same-sex groups of 3 to 5)

Men's/Women's Ministries

Short-Term Studies

Special Events (e.g., retreats, seminars, workshops)

Service Opportunities

Mission Experiences

LET’S FORMALIZE YOUR CHURCH’S DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

You’ve invested a lot of time, prayer, thought, and discussion around the topic of your church’s discipleship pathway. It’s time to put it all together and design the plan that will carry your church into the future.

Use the space below to **design** a new or updated discipleship pathway. Ask yourself:

What are the major steps for people to grow as disciples at your church?

What primary ministries and experiences do you want people to take part in?

Use the following table to create a potential discipleship pathway for your church to be discussed at your team’s next meeting. Together as a team, you’ll decide on ONE pathway for your congregation. It may take a meeting or two to fully discuss your options.

Primary Church Program					



STEP 4: DEPLOY

Goal of this Step:

Review the decisions made in *DisciplesPath* steps 1-3 and take action to implement the new discipleship pathway in your church.

Objectives:

1. Read this section of your *DisciplesPath* booklet that details the DEPLOY step and highlight key insights. Respond to questions and prompts along the way.
2. Meet with your church's *DisciplesPath* team and discuss your insights.
3. Make the following three items your next steps:
 - **Determine** how you will inform key influencers in the church about your work as a *DisciplesPath* team.
 - **Decide** how you will promote the church's discipleship pathway.
 - **Select resources that align** with your chosen pathway.

PUTTING THE DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY INTO MOTION

After a season of deep reflection on Scripture and honest evaluation of your church's current disciple-making efforts, you've designed a pathway that is intentional, clear, and aligned with your mission.

This final step is critical: It's time to **DEPLOY**. This is about moving from planning to action—mobilizing your church to embrace and engage the new or revised discipleship pathway you've chosen for your congregation.

Deployment involves three major steps:

FIRST, communicate with your church's key influencers about your church's discipleship pathway.

These leaders can help you communicate important information about your discipleship pathway to the rest of the congregation. At this point, your key influencers may be aware that a team is meeting and crafting a new discipleship pathway, but they have not had access to this workbook or the *DisciplesPath* process. They haven't spent months praying and discussing discipleship like you have. Now it's time to bring them up to speed.

Schedule meetings with the deacons, Bible study leaders, and others who are key influencers. Share biblical insights about discipleship you've learned during the *DisciplesPath* process, share the team's journey, conclusions made, and recommendations for moving forward with a new or revised discipleship pathway. Use the Key Influencers meeting agenda in the appendix to help guide this important meeting.

SECOND, bring the congregation up to speed on your church's unique *DisciplesPath*.

This is an important part of the *DisciplesPath* process where you cast vision to the entire church and underscore the importance of a discipleship pathway. You may consider scheduling a special month of sermons (see the sample four-part series in the appendix) to address the importance of discipleship, culminating in the introduction and launch of your church's discipleship pathway.

You may want to include a page on your website that is dedicated to your church's discipleship pathway. Members and guests should be able to quickly grasp your heart for discipleship and the church's plan to help people of all ages grow in Christ.

Consider posting the steps of your discipleship pathway on social media accounts or printing large wall-size posters and placing them in strategic locations around the church for your congregation to see. No one should have to wonder what their next step is along the discipleship pathway of your church.

THIRD, select resources and experiences that align with your discipleship pathway.

Providing trustworthy, biblically-centered resources for your church's discipleship pathway is essential for nurturing spiritual growth across all age groups. These resources serve as foundational tools that guide individuals in understanding Scripture, applying biblical truths to everyday life, and growing in their relationship with Christ. For children and students, age-appropriate materials help build a strong spiritual framework that will be built on as they mature. Adult resources will challenge and equip believers to live out their faith with depth and purpose.

When churches invest in well-crafted, theologically sound content, they ensure consistency in teaching and create a more effective pathway for spiritual development that aligns with their mission and values. Ultimately, these resources empower the church to make disciples who are rooted in biblical truth and equipped to disciple others.

All of Lifeway's resources are grounded in Scripture, vetted theologically, and are in full alignment with Southern Baptist doctrine found in The Baptist Faith and Message 2000.

Review **Resourcing Your Church's Discipleship Pathway** in the appendix to discover:

- How curriculum becomes a disciple-making tool
- Ten values of Lifeway's curriculum
- Lifeway curriculum distinctives to help you choose materials that align with your discipleship goals

APPENDIX

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MEETING GUIDES

The meeting guides on the following pages give you suggestions to guide the flow of your *DisciplesPath* leadership team meetings.

Feel free to change things to fit your team! Add or delete elements. Let these guides help you prepare agendas that direct conversations and planning for the future.

***DisciplesPath* Initial Meeting (60 minutes)**

- 10 minutes Pray for the *DisciplesPath* team and the six-month process.
- 5 minutes Introduce people on the church's *DisciplesPath* team.
- 25 minutes Review the content on pages 4-13.
- 10 minutes Answer any questions about the purpose, content, and goals of the *DisciplesPath* process.
- 5 minutes Assign the next reading, Step 1: Discover, that begins on pg 14. Instruct the group to respond to questions and assignments in that section and come to the next meeting ready to share their insights.
- 5 minutes Set the date or remind the group of the next meeting date and time.

***DisciplesPath* Team Meeting: DISCOVER (90 minutes)**

- 10 minutes Pray for the members of your congregation, and your role in helping develop a new (or updated) discipleship pathway that will guide their spiritual growth.
- 45 minutes Review the observations of the *DisciplesPath* team members from their study of the Discover chapter, as well as their conclusions regarding discipleship and the definition of a disciple.
- 30 minutes Work together to define “disciple” as a group. Extend or add meetings if needed.
- 5 minutes Remind the team of the next meeting date/time. Assign new reading from the next chapter (Discern), and ask everyone to come ready to share insights on the congregation's spiritual maturity.

***DisciplesPath* Team Meeting: DISCERN (90 minutes)**

*Note: this meeting should come after the informal assessment has been completed by the *DisciplesPath* team and after the results of the churchwide/online survey are also known

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 10 minutes | Pray for the members of your congregation and your role in helping develop a new (or updated) discipleship pathway that will guide their spiritual growth. |
| 30 minutes | Discuss the insights of the team members from their study from the Discern chapter. |

Which of the Eight Signposts of Discipleship are most visible among the members?

Which of the Eight Signposts of Discipleship are not as visible and may be areas in which the congregation needs to grow as disciples?

How mature are the members of the congregation, and where are they lacking maturity as disciples? Why do you believe this?

Are there some ministries/age groups in the church that are doing a better job of helping people mature as disciples? Which ones?

45 minutes Discuss the results of the online assessment (use the Interpretation page in the appendix to help with this process).

Where do perceptions of spiritual maturity match the congregation's self-assessment?

Are there areas where you overestimated or underestimated your people's spiritual habits or growth?

What strengths do both assessments show that you can celebrate and develop?

What top three weaknesses or gaps need attention?

5 minutes Remind team members of the date/time of the next meeting. Assign new reading from the next chapter, Discern. Ask team members to come to the next meeting prepared to discuss their insights about the congregation's spiritual maturity.

DisciplesPath Team Meeting: DESIGN (90 minutes)

*Note: This meeting will likely need to be divided into two or more meetings because of the nature of deciding which ministries and experiences will become the major elements in the church's discipleship pathway. Don't rush this phase. Spend as much time here as needed over multiple meetings.

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 10 minutes | Pray for the members of your congregation and your role in helping develop a new (or updated) discipleship pathway that will guide their spiritual growth. |
| 15 minutes | How will we include pre-Christians in the church's discipleship pathway? Discuss the options by age group. |
| 15 minutes | Based on responses in the Decision Matrix, what ministries are helping the church make disciples, which ones are not, and which ones may need to be "sunset" (ended) going forward? |
| 45 minutes | What events and experiences will you include in your church's discipleship pathway? Why would you argue for their inclusion? Review each person's ideas and the discipleship pathway they developed while reading this section of the booklet. |
| 5 minutes | Remind team members of the date/time of the next meeting. Assign reading from the next chapter, Discern. Ask team members to come to the next meeting prepared to discuss their insights about the congregation's spiritual maturity. |

DisciplesPath Team Meeting: DEPLOY (90 minutes)

*Note: This meeting will likely need to be divided into two or more meetings because of the nature of deciding which ministries and experiences will become the major elements in the church's discipleship pathway. Don't rush this phase. Spend as much time here as needed.

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|------------|--|
| 10 minutes | Pray for the members of your congregation and for the successful launch of your church's new discipleship pathway. |
| 25 minutes | Discuss each team member's thoughts about the three elements that should be included in the church's Next Steps Plan. Decide as a group which three steps are most important to your church. |

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| 25 minutes | Decide on action steps that flow from the three elements in the chosen Next Steps Plan and the people who will be responsible for accomplishing them. |
| 20 minutes | Begin discussing how the church will train its group leaders going forward. You won't fully complete this step at this meeting, but you will begin the conversation and continue it a subsequent meeting. Talk about the eight training topics you believe would be important for your church's group leaders. |
| 10 minutes | Begin discussing how your church will evaluate and resource your discipleship pathway. You'll only begin this conversation at this meeting, and continue it at a subsequent meeting. Use the information about resources in the appendix to discover many Lifeway resources that can fuel your church's discipleship pathway experience for your members. |

INTERPRETING THE ONLINE ASSESSMENT RESULTS

First, review your congregation's scores for each signpost. The report provides an indicator of whether a score reflects limited or more consistent spiritual maturity. But no individual or any church is perfect. We all need to follow Christ more closely. Take note of the signposts where your congregation is stronger and where it is weaker. Notice if there are any drop-offs or scores which are much lower than others (scores are often close to each other). A big gap is noteworthy.

Once you and your team understand the strength order of the signposts for your church, we recommend narrowing your initial conversations to the signposts with the highest and lowest scores and go deeper by looking at the questions within those signposts.

Celebrate

Which is the strongest signpost (highest score)?

Focus: Look at the questions within this signpost. Which one or two questions appear to be the source of your congregation's strength in following Christ in this area (typically the highest scoring questions)?

What has helped your congregation grow in this area most?

This strength is worth celebrating and complementing the congregation. Then, as you begin to address weaker areas and design your church's *DisciplesPath*, consider how you can leverage this strength in this process.

Lean In

Which is the weakest signpost (lowest score)?

Remember, we want an accurate picture. No matter how good a church's design is, your congregation will fall short of biblical standards in multiple areas. How you react to knowing you are less mature in a specific area is important.

An unbiblical response would be to say, "We are just not that type of church," or, "Not every church needs to excel at that." The signposts are biblical attributes, and our journey with Christ requires attention in each of these ways.

Another unproductive response is to acknowledge your congregation is weaker in this area but not address it or to simply accept failure. The Bible condemns looking in the mirror and forgetting what we see (James 1:23-24). We are to be doers of the Word, pursuing Him in all these ways. This is not something to address in our own strength. Jesus provided the Holy Spirit to empower us to do His will.

Focus

Look at the questions within this signpost. You won't be able to address all the components of this attribute simultaneously. Which one or two questions in this area appear to be the source of your congregation's struggle with following Christ (typically the lowest scoring questions)?

Why do you think this is hardest for your congregation?

If your team has time, you can repeat this for the second strongest and second weakest areas. Pray about the things you discussed. Praise God for His work in your congregation and confess where you fall short.

NEXT STEPS

Hopefully, celebrating strengths with your congregation will come easily. Leaning in to address an area of weakness will take intentionality. Be intentional with what you have learned both in the long term and the short term.

- **Long Term:** As you work on the design of your church's pathway, let your congregation's spiritual strengths and weaknesses inform those discussions. Evaluate your current design elements: How have they helped develop

strengths, and why were they less effective in the weaknesses? As you consider changes, ask how the change will impact spiritually weak areas.

- **Short Term:** What you listed in “Focus” regarding a weak signpost, should be specifically addressed for a season. Whether that is a short-term Bible study, retreat, sermon series, a specific challenge for the congregation, or a campaign, give specific attention to this spiritual need. The goal is not a “fix it” quest, but to spur a change of heart in this area.

As the assessment reminds us, the Bible shows us many ways we need to be walking with Christ. Corporately addressing a need for a season is important, but so is raising another area of focus in the next season. This creates a healthy rhythm.

Inform Your Path

Consider the following outcomes and questions. Discuss them as a team to help you apply what you have learned from the assessment to outcomes of the *DisciplesPath*. Outcomes should be:

- **Clear:** Gaps often represent things that are not clear to disciples. What are some areas where we need to improve clarity?
- **Reproducible:** Some in your church have matured in areas where others need to grow. How can your model encourage a culture where we are transferring the growth God has given us?
- **Relational:** This biblical principle is reflected in the Building Relationships signpost. How can your church’s Discipleship Path encourage more loving relationships, both inside and outside the church, centered on the truths of God?
- **Equipping Leaders:** Making leaders aware of the weaker discipleship signposts in your church may be more important than a redesign of your process. How can you equip leaders within the pathway you have designed to practically address this spiritually weak area you have selected?
- **Community Building:** It is hard to help each other spiritually when we don’t know what other churchgoers need. How can you use these assessment results to increase your transparency with one another around our spiritual needs?

KEY INFLUENCERS MEETING AGENDA

The purpose of this meeting is to bring key lay leaders in the church up to speed on the work of the *DisciplesPath* team and to secure their support of the initiative plus their help in disseminating the information throughout the congregation.

Total Time: 90 Minutes

Welcome & Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

- Offer brief spiritual encouragement and pray with unity and clarity.

Purpose of the Meeting (5 minutes)

- Explain why this gathering is important and what you hope to accomplish.

The Need for a Discipleship Pathway (10 minutes)

- Share the spiritual and strategic reasons behind developing a pathway.
- Highlight current gaps or challenges in discipleship.

Committee Overview & Process (10 minutes)

- Introduce the committee members and summarize their work over the past months.
- Share guiding principles or biblical foundations used in development.

Presentation of the Discipleship Pathway (20 minutes)

- Walk through the pathway visually (slides, handouts, or posters).
- Explain each phase or step and how it applies to different age groups.

Testimonies or Sample Stories (10 minutes)

- Give opportunities for select members of the *DisciplesPath* team to share insights from their part in the process and their excitement for the new discipleship pathway.

Interactive Discussion & Feedback (20 minutes)

- Invite questions, reactions, and suggestions.
- Use sticky notes, whiteboards, or digital tools to gather input.

Next Steps & Leader Involvement (5 minutes)

- Outline how these influencers will help champion the pathway.
- Share upcoming training, launch dates, or promotional plans.

Closing Remarks & Prayer (5 minutes)

- Reaffirm the vision and thank attendees for their leadership.
- Pray for unity and fruitfulness as the pathway is implemented.

SAMPLE SERMON SERIES

When you are ready to begin introducing the church's new discipleship pathway, we recommend that the pastor preach a sermon series on discipleship. This is vital for a congregation because it helps believers understand the core of what it means to follow Jesus—not just attending church but actively growing in faith and living it out daily. The *DisciplesPath* team has spent months delving into discipleship, but the congregation has not. Let's bring them up to speed!

Remind the members of your church that discipleship is the process of becoming more like Christ. Teach your people that faith is not passive but an intentional journey of transformation, obedience, and service. A focused series can also unify the church around a shared vision for growth and multiplication, encouraging members to invest in others and live out the Great Commission in practical ways.

Use a sermon series to provide the details of the church's new discipleship pathway, and thoroughly explain that it is grounded in Scripture and practical ways the church will help people of all ages grow as disciples. See the sample series below.

Series Title: "Follow Me: The Journey of a Disciple"

Week 1: "The Call to Follow"

Theme: The Biblical Basis for Discipleship

Text: Matthew 4:18–22

Main Points:

Discipleship Begins with a Call

- Jesus initiates the relationship ("Come, follow me...").
- It's a personal invitation, not a general announcement.
- It requires a response—immediate and intentional.

Discipleship Means Leaving Something Behind

- The disciples left nets, boats, and even family.
- Discipleship involves surrender and sacrifice.
- What we leave behind is nothing compared to what we gain.

Discipleship Is a Lifelong Journey

- Discipleship is not a one-time decision but a daily walk.
- It involves learning, growing, and being transformed.
- Jesus shapes us into “fishers of men.”

Week 2: “The Joy of the Journey”

Theme: The Blessings of Discipleship

Text: John 15:1-11

Main Points:

Abiding in Christ Brings Fruitfulness

- Disciples are connected to the Vine.
- Fruitfulness is a natural result of abiding.
- Our lives become impactful and purposeful.

Obedience Leads to Intimacy

- Jesus reveals Himself to obedient disciples.
- Obedience is not legalism—it’s love in action.
- The closer we walk, the clearer we hear.

Joy Is the Overflow of Discipleship

- Jesus promises “My joy in you...your joy complete.”
- Joy is deeper than happiness—it’s rooted in relationship.
- Discipleship brings peace, purpose, and fulfillment.

Week 3: “The Cost of Commitment”

Theme: The Challenges of Discipleship

Text: Luke 9:23-26

Main Points:

Discipleship Requires Self-Denial

- “Deny yourself” is counter-cultural.
- It means putting God’s will above our own.

- It's a daily decision, not a one-time event.

Discipleship Involves Carrying a Cross

- The cross symbolizes suffering and sacrifice.
- We may face rejection, hardship, or persecution.
- We're never alone—Jesus walks with us.

Discipleship Demands Eternal Perspective

- “What good is it to gain the world...?”
- We live for eternity, not temporary gain.
- True disciples value the soul over success.

Week 4: “Ripple Effect”

Theme: The Influence of Disciples on Their Families and Friends

Text: Acts 16:25-34

Main Points:

Disciples Influence Through Example

- Paul and Silas worshiped in prison—faith on display.
- Our actions speak louder than words.
- Consistent faith inspires curiosity and conviction.

Disciples Create Opportunities for Salvation

- The jailer asked, “What must I do to be saved?”
- Our lives can lead others to ask spiritual questions.
- Discipleship is evangelism in motion.

Discipleship Impacts Entire Households

- The jailer's whole family believed and were baptized.
- Faith is contagious when lived authentically.
- Our homes become mission fields.

OTHER WAYS TO PROMOTE YOUR DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

A church can promote its discipleship pathway in a variety of creative and strategic ways to ensure visibility and engagement across different touchpoints.

- A dedicated page on the church website can serve as a central hub, outlining the pathway, next steps, and available resources.
- Social media announcements through online platforms will get the word out not only to your members but also to others who live in your community.
- Schedule a special church family meeting with your congregation to announce the new discipleship pathway. Consider having a fellowship meal, making this a special event that everyone will want to attend.
- Graphics in the worship bulletin can reinforce the message weekly.
- Banners or signage in the church lobby can visually guide people toward discipleship opportunities.
- Short testimonial videos featuring congregants sharing their personal discipleship journeys can be powerful tools for inspiration and relatability, and these can be shared during services, on social media, or via email campaigns.
- Hosting a “Discipleship Sunday” or a launch event can create momentum, and offering printed brochures or QR codes that link to digital resources can make it easy for people to take their next step.
- Integrating the pathway into small group discussions and leadership training also ensures that discipleship becomes part of the church’s culture, not just a program.

What other opportunities do you see for promoting your church’s discipleship pathway?

Resourcing Your Church's Discipleship Pathway

One of the most powerful ways a church can support the spiritual growth of its people is by providing access to high-quality, biblically sound resources. While relationships and environments are essential to disciple-making, the tools we place in people's hands can either accelerate or hinder their growth. Thoughtfully chosen resources—whether curriculum, books, articles, or digital content—can help individuals and groups engage Scripture more deeply, apply truth more personally, and live out their faith more intentionally.

Resourcing your church well means more than simply offering content—it means curating tools that align with your discipleship pathway and meeting people where they are in their spiritual journey. From foundational studies for new believers to deeper theological explorations for mature disciples, the right resources can provide structure, clarity, and momentum. They can also help group leaders feel more confident and equipped, especially when paired with training and support.

It's important to consider the diversity of your congregation. Different age groups, learning styles, and life stages require different types of resources. Children's curriculum, student devotionals, Men's/Women's Bible studies, and short-term topical or book studies all play a role in shaping a holistic disciple-making environment. When these tools are intentionally selected and clearly connected to your church's mission, they become more than just content—they become catalysts for transformation.

CURRICULUM AS A DISCIPLE-MAKING TOOL

The word *curriculum* comes from the Latin word *currere*, which means "to run". *Curriculum* was used in the Roman Empire to refer to the course used for chariot races. The curriculum was the racetrack with its starting and finishing points.

The curriculum we use in group ministry today has starting and finishing points for the series, but it also has starting and finishing points in each session. The curriculum gives us a "lane" in which to run as we teach Scripture. This is often referred to as the "scope and sequence" (the topics covered and the order in which they are covered).

TEN VALUE PROPOSITIONS OF LIFEWAY CURRICULUM

1. Lifeway ongoing curriculum provides a structured, long-term Bible study plan for groups and leaders, minimizing repetition and ensuring comprehensive coverage of major topics.
2. Recruiting new leaders is easier because it offers clear guidance and tools for success.
3. All Lifeway resources adhere to the Baptist Faith and Message and are doctrinally sound.
4. Preschool and children's materials are age-appropriate, educationally solid, and based on the Levels of Biblical Learning.
5. Free online resources such as sermon outlines and leader-prep podcasts are provided.
6. Personal Study Guides keep groups interactive and engaged.
7. Flexible teaching plans allow leaders to customize group sessions.
8. Activities address various learning styles.
9. Curriculum supports an open, evangelistic group approach.
10. Evangelism is incorporated in all of Lifeway's ongoing curriculum, reaching preschoolers, children, students, and adults through regular sessions.