

REIMAGINE DISCIPLESHIP ONLINE & IN-PERSON



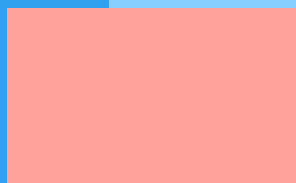
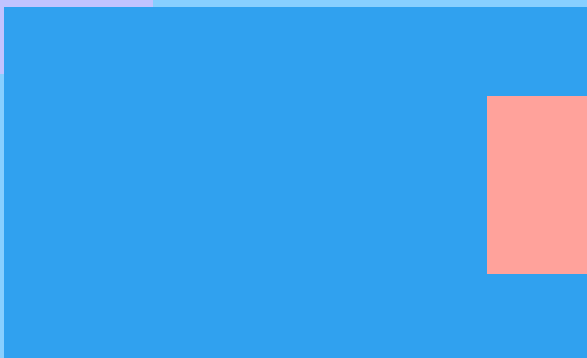
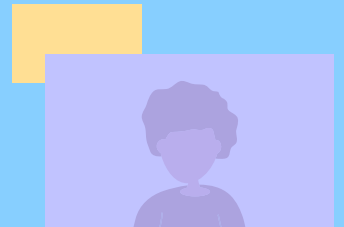
*How to multiply ministry
in any context*



Every believer, church leader, and pastor worth their salt knows that discipleship is of utmost importance in the development of any ministry. It's our command. It's our best method for growth. It's the secret to unlocking the potential of every person and every ministry.

And yet, we fail so miserably at it.

This guide has been created to help you reimagine what's possible through discipleship in any context, especially now when it's hard to get everyone together.





Nothing New

The premise for discipleship is longstanding. Most people working in ministry know it. Its desired outcome is obedient followers of Christ. Its method varies. It involves the selection of pupils, teaching, demonstration, fellowship, and working together to build the Church.

Discipleship requires one-on-one or one-on-few time together. It includes bigger groups, classes, and a variety of tools to help people grow and follow.

At its core, discipleship is built around relationships.

Before media, before social media, in the midst of political upheaval, and surrounded by opposition, the difficulties of discipleship have remained relatively constant. Chief among them is the ability to gather people in a common pursuit who are dedicated to the cause. Recently, social media, social distancing, political divide, and the ever-increasing busyness of life have all exasperated those difficulties. Thus, forcing many churches to “take what they can get” and resign to offering periodic classes and resources, hoping that producing good content will entice would-be disciples to dive deeper into their relationships with God. The problem - as we’ve seen all too clearly - is that content and programs alone do not develop the commitment, accountability, and unity that discipleship requires.

So what is required? Simply this:

You need to get creative to engage your people with a commitment to the transformative work of being and making devoted disciples.



Entirely Different

To understand how to adapt our approach for present-day, we must first understand the core principles that we are adapting: The principles upon which discipleship is founded.

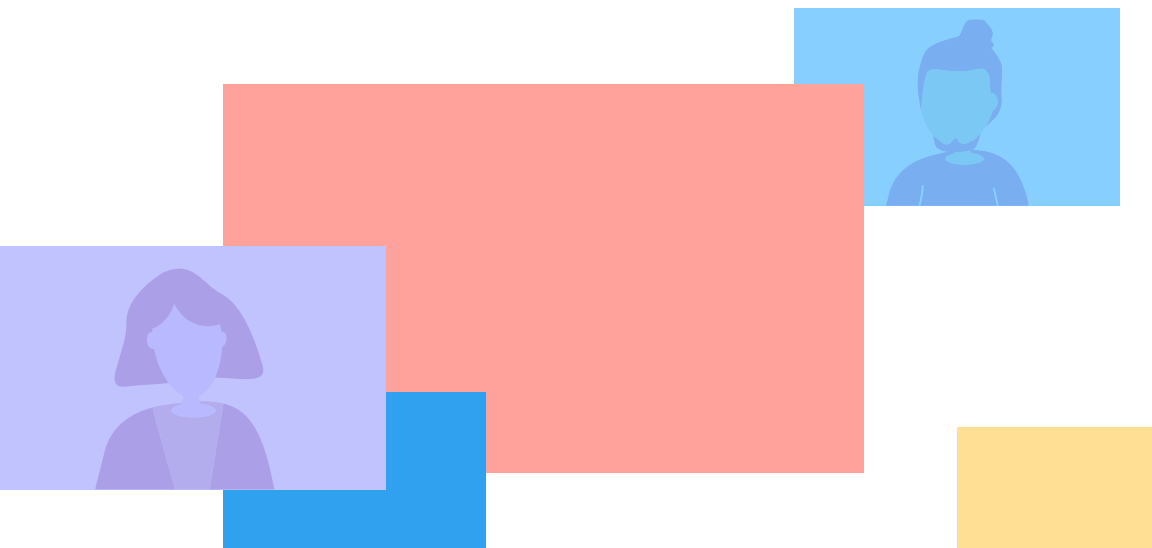
A Timeless Model

Jesus' model was simple, yet included a lot of different components. In spite of all his varied interactions and unique approaches to situations, most of what Jesus did in relationships to make disciples could be boiled down to the following core components:

- **Calling Disciples** - Jesus had disciples that He selected. Sometimes, as with the Twelve, He asked them specifically. Other times, He made assignments - as with the 72 - from among His followers. And He certainly had an open invite with crowds.
 - *The Big Takeaway:* Your church leaders need to be calling people into discipleship, not just offering it.
- **Teaching Principles** - Jesus spent a lot of His time teaching in small-group and large-crowd formats. He adjusted His content to match His audience, and those closest to Him learned the most in the context of relationship.
 - *The Big Takeaway:* Sunday messages aren't enough. You need varied, contextualized teaching.
- **Demonstrating Actions** - As we know, Jesus didn't just teach what to do; He demonstrated how to do it. He did the works the Father showed Him to do in a way that others could see and replicate.
 - *The Big Takeaway:* Your leaders must be developed not only just to talk about God but also to actually live as followers of Christ.

- **Fellowshipping Together** - Much of what Jesus taught was done either in the context of relationships or while in the midst of relating. Meals, travel, fishing, even floating on a boat, Jesus integrated life fully.
 - **The Big Takeaway:** Church can't only be a place people come for "God" stuff. Full-fledged community is a must.
- **Sending Out** - While it would be nice and neat to just theorize about what must be done for the Kingdom, Jesus demanded that His disciples actually go out and do it on their own so they could learn from experience.
 - **The Big Takeaway** - Any discipleship initiative you undertake must involve assignments with measurable goals.

These principles are non-negotiable. If Jesus did it, so should we. But the way in which Jesus conducted His ministry was contextualized to His point in history. He used and referenced the context of His day in everything He did. His teaching, His calling, His method for fellowship - all of it - was all done in a way that spoke to the lives of the people who lived 2,000 years ago. It stands to reason if He did that, then He'd do the same today. He'd apply his everlasting, unchanging principles within the framework of history in which He lived... And, that's exactly what we intend to do.



Expanding Influence & Overcoming Limitations

Now that we know what's essential. Let's talk about how we can apply these principles in the 21st century. To do so, we've created a comparison to show how tried and true fundamentals can be re-engineered for a modern era.

JESUS' PRINCIPLE	APPLIED TODAY
Calling disciples meant being in person because it was the only (primary) way they could connect.	Calling disciples can be done online, reaching a broader group of people who might participate.
Teaching principles had to be to a live audience. (Online groups, Zoom, and Youtube weren't really a thing.)	Teaching can be done in print, in podcasts, vodcasts, blogs, websites, text, online groups, and yes, still in person.
Demonstration meant being with a person who could see what you were doing and communicate about the process.	Demonstration can be documented with opportunities to comment and dialogue about the work as you go along, even remotely.
Fellowshipping together meant gathering together. There was no substitute for being in the same room or on the same road.	While in-person fellowship is preferred, it is now possible to develop certain aspects of relationships and connections online.
Sending out disciples to do the work required reporting back with progress and tracking effectiveness on a case-by-case basis.	Assignments can be given and processes followed up on with a certain level of automation and accountability for fidelity.

As you can imagine, these comparisons are just the tip of the iceberg. They reveal that there is room for creativity in carrying out our most important mandate.

In today's unique times, there is a lot that hasn't changed. If we are going to reach people the way Jesus did, we have to meet them where they are and how they understand.



A Hybrid Approach

Now let's zoom (pun intended) into today and see what this means for us.

The advent of social media has altered how people interact. A global pandemic has further alienated people from their normal way of life. Political upheaval has caused division to breed fear and anxiety. Racial tensions strain relationships with our primary societal systems and institutions. A 24-hour news cycle overloads people with often-contentious information. Always-on sources of streaming entertainment pacify our critical thinking and steal time for reflection. Societal demands and peer pressure - both real and imagined - have people running around like crazy just trying to keep up. Economic instability and disparity leave many struggling just to stay afloat. And in the midst of all this, you are asking people to simply pause everything and come to your discipleship class?

Discipleship should not be an extra activity but an integrated way of life that is sustainable - even if sacrificial - in the context where people live.

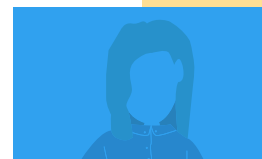
To counteract the unprecedented demands on people's time, resources, emotions, and energy, churches must take a hybrid approach that uses the tools available while staying true to basic principles.

Your people will have to understand that there is a sacrifice involved in discipleship. But also that your church is doing all it can to integrate, not just add on, discipleship in their lives. It means you'll have to have things in person *and* online. You'll need teachings that are short *and* long format. You'll need fellowship that involves gathering *and* accommodates those who can't commit to being present. It means you'll need to demonstrate and document effective Kingdom work *even if* people can't watch it happen live. It means... The weekly bible study at your church still isn't getting the job done.

Ideas for Innovation

The following exemplify some of the myriad methods you could use to adapt basic principles to our present-day:

- **Calling** - Invite people into discipleship in smaller groupings. Have leaders reach out to individuals and families in a way that focuses their circle of influence, thereby creating a closer context for accountability and relationships. This can be done on social media, by dissecting and delegating your church directory, personal phone calls, or just invitations from one friend to another. The goal is to get your church to be one that is always inviting people to participate in the teaching, demonstration, fellowship, and sending that your church is undertaking.
 - **For example:** Offer a churchwide invitation to your people, knowing that not all will respond. Then, select a group of leaders at your church and ask them to find three (or however many) people they can invite into discipleship. From there, lay out what the time commitment and expectations are through your leaders and ask for disciples to commit to going on this journey. Then, offer them the resources to get started. A personal invite multiplies accountability and commitment.
- **Teaching** - Create teachings that can be digested in long or short format so that it can be delivered and consumed with varying flexibility. That might include daily text messages, weekly posts, or in-person classes that allow people to zoom in. It could also include classes taught in online groups where resources are posted and people can interact and respond to questions or assignments. The goal is to remove any excuse or reason why people can't get involved, so as many people who will commit, can participate.
 - **For example:** Let's say you have a class you usually run for four weeks through a 2-hour class at your church. Go ahead and keep doing that. But add these components: Segment the weekly teachings into daily, shorter teachings that can be shared in an online group. Share the group handout as a PDF in that same online group. Allow video conferencing so people who can't be there in person can watch. Take what was taught in the class and post commentary in the online group so people who couldn't watch or attend can still keep up. Ask the same questions you did in class in the online group. Chop it all up so people can consume it where, when, and how they live.



- **Demonstrating** - Document how things are done at your church. How to witness, how to disciple, how to run a meeting or a group, how to serve, how to pray, and on and on. Show people easy steps they can take to grow in these areas. Then have your leaders share a story of how these principles work in their own lives. Testimony is an effective form of demonstration because it connects the dots between the how-to and the outcome. It's like seeing the fruit right before you. Stories of successful work accomplished - not just personal milestones - will show your church not only how things work but also that they work. Nowadays you can share testimony in a video, posts, and even documents that include the how-to with stories of successful applications.
 - **For example:** You teach on witnessing in your group (which people can attend in person or online). You provide the simple steps to evangelism. You tell a story of how it was done. You allow people to ask questions about your story. You ask them how your story might be similar to their story. And voilà! Your people have "seen" the thing you're about to ask them to do "in action."

- **Fellowship** - "Don't neglect meeting together, as is the habit of some," Hebrews 10:25 At the same time, don't neglect the many forms of meeting together available today. Nothing is quite like an in-person gathering. But when that can't be done, or can't include everyone, there are things you can do to keep a connection. Gathering means being at the same place, at the same time. That can be done online in groups, just as it can in person - albeit with more difficulty and less emotional benefit. Why not include people online in your in-person gatherings? The key to making this effective is to encourage, entice, and if needed, full-on extract participation from the online participants.
 - **For example:** You could have a small group dinner, communion, or game night where people who can't make it can be eating the same thing (shared menu) and you can ask the same questions. Maybe take virtual turns on a game you've been playing by having an in-person attendee move the piece. Whatever you do, find a way to include the online participants in your in-person activities.

- **Sending** - This one's easy. Well, sort of. Nowadays there are a bunch of solutions for task management and assigning of duties. Where it gets tricky is on the follow-up and follow-through. When the 72 came back from being sent, Jesus asked them how it went. They had to give a report on their progress. This doesn't have to be done in person, but it does need to be done - or owned - by a person. Your church needs a tool to assign tasks or next steps that includes a personal follow-up to monitor, track, and adjust assignments as needed.
 - **For example:** You've been teaching on evangelism. You've demonstrated how it's done. You've provided the how-to and the why-to. And now it's time for the disciple to actually go out and do it. You assign them a task. Now, instead of crossing your fingers and hoping they do it, you follow up to see if they actually did, what roadblocks they hit, and how they felt while doing it. Then, you can encourage, advise, and adjust as needed to ensure they keep on pursuing.



Realm® Helps

Realm offers tools and resources to supply your discipleship processes with a host of features to enhance your efforts.

Using the Congregant Directory in Realm gives leaders the opportunity to identify people and their activity history within your church. This is done in a way that will empower them with the knowledge they need not only to know who to reach out to but also how best to do it. By seeing family structures, giving history (if desired), participation in events, serving, and so on, your leaders will be apprised of valuable information to aid their decision making on who to call.

You can support your classes by creating events and groups to track attendance and foster online engagement. Post curriculum and step-by-step guides in an online group. Offer discussion questions. Follow up with responses. And, keep your people growing.

You can share stories that demonstrate the very things you want to see your disciples partake in. You can engage in fun dialogue and challenging conversations and develop deeper relationships all within the safe context of a designated group structure.

Using discipleship Pathways, you can assign steps for each disciple to take and have the accountability of leaders who are prompted to follow up, thereby creating a limitless combination of activities with built-in commitment.

Whether it's in-person or online, Realm was designed with discipleship in mind.





Discipleship Fails

Okay, so it sounds like a good plan, so far. But it's not entirely bulletproof. Here are a few things that have caused would-be disciple-makers to run aground.

Inviting just anyone - While every believer is called to be a disciple, not everyone in your church is ready - or willing - to commit to the process. Make sure the invitation is open to all, but vetted for the devoted.

Not counting the costs - You might want as many people as possible involved in discipleship at your church, but don't let that tempt you into lowering the bar. Discipleship is hard work that takes time.

Replacing instead of supplementing - Most of your new ideas and approaches shouldn't be designed to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Stick with basic principles and augment with modern tools.

Making online impersonal - It's easier to exhort and correct people in written form than face-to-face. Don't get in the habit of being "nicer" in person or disciples will wonder what standard is the one they should follow.

Automating authenticity - In your excitement to engage in new ways and with new audiences, don't rush to templatize and automate everything. There's nothing like a personal touch, even if digital.

Forgetting to follow up - Without following through, your efforts will amount to little more than getting good content in front of your people. Discipleship starts after the lessons have been learned when experience becomes the teacher.

Diminishing the impact - It's easy to get stuck in a rut and begin to focus your discipleship efforts on the personal growth of the disciple. When they feel it's only about their development, it diminishes the Kingdom impact.

Making it multiplicative - Because many disciple-making programs focus on the disciple instead of the making, there is no vision beyond the singular. Require all disciples to make disciples from the very start.



Contextualized Accountability

A word about accountability. It's the key component that differentiates learning from discipleship. Anyone can throw out a bunch of good ideas and truths in the hopes that some will stick. Be applied and make a difference in someone's life. And indeed, many are with little results.

Discipleship is different from learning alone because it requires an answer. It asks not only if a student learned a concept but also if they followed it. Thus...

Teaching without accountability leads to overfed and under-exercised followers of Christ.

Discipleship should not be an extra activity but an integrated way of life that is sustainable - even if sacrificial - in the context where people live.

To see success in making disciples, it really comes down to just one thing that most churches aren't good at - holding people accountable to do something with what they learned.

Accountability does not consist of a guilt trip but of an intentional effort to encourage and support the disciple while holding fast with an expectation for an outcome. Essentially, it's follow-up in a consistent manner.

It could be as simple as asking disciples to report on activities. Maybe it's a regularly scheduled meeting with a leader. And at best, it should include the exchange of ideas, frustrations, and successes with peers.

Anything you do in discipleship will fail without a documented and emphasized follow-up system.



Multiplication Matters

Without a focus on multiplication, discipleship becomes a dead end. Sure, it'll enrich the lives of the participants. And admittedly, those enriched lives will leave a mark on others and the world. However, if followers of Christ aren't fully aware that they are growing so they can be going and they are receiving so they can be giving, their own lives will become their focus and their efforts will exist primarily to benefit themselves alone.

Because an emphasis on reproduction is so important, we recommend that every discipleship program starts with the end in mind.

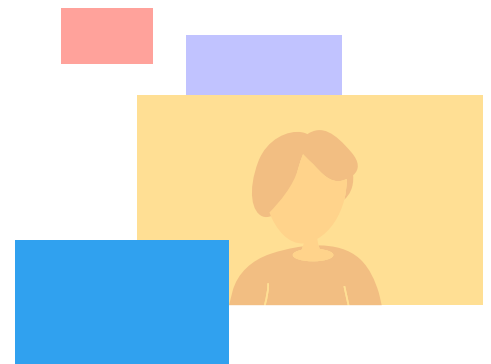
When calling or inviting people to engage in making disciples, clearly state the goal that they are not being enriched in a vacuum. Rather, they are being built up to enrich others.

What you are doing is important. You're not just helping people live better lives. You're helping people live in a way that multiplies Christ-likeness beyond themselves.

Don't diminish the value of the great work you're doing. Don't let up. And don't get so internally focused that you lose sight of the very grand thing that God is doing in and through you and your ministry.

Discipleship is a lot of hard work. It's work that never ceases. That's because it's eternal.

Proceed knowing that the investments you make in discipleship will receive an eternal reward!



Choosing the Right Ministry Partner

The know-how you need from experts you trust.

ACS Technologies is the original pioneer of Church Management Software (ChMS). We are firmly dedicated to serving local churches all over North America by providing the best-in-class ministry software and service solutions that help you fulfill Christ's mission for your Church.

Tools and support to strengthen churches.

We build great software, but we don't stop there. We have a "service-first" approach that truly sets us apart. With hundreds of dedicated support and consulting personnel, your staff can reach our team 24/7. We're in your corner to help you with the ministry challenges you face every day.

Ideas and solutions powered by integrity.

Integrity is real for us, and it means consistently being faithful stewards by doing the right thing for church success. We have earned the trust of pastors, church staff, congregants, our employees, and colleagues for over 40 years.

A plan to meet your needs and move your ministry.


We're not just interested in satisfied customers. We see ourselves as your real ministry partner and will work with you to make disciples that will last for an eternity. We're excited to talk about your goals, create a plan together, and set you up with the software, service, and resources you need.

We believe in YOU!

ACS Technologies believes in the local church. Over 75% of our team has experience serving in their local churches. We know firsthand that serving the Church means serving people, and we take seriously our commitment to helping ministries like yours achieve their God-given mandate - to make disciples in their communities, states, and across the world.

Let's Talk

We know the challenges of switching or implementing new technology and how that can be intimidating. But we also know the unbelievable changes that have happened within churches that have partnered with us for their ministry needs. Let's connect and see how we can assist you in the greatest thing you do - grow God's Kingdom.

 1-844-467-3256

 solutions@acst.com

 180 Dunbarton Dr, Florence, SC 29501