

PASTORS CONFERENCE • 2026

Making Disciples, Not Just Members

A Biblical, Missiological, and Seventh-day Adventist Exploration

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." — Matthew 28:19

Three Movements in 40 Minutes

01

Biblical Identity

What is discipleship?
What does Scripture really say?

02

Theological Clarity

Disciple vs. Member —
have we lost the distinction?

03

Mission in Practice

Discipleship in urban,
secular contexts today

MOVEMENT ONE

Biblical Identity: What Is a Disciple?

*"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when fully trained will be like his teacher." —
Luke 6:40*

The Great Commission: One Command, Four Verbs

Matthew 28:19–20 | The imperative: *mathēteusate* ("make disciples") — a single aorist imperative governing three participles:

Going (as you go) **Baptizing** (initiation) **Teaching** (formation) — all in service of *making disciples*

Going

poreuomenoi

Present participle — discipleship begins in everyday movement, not the church building

Making Disciples

mathēteusate

THE imperative — the mission's single commanding verb; everything else supports it

Baptizing

baptizontes

Entry into community — initiation, not the endpoint of spiritual formation

Teaching

didaskontes

Ongoing formation — obedience to all Christ commanded; lifelong transformation

Process, Event, or Lifelong Identity?

NOT merely an event

Baptism is the door, not the destination. The NT never reduces discipleship to a single moment of decision.

John 8:31 — "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples"

NOT only a process

Discipleship is not a curriculum to complete. It is a covenant relationship that transforms identity at the root.

Luke 14:27 — "Whoever does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple"

A LIFELONG IDENTITY

In the NT, mathētēs is who you are, not what you do. The disciple shares Jesus's life, mission, and cross.

John 15:8 — "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples"

Five Marks of a True Disciple (John's Gospel)

1

Abiding in the Word

John 8:31

Not occasional reading but continual formation in Scripture — the disciple's identity is shaped by Jesus's words, not cultural norms.

2

Bearing Much Fruit

John 15:8

Fruitfulness is not optional. The vine-branch metaphor ties discipleship directly to reproductive mission and character transformation.

3

Love for One Another

John 13:35

"By this all people will know..." — the most public mark of discipleship is not doctrinal precision but sacrificial, visible love within community.

4

Carrying the Cross

Luke 14:27

Radical self-denial. Jesus raises the cost deliberately. Discipleship is counter-cultural in every age, especially in consumerist modernity.

5

Ongoing Obedience

Matt. 28:20; John 14:15

Teaching to observe — not head knowledge but lived compliance. Discipleship produces a new way of walking, not just a new way of thinking.

The Adventist Calling: A Discipleship People

"The greatest want of the world is the want of men — men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall."

Ellen G. White — Education, p. 57

The Remnant Vision SDA identity is inherently missional — a movement raised to restore truth and prepare a people, not merely maintain an institution.

Acts of the Apostles Ellen White's vision: "Every church member should be a channel through which God can communicate to the world" — discipleship is never passive membership.

The Three Angels' Messages Our distinctive calling (Rev. 14:6–12) demands disciples who are formed, not just informed. Urgency requires depth, not shallow religiosity.

MOVEMENT TWO

Theological Clarity: Disciple vs. Member

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." — Matthew 7:21

Is There a Biblical Difference?

NOMINAL MEMBERSHIP

Relates to an institution

Defined by attendance and records

Consumer of religious services

Commitment bounded by convenience

Satisfied with orthodoxy

Counts cost only once (baptism)

BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP

Relates to a Person — Jesus Christ

Defined by transformation and mission

Participant in redemptive mission

Commitment shaped by the cross

Pursues orthopraxy — lived obedience

Counts cost daily (Luke 9:23)

Has the Church Reduced Discipleship to Baptism and Attendance?

A DIAGNOSTIC FRAMEWORK: Three Levels of Institutional Drift

LEVEL 1

Discipleship Reduced to Conversion

Success = number of baptisms. Post-baptism care is absent or minimal. The new believer is celebrated, then left alone to survive. Result: revolving door churches; faith without formation.

LEVEL 2

Discipleship Reduced to Attendance

Success = attendance numbers and program participation. Being present at services replaces being formed into Christ's image. Result: spiritually passive consumers who know doctrine but resist transformation.

LEVEL 3

Discipleship Reduced to Information

Success = theological knowledge. Bible studies, Sabbath School lessons, and seminars proliferate — but application to missional living is absent. Result: believers who are theologically fluent but missionally silent.

Are We Forming Disciples — or only Maintaining Structures?

	Member Management	Disciple Making
Our primary metric	Baptisms per quarter	Disciples who make disciples
Our energy goes to	Church programs and events	Intentional relationships and mentoring
We celebrate when	Members show up faithfully	Members go out missionally
Formation happens via	Preaching heard passively	Apprenticeship practiced actively

The Cost of the Discipleship Deficit

~50%

of baptized members become
inactive within 5 years

Low

intentional post-baptism discipleship
programs in local churches

High

doctrinal knowledge; low
transformation metrics in studies

"Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian conception of God."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer — The Cost of Discipleship (1937)

MOVEMENT THREE

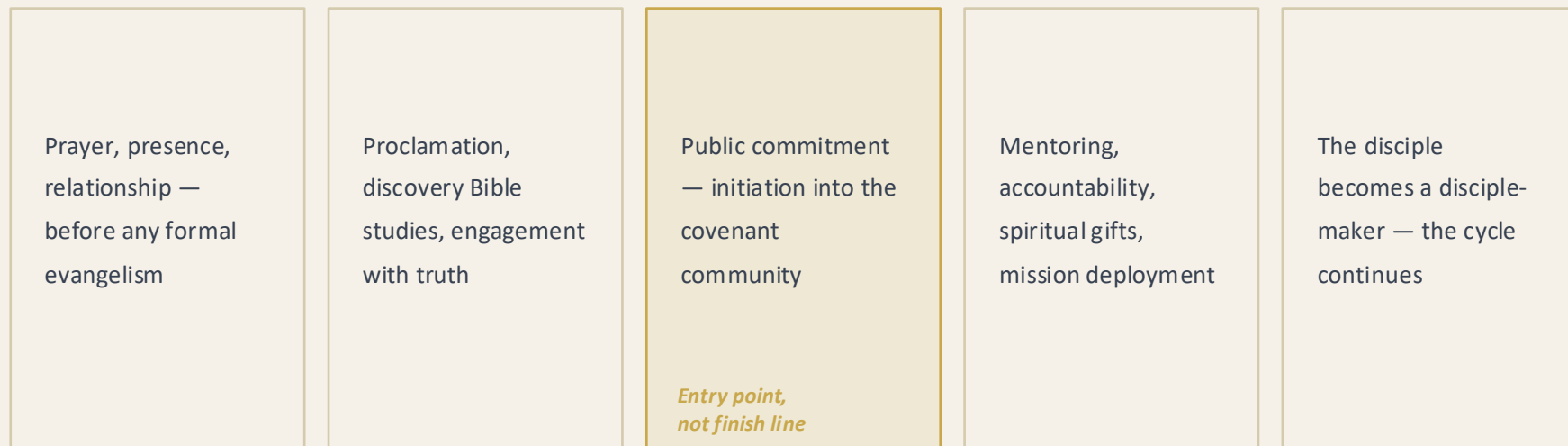
Discipleship as Mission: Urban & Practical

"The field is the world" — Matthew 13:38. Discipleship happens where people live, work, and struggle.

Does Discipleship Begin Before or After Baptism?



DISCIPLESHIP SPANS THE ENTIRE JOURNEY



Evangelism, Baptism & Teaching: An Integrated Model

THE SEQUENTIAL ERROR

Evangelism → Baptism → Teaching

This linear model treats evangelism as pre-church, baptism as the goal, and teaching as an optional follow-up.

It produces converts with some doctrine but without formation — people who know some of the truth but have not been shaped by it into witnesses.

THE INTEGRATED MODEL

Evangelism + Teaching + Baptism = Discipleship

Acts 2:42 model: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Formation and proclamation are inseparable.

Pre-baptismal instruction, accountability groups, and missional community are not programs — they are the shape of NT discipleship.

Discipleship in Secular, Urban Contexts

Presence Before Proclamation

In post-Christian urban settings, trust precedes truth. Disciples must earn relational capital before theological conversation is possible. Jesus ate with sinners before he taught them (Luke 15:2).

Luke 15:2; John 1:14 — "dwelling among us"

Discipleship in Third Places

Cafés, gyms, workplaces, neighborhoods — the city is the mission field. Discipleship must move off campus. The early church disciplined in homes, markets, and synagogues — not exclusively in temple courts.

Acts 20:20 — "from house to house"

Secular Questions, Biblical Answers

Urban secular people ask: Who am I? Why am I here? Does love last? Disciples trained in incarnational apologetics can answer these with the gospel. Tim Keller's urban ministry modeled this bridge.

1 Peter 3:15 — "always prepared to give an answer"

Micro-Communities of Formation

Small, accountable, missional groups replace the passive large-service model. These 8-12 person communities combine prayer, study, confession, and neighborhood service — the Acts 2:42 pattern in urban form.

Acts 2:42-47 — "breaking bread in their homes"

The Adventist Missional DNA: Resources for Urban Discipleship

Ellen G. White

- Ministry of Healing: holistic mission — body, mind, spirit — as discipleship strategy
- Christ's Object Lessons: every church member a missionary channel in daily life
- "Small companies" model: neighborhood-based groups for witness and formation

SDA Global Mission Vision

- Total Member Involvement (TMI): every baptized believer is a disciple-maker
- Intentional Discipleship pathways adopted by GC leadership (2015 onward)
- Urban Centers of Influence: café missions, clinics, schools as discipleship hubs

Practical Applications

- Pre-baptismal covenant groups (not just Bible studies) — accountability built in
- Post-baptism mentoring: pair every new believer with a mature disciple for 12 months
- Missional integration: disciple through service projects, neighbor care

The Discipleship Cycle: A Reproducible Model

1

CONNECT

Build intentional relationships within and beyond the church community

2

PROCLAIM

Share the gospel in relevant, culturally sensitive ways — the whole Christ

3

INITIATE

Baptism as public commitment — celebrated and surrounded by community

4

FORM

Scripture, prayer, accountability, spiritual disciplines — ongoing transformation

5

SERVE

Deploy gifts in local mission — church and community service as formation

6

MULTIPLY

Every disciple mentors at least one other — the cycle repeats and expands

Seven Imperatives for Pastoral Action

01	Redefine success: Shift metrics from baptisms to transformed lives that make disciples.	05	Move discipleship off campus: Homes, neighborhoods, workplaces — the city is the classroom.
02	Build pre-baptismal community: Covenant groups before baptism, not just Bible studies.	06	Integrate service and formation: Mission is not optional; it is the curriculum of discipleship.
03	Establish post-baptism mentoring: Every new member is paired with a mature disciple for 12 months.	07	Model vulnerability and transparency: Pastors who disciple openly invite others into the same journey.
04	Train members as missionaries: Total Member Involvement — equip the whole church for daily mission.		

The Question That Cannot Wait

Who are you currently discipling?

Not: who is in your church? But: who are you intentionally walking with toward Christlikeness?

What would change if you led a church of disciples instead of members?

Reimagine your structure, metrics, programs, and pastoral calendar around formation, not attendance.

Are you a disciple yourself?

The first duty of every pastor is not to make disciples but to be one. The greatest gift to your congregation is your own discipleship.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

**“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and
of the Holy Spirit,
teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”**

“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18–20

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A Presentation by Frank Hasel · Pastors Conference 2026