

EQUIPPED

A PATH FOR DISCIPLESHIP

To understand our ministry at Ashland, we have three foundational documents: Witness, Essentials, and Equipped.

In our Witness Guide¹, we explain our identity as witnesses of Christ, answering the question, “Who am I as a follower of Christ at Ashland Church?”

Our Essentials² serve as a map for everyone at Ashland. The Essentials answer the question, “Where am I following Jesus in the church?”

Our Equipped Guide seeks to answer the question, “What does it look like to faithfully follow Jesus as a witness within the Essentials at Ashland?” We believe the answer to this question is found in one word: Equipped.

Equipped is the result of faithful discipleship in the local church.

What is discipleship?

Discipleship is the process or activity of following Jesus.

Our prayer is that everyone at Ashland faithfully follows Christ. We firmly believe that effective discipleship happens *primarily* within a local church community. In this document, we set forth our vision for discipleship in the local church, which we call Equipped.

Who are you? Disciples are witnesses

In our Witness Guide, we explain our identity as Christians in the local church. God has empowered us with His Spirit to witness the truth that Jesus is Lord.

“Witness” isn’t only what we do, but who we are in the world.

We also explain how the Spirit binds us together in the church as a collective witness. So what does this have to do with discipleship?

In the gospels, Jesus called his disciples to take up their cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). The call was to identify with Him, even if it meant dying with Him. In the book of Acts, we see what this call looks like after the resurrection. In Acts 1:8, Jesus promises his disciples that they will be His witnesses in the world by the power of the Spirit, declaring the truth of the resurrection. His call remains just as costly as taking up a cross. To be a witness means declaring the truth about Jesus despite suffering and in the face of death. The word for “witness” (which means “to tell the truth”) is the word “martyr.” Because so many of His followers died as witnesses, we associate martyrdom with dying for Jesus.

**“Witness” isn’t only
what we do,
but who we are
in the world**

¹ To access our Witness Guide, visit www.ashland.church/witness

² To access our Essentials, visit www.ashland.church/essentials

By the Spirit, the call to take up our cross and follow Jesus is lived out as we witness the gospel, no matter the cost. The book of Acts tells the story of how the collective witness of Jesus' disciples makes up the witness of the church. It's this story of discipleship that we continue today as the witness known as Ashland Church. We follow Jesus together as witnesses in the church.

Equipped: Discipleship in the local church

The church is designed by Jesus to equip us with everything we need as His followers.

Just as a body is made up of many parts who care for the whole, the church has many members who care for one another. Discipleship involves each of us personally engaging in this care through all the gifts, skills, and resources Jesus has provided in the church to equip us as witnesses in the world.

Ephesians 4:11-16 gives us a vivid description of the process of discipleship in the church.

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,
¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

At the heart of this passage is the word equipped. "Equipped" means to be prepared, supplied, or outfitted for a task. Equipped is used to describe discipleship at Ashland, the activity of each person following Jesus together as witnesses in the church.

But how are we equipped? Why should we be equipped?

Equipped with the Word of God

In Ephesians 4:11 we see a list of Word gifts that Jesus has given to the church: the prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. These leaders deliver to the church the faith or message that unites the church together (13). They speak the truth of God's revelation of Himself to the church in love (15). We have this revelation today through God's Word, the Bible.

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Equipped to Know Jesus

To know God we must know Jesus. The Bible is the story about Jesus. We cannot know Jesus apart from the Bible. The story of Jesus in the Bible is the Good News that through faith in Jesus we can know God personally. The church is equipped with the word of this gospel (the faith) that reveals to us Jesus, God's King, *the knowledge of the Son of God* (13).

- “[Jesus] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.” (Hebrews 1:3)
- “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell...” (Colossians 1:19)
- “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6)
- “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me...” (John 5:39)

Equipped to Live in the Gospel

The knowledge we're seeking is not generic Bible information. The *good news* in the Bible is that **Jesus' story becomes our story when we believe in Him.**

- His life becomes our life.
- His death becomes our death.
- His resurrection becomes our resurrection.
- His kingdom becomes our kingdom.

We're seeking to be equipped to grow and mature in the fullness of Christ; to live with all we have in Christ. (Ephesians 4:13).

We're striving to live in Christ.

“Equipped Discipleship” Defined

At this point, we can lay out a clear path of discipleship. We must be *following Jesus as witnesses in the local church by seeking to know Jesus according to His Word that we apply our life to in light of His gospel.*

Notice the benefits of discipleship within the church. Through discipleship, we are...

Equipped to Love the Church

The Word of God ultimately equips us to care for the church. We hear the truth in love that leads to strengthening the church in love. The more you apply your life to the story of Jesus, the more you will love the church like Jesus loves the church. Jesus, the Head, loves the body, the church - the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Following Him and being ready to die with Him means you grow in your sacrificial love for the church whom He loved and gave His life

for. Until His church is with Him, Jesus continually cares for His church by equipping us to love His church.

Equipped in Unity with the Church

Ephesians was written by Paul to deal with divisions between Jew and Gentile Christians. These two people groups rejected the idea that they both belonged to the same community. The Word equips us to see both Jews and Gentiles have access, by faith, to all the spiritual blessings in Christ through the gospel. This knowledge is fleshed out through love for those who are different from us.

We serve the church so that every member of the body will come to know all that they have in Christ. A culture of discipleship leads to unity with those who, apart from the gospel, we have nothing in common with and would otherwise avoid.

Equipped in Corporate Worship

Discipleship in the local church is central to our life in Christ. We are equipped to follow Jesus through and for the church. At Ashland, we believe this begins in corporate worship on Sunday as we hear the Word together.

Equipped in Worship with the Word

The primary means by which we're equipped with the knowledge of God in the Scriptures is through the preaching ministry of the church (Ephesians 4:12, 2 Timothy 4:1-2). The preaching ministry must be the centerpiece of all theology and biblical knowledge in the church. We will not be equipped with a deeper knowledge of God if the Word of God is not faithfully preached and received by the church in worship each week.

Central to the knowledge we have of Jesus in the Bible are His plans for the church. So, as we seek to become equipped through the Scriptures, we're not merely seeking to understand God's plan for our individual lives, isolated from others, but seeking to understand God's plan for our individual lives in the context of the church. We're seeking to apply our lives to His plans for the church. Personal Bible study where we apply our individual lives to the gospel is crucial. Nevertheless, what happens by hearing the Word of God preached to the church in worship cannot be replicated in any other context. The preached Word ties us together as unique individuals with all kinds of different gifts and abilities for one mission in the world.

Equipped Through BFGs

To help us apply our life to the preached Word, we have our small group ministry; Bible Fellowship Groups (BFGs). BFGs are contexts of gospel fellowship where the Word is strategically lived out through friendship and accountability. In BFGs, we begin to experience the unity of the faith preached. This is why we apply the sermon during our discussion in

BFGs. It's within our BFGs that we are mobilized to love the church as Jesus loved her through acts of service. Through our BFGs, we experience the unity that comes from these immediate acts of sacrificial service.

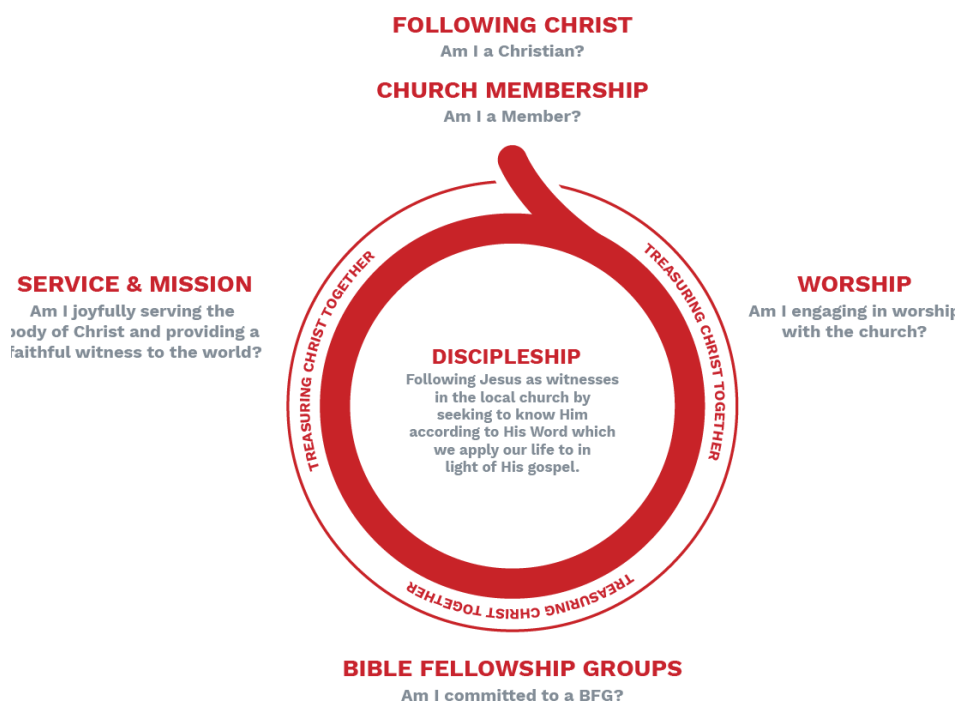
Discipleship Defined

In summary, we see that discipleship is...

***Following Jesus as witnesses in the local church
by seeking to know Him according to His Word
and applying our life to His gospel.***

On this path, we love the church. On this path, we experience unity that comes from every member loving the church.

The Essentials



We want to be specific about where and how discipleship is experienced at our church. The Essentials at Ashland provide us with a map of where we are in the process of discipleship.

Where do we follow Jesus? In the church. But what are the *specific* contexts where we are equipped as followers of Jesus? Our Essentials help us answer this question.

We are equipped as followers within the church through Membership, Worship, Fellowship (Bible Fellowship Groups³), and Serving. Where do we begin to follow Jesus in His love for the church? Covenant church membership. Where are we equipped with the knowledge we need from the Word to follow Jesus? In Worship. Where do we work to apply our lives to the Word in light of the gospel? Bible Fellowship Groups. Where do we follow Jesus to love the church as He loves her? Service. Where do we experience the unity of the church as followers of Jesus? Gospel friendships.

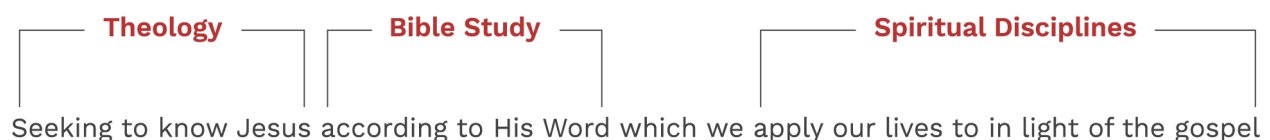
Are you seeking to know God, understand Scripture, and apply your life in...

- Accountable church membership?
- Worship?
- Fellowship in a small group (Bible Fellowship Groups)?
- Service?
- Gospel friendships?

Equipped Discipleship Path

Personal Growth

If discipleship is following Jesus as witnesses in the local church by seeking to (1) know Jesus (2) according to His Word, which we (3) apply our life to in light of His gospel, we must individually engage and grow in three personal disciplines. These are: Theology, Bible Study, and Spiritual Disciplines. They make up what we are calling the Equipped Discipleship Path.



1. **Theology** - the practice of studying God to *know Jesus*
2. **Bible Study** - the practice of studying the WORD to *know Jesus*
3. **Spiritual Disciplines** - patterns in which *we apply our lives to* the knowledge of God *in light of the gospel*

³ For more information about our Bible Fellowship Groups, visit www.ashland.church/bfg

Theology

Discipleship is following Jesus as witnesses in the local church by seeking **to know** Jesus through the study of God that is called **theology**.

And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)

Theology is the study of God. We study God to know Him. This study of God must never be generic. The aim of our knowledge of God is to know Jesus.

- Jesus is the Word, the explanation of God, in flesh (John 1:1 -4).
- Jesus is the expression of the invisible God (Hebrews 1:3).
- Jesus is the fullness of God in flesh (Colossians 1:19).

This knowledge of God is revealed to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ. *So all theology must be done in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Bible Study

Discipleship is following Jesus as witnesses in the local church by seeking to know Jesus **according to His Word through Bible study**.

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:27)

To know God, we must be equipped with the resources and skills to study the Bible. Our doctrinal statement, the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, clearly explains why the Bible should be our source and authority for knowing God:

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation. (Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 17:19; Joshua 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isaiah 34:16; 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16; 36:1-32; Matthew 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Romans 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21).

To adequately understand the Bible, it's crucial to understand that the Bible is a story about Jesus. In the story of the Good News of Jesus Christ, we seek to know God. Nothing in the

Bible can be understood or lived out apart from Jesus' life. We must read, study, and see all of the Bible in light of Christ.

Helpful Questions to Ask When Reading the Bible

- Where is Jesus and how do I by faith follow Him?
- What is Jesus teaching me about God?
- How is Jesus challenging my thoughts about God?
- How is Jesus seeking to change my heart?
- Where is Jesus calling me to follow Him in righteousness through sacrifice?

Spiritual Disciplines

Discipleship is following Jesus as witnesses in the local church by seeking to know Jesus according to His Word which we **apply our life to in light of His gospel through Spiritual Disciplines.**

"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel..."
(Philippians 1:27)

Knowledge for knowledge's sake is more dangerous than no knowledge at all. J. I. Packer in his book *Knowing God* says, "To be preoccupied with getting theological knowledge as an end in itself, to approach Bible study with no higher a motive than a desire to know all the answers, is the direct route to a state of self-satisfied self-deception" (22).

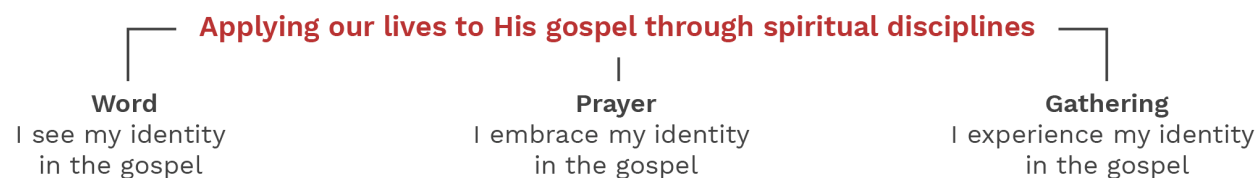
We pursue knowing God in His Word so that we might live before Him in light of this knowledge. The skill of applying our lives to what we know about God is cultivated through consistent routines and patterns that we call Spiritual Discipline. These patterns and routines include Bible reading, prayer, evangelism, fasting, and other disciplines.

"I do not believe that God intended the study of theology to be dry and boring. Theology is the study of God and all his works! Theology is meant to be lived and prayed and sung! All of the great doctrinal writings of the Bible...are full of praise to God and personal application to life." (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*: Second Edition, pg xxiii)

The work of applying our lives to the knowledge of Jesus is to remember **our identity is wrapped up in who He is and what He has done.** Spiritual Discipline refers to the patterns we follow in the local church to apply our lives to the gospel. Seeking to live out the knowledge of God apart from the gospel is both meaningless and burdensome.

We summarize the disciplines into three categories: **Word, Prayer, and Gathering.** We must establish in our lives rhythms and patterns of the Word, prayer, and gathering. Within these

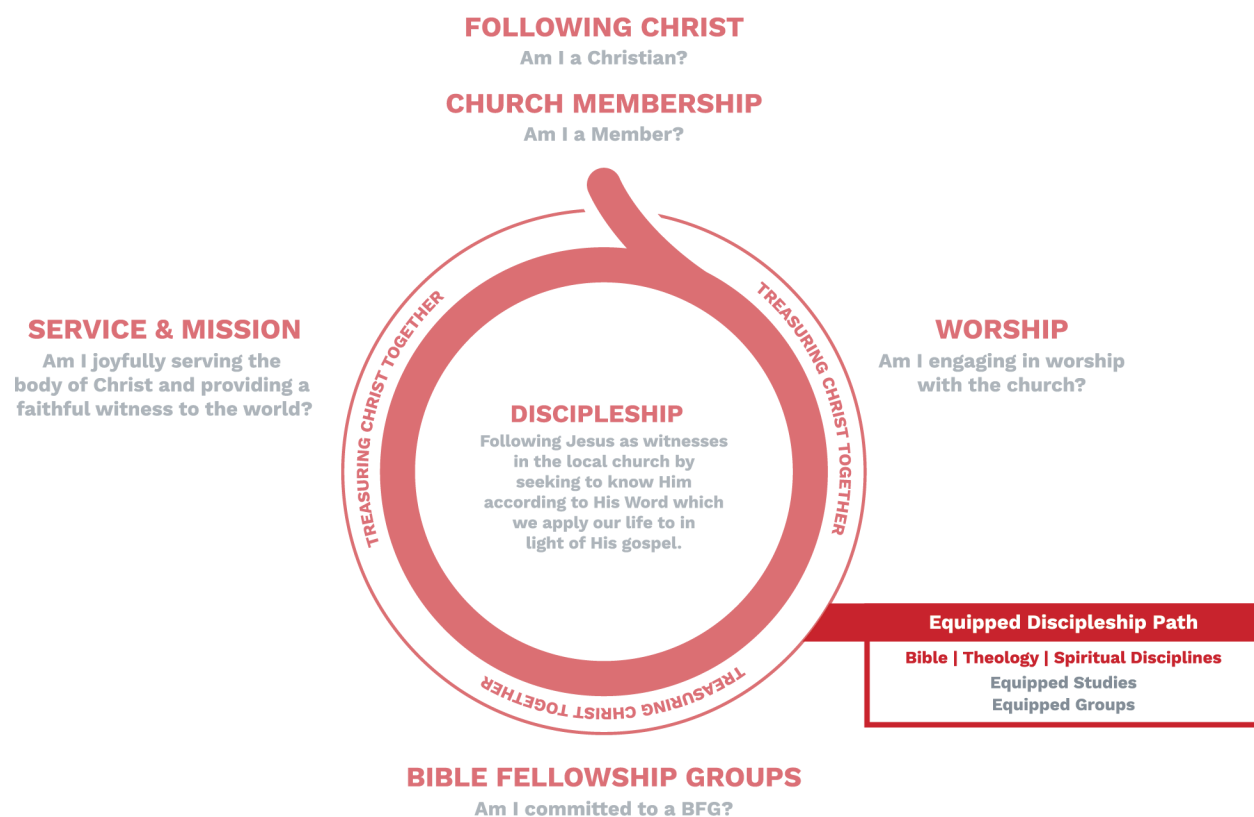
categories we find other disciplines but they start with *Daily Bible Study*, *Daily Prayer Times*, and *Gathering for worship* with the church body each Sunday.



“More Than Essential” Discipleship

We will naturally be engaged in these three disciplines within the Essentials at Ashland. The Equipped Path will always lead us in and to the Essentials. Our definition of discipleship assumes we are growing in these disciplines within the church.

As a follower of Christ, you may long to be equipped even more than the ordinary means provided by the Essentials. There are two more opportunities for deeper discipleship at Ashland: **Equipped Studies** and **Equipped Groups**.



Equipped Studies

Equipped Studies are church-wide discipleship trainings taught by our pastors and qualified guest teachers that focus on three disciplines: (1) Theology, (2) Bible, and (3) Spiritual Disciplines. They take place quarterly on Saturday mornings at the church building.

Equipped Groups

An Equipped Group is a gender-specific group of around 4-6 people that meets for 6-8 weeks to read and discuss a recommended book or resource approved by our pastoral staff. The goal is *to be equipped in the knowledge of God as revealed in His Scriptures while becoming skilled at applying His wisdom to our lives by the power of His Spirit in light of the gospel.*

We encourage everyone at Ashland to take *personal ownership* to walk down the Equipped Path through the study and practice of (1) Theology (2) Bible Study (3) Spiritual Disciplines. In Equipped Groups, we're able to intentionally engage in the Equipped Path on a more personal and deeper level.

What's the difference between an Equipped Group and an Equipped Study?

Equipped Studies are church-wide discipleship trainings taught by our pastors and qualified guest teachers. They are designed to systematically disciple and equip the church in core areas of Theology, Bible, and Spiritual Disciplines. They are held on Saturday mornings four times a year at the church building.

Equipped Groups are gender-specific small groups of 4-6 people that meet for 6 to 8 weeks to read and discuss a recommended book or resource approved by our pastoral staff. Equipped Groups are self-directed and can occur at any time throughout the year, but typically happen in the spring and fall.

Want to start or join an Equipped Group?

Visit www.ashland.church/equipped for more information. There you'll find the "how" to start or join a group, a host of other Frequently Asked Questions, and a complete list of resources, hand-picked by our pastoral staff.



ASHLAND
CHURCH

Visit ashland.church/equipped for more information.

There you'll find the "how" to start or join a group, a host of other Frequently Asked Questions, and a huge list of resources, hand-picked by our pastoral staff.