



Our Discipleship Path

One of our greatest hopes here at Marshall First United Methodist Church is to encourage and provide support for every individual to establish and maintain a deep connection with Jesus. We believe that following Jesus is the key to life. The Discipleship Path is not a map to an ending or finish line, but the pathway for a lifelong journey of being transformed into a mature disciple of Jesus Christ who embodies God's great love and presence in all aspects of life.

Our understanding of discipleship is rooted in Scripture where Jesus is seen, heard, and experienced by people from all walks of life, including those with a faith foundation and those who have yet to know God in any way, shape, or fashion. As a Church, we follow Jesus' command (which we often call The Great Commission) that is found in Matthew's Gospel:

*Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted! Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. **Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.** And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.* (Matthew 28:16-20)

Our understanding of the Christian faith, therefore, is a "going" faith. Our Mission Statement at Marshall FUMC, "To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world", is based on The Great Commission. The spirit of the Methodist movement is characterized by going to the people with a passion for making disciples. Unfortunately, we often forget that our passion and drive as Methodists for disciple-making is found in the actual effort, continuing and ongoing, to respond to Jesus' command to "go and make disciples." We are reminded of the continuing journey and process to which Jesus spoke. As we "go" there is greater passion for making disciples who are transforming the world.

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few." (Matthew 9: 35-37)

Marshall FUMC's *Discipleship Path* is designed to help each of us understand discipleship and the characteristics of a disciple, acknowledging that our spiritual growth as disciples is much like the life cycle of an oak tree. (See the *Discipleship Path* page.) There is a time when we are like an acorn simply sitting on the ground. We then become a seedling. Once new life bursts forth we become a sapling, then a growing tree and then a mature, mighty oak. In a similar way, we journey through the five spiritual stages. As we grow, as we move toward maturity, we acknowledge that the pace of change/growth is not the same for all of us.

Comparing our spiritual growth to the growth of an oak tree helps us see or determine where we are in our spiritual journey as disciples of Jesus and to see what stages of discipleship still lie ahead. For our *Discipleship Path*, we have named five stages of spiritual life/growth. These five stages are **Indifferent, Curious, New Believer, Growing Believer, and Mature Believer**. Every person is at a different point along the journey. Not everyone moves through the stages of development at the same age or at the same pace. Nevertheless, we use these stages and the image of a path to remind ourselves that discipleship is a lifelong journey.

A discipleship path is intended to provide us with guidance, confidence, encouragement, and assurance along the way.

Therefore, we offer this intentional system of discipleship in hopes that you are able to sense who Jesus is calling you to be as a follower; to determine your current stage of Christian maturity (growth); and to better understand how your future journey of discipleship can be lived out in the context of relationships with Jesus, within the local church and with your neighbors; and ways that the local church offers its ministries of support and nurture to you.



Being Jesus Christ's disciple is not about checking boxes on our spiritual to-do lists. It is about a living loving relationship with the Lord of Life. This comes through acknowledging Jesus as the leader of your life and the forgiver of your sins. In John 3:3 Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." This new life is received by faith in Jesus. Jesus goes on to say in John 3:16, For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." Believing in Jesus is a matter of faith in God's love and receiving new life given through Jesus. If you desire to be Jesus' disciple, turn your heart and life to him today. Talk to the pastor or other Christ follower and ask them to pray with you and support you on your discipleship path.

To find out more about growing as a discipleship of Jesus Christ, please contact Pastor Bob Sabo at bob.sabo@marshallfumc.org

*May the Lord bless you as you explore
the discipleship path!*



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Approved by Church Council on May 24, 2022.

Our Mission:

*“Make disciples of Jesus Christ
for the transformation of the world.”*

We believe that our Christ-given mission should empower, guide, and shape our personal discipleship and the life and ministry of the church. There are several reasons for this including: Jesus commanded us to, we bring honor to God, people need the Lord, it offers us the opportunity to grow as Christ’s disciples, and it can help in transforming the world into God’s Kingdom. Perhaps you can add other reasons.

Description of a Disciple of Jesus Christ:

*“A disciple of Jesus Christ is growing in their
obedience to God’s will, increasing in their
love for God, and witnessing God’s love to others.”*

If our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ, then it is important to have a common understanding of what a disciple is. After prayerful reflection, Bible study and open conversation, this is the description that we have named.

Five Spiritual Stages

We understand the spiritual life to be a lifelong journey. Our desire is to grow from one stage to the next until we reach maturity in Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13). We realize that growth happens at different paces for each person. There may also be times when we are plateaued or even take a step back. We also know that in each of these times God's grace is at work in our lives calling, leading, and empowering us to grow toward his Son, Jesus Christ.



Indifferent (Acorn):

Those who are unaware, resistant, or unbelieving toward Jesus and his church.



Curious (Seedling):

Those who have some interest in knowing about Jesus or getting to know Jesus.



New Believer (Sapling):

Those who have recently received Jesus Christ as their Savior and/or are early in their learning about the Bible, the church, and the Christian life.



Growing Believer (Developing Tree):

Those who are moving toward spiritual maturity in their relationship and service to Jesus. They have a growing understanding of the Bible and are learning to apply God's word to their life. They are growing in the five spiritual practices.



Devout (Mighty Oak):

Those who are frequently engaged in the five practices of spiritual formation with intentionality as they continue to grow in their relationship and service to Jesus, his church, and in their witness to the world.

Five Spiritual Formation Practices

Our lives are busy and filled with many activities. Yet often we neglect to take the time to nurture our relationship with God and grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. However, God has been faithful in providing us with practices that if done with intentionality, and with open heart and mind, we can grow as Jesus' disciples. We understand there to be five primary spiritual formation practices: **Worship, Service, Witness, Fellowship, and Faith development.**

Worship:

Individual and corporate acknowledgment and expressions of God's worthiness and glory.

Service:

Expressing God's love by meeting the needs of others through tangible acts.

Witness:

Sharing the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ and our personal experience of being Jesus' disciple in word and deed.

Fellowship:

Sharing in the deep connection that believers have in Jesus Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Faith Development:

Participating in practices that nurture and encourage spiritual growth and maturity both individually and in community.

We have included a Discipleship Path grid in this packet (page 9). The grid offers a brief description of four spiritual stages and suggested steps for each spiritual practice. Each step is intended to nurture and support your spiritual growth as you make your discipleship journey. Reflect on where you are currently on the grid. Then begin to engage the practices that are provided. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list but a suggestion of the most helpful steps. As you journey toward becoming a mighty oak (mature believer), may Christ empower you by the Holy Spirit.

As we both individually and as a church faithfully live out our mission, we believe our church will become more joyful, caring, compassionate, welcoming, and inclusive. We believe that as we intentionally focus *as individuals* on making disciples, we will love Jesus more, our families will be made stronger, and there will be less dependency on harmful practices.

This is our hope and dream for you and the Marshall FUMC!

Suggested Resources for Personal Growth in Discipleship

We are offering the following resources to assist you in your personal growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Choose the ones that work best for you.

Bible Translations

New International Version (Published in 1978 to meet the needs of a modern translation using earliest, highest quality manuscripts available at that time), *New Living Translation* (Published 1996 as a modern translation relying on critical editions of the original Hebrew and Greek texts), *Common English Bible* (Published 2011 is intended to be at a comfortable reading level for the majority of English readers), *New King James Version* (Published in 1982 and is faithful to the original, yet updated to enhance its clarity and readability), *New English Translation* (Published 2005 is a completely new translation of the Bible)(Good for Bible study: Free Online Bible translations at biblegateway.com.)

Study Bibles

Each of these study bibles is helpful and comes in a variety of translations: Life Application Bible, Thompson Chain-Reference Bible; NIV Study Bible; ESV Study Bible

Personal Devotionals

The Upper Room, Our Daily Bread, Guideposts; **Online Apps:** First 15, Daily Bible, Our Daily Bread, You Version

Books and Ministry Resources

Worship: *The Purpose of Man: Designed to Worship* by A.W. Tozer

Witness and Service: *Just Walk Across the Room* by Bill Hybels



Fellowship: *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Faith Development: *Rightnow Media* – A streaming library of over 20,000 Christian videos. Videos cover many topics and ages. You can access *Rightnow Media* resources by texting **RightNow MARSHFIRST** to 41-411.

Mission of the Church: *Not a Fan* by Kyle Idleman (Zondervan Publishing)

Weekend Retreats: *Walk to Emmaus* (emmaus.upperroom.org), *The Great Banquet* (elohimgreatbanquet.org)

Discipleship Occurs at All Ages!

We understand that discipleship for children and youth primarily happens within the life of the family. We also believe the church plays an important role in supporting our families in this effort. If you are a parent or are a young person, these opportunities are offered and intended to help develop and nurture a young person toward a growing faith and life as a disciple. Therefore, we offer the following as opportunities for discipleship to occur:

Children (Through 5th Grade)

- Sunday School
- Worship - Includes opportunities to see worship and faith modeled by people of all ages, Children's Moment, Children's church; serve as Acolytes
- Kids for Christ (KFC) - After school ministry of fun, learning, arts/crafts, refreshments from September to April
- Vacation Bible School
- Summer Camps - Both local and conference



Youth (6th-12th Grades)

- Sunday School
- UMYF (United Methodist Youth Fellowship) - Typically Sunday evening activities of learning and fun that shape the individual in a group setting
- Confirmation - Junior High youth are invited to participate in a process that helps them understand the Christian faith and offers them the opportunity to profess their own faith in Jesus as Lord of their life
- Service/Mission projects - especially a summer mission trip
- Summer Camp - Local and Conference
- Chrysalis - Weekend event of spiritual growth for older teens

The opportunities for children and youth vary from time-to-time. These are some of the most common, as well as the most important to facilitate young discipleship.

To find out more information about our children and youth ministries, please contact Children's and Youth Ministries Director, James Southworth, at James@marshallfumc.org.