

# The Discipleship Pathway of Cornerstone

## “...Make Disciples”

Whenever I arrive at the conclusion of Matthew and read of Jesus delivering the Great Commission to his followers, my imagination tends to run wild. In my mind, I see dazed and confused men and women who recently saw the horrific death of their hoped-for Messiah, yet now they expectantly wonder at the fact that he is alive from the dead. I see their faces, a mixture of amazement and bewilderment, as they see him in the flesh. The fact that “some worshiped him, but some doubted” (Matt 28:17) makes complete sense to me. The last few weeks were a rollercoaster of emotions for this group. And then, at least in my head, Jesus raised his voice and said to the group:

<sup>18</sup> ....All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> 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, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (vv 18-20).

There are so many aspects of this loaded declaration that they wouldn't have fully understood in that moment, but Jesus had been preparing them for his charge since the day he met them.

The two words I would use to describe how he prepared them are: *relational* and *intentional*. He spent time with those he encountered, at first accepting them where they were, but he saw so much more than their status quo. With each facet of the process in preparing them, he was intentionally helping them to take the next step toward the great mission he would give them. He brought them to purposeful forks in the road, forcing them to make decisions about whether they would trust and follow his leadership and lordship in their lives. Some rejected him, but these disciples, who were still with him that day he gave the Great Commission, kept learning to bring more and more of their lives into alignment with the kingdom he modeled for them.

As we learn from the book of Acts, only a few weeks after Jesus gave them his commission, Jerusalem was turned upside down by this ragtag group. When the Holy Spirit came upon them, the Great Commission came to life! And now we, too, are a part of this amazing mission. We, too, have been invited and have accepted his call.

Too often, however, after my imaginative journey, sparked by reading the early days of the church, it is discouraging for me to return to reality. In Scripture, we learn of his disciple-making call spreading out of Jerusalem and throughout the then-known world. Yet we see so little of what we read coming to life where we live. Deep within, we want to see God do a work through us and the church of which we are a part, yet it seems like the gospel isn't moving forward as it was with his early followers. But why?

On the one hand, I'm confident that the people of that time often felt like the mission had stalled, just like we do. I write that because we only read the highlights of the mission as it

advanced in the Gospels and Acts. We must keep in mind that the book of Acts took place over almost 30 years, and we only read of a few individuals. On the other hand, I've come to believe that this "stall" has happened because we've not engaged in the mission Jesus left us like he did, *relationally* and *intentionally*. Like those early followers of Jesus, we, too, have the Holy Spirit, so the issue isn't with the power of God to accomplish his work. Instead, I believe that the path and ways that Jesus used to train and equip his people have either been used in part, meaning we've only used pieces of it at a time, or, even worse, we've neglected it altogether.

A few years ago, this "stall," this lack of *being disciples who make disciples*, is what caught the elder's attention and sent us on a journey to reacquaint ourselves with the ways Jesus modeled for us in his time on earth. We can't necessarily duplicate everything that Jesus and the early church modeled in their time, but we must learn the principles of his path and ways, and bring them to life in our time and place. Bringing his principles into our time is exactly what Cornerstone's *Discipleship Pathway* is all about. The principles don't change, but the methods we use might look a bit different. Our desire has been to learn the heart of Jesus and how his disciples brought it to life in the early church and depend upon God's Spirit and his Word to do the same through us in our time in Southern California.

### **The Heart and Ways of Jesus**

When the elders began to think through the heart and ways of Jesus, we found ourselves gravitating towards looking at the methods with which he made disciples. We think in the back of our minds that if we can just get ourselves or the people we walk with to *do* what Jesus did that we will intuitively make disciples. However, to make disciples, we must first capture Jesus' *heart* for disciple-making before we model his ways.

#### *The Heart of Jesus*

To capture Jesus' heart, it is best to tell you of a time in Jesus' ministry when he clarified it. The story is found in Matthew 22:34-40:

<sup>34</sup> But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. <sup>35</sup> And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. <sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup> And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

If you look around our church campus, you'll find references to this discussion he had with the Pharisees in the materials we put out: *love God and love people*. Not only is this the heart of the Law, but it is also at the very heart of God in making disciples. In fact, all of Jesus' ministry and teaching expressed this reality. This heart was in every teaching, parable, and action. God was to be loved and obeyed above all else, and people, as God's image bearers, were to be seen with God's eyes and treated with love and compassion. This passion of learning to and developing a love for God and people in this way is the mark of being a disciple of Jesus (Lk

10:26-28; see also Matt 5:43-48 [loving even enemies]; 10:37; Jn 15:9-12; 1 Jn 4:20-21). Without this love for God and people, it becomes merely a lifeless exercise in wrong imitation.

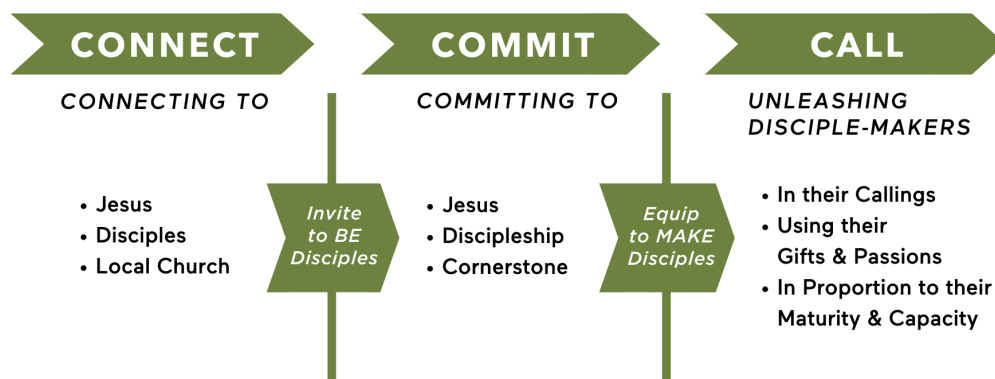
Even more, the key to loving people doesn't just happen generally or anonymously, but through real, honest, and authentic relationships. Jesus showed us the best way of discipleship possible, and it was one based upon these types of relationships. It is in that environment in which his disciples functioned and continued his mission. For example, elders were people shepherding other people in relationship (1 Pet 5:?). Evangelists were people sent to reach people and invite them into relationships (see the life of Jesus, Paul, Timothy, and Philip; Lk 20:1; Acts 21:8ff; Rom 1:15; 1 Thess 2:6-8, 11-12; 2 Tim 4:5). Parents were people discipling children in relationship (Eph 6:4; see connection to Deut 6:4-8). The apostles taught us that discipleship was through relationship. That is why for *The Discipleship Pathway* to function properly, it can't merely be a *model or method*, but one in which people experience meaningful relationships with other disciples who love God and them. That is a life-giving exercise in correct imitation.

### The Ways of Jesus

Relationships built in love are crucial; however, relationships without structure result in the making of disciples that are lacking in a different way because relationships by themselves are not discipleship. Discipleship involves imitation, which requires more than just relationship (1 Cor 4:16). Being with people, enjoying life, sharing pain and the like are all essential (see Rom 12), but disciple-making also requires an intentional structure.

This idea of relationships without structure grew significantly in the 1990s and 2000s. It was often referred to as "organic." The theory suggested that in merely hanging out and loving others, the person being loved would "get it." What is ironic, however, is that books espousing this idea always had a structure. More importantly, this "organic" approach wasn't Jesus' approach. He did love his disciples (Jn 13:1), but as we read the Gospels, he also had a structure in which he formed them as disciples, one that we, too, need to understand, follow, and adapt to our context.

## THE DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY



## Connect

After the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, Jesus began his ministry. In the Apostle John's Gospel, we learn of John the Baptist identifying Jesus as the "...the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29). The next day, he repeated that statement (vv 35-36) and two of John the Baptist's disciples (Andrew and probably the Apostle John; v 40) left John to follow Jesus. After a little convo between them, Jesus told them: "Come and you will see" (v 39). As we will learn later, this invitation was more than simply seeing where he was staying. He was inviting them to come and *connect* relationally with him and see him in action. It was an invitation to see the kingdom he was preaching firsthand in relationship with him.

This idea of "come and see" is at the heart of what we mean by *Connect*. As Jesus did, we want to invite people, whether they are followers of Jesus or not, to come and see the people of Cornerstone in action relationally. To "connect" is to bring people together or into contact with us so that a relational link is established. The first phase of our *Discipleship Pathway* is called *Connect* because we believe the Bible teaches, and Jesus modeled, that people are placed in the best possible environment to be a disciple of Jesus Christ when they are relationally "linked" with Jesus, his disciples, and a specific local church family. Jesus didn't merely show up on earth, announce his Kingdom, die, and rise again. He established a "link" with those he came to rescue. After his followers watched him, he then sent them to do the same. And before he left, he told them to continue along this same path until he returned.

How did Jesus *connect* with people? The key to this question is that Jesus met people where they were. He entered their world in the way they understood life and began from that point. He met Nicodemus, probably the greatest Jewish scholar of the time, late at night to explain what it means to be born again. To a woman struggling as a demeaned outcast due to her licentious life, he met her at a well to talk about living water. For tax collectors, drunks, and prostitutes, he met them in the places they were, even at the cost of being looked down upon by others (Matt 9:10-13). He entered their social groups and helped them see that the kingdom he was ushering in was for everyone.

Because that is what Jesus modeled for us, we want to follow in his footsteps. Whether someone is a follower of Jesus Christ or not, we want to be a church that helps people to connect with Jesus Christ (if they are not), connect with disciples of Jesus (if they are not), and connect to a local church (if they are not; even if it isn't with Cornerstone) by meeting them where they are. We want to engage with people through our weekend services, events, programs, and ministries. But we also must connect with our community at work, school, neighborhoods, activities, etc. In fact, the "normal" places of life are often the best ways to connect people to Jesus, disciples, and a local church family. We want to meet groups of students, co-workers, parents, single or married people, men or women, and even those struggling with an unwanted desire(s) or life situation(s) where they are. Again, this goal is not so they can stay there but so that we can help them to see their need for Jesus Christ and a local church (not necessarily Cornerstone) in which to flourish by becoming the man or woman God intends them to be.

## Invite

Before beginning the process with his apostles, however, Jesus took the time to *invite* them into the process. In Matthew 4, he invited a group of fishermen to join him as apprentices in his school of disciple-making, teaching them the ins and outs of the new movement. His invitation to these men was to come fishing, not for fish, but *for men* (vv 18-22). It was a call to *participate* in on-the-job training.

At Cornerstone, as we connect with people, we are seeking to allow them to see us in action. However, at some point, our heart and desire are that people will not merely want to “come and see” but to *participate* in Jesus’ continuing movement. But first, want them to understand fully what they are agreeing to *participate* in. That is the purpose of the next aspect of the *Discipleship Pathway: Invite*.

We call this invitation *Introducing Discipleship*. This is a small group environment in which we meet with people for a few months and give them the opportunity for three important things: (1) help them get to know the people of Cornerstone to which they are choosing to join, (2) help us get to know them a little better, and (3) help them get to know some of the special ways that God has made them as a unique disciple. During this time, we hope to accomplish two very important things: (1) to explain why becoming a member is so important to the process (Jesus had to define his relationship with them, and we do too), and (2) to establish what we call a “Disciple Profile” for them. To understand membership and how it connects to *The Discipleship Pathway* as a pivotal milestone along the path, you can read about it in the [church membership booklet](#). However, let me explain the *Disciple Profile* a little further.

The *Disciple Profile* serves three vital purposes. First, it allows us, in conjunction with the person, to evaluate where on *The Discipleship Pathway* the person is in their walk with Jesus. This assessment is important because it allows both them and us to know where they are beginning on their journey with us. On the one hand, one who is a newer, or less mature, follower of Jesus requires more training and should begin early on the path. On the other hand, one who is more mature and has followed Jesus for many years in intentional discipleship lands further down the path. It prevents the first from missing out on key aspects of their discipleship training while recognizing and affirming the growth that has already taken place in the latter.

Second, the *Disciple Profile* provides a roadmap to follow as a disciple walks the path with their various leaders. This path includes what we believe are three core components of becoming a healthy disciple: (1) Scripture, (2) shared life, and (3) service (see below). Along *The Discipleship Pathway*, the disciple will see the areas of those components in which he/she needs to develop. As he/she matures through on-the-job training, he/she can see the next step to take in growing in each of those three areas. This awareness gives clarity.

Last, the *Disciple Profile* allows the leaders with whom he/she walks with to know where to walk with him/her, avoiding unnecessary steps (without losing the need for repetition) or

potentially missing crucial steps. Often in discipleship, this lack of intentionality stunts the disciple's growth in multiple ways. We don't want to hinder the process by being too slow or too fast, but, like Goldilocks, we want it, as best as we are able, to be just right.

The *Disciple Profile* will continue to guide the person throughout their journey in discipleship at Cornerstone, hopefully creating a more objective way to determine readiness, highlight milestones of the work of God in their life to be celebrated, and encourage each disciple into a pattern of lifelong learning. Upon completing the *Introducing Discipleship* group, we will seek to find a place for them to experience and receive their on-the-job training with other disciples of Cornerstone under the guidance of healthy spiritual leaders, or a *Discipleship Community* (which will be discussed in just a bit).

## **Commit**

These fishing trips for men, which Jesus took his early followers on, began small but expanded in size and frequency until fishing for people became a lifestyle of reaching out and calling people to the King and his Kingdom. There were two phases: training to fish and equipping to multiply. The fishing took place in the synagogues (Lk 4:31-37), in homes (vv 38-44), or at the seaside, where Jesus repeated his invitation to participate (Lk 5:1-11). He gathered lepers, paralytics, tax collectors (vv 12-32), and "large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan" (Matt 4:25).

For Jesus, making disciples was lifestyle based (as was discussed earlier), sometimes surprisingly ordinary: *come and see, follow me, come fishing!* Engaged with everyday concerns, his growing circle of disciples needed repeated encouragement to *come fishing* with him (Matt 4:18-22; see also Lk 5:1-11). Understanding them and the nature of the movement he was cultivating, Jesus led them on a path that was experiential, relational, and participatory, not simply the dissemination of information in lectures and study guides. Jesus was teaching them Scripture and modeling through shared life how his Kingdom was "at hand" through serving God and people (or, as I wrote earlier, we want to love God and people in action).

This pattern is exactly what we hope to accomplish in our *Discipleship Communities*. In smaller groups of people, through equipped leaders, in shared life with you and other disciples, we want to train you in Scripture and service to others (loving action). We believe that these three ideas—*Scripture, Shared Life, and Service*—are essential components to becoming a healthy disciple who makes disciples. So, let's look at those three components more closely.

## *Scripture*

We want to train you in *Scripture* in four interconnected ways (which we call *Core 4: The Biblical Story, Gospel Transformation, Basic Doctrine, and Mission/Evangelism*). First, regarding *The Biblical Story*, we believe that healthy disciples need to understand the Bible, not just parts of it, but the whole. It is the only true story of God, the world he created, and humanity. And our desire is to bring our lives into alignment with this story so that we can faithfully play our part in it.

*Gospel Transformation* is crucial because we believe that the truths of the Bible aren't just meant to be read and discussed, or even just believed. They are meant to change us. God, through his Spirit, brings us into alignment with this story, and we are made different in our thoughts, desires, and actions (Jn 17:17; Col 3:16ff; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb 4:12). We are transformed into the men or the women that God intends us to be. And this happens as we see God, ourselves, others, and our world as God sees it.

As we grasp God's story and seek continued transformation from God's Spirit, we also want to learn to think and speak clearly about what the whole Bible teaches about particular topics—especially concerning the pressing issues of our day—so that we can hold and share this truth with others, both confidently and with humility. This idea is what we call *Basic Doctrine*.

Finally, the purpose of knowing God's story, seeking transformation, and believing sound doctrine ultimately comes back to Jesus' commission to be and make disciples. This is what *Mission/Evangelism* is all about. Sharing the good news, discovering our gifts, and exercising them within our callings out of love for God and others.

### *Shared Life*

As you can see, we want to train disciples to handle God's word with seriousness and depth. However, as was stated earlier, this must happen in the context of *Shared Life*. What we mean by *Shared Life* is contained in another four crucial aspects of *Discipleship Communities: Shared Identity, Biblical Practices, One Another'ing*, and *Significant Moments*. *Shared Identity* means that we believe we need others to be healthy disciples. Every aspect of the practices of Scripture demands walking with healthy leaders and fellow disciples. Often, we read the Bible individualistically, but much of what is written in God's Word is corporate, written to groups of people. To become healthy disciples who make disciples, we must be growing as individuals, but without others (leaders and fellow disciples), we will not grow to full maturity. We learn our *Shared Identity* as we learn to share life together.

As we engage in *Biblical Practices* (prayer, reading Scripture, worship, the Lord's Supper, etc.), they not only draw us closer to Christ, but also to one another. These practices cultivate a love for God and for each person with whom you will share life. And, by the way, this love for one another is crucial to *Mission/Evangelism*. In fact, the way in which Jesus told his early followers that people would know we are disciples is "...if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35).

Along with *Biblical Practices*, *Shared Life* is cultivated by practicing the "one another's" in the New Testament, or what we call *One Another'ing* (see [Appendix E](#) in our doctrinal statement to learn more). God's people are the church when we love and serve each other in the way that God has commanded and designed us. Living out these verses in community is how we can *love and be loved* by one another.

*Shared Identity, Biblical Practices, and One Another'ing* many times will seem “disappointingly ordinary”; however, they lead to and walk us through *Significant Moments*. Most of Jesus’ time with his followers, as I wrote earlier, was “disappointingly ordinary,” but the regular practice of sharing life with him and each other was the path that either led the men and women who followed him to make big decisions or enabled them to walk through challenging moments, which shaped their lives significantly. They were able to support each other in trials and collaborate together in times of joy because of how they had learned to share “ordinary life” together.

### *Service*

As you read earlier, what we mean by *Service* is “*loving God and people in action.*” The New Testament writers often referred to it as doing *good works* (see Titus 3:14). No doubt, we are to serve God above all. However, Jesus made an interesting connection to serving others by serving God in Matthew 25:39: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” In a very powerful way, when we serve others, we are serving God. In fact, one of the recurring themes in Jesus’ teaching is love for others. He doesn’t spend his time talking about loving things but, rather, loving people...in action. Even costly action because this is the example set for us (Mk 10:42-45).

### *Church Family*

The first group that we are to serve, or love in action, is our *Church Family*. Earlier, I quoted Jesus’ words from the Gospel of John, in which he told his followers that their love of one another would be the sign they were disciples. John later wrote a letter later in his life reminding a group of Christians that “...if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 Jn 4:11). Churches are where people experience and demonstrate and also learn to love, which is why John wrote just one verse later, “...If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us” (v 12). The love we have for one another isn’t intended to stay amongst ourselves, but instead, if we do it well, we won’t be able to contain it! It will spill over. But spill into where?

### *Community*

The writer of Hebrews tells us that it is to overflow to those that live around us. He wrote, “<sup>1</sup> Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. <sup>2</sup> Don’t forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it” (13:1-2; NLT). They were to fuel their love for one another like a healthy family would, but then, they were to allow the overflow that the Holy Spirit provided to land with love in action, “hospitality,” on “strangers.” They were, as Jesus commanded, to “love their neighbor as themselves” (see Matt 22:34-40 for the fulness of this command from Deut 19:17-18). This truth means that from the “incubator” of love created by the Holy Spirit and through relationships with other followers of Jesus, we are to love Simi Valley, Moorpark, the San Fernando Valley, Thousand Oaks, etc.



## *The Nations*

However, it isn't to stop within a 20-mile radius, but instead, it is to go to *The Nations*. In the Great Commission, Jesus didn't ask us to only impact our towns and communities, but to "make disciples of all nations." One of the first verses we learn as new followers of Jesus is John 3:16. In it, we find that God loves "the world"! And if we are going to love like Jesus loves, we too must gain a heart for *The Nations*. At Cornerstone, that means fueling our passion for God by engaging in *Global Ministry*, sending and supporting cross-cultural disciple-makers, and strengthening churches in other parts of the world.

## *Our Enemies*

At first, loving *Our Enemies* may seem strange, but a defining mark of God's people is that they love them too. The love that God has poured into our hearts, that he incubates in local churches and that spills into our communities and world, is also intended for those that might be termed an "enemy." In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his disciples, <sup>43</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' <sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt 5:43-44). Wow! Let that sink in for a moment. That is how powerful this love is. That means we can love people regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, political persuasion, nationality, etc., and even those who have wronged and hurt us. This love is the extent to which our *Service* is intended to go. It doesn't come easily or naturally to any of us, but as we walk together as disciples of Jesus, he trains us to love and serve our enemies because this is what he has done for us (Rom 5:10).

## **Equip**

From the moment Jesus called his first disciples to uniquely follow him in relationship to learn his path and ways (see Matt 4:18-22), he began immediately to train them. His future apostles would watch, I'm guessing, many times in wonder, as he engaged people. It was a masterclass on making disciples. However, when we arrive at chapter 10, he gave twelve of them a new title, Apostle, and <sup>4</sup> "...[he] gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction..." <sup>5</sup> These twelve Jesus sent out" (vv 1, 5). They had watched enough, and now it was time put his ways of engaging people into practice. Each of them at different points were sent out on a "short term" assignment, and upon returning, he would give more lessons.

This idea of sending out, allowing the disciple to serve (love people in action), and then evaluating and instructing them regarding their service is why we see the need for this phase of the discipleship process, called *Equip*. Before fully unleashing people, they first need to practice leading others in the ways in which they have observed and begun to practice. In other words, they aren't quite ready yet.

At some point along the *Discipleship Pathway*, it will become evident that the disciple is ready to be one *who makes disciples* in the way that God has created them. Their development, as charted in their *Disciple Profile*, will demonstrate that they have a competent grasp of what it means to be a disciple (competent in *Scripture*, *Shared Life*, and *Service*), and those walking with

them in relationship (leaders and other disciples) will affirm their readiness. They are prepared to learn what it means to be a person who leads others to be disciples who make disciples. Our heart at this point is to train them for a role to play.

Each person's role may look different, depending on how God has created and called them, but they will all learn to play a role within *The Discipleship Pathway* alongside a leader who can equip them for ministry. The disciple will be engaged in serving people as a leader and taught hands-on as they do so from the leader(s) overseeing them.

This process of allowing the disciple to lead others, and then instructing and evaluating them regarding their service is crucial. It is one thing to be *competent* and another to be *experienced*. The disciple must have more than cognitive information or theory to rely upon, they need tested know-how to serve effectively. When a disciple weds collected information and experience with know-how, they are almost ready to be a servant leader with others.

I wrote "almost" because there are two last things that must be evaluated after we determine the person's calling, gifts, and passions. We must also determine their *maturity* (character) and *capacity* (availability).

First, the maturity of each leader who will be unleashed within Cornerstone to make disciples is critical. Throughout the New Testament, we see that for any type of leader, character, and wisdom are crucial. As a disciple-maker, the leader will pass along more than information and experience, they must pass along to those they are discipling a transformed life that is worthy of being imitated.

Second, we must also determine a leader's capacity. Too often in the history of Cornerstone, we've invited people to lead with us who checked all the boxes but this one. Sadly, because the leader didn't have the capacity and wasn't led to assess their capacity, as they began to invest in the lives of disciples, other areas of the leader's life begin to suffer. Maybe it was their family, work, etc., but most often, it was their relationship with Jesus Christ. The stakes are too high, and the mission is too important to skip this step. It is better to assume a lesser amount of responsibility than to overcommit and fail to be faithful. It is even better to take time to clear space in one's life (when possible) to engage more fully in disciple-making.

## **Call**

When a leader is determined to be ready to lead others in making disciples, we will lay hands on them and celebrate the work of God in their life. In the New Testament, this act was the way in which a person was identified before others to be a person who was prepared to steward authority like Jesus (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Tim 4:14). We don't believe we "give" authority, but instead we "acknowledge" what God has done and that he has prepared the leader to steward authority alongside other leaders.

That last sentence is important! In the church, we never steward the authority God gives us alone, but alongside other leaders. Making disciples demands a team. Or, as Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 12, we are a part of a body where each part is expected to function for the fame of Jesus and the health of one another.

### **Conclusion**

Let me return to where I started: “The two words I would use to describe how [Jesus] prepared [his disciples] are: *relational* and *intentional*.” That is our prayer and intent for discipleship at Cornerstone. It is what we hope to prepare you and many others to do. We want to fully embrace the commission left us and faithfully engage in it until he returns.