

Here are some personal accounts of "God things" that happened during Harvey:

- "I'll never forget Gina stepping in to help a neighbor while the rest of the neighborhood was standing around gawking. It gave us the opportunity to minister to this Mandarin-speaking family. An unexpected benefit was the great dumplings they brought over the next day!" - Mike Johnson, AL Founder/President
- "The reporter from Detroit spoke of his surprise over people coming together and sacrificing to help each other in the middle of this devastation. I was impressed that he said he had never seen this before." - Teri Watson, Accounts Assistant
- "A neighboring church invited our Chinese church members to a training session on how to help following a flood—mold remediation, and things like that. Despite little notice and difficult roads, a hundred people from our church showed up for that. That was a gift from God, because it helped equip us." - Ellie Tow, Executive Assistant

• "After Harvey hit, our church members called for help first to others in their community groups. And I witnessed that with my own community group, with everyone texting and calling each other with offers of shelter or help as the flooding got worse. It was beautiful to see everyone living out our goal of doing life together as a church."
- Megan LaFollett, Communications/Resourcing Lead

Mike and other staff members received calls, e-mails and texts from people out of town who wanted to help and needed advice on where to give aid that would effectively help people. Thanks to Ascending Leaders' national connections, we were able to link people across the country who wanted to send resources to the front lines in the very early hours and days of recovery.



Dr. Michael Johnson, Founder/President
Megan La Follett, Highpoint Editor

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Thinking of discipleship in 2018?

Our calendar for the first quarter is already near full.

Call now to benefit from our discipleship services during the rest of 2018!!

832-655-4935



Mike Johnson, Sugar Land, TX
Ken Schripsema, Grand Rapids, MI
Peter Cammarano, Lake Jackson, TX
Brad Munroe, Tucson, TX
Bob Johnson, Houston, TX



Our first fearless foursome of adjuncts, coaching/teaching with Ascending Leaders alongside their full-time ministry positions.

Together with Mike they have accumulated experience of **over 120 years of ministry**, in three different denominations.

admin@ascendingleaders.org

Donor Spotlight

Late last year, one Ascending Leaders friend sold a large parcel of land and channeled much of the estate tax bill to the Christ-centered nonprofit Ascending Leaders. Two churches which had to close and sell their buildings shared with Ascending Leaders large donations from the sales. Ascending Leaders' board spent months discerning how best to steward and leverage this unexpected support. We announce our discernment of the following impact from these large donations.

We are splitting half the amount between:

- Strategically increasing staff to impact more churches for better discipleship.
- Technological and back office upgrades in order to more efficiently help more churches at less overall cost.

You too can help us: soon on National Giving Day, or the rest of the year through our **Match 2 Multiply** drive to help more churches better grow disciples.



SAVE the DATE for #GIVING TUESDAY

All donations on Giving Tuesday will be **Quadrupled x4**

for stronger churches with actively growing disciples.

Year-end Donations will be **DOUBLED x2**



Matched up to \$33,000 by our board members, board emeritus and some other close friends of Ascending Leaders.

*Donate online at www.ascendingleaders.org or mail to 3947 Field Crossing, Sugar Land, TX 77498 on Nov. 28 for Giving Tuesday.



HIGH POINT

Helping Churches, Disciples and Leaders

Flourish



"...I have come into the deep water; the floods engulf me." Psalm 69:2

Harvey: Aftermath of a Monumental Crisis

On Thursday Aug. 24, 2017, the Ascending Leaders board concluded our annual meeting with a lunch-and-learn event at Houston Baptist University, listening to 30 area discipleship practitioners. The Houston-area attendees were checking the weather updates on their phones; the out-of-town board members wondered if their flights would be affected by Harvey's imminent landfall. Board member Dr. Robert Sloan, President of HBU, checked in on the college's emergency planning. Everyone agreed that the meeting was over just in time. On the drive home, Mike waited in a gas line to get enough gas to last a week, not realizing floods would keep his car in the garage for the next seven days.

No one expected the hurricane would stall west of Houston as a record-breaking tropical storm, sitting there for days picking up water from the Gulf of Mexico and dropping it over the area surrounding the United States' fourth largest city. By Thursday morning, a week later, the rain gauge total at Mike's home measured 44+ inches of rain. Harvey had officially broken the continental U.S. record for rainfall from one storm.

Like everyone else in the region, Ascending Leaders' plans for the fall drastically shifted. Three staff members evacuated, family and friends endured flooding of their homes, and it was a month before the whole team was back together at our offices in Sugar Land. One church in a coaching partnership had over 200 members flooded.



Satellite image of Harvey

And yet, the storm provided opportunities for disciples to love their neighbors more selflessly, and to surrender to God during scary unknowns. In the aftermath of a community crisis, the real impact of doing discipleship well becomes clear. It shows up in the people sacrificing their best interests for the sake of the displaced. It's seen in churches with open doors and lines of volunteers. When you get discipleship right in your church, you have an abundant outpouring of faithful service when crisis hits.

Ascending Leaders Presents: The Discipleship Podcast for Church Leaders

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

09/04/17
Episode 00: What is Discipleship?

Dr. Michael Johnson

Episode 01: Defining Discipleship

With Matt McClure, Pastor at Prairie City Christian Reformed Church, Prairie City, IA
And Peter Cammarano, Pastor at Chapelwood United Methodist Church, Houston, TX

10/10/17
Episode 02: Stages of Faith

With Bob Johnson, Executive Pastor of Discipleship at Chapelwood United Methodist Church, Houston, TX

10/24/17
Episode 03: Come and See—Moving Toward Belief

With Blair Lerner, Director of Outreach and Discipleship at Grace Fellowship United Methodist Church, Katy, TX

11/07/17
Episode 04: Come and Follow—Moving Toward Intimacy

With Richard Blackaby, President of Blackaby Ministries International
And Julia Johnson, Small Groups Director at Grace Fellowship United Methodist Church, Katy, TX

11/21/17
Episode 05: Come and Be—Moving Toward Deep Sacrifice

With Greg Hawkins, Minister of Strategy at Oak Hills Church, San Antonio, TX

12/05/17
Episode 06: Remain in Me—Moving Toward Mission

With Joel and Patty Hogan, Spiritual Directors from Madison Square Church, Grand Rapids, MI

12/19/17
Episode 07: Naming the Stages for YOUR Church

With Ken Schripsema, Executive Director of Ministry, Madison Square Church, Grand Rapids, MI



In the weeks and months leading up to Harvey we were working behind the scenes preparing a new resource for discipleship leaders that is easily accessible, relevant and convenient.

We're always looking for ways to share the information and tools we know will make a real impact on discipleship in churches, and podcasts are a rapidly growing means of communication. Nearly a quarter of internet users in the United States listen to podcasts at least once a week. Our recent audience survey showed that over 53% regularly listen to podcasts. Despite the effects of Harvey, Ascending Leaders released the first two episodes of our new podcast on September 4. In its first five weeks, people downloaded almost 200 episodes!

We're convinced that a podcast can serve our audience—can serve *you*—by encouraging and educating in a way that integrates easily into existing daily routines. In Episode 00, you will hear Mike talk about what “discipleship” is. In subsequent episodes, hear conversations with different church leaders who are actively applying a stages of faith approach in their churches. Hurricane Harvey slowed us down in getting Episode 02 out, but now we are on a regular cycle, release a new episode every other week.

To further enhance the value the podcast provides church leaders, each episode transcript is available on our website, along with a free downloadable tool or resource related to that episode's topic. For example, Episode 02: “Defining Discipleship” has a list of ten example definitions from churches of varying contexts and sizes.

“God's perfect timing for me. I listened to the first podcast episode on discipleship. It was what I needed to hear at this time. Thanks for your work!”

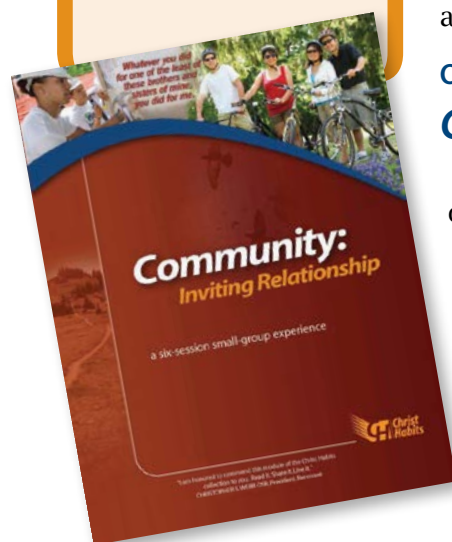
Subscribe to **Ascending Leaders Presents: The Discipleship Podcast for Church Leaders**, listen to an episode, and leave a review! The more subscriptions and reviews the show receives, the more people will hear and benefit. www.ascendingleaders.org/podcast

What is a podcast?

Think of a podcast as internet radio on-demand. You can listen to podcast “shows” on your computer or mobile device, and you can download episodes to listen to when you're not connected to the internet. You can subscribe to podcast shows in iTunes or Stitcher Radio and new episodes will automatically be downloaded to your device, so you don't have to keep checking back. The Ascending Leaders podcast has a new episode every other week on Tuesday. Each episode is 30-45 minutes long. It flexes to your life—you can pause and come back to it at any time.

DiscipleshipDare: Inviting Relationship

“And even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. Galatians 4:14”



Hospitality, fellowship and community are inseparably linked and permeate Scripture. Their basis is our common worth as being created in the image of God, beings for whom God Himself died. In fellowship, both parties are giving and receiving in relationship; the over-arching goal is to become more like Christ and in doing so, long for more fellowship with the Father.

The Christ habit of “community” is the habit of opening one's life and offering friendship and acts of kindness to others, even to strangers and those whom you find most difficult to love. It is precisely in the latter situation, that we need to be most intentional to practice the habit of hospitality and extend the hand of friendship.

A “church of friends” is a church with a culture that expects people to freely open their lives to each other. Members share more than superficial greetings. They share their greatest joys and deepest sorrows; they know their church family will be there for them through thick and thin. They experience community—an honest, selfless sense of caring for one another.

Our challenge to you, disciple, is this:

Grow at actively inviting relationship.

Think of an upcoming lunch, breakfast or other meeting you are having with one other person. Picture yourself being totally present for that other person. What do you expect to potentially distract you? How can you help yourself remain attentive?

Ask God: “Show me how to treat this other person with dignity. Show me how to offer a sense that this person is honored and loved. Show me how to take seriously whatever he or she is struggling with, even if the person doesn't feel free to talk about it.”

Adapted from *Community: Inviting Relationship* from our Christ Habits collection of studies for targeted discipleship.

Virtual Learning for Discipling Staff/Pastors

“My personal goal right now is to be all in with *DiscipleOn*. To be all in with going through the materials that are sent. Because it keeps it in front of me, because this is what I do for a living. Also, it's valuable being able to hear everyone else's comments. I write phrases and notes and go back and look at them. It helps me in ongoing conversations as I go about the week, using more of the language and more of the concepts, while talking to other leaders; and reading other books, it connects to what I've been learning in *DiscipleOn*.” One Season 3 Participant



Are you all in for discipleship? **Season 4** is Feb.-June, 2018

Register for the next Informational Webinar and discover if you're ready for *DiscipleOn*!

December 06 at 2:00-2:45 p.m. CDT

www.ascendingleaders.org/info

A Journey Toward Clear DisciplePaths: Prairie City, IA

Matthew McClure, the pastor of Prairie City Christian Reformed Church (PCCRC), was eager to move his congregation forward in discipleship. So in 2013, he began *Charting Your CHURCH Course* coaching with Ascending Leaders. “We as a church reflected on the past and started looking toward the future,” he said.



A gathering of Prairie City CRC at the river.

At the same time, Matthew was experimenting with accountability groups using discipleship resources from a church in Atlanta. But this turned out to be too big of a step for most of the congregation. While having small and intimate accountability groups was an excellent idea, not enough people were willing to commit to that level of discipleship. All but one of the accountability groups fizzled out in a year. That's when Matthew realized they needed more than just a resource; they needed ongoing guidance for improving discipleship.

“We had to back up a bit in discipleship,” Matthew said. The next step he took was to attend Ascending Leaders' discipleship seminars led by Mike Johnson. “I went to five of those sessions,” he said, “and I also encouraged the leaders who could not come with me to watch the sessions on YouTube.” The sessions covered the whole gamut of discipleship from forming a definition of discipleship to laying out the four stages of discipleship, and they even looked at how “the wall” factored into this journey of discipleship.



Matthew recognized that much of his church was stuck at “the wall”—the obstacle between Stages 2 and 3. He wanted more people to be able to move forward. In 2016, Pastor McClure and the church moved with more coaching from Ascending Leaders through participating with eight other churches in the

Congregational Learning Network, in which Mike was providing DisciplePath coaching. This church launched a project focused on helping people over “the wall” so that they could continue the journey into Stage 3 of discipleship.

Matthew's church began this journey by developing a definition of discipleship that captured what they wanted to move toward

as a church: “Discipleship is following after Christ in a lifelong process to grow closer to God, love others more deeply, and intentionally participate in the Great Commission.” (Listen to Matthew talk about this in Episode 01 of the podcast.) They also tested the quality of this definition using from Ascending Leaders the acronym C.O.R.E.—Continual, Ours, Rooted, Encompassing. To make the stages more meaningful for the congregation, they created their own visuals for the four stages of discipleship: an Acorn (First Stage), a Sprout (Second Stage), a Sapling (Third Stage), and an oak (Fourth Stage). Matthew then preached a sermon series on the four stages, to introduce the concepts to the congregation.

The church's discipleship planning team met monthly by Zoom for coaching from Mike, which provided “new perspective and energy to keep moving toward Jesus and helping others move toward Jesus.” During their time together, all of the team members wrote and shared their own stories of being at “The Wall.” By relating his own personal experiences to his mission, Matthew was able to even more effectively guide more church members past “The Wall” and into becoming closer friends of Jesus.

Matthew also extended the DisciplePath concepts to the high school Sunday School class and led them through Ascending Leaders' small group study, *Your Pathways*, connecting the spiritual revelations of each student's faith story to the everyday practice of their faith.



This summer, Matthew began using **REVEAL** Survey Coaching to help ensure long-term progress and further effective discipleship. “We have taken the Reveal Survey and will wrestle with the results in the fall as a congregation.” Now Matthew is wanting to serve as an Adjunct **REVEAL** Coach himself so that he can help other churches the same way he was helped by Ascending Leaders. Ascending Leaders is one of two preferred providers of coaching for **REVEAL** for Church.

