



STRATEGIC DISCIPLESHIP

GETTING STARTED

1. Create Your Strategy

Determine your discipleship goals (See the Discipleship Strategy document) for each ministry you offer. Be clear on these, so each leader knows what they are trying to accomplish.

We've included a free sample [Ministry Plan Form](#) in our downloads section.

Determine what content is best presented in a small group context, preaching series, and seminars, and create a plan to deliver that content over the next five years.

Determine what context is best to develop spiritual disciplines.

Determine your strategy for giving people varied ministry experiences. A regularly presented course on spiritual giftings and passions may assist in this process.

Determine how what strategy you will use to give people missional experiences. Local and short-term, cross-cultural experiences help expand people's minds to their missional potential.

Determine how you will help shape your people into an authentic, caring community that is attractive to outsiders.

2. Create Spiritual Tension

If your church has not had a clear discipleship focus, sometimes getting people to shift gears and embrace a new approach is challenging. One way to do this is to reveal to them how little they know and how little they have grown for all the years they have been following Jesus.

To accomplish this, we created a [Spiritual Journey Survey](#) (available in our downloads section), which we had our congregation fill out during a worship service to help them see what a mature disciple looks like.

According to the survey, most identified they were in Phase 2 regardless of how long they had followed Jesus. We then explained that Jesus moved his disciples through Phase 1 in three months, Phase 2 in nine months, and Phase 3 in two years. Jesus then ascended into Heaven as they began Phase 4. **After three years of intentional discipleship, they were ready to serve as leaders of the church.**

Those who had been Christians for a long time (8-plus years) were initially shocked at how little they knew in light of all the years they spent attending church. That shock then turned to anger as they questioned why the churches they attended in the past had failed to disciple them properly. Despite all the years, they were not ready to be sent out as missionaries and church planters. They weren't yet ready to assume significant roles within the church. We effectively created a spiritual discontent and a deep desire to grow spiritually.

We then presented them with a discipleship plan to rectify that situation and prepare them for ministry impact. In a church that had never done small groups, we had 70% of our people sign up that week to start a discipleship small group.

3. Start a Discipleship Small Group Ministry

Teachers and Shepherds

We recommend that each small group have two leaders: a Teacher and a Shepherd. Teachers disciple through teaching the content and life application. Shepherds disciple people by teaching them how to pray and care for one another. They tend to be two different gift mixes, and both are needed

Apprentices

We also recommend that as part of the discipleship strategy, you always have apprentices to continually develop new leaders. So potentially, you will have two leaders and two apprentices in each group. We have created an Apprentice Manual for this purpose which is available on Amazon.

Small Group Content

You can utilize any curriculum or create your own. Just remember, curriculum, in and of itself, does not disciple people. Curriculum is merely a tool that a teacher uses to accomplish their discipleship goals for the group.

Also, remember, we're not talking about finding the next five or ten-week series to work through. We're looking for a long-range plan that will teach people the essential things we believe they need to grapple with over the next four or five years.

The **Strategic Discipleship curriculum** is one of many options available to you. The best feature is that we offer it free of charge. It is set up as four phases, with approximately 26 studies in each phase.

We recommend that everyone starts at Phase 1, whether they are a retired pastor or a skeptic walking in from the street. There are numerous reasons for this.

- It puts everyone on the same page.
- People never know as much as they think they know.
- Many people who thought they were Christians discovered they were not.
- Everyone learns how to present the gospel to their friends.

- Skeptics need to be around other believers where they can see spirituality modeled and applied.
- Believers need to be around skeptics to hear their questions and perspectives.
- Everyone learns something in each phase, no matter how long they have been saved.
- Some of those going through the course will eventually teach the course themselves.

This policy means we don't have to keep guessing which phase the person should really be in, especially when people think they should be in a higher phase than they ought to be.

Everyone who initially felt insulted by starting at Phase 1 said afterward it was the best thing they could have done.

If you are in a church with pre-existing small groups and they are hesitant to change, you may find it beneficial to start with one trial group and let the others see the benefits.