

# Measuring Discipleship



# #SEE<sup>ALL</sup>THE PEOPLE

*“We cannot disciple people that we are not in relationship with. Discipleship begins with relationship.”*

**Rev. Junius Dotson**

General Secretary, Discipleship Ministries

**[www.SeeAllThePeople.org](http://www.SeeAllThePeople.org)**

**This booklet is a companion piece to:**

*Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations*

by Rev. Junius B. Dotson

# Table of Contents

Is It Working?	2
Outcomes: Beginning with the End in Mind	5
Counting and Measuring	10
Measuring What Matters – for You	15
What Can't Be Counted, But Definitely Matters: The Power of Story	25
Conclusion	29

---

Measuring Discipleship Copyright © 2020 Discipleship Ministries

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the Common English Bible (CEB). Copyright © 2011 Common English Bible. Used by Permission.

# Is It Working?

How do we know?

We've added new Sunday school classes to help people build a stronger foundation for faith. Is it working? How do we know? We've developed new outreach to our community. Is it working? How do we know? We've added a contemplative worship service to reach new people. Is it working? How do we know?

"Is it working?" and "How do we know?" can be tough questions for churches. We want to help disciples grow, but it's difficult to know if we are helping.

Meanwhile, we live in a world that is obsessed with metrics. From the dozens of business surveys that bombard our in-boxes every week to local police hoping to spot patterns in crime data that will help them keep neighborhoods safe, it seems like everyone is convinced that numbers and math can answer all our questions and problems. Yet without thoughtful use, numbers may mislead us, especially in this time of great cultural change.

A simple example: In the church, "regular" worship attendance has long been understood to mean worshipping three

to four times a month, and that “regular” attendance was considered a standard measure of a congregation’s health and commitment to discipleship. In fact, it was understood that when worship attendance increased, other positive changes would follow. This meant that the dynamic relationship between worship and other congregational activities and measures was similar to an economic concept called a “virtuous cycle” or a series of events that beneficially affects other events, which in turn beneficially affect the first events.<sup>1</sup>

Yet today, many people see worshipping once or twice a month as active attendance, and the relationship between their worship attendance and other discipleship practices is less clear. Given that, can average weekly worship attendance tell us what we need to know about the total life of discipleship within our congregations? Probably not. In fact, in these changing times, worship attendance may decline while participation in small groups or outreach ministries or even giving increases. The numbers have been decoupled. The virtuous cycle—if it exists—no longer begins with worship. And so, as we strive to focus on discipleship, we cannot assume it begins with attendance.

If we want to make sure we are making a difference, we need to expand and adjust our ways of thinking about numbers and effectiveness. We’re going to work on do-

---

<sup>1</sup> See David L. Odom, “Creating Virtuous Cycles,” Faith & Leadership blog, August 22, 2013, accessed February 24, 2020. <https://faithandleadership.com/creating-virtuous-cycles>

ing just that in the pages ahead, basing our efforts on a few simple approaches that will help us determine important indicators, or markers, for growth in discipleship. And, we'll explore several tools that we can use to measure progress on the indicators. In terms of approaches, we'll emphasize:

- Focusing on outcomes.
- Understanding the difference between counting and measuring—and increasing our attention to measuring.
- Measuring what truly matters.
- Attending to those things that really can't be counted or measured but are critical aspects of a life of discipleship and a healthy discipleship system.

So, let's begin!

# Outcomes: Beginning with the End in Mind

---

*“If you don’t know where you are going, you might wind up someplace else.”*

– BASEBALL LEGEND YOGI BERRA<sup>2</sup>

---

We should always begin by thinking about where we want to end—the best first step to knowing if something we are doing is (or isn’t) “working.”

That’s because “working” really means that what we *do* is getting us where we want to *go*. And to figure out if this is happening, we have to *know* where we are trying to go. This is called developing *outcomes*. Outcomes are the changes we are trying to accomplish in our own lives, in our churches, and in our communities. Outcomes are usually understood as changes in knowledge, attitude, behavior or condition, but they don’t have to be limited to these.

---

<sup>2</sup> Of course, it could be a myth that Yogi Berra said this. But they are wise words no matter from where they come.

By simply naming and describing where we want our discipleship system to lead—in other words, the change we are seeking—we already have a picture of where we want to go, and we probably have some sense of how close or far away that is.

Clearly defined outcomes are critical for several reasons:

- They make our work purposeful. When we can name and describe the change we feel called to make in our churches, our people and our communities, we gain a sense of purpose, identity and meaning.
- They force us to confront the danger of “busyness” that may not get us anywhere.
- They invite us to ask what needs to happen to move us from our present reality to the change we are seeking to make.

Outcomes are, therefore, an act of stewardship. Identifying our outcomes “means making a choice among an array of possibilities to which we can direct the limited attention and resources available to us at any given time.”<sup>3</sup>

Remember Jesus’ description of the kingdom of heaven being like “one precious pearl,” so valuable that the merchant who found it “sold all that he owned” to buy it?<sup>4</sup> In the

---

<sup>3</sup> Gil Rendle, *Doing the Math of Mission: Fruits, Faithfulness, and Metrics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014) 48.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 13:45-46, Common English Bible.



parable, the merchant discerned wisely that the pearl was the *one thing* to which he should devote all of his resources, that it was worth letting go of everything else. This is the type of discernment we are called to make when we consider what we should do, to live out who we should be.

And it is worth noticing the audience for this parable. Although Jesus has just been sharing many parables of the kingdom of heaven with a large audience—the crowd of thousands who were fed with a few loaves and fishes—Jesus tells this particular parable *after* he leaves the crowd, just to his disciples, those he called to steward the Gospel in the world.

Today, we are those stewards, called to discern the pearl of greatest value in our own churches and communities. That's the outcome toward which we should travel. Practical theologian Kathleen Cahalan points out that “to be stewards of God’s mysteries and grace means that we are entrusted with Christ’s mission on earth. We are called upon to care for the tradition’s resources. To keep alive the stories, practices and ways of life that have faithfully sustained Christians for generations.”<sup>5</sup> Determining outcomes is the foundation of caring for the tradition’s resources.

But we aren’t just talking about any outcomes. Instead, in the local church the “end” should be local and transforming. While the mission of the United Methodist Church as

---

<sup>5</sup> Kathleen Cahalan, *Projects that Matter: Successful Planning and Evaluation for Religious Organizations* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2003) 86.

a whole is to make disciples for the transformation of the world, disciple-making must reflect local contexts and local theologies. That means that the outcomes you discern for your church should address local needs, disparities, or opportunities.

That's what we tried to do in the first church I served. This church was in a small, post-industrial town with an aging population that represented the town's earlier, brighter days, and an emerging population of underprivileged families and children. The opportunities for economic advancement were limited, and most parents worked in low-paying service jobs and had little time or money to enrich their children's lives.

My congregation, though far from wealthy, had received an extremely generous bequest from a deceased member. We believed the difference God was calling us to make was to ensure that parents and children in the town saw our church as a place of welcome and care for their families. This was needed in our challenged community. And so our discipleship process revolved around inviting, welcoming and offering a place to grow in Christ for working-class families. That was our *one thing*, our pearl of great value, to which we devoted most of our time and energy, and much of our financial resources.

We employed a part-time family minister who connected with families in the town through school events and other organizations. We started a day-time play group for stay-at-home parents and young children. We sent more than a

dozen children from *outside* the church to our conference camp every summer, and we invited the families to picnics at the church before and after camp. At the picnics, we promoted our vacation Bible school, which would happen later in the summer, in the evenings so that working families could more easily attend. We increased our discipleship offerings for whole families, for moms, dads, teens and young children.

# Counting & Measuring

So—was it working? In one sense, definitely: We had thoughtfully determined a meaningful outcome that addressed a local need and to which we were willing to devote our resources. That faithful stewardship alone represented growth in discipleship for the congregation.

In other ways—I wasn't sure. It seemed like it. More people were at church. More money was in the collection plate. The old-fashioned virtuous cycle of church growth seemed to be working. But were we making a difference in peoples' lives? That I wasn't sure about. I didn't know it then, but now I understand that I was realizing that simple numbers couldn't reliably evaluate discipleship. Basically, we were counting – but we also needed to be measuring.

What's the difference? Counting is about numbers. It tells us “how many”—how many worshipers, how many children, how many dollars. Measuring is about change. It tells us “how far”—the distance between where we started, and the end that we are reaching toward. Both counting and measuring are important, but in different ways

and for different reasons.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, we needed to know “how many” to have an accurate picture of the life of the church. Remember: Jesus cared an awful lot about the one sheep that was out of the fold, as well as all the rest that were inside it. But it also was important to know “how far” we had come toward our goal. The pearl of great value for us was the goal of making our church a place and a people that all types of parents would view as supportive and loving for them and their children. We *thought* we were well on our way—but we weren’t sure.

Why does it matter? Well, if we had known “how far” we had come, it would have:

- Helped us to see what was supporting that goal, and what was impeding it, and how we might fine-tune our family-centered discipleship system to bring us closer to our goal.
- Continued to inspire the people who were working hard to make the system work.
- Affirmed to new families that we cared about them as whole people – not just as numbers.
- Provided a solid foundation of knowledge for continuing the system when personnel—lay and clergy—changed.

---

<sup>6</sup> Rendle, 14-15. I am deeply indebted to Rendle’s work for helping me to understand this critical distinction.

So how could we have determined “how far” we had come toward our goal?

Ideally, before you develop your discipleship system, you will think about how you will assess the system. Even if you have not done so, however—as we had not at my small-town church—you can still develop tools to measure your church’s progress. Here’s one.

## ***Journey Map***

For example, a helpful tool from the evaluation field is a *journey map*. A journey map visualizes the journey that a person or a group takes to achieve a goal—in our case, authentic discipleship. Used in a congregational setting, the journey map is based on the idea that we must account for rational, emotional, spiritual and sensory layers of human experience to truly understand a person or group’s journey. Journey maps can:

- Show pain points and strength areas
- Help leaders who focus in one area of discipleship or church life understand the whole system
- Build empathy and understanding for those being served<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Katherine Haugh and Jenny Nulty, “Journey Mapping: Inspiring Dynamic Participation through Visual Storytelling.” AEA365, American Evaluation Association blog, February 23, 2020. Accessed February 24, 2020. <https://aea365.org/blog>

And by mapping the ways that a person engages with a congregation, such as participating in small groups, drawing on resources and worshipping online or in person, giving or receiving support, volunteering in missions, leadership and teaching, etc., we can see patterns among the various aspects of congregational life. We can ask which activities and practices seem to lead newcomers into deeper engagement in the church. Which seem to accompany spiritual growth? Which seem likely to contribute to meaningful human connections?

Once we have the journey map in front of us and can see the patterns of engagement and places of entry into our discipleship system, we will notice places that invite assessment and measurement. As we do so, we should keep in mind the distinction between counting and measuring, and try, whenever possible, to focus on measuring.

For instance:

- Generosity. Focus less on the number of dollars given in a particular year, and more on change over time. Is giving to missions, for example, increasing from year to year?
- Membership and presence: Focus less on the number of members, and more on professions of faith—in particular, whether professions of faith are increasing over time.
- Worship attendance: Focus less on the number and more on the trend.

- Invitations: Ask people to inform the church when they invite others to worship, and track the invitations that lead to baptisms and professions of faith.
- Community engagement: Track relationships built as a result of training in community engagement.



# Measuring What Matters – for You

---

*“Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”*

– SOCIOLOGIST WILLIAM BRUCE CAMERON

---

For our purposes we’ll substitute “measured” for “counted” and “matters” for “counts”—but the point is the same. We need to focus our time and energy on gathering truly meaningful data that tell the story of our congregation’s life of discipleship.

And to measure what matters, we begin by acknowledging that the church is the means to an end—world-changing discipleship—not the end itself. It’s the vehicle for transformation. And we must do two more things:

- First, ask good questions. What are the markers of a disciple? If the end for us is authentic discipleship and world transformation—what might that look like in our corner of the world? How will we know that we are bearing witness to the world-changing love of Jesus

# DISCIPLESHIP SYSTEM SAMPLE

(adapted from the work of Phil Maynard)

	Searching	Exploring	Beginning	Growing	Maturing
<b>Worship</b>	Searching for something more.	Invited by a friend to attend worship. Attend sporadically.	Begin to worship regularly; becoming more aware of God in each day.	Attend regularly and begin to recognize daily moments of worship.	Begin to honor and worship everyday in work and play; inviting others to worship.
<b>Community</b>	Searching for genuine community.	Begin to feel strangely drawn to these followers of Jesus and feel warm acceptance by them.	Move from receiving gracious hospitality to offering it to others in every day life.	Begin to look for ways to love, accept, and relate to others in the same way that the church and God lovingly welcomed you.	Seek to build relationships with others and share with them the life and community that you have found in God.
<b>Spiritual Practices</b>	Wonder about the Bible and if there are ways to experience God.	Feel drawn to the story of God's love and begin to explore scripture.	Begin to pray and read scripture regularly; being open to God.	Move to exploring spiritual disciplines; drawn closer to God on a daily basis.	Enjoy and practice spiritual disciplines, and begin to show others how to use them to grow in faith and be drawn closer to God.
<b>Generosity &amp; Service</b>	Wonder if there is more to life than making money and selfish gain.	Begin to give occasionally in worship and try a service project at church. See other people making a difference in the lives of others and seek to be a part of that.	Begin to give regularly of money, time, and talents; understand Christ's invitation to serve others and discover how God has gifted you to do this.	Try tithing my resources, time, and talent to God through the ministries of the church; exploring ways to use one's gifts, talents, and passions.	Tithe and occasionally give beyond when led by God; begin to restructure life and resources to join Jesus in mission to others.
<b>Christ-Like</b>	The life and teachings of Jesus are intriguing.	Exploring the life of Jesus on my own by reading the Bible and attending my first Bible study.	Accept the call to follow Jesus and commit to the church; seek to become like Jesus and serve others.	Begin to daily apply the teachings of Jesus in everyday life.	Partner with God and invite others to explore the life and teachings of Jesus.

**Prevenient Grace**

**Justifying Grace**

**Sanctifying Grace**

Christ? Transformation doesn't often happen quickly. What might be some early indicators (or markers) for transformation?

- Have meaningful conversations within and outside the church. Who outside the church should be noticing the impact you have named? For instance: Are principals, teachers, judges, public health professionals, police officers, social workers or others in the community seeing evidence of your congregation's impact? Does it reflect authentic discipleship? And if the signs are not evident—ask yourselves why not.<sup>8</sup>

## ***Discipleship System***

If you need a place to begin these conversations, another useful tool is the discipleship system example in *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations*<sup>9</sup>, which was adapted from the work of Phil Maynard (see page 16).

The grid shows stages of discipleship in the areas of worship, community, spiritual practices, generosity and service, and Christ-likeness. For each area, there is a description of each stage, beginning with “searching” and leading to “matur-

---

<sup>8</sup> David Odom, “Name Your Mission, Develop Strategies, and then Evaluate Impact,” Faith & Leadership blog, September 5, 2017. Accessed February 15, 2020. <https://faithandleadership.com/dave-odom-name-your-mission-develop-strategies-and-then-evaluate-impact>

<sup>9</sup> Junius Dotson, *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations* (Nashville: Discipleship Ministries, 2017) 28.

ing.” Remember the idea that measuring is determining “how far” we have come? The grid helps clarify this. There is an obvious distance between “attending worship sporadically,” for example, and “worshiping every day in work and play, [and] inviting others to worship.”

As the church seeks to determine if its work is “working” consider what type of movement you have seen. Think about the breadth of your community, and ask yourself: Are searchers becoming explorers? Are explorers becoming beginning disciples? Have growing disciples become mature or maturing disciples? Authentic discipleship is really a cycle—so are mature disciples inviting and supporting explorers in their early steps? If you can see people in each area of this system, and movement between them, you are making progress.

One church that has worked to develop a system like this with clear outcomes in mind is First United Methodist Church of Land O'Lakes in Florida. FUMCLOL used their vision: Love God, Love Others, Serve the World to design a discipleship system offering multiple entry points that all lead toward their main outcome: Growing the kingdom. FUMCLOL's discipleship system is a circle, rather than a grid “so anyone can enter at any point,” but the principle holds: It's movement that matters.

“We're in an area of highly mobile, highly educated people. But they don't necessarily have a strong faith background. So we want anyone to feel like they can enter in any way, at any stage. Small groups, worship, service. We meet people

where they are,” said Tonya Stout, director of family ministries at FUMCLOL.

They adopted “Growing the Kingdom” as their main outcome because they looked at their core members and realized they had a great opportunity to make connections outside the church. They realized they were more interested in touching people throughout their lives than they were in the numbers coming in their door on Sunday morning.

“Measuring this is difficult,” Tonya said. “We’re used to counting people in the pews, and as tempting as that is, it doesn’t tell us much about how we’re impacting our community. Plus, we’re shifting our expectations. Rather than expecting people to come to our campus, we’re realizing we’ve got to take God to them.”

One of FUMCLOL’s current programs that fits this focus is an outreach ministry called 5th Quarter, in which FUMCLOL partners with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and their local high school to offer a safe place for food and fun after every home high school football game (and also at occasional “pops up” at other times of the year). 5th Quarter events provide a welcoming space and pounds of tater tots, burgers and more for hungry teens and others.

But this isn’t all about burgers and tots. Tonya says engaging in the partnership and hearing about it from others tells her they are reaching people outside the church.

The discipleship system at FUMCLOL encourages movement from “Exploring” to “Joining the Journey” to “Serv-

ing,” in any areas of congregational life. This reflects their understanding of a disciple as “one who knows Christ, is growing and serving in Christ, and is willing to share Christ with others.” Given that, they also look inward, asking individuals and families where they see themselves in the discipleship system and seeking to discern progress in the process.

So is it working? How do they know? Let’s consider two more tools: Likert scales and cascading questions. Both are used in the evaluation world, but also are presented for a congregational context in Gil Rendle’s *Doing the Math of Mission*.

## ***Likert Scales***<sup>10</sup>

A Likert scale allows you to determine “how much” of something: How much learning, how much attitude change, how much growth in an ability, etc., determined with individuals’ answers to survey-style questions. Respondents are asked to evaluate their experience or observations using criteria determined by the writer or writers of the question. Likert scales are familiar to most people because they are used frequently in consumer and other types of surveys. In a congregation, we might ask individuals to consider change in their spiritual lives due to engagement with some aspect of our discipleship system. Or we could ask about their observations of congregation-

---

<sup>10</sup> Rendle, *Doing the Math of Mission*, 129-131.

al life in comparison with standards we've researched on healthy congregations. Here are a few examples, using the common five-point scale of:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

Considering factors related to individual discipleship, we might ask questions like:

- My participation in this church over the past six months has helped me:
  - To grow in my prayer practice, so that I am turning to prayer in times of need
  - To grow in caring for those in my family in ways that honor who I see myself to be as a disciple of Jesus
  - To give of my financial resources more freely and joyfully

Considering factors related to congregational health, we might ask questions like:

- In this congregation over the past six months I have seen:
  - More focus on our mission in decision-making.
  - More attention to the role of spiritual gifts and call in leadership roles.

Within a congregation, the Likert scale will work best in an atmosphere of trust, where people feel like they can be honest. Even so, it would be best to use with the whole congregation or a reasonably sizable group, and to allow respondents to be anonymous if they choose. Outside of the congregation, it could be used with neighbors or a partner organization, to assess the persona that the congregation is displaying in the wider world.

## ***Cascading Questions***<sup>11</sup>

This tool can be used for both planning and evaluation. It is a series of questions that do not need to be asked in the exact order below, but that together will help a congregation shape its discipleship system around its own identity and context, develop metrics for accomplishment, learn from experience, and re-tool when necessary. Here are the questions:

- Who are we, now?
- Who is our neighbor, now?
- What does God call us to do, now?
- In order to address God's call, what difference do we believe God has called us to make in the next 3 to 5 years?
- What would it look like in 3 to 5 years if we are faithful and fruitful?
- How will we do it?

---

<sup>11</sup> Rendle, *Doing the Math of Mission*, 139-140.



- How will we measure our progress?
- What have we learned from our experience?
- What reshaping or changing do we need to work on because of what we have learned?

These are best used with a group of good leaders who can effectively represent all stakeholders—not so many that the discussion gets bogged down, but enough so that the congregation as a whole has a voice.

## ***Discipleship Measures that Matter***

The Likert scale and cascading questions tools lend themselves to use for more complex measures, like:

- Disciples leading other disciples into leadership. What is God calling your congregation to do, now, in the area of leadership? What will it look like if you are faithful and fruitful? How will you measure your progress? Etc.
- Similarly: Community engagement that builds relationships and creates opportunities to invite is a good candidate for cascading questions. Who is your neighbor, now? What is God calling you to do, now? What difference do you believe God has called you to make? How will you measure your progress? Etc.
- Systematic welcome of visitors: This invites assessment with a tool like a Likert scale. Ask those who have become “regulars” relatively recently (perhaps in the past year) to respond to a series of statements re-

lated to the congregation's ways of orienting, inviting and assimilating new people into the life of the church. For instance:

- The first time I entered the church I was greeted warmly within one minute. (Disagree strongly – Disagree – Neither agree nor disagree – Agree – Agree strongly)
- Sunday School/Small Group regular attendance: Connecting these with congregational care and service invites deeper reflection than just counting attendance. You could use cascading questions to discern a vision for group discipleship within the context of your whole discipleship system, planning for a Likert scale survey to measure progress and growth for individuals and the congregation as a whole.

Measures like these matter. They aren't about showing up. They're about *change*.

# What Can't Be Counted, but Definitely Matters: The Power of Story

Some things are difficult to count *or* measure – but matter a lot. This is where stories, especially stories of transformation, can be valuable. Collecting and sharing stories of transformation can help others understand more deeply what change is like. Stories can, for example, convey the richness of an outreach ministry's interactions with families in need, the human impact of a recovery ministry's engagement in faith formation, or the joy of growing into more faithful giving and what experiencing that joy has felt like for an individual or a family. Stories can be remarkably effective at clarifying detail, nuance and meaning and helping a listener or reader to gain empathy for another's experience.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, stories often have been used to try to “prove” things, like the value of a program that needs funding. To people who are on the receiving end of the story sharing, this can feel manipulative. Moreover, understanding what something is like doesn't mean that we understand how significant or widespread it is. Using stories in these ways can be irresponsible and even unjust. See Rendle, 79, for further discussion of this topic.

When I tell stories related to discipleship, I like to keep in mind the idea of a “thick description.” This is a social science practice often borrowed by pastoral theologians to help convey the depth of detail that is needed to truly tell a story.<sup>13</sup>

## ***A Sample Story***

A man walked into a church.

Yes, it’s a whole story. But it certainly doesn’t tell us much. In fact, we know only what happened—not why, not what that walk into the church represents for the man, not anything about anyone else who might have been a part of his decision to walk in, not what he sees, and how that resonates or conflicts with memories, hopes or other church experiences. Ultimately—we don’t know what the walk into the church means.

A thick description would tell us more about the man. We might learn about his family, his work, his history, what he “carried” into the church with him. It would tell us why he was there, what his eyes saw first, how that encouraged him to keep moving forward—or not. It would attempt to convey, on an emotional level, what the experience of entering the church was like. Stories well told help hearers to better understand their world and the experiences and needs of those in it. As such, they can be a tremendously

---

<sup>13</sup> Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2008) 197-199.

powerful tool in a congregation that wants to understand (not measure, but understand) the impact of their discipleship system, or to get to know one another or a community more deeply.

Returning, for example, to the topic of outcomes, we can use stories to help us look for strengths and weaknesses in our efforts. If we have recently added a welcoming ministry, for example, with the desired outcome being that every first-time visitor would be greeted within 20 seconds and offered coffee or guidance to worship or another gathering—what might we be able to learn if we asked the male visitor mentioned above to talk in detail about his experience of entering our building and what brought him there?<sup>14</sup>

## ***Indicators***

Some aspects of a discipleship system lend themselves especially well to assessing via story. For instance: Even as we try to move to meaningful measures, it is still important to continue our basic counts: Worship attendance, giving, hours donated to mission, participation in faith formation at all levels, etc. All of these are aspects of a discipleship system, but the numbers alone don't tell us much. How are they related, for instance? How does worship experience impact service in mission? How does giving impact Bible study? Collecting and sharing stories of

---

<sup>14</sup> Rendle, *Doing the Math of Mission*, 80. Rendle draws on the idea of “results mapping,” a detailed approach to story writing and collecting for evaluating social programs.

transformation will help leaders to better understand the people they serve, the needs they face, and the possibilities for impact.

In so doing, I recommend the approach of focusing on strengths. Focusing on strengths doesn't mean that we are dishonest. It simply means that we ask what it looks like when each aspect of our discipleship system is operating at its best. What is the dynamic in the room, for example, during a highly effective Bible study? How do people behave, interact, reflect? When have we seen this? What else was going on? Focusing on strengths in the context of story is an invitation to see where and when the "best" was operating, so that we can draw from this for the future.

# Conclusion

This booklet emerged from repeated requests from Discipleship Ministries stakeholders. Leaders were excited about a systems approach to discipleship. They wanted to emphasize the “why” that should shape all of congregational life. But for some, it was a slightly different way of thinking. They wanted a way to figure out if they were making progress. I hope this book has provided some tools for that. It’s important that we evaluate our work, not so that we can feel badly when we are not where we want to be, but so that we learn from our work, good, bad, and neutral. Susan Weber puts it like this:

“At the heart of the word “evaluation” is “value”—to *find the value of*. At its most effective, evaluation is an activity of valuing and learning from one’s work, not a judgment. Principles such as collaboration, inquiry, learning, curiosity and mutuality guide such an approach to evaluation.”<sup>15</sup>

May these values guide all that you do, so that your faithful discipleship will lead others to Christ. Blessings.

---

<sup>15</sup> Susan M. Weber, “Reframing Evaluation,” Faith & Leadership blog, March 19, 2019, accessed February 20, 2020. <https://faithandleadership.com/susan-m-weber-reframing-evaluation>



## **DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES**

The United Methodist Church

This and many other See All The People resources are  
available for download and purchase at:

**<https://store.umcdiscipleship.org>**

1908 Grand Avenue, Nashville, TN 37212

[UMCdiscipleship.org](https://umcdiscipleship.org)

877.899.2780

[info@UMCdiscipleship.org](mailto:info@UMCdiscipleship.org)

COM1003