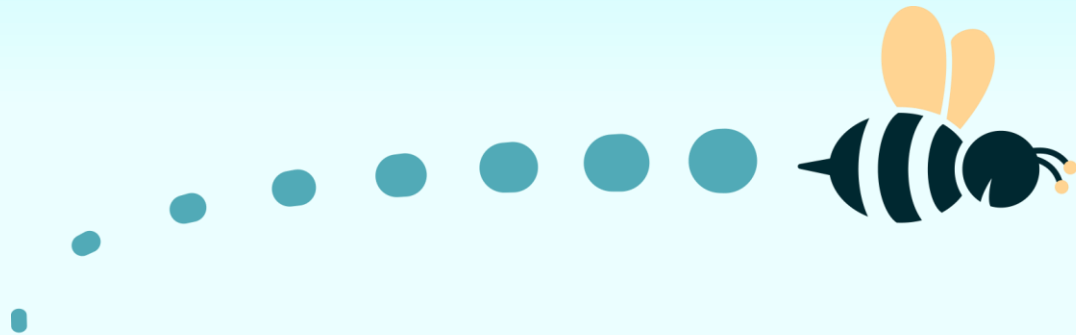


WHAT ARE OUR STRATEGIES AND WHAT DO THEY MEAN?



THE VISION PROJECT **BELONG
BECOME
BEYOND**

DEVELOPING OUR STRATEGIES

As Session worked to determine a response to the difficult issues we face, a light went on. The answer was not in a bigger building, or more and better programs, or more staff, or a rock concert service.

The answer is in us.

No issue facing us could not be solved if we took our discipleship seriously and became living copies of Jesus.

OUR STRATEGIES

After months of prayer and discussion, Erin's Session adopted two strategies to focus on over the next 3 to 5 years:

Strategy 1:

Instilling in Erin's members and friends, as seekers together, a true understanding of and subsequent active commitment to what it means to be and to live as Christ's disciples.

Strategy 2:

Sharing with the community the ministries that God has called Erin to as a body of believers, and living as disciples of Christ in all aspects of our individual and diverse lives so that others see Jesus in us.

OUR STRATEGIES

These two strategies address the challenges that we believe we must solve if Erin is to survive and thrive in the coming years.

Strategy 1 targets our inward relationships with God and with our fellow members.

Strategy 2 targets our outward relationships with our community and with the wider world.

STRATEGY 1: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Instilling in Erin's members and friends, as seekers together, a true understanding of and subsequent active commitment to what it means to be and to live as Christ's disciples.

In Biblical times, a disciple followed a teacher, rabbi, or master and accepted and helped spread the teacher's doctrine. Unlike a modern student, the disciple not only learned the teachings of the rabbi but imitated the details of his life. Beyond study and reflection, disciples interacted with and imitated a real person in the hope of becoming what he was.

The goal of discipleship was to make a living copy of the master.

STRATEGY 1: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The term **disciple** is found only in the four gospels and the Book of Acts. Jesus uses this term **exclusively to refer to His followers**, and over the course of His ministry, He taught them what **discipleship—becoming living copies of Him**—meant.

Jesus' last command to His disciples was to **go and make other disciples**, teaching them His commands, His words, and His ways. In other words, make more copies of Him!

STRATEGY 1: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Today, followers of Jesus are called Christians or Christian disciples. However, the meaning of the term has not changed. Followers of Jesus accept, learn, and spread His teachings, and imitate—as closely as possible—His life and ways.

Christian discipleship means **belonging** to Jesus and His bride the church, **becoming** more and more Christ-like each day in all areas of our lives, and **going beyond** ourselves to serve and share Christ with others.

STRATEGY 1: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

“**Jesus in His extremism insists that we surrender** all our relationships, our resources, our careers, our futures—our total lives—to His lordship... In becoming Christian, many of us have attempted to layer our faith over the top of the secular values with which we have been raised. We have accepted cultural expectations as largely unquestioned givens. **For many, following Christ seems to be placing a little “Jesus veneer” over middle- and upper-middle-class lifestyles** and their implicit values. That simply won’t work.”

— Tom Sine, *TAKING DISCIPLESHIP SERIOUSLY*

STRATEGY 1: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

“To be a disciple of Christ, one must actually follow Christ. When someone claims to have faith in Christ, he must also commit to following Christ. Remember, Jesus taught that faith meant to follow Him. Anything less is something else—a wish, a desire, or a good intention. But it’s not faith, because faith means to follow.”

– Bill Hull, *THE COMPLETE BOOK OF DISCIPLESHIP*

“Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer

WHAT DOES A TRUE DISCIPLE OF CHRIST LOOK LIKE?

According to scripture, a **Christian disciple does the following 8 things:**

1. Accepts God's salvation

Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the first condition of discipleship. Without the miracle of new birth, devotion to Christ is not possible.

John 3:5-7 *Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'"*

WHAT DOES A TRUE DISCIPLE OF CHRIST LOOK LIKE?

2. *Puts Jesus first in all things*

A sincere commitment to Jesus Christ means loving Him more than anyone or anything. Our passion shifts from the things society values—status, money, comfort—to Jesus. We trade our self-centeredness for Christ-centeredness and focus our lives around Him.

Mark 8:34-35 *Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.”*

WHAT DOES A TRUE DISCIPLE OF CHRIST LOOK LIKE?

3. Engages in spiritual growth

As Christians, our relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit leads to spiritual growth. Growing as a disciple becomes our top priority. We organize our lives around it, dedicate time to it, and engage in practices that nurture it.

Matthew 11:29 *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*

Hebrews 6:1 *“We must try to become mature and start thinking about more than just the basic things we were taught about Christ. We shouldn’t need to keep talking about why we ought to turn from deeds that bring death and why we ought to have faith in God.”*

WHAT DOES A TRUE DISCIPLE OF CHRIST LOOK LIKE?

4. Follows Jesus' teachings

We must give up any notion of simply adding Jesus to the structure of our lives and fitting Him into our priorities and plans. Following Christ **demands total commitment** to do what he says, live as He lived, love as He loved, and obey what He taught.

John 8:31 *To those who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, then you are my disciples."*

James 1:22 *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves; do what it says.*

WHAT DOES A TRUE DISCIPLE OF CHRIST LOOK LIKE?

5. Engages with a body of believers, the Church

God wired us to function best in a biblical community, the church. As part of God's family, we don't have to run this race alone. Disciples engage in church to worship, to grow, to fellowship, and to encourage, support, and serve one another. To thrive, the church needs all of us to be present and use our gifts.

Acts 2:42, 46 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to breaking bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs... All the believers were together and had everything in common.

WHAT DOES A TRUE DISCIPLE OF CHRIST LOOK LIKE?

6. *Produces fruit through the Spirit*

As we grow in Christ, our **lives change** from the inside out. Our thoughts, words, and actions **become more Christ-like**. If we stay connected to Him and continue to grow, we will **produce the fruit of God's spirit**: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23)

John 15:5-8 *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will **bear much fruit**; for you can do nothing without me. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and you shall have it. My Father's glory is shown by your **bearing much fruit, and in this way you become my disciples.**"*

WHAT DOES A TRUE DISCIPLE OF CHRIST LOOK LIKE?

7. Loves all people

Love is evidence of discipleship – love that is action, not emotion, and sees all people as Jesus sees them: beloved children of God. Jesus came to model this love and to teach us to do the same. We are a light to the world, showing the Father’s heart to all.

John 13:34-35 “So I give you a new commandment: *Love each other*. Just as I have loved you, love each other. *Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.*”

Philippians 2:3-5 “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility *value others above yourselves*, not looking to your own interests but to the interests of the others. *In your relationships, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.*”

WHAT DOES A TRUE DISCIPLE OF CHRIST LOOK LIKE?

8. Makes new disciples

Jesus' last words were to go and make disciples. This is our greatest responsibility. People everywhere are searching and need us to share our faith, to share the changes Christ is making in us, and to show them the love of the Father, no matter where we are in our Christian journey.

Matthew 28:18-20 *"Therefore go and **make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."*

HOW CAN WE LEARN TO BE CHRIST'S DISCIPLES?

Throughout the centuries, men and women who have accepted the challenge and commitment of discipleship have used common practices to move toward God and grow spiritually. The following actions are not a checklist. They are practices that prepare us to clearly hear God's voice and follow His leading.

HOW CAN WE LEARN TO BE CHRIST'S DISCIPLES?

Pray.

Prayer is the central means of communicating with God. When we pray, we engage in a two-way conversation with God. As we consistently share with Him our fears, hopes, doubts, and dreams, God will share—if we listen—the plans He has for us.

HOW CAN WE LEARN TO BE CHRIST'S DISCIPLES?

Confess.

We all sin, but God promises to forgive us if we confess our specific sins to Him. Confession makes us aware of our need for God, since we cannot be “good enough” to earn His blessing on our own. Confession helps us appreciate His mercy and grace, which we do not deserve, and it compels us to show mercy and forgiveness when other people offend us.

HOW CAN WE LEARN TO BE CHRIST'S DISCIPLES?

Worship.

Every Christian is called to worship both corporately and privately. Worship for most people is the Sunday morning service. But true worship is our soul's response to God's spirit, to who God is and to what He has done. Worship means ascribing worth to something. Sometimes we worship things more than God—money, status, sports teams, kids—but biblical worship turns that affection to God, whether during corporate worship with other Christians, during private worship time with God, or in spontaneous moments of worship in response to a sunrise or an answered prayer.

HOW CAN WE LEARN TO BE CHRIST'S DISCIPLES?

Study God's Word.

The Bible is God's word, His instructions for us as followers of Christ. To be like Christ, we study His life and teachings and those of His followers as recorded in the New Testament. The Old Testament helps us understand the history of God's engagement with His people and Jesus' purpose. We can study the Bible alone or with a group. But study is more than acquiring knowledge. Study transforms our thoughts and our actions and makes us more like Christ.

HOW CAN WE LEARN TO BE CHRIST'S DISCIPLES?

Spend time in community with other believers.

Jesus tells us to love each other, and that's hard to do at a distance. We meet regularly with other Christians to love, comfort, encourage, and support one another and share our joys and troubles. God's guidance often comes to us through the words of other Christians. Discussing our ideas with other believers and hearing multiple perspectives helps us grow as disciples.

HOW CAN WE LEARN TO BE CHRIST'S DISCIPLES?

Serve others.

Jesus taught his disciples a new way of leading—by serving. This goes against what society tells us. Important people are to be served, not to serve. But Jesus willingly took care of others' needs while ignoring his own. We are to do likewise, living our lives in service to believers and unbelievers, to those like us and not like us, to those we know and those we don't. Our strongest statement of Christ's love is our willingness to serve.

HOW CAN WE LEARN TO BE CHRIST'S DISCIPLES?

Serve the Church.

The Greek term *ekklesia*, translated “church,” is used in the New Testament to identify the community of believers in Jesus Christ. After Jesus declares, “I will build my church” in Matthew 16:18, the word *only* refers to communities of believers in Jesus Christ, both local congregations and the overall collection of Christians. Jesus loved the church and gave himself for her. In fact, the church is called the bride of Christ. Following Jesus means loving and serving the church, His bride, as He did.

STRATEGY 2: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Sharing with the community the ministries that God has called us to as a body of believers and living as disciples of Christ in all aspects of our individual and diverse lives so that others see Jesus in us.

We believe Erin Church is called to be a place where members gather to support one another in becoming true disciples of Christ. The result of our personal and corporate focus on discipleship is Strategy 2: an outward focus on serving our community and making new disciples.

STRATEGY 2: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Changes in America's religious landscape require the church to re-evaluate how we engage with the communities around us. The church's strategy has been *if we build it, they will come*. We built bigger buildings and developed better programs, and for a while people did come.

For past generations, this strategy worked. But for younger generations, it doesn't. In Gallup research, one third of Americans agree with the statement, "Religion is not an important part of my daily life and I seldom or never attend religious services."

STRATEGY 2: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

To reach the millions who need God's message of love, **we must rethink our invitation strategy.** No clever social media push, pithy sermon series, trendy worship style, or super-relevant programming is going to draw people who see no need for church in their lives and do not experience Christians as being different from non-Christians.

STRATEGY 2: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

What draws people to church today is seeing that God makes a difference in how we think, feel, live our lives, and love and serve others. We must take the message of Jesus to where people live, work, and play, rather than expecting them to come to us. Reaching those who need God is really about us, and our living as true disciples in front of them.

Jesus' original followers—with no training, but with the Holy Spirit—told about the things they had seen and heard. As we grow and commit to being His disciples, talking to others about what Christ is doing in our lives becomes natural. And there is no more effective witness.

STRATEGY 2: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

To sum up, Erin will not grow by promoting programs. We will grow as our members share God's love and good news with a hurting world. People all around us need what Jesus has to offer, but it's up to us to show them. We are called to transform our community—to make a difference so that if Erin Church were no longer here, those around us would notice and our influence would be missed. We get to know people outside our walls by serving them. Serving is a way to treat people the way God would treat them. That's the way to grow the church.

Also check out:

WHY IS ALL THIS NECESSARY?

erinpres.org/thevisionproject

Coming in June:

WHAT CHANGES ARE REQUIRED TO IMPLEMENT THE STRATEGY?

Be Informed!

Read all about the Vision Project on Erin's website, and join us for muffins and coffee and a live presentation where you can ask questions before the worship service on June 9, June 30, July 21 or August 4, 9:30 to 10:45.