

# HIGH POINT

Helping Churches, Disciples and Leaders

*Flourish*



*Devote yourselves to prayer,  
being watchful and thankful.*

(Colossians 4:2)

Our staff pray for the churches we serve when we drink from their state mugs.

## Going Deeper, Walking Farther

New and expanded workshops give pastors, leaders and church staff what they need to implement DiscipleForward tools with church-specific strategy.

In 2013, DiscipleForward came into existence as a two-and-a-half-hour seminar presented in Grand Rapids, MI. Within two years, the seminar became a half-day workshop, serving as an effective channel for Mike to share about the stages of disciple growth, the effect group size has on spiritual growth, and how to build a clear and simple disciple path in a church. But when Cathy Richardson came on board as Ascending Leaders' new Director of Mission Expansion, she saw right away that people were wanting more; specifically, the answer to the question, "What do I do *next*?" So began the latest evolution of DiscipleForward from a half-day, intense presentation of concepts to a series of three full-day workshops.

DiscipleForward1 is now five hours long; because the desire is to equip rather than to overload, however, not a single slide has been added to the presentation. Instead, the purpose of the extra time is to guide the participants in assimilating the information into their own particular contexts. The response to this change has been overwhelmingly positive! The common experience at group teaching events is to be flooded with exciting ideas and energized by being around people who share the same passions and face the same challenges; but how much better it is to walk



away having already processed the new ideas into the beginning of a *plan*!

Many DiscipleForward participants expressed a desire to go deeper into some of the core topics—this prompted us to develop a second workshop. For DiscipleForward2: GoingDeeper, we polled alumni to select the four topics from the first workshop that we could spend more time on,

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while still including time for collaboration and processing. Everyone leaves with a specific, written “next action” plan, and Cathy follows up with a phone call a few weeks later to check in and offer support, whether that takes the form of “well-done” or help in brainstorming the navigation of unexpected obstacles.

The end of August saw the inaugural DiscipleForward3: HereToThere workshop on the campus of Fuller Texas in Houston. This third workshop looks very different; developed from the ground up with direct input from churches we serve, HereToThere is a strategy session designed for **teams** to develop a prescriptive path. Whereas workshops 1 & 2 are about where they are as a church, DiscipleForward3 is about getting to where they need to be.



*The discussion on the Wall really helped us to understand what is going on with people at the wall spiritually and emotionally, and generated terrific discussion on our pastoral staff about how to help people through.*

Andrew Bywaters  
West Houston Chinese Church

With all of the changes to DiscipleForward, our goal remains unchanged: support and equip churches to implement intentional discipleship systems. As we learn more about the needs of the churches we work with in the future, we’ll continue to make adjustments to ensure that we’re meeting that goal.



## A Newcomer’s Perspective on Ascending Leaders

By Megan LaFollett, Communications/Resourcing Lead

As the newest member of the staff, a good portion of my time in recent months has been devoted to learning and grasping the culture of Ascending Leaders—especially the values, the mission and the history of this organization. Desk-hopping (a necessity with five people, four desks, and two small rooms), while occasionally inconvenient, has helped to speed up this process; I propose that sharing a work desk is just as effective as walking in someone’s shoes! Without taking up too much space, I’d like to take this opportunity to share just a few qualities that, in my mind, make this team special.

### 1) Practice what we preach.

Even during my interview process, I knew that self-reflection and team assessment must be core values of Ascending Leaders. By the time I was hired, I had a very clear idea of what my unique fit was on this team and how best to interact with each member of the staff. In our staff meetings, we use exercises from our small group resources to promote our personal spiritual growth. Prayer is interwoven through all of our interactions—at weekly staff prayer meetings, daily in e-mail prayer updates, and spontaneously in texts when life hits one of us hard. I’ve never worked with a kinder or more authentic group of people.

### 2) Purpose instead of profit.

This may seem obvious because of our non-profit tax status. But looking at the history of Ascending Leaders,

I’m genuinely struck by how the organization doesn’t get stuck on who we are or what we do. The core mission drives our development. In response to what churches and church leaders needed from us, we moved from a focus on resources to focusing on coaching and teaching in workshops; and we recently unveiled a new online learning community to better equip and encourage discipleship leaders.

### 3) Process instead of program.

Everywhere you turn, there are programs for every part of your life or business: fitness programs, marketing programs, financial programs, potty-training programs (did I mention I have four young children?). One of my very favorite characteristics of Ascending Leaders is the inherent recognition that no program fits every church. Context matters. The process we use to develop a dynamic discipleship strategy takes this into consideration as we deliberately guide each church in understanding their past and recognizing their values before looking to the future.

As I write this, the Ascending Leaders board is preparing to meet to further define our values (remember, we practice what we preach!). Please pray with us that as

we move forward in expanding our ministry, we don’t lose sight of our **raison d’être**.

Cheers,  
Megan LaFollett





# DiscipleshipDare: John 21

Rev. Cathy Richardson has been leading us in listening to John 21:1-14 at our monthly staff meetings this year. We invite you to join us by creating a quiet moment, and listening to the verses with your eyes closed. Right now, while you're reading this, open your calendar and schedule five minutes for the DiscipleshipDare. Select a tool for listening to the Bible from below—bookmark the website or download the app so you're ready to go.

## Listening to Scripture

- Bible Gateway: Select the NIV version, go to John 21, and click the speaker symbol on the upper right.
- Prefer an app? Bible.is offers dramatized audio in hundreds of languages, as well as video version with sign language for deaf users.
- Finally, just for you, find on our website or Facebook page a recording of Cathy reading it.

Ready to go? Sitting down? Cue up John 21. Press play, close your eyes, and listen to the words – just the words, with no agenda.

Now listen one more time, this time thinking about who you identify with in this account of Jesus returning to his disciples.

With whom did you identify? Why?

Imagine how each person interacted, how they feel about themselves and each other. How do the dynamics of the story connect with your own life experiences?

Ask yourself: "Given what I have heard, how do I find myself praying for my own needs? For others?"

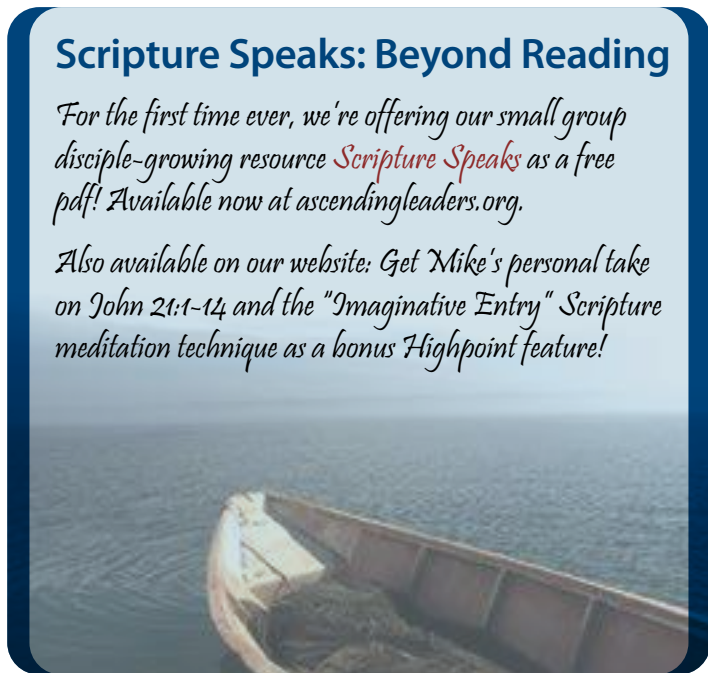
Using imagination to experience a Biblical story is a method first developed by Ignatius of Loyola. He encouraged his friends to imagine what they would see, hear, smell, touch, or taste if they had been present in the Biblical scene. In the process of listening and imagining, the Holy Spirit brings something to your mind that you need to consider, or an action you need to take. Ask the Spirit to apply the purpose of the story to your own heart.



## Scripture Speaks: Beyond Reading

*For the first time ever, we're offering our small group disciple-growing resource **Scripture Speaks** as a free pdf! Available now at [ascendingleaders.org](http://ascendingleaders.org).*

*Also available on our website: Get Mike's personal take on John 21:1-14 and the "Imaginative Entry" Scripture meditation technique as a bonus Highpoint feature!*

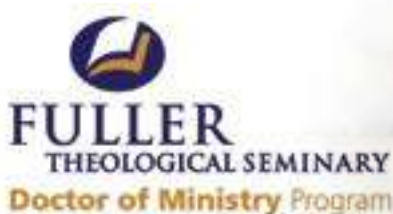


## Upcoming Winter 2017 Fuller DMin course in Houston

"Growing Effective Discipling Cultures," Dr. Mike Johnson

**January 9-13, 2017**

**Register this Fall!** Those not interested in a DMin degree may be eligible to audit the course, or consider the Advanced Diploma in Ministry Leadership (ADML) program, which offers the education and relationships of a DMin without the formal degree and at a much lower cost. Contact the DMin office at [dmin@fuller.edu](mailto:dmin@fuller.edu) or 1-800-999-9578.





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**FIND A WORKSHOP NEAR YOU**  
 Search *discipleforward* at eventbrite.com

- Oct 13 - Houston, TX: DiscipleForward1
- Nov 03 - Houston, TX: DiscipleForward2: GoingDeeper
- Nov 16 - Grand Rapids, MI: DiscipleForward1
- Nov 17 - Grand Rapids, MI: DiscipleForward2: GoingDeeper

E-mail [info@ascendingleaders.org](mailto:info@ascendingleaders.org) to schedule your city for 2017.

for YOU & YOUR SMALL GROUP

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