

HIGH POINT

Helping Churches, Disciples, and Leaders

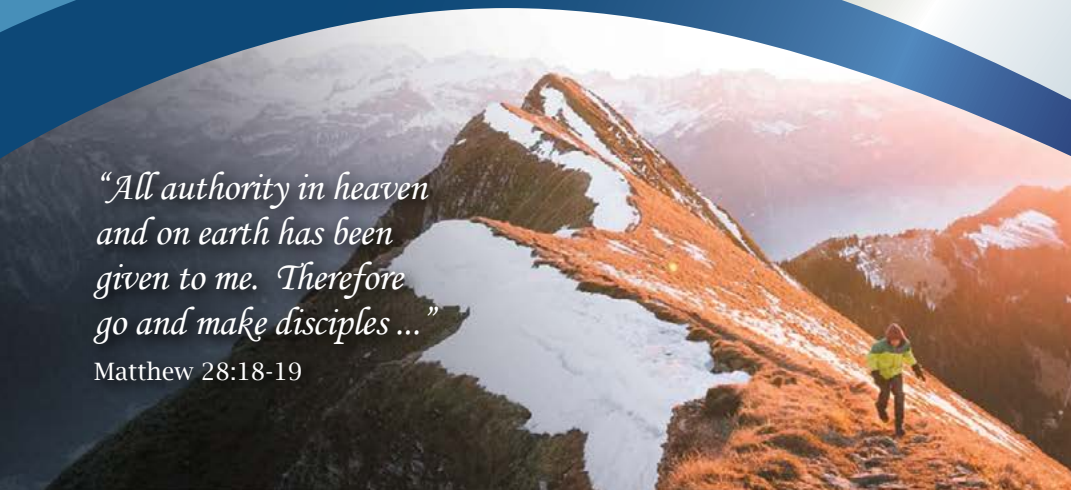
Flourish



Ascending Leaders

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples ...”

Matthew 28:18-19



Find us on



Flourishing: BLACK PANTHER & DISCIPLESHIP

A frustrated Christian man asked his church’s Executive Director of Ministry, “Does anyone *want* to grow?”

The director, Ken, asked him, “How many people do you think have an authentic, intimate relationship with another person that helps them deepen their relationship with God?”

The man responded, “Maybe five percent.”

Whether or not this is an accurate statistic, it reflects a common frustration expressed both by church leaders and lay people who are looking for more than entertainment and cozy feelings from their churches. Churches offer seminars, programs, and other events that promise genuine change, but after the inspiration wears off, people often discover that their lives still look the same. That’s because discipleship is a journey made up of steps; it’s not a stream of emotional rushes, revelatory sermons, and inspirational seminars that sweep the disciple along. As one Houston theologian

expressed, “Discipleship isn’t a matter of discovering some hidden piece of knowledge. We already know pretty much everything we need to for discipleship. We just don’t do it.”

Ken shared, “Our church has a history of just doing events. We felt successful because people showed up, and we did the event. Then we realized that people’s relationships with Jesus weren’t getting any deeper. We had so many conferences and events, and we realized that we were just making people busy. Our staff knew how to run programs—not how to disciple.”



Two of the church’s staff had attended Ascending Leaders’ DiscipleForward seminar several years ago, which led to Ken’s joining the DiscipleOn community and his church beginning a coaching contract with Ascending Leaders. Through the personal coaching they received, Ken and his church



Coaching

realized that a cookie-cutter program for getting more people active in church just wasn't for them. "We have readjusted our plan for growing a discipleship culture. We're taking a year to train our staff in discipleship. We decided to cut down on events and programs and encourage more relational interactions. It has made some people mad, of course, but as we recast our vision, more and more people are coming on board with it."

Of course, the church did not simply abandon all their ministries. Rather, Ken and his church are beginning to simplify and streamline their programs so that these now serve as stepping stones for people in their discipleship journeys. Rather than pushing everyone to join every program, each program will be designed to serve people at a particular stage in their discipleship journey and provide them with the action steps to move into the next stage. As Ken explains, "the programs need to function as on-ramps *and* off-ramps to move people into the church, into small groups, and into deeper, more connected relationships with fellow disciples and with Jesus."

A perfect example of this process is the church's Neighborhood Friends ministry and a recent *Black Panther* movie night. The Neighborhood Friends ministry is made up of prayer teams who gather on Wednesday evenings and walk porch to porch in the neighborhood surrounding the church, asking neighbors if they would like prayer for anything. Ken observed, "In a white suburban neighborhood you don't go door to door. People don't want to be bothered. But we're in an urban multicultural neighborhood. People are very relational and often want to get to know us and find out why we're at their door."

The ministry ensures that each team goes to the same street every week so they can build relationships with the same people each week. Within weeks of starting this ministry, the neighbors began to recognize their Neighborhood Friends and respond. One woman saw a team and asked for prayer for deliverance from drugs and prostitution. Another team prayed for a family about to be evicted from their home. Two weeks later, this family spotted their Neighborhood Friends and shared about the miraculous provision that had allowed them to stay in their home.

As a further step to help move people from neighbors to fellow disciples, the church hosted a *Black Panther* movie night for the neighborhood. The movie night started with a BBQ dinner and was followed by four Wednesday evenings of discussion about what people could learn from the film. Not only was the event a successful on-ramp, with many people from the community showing up—it also had a successful off-ramp, with more people from the neighborhood showing up to the adult Bible studies afterwards.

Ken shared, "I was getting to know a neighbor woman through the Neighborhood Friends ministry. Her family began to see things change in response to our prayers. We invited them to the movie night, and now she is coming to our church and wants to become a member!"

These stories are an encouraging example of a church that decided to take discipleship seriously and move beyond a culture of busyness to a culture of growing. This church is tangibly impacting its community while helping its own congregants to grow closer to Christ. We at Ascending Leaders rejoice to see this and other churches flourishing. Helping disciples to have an intimate walk with Jesus is the goal of everything we do!

¹ Madison Christian Reformed Church is located in Grand Rapids, MI.

TAKING STEPS:

² Five years ago, Chapelwood UMC was trying to figure out how to help their large congregation take active steps in their walks with God. After years of unfocused effort, they stumbled across Ascending Leaders. Since then, their work on discipleship has gone into overdrive while simultaneously becoming clearer and simpler, thanks to having a defined goal and pathway. They took the *REVEAL for Church* survey, and Ascending Leaders coached them through the results. They found that their discipleship health was far below what any of the staff had predicted. Now after two years of working with Ascending Leaders, here's what Chapelwood has built to develop a discipleship culture.

- **A COMMON LANGUAGE**

Chapelwood developed their own phrases and images for each discipleship stage. The church put up banners of each stage in the main hall so that when people walk through the church, they see the discipleship journey laid out alongside them, with the question "What's My Next Step?" Through efforts like these, Chapelwood is bringing active discipleship into their church's language and culture.

- **NEW LOGO**

Chapelwood created a logo to depict the four stages of discipleship. The logo shows how the journey isn't simply linear, but has a direction and goal.

Profile of a *Flourish* Church

- **MY NEXT STEP APP**

Chapelwood developed an app as a tool to help their congregation keep moving on the discipleship journey. The app allows you to assess your own journey and brings you to Bible studies, ministries, and resources that will help you take your next step in learning more about Jesus and developing an intimate relationship with Him. The app is called "Chapelwood Discipleship" and is available in most app stores.

- **MY NEXT STEP BROCHURES**

So that it's easily accessible to everyone, Chapelwood provided brochures around their church that also allow people to assess their stage of discipleship and find out what next steps they can take.

- **PERSONAL NEXT STEP GUIDES**

Of course, discipleship is best taught and modeled in relationship with a Christian friend. The church is training guides to walk people through discovering where they are in their discipleship journey and what steps can help them move closer to Christ.

Ultimately, each of these items are tools that Chapelwood has created to motivate and help people take discipleship seriously. Their real work lies in cultivating relationships with their congregants using the "My Next Step" discipleship model.

2 Chapelwood United Methodist Church is located in Houston, TX.

#GIVINGTUESDAY™

GET READY FOR

NOVEMBER 27, 2018

8,000 DISCIPLES CHALLENGE

ASCENDING LEADERS HAS INVESTED IN THE JOURNEY OF 33,000 + DISCIPLES SO FAR THIS YEAR

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If you'd like to learn more about us...
Email rhonda@ascendingleaders.org
Or call us at 832-655-4935

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- Mike Johnson, Senior Editor
- Natalie LaValley, Editor, Writer
- Sunny Hyun, Graphics Designer
- Rhonda Spriggs, Project Manager
- Victoria Hornsby, Design Consultant

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Merry Christmas from the Ascending Leaders family!