

Fresh Start
Week 1: Discipleship pathway

It's time for a fresh start. What does that mean? **It means that we step back from where we are and go back to the beginning.** On that trip back to the beginning, we can notice **where we have gotten off the path** since we first started down it. **We can also then put aside the disappointments, failures, missteps, and unnecessary detours.** We start with a **clean sheet** of paper to write. We don't have to start with one that is full of confusing notes, it's fresh and clean.

The trick is that we have to view God as someone who allows for this sort of thing. We also have to view ourselves as **willing to receive his grace, to start fresh.** A fresh start is about **God's love and grace toward us.**

"Strength shows not only in the ability to persist, but the ability to start over." Karl Edwards

We are resetting the target, which starts with Jesus.

This may not be a surprise, but Jesus was very purposeful in the way he went about starting the movement that spread across the world and the years from his resurrection until now. **He didn't just wander around Palestine** giving sermons, healing people, in order to die for our sins. He had a plan. **And that plan isn't the way we would have done it here in America.**

Jesus didn't gather a big crowd by healing someone and then preach a sermon that **called them to say a prayer,** acknowledging him as God, and asking him for forgiveness so that they could go to heaven. **Then that big crowd would make a church** that would continue to add people to that church. **That church would be the center,** where they were drawn to learn more about this Jesus and how he could make their life really great.

Jesus didn't do it that way. **He sent them to go make disciples by baptizing and teaching these new disciples to obey everything that he taught.** **It was about sending, not accumulating.**

In order to start a movement, he led his followers through **4 phases of discipleship.** We have tried to set up a **pathway, or flow plan,** of making disciples here at Eagle Ridge that is **faithful to what Jesus did.** **And since our mission is described by the phrase "Be a Bridge, Build a Bridge"** we are using the image of a bridge to describe the path we hope all of you will take.

Jesus led people through 4 phases of discipleship:

The 4 phases of this pathway are the columns that make up the foundation, which supports the bridge and those who move across it. These columns reflect the 4 relational discipleship contexts Jesus used to make disciples. The words reflect the different invitations given by Jesus as a person follows Jesus from spiritually dead to fully functioning disciple, moving from left to right.

Jesus is inviting people to join him in what he is doing. And these are the same invitations he makes today.

Phase 1: "Come and See," an invitation to explore.

Bridge Diagram, reveal first column.

Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand. Matthew 13:9

Jesus did preach to crowds, even though this was not his main emphasis. When he did, he was allowing people to meet him and see if they were interested in going further. Jesus never chased anyone.

Come and see what Jesus is about and what it would mean to start following him. It is for churches and for individual Christ followers to provide space for people where they can see who Jesus is and what it would mean to start following him.

We need a space where people can come and explore.

But what did he do with the crowds that gathered around him? Did he try desperately to keep them, following him in order to grow his following bigger and bigger?

So Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. ⁵⁴ But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ I am the true bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever." ⁵⁹ He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. ⁶⁰ Many of his disciples said, "This is very hard to understand. How can anyone accept it?" ⁶¹ Jesus was aware that his disciples were

complaining, so he said to them, **"Does this offend you? At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him.** ⁶⁷ Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you also going to leave?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. ⁶⁹ We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God." ⁷⁰ Then Jesus said, "I chose the twelve of you, but one is a devil." John 6:53-61 & 66-70

Jesus was seeing who really wanted to follow and not just see a miracle or hear something that can make their life better.

That's where he makes the **second invitation** to move to phase 2. **Phase 2: "Come and follow me," an invitation to learn.**

Bridge Diagram reveal 2nd column.

People explore and if there is interest, they then try to learn more about it.

This is the phase when a person **moves closer** to Jesus because they have seen something in him that is real and truthful. **Upon moving closer, this new disciple gets more of Jesus as he teaches about his kingdom and what it means to continue following him.**

Keep in mind, "learn" to Jesus **didn't mean dispensing information** that they would absorb. No, learning was about living like Jesus and loving others like Jesus. In the west we view learning as getting an understanding of the information that will transform our lives. **Learning for Jesus is based upon a relationship where you hear, watch, do what he did.**

Again, this **space needs to be created** by our church and all of us who are following Jesus as disciple makers.

As you can see with the disciples, Jesus make another invitation. **Phase 3: "come and be with me," an invitation to serve.**

Bridge diagram reveal 3rd column.

To be with Jesus means to serve, because that's what he came to do, "to serve, not to be served."

and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. ²⁸ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:27

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10

In this phase, Jesus invites disciples who have learned more about him by being with him, to join him in his mission, loving people around us in the way he loves us. We are serving with Jesus as he serves through us. We are being trained by Jesus to do what Jesus does.

As a church, we have created opportunities to discover the ministry God has shaped you for and the calling he has on your life. Then space is created to experiment with different ways of serving that fits each disciple's giftedness and calling. In those spaces we experience God working through us as we follow Jesus. This is what Tammy does. This is what we will do in our Come and See Class.

Finally, the phase that we have most neglected in the American church is...Phase 4: "Remain in me," an invitation to multiply.

Bridge Diagram reveal 4th column.

Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. ² You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others. 2 Timothy 2:1-2

If we remain in him, we will produce fruit!

This is the phase where the person who is learning by being with Jesus and is experiencing serving and loving as Jesus did, will learn to replicate himself. The ability to replicate is the final piece before being released as a fully functioning ambassador for Jesus. In whatever corner, context, or setting in life this disciple can love like Jesus and make disciples who can then make disciples themselves.

Our church will create space for people to become equipped, empowered, and commissioned and then released to continue Jesus' mission.

These 4 pillars support the path that a person will move across from spiritually dead to fully functioning disciple who, because of following and being changed, has become an ambassador who is committed to Jesus' mission.

Let's go back to the beginning, how people enter the bridge and start moving across these discipleship phases. Bridge Diagram.

First, the Holy Spirit must draw people.

The **second level** of the bridge, or pathway, is the **deck**. The deck is the path taken by a person who is becoming a disciple. This reflects the **reason for stepping onto the bridge**, the **direction taken** and exiting the bridge on the other side.

A person who is not following Jesus is **in need of being reborn** through Christ. This person is **spiritually dead**. It is at this **pre-discipleship point** that the **Holy Spirit draws or invites him to come closer to Jesus**. Stepping onto the bridge he moves toward Jesus. **God is the one who initiates this movement, not the person**. This is the message of **John 6:44-45**.

For no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me, and at the last day I will raise them up. ⁴⁵ As it is written in the Scriptures, 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me.

Moving across this bridge, this person being drawn from spiritually dead will move into these different discipleship contexts where they can move from dead, to someone who is a fully functioning disciple who is following Jesus, being changed by Jesus, and committed to Jesus' mission.

So what does Joining Jesus in each phase look like here at Eagle Ridge Church of God?

"Come and See," an invitation to explore at Sunday Worship.

Bridge Diagram reveal "Sunday Worship."

The primary ministry vehicle for the **spiritual infant** is **Sunday AM worship**. The act of meeting Jesus and his body (his people) each week is **full of opportunities to understand more about following Jesus**. The **obedience of meeting is a start**. The act of worship, through **singing, hearing scripture, and participating in communion**, all in community with others who are crossing the bridge, can give the spiritual infant what he lacks. **The sermons will, in turn, be obedience driven with a challenge to interact with scripture** and do something in response to Jesus' calling.

As this person explores and is being nourished, the **desire to connect with others on a deeper level grows**, which begins **spiritual childhood**. The spiritual child is, by nature, **self-centered and needs to be in a more relational environment** where he or she can continue to learn through

reflection, encouragement, and accountability with others. Again, the learning is relational, not based upon simply adding information about God.

"Come and follow me," an invitation to learn in Bridge Groups.

Bridge Diagram reveal "Bridge Groups."

It is in community with others who are also following Jesus in a Bridge Group, that this young follower can learn and change more rapidly because of being in a context where Jesus does his best work. Like Jesus' closest followers, who moved from hearing Jesus preach about the kingdom to spending time with him, the spiritual child can experience more rapid growth and transformation.

Let's move down the bridge or pathway a little further...**"Come and be with me," an invitation to serve neighbor's needs.**

Bridge Diagram reveal "serve."

This relational **bridge group** setting will continually drive this follower to become **not only Christ centered, but other focused**. There will be inertia toward service in these groups that will help them meet Jesus in **areas of service**, both inside the church and in the community. **By joining Jesus, loving like Jesus, this follower is able to have his or her heart broken for what breaks the heart of God and allow Christ's life to be lived through her.** Like the first disciples who **fed the 5000**, Jesus works through this follower and in the process they become more like him.

Joining the Come and See class is the best first step to learning where God wants you to serve, based upon how he designed you. Remember, he created good works for you ahead of time. There are many things in house that need to be done, but we aren't simply doing this to get you to volunteer for Eagle Ridge Church of God. We will provide opportunities in the community with Cultivate or our community partners like Adoption Option, Young Lives, Forgotten Man, and Open Door.

Let's keep moving...**"Remain in me," an invitation to multiply in Builder Cohorts.**

Bridge Diagram reveal "Builder Cohorts."

Through being discipled in a **Builder Cohort**, this follower becomes **equipped with the tools to repeat** what has been done for him. **He is also given the tools to become a disciple maker in whatever context God has sovereignly put him.** This person can lead a person who is being drawn by

the spirit to become someone who is following Jesus, being changed by Jesus, and committed to Jesus' mission. **Now no matter where this follower is serving, that setting can become a discipling environment.**

This is where a disciple steps off the bridge and is **released** to serve, love, and multiply disciples inside the congregation and in the community or world. **The released disciple becomes an ambassador**, just as Paul described in 2 Corinthians 5:19-20.

For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.²⁰ So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" (NLT)

By releasing these fully functioning ambassadors for Christ into the world, the same sort of kingdom growth can happen as did in the book of Acts. A church can become a movement instead of a destination. Eagle Ridge becomes more like an airport terminal and less like a hotel, warehouse.

Everything else has a place on this bridge because everything is about disciple making. **If it doesn't help us move people from drawn to release, then we need to stop doing it. Finally people must be released.**

Let me stop right here. **We need to understand that this isn't a one-time check the boxes so that we can be "mature" or know the answers. These contexts we continue to participate in because we are constantly being released. As disciples of Jesus, we are constantly spending time in these 4 contexts that Jesus ordained as the path to being his disciples. We don't graduate from each one after we do it. We keep cycling through the discovering, the learning, the serving, and the multiplying.**

If I am doing my job, you will continue to discover new things about God and what it means to follow Jesus through the sermons. Then you can take those things you discover into your bridge group, where you refine in relationship with others, how God wants you to live differently. And we are constantly serving others because it fights against our human desire to be served and because there is no end to the needs of our neighbors.

The builder cohort is not something you stay in. We aren't asking you to be in two groups forever. Your bridge group is vital. But we want every disciple to get that experience in a smaller more intimate cohort where you can learn how to disciple someone. Then wherever God sends you, you take the ability to replicate. We do challenge each person to be ready to see that person of peace in his or her life and now with the tools, disciple

that person to be someone who is following Jesus, being changed by Jesus, and committed to Jesus' mission.

Steps of Obedience:

What's your next move?

Where have you stopped moving from being drawn? Typically that is **right here in this setting or at home watching**. You have seen the pictures and times when the different Bridge Groups meet. **In the lobby** we have those leaders ready to meet you and answer any questions about their group. Let me challenge to take a moment to do that. **They won't bite or pressure you.**

Looking at the bridge again, a great next step from here can also be to join our Come and See class. This is where we go over, in depth, some of the stuff I am talking about in the next three weeks. This is where you can learn what it really means to join what God is doing through Eagle Ridge. **You will understand what we are really about.** Also you will get to begin the process of **learning how God has designed you or shaped you to serve.** It's about learning your **calling**. You will begin by taking a **spiritual gifts inventory** and then work with Tammy, our director of deployment. **Tammy will be in the lobby** to answer your questions and get you signed up. **This is something that everyone who calls this their church takes home.** It's a **one time deal**. If you are new, it's the **best way to get a fresh start here at Eagle Ridge.**

These are two really good first steps from this place toward being released. **If you choose to do the Come and See, we end that with another opportunity to jump into a bridge group.**

Name your resistance.

What is it that causes you to stop? Is it pride, fear, time... You are broken and so are the people in the group you are joining. **You don't have to share anything that you don't want to share.** You won't be forced to read out loud.

Who needs a loving nudge?

Who can you take by the hand who really wants to take that next step but needs you to do it with them?

Bridge Diagram Completed

Cross the bridge so that you can be a bridge and build bridges.