



DISCIPLEMAKING ESSENTIALS:

FIVE
CRITICAL
PRACTICES

*Transform Your
New Visitor Experience
into a Life-Changing
Discipleship Journey*





Molly walked into your church last Sunday, unsure of what to expect. She filled out a visitor card, shook a few hands, and left with questions.

What happens next determines everything.

You do a lot of important tasks as a church:

- You teach God's Word.
- You welcome strangers and make them feel like family.
- You feed the hungry and care for the vulnerable in your community.
- You create spaces where people can worship, heal, and grow in faith.

But Jesus was clear about what job #1 is:

"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, CSB)

In the Great Commission, Jesus tells us it's not enough to get people into our churches. It's not even enough to help them learn to trust in Jesus.

Jesus calls us to make disciples.

Disciplemaking is not only our top priority—it may also be the most challenging task we face as churches. Helping Molly start a relationship with Jesus and grow into a faithful disciple takes a concerted effort.

Everything in our culture works against it.

Disciplemaking is slow, relational, and deeply personal, but our world is fast, transactional, and increasingly disconnected. Our churches are stretched thin. Volunteers are hard to find. Staff are overwhelmed. Visitors come and go. And our systems—often built for attendance, not transformation—can't always carry the weight of disciple-making.

But it doesn't have to stay that way.

What if Molly's story didn't end with a handshake and questions?
What if it became the first step in a lifelong journey of faith—and she one day disciplined someone else?

This guide isn't about more work. It's about better alignment, so that everything your church already does leads people toward becoming disciples who make disciples.

Imagine a church where no visitor gets lost, every member has a next step, and disciplemaking is everyone's normal. That vision starts here.

You'll explore five key areas where your church can grow in its disciplemaking efforts...

- **Creating a welcoming environment.**
- **Establishing clear next steps.**
- **Integrating visitors into the community quickly.**
- **Equipping disciples to disciple others.**
- **Measuring and adjusting your discipleship pathways.**



Along the way, you'll also see how [Realm](#) and [Growth Method](#) can help you implement these steps in a personal, scalable, and effective way.



CREATE A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

You've heard the old adage:

"You never get a second chance to make a first impression."

It's a tired statement, but it's so true in the church.

Studies have shown that most of your guests decide on whether to return to your church within the first ten minutes after they step inside. You have precious little time to make a good first impression.

Imagine a young couple walking into your church lobby for the first time—baby carrier in one hand, diaper bag in the other, nervous smiles on their faces. What do they see? Who greets them? How easy is it to know where to go?

First impressions may feel surface-level, but they lay the groundwork for trust, and trust opens the door to transformation. A visitor who feels seen is more likely to return, and a returning guest is one step closer to becoming a disciple.

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That's why discipling doesn't start in a Bible study—it begins in the lobby.

So, how can your church create an environment that welcomes guests, builds trust, and invites them to take their next step? Let's explore a few practical ways to make a welcoming environment that leads to deeper engagement.

Start before they enter your campus.

Your church's disciple-making starts when your visitors first consider coming, whether they've been invited by someone or are simply checking out churches. Most people today start with a visit to your [website](#), where you'll need to provide clear information about what to expect at your church, including where to park, where to drop off children, and where to worship.

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Ensure you have clear signs.

Assume that when someone walks on your church campus, they are clueless about where to go. Your signs must lead the way—from guidance on where to park to where to use the restroom. It's not a bad idea to have someone unfamiliar with your church test out your signage ahead of time. Ask them to visit your campus, find different locations where first-time guests frequent, and see if they note any hiccups.

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Smile—a lot!

Most people see way too few smiles throughout their days. Church should be the exception. A warm smile communicates belonging, grace, and welcome before a word is even spoken. Smiles from parking lot volunteers, greeters, children's check-in helpers, and seat ushers go a long way in creating a joyful, safe, and approachable atmosphere.

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Train greeters to serve as guides.

Your greeters are often the first people your visitors meet on your campus. You need greeters who are well-acquainted with your campus and can help point the way (even take guests) to key locations like restrooms, the sanctuary, and children's rooms.

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Help guests feel at home in your space.

The physical space of your church should invite people in, not intimidate them. Think about lighting, cleanliness, the smell of coffee or baked goods, comfortable seating areas, and clear pathways. When your environment feels like home, people relax—and when people relax, they're more open to building relationships and hearing the truth.

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Make visitor follow-up easy.

If a guest fills out a connection card or gives you their contact info, that's a massive act of trust. Don't let it fall through the cracks. Make sure your team has a clear, consistent plan to follow up—ideally within 24 to 48 hours. Whether it's a quick text, an email, or a handwritten note, timely [follow-up](#) helps guests feel remembered and valued—and opens the door for deeper engagement.

Every handshake, every smile, and every clear sign is an opportunity to reflect the love of Christ. When we welcome guests with genuine warmth and care, we offer them a glimpse of the grace that God extends to each of us. Creating a welcoming environment isn't just good hospitality—it's the first step in inviting others into the life-changing journey of discipleship.

ESTABLISH CLEAR NEXT STEPS

You made a great first impression. A visitor felt welcomed. They're interested in coming back.

Now what?

Too often, we leave guests wondering what their next step should be. A lack of clarity leads to hesitation, and hesitation usually leads to disengagement.

Helping people move from visitor to connected member doesn't happen by accident. It occurs when the following steps are easy to see and easy to take.

Clear next steps create confident movement toward discipleship.

WHY CLEAR NEXT STEPS MATTER

Guests need to know where they fit and what to do next. Without clear direction, even the most interested visitors may drift away. Discipleship is a journey, and every journey needs signposts.

Imagine taking a long road trip without a map or any road signs. You might know the general direction you want to head, but without clear markers, it would be easy to get lost, take wrong turns, or even give up altogether. That's what your next steps are—clear, visible signs that help guests move forward confidently and stay on the path toward deeper faith and community.

WHAT CLEAR NEXT STEPS LOOK LIKE

Choosing your church's next steps is one of your most important strategic decisions.

Some are obvious—others may be unique to your church's context.

Most of the time, they will include:

- Attending a newcomer lunch or reception.
- Joining a small group, Bible study, or short-term class.
- Meeting briefly with a pastor or ministry leader.
- Attending a membership or "discover your church" class.
- Volunteering to serve in some capacity.

You'll notice these next steps have something in common: they invite people into a relationship. None of them are about simply transferring information or filling out paperwork. Each one moves a guest closer to being known, connected, and disciplined.

HOW TO COMMUNICATE NEXT STEPS CLEARLY

Clear next steps won't help if no one hears about them.

Communicate your next steps often and through multiple channels.

- *Announce them during the service.*

Of course, this could mean doing so as part of a regular series of announcements.

Consider also integrating these next steps into sermons. For example, when preaching on community or spiritual growth, you could invite people to take their next step by joining a small group or attending a newcomer's event. Tying next steps to the message reinforces that discipleship isn't a program—it's a way of life.

- *Post information about them at welcome centers, in lobbies, and in bulletins.*

Make these notes easy to spot. Use clear signage and create simple brochures. You could even create a "next step" wall where guests can see all their options at a glance. A visible next step feels like an open invitation instead of a hidden expectation.

- *List them prominently on your website.*

In fact, you could organize your entire website around these next steps. Most guests will check out your site before visiting, and if they can't quickly find how to get connected, they may never come at all. Structure your homepage around the journey you want people to take—like "I'm New," "Join a Group," or "Serve." A clear [website](#) helps visitors move from interest to involvement even before they walk through your doors.

- *Promote them through social media.*

Use posts, stories, and reels to highlight simple next steps visitors can take. A quick video tour of your lobby, a photo of a small group gathering, or an invitation to a newcomer event can make next steps feel approachable and exciting. Consistent social media reminders keep opportunities visible long after Sunday morning ends.

- *Train greeters, ushers, and volunteers to talk naturally about them.*

Your team should be able to point guests to their next step as easily as offering a handshake. Encourage volunteers to listen for cues—like someone mentioning they're new or looking for ways to get involved—and respond with a friendly, personal invitation. When next steps flow through conversations, not just announcements, guests feel personally invited into the life of the church.

When next steps are easy to find and naturally shared, guests are far more likely to move forward. Clear communication turns good intentions into real connections.



HOW REALM AND GROWTH METHOD HELP

This is where technology becomes a ministry partner.

Realm and Growth Method make it easy to stay connected with guests without losing the personal touch vital to discipling.

With Realm, you can set up workflows that guide people to their next appropriate step, whether that's joining a group, signing up for a newcomer event, or connecting with a ministry leader.

Growth Method takes follow-up a step further, enabling ministry leaders to send automated text messages hours after the first visit. This ensures every guest hears from you while still emotionally connected to their visitor experience.

Both solutions allow you to track visitor engagement over time, giving you clear insights into who's getting connected and who might need a little extra care.

With the right tools, your church can remain deeply personal and relational, even as you grow. Clear steps plus intentional tools create a pathway for lasting connection and lifelong discipleship.



**Growth
Method**



INTEGRATE VISITORS INTO COMMUNITY QUICKLY

A warm welcome is important, and clear next steps are essential, but real growth happens when people move from sitting in rows to living in circles.

Guests might come back because they enjoyed a worship service. They stay because they find meaningful relationships.

Helping visitors connect to the life of your church quickly is one of the most important steps in turning first-time guests into lifelong disciples. The longer someone remains on the fringe, the harder it becomes for them to engage. Isolation almost always leads to disengagement.

Community isn't just a bonus to discipleship—it's the environment where discipleship thrives.

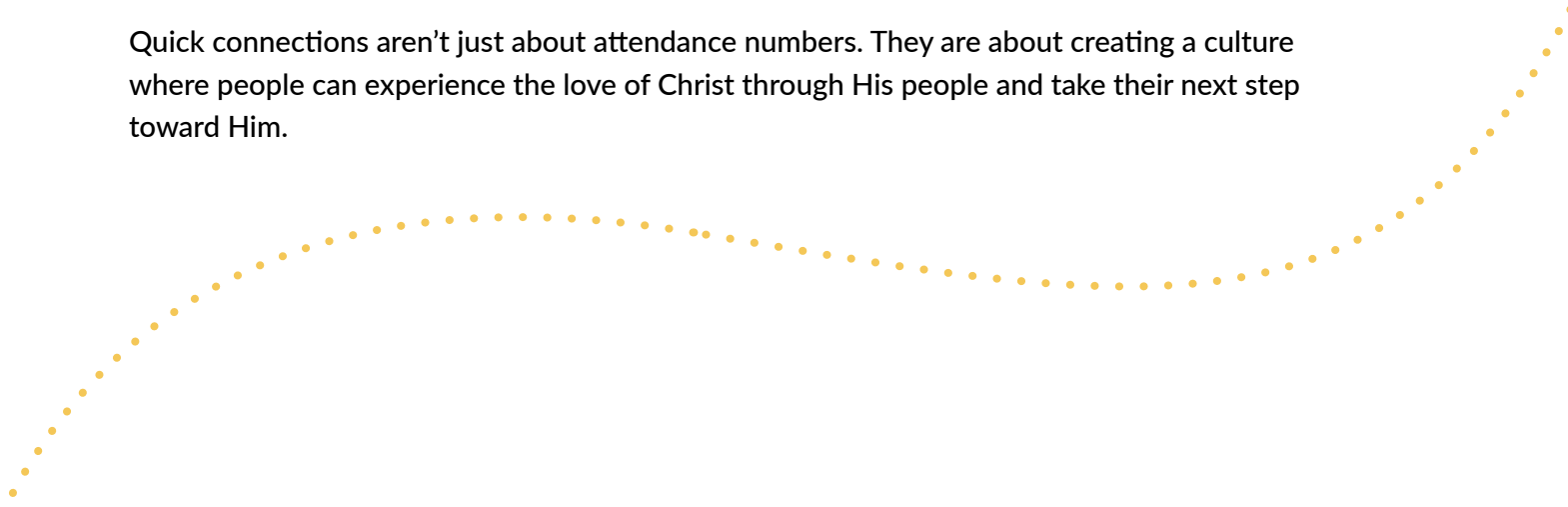
WHY FAST CONNECTION MATTERS

First impressions open the door, but relationships invite people to stay.

When guests attend a church for the first time, they're not just looking for a good service. They're asking a deeper question: ***"Is there a place for me here?"*** If they don't begin to find meaningful connections within the first few months, they're far more likely to drift away quietly.

People are looking for belonging before they're looking for belief. Before someone is ready to join a Bible study or volunteer team, they want to know they're welcome and wanted. Fast connection helps close the back door, keeping guests from feeling like perpetual outsiders. It creates a natural, relational bridge to deeper spiritual growth and long-term discipleship.

Quick connections aren't just about attendance numbers. They are about creating a culture where people can experience the love of Christ through His people and take their next step toward Him.



CREATE EASY ENTRY POINTS

Connection shouldn't feel complicated. If visitors have to jump through too many hoops to get involved, most of them won't. That's why creating easy, low-pressure entry points is essential.

Short-term groups, welcome lunches, or casual service opportunities give guests a chance to dip their toes into church life without feeling overwhelmed. A newcomer might not be ready to join a year-long Bible study or sign a membership covenant, but they'll likely say yes to a four-week class, a casual meal with leaders, or a one-day volunteer project.

The goal is to offer clear, simple steps that move people from attending to belonging. Every easy entry point should answer this question: ***"How can we make it easier for a guest to find a friend and feel at home here?"***

When visitors experience authentic relationships early on, they begin to see the church not just as a place they attend, but as a family they belong to.

MAKE GROUP LIFE VISIBLE AND APPROACHABLE

Small groups, Bible studies, and serving teams are often where the deepest connections happen, but guests can't join what they can't see.

Make your community life highly visible. Regularly highlight groups from the platform, in your bulletins, and online. Feature real stories and testimonials from people whose lives have been changed by being part of a group. A brief video clip, a simple quote, or a casual conversation in a service can make a huge difference.

It's also important to remove the mystery. For a new person, ***"join a small group"*** can sound intimidating. Be clear about what groups are, when they meet, how long they last, and what someone can expect. Make the first step into group life feel welcoming, not overwhelming.

When group life is easy to see and easy to understand, guests are more likely to take a step toward lasting relationships—and lasting discipleship.

HOW REALM AND GROWTH METHOD HELP

Integrating guests into your church community is easier when you have the right tool behind the scenes.

Realm makes it simple for guests to sign up for small groups or ministry teams. With just a few clicks, visitors can find groups that fit their interests, schedules, or life stages, removing barriers that might otherwise cause hesitation.

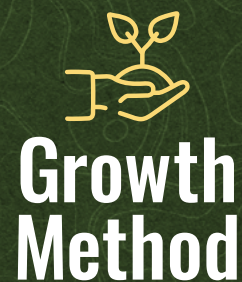
Growth Method allows your team to map a guest's journey from curiosity to commitment. During their visit, your visitors can conveniently share their contact information via online forms. Once the form is complete, Growth Method uses conditional logic to determine what ministries are relevant to their profile and sends an automated, personalized message to welcome and encourage their participation.

With tools like Realm and Growth Method, you're not just organizing information—you're building pathways into real relationships, where true discipling begins.

Quick connections aren't just about filling spots in groups or growing attendance—they're about helping people find a place where they can belong and grow.

When guests move from simply attending services to living in an authentic community, they step into an environment where true discipleship thrives.

And when they find real relationships, they find a family that will walk with them as they follow Christ.





EQUIP DISCIPLES TO DISCIPLE OTHERS

The goal of discipleship isn't just to help people grow in their own faith—it's to equip them to help others grow too.

Jesus didn't just call His followers to believe in Him.

He called them to make disciples.

When guests become connected members and members become growing believers, the next step is to help them see themselves as disciple-makers. Healthy churches don't just gather—they multiply. They produce believers who are confident, equipped, and ready to invest in the faith journeys of others.

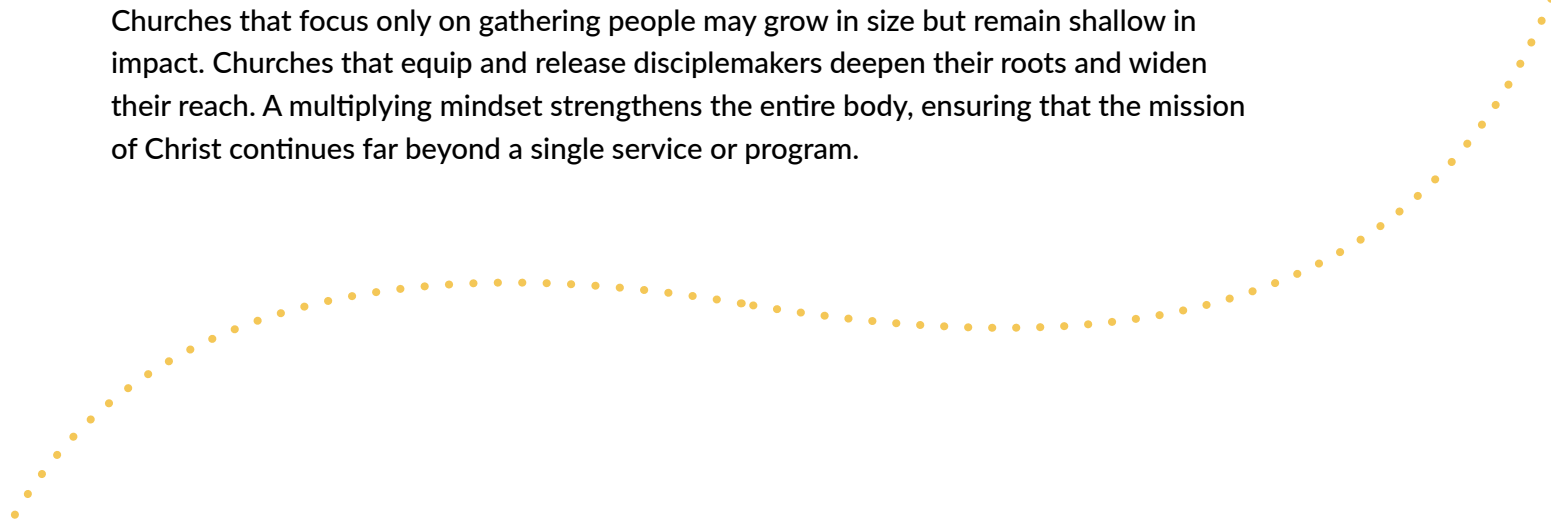
Discipleship isn't complete until it multiplies.

WHY MULTIPLYING MATTERS

When Jesus gave the Great Commission, He didn't say, "***Go and gather believers.***" He said, "***Go and make disciples.***" Disciplemaking is more than growing in our own faith—it's about investing in the faith of others.

Healthy disciples naturally multiply. They share what they've learned, encourage others in their walk with Christ, and help new believers take their first steps of faith. Multiplication isn't a bonus feature of maturity—it's a core marker.

Churches that focus only on gathering people may grow in size but remain shallow in impact. Churches that equip and release disciplemakers deepen their roots and widen their reach. A multiplying mindset strengthens the entire body, ensuring that the mission of Christ continues far beyond a single service or program.





SHIFT THE MINDSET FROM ATTENDEE TO DISCIPLEMAKER

Many people in our churches today see themselves primarily as participants.

They attend services, join groups, and maybe even serve, but they don't always see themselves as part of the discipling mission.

That mindset has to shift.

Discipling isn't reserved for pastors, staff, or highly trained leaders—it's the calling of every believer.

Every follower of Jesus has something to offer someone else—whether it's a word of encouragement, a testimony of God's faithfulness, or simply walking alongside someone who is newer in their faith.

Helping your people see themselves as disciplers begins with how you talk about growth.

Celebrate stories not just of personal transformation but of multiplication. Highlight how everyday people—not just ministry leaders—are investing in the lives of others.

When believers realize they don't have to be perfect to disciple someone else, just faithful, they move from building a congregation to fueling a movement.



PROVIDE SIMPLE TOOLS AND TRAINING

If you want people to live as disciplemakers, you have to show them how.

Disciplemaking can feel intimidating if people think it requires seminary training or years of leadership experience. But most of what new disciplemakers need isn't complex—it's simple tools and encouragement.

Offer basic resources that equip people to take their next step. This could include:

- A simple guide on how to share your testimony and invite people into a life of faith.
- A short training on how to lead a Bible study or mentor someone one-on-one.
- A basic set of recommendations for praying with others or guiding a spiritual conversation.

Keep the focus relational and reproducible. The goal isn't to create professional teachers—it's to empower everyday believers to invest intentionally in others.

Workshops, one-on-one coaching, or even short videos can give your people the confidence they need to take the first step toward discipling someone else.

Disciplemaking grows best when it's clear, simple, and personal.

HOW REALM AND GROWTH METHOD HELP

Equipping disciplemakers takes intentionality, and the right tools can make supporting and tracking their growth easier.

Realm allows your church to track involvement in small groups, mentorships, serving teams, and leadership development opportunities. You can see when someone moves from attending to leading, and use that information to provide encouragement, additional training, or next-step invitations.

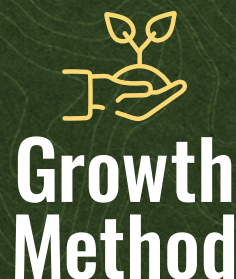
Growth Method helps your church create and track custom engagement pathways. You can define steps like connecting to a group, participating in leadership development, or serving—and then monitor how people move through those stages toward deeper discipleship.

With Realm and Growth Method, you're not just tracking attendance—you're building intentional pathways that help people grow and thrive as disciples. The right tools make it easier to guide every individual toward their next step in following Jesus.

Disciplemaking isn't a ministry for a few highly trained leaders—it's the mission of the whole church.

When you equip everyday believers to see themselves as disciplemakers, you ignite a multiplying movement of faith. Each person becomes not just a follower of Jesus, but someone who helps others follow Him too.

And when a church is full of disciplemakers, it doesn't just grow in size—it grows in depth, in reach, and in impact for the Kingdom.



MEASURE AND ADJUST YOUR DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAYS

Disciplemaking is a journey, and every journey needs regular checkpoints.

If you don't measure how people are growing and engaging, it's easy to assume everything is working fine...until you realize guests are slipping away, members are stalling, or leaders are burning out.

Healthy discipleship pathways aren't static. They grow, adapt, and adjust based on real people and real experiences.

What you measure shapes what you multiply.

WHY MEASURING MATTERS

What you measure shows what you value.

If you measure only attendance, you'll focus only on filling seats. If you measure giving, you'll focus only on budgets. But if you measure engagement, growth, and multiplication, you'll focus on building disciples.

Without measurement, it's hard to know if your ministry efforts are truly moving people toward deeper faith. You might assume guests are connecting or that groups are thriving—until you realize people are slipping away quietly or staying stuck without growing.

Good measurement isn't about collecting stats to fill a report. It's about understanding how people are moving toward Christ, and where they might be getting stuck. It's about being faithful stewards of the mission Jesus gave us.

When you measure with the right heart, you're better equipped to shepherd people well.

WHAT TO MEASURE

Healthy discipleship isn't just about how many people show up—it's about how people are growing and moving forward.

Here are a few key areas to watch:

- **Engagement:** Are people consistently participating in worship, groups, and service opportunities? Sporadic attendance can signal disconnection.
- **Connection:** Are visitors finding real relationships? Are they joining small groups, serving on ministry teams, or getting involved beyond Sunday morning?
- **Growth:** Are people taking clear spiritual steps, like baptism, serving in leadership roles, or mentoring others? Growth shows that faith isn't staying private—it's becoming active.
- **Multiplication:** Are new leaders, new groups, and new ministries emerging?
A multiplying church shows that discipleship is producing more disciplemakers, not just more attendees.

Measuring these areas gives you a fuller picture of how your church is doing— attracting people and forming disciples.

HOW TO ADJUST BASED ON WHAT YOU SEE

Measuring without adjusting is like reading a map but never changing your direction. Real growth comes when you're willing to respond to what you learn.

Here's how to adjust as you measure:

- **Look for barriers:** Where are people getting stuck? If guests regularly attend but never join a group, you may need easier entry points or more personal invitations.
- **Celebrate movement:** Progress matters more than perfection. Celebrate baptisms, new group leaders, and first-time volunteers. Movement—even small steps—is a sign of health.
- **Simplify if needed:** If your next steps feel complicated or overwhelming, simplify them. Make sure every guest knows exactly what their next step is and how to take it.
- **Stay relational:** Numbers inform ministry decisions, but people are the mission. Use data to guide conversations, relationships, and personal follow-up, not to reduce people to checkmarks.

Healthy churches will adjust their methods in order to stay faithful to their mission.

HOW REALM AND GROWTH METHOD HELP

Measuring and adjusting discipleship pathways is much easier when you have the right tools in place.

Realm allows you to track key engagement points, such as worship attendance, group involvement, serving opportunities, and leadership development. You can quickly see how connected someone is and where they might be ready for the next step.

Growth Method helps direct and extend the pastoral span of care to gain greater insight into the health of your congregation and visualize where individuals are on their discipleship path. You can create customized engagement tracks, assign milestones, and monitor progress toward increasing ministry engagement, helping ensure that no one stays stuck or is overlooked.

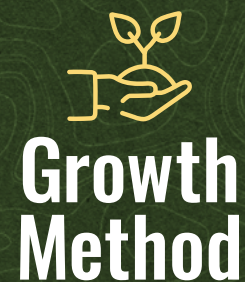
Both tools provide dashboards and reports that show trends over time. With this information, your church can make informed decisions, adjust strategies as needed, and celebrate real spiritual growth, not just numbers on a page.

When you track the right things, you can lead the right way.

Healthy churches are learning churches.

When you measure with the right heart, you're better equipped to love, guide, and grow people into the image of Christ. Measuring and adjusting discipleship pathways isn't about chasing numbers—it's about faithfully stewarding the people God has entrusted to you.

A church that humbly evaluates and adjusts will keep moving forward, helping more people take their next step toward Jesus.





CONCLUSION

Disciplemaking doesn't happen by accident.

It happens when churches are intentional about welcoming guests, providing clear next steps, connecting people quickly, equipping disciplers, and measuring growth with wisdom and love.

You don't have to overhaul everything overnight. Start by strengthening one pathway, one relationship, one next step at a time.

As you create a culture of discipleship in your church, you're doing more than building programs—you're building people who follow Jesus and invite others to do the same.

That's the heart of disciplemaking. ❤️

And it's how the church grows—not just bigger, but stronger and deeper for the Kingdom.