



discipleship

church leadership resources

sbtexas.com/healthsurvey

Based on the Church Health Assessment you completed, discipleship may be one area of needed growth for your church and/or church leadership. Our Great Commission is to make disciples of all nations. With the business of church programming, sometimes a church can lose sight of her primary mission. In the **Explanation** section below, you will find several important biblical foundations for discipleship as it relates to church health. Subsequent sections of this report will include **SBTC Resources/Tools, Other Recommended Resources** and **Contacts**. All of these are designed to help strengthen your church in the area of discipleship. Please take time to read through this report and to share it with some key influential leaders in your church.



explanation

**“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
– Matthew 28:19-20**

The Great Commission is a command from our Great Commander to go and “make disciples”—not “make converts” but “make disciples.” As Jim Putnam put it in his 2010 book, *Real Life Discipleship*, “A disciple is one who is following Christ . . . who is being changed by Christ . . . who is committed to the mission of Christ.” The church is to be about the perpetual business of making followers of Christ who are being progressively sanctified in Christ while they also commit to and engage in the mission of Christ. Healthy churches don’t just make converts. They make disciples who make disciples who make disciples.

Healthy churches have codified discipleship language, clear discipleship pathways and a perpetuating discipleship culture.

Codified Discipleship Language.

Often, communication between church leaders and church members is exacerbated because their language is not codified. In other words, as someone has said, we sometimes use the same vocabulary without using the same dictionary. Allow me to offer three examples: (1) What is a disciple? Before your church can settle on a discipleship pathway or program, it should possess a clear and biblical definition of what a disciple is. “We want to produce disciples” sounds great. But by that you might mean that you want to produce converts while church member B might mean she wants to produce disciple-making disciples, and church member C might mean he wants to produce faithful attendees at church events. What exactly is a disciple of Jesus? (2) Additionally, do you have a discipleship program, a discipleship pathway or both? Programs are events—ends in themselves. Pathways are processes—designed for movement and reproduction. If you have both programs and events, how are they working together to make disciples? Is there a clearly communicated difference between discipleship programs and discipleship pathways? (3) Do you have small groups, life groups, cell groups, Sunday School groups or something different? If you have more than one, what is the difference? If you are using these terms interchangeably, pick one and stick with it. Church members and guests alike need to know clearly what is meant when church leaders encourage their participation in discipleship groups. In unhealthy churches, the language of discipleship is unclear, unconvincing and inconsistent. In healthy churches, leaders say the same things with intentionality, and the membership adopts the language with understanding and conviction.

Clear Discipleship Pathways.

For years, “discipleship” in churches has been regulated to a program or a series of programs. Your church may have a children’s discipleship program on Wednesday nights, a men’s and women’s discipleship program on Sunday nights, a Sunday School or small group discipleship program on Sunday mornings, or any other number of weekly offerings. These are programs. Events. Programs are not bad in themselves. Organized and managed with intentionality, they can be of great benefit to the discipleship goals of the church. However, in healthy churches, discipleship programs are not the end game.

In healthy churches, discipleship programs either feed or fit into discipleship pathways. Programs are events. Pathways are processes. The goal of a program is to increase numbers of attendees. The goal of a pathway is to reproduce increasing Christlikeness in participants. A discipleship program says, “Come, sit, participate, and learn. Then go home and apply.” A discipleship pathway says, “Here is our church’s plan for helping you strategically walk more and more closely with Jesus.” Pathways get you from Point A to Point B. Programs get you to Point A and keep you there. Discipleship programs without discipleship pathways can easily become stale, self-serving and ineffective. But when discipleship pathways are clear and discipleship programs are part of their processes, there is great potential for a church to reproduce disciple-making disciples. What is your church’s pathway for a new believer to become a mature believer? How do you move them from an infant disciple to a maturing disciple-maker? Is there a mentoring or 1-on-3 discipling season involved? Where do small groups fit in? At what point and with whom do they learn how to evangelize? How do worship services fit into their personal spiritual growth? Unhealthy churches seek only to amass disciples into their weekly programs. Healthy churches develop and communicate clear pathways for taking a new believer in Christ from a freshly reborn disciple to a reproductive disciple-maker.

Perpetuating Discipleship Culture.

Culture is hard to define but easier to feel. As Lance Whitt explained in *High Impact Teams*, “Culture is the collective personality of an organization, composed of assumptions, beliefs, traditions, values, and attitudes. Ideally, these cultural qualities drive and govern desired behaviors.” A church’s culture is that attitude—that collective personality—which develops over time as church leadership and membership share language, initiatives, common goals and common frustrations. Unhealthy churches have developed an unhealthy common personality by focusing on the wrong missions, valuing the wrong things, protecting the wrong traditions, perpetuating the wrong beliefs and operating from the wrong assumptions. They have lost the one thing—to make disciples who make disciples. Methods, programs, decorations and styles change over time. But the one thing does not. Unhealthy churches have lost their one thing in the churning ocean of other things. Healthy churches constantly call the congregation’s attention back to the one thing. A discipleship culture is created and facilitated from the pulpit, in classrooms, during committee and deacons’ meetings, and through online communication. It is in the language church leaders choose the attitudes they bring to the table and the values that shape their decision-making. Churches that make disciple-making disciples are intentional about developing and perpetuating a discipleship culture.

Like every other arena of life together, discipleship language, pathways and cultures do not happen by accident. They require intentionality and determination. Unhealthy churches expect to coast through the generations on the backs of various discipleship programs. Healthy churches are intentional about developing and perpetuating a biblical disciple-making culture through shared discipleship language and clear discipleship pathways.

sbtc tools & resources

Rhythms

The goal for this resource is to provide an introductory disciple-making tool for churches and leaders in Texas and beyond.

Bold Moves

This seven session video series spotlights seven bold moves churches can take to become disciple-making churches.

Roles of a Man

This gives all men a proper framework for what it means and what it looks like to be a biblical man. This resource is designed for men of all ages, single or married.

@Home APP

A free download with dozens of relevant lesson series to be used in the home or in small groups.

Disciple-Making Forum Online Videos

These sessions discuss how discipleship must remain centered on spiritual replication and helping people mature, instead of just the completion of a course based on programmatic steps to make a disciple.

SBTC Discipleship Training videos

A bank of helpful videos for training discipleship leaders in your church.

A Visionary Process for Making Disciples

An inexpensive tool for helping smaller-membership churches think through effective discipleship strategies.

SBTC Consultation

Often the best resource is a trained and experienced person who can help you think through your specific context. Fill out this short form to request an SBTC discipleship consultation.

other recommended resources

Recommended Books:

A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

by Eugene Peterson

Walk as Jesus Walked

by Dann Spader

Rediscovering Discipleship

by Robby Gallaty

The Life You've Always Wanted

by John Ortberg

Deep Discipleship

by JT English

7 Things You Must Do to be an Effective

Small Group Leader

by Tony Wolfe

Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life

by Donald S. Whitney

discipleship contacts

Please do not hesitate to reach out to one of the following contacts for encouragement, consultation or direction. It will be our joy to come alongside you as you lead your church to reach your community for Christ.

Jeff Lynn – jlynn@sbtexas.com

Senior Strategist for Church Health & Leadership

Karen Kennemur – kkennemur@sbtexas.com

Children's Ministry Associate (Children and Preschool Discipleship)

Nathaniel Kuhns – nkuhns@sbtexas.com

Student Ministry Association (Students/Youth Discipleship)

[Ministry Request Form](#) (www.sbtexas.com/help)



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