

ON DISCIPLESHIP IN THE CHURCH

Adopted by the Session – April 2018

PURPOSE

A disciple is a learner or student devoted to learning a way of life. A Christian disciple is devoted to learning Christ Himself; thus, Christian discipleship is a process of transformative learning—wherein the knowledge of Christ, through the power of the Spirit, actually transforms our outward lives to be more like our Savior as we journey home to Him. This transformation begins as believers learn who Christ is and what He has commanded. Then, as we grow deeper in our knowledge of Him, we strive to live purposefully in His way, learning to stand firm in the face of culture and our own nature. As God’s truth radiates from inward to outward, our lives begin to look more like the pattern of Christ. The working out of God’s truth in our lives is helped by walking alongside fellow believers who can challenge us, help us, and extend gracious accountability where needed. As we grow together as faithful disciples of Christ, goodness and truth will naturally overflow in each of us in the church and in every area of her ministry, and we will be salt and light in the world.

PRINCIPLES

Christ Covenant Church endeavors to follow a biblical model of discipleship using these guiding principles:

- 1. God Empowers His Word.** Discipleship is a process, and God is present in every step. He enlivens the Word as it is preached, enables people to repent and believe, gives grace to believers to follow His example, and spurs them on to pray and persevere in faith. It is God who is the Power behind each part of this process. Thus, it is ultimately God who spreads His Word by the power of His Spirit.
- 2. God Uses People.** All His people. He is the Power, but He uses us as a means, as fellow workers in making more disciples. *Our service in discipling others is a service in which all believers should be engaged.* Thus, although we desire to see many serving in the church’s various ministries as each is gifted, it is for ALL to serve in discipling others. This is a quiet, often unseen, and sometimes uncomfortable service. Instead of filling ourselves, we rather deny ourselves, emptying ourselves into others and considering it more blessed to give than to receive. This is our delight, for to whom much is given, much is expected, and we, knowing what it is to need God’s grace and mercy, count it joy to point others toward Him. Thus, we share in the marvelous work of passing the baton of faith. May we never be a “dead end” to truth.
- 3. God Grows Us Together.** We grow together as a church, a great covenant family of families. God has intentionally designed his people to live as a body, intermingling male and female, sharing the energy of youth and the wisdom of age, and blessing one another with the gifts He has given to each. Because it is God’s design that we grow together in this way, we are free to forego the modern church’s trend of segregating its people according to age, gender, etc., and instead grow deeper by knowing one another and living life together. Rejoicing in God’s pattern for His covenant family, we seek to be a unified body, operating wherever possible with the full strength of male and female, young and old, people of every background, all working together in every ministry and effort.
- 4. God Calls for Perseverance & Prayer.** We must endeavor as believers to work out our faith and to contend for the faith that has been once for all delivered to us. Each of us ought to seize eagerly the opportunities for growing in faith and knowledge of God, that we might persevere well on our own journey and that we might also disciple others. As we seek to deepen our own faith and knowledge, we must also pray, for it is God alone who grows His people.

These biblical principles are at times foreign to the modern church, and Christ Covenant will look different from other churches by following them. Indeed this is our hope. May we seek after the pattern established by Christ and the apostles and not after the pattern of our day.

LAYERS OF DISCIPLESHIP

1. **Corporate Discipleship.** The church is first and foremost disciplined corporately as a whole body.
 - Preaching of the Word in Worship.** The pulpit is the anchor and tuning fork for discipleship in the church, serving to provide the impetus for discipleship and to guide the direction. Thus, worship is the main event each week, and it is rich in the ordinary means God has ordained (preaching of the Word, sacraments, and prayer) to disciple His people. Our worship is also rich with hymns, psalms, and Scripture as well as the teaching of creeds, confessions, and catechisms.
2. **Education & Shepherding.** Second, the pastor and elders also shepherd the church outside the pulpit.
 - a. **Sunday School.** This is a primary way our elders disciple the congregation. We offer 2 adult classes from our “Lifelong Learning Tracks” at all times throughout the school year. For children, we offer a robust and age appropriate curriculum led by gifted teachers.
 - b. **Elder Shepherding.** In addition to the pastor’s shepherding and counsel available to the entire congregation, there is a specific elder praying for and focused on each member of the church.
 - c. **The Covenanter Devotional.** Pastor Stewart writes the devotional in the Covenanter each week specifically for our congregation, and every man, woman, and child will benefit by reading it.
 - d. **Clapham Circles.** Small groups of believers meet monthly over dinner and discuss a relevant topic for Christians in our culture. Together they spur one another on in zeal for the Lord and His work.
3. **Focused Discipleship Groups.** Third, the Session will designate focused discipleship groups according to specific discipleship needs. Creating discipleship opportunities for focused groups allows the church to tailor some amount of church-led discipleship to special needs of specific groups. Although the elders oversee these groups, members are encouraged and empowered to propose studies and events they would like to lead. To do so, members should meet with the appointed Ministry Leader (listed below) to discuss details and dates 2 months or more prior to the event. The elders will review proposals at regular meetings.
 - a. **Children’s Discipleship** (Ministry Leader: Heather Essary)
 - b. **Youth Discipleship** (Ministry Leader: Jamie Johnson)
 - c. **Women’s Discipleship** (Ministry Leader: Rachel Van Eerden)
 - d. **Men’s Discipleship** (Ministry Leader: Neil Stewart)

These groups may have Bible studies (for men, women, or youth), book studies (“Dead Theologians Society” for men and “Hearthside” for women), topical studies (marriage, parenting, and “Lead With Character”), conferences, or even social gatherings.

We encourage involvement in these events in so far as they are beneficial to you, but these focused events should not supersede Corporate Discipleship (#1 above) or Education & Shepherding (#2 above).

Likewise, focused discipleship groups will not supervise other areas of the church’s ministry in areas of worship, evangelism, hospitality, mercy, or stewardship. Rather, all members of the congregation, old and young, male and female, will serve alongside each other in the church’s various ministries as each is gifted.

4. **Personal Discipleship.** This category is not “scheduled” by the church, but our pastor and elders would be delighted to help you grow personally in your faith as you work out your own salvation. To this end, we entreat you to persevere in prayer, to seek to know God better by being in His Word, and to work to conform your life more to the pattern of Christ. This last is often best done in mentoring relationships— one-on-one discipleship opportunities with fellow believers where you serve in some relationships as mentor and some as learner. If you would seek to grow deeper in your prayer life, Scripture reading, or mentoring relationships with other Christians, please ask your pastor or an elder for good resources.