

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

A Practical Field Guide for Intentional Discipleship

Moving from Church Activity to Transformed Lives

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Introduction

Every pastor cares about the same thing: Are the people sitting in front of them each Sunday actually becoming more like Jesus? Not simply whether they showed up. Not even whether they gave. But whether they are, in some measurable way, closer to Christ this year than they were last year. Beneath the surface, many pastors carry the same quiet question: “*Are we really making disciples?*”

Thank you for allowing me to walk alongside you in this journey of faith. Over the past thirty years, I have had the privilege of serving in pastoral, missions, and discipleship ministry with churches of all sizes, from fewer than one hundred to more than six thousand members. Along the way, I have developed discipleship curricula, led strategies to help people connect and grow, and taught at several colleges. One of the most meaningful projects I have been part of is the early development and field-testing of what became the Discipleship Dynamics Assessment. This tool, rooted in Scripture and validated by research, provides churches with a clear way to measure 35 specific outcomes of whole-life discipleship across 5 key areas of maturity. I hope that by using these insights, you can move forward with a focused strategy that helps each person in your church family grow in Christ.

This book shares the story of that process and encourages you to implement it in your own church. It is structured as a practical conversation that guides pastors step by step through the process: first, why measurement matters and what it actually looks like (Chapters 1 and 2); then the five steps themselves — Diagnose, Define, Plan, Implement, Evaluate — each with its own chapter (Chapters 3 through 7); followed by a complete case study of a congregation that completed the entire cycle from start to finish (Chapter 8); and finally, what is needed to make measurement a permanent rhythm rather than a one-time project (Chapter 9).

You don't need a background in data, a big team, a research budget, or extra hours. What you need is the willingness to replace your best guess with an honest picture and the courage to act on what you discover.

Let's get started.

Chapter 1: The Guesswork Problem

One of my colleagues at Discipleship Dynamics, Dr. Charlie Self, experienced a conversation that captures one of the greatest challenges facing the church today. Charlie, one of the designers of the Discipleship Dynamics Assessment and co-author of *Life in 5D*, tells the story in the book of sitting across the table from the pastor of a thriving suburban church.

By every measurable standard, the church was succeeding. Attendance had grown for four consecutive years. Giving was strong enough that they had broken ground on a new building. Volunteer teams were fully staffed. The numbers looked impressive.

But then the pastor said something that stopped him:

“I honestly don’t know if we’re making disciples or just running a really good show.”

That question gets to the heart of the challenge facing many churches today. We have become skilled at measuring outputs — attendance, budgets, buildings, programs, and participation — but we often struggle to measure outcomes: whether people are becoming more like Jesus, growing in spiritual maturity, developing healthy relationships, discovering their calling, and living faithfully in every area of life.

That conversation is one of the reasons the Discipleship Dynamics Assessment was created and why *Life in 5D*, the book that explains its framework, was written. It is also why this book exists: to help churches move beyond measuring activity and begin measuring transformation.

The Goal in One Sentence

Equip the church gathered on Sunday to be the church scattered on Monday: whole people, carrying the whole gospel, into the whole world.

The church does not exist merely to produce activity; it exists to form disciples. And what we measure shapes what we prioritize.

We measure what's easy to count. Attendance is easy to count — someone's either in the room or they aren't. Giving is easy to count — it shows up in a bank statement. Small group sign-ups are easy to count — there's a roster. None of these numbers is bad. They're often genuinely useful. But none of them answer the actual question a pastor loses sleep over: Are people becoming more like Christ?

That question is harder to count, so most churches stop trying. They substitute outputs (attendance, giving, program participation) for outcomes (transformed character, deepened prayer life, restored marriages, integrity at work) and hope the two are correlated closely enough that tracking the first will tell them something true about the second.

Sometimes it does. Often it doesn't. A congregation can have rising attendance and shrinking marriages. It can have records of giving and members who have never once spoken about their doubts with another believer. It can run a full slate of programs and still have a Sunday-Monday gap so wide that faith barely survives the drive home from church.

The cost of guessing. When a church has no real data on discipleship outcomes, three things tend to happen, usually all at once:

- **Strategy becomes reactive instead of intentional.** Leaders respond to the loudest voices: the volunteer pushing a pet program, the trend everyone else is chasing, the crisis of the week, rather than focusing on what the congregation truly needs.
- **Every ministry claims the same three verses and hopes for the best.** Without outcome data, there's no way to determine whether the men's ministry, the sermon series, and the small group curriculum support or conflict with one another.
- **Evaluation becomes impossible.** If you can't identify where people started, you can't assess whether your actions influenced them. Every initiative becomes an act of faith instead of a tested strategy, not because pastors lack faith, but because they lack a baseline.

None of this is meant to criticize pastors. These are common pitfalls faced by many committed leaders who are passionate about making disciples but lack a clear, measurable process to do so. The issue isn't a lack of care; it's a lack of proper tools. Doctors don't guess at a diagnosis; they run tests. Businesses don't guess at customer satisfaction; they survey it. Farmers don't guess at soil health; they test it before planting. Among institutions, the church has been the slowest to develop a rigorous, humble, biblically faithful way of asking the most important question: are we making disciples, and how can we tell?

A different kind of scoreboard. The rest of this book is built around a simple conviction: discipleship growth can be measured, without reducing faith to a spreadsheet and without pretending a number can capture the fullness of a transformed life. A number can't tell you everything. But it can reveal something true, and something true is infinitely more useful than an educated guess dressed up as confidence.

The Discipleship Dynamics Assessment exists to give you something true. It measures thirty-five specific, biblically grounded outcomes across five dimensions of whole-life discipleship, not as a spiritual report card, but as a mirror. It doesn't tell you who your people are; it shows you where they are on the journey of becoming like Christ.

Before we get to the five-step process for using that data, we need to understand the picture it's measuring. That's the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Five Dimensions of Whole-Life Discipleship

Introducing a biblical framework that reaches beyond Sunday into Monday.

Many discipleship strategies unintentionally make Sunday the destination instead of equipping people to follow Jesus every day. Most churches measure what happens in a worship service, in a small group circle, in a Bible study: the parts of life that already happen inside church walls. But Scripture never confines discipleship to those hours. Jesus talked about money, work, family conflict, anxiety, forgiveness, and purpose, about the whole territory of an ordinary week, not just the ninety minutes a person spends in church on Sunday.

The Discipleship Dynamics Assessment (DDA) was created around this conviction: discipleship touches every part of a believer's week, and growth in those areas can be described and measured honestly. The DDA is a biblically grounded, research-validated assessment designed to provide an accurate picture of where a congregation is growing and where people may be stuck. It does not define a church's identity or measure its worth, but it reveals the current reality of discipleship so leaders can respond with wisdom, focus, and purpose. To make this whole-life picture visible, the DDA organizes discipleship into five interconnected dimensions:

1. Spiritual Formation: loving and knowing God through prayer, Scripture, and hearing His voice. This is the dimension most churches already measure informally: Bible reading, prayer, worship engagement. It remains foundational. But it's only one-fifth of the picture.

2. Personal Wholeness: emotional health, identity in Christ, hope, and the capacity to manage negative emotions well. A believer can be theologically fluent and emotionally unwell at the same time. This dimension asks whether people are being transformed from the inside out: growing in identity, emotional health, resilience, and hope as they grow in their knowledge of God.

3. Healthy Relationships: loving neighbors, marriage and family health, forgiveness, and authentic community. Jesus made it clear that love for others is one of the clearest marks of a true disciple. (John 13:35). A church can be full of theologically sound, individually devout people who are nonetheless at odds with their spouses, unreconciled with a sibling, or isolated from real community.

4. Vocational Clarity: understanding one's calling, sense of purpose, and the integration of faith with daily work. We cannot disciple people on Sunday and leave Monday untouched. Many churches equip people to serve inside the church while leaving their everyday work and vocation disconnected from their faith. This dimension asks whether someone understands their work itself, whatever it is, as a place of calling.

5. Economics & Work: generosity, stewardship, ethics, and the practice of viewing daily labor as worship. This dimension goes beyond the tithe. It explores whether the gospel is influencing how people earn, spend, serve, and work, or whether their Sunday faith remains disconnected from their Monday life.

Why five, and why these five? These dimensions aren't arbitrary. They are rooted in Scripture, confirmed through experience, and focused on the areas where discipleship becomes visible in everyday life. The five dimensions map onto categories Scripture itself treats as inseparable from discipleship: worship and prayer, emotional and relational health, calling and stewardship. Put simply, biblical discipleship was never designed to reach only the parts of life that happen at church. It was designed to reach all of it.

Thirty-five outcomes, not five vague categories. Each of these five dimensions is further defined by specific, observable biblical outcomes (thirty-five in total) that reveal what discipleship looks like in everyday life. "Healthy Relationships," for instance, isn't measured as one fuzzy score; it includes distinct outcomes like forgiveness, marital unity, and authentic community. This level of detail is enormously important for what comes later in this book. A church doesn't need to fix "Healthy Relationships" in the abstract. Church leaders need to know, specifically, whether its people are struggling most with forgiveness, marital health, or loneliness, because the strategy for each looks different.

A mirror, not a report card. One thing must be clear from the start: this process is not a scorecard. Nobody passes or fails. The goal is not to assign a grade to a congregation; it is to provide clarity about where discipleship is taking place and where growth is needed.

Most congregations score somewhere between 40 and 80 percent across these dimensions. That's not bad news; it's simply where growth happens. A church that discovered every score already at 95 percent would have nothing left to disciple toward. The whole value of the framework is that it shows you, honestly, where the real growing edge is.

With the five dimensions in view, we're ready to walk through the process itself: five steps that take a congregation from a vague sense that "we should be discipling people better" to a specific, measurable strategy. Every healthy process begins with an honest assessment of reality: seeing where things truly stand before deciding where to go next.

What the DDA Produces

What You Get	What It Means for Your Church
Objective data	Move past ‘I think we’re doing okay’ to ‘Here is exactly where we are.’
Whole-life focus	Connect Sunday worship with Monday ethics, workplace, and relationships.
Private individual report	Every participant receives a confidential 10-page personal report with their own scores across all 35 outcomes.
Group dashboard for you	You see anonymized congregational averages — the collective strengths and growth opportunities of your church.
A clear roadmap	The 5-step process guides you from data to deployed discipleship strategy.

Chapter 3: Step 1 — Diagnose

Getting an honest, current picture of a congregation's strengths and blind spots.

Ephesians 4:13 describes the goal of the church's ministry in language of measurement: growing "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." Paul assumes a congregation can be somewhere on a spectrum toward that fullness: not simply "in" or "out," but at a describable point on a real journey. Diagnosis is how a church honestly finds that point.

Before you open the data. The single most important thing a leadership team can do before looking at any assessment results is to gather, pray, and frame the conversation around one question:

"How hungry are we to see tangible growth toward whole-life maturity in Christ — and what are we willing to do about it?"

If the honest answer is "not very," no amount of data will change anything. Diagnosis only matters if a church is prepared to act on what it finds.

Reading scores without either panic or complacency. When a congregation receives its assessment results, the scores usually fall into one of four ranges. Rather than viewing these ranges as grades, they can be understood as markers that help identify where a congregation currently is on its discipleship journey:

Score Range	What It Means	Recommended Response
0–25%	The <i>Awakening Zone</i>: Unfamiliar territory; low awareness.	Start Small: Introduce basic spiritual practices and create safe spaces for honest questions.
25–50%	The <i>Tension Zone</i> — Real effort is present, people feel inconsistent or stuck.	Build Consistency: Use mid-size and small groups for relational accountability.
50–75%	The <i>Momentum Zone</i> — Solid health; Sunday faith is actively connecting to Monday life.	Targeted Equipping: Offer practical workshops and focused teaching series.
75–100%	The <i>Legacy Zone</i> — Mature and thriving disciples ready to serve and lead.	Mobilize & Multiply: Move these individuals into mentoring and disciple-making roles.

Most scores land between 40 and 80 percent, and that's healthy, not alarming. A change of five percentage points or more in a single outcome indicates measurable spiritual growth. Given the interconnected nature of the five dimensions, improvement in one area frequently contributes to development in others, a pattern referred to as the Spillover Effect, which we will return to in later chapters.

Three questions worth asking as a team. Once your leadership has the data in front of them, three questions consistently surface the most useful insight:

Reflection Question	Your Notes
The Surprise Factor: Which high or low scores caught us off guard? Why might that be?	<i>[Record initial insights here]</i>
The Strength Leverage: How can our highest-scoring Dimension pull up our lowest score?	<i>Example: A congregation strong in community may be able to use that relational strength to address a weakness in financial stewardship, through peer accountability rather than another sermon.</i> <i>[Record ideas for leveraging strengths]</i>
The Cultural Anchor: What past sermon series, leaders, or programs nurtured our current strengths? How can we replicate that energy for our weak areas?	<i>[Record past practices to replicate]</i>

Anchoring data to your church's own language. Every congregation already has a vocabulary for spiritual growth: a mission statement, a set of core values, a rhythm like "Gather, Grow, Go" or "Worship, Word, Work." Before you strategize, translate the assessment's five dimensions into that existing language.

Example: Mapping Your Church Language to the DDA Dimensions

A church organized around *Worship*, *Word*, and *Work* might map:

- *Worship* → Spiritual Formation + Personal Wholeness
- *Word* → Spiritual Disciplines, Healthy Relationships, Biblical Obedience
- *Work* → Vocational Clarity + Economics & Work

Another church using *Gather / Grow / Go* might map:

- *Gather* → Spiritual Formation + Healthy Relationships
- *Grow* → Personal Wholeness + Spiritual Formation
- *Go* → Vocational Clarity + Economics & Work (Great Commission in daily life)

This step matters more than it looks like it should: data that arrives in a foreign vocabulary gets filed away and forgotten. Data translated into a church's own language becomes part of how that church talks about itself.

Quick Worksheet: Your Church DNA Map

Church Language	DDA Dimension(s) / Outcomes
Your Mission/Vision Marker (e.g., 'Grow')	DDA Dimensions & Outcomes That Fit

Diagnosis reveals reality; it does not create a strategy. It shows you where people are, but not necessarily where to begin. Trying to address everything at once is the fastest way to accomplish nothing. The next chapter is about deliberately choosing what not to fix yet.

Chapter 4: Step 2 — Define the Win

Choosing a few focus outcomes instead of trying to fix everything at once.

2 Peter 1:3 makes an audacious claim: God's divine power has already given us everything we need for a godly life. The gap most churches face isn't a shortage of resources. It's a shortage of focus. In working with churches, the Discipleship Dynamics team has discovered that the challenge is rarely a lack of good discipleship material. They struggle because they try to address every weakness the data reveals at once, spreading their time and energy so thin that meaningful progress never happens.

A win is specific. A win is defined as: any measurable gain of five percentage points or more in a specific outcome or dimension, achieved over a six-to-twelve-month strategy cycle. Notice that this definition transforms a general hope: “we want people to grow spiritually,” into a measurable outcome that allows a leadership team to identify progress, make adjustments, and celebrate real movement toward Christlikeness.

The Spillover Effect. Here's the encouraging discovery behind this whole approach: when a congregation makes real progress in one or two targeted outcomes, several others tend to move as well, without any direct effort spent on them. For example, growth in hearing God's voice, in my experience and in the underlying research, tends to lift hopefulness, forgiveness, and emotional regulation alongside it. Growth in marital unity tends to lift both a couple's shared work ethic and their prayer life. Discipleship dimensions aren't separate silos; they're interconnected systems. A church doesn't need to fix all thirty-five outcomes directly. It needs to find the one or two levers that, when pulled, move several others along with them.

Turning data into goals that a team can track. The goal is not simply to identify where discipleship is strong or weak; it is to translate those insights into focused outcomes a team can pursue together. Vague aspirations do not create movement. Specific goals do. Here's what that specificity looks like in practice:

Dimension	Example Measurement Goal
Spiritual Formation	"60% of attenders engaged in a Life Group within 6 months (50% increase)."
Personal Wholeness	"Launch an emotional health workshop series with 40% attendance among adults."
Healthy Relationships	"80% of adult attenders complete a 30-day devotional on forgiveness."
Vocational Clarity	"Increase Faith/Work Integration score by 7% by next assessment cycle."

Dimension	Example Measurement Goal
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Economics & Work	"Host 2 Business as Mission conversations; 25 new participants in generosity track."
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Each of these answers the same underlying question: *how will we know we're making progress?* Not "we did a sermon series on it," but a specific, measurable change we expect to see twelve months from now that is not true today.

Naming strengths and weaknesses honestly. Before a leadership team can choose its one or two focus outcomes, it needs to do something uncomfortable: name, honestly name its strongest two or three dimensions, its weakest two or three, and then ask what those results reveal.

- For the strengths: who championed this, and what programs supported it, so we understand what actually produced it?
- For the weaknesses: was this ever strong? What changed? What's been over-emphasized at its expense?

Use your Group Report to fill in this table with your leadership team:

Focus Area	Baseline	Target
Target Dimension or Outcome	Current Score (from Report)	Growth Goal for Next 12 Months

This exercise routinely surfaces something a congregation's leaders suspected privately but had never said to each other directly, which can be exact insight that shapes the next twelve months.

Once a church has named its win (a specific, measurable outcome tied to the data), the next step is to build the team that will implement and champion the strategy. That's the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Step 3 — Plan Your Strategy

Building a small discipleship team and assigning outcome champions.

"Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?" Amos asks (3:3, NLT). A strategy, however well-designed, dies without a team that owns it. This chapter is about intentionally forming the right team: small enough to function, but strong enough to move the mission forward.

You don't need a committee. You need a Grow Team. Gather three to five trusted leaders (staff, elders, or mature volunteers) to form a Discipleship Grow Team. This is not another standing committee that meets quarterly to review minutes. It's the small group of people who will analyze the assessment data, identify the real discipleship gaps behind it, and build the actual strategy for whole-life maturity.

Who belongs on this team? Trusted influencers who are truly passionate about the mission and willing to let data, not just intuition, shape decisions. Include a variety of ages, life stages, and ministry backgrounds to ensure that the team doesn't accidentally build a strategy that only works for people like themselves. Aim for a team of five to eight people: large enough to represent key perspectives but small enough to stay focused, make decisions, and take ownership of the work.

Sample Grow Team Invitation

"Our church is thriving in many ways, but our mission is more than growing attendance—it's helping people become mature, whole-life disciples of Jesus. I'm forming a small team to review our Discipleship Dynamics Assessment results, identify our greatest opportunities, and help shape our discipleship strategy for the coming year.

I've identified you as someone whose wisdom and leadership I value. Would you join me for our first session on [Date/Time]?"

Every initiative needs four answers. Whatever your Grow Team decides to pursue, it should be able to answer four questions clearly:

- What are we trying to accomplish?
- Who is responsible?
- How will we measure success?
- And when will we evaluate progress?

An initiative that can't answer all four honestly isn't ready to launch yet.

Assigning Outcome Champions. Once the Grow Team has reviewed the data and chosen its one or two focus outcomes, each focus area needs a champion: a person who will advocate for that dimension and help translate the data into meaningful life change across the congregation.

The Outcome Champion provides ownership for that focus area. In larger churches or more complex settings, this may include leading a small Design Team of three to five people. The team listens to congregation members, identifies barriers to growth, develops and tests practical next steps, reports progress to the Grow Team, and celebrates evidence of transformation.

Naming resistance before you meet it. Every strategy meets resistance, and it's far better to name the likely forms of it before launch than to be surprised by them mid-stream.

Potential Barrier	Description
Lack of Information	People genuinely don't know how to grow in this area.
The Triage Trap	We're too busy with ongoing crises to build proactive health.
Cultural Resistance	'We've never done it this way' or 'That's not really spiritual.'
Resource Gap	Not enough money, time, or the right leader.
Relational Friction	Lack of trust or unity in the leadership or congregation.
Over-spiritualizing	Belief that 'the right method' or a revival will automatically produce growth without any planning.

Naming these potential barriers in advance doesn't eliminate them. It means your team isn't blindsided when one of them shows up.

The strategy development process. The Outcome Champion guides the process through four phases, involving the Design Team as needed, to intentionally move from data to a practical action plan.

A	LISTEN — Understand the Struggle Interview 4–8 congregation members to understand why this specific area feels challenging. Ask: Is the low score due to lack of information, a genuinely busy life, trauma, or simply never being taught this dimension?
B	DESIGN — Create the 'Next Step' Ask: 'What's the smallest, most accessible step that could move the needle?' Choose one Realistic (quick win) and one Reach (bigger impact) idea.
C	PILOT — Test Before You Scale Launch with one small group or class for 4 weeks. Gather honest feedback. Refine the resource based on real experience before rolling it out church-wide.
D	SHARE — Roll Out What Works

Present the proven tool to the whole congregation across sermons and groups. Provide content for the website, talking points for the pastor, and training for small group leaders.

Before the Grow Team approves any strategy, run it through a simple three-question filter:

- *Can people understand it?* Is the next step explainable in a single sentence?
- *Can people start it?* Is the first step achievable even for someone who feels spiritually stalled?
- *Can people see progress?* Is there a visible, recognizable sign that growth is happening?

A strategy that passes all three questions is ready to move from planning into the wider life of the church. That transition — from a pilot group to the whole congregation — is where most church initiatives quietly die. The next chapter is about making sure yours doesn't.

Chapter 6: Step 4 — Implement Across Zones

Deploying focus outcomes through sermons, groups, and one-on-one mentoring.

"Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty," Proverbs 21:5 warns (NLT). Most church initiatives don't fail because the idea was bad. They fail in the transition from planning to doing — a beautifully designed strategy that makes sense only to the people who were already in the room when it was designed.

Three relational zones. Each congregation has three interconnected relational environments, and healthy discipleship involves engaging all three: the Crowd, the Circle, and the Mirror.

Relational Zone	Ministry Context	Implementation Example
THE CROWD	Weekend Services & Website (largest, least personal environment)	Preach a sermon series on the target dimension and outcomes; post 2–3 practical digital guides on your website.
THE CIRCLE	Small Groups, Classes & Workshops (mid-sized environments where people process alongside others)	Provide small groups with a 4–6 week curriculum matching the sermon series. Short-term intensives (a Saturday seminar on Faith & Work, a workshop on Forgiveness). Connect congregation members with similar needs or strengths.
THE MIRROR	Mentoring & Individual Reflection (the most personal zone)	Encourage members to review their private 10-page assessment report as their personal action plan. Connect mature believers with newer disciples.

A strategy that only lives in the Crowd reaches a lot of people shallowly. A strategy that only lives in the Mirror reaches a few people deeply but never touches the wider congregation. The strongest strategies deploy the same focus outcome across all three zones at once, so a person hears it from the stage, processes it in community, and reflects on it personally, resulting in three exposures to the same truth, from three different angles, in the same season.

A strategy that only lives in the Crowd reaches many people, but changes few deeply. Conversely, a strategy that lives only in the Mirror reaches only a few people deeply but never touches the wider congregation. The strongest strategies deploy the same focus outcome across

all three zones at once: a person hears it from the stage, processes it in community, and reflects on it personally. This results in three exposures to the same truth, from three different angles, in the same season.

Three pitfalls, named plainly.

- **The Complexity Trap:** if a plan requires too many steps to get started, most people simply won't start. It's critical to keep the first step clear and brief, almost embarrassingly simple.
- **The One-Sermon Myth:** real habit change requires consistent reinforcement over weeks, not a single well-crafted Sunday message, however good it is.
- **Ignoring Digital Access:** curate your resources on the church app or website so people can find help in the middle of a Tuesday, not just during the fifteen minutes after a service ends.

Choosing the right strategy type. Not every focus outcome calls for the same kind of push. It's helpful to distinguish between three strategy types, each suited to a different situation:

Strategy Type	Best For...	Example
The Surge	Addressing a single critical weakness quickly.	A 4-week church-wide focus on Forgiveness, with messages, Life Groups, and a resource page all aligned.
The Pathway	Creating a long-term, repeatable discipleship track.	A 'Growth Track' for all attenders organized around the 5 Dimensions. New members onboard through this pathway.
The Infrastructure	Embedding discipleship into the DNA for years to come.	Redesigning the budget, staff roles, and programming calendar around the Outcomes.

A working action plan. For each target area your Grow Team selects, it should specify the target dimension and outcome, the Outcome Champion responsible, the strategy type (Surge, Pathway, or Infrastructure), a Realistic goal (an adjustment to something you're already doing), a Reach goal (a genuinely new rhythm), and a Radical goal, one that invites God to do something beyond what careful planning alone could produce. It should also specify the Crowd, Circle, and Mirror strategies concretely, a launch date, and how you'll know it's working before you ever launch it.

Action Plan Worksheet

For each selected target area, fill out an action plan with your Grow Team:

Planning Element	Your Notes
Target Dimension / Outcome	
Outcome Champion	
Strategy Type (Surge / Pathway / Infrastructure)	
Realistic Goal <i>(adjust what you're already doing)</i>	
Reach Goal <i>(introduce a new rhythm)</i>	
Radical Goal <i>(invite God to do the impossible)</i>	
Crowd Strategy (Pulpit / Website)	
Circle Strategy (Groups / Workshops)	
Mirror Strategy (Mentoring / Individual Report)	
Launch Date	
How We'll Know It's Working	
That last question, “how will we know it's working?” is the bridge into the next chapter. Because eventually, nine to twelve months later, every strategy must answer the question: “Did it make a difference?”	

Chapter 7: Step 5 — Evaluate and Celebrate

Re-measuring after nine to twelve months and reading the results honestly.

"Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves," Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 13:5. Every great story has a moment where the hero pauses to look back and see how far they've come. Evaluation allows a congregation to see clearly. It is not about measuring performance, but about celebrating the Holy Spirit's work and using honest information to shape the next season of discipleship strategy.

The nine-to-twelve-month rhythm. Measurement is a rhythm, not a one-time event. A nine-to-twelve-month cycle between assessments allows sufficient time for teaching to become habit, and habit to become measurable life change, while keeping the congregation engaged with the strategy.

Three things to measure, not just one. When a congregation retakes the assessment, the temptation is to look only at whether the target score moved. That's necessary, but it's incomplete. Evaluate each strategy along three separate measurements:

What to Measure	The Question to Ask	What to Look For
Results Achieved	Did the score improve in your target dimension(s) and outcomes?	A 5%+ gain in any outcome is a genuine win. Look also for the Spillover Effect — unexpected improvement in connected outcomes not directly targeted.
Steps Taken	Did the resources invested produce results?	Evaluate each tactic honestly. Did the Life Group curriculum, website resources, or mentoring program move the needle or consume budget and calendar space without impact?
Resistance Encountered	What stalled growth? Why?	Identify over-spiritualizing ('God will do it without planning'), method-idolatry ('our program just needs time, not a different approach'), and cultural resistance — and address them relationally.

A simple template for sharing results. When you bring your findings back to your board, staff, or congregation, a clean before-and-after comparison across all five dimensions: Spiritual Formation, Personal Wholeness, Healthy Relationships, Vocational Clarity, and Economics & Work, paired with your single top win, your greatest remaining opportunity, the strategy that

worked best, and the strategy you'll adjust or replace, gives people a complete and honest picture in a single page.

Celebrate before you strategize. This is the instruction worth underlining twice: before your team dives into "what's next," stop and celebrate what God did. Share two or three real transformation stories from real people in your congregation. Bring the numbers to life with faces and names: a marriage that was restored, a person who finally forgave a parent, a business owner who changed how they treated employees. Data convinces the mind. Stories move the heart, and a congregation needs both before it's ready to hear what comes next.

Then, and only then, ask what's next. Once you've celebrated, bring your Grow Team back to a short set of honest questions:

- Which Growth Goals did we hit? Which did we miss — and why?
- What should we continue, stop, or start?
- Which outcomes are now in need of attention that weren't a priority before?
- How should we adjust the budget, calendar, staffing, or facilities to support discipleship outcomes better?
- Who moved into the Legacy Zone and is now ready to mentor others?

That last question closes the loop. The people your church disciplined this cycle become the mentors for the next one, which is exactly what the next chapter, a full case study of a congregation that ran this entire process from start to finish, shows in practice.

Annual Progress Review Template

Use this template to share results with your board, staff, or congregation:

Metric	Results
Dimension	% Change (Before → After)
1: Spiritual Formation	___% → ___%
2: Personal Wholeness	___% → ___%
3: Healthy Relationships	___% → ___%
4: Vocational Clarity	___% → ___%
5: Economics & Work	___% → ___%
Top Win (Highest Gain)	

Metric	Results
Greatest Opportunity (Most Room to Grow)	
Strategy That Worked Best	
Strategy to Adjust or Replace	

Chapter 8: Case Study — New Life Church's Discipleship Consultation

The full diagnose-to-evaluate cycle, from field research at a two-campus Ohio congregation.

Every principle in the previous five chapters is easier to trust once you've seen it in action with real numbers. This chapter provides that record. It's based directly on the doctoral field project I carried out at New Life Church, a congregation with campuses in Aurora and Stow, Ohio, where I served as lead pastor. I'm sharing both what worked and what I would do differently because a case study that only shows success teaches a pastor less than one that reveals the real nature of the work.

Where we started. New Life's vision statement — "Being Transformed to Transform the World" — was already, in essence, a restatement of the discipleship journey this book describes. The church's core values are biblically anchored, Spirit-led, family-driven, better together, and mission-minded. By ordinary metrics, the church was healthy: attendance was strong across both campuses, and the staff and elder board were united. But naming a vision and measuring progress toward it are two different things, and we had never done the second.

I introduced the concept of whole-life discipleship and the Discipleship Dynamics Assessment (DDA) to our executive team on January 30, 2023, to the combined staff of both campuses on February 5, and to our elder board on February 20. On February 26, we invited forty-two people—our five elder board members, ten campus deacons, seven staff members, several small group leaders, and each of their spouses—to complete the initial DDA. This group, rather than the entire congregation, became our benchmark. I want to be honest about that scope because it influences how we interpret everything that follows: this was a leadership-cohort pilot, not a congregation-wide rollout, and that choice both enabled the project within our timeline and limited what the data could reveal. I'll revisit that tradeoff at the end of this chapter.

What the diagnosis showed. Thirty-five leaders attended our initial discipleship consultation, and almost everyone had completed the assessment before we met. Thirty-three leaders had successfully submitted their results, with a few additional completions resolved afterward. Across all five dimensions and thirty-five outcomes, our leadership group's initial scores clustered between 67 and 71 percent tightly — solidly in what this book calls the Momentum Zone, which was unsurprising for a room full of staff, board members, and small group leaders. But averages hide the interesting detail. Two scores genuinely surprised us. "'Listen to the Voice of God" came in at just 61 percent, the lowest score in the entire Spiritual Formation dimension, which is notable given the strong Pentecostal history and identity of both campuses. And

"Positive Self-Image," inside Personal Wholeness, was also low enough to concern a room full of people whose job, in various ways, was to shepherd others.

Defining the win. Instead of trying to address all 35 outcomes at once, we dedicated meaningful time during the consultation to the Surprise Factor and Strength Leverage exercises described in Chapter 3, then reached group consensus. The leadership selected three dimensions to guide a six-week strategy: Spiritual Formation, Personal Wholeness, and Healthy Relationships. We split into three breakout groups, each focusing on outcomes within one dimension and considering the same four questions: why do we struggle with this as a group, how might we address it in our church, how do people typically develop a low score here, and how could deeper biblical teaching help listeners grow? Those breakout discussions, more than any spreadsheet, helped us determine the final eight outcomes for the series: Love for the Word of God and Listening to the Voice of God (Spiritual Formation); Positive Self-Image, Hope for the Future, and Managing Negative Emotions (Personal Wholeness); and Forgiveness, Sensitivity to the Marginalized, and Hospitality (Healthy Relationships).

The "Sensitive to the Marginalized" outcome deserves its own mention. It had the lowest score of any outcome in the Healthy Relationships dimension, and the breakout discussion around it ran long — leaders had genuinely different instincts about how this biblical category applies inside today's cultural conversation. Rather than avoid that tension, we chose to preach directly into it.

Building the team. Our executive team (myself, our Stow campus pastor, our executive pastor of finance and administration, and our executive pastor of family ministry), with input from board members, turned the consultation's raw input into a finished strategy. We built a six-week sermon series called *Welcome to My New Life*, with each message built around specific texts: James 1:18–27 for Love for the Word of God; 1 Kings 19:1–13 and Luke 8:4–8 for Listen to the Voice of God; Ephesians 2:1–7 and Romans 12:1–8 for Positive Self-Image; James 5:7–16 and Psalm 23 for Hope for the Future and Managing Negative Emotions; Luke 15:11–24 and Matthew 18:21–35 for Forgiveness; and Acts 2:5–12 for Sensitivity to the Marginalized and Hospitality. I created four sermon-based small group lessons to reinforce the series, organizing the eight outcomes into four weeks of discussion material. This aligned every small group across both campuses around the same discipleship focus, either immediately after the sermon or the following week.

What changed by early summer? We invited the same leadership cohort to retake the DDA after the series concluded. One limitation is worth acknowledging: our assessment cycle was only four months, much shorter than the nine-to twelve-month rhythm recommended in this book. Even so, the results were encouraging.

Every one of the eight targeted outcomes showed improvement. Spiritual Formation increased from 70 to 78 percent (an 8-point increase) with Love for the Word of God climbing 9 points (from 71 to 80 percent) and Listen to the Voice of God, our lowest initial score, rising 6 points. Personal Wholeness improved 7 points, from 68 to 75 percent, with Positive Self-Image increasing 8 points; Hope for the Future and Manage Negative Emotions each grew by 4 points, a modest gain I take seriously rather than dismiss. One sermon and one group lesson may have moved the needle, but emotional patterns this deeply rooted clearly need more than a single series to change fully. Healthy Relationships increased 5 points overall, and Sensitive to the Marginalized (the outcome that sparked the most leadership debate) saw the greatest improvement within that dimension, from 62 to 70 percent, an 8-point rise that can be seen as strong evidence that direct biblical teaching helped people work through disagreement rather than avoid it.

The Spillover Effect, in our own data. The most significant lesson from our data came from the areas we did not directly target. We focused our strategy on three of the five dimensions, yet Vocational Clarity experienced the largest gain of the entire project, increasing 10 points from 67 to 77 percent. Two outcomes within that dimension, Teamwork and Seek the Common Good, began as the lowest scores in the initial assessment at 58 percent. Teamwork increased 8 points and Seek the Common Good increased 12 points.

Those gains were possibly influenced less by the sermon series itself and more by a matrix leadership structure we put in place during the same season, along with a guiding question shared at the consultation from Jamé Bolds (*Life in 5D* co-author and my co-lead pastor at Victory): “How do we glorify God and bless the zip codes we serve?”

Economics & Work also increased by 5 points, though the data included important complexity. Workplace Ethics, the highest-scoring outcome in the initial assessment at 82 percent, declined slightly to 79 percent. It remained the strongest outcome in the dimension, but the decrease was a reminder that honest evaluation celebrates progress while acknowledging areas that need continued attention. Stewards of the Environment remained the lowest-scoring outcome in the entire assessment, a gap we identified rather than explained away.

What We Learned

Four lessons stand out from this project.

First, alignment between preaching and groups matters. Leaders consistently observed that the sermon provided the biblical foundation, while small groups created the essential relational environment where people could process, apply, and live out what they heard. The Crowd and

Circle principle from Chapter 6 became visible in practice: transformation requires both biblical teaching and relational processing.

Second, the group you assess matters. Limiting the initial assessment to our leadership team was the right choice given the academic timeline, but it also presented a drawback. The results highlighted how our most committed leaders were growing, not necessarily how the average attendee across two campuses was progressing. Churches with more time should consider starting with the entire congregation.

Third, discipleship growth is interconnected. We intentionally focused on only three dimensions, yet the untargeted dimension of Vocational Clarity showed significant unexpected growth. The spillover effect suggests that when churches address discipleship holistically, growth in one area can strengthen others.

Fourth, the most significant outcome may have been cultural rather than numerical. During the project, I moved from being the lead pastor at the church where the strategy was executed to serving as the lead pastor at Victory Church in Yorktown, Virginia. What stood out most was how effectively the Grow Team and executive team continued their work without relying on me. The clearest sign of success was not just improved assessment scores, but a leadership culture that had so internalized the process that no longer relied on a single pastor to keep operating.

This is what the five-step process produces when practiced honestly: not a perfect church or a flawless strategy, but a clearer understanding of what helps people grow. And sometimes, the most important evidence comes from the areas no one expected to change.

Chapter 9: Building a Culture, Not Just a Cycle

Making measurement a permanent rhythm rather than a one-time project.

The previous eight chapters describe the beginning of a process, not the completion of a project. When churches treat assessment and strategy as a one-time exercise, they miss the ongoing value of what this process is designed to produce.

Whole-life discipleship is not a program. It's a lens. The main shift this book encourages for a leadership team is to learn to look at every sermon, every small group, every ministry, every budget line, and every hiring decision through one recurring question: *Is what we're doing actually equipping this person to be more like Christ in every dimension of their life?* A program can be finished, but a lens is something you keep looking through.

Three ongoing commitments. It can be helpful to sum up the stance this requires in three words, intentionally chosen to be memorable enough to stick in a staff meeting eighteen months from now, long after this book is back on a shelf.

1

ENVISION

See the flourishing life Jesus intends for His disciples (John 10:10) and make whole-life maturity the driving vision behind every ministry decision your church makes.

2

EQUIP

Align your sermons, groups, ministries, and resources around the Five Dimensions and 35 Outcomes, giving every person, at every stage, a clear next step toward maturity.

3

ASSESS

Measure and celebrate progress on a recurring rhythm. Use the Discipleship Dynamics Assessment to evaluate progress, celebrate transformation, and continually refine your strategy, because a congregation keeps changing.

What to expect over time. Building a genuine discipleship culture, rather than just running a discipleship project, takes real time. Most churches our Discipleship Dynamics team has worked with begin to see significant, church-wide change over 12 to 24 months, as consistent, intentional disciple-making becomes part of the congregation's actual DNA rather than a single initiative layered on top of business as usual. And there is a genuine dividend on the other side of that patience. As disciples truly grow, evangelism becomes less like a program and more like an inevitability, because transformed lives remain the single most compelling witness a church has to the hope and abundant life found in Jesus Christ.

Where to start, if you haven't yet. If this book has done its job, you don't require a complex launch plan, just five straightforward steps, taken in order, over the next year:

The 5-Step Discipleship Roadmap

Step	Action	Core Objective
1. DIAGNOSE	Read the Group Report	Understand and name your congregation's true strengths and blind spots.
2. DEFINE	Set Focus Areas	Select 1–2 key dimensions to grow rather than trying to change everything.
3. PLAN	Form Discipleship Grow Team	Gather 3–5 trusted leaders to share the load and champion implementation.
4. IMPLEMENT	Deploy Across Zones	Integrate target outcomes into sermons (Crowd), groups & ministries (Circle), and 1-on-1s (Mirror).
5. EVALUATE	Re-assess & Celebrate	Review progress in 9–12 months, celebrate life-change, and then refine strategies for the next season.

Thank you for caring enough about the people in front of you to trade a comfortable guess for an honest answer. May you see the life of Jesus Christ grow, in a way you can see and name, in every person you have the privilege of leading.

APPENDIX

Introducing the DDA to Your Congregation

Before your congregation takes the assessment, they need to understand what it is — and what it isn't. Use the frameworks below to frame the DDA as an invitation, not an evaluation.

How Many Participants Do You Need?

To ensure a statistically accurate Group Report, aim for these participant numbers based on church size:

Church Size	Recommended Participants
50 adult members	30 participants
100 adult members	60 participants
200 adult members	100 participants
500 adult members	150 participants
800 adult members	165 participants
1,000 adult members	175 participants
5,000+ adult members	200 participants

The assessment is designed for ages 17+. Consider complementary content for children and teens that aligns with the 5 Dimensions, to help youth begin developing whole-life discipleship patterns before adulthood.

Sample Launch Statement for Your Congregation

What to Say When Introducing the DDA

“Church family, our passion is not just filling seats on Sunday, but equipping you to live a flourishing, Christ-centered life every day. To help us disciple you more effectively, we're using the Discipleship Dynamics Assessment.

This isn't a test, and you can't fail it. It's simply a snapshot of where you are today and a tool to help you discover where God may be inviting you to grow. You'll receive a private, confidential 10-page personal report.

Our leadership team will only see anonymous church-wide averages—we'll see the big picture, not individual scores.

The assessment takes about 15–20 minutes. Please complete it honestly, prayerfully, and without overthinking your answers. Your honesty will help you grow and help us better equip our church to make mature, whole-life disciples.”

DDA Kickoff Presentation Outline

Use this 12–15 minute presentation framework to launch the DDA with your congregation:

Slide	Key Message / Script Starter
Slide 1: The Hook	"We've all felt it. By every traditional measure, we're a successful church. But one question keeps me up at night: Are we actually making disciples?"
Slide 2: The Mission	Jesus called us to make disciples, not attenders. Discipleship changed how people worked, spent money, and handled conflict. Our mission hasn't changed — but our world has.
Slide 3: The Problem	We have more resources than any generation in history, yet many feel spiritually thin. We've been guessing about our growth. It's time for clarity.
Slide 4: Introducing the DDA	Not a personality test. Not a spiritual gift inventory. A mirror — measuring 35 biblical outcomes across 5 dimensions: Spiritual, Personal, Relational, Vocational, Economic.
Slide 5: The Plan	Everyone takes the assessment (20 min). You receive a private 10-page report. We won't judge you — we'll guide you.
Slide 6: The Stakes	Imagine a church where Sunday worship fuels Monday ethics. Where every member knows exactly how to grow. Where we're not guessing — we're knowing.
Slide 7: The Call to Action	Pull out your phone. Scan the QR code. This week, take the assessment. Your results are private, but our growth as a church starts with your honesty.

Member FAQ: What Is the DDA?

Share this with your congregation as a printed handout, bulletin insert, or digital resource.

What exactly is the DDA?

The DDA (Discipleship Dynamics Assessment) is a scientifically validated, biblically-based maturity map. Unlike a personality test that tells you who you are, the DDA tells you where you are — measuring 35 specific outcomes across 5 dimensions of life: Spiritual, Personal, Relational, Vocational, and Economic.

Is this a 'spiritual report card'? Can I fail?

No. You cannot fail the DDA. Discipleship is a journey, not a competition. Whether you score in the Awakening Zone or the Legacy Zone, the goal is simply your next step. Every score is an invitation for God's grace to work in a specific area.

Who sees my results?

Your privacy is our priority. You receive a detailed, private 10-page personal report. Church leadership only sees the anonymous Group Report — the congregation's averaged scores. They see the forest, not your individual tree. Your specific answers and scores are never shared with the pastor or staff without your explicit permission.

How long does it take?

About 15–20 minutes. We recommend taking it in a quiet space where you can be honest with yourself and God.

Why are there questions about my job and finances?

Because Jesus cares about your work and your money. Biblical discipleship isn't just about Sunday — it's about how you live on Monday. The DDA helps you bridge the gap between Sunday worship and everyday life.

I've been a Christian for 30 years. Do I need this?

Legacy Christians are among our most important participants. Your scores help identify where our community is strongest, and your maturity can guide others. Even after 30 years, there is always a next step toward Christlikeness.

What happens after I finish?

You immediately receive your Individual Report. We encourage you to: (1) Read it — reflect on the Surprise Factors; (2) Pray over it — ask God which one outcome He wants to grow this season; (3) Share it (optional) — discuss with a trusted friend, spouse, or mentor.

Ready to take the assessment?

Visit: www.discipleshipdynamics.com

It takes 15–20 minutes. Your results are private. Your growth is the goal.

Launch Email Template

Subject: Where We Are Growing Together: Our New Series & Small Groups

Dear **[Church Family / Name]**,

Over the past few months, so many of you took a significant step in your personal walk with Christ by completing the Discipleship Dynamics Assessment (DDA). You received your individual reports, giving you a fresh, honest look at your personal growth across key spiritual dimensions.

When we look at our church's aggregated group results, a clear and inspiring picture emerges. We see incredible strengths to celebrate—and specific, actionable areas where God is inviting us to grow deeper together as a church family.

Starting on **[Series Start Date]**, we are launching a new church-wide preaching series: **[Series Title]**.

Throughout this series, every Sunday message will target key dimensions from our DDA outcomes. But church doesn't stop on Sunday morning—we want to take these truths deeper into community.

How to Engage

- **Look Back at Your DDA Report:** Re-open your individual DDA profile this week to reflect on where God is speaking to you.
- **Join a Small Group:** Whether you're already in a group or looking for a new one, our groups will be using custom DDA study guides designed to match each week's sermon outcome.
- **Grow Together:** Experience honest, focused conversations about spiritual formation alongside brothers and sisters on the exact same journey.

[Button / Link: Find a Small Group or Sign Up Here]

In Christ,

[Pastor / Leadership Team Name]

Sunday Stage / Announcement Script (1–2 Minutes)

"If you took the Discipleship Dynamics Assessment recently, you know it gave us a powerful mirror into our individual walk with God. But when we put all our assessments together, God gave our leadership team a clear roadmap for where He wants to take us as a congregation.

Starting on [Start Date], we are diving into a brand-new series called [Series Title]. Each week, we'll take a deep dive into the core dimensions and outcomes identified in our church's DDA data.

To get the most out of this season, we want every single person in a small group. Our existing groups and newly formed groups will be stepping through weekly DDA study guides

designed to turn Sunday sermons into real, daily transformation. Head over to [Church App / Information Desk / Website] today to grab a group or find out more."