

AN ANTIOCH MOVEMENT RESOURCE



5 Circles

PLAYBOOK

Making disciples and planting churches marked by a passion for Jesus and His purposes on the earth.

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- 1 Personal Devotional Life
 - 2 Life-on-Life Discipleship
 - 3 House-to-House
 - 4 Church Gathered
 - 5 Witness in the World

Inside the playbook

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Each circle chapter follows the same pattern: Defined, Why it matters, Core practices, Putting it into practice, What it looks like, and Tools and resources.



Start Here

The vision, the problem we are solving and an overview of the five circles.

Why this playbook exists

Every church leader wants a healthy church. But what does a healthy church look like and how do you cultivate health on purpose?

The 5 Circles of a Healthy Church are our answer to that question. They form a framework describing five circles where the life of Jesus takes root in His people: in the secret place of personal devotional life, in Life-on-Life Discipleship relationships, house to house, in the gathered church and out as a witness in the world. When all five are alive, a church grows deep and wide at the same time.

The circles did not start as a strategy on a whiteboard. They come from the book of Acts, where the Spirit breathed life into the church and she flourished, devoted to prayer, making disciples, breaking bread from house to house, gathering in the temple courts and carrying the Gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Each place the church spread, these circles helped cultivate the life of the Spirit at work in and through the church.

These same circles have marked healthy churches and church movements through the centuries and they have been tried and tested in our own context of Antioch Waco and the Antioch Movement of churches around the world.

This playbook takes what we have learned and puts it in your hands. It explains each circle, why it matters and, most of all, how to lead it in your own context. We are excited to see how the Holy Spirit works through you and your church as you put these values into practice.

Who this is for

- **Church planters.** You are laying foundations and want the church to start healthy and stay that way.
- **Senior pastors.** You lead an established church and want to see where growth is needed next.

- 
- **House church leaders.** You lead a small community that carries the whole life of the church and can be reproduced.



“They saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”

ACTS 4:13

— THE VISION

A passion for Jesus and His purposes on the earth

We are a people with a passion for Jesus and His purposes on the earth. Everything in this playbook comes back to that phrase.

A passion for Jesus is the Great Commandment: loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. **His purposes on the earth** is the Great Commission: going and making disciples of all nations.

A passion for Jesus. People whose hearts belong to Him and who want to be with Him every day.

MARK 12:30-31

His purposes on the earth. Disciples who make disciples, and churches that plant churches among every people.

MATTHEW 28:19-20

Passion keeps the fire lit. Purpose carries it to the neighborhood and nations.



The 5 Circles exist to form disciples and churches that carry both, and each circle shapes that kind of disciple and that kind of church in its own way.

Each circle is activated the same way: through the Word of God, the worship of God, prayer and obedience, for the sake of the city, the nation and the nations. Think of them as five expressions of the church empowered by the Holy Spirit.



“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

ACTS 1:8

— THE PROBLEM WE ARE SOLVING

Healthy churches are whole churches

Most leaders lean into the circle they love most, and their church usually ends up strongest there. Over time the other circles get less attention and the church starts to tilt.

A church can be healthy in one or two circles and weak in the others, and the strong circle can only carry it so far. Here are four patterns we see often.



STRONG IN THE SECRET PLACE

Passionate, but private

People love God deeply on their own, but their faith stays individual. Few are disciplined, and little multiplies past the leader.



STRONG ON SUNDAYS

Full, but thin

The gatherings are inspiring and the teaching is strong. Most people stay in their seats, though. Relationships are shallow, and few realize they are called to minister.



STRONG IN COMMUNITY

Deep, but inward

Groups feel like family, and they rarely open the door. Years go by without a new believer, a new leader or a new group.



STRONG ON MISSION

Busy, but running dry

The outreach is bold and the impact is real. Eventually the leaders burn out, because the work is not being fed by time with God or by close friendships.

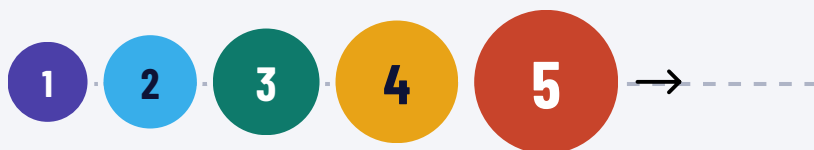
Every one of these churches is doing something good. Keep doing what you love. Look at the whole picture, continue the circles that are strong and intentionally cultivate the ones that are missing.

That is the second purpose of the 5 Circles. They give leaders a shared language and framework to see their church and shape their next steps.

— THE 5 CIRCLES AT A GLANCE

Five circles, one vision

The circles move from the most personal to the most public. They start with time alone with God and widen to a few close friends, then a household of faith, then the whole church, and finally every sphere of society.



- 1 Personal Devotional Life
- 2 Life-on-Life Discipleship
- 3 House-to-House
- 4 Church Gathered
- 5 Witness in the World

SENT INTO EVERY SPHERE OF SOCIETY

School

Family

Neighborhood

Business

Healthcare

Social Justice

Government

Arts and Media

Sports

Every circle carries the church outward into the spheres of society where God has placed His people.

How the circles work together

Each circle feeds the others. Time alone with God gives people something real to bring into a discipleship relationship. Those relationships are what make a house church feel like family. When the homes are healthy, Sunday means more. And all of it sends people out into the world.



Each circle depends on the others. Witness without devotion runs dry. Gatherings without discipleship produce spectators. The arrow points outward, and the tip is only as strong as what is behind it.

No one graduates from a circle. A brand new believer and someone who has walked with Jesus for forty years both live in all five at once, in ways that fit their age and season.

— THE FIVE CIRCLES

What each circle forms

Each circle shapes disciples and churches with a passion for Jesus and His purposes on the earth.

1 Personal Devotional Life

Psalms 27:4, 8; Acts 4:13

The habit of spending daily time alone with God to build a rich, intimate and joyfully abiding relationship with the Lord that is lifelong, life-giving and life-shaping.

A PASSION FOR JESUS

We become like what we behold. Time in the secret place keeps Jesus at the center of our affection.

HIS PURPOSES ON THE EARTH

Like the first disciples, we want people to notice that we have been with Jesus.

2 Life-on-Life Discipleship

Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:2

Intentional relationships focused on growing as lifelong, obedient followers of Jesus who in turn help others to do the same.

A PASSION FOR JESUS

We need a few people who know what is really going on in our lives. Confessing sin and hearing honest counsel keeps our hearts soft toward Him.

HIS PURPOSES ON THE EARTH

Jesus made disciples and told us to do the same. This is how faith gets handed from one generation to the next.

3 House-to-House

Acts 2:42-47; Romans 16:5

Small, home-based discipleship communities at the heart of the church, where authentic relationships live out Kingdom values together.

A PASSION FOR JESUS

In homes we experience the church as a spiritual family gathered around the Word, the table and prayer.

HIS PURPOSES ON THE EARTH

A house church can be started in any culture, and it is where most new leaders get their first chance to lead.

4 Church Gathered

Acts 2:46, 47; Ephesians 4:11, 12

Gathering as a broader church family for intentional times of prayer, equipping, ministry, giving, celebration and public proclamation.

A PASSION FOR JESUS

Together we worship, pray and celebrate what God has done across the whole family in ways no single home can.

HIS PURPOSES ON THE EARTH

When we gather, the saints are equipped for ministry, and our combined giving reaches the city and the nations.

5 Witness in the World

Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:20

The Spirit-empowered intentionality with which we live on mission as salt and light in every sphere of society, loving our neighbors, sharing the Gospel, making disciples and planting churches.

A PASSION FOR JESUS

He is worthy of the worship of every family on earth. Loving Jesus spills over into loving the people He died for.

HIS PURPOSES ON THE EARTH

We are called to be a multiplying church-planting movement that brings transformation to lives, families, neighborhoods and every sphere of society.

— BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Principles for using this playbook

Five things to keep in mind as you read.

- 1 Strengthened by grace, not a checklist.** We are after a church family that knows and loves the Lord and keeps growing in an environment of love and grace. If the circles start to feel like a scorecard, go back to the heart behind them.
- 2 Every age and every stage.** A second grader, a college student in a crowded dorm, a mom of three toddlers and an empty nester will each live out the circles differently. In a healthy church everyone is growing, and the growth looks different from person to person.
- 3 Leaders go first.** Leaders cannot give away what they do not carry. Healthy circles start with leaders who live them and who raise up other leaders who do the same.
- 4 Simple enough to reproduce.** The circles work in a megachurch and in a living room, in Texas and in North Africa.
- 5 Led by the Spirit.** This playbook offers patterns. The same Holy Spirit who led the church in Acts will lead you as you apply them to your city and your people.

— USING THE PLAYBOOK

How this playbook is organized

- **Part 1: Start Here.** The vision, the problem we are solving and an overview of the five circles. You are here.

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- **Part 2: The Five Circle Playbooks.** One chapter for each circle: Personal Devotional Life, Life-on-Life Discipleship, House-to-House, Church Gathered and Witness in the World.
 - **Part 3: Leading the 5 Circles.** How to lead your church in the 5 Circles.

Inside every circle chapter

Each chapter follows the same basic pattern, so once you have read one you can find your way around the rest.

- 1 **Defined.** A short description of the circle.
- 2 **Why it matters.** The biblical convictions behind it.
- 3 **Core practices.** What every healthy church needs in this circle.
- 4 **Putting it into practice.** The leader's role and the common pitfalls to watch for.
- 5 **What it looks like.** Stories of people and churches living it out.
- 6 **Tools and resources.** Questions, activities, books and trainings to keep growing.

Where to begin

Read through all five circles before going deep in one. Then start where the Holy Spirit is drawing your attention, which is often the circle your church needs most, and take one faithful next step.



“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

GALATIANS 6:9



The Five Circle Playbooks

One chapter for each circle: Personal Devotional Life, Life-on-Life Discipleship, House-to-House, Church Gathered and Witness in the World.

CIRCLE 1 OF 5

1

Personal Devotional Life

The habit of spending daily time alone with God to build a rich, intimate and joyfully abiding relationship with the Lord that is lifelong, lifegiving and life-shaping.

"One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple."

PSALM 27:4

Circle 1: Personal Devotional Life

Personal Devotional Life is the first circle and it feeds all the others. Every healthy church is built on people who know God for themselves.

In the secret place we behold Jesus, hear His voice and receive the grace to love Him and live for Him. Everything else in the church grows out of that.

In this chapter: Why it matters, Core practices, Putting it into practice, What it looks like, Resources.

This circle keeps Jesus at the center of our affection, and it forms people whose lives show that they have been with Him.



“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

JOHN 15:5

— WHY IT MATTERS

Eight convictions

These convictions are the reason we keep calling our people back to the secret place.

We were created for communion with God

Time alone with Him each day puts our relationship with the Lord first and sets us up to abide in Him for the rest of the day.

PSALM 27:4, 8; JOHN 15:1-5

We follow Jesus' example and teaching

Jesus often slipped away to lonely places to pray, and He taught His disciples to meet with the Father in secret.

LUKE 5:16; MATTHEW 6:6

We become like what we behold

Everyone fixes their attention on something. We want to fix ours on Jesus, because that is how we are changed into His likeness.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:16-18

We want lives marked by His presence

We want people to look at us the way they looked at Peter and John and realize we have been with Jesus.

ACTS 4:13

God rewards those who seek Him

The Lord promises to reward those who earnestly seek Him. We want what He has for us.

HEBREWS 11:6

We need the Lord

Jesus said that if we abide in Him we will bear much fruit, and that apart from Him we can do nothing.

JOHN 15:5

His Word brings strength and freedom

Scripture promises power and freedom to those who meditate on it and obey it. If we neglect the Word, we leave all of that sitting on the shelf.

JOHN 8:31-32; PSALM 1; MATTHEW 7:24-27

Prayer works

Prayer is powerful and effective. We have seen it bring breakthrough in our own lives and in the lives of people we love.

LUKE 11:8-10; 18:1

CORE PRACTICES

Five key nutrients for our time with God

Scripture and church history point to five practices the Holy Spirit uses to feed our time alone with God.

- **Word.** Reading, studying, memorizing and meditating on Scripture. The Bible is the main way God speaks, and everything else we hear from Him gets tested against it.
- **Worship.** Responding to who God is. Sometimes that is a song. Sometimes it is a psalm read out loud, or a few minutes of telling Him what you love about Him.
- **Prayer.** Bringing our hearts and our needs to God, along with the needs of our families, our city and the nations.

- **Listening.** Listening to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying, often by journaling what we sense Him highlighting for our day.
- **Obedying.** Responding to what we heard. If our time with God never changes how we live, something is missing.

Nutrients, not a checklist. These are not steps to complete in order every day, and time with God is not limited to them. Think of them as nutrient-rich food. Over the long run a healthy devotional life includes all five, in whatever shape the Holy Spirit leads.

The fruit we are looking for

We want to become people who are growing in knowing and loving the Lord, joyfully abiding in His presence throughout the day, faithfully obeying His leadership and steadily growing in the fruit of the Spirit.



“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

JOHN 15:5

— PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Leading This Circle

How do you build a culture of personal devotion?

- ☐ **Live it Personally (lead by example).** Keep your own time with God first. Select leaders who walk in this value.

☐ **Model it (make it a priority).** Jesus taught His disciples to pray and the value of the secret place. Prioritize modeling this way of life to the people you are investing in.

☐ **Resource it (make it clear).** Put good tools in people's hands for every age, from kids' devotional guides to Bible reading plans to books on prayer.

☐ **Celebrate it (make it visible).** Share stories of what God is doing in people's time with Him. What gets celebrated gets replicated.

— PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Common pitfalls

Here is where a devotional culture usually goes wrong.

Legalism

PITFALL Time with God becomes a performance, and people feel guilty instead of drawn.

INSTEAD Lead with grace, joy, and invitation. Talk about how good it is to be with God.

Isolation

PITFALL Devotion stays completely private, so struggles go unseen and nobody grows together.

INSTEAD Make "How is your time with the Lord? What is God speaking to you?" a normal question in Circle 2 and 3.

One size for everyone

PITFALL Everyone is expected to meet with God like the senior leader does, at 5 a.m. with a journal.

INSTEAD Celebrate the variety of ways people meet with God across ages and stages.

Information without transformation

PITFALL People study hard and rarely do anything with what they read.

INSTEAD Keep asking, “How are you responding to what God is saying?”

Leaders running on empty

PITFALL Leaders are so busy serving that their own time with God gets squeezed out.

INSTEAD Protect leaders’ time with God and ask about it in leadership meetings.

Assuming people know how

PITFALL Leaders call people to the secret place and never show them what to do once they get there.

INSTEAD Teach a few concrete tools and practice them together.

— WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Eight people, eight ways to meet with God

These stories show how differently a healthy devotional life can look across ages and stages of life.

ELEMENTARY

Addy

Addy is in second grade and learning to meet with God on her own. A simple kids' devotional guide walks her through reading Scripture, worshiping and praying each day.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Elijah

Elijah has football and basketball practice before school, so he meets with the Lord before bed. He and his dad are reading through the Bible this year and talk about it every Saturday morning.

HIGH SCHOOL

Beth

Beth tries to start each day alone with the Lord. She memorizes verses tied to areas where she wants to grow, then puts on worship music while she gets ready for school.

COLLEGE

Adolpho

Adolpho shares a dorm room with two guys, so he gets up early and reads Scripture in his closet. He keeps a journal of what the Spirit highlights, and at night he runs by the river and prays for his family and his house church.

WORKING PROFESSIONAL

Kendra

Kendra teaches middle school. She gets to her classroom early to worship and read before the students arrive, and during her off period she walks the halls praying for coworkers and kids. This year she is trying to keep Saturday as a real Sabbath.

PARENT OF YOUNG KIDS

Tammy

Tammy has three kids under four and nobody sleeps on a schedule. Most mornings she puts the baby in the jogging stroller and listens to the Bible while her husband gets the other two kids up and started with breakfast. She and a few moms from her house church pray for each other by group text through the day.

BUSINESS OWNER

Robert

Robert picks up his guitar and worships first thing every morning. The guys in his discipleship group are studying Matthew this fall, and he uses Lectio Divina to pray through each chapter.

EMPTY NESTER

Anne

Anne loves the quiet now that the kids are gone. She sits in silence with the Lord, prays through the Psalms and writes down what she senses God saying. Gardening is her time to pray for her family and for friends planting churches overseas.

Four ways churches & church planting teams cultivate this value

An Annual Priority

One church community does an annual initiative in January to start each year strengthening their devotional lives.

A Missional Experience

One church community does a devotional experience as part of all of their mission trip training and all of their mission trips build into their schedule the practice of personal devotional time.

In Discipleship Lessons

A church planting team has a lesson on personal devotional life built into their discipleship lessons to train new believers in.

For Leader Selection and Training

A church makes personal devotional life a key part of their leadership selection and training program.

TOOLS

Resources

Keep growing in this circle personally and as a church with these resources.

- **Alone With God** (Antioch resource). Our foundational book and workbook for building a meaningful devotional life through the Word, worship, prayer, listening and obeying.

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- **40 Days of Devotion** (Antioch Resource). A 40 Day Devotional to help build or rebuild the habit of life-giving time with Jesus.
 - **Kids' devotional guides** (For kids and families). Simple daily guides that help children build their own time with God. Antioch Waco Kids Ministry uses JAM Time guides.
 - **Practicing the Presence of God, Brother Lawrence** (Classic). A short book on staying aware of God while you wash dishes, work and go about an ordinary day.
 - **Celebration of Discipline, Richard Foster** (Classic). An introduction to the spiritual disciplines that help us abide in Christ.

Next: Life-on-Life Discipleship. Time alone with God was never meant to stay alone. Circle 2 is about the few close relationships that keep us honest before God and help us bring others along.

2

Life-on-Life Discipleship

These are intentional relationships focused on growing as lifelong, obedient followers of Jesus who in turn help others to do the same.

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”

2 TIMOTHY 2:2



Making Disciples Who Make Disciples

Jesus spent three years investing in the 12. He ate with them, traveled with them, ministered with them, corrected them and sent them out. That is still how disciples are made.

These relationships look different depending on age, stage of life and need, but underneath they share the same core:

- Looking Up: Growing in a lifestyle of love and devotion to Jesus
- Looking In: Growing in a lifestyle of holiness and love
- Looking Out: Growing in a Great Commission lifestyle.

In this chapter: Why it matters, Core practices, Putting it into practice, What it looks like, Resources.

This circle keeps our hearts honest before Jesus, and it is how disciples who make disciples get multiplied.



“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

PROVERBS 27:17

— WHY IT MATTERS

Four convictions

This is why life on life discipleship is important.

Jesus modeled it and commanded it

Jesus poured His earthly ministry into a few relationships, and then He told His followers to go and do the same. When we invest in discipleship relationships, we are following His lead.

MATTHEW 4:19; MATTHEW 28:18-20; 2 TIMOTHY 2:2

We need people who know the real story

Google, Facebook and TikTok study us so they know exactly what will grab our attention. The enemy knows our algorithm for temptation too. We need a few people who know it as well as he does.

PROVERBS 28:13; ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10; JAMES 5:16-20

We need encouragement (and sometimes rebuke)

We do not always see ourselves the way the Holy Spirit sees us. A discipleship relationship gives us steady encouragement, a godly outside view and, when we need it, a friend willing to tell us we are wrong.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:14; 2 TIMOTHY 4:2; HEBREWS 3:13

We learn by watching a life up close

We can learn a lot from classes, books, sermons and podcasts. Most of those show people at their best, though. In a discipleship relationship you get to see how someone follows Jesus on a bad Tuesday or boring Thursday, which is the kind of learning Jesus gave His disciples.

1 THESSALONIANS 2:7-12; PHILIPPIANS 4:9; 1 CORINTHIANS 11:1

CORE PRACTICES

Look Up, Look In, Look Out

Every discipleship relationship, at any age, comes back to the same three things.

- **Looking Up:** Helping each other build a close, lifelong relationship with God through a daily devotional life and abiding with Jesus every day.
- **Looking In:** Helping each other grow in Christlike character and following Jesus' leadership. This is where accountability, confession, repentance, encouragement and prayer happen.
- **Looking Out:** Helping each other live as salt and light wherever God has placed us, loving neighbors, sharing the gospel, making disciples and planting churches.

Two kinds of discipleship relationships

Peer-to-peer

People at a similar stage of life and spiritual maturity meet to sharpen each other. These groups are usually two to four people, and they are a core part of house church life.

PROVERBS 27:17

Mentoring

A more mature believer invests in someone younger in the faith, the way Paul invested in Timothy and the way Titus 2 tells older women to invest in younger women. These relationships usually last a season and often start on their own.

2 TIMOTHY 2:2; TITUS 2:3-5

Grace over performance. We are not trying to build a perfect discipleship system. We want a church that makes these relationships a priority, in an environment of love and grace, so that everyone gets to experience what they bring.

— PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

The leader's role

Discipleship spreads one relationship at a time. A leader's job is to make it normal for every disciple to be disciplined and to be discipling someone else.

- **Model (lead by example).** Be in discipleship relationships yourself. Intentionally invest in a few people. If the leaders are not being disciplined, it will not be a part of the culture.
- **Structure (make room for it).** Build discipleship groups into house church life. Some groups meet during the gathering. Others meet another time during the week.
- **Equip (make it simple).** Give leaders simple tools to use when they meet, like the lessons at DiscipleshipLessons.com.
- **Connect (make it easy).** Help people find peers and mentors. Make it normal to say, "Would you walk with me this season?"
- **Multiply (keep it moving).** Keep asking, "Who are you investing in?"

— PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Common pitfalls

Discipleship relationships usually go off track in one of these ways.

Accountability without grace

PITFALL The group becomes a place of shame, and people start hiding instead of confessing.

INSTEAD Cultivate honesty. When someone confesses, respond with grace and pray for them.

A book club

PITFALL The group studies together and never gets personal.

INSTEAD Make room for Looking In every time you meet. Talk honestly about how each person is following Jesus, even when there is a study to get through.

Only looking inward

PITFALL The group takes good care of each other and never talks about mission.

INSTEAD Keep Looking Out in every conversation. Ask who each person is reaching and who they are discipling.

Waiting for the perfect mentor

PITFALL People never start because they cannot find the ideal person to disciple them.

INSTEAD Start with peers. Peer-to-peer discipleship is biblical too.

Groups that never change

PITFALL The same group meets for years and never sends anyone out to disciple others.

INSTEAD Expect seasons. Send people out to start new groups.

Leaders who only give

PITFALL Leaders pour into others and have no one pouring into them.

INSTEAD Make sure every leader has their own discipleship relationship.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Peers and mentors

These examples show how discipleship relationships form across ages, stages and ministries.

Peer-to-peer examples

Middle school students

Middle schoolers meet in peer discipleship groups every week as part of their Sunday night service.

High school students

High schoolers meet every week in small core groups as part of their house churches.

A house church that splits for the second hour

For the first hour, everyone eats, worships and prays together. For the second hour, they break into peer discipleship groups.

A house church with groups through the week

The whole group worships, studies Scripture and prays together, and they eat lunch together after church on Sundays. Four discipleship groups meet at other times during the week, whenever their schedules line up.

A house church full of young kids

This group has a lot of little ones. Twice a month everyone meets to worship as families, pray for each other and have fun. Two evenings a month the moms meet in discipleship groups, and the dads meet every Friday morning.

Mentoring examples

Kids

Starting in first grade, kids break into discipleship groups led by an Antioch Kids leader during Sunday morning. Every week they practice the basics of discipleship in ways that fit their age.

COLLEGE

Sarah

Sarah is a junior. Three freshmen in her sorority are new believers and hungry to grow, so on top of being in a house church with them she meets with them every week. Next fall she wants to team up with them to mentor other new believers in the sorority.

MINISTRY LEADER

Eric

Eric is a section leader in the young adult ministry. His zone pastor mentors him, Eric invests in four house church leaders, and those leaders invest in the men in their groups.

MENTORING MINISTRY

Helen

Helen has been part of Kingdom Mentoring for six years. Each year she mentors three younger women who sign up, and four of the women she has mentored now mentor others through the program.

VOLUNTEER TEAM LEADER

Tim

Tim leads the production team. He started a mentoring group of four guys on the team, and on top of serving together they meet regularly.

WORKPLACE

John

John works at the university and each semester discipless students on his lunch break. Over the span of 10 years, he has discipless 400 students through lunch time Bible studies and many have gone on to disciple others.

MARRIAGE

Donny and Meredith

Donny and Meredith care a lot about helping young couples start their marriages well. With two other couples, they invited a handful of newlyweds into a house church and mentor them in discipleship groups.

Four ways churches & church planting teams cultivate this value

Through Discipleship Trees

One church community keeps a discipleship tree to keep track of the discipleship relationships in their church.

For Leader Selection and Training

One church makes making disciples a key part of their leadership selection, role descriptions, and training program.

With Testimonies

One church community shares testimonies when they gather around discipleship and making disciples. This is a celebrated value in their community!

In Discipleship Lessons

A church planting team includes helping new disciples make disciples as a part of their discipleship foundation lessons.

TOOLS

Resources

- **DiscipleshipLessons.com** (Antioch resource). Our foundational website with basic lessons for starting a discipleship relationship and going deeper.
- **The Master Plan of Evangelism** and **The Master Plan of Discipleship**, Robert Coleman (Classic). The first studies how Jesus made disciples. The second follows the early church in Acts as it carried that pattern forward.
- **Looking Up:**
 - Model your own devotional life.
 - Follow a Bible reading plan or study a book of the Bible together, and talk about how you are responding.
 - Work through the Alone With God workbook and try a new tool each week.
 - Memorize Scripture together.
 - Do 40 Days of Devotion together

- Read Practicing the Presence of God or Celebration of Discipline together.

- **Looking In:**

- Work through 7 Steps to Freedom together.
- Use Galatians 5:16–26 or the John Wesley’s Accountability Questions as a guide for confession.
- Write down prayer requests, keep track of answers and pick days to pray for each other.
- Practice listening prayer for each other and share what you sense.

- **Looking Out:**

- Serve together on a ministry team that makes disciples.
- Pray by name for the people each of you is discipling and for friends who do not know Jesus.
- Help everyone learn to tell their testimony, and practice sharing the gospel together.
- Make a relationship map of the people in your life who do not know Christ.
- Set a group goal for sharing your faith.
- Go on a mission trip or serve in an evangelistic ministry together.

Next: House-to-House. Discipleship relationships grow best inside a spiritual family. Circle 3 is about the home-based communities at the heart of the church.

3

House-to-House

Small discipleship communities at the heart of the church, where authentic relationships live out Kingdom values together in homes and apartments across the city.

“They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

ACTS 2:46-47



The church as a family

House-to-House communities are the small discipleship communities at the heart of the church. They meet on a certain night of the week, and their life together carries on well past that night. People eat together, study God's Word together, show up for each other and look for ways to be salt and light in their neighborhood.

In this playbook we call them house churches. At Antioch Waco they are called Lifegroups, and across the movement you will also hear missional communities or small groups. The heartbeat is the same, even though a high school group in a basement looks nothing like a group of young families or a dozen retirees on a back porch.

In this chapter: Why it matters, Core practices, Putting it into practice, What it looks like, Tools, Resources.

In this circle, Jesus and His Word sit at the center of family life together. And because a house church can be planted anywhere, this circle is how the church spreads.



“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.”

ACTS 5:42

— WHY IT MATTERS

Five convictions

This is why House-to-House community sits at the heart of a healthy church.

The early church met house to house

Throughout the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, the church met in homes. When we invest in these communities, we are following the pattern they set.

ACTS 2:42-47; 5:42; 16:40; 20:20; ROMANS 16:5; 1 CORINTHIANS 16:19; COLOSSIANS 4:15; PHILEMON 1:2

It is where we live as a spiritual family

In Christ, God has adopted us into His family. The New Testament is full of “one another” commands. We are told to love, honor, welcome, forgive, bear with and build up one another. It is hard to obey most of those from a row of chairs on Sunday. In a home, we actually get the chance, and the Holy Spirit uses it to change us.

JOHN 13:34-35; ROMANS 12:10; GALATIANS 6:2; HEBREWS 10:24-25

Everyone gets to contribute

Every disciple is part of a royal priesthood, and the Holy Spirit works through each one. In a living room, everyone can share, pray and use their gifts. It is also the best place we know to give new leaders their first chance to lead.

1 PETER 2:5-9; 1 CORINTHIANS 12:7-11; 14:26

It puts the church in every neighborhood

House churches build up disciples, and they also exist for the people around them. A group might focus on its street, a school campus, a workplace or a particular people group in the city.

MATTHEW 5:13-16

It works anywhere in the world

Every culture has homes, friends, neighbors and extended family. The pattern in Acts started with the Holy Spirit, and it can be planted in any country and any culture.

ACTS 2:42-47

CORE PRACTICES

Ten marks of an Acts 2 community

We use Acts 2:42–47 as a picture of what a House-to-House community should look like.

- **Devoted to Scripture.** The early church built their lives on the apostles' teaching. We want to hear God's Word and then do something with it, as individuals and as a group.
- **Devoted to fellowship.** Sharing life, being honest with each other and loving one another.
- **Devoted to breaking bread.** Eating together often, and taking communion together as the Spirit leads.
- **Devoted to prayer.** Prayer is one of the things people should notice first about the group.
- **Filled with awe.** Making room for God's presence through worship, testimonies and spiritual gifts.
- **Generous with one another.** Taking care of each other's needs, sometimes financially, as the Spirit leads.
- **Connected to the broader church.** They met house to house and in the temple courts. A house church is part of a larger church family.
- **Marked by joy and authenticity.** Every group goes through seasons. We want joy and honesty to stay through all of them.

-
- **Enjoying favor with God and people.** Neighbors should be glad the group is there.
 - **Seeing people saved.** The Lord added to their number daily. We want the same.

Godly leaders

The house churches in the New Testament had godly leaders. We want house churches led by leaders and leadership teams who are:

- **Godly examples** in and to the community.
- **Humble**, in it for Him and for them.
- **Eager to serve.**

ACTS 6:3-7; 1 TIMOTHY 3; TITUS 1; 1 PETER 5

— PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

The leader's role

A house church leader is a shepherd. They build a family, raise up new leaders and keep the group looking outward.

- **Model (lead by example).** Live the Acts 2 marks yourself. Over time the group will look a lot like its leaders.
- **Gather (make it a family).** Open your home and your life. Meals, birthdays and time together outside the meeting are what make the meeting work.
- **Facilitate (make room for everyone).** Help people share, pray and use their gifts. You do not need to do it all yourself.
- **Develop (raise new leaders).** Always have someone you are training to lead. Hand off parts of the gathering early.
- **Send (keep it outward).** Keep the neighborhood, campus or people group in front of the group, and talk about multiplying from the start.

- 
- **Stay connected (never alone).** Every house church leader needs someone investing in them, like a coach or overseer. That person needs someone too.

A simple gathering pattern

Gatherings vary by age and stage. Most include these parts.

- **Eat together.** A meal or snacks, and time to catch up.
- **Worship.** Song, Scripture and testimony.
- **Word.** Study Scripture together, often from that week's sermon, and talk about how to apply it.
- **Pray and minister.** Pray for one another, use spiritual gifts and break into discipleship groups.
- **Mission.** Pray for people who need Jesus and plan ways to serve and reach out.

— PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Common pitfalls

House churches usually get stuck in one of these places.

A meeting, not a family

PITFALL The group meets faithfully, but nobody's life touches anyone else's between meetings.

INSTEAD Eat together, celebrate together and spend time together during the week.

Bible study only

PITFALL The group studies well but rarely prays, worships or ministers to each other.

INSTEAD Use the simple gathering pattern and leave room for the Holy Spirit.

The leader does everything

PITFALL One person hosts, teaches, leads worship and follows up with everyone.

INSTEAD Hand things off. Let others lead.

A closed circle

PITFALL The group is so close that new people feel like outsiders.

INSTEAD Keep an empty chair and invite people in regularly.



Never multiplying

PITFALL The group gets comfortable and never raises leaders or starts new groups.

INSTEAD Talk about multiplying from day one, and always have an apprentice.

Disconnected from the church

PITFALL The group slowly drifts away from the wider church family.

INSTEAD Tie the gathering to Sunday teaching and to the life of the whole church.

— WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Four house churches

These stories from Antioch Waco show how differently House-to-House communities can look.

HIGH SCHOOL

The Jones house church

High schoolers pile into the Joneses' house on Sunday nights for games, snacks and a lot of noise. They worship, then split into core groups to study God's Word and talk about how they are living it out. They close by praying for each other and for friends and family who need Jesus, and the group text keeps going all week. The Joneses are training a young adult couple to lead with them this spring, and in the fall they hope to help that couple start a new high school group.

COLLEGE

Stephen and Larissa

Stephen and Larissa are juniors who lead a house church in an apartment near campus on Tuesday nights. They celebrate every birthday, eat together and play a lot of sports on the weekends, and they bring friends who do not know Jesus to those hangouts. Tuesdays are worship and a Bible study from that week's college service. They pray together before class on Thursday mornings and meet in discipleship groups through the week. Each of them is training two sophomores to take over in the fall so they can start a new group for incoming freshmen.

SCHOOL FAMILIES

The Mora and Fisher house church

These families all have kids at the same school. Twice a month everyone meets to worship, eat and catch up. Twice a month the moms meet for discipleship while the dads watch the kids, and the dads meet on Friday mornings before work. The whole group prays for their school and reaches out to students, teachers and families there. They have asked another family to help lead, and they are excited to watch them grow.

MULTIGENERATIONAL

The Phillips house church

The Phillips lead a group of all ages who live in the same part of the city. They eat, worship and study Scripture together every week, and the kids are part of it. The group has grown, and now they are praying about starting a new one in a nearby neighborhood. Each family takes a turn leading so that new leaders are ready when it is time.

Underneath every one of these groups is a culture of investment. House church leaders invest in their groups. Coaches invest in house church leaders. Overseers invest in coaches.

TOOLS

Key questions for leaders

Talk through these with your leadership team or your coach.

- 1 Which of the ten Acts 2 marks is strongest in our group right now, and which needs the most attention?
- 2 Does everyone in the group have a discipleship relationship?
- 3 Who are we developing to lead, and what could we hand them next?

-
- 4 Who are we reaching? When did someone last come to faith or join the group?
 - 5 How are we caring for each other outside the weekly gathering?
 - 6 How are we staying connected to the broader church family?

Activities to try

- Share a meal before every gathering, and rotate homes or hosts.
- Open with stories of what God did that week.
- Take communion together.
- Practice listening prayer and spiritual gifts for one another.
- Adopt a neighborhood, school or apartment complex and serve it together.
- Throw a party that is easy to invite friends to.
- Have apprentices lead different parts of the gathering each week.
- Study the book of Acts together.

A leader development path

- 1 **Identify.** Watch for people who are godly, humble and eager to serve.
- 2 **Apprentice.** Invite them to lead parts of the gathering alongside you.
- 3 **Co-lead.** Share full leadership of the group for a season.
- 4 **Launch.** Send them out to start a new group, with your blessing and support.
- 5 **Coach.** Keep investing in them while they start the cycle again.

Resources

Keep growing in this circle personally and as a church with these resources.

- **The book of Acts** (Scripture). Read Acts 2:42–47, then follow the house-to-house church through the rest of the book.
- **LifegroupLeaders.com** (Antioch resource). Training and tools for leading and multiplying Lifegroups.

Next: Church Gathered. House churches were never meant to stand alone. Circle 4 is about the whole church family coming together.

4

Church Gathered

Gathering as a broader church family for intentional times of prayer, equipping, ministry, giving, celebration and public proclamation.

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

EPHESIANS 4:11-12

The whole church family in one room

The early church met house to house and in the temple courts. Church Gathered is the temple courts half of that picture.

Sharing life in homes is essential, and so is coming together as one big church family. When we gather, we pray, get equipped, serve, give, celebrate what God is doing and proclaim the gospel to anyone who walks in the door.

People take part differently depending on their age, stage of life, maturity, personality and what the Holy Spirit is leading them into that season. The location of the church can also shape how this circle works, but the big idea is that the church needs times to gather as a community for the Ephesians 4 vision of the body being equipped and building itself up in love to happen.

In this chapter: Why it matters, Core practices, Putting it into practice, What it looks like, Tools, Resources.

In this circle the church family worships and prays together. It is also where believers get equipped for ministry, and where our combined giving reaches the city and the nations.



“From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

EPHESIANS 4:16

— WHY IT MATTERS

Six convictions

This is why gathering as a whole church matters.

The early church gathered

Throughout the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, God's people came together in larger groups to pray, be taught, minister, give, celebrate and hear the gospel proclaimed.

MATTHEW 5:1; ACTS 2:42-47; 5:42; 11:26; 19:10; 20:20

Some prayer needs the whole church

Prayer belongs in every circle. Some burdens, though, like a heart for a nation or a local school, call for the whole church to pray together. So do hard seasons, when the church is going through a trial.

ACTS 1:14; 3:1; 4:23-31

Gathering allows the church to be equipped

When the church gathers, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers have the chance to equip everyone for works of service.

MATTHEW 5:1-7:28; ACTS 19:9; EPHESIANS 4:11-16; 1 TIMOTHY 4:13

We can do more together

Some ministry opportunities take more hands than one house church has. When the whole congregation serves together, a lot more gets done.

ACTS 6-7; 1 CORINTHIANS 12

Our giving goes further together

When we pool our giving, we can make a real difference in the life of the church and in Kingdom work in our city, our nation and the nations.

ACTS 4:32-36; 11:27-30; 1 CORINTHIANS 16:2

We celebrate and proclaim together

When we gather, we get to celebrate what God is doing all across the church family, and we get to proclaim the gospel out loud.

ACTS 12:5-18; 15:2-4; 1 TIMOTHY 4:13; ACTS 20:20

CORE PRACTICES

Six purposes of gathering

A healthy church gathers on purpose. Over the course of a year, its gatherings make room for all six of these.

- **Prayer.** Focused times when the whole church prays for the church, the city and the nations.
- **Equipping.** Teaching and training that prepare every believer for ministry.
- **Ministry.** Members serving with their gifts, on stage and off.
- **Giving.** Tithes, offerings and special projects.
- **Celebration.** Worship, and stories of what God is doing among us.
- **Proclamation.** Telling the gospel clearly and publicly.

Fueled by grace. We are not trying to check off a list of events. We want a church family that runs on grace and works like a body, building itself up in love as each part does its work.

The leader's role

Few things shape a church's culture like its gatherings do. Plan them on purpose, and plan them so people participate.

- **Model (lead by example).** Gather faithfully. Pray, serve, give and celebrate alongside everyone else, and not only from the stage.
- **Plan (hold all six).** Build a yearly calendar with room for all six purposes. Sunday alone usually cannot carry them.
- **Equip (release the fivefold).** Give apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers room to equip the church. If only one kind of gifting ever gets the microphone, the church ends up lopsided.
- **Mobilize (every member a minister).** Make it easy to start serving. Young adults and new members are often ready to start giving instead of only receiving. Give them a clear first step.
- **Steward generosity (give with vision).** Teach giving as worship, and show people what their giving is doing.
- **Connect (link gathered and scattered).** Tie Sunday to the other circles. A house church study based on the sermon and a testimony from someone's mission or time with God are two easy ways to start.

— PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Common pitfalls

Gatherings usually go off track in one of these ways.

A spectator culture

PITFALL People attend but never serve, pray or contribute.

INSTEAD Make it easy to start serving, and honor the people who do.

Sunday only

PITFALL The weekly service becomes the only gathering, so prayer, equipping and celebration get squeezed out.

INSTEAD Plan a yearly calendar with room for all six purposes. Think prayer nights, ministry projects, training weekends etc.

Event overload

PITFALL The calendar is so full that people have no time left for their homes, their discipleship relationships or mission.

INSTEAD Gather on purpose, and protect time for the other circles.

Teaching without equipping

PITFALL People hear great sermons and never get trained to minister.

INSTEAD Pair teaching with practical training and a chance to practice.

Giving as fundraising

PITFALL Giving is always presented as a need to meet.

INSTEAD Teach generosity as worship and partnership, and tell the stories of what giving accomplishes.

Disconnected from homes

PITFALL Sunday and the house churches feel like two different churches.

INSTEAD Link Sunday teaching to house church study, and share stories across both.

— WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Five Ways People Participate in Church Gathered

These stories show how differently people take part in Church Gathered.

HIGH SCHOOL

Juan

Juan is a junior who worships and learns on Sunday mornings. He serves on the tech and media teams, which is how he has made a lot of his friends at church. He came to the spring and fall prayer nights, and he has started tithing on what he earned at his summer job.

COLLEGE

Alicia

Alicia goes to the Sunday service and the weekly college service. This semester she signed up to lead worship for an hour in the House of Prayer, so she gets to pray with the church and use her gifts at the same time. She works part time on top of school and is learning to tithe on what she makes.

YOUNG ADULTS

Joe and Marybeth

Joe and Marybeth are a few years into marriage and their first full-time jobs. They volunteered in youth ministry, and for the first time in their lives they are coming to church to give and not only to receive. It is changing how they own their faith. They meet before the youth service to pray for the students, they tithe, and this summer they sponsored two kids to go to Camp Nikos.

FAMILY

The Smith family

The Smiths serve as college parents and pray with the other college parents before the college service. Serving together has brought their family closer. They tithe and support two missionaries who came through the college ministry before moving overseas.

WIDOWER

Will

Will went through Antioch Discipleship School a few years ago, and now he leads a discipleship group in it. He loves investing in people. He also joins a nations prayer time in the House of Prayer, where he prays for former ADS students who are now planting churches overseas. He tithes and gives faithfully to Acts of Mercy.

4 Ways Churches & Church Plants Are Doing Church Gathered

These stories show how differently churches practice Church Gathered.

CLOSED COUNTRY

Church Planting Team

This team ministers in a closed nation. Once a month they host a half night of prayer to bring house church leaders from around their city together to pray. In the summer they rent a cabin in a remote mountain town and run a discipleship school for a week at a time.

New Church Plant

This new church plant has three house churches. They gather once a month on Sundays to celebrate all that God has done in the churches that month. They have also started their first cohort of discipleship school.

Church Plant in Prison

This church plant hosts a prison wide revival weekend twice a year. This weekend has worship, preaching, ministry and baptisms. They also run a Bible training program one night a week for leaders in their ministry.

At Antioch Waco

- **Weekly worship.** The Sunday service, plus services for middle school, youth, college, young adults and our Spanish-speaking congregation.
- **Prayer.** Churchwide prayer nights and House of Prayer hours.
- **Equipping.** Antioch Discipleship School, leadership trainings, Come Together and Life University classes.
- **Ministry.** Serving teams such as Kids, Welcome, Worship and Prophetic Ministry.
- **Giving.** Tithes, offerings and special projects like Christmas Adopt a Family.

TOOLS

Key questions for leaders

Talk through these with your leadership team.

- 1 Over the past year, which of the six purposes did our gatherings serve well, and which did we neglect?
- 2 What percentage of our people serve, and how easy is it for a new person to start?
- 3 Are we training people for ministry, or only teaching them?
- 4 How do our gatherings connect to what is happening in house churches, discipleship relationships and mission?
- 5 When did we last celebrate a story of what God is doing among us?
- 6 Do our ministries ever gather as one family, or only on their own?

A gathering planning grid

List every gathering on your calendar down the left side. Put the six purposes across the top. Mark which purposes each gathering serves. Any column with few marks is where to plan next.

Activities to try

- Hold a churchwide night of prayer for a specific need, nation or local school.
- Invite a testimony from a house church, a mission team or a new believer.
- Host a serving team fair, or offer one simple first step into serving.
- Offer a semester-long equipping class, like a discipleship school or leadership training.
- Launch a special giving project tied to a clear Kingdom cause.
- Send home a sermon-based study guide for house churches each week.

Resources

Keep growing in this circle personally and as a church with these resources.

- **Fivefold Ministry and the Antioch Movement** (Antioch resource). The movement's position paper on how apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers equip the church.
- **Antioch Discipleship School** (Antioch Waco). An intensive season of discipleship and training.
- **House of Prayer** (Antioch Waco). A model for sustained prayer and worship.

Next: Witness in the World. We gather so we can be sent. Circle 5 is about carrying the gospel into every sphere of society and to the nations.

CIRCLE 5 OF 5

5

Witness in the World

The Spirit-empowered intentionality with which we live on mission as salt and light in every sphere of society, loving our neighbors, sharing the gospel, making disciples and planting churches.

"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

2 CORINTHIANS 5:20

Sent

Every circle carries the church outward. Witness in the World is where the arrow lands, in neighborhoods, workplaces, campuses and nations.

Witness in the World is the calling of every disciple and the corporate witness of every church. Jesus sends each of us to be salt and light where we live and work, to love our neighbors, to share the gospel and to make disciples. And as the Lord leads, He sends some of us to plant churches. None of that is reserved for staff or for the few people who seem wired for it.

Together we are called to be a multiplying church-planting movement reaching every tribe, tongue, people and nation, through whom God brings transformation to personal lives, families, neighborhoods and every sphere of society in our city, nation and the nations for the glory of God.

In this chapter: Why it matters, Core practices, Putting it into practice, What it looks like, Tools, Resources.

In this circle, love for Jesus spills over into love for neighbor, and the church goes into every sphere of society and every nation.



“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

ACTS 1:8

— WHY IT MATTERS

Four convictions

This is why every disciple and every church is called to be a witness.

Jesus and the early church went out on purpose

All through the Gospels and Acts, Jesus and His followers were deliberate about being witnesses. When we do the same, we are following them.

JOHN 1:9; MATTHEW 5:13-16; 24:14; 28:18-20; ACTS 1:8

Lost people matter to God

God wants all people to be saved, and He has given the church the ministry of reconciliation. The Lamb is worthy of the reward of His suffering.

1 TIMOTHY 2:3-4; 2 CORINTHIANS 5:18-20

Jesus told us to love our neighbors

When the church takes its calling seriously, people get to experience the love of God through God's people.

MARK 12:31; LUKE 10:25-37

God is worthy of worship from every people

God wants the whole earth filled with the knowledge of His glory, as the waters cover the sea. Every family on earth should get the chance to worship Him.

HABAKKUK 2:14; PSALM 22:27; REVELATION 7:9-10

Five expressions of witness

The Holy Spirit leads each person differently. Across a healthy church, all five of these are happening.

- **Salt and light in daily life.** Living out Kingdom values at home, at work, at school and on our street.
- **Loving our neighbors.** Meeting practical needs, and letting people see God's love in what we do.
- **Sharing the gospel.** Telling our story and the story of Jesus, and inviting people to follow Him.
- **Making disciples.** Walking with new believers until they are following Jesus and helping someone else do the same.
- **Planting churches.** Starting new churches in our city, our nation and the nations.

Three pathways for witness

Long-term initiatives

The elders identify a few long-term efforts in the city, the nation and the nations. At Antioch Waco these include STARS, prison ministry, ETN and our church planting initiatives.

Spontaneous needs

Some needs show up without warning, like a disaster or a crisis in the city or overseas. At Antioch Waco we mostly respond through Impact Waco and Acts of Mercy.

Spirit-led personal witness

The Holy Spirit leads each believer personally and sends them to be His witness wherever He has placed them.

Every sphere of society

God has placed His people in school, family, neighborhood, business, healthcare, social justice, government, arts and media, and sports. The church is sent into all of them.

Faithfulness over activity. We are not trying to check off a list of outreach events. We want a church family filled with the Holy Spirit and faithful to its calling as witnesses.

— PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

The leader's role

Very few people become bold witnesses on their own. Leaders have to keep the lost and the nations in front of the church, train people to share their faith and show them where to go.

- **Model (lead by example).** Share your faith and love your neighbors. Tell the church your own stories, including the awkward ones. People will rarely be bolder than the leaders they watch.
- **Cast vision (keep it in front of people).** Remind the church often that lost people matter to God and that we are called to every nation.
- **Equip (make it doable).** Train every believer to share their testimony and the gospel. Give them a simple tool and a chance to practice it.

- **Build pathways (make it clear).** Give people clear next steps, from serving a need in the city to a short-term trip to a year of service to long-term sending.
- **Send (release people).** Find, train and send church planters and missionaries. Bless them in front of the whole church.
- **Celebrate (make it visible).** Tell stories of salvations, baptisms, new groups and new churches. They stir others to go.

— PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Common pitfalls

A church's witness usually stalls in one of these places.

Outsourced to the professionals

PITFALL Evangelism and missions get left to staff, missionaries and a few passionate people.

INSTEAD Train and expect every believer to be a witness where they are.

Programs without relationships

PITFALL Outreach events happen, but nobody stays in touch with the people they met.

INSTEAD Connect every outreach to house churches and discipleship relationships.

Deeds without words, or words without deeds

PITFALL The church serves well and never shares the gospel. Or it shares the gospel and does not show love.

INSTEAD Do both. Love your neighbor and tell them about Jesus.

Local only, or nations only

PITFALL The church focuses on its city and forgets the nations, or the reverse.

INSTEAD Keep Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth in view.

Never planting

PITFALL The church keeps growing and never sends anyone out to start a new church.

INSTEAD Pray for church planters, find them, send them and celebrate them.

Running on empty

PITFALL People serve and go until they burn out.

INSTEAD Keep witness rooted in the other four circles, especially time alone with God.

— WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Eight witnesses

These stories from Antioch Waco show how differently the Holy Spirit leads people to be His witnesses.

HIGH SCHOOL

Ellen

Ellen went with her youth group to serve at Camp Nikos for their summer mission trip. When she got home, she signed up to be a peer mentor for freshmen who are new to her school.

COLLEGE

Jeremy

At World Mandate, the Holy Spirit nudged Jeremy to reach out to a few students in his biology lab. All spring he has kept sharing his faith with them. One of them has come to Christ, and the two of them have started discipleship together.

YOUNG MARRIED COUPLE

Kevin and Danielle

Kevin and Danielle first heard about the need for foster and adoptive families during Antioch Discipleship School. The Holy Spirit led them to become foster parents. After caring for several children, they have started the process of adopting twins.

MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

Drew and Angie

Drew and Angie are both doctors, and they look for ways to care for their patients spiritually as well as medically. They went through Acts of Mercy training, and last summer they helped provide medical care to Ukrainian refugees in Europe.

NEIGHBORHOOD

The Binns family

When the Binns family moved into a new neighborhood, they joined the school PTA as a way to love their neighbors and help where they could. Those friendships turned into a house church for people from the neighborhood.

PRISON MINISTRY

Aric

Aric heard about Impact Waco's work in nearby prisons and felt the Spirit leading him to volunteer. Now he goes every Tuesday night to minister to prisoners, and he has started a house church inside.

SHORT-TERM TO LONG-TERM

Kara

Kara heard that Antioch wanted to plant a church in Colombia, so she went on a short-term trip there with her zone. While she was there, she felt the Lord leading her to join the church planting team for a year through the Serve Project. When the year is up, she will pray about joining the long-term team.

CHURCH PLANTERS

Colby and Jennifer

Colby and Jennifer sensed God calling their family to plant a church on a college campus in North Carolina. They are working with Antioch's missions team to be sent out.

TOOLS

Key questions

Use these in discipleship relationships, house churches and leadership meetings.

- 1 How are you being salt and light in your sphere of influence?
- 2 Who are you discipling, and how can I help you with that? Who are they investing in?
- 3 Who are you reaching out to who does not know Jesus, and how can I help you?
- 4 Where is the Holy Spirit leading you to serve, go or give in this season?

For leaders

- 1 When did someone in our church last come to faith, and did we celebrate it?
- 2 Do our people know how to share their testimony and the gospel?
- 3 Which long-term initiatives has God given us, and are we focused on them?
- 4 Who is God calling out from among us to plant or go, and how are we preparing them?

Activities to try

- Make a relationship map of the people in your life who do not know Christ.
- Pray by name for those who do not know Jesus, on your own and as a group.
- Help everyone learn to tell their testimony in two minutes.
- Practice sharing the gospel with each other.
- Set a group goal for sharing your faith.

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- Serve your neighborhood, school or a local need together.
 - Go on a mission trip together or serve in an evangelistic ministry.
 - Pray for the nations, and for the church planters and missionaries your church has sent.
-

— GO DEEPER

Resources

Keep growing in this circle personally and as a church with these resources.

- **Acts of Mercy** (Antioch movement). Relief, development and disaster-response training and opportunities.
- **Impact Waco** (Antioch Waco). An example of how a church can organize to meet needs across its city.
- **World Mandate** (Antioch movement). A missions conference focused on the nations.
- **The Serve Project** (Antioch movement). A one-year commitment to serve with a church planting team.
- **Antioch missions and church planting** (Antioch movement). How to be trained and sent as a church planter or missionary.

Next: Leading the 5 Circles. Part 3 pulls all five circles together into one leadership rhythm.



Leading the 5 Circles

How leaders keep all five circles healthy, year after year.

"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

1 CORINTHIANS 11:1

Leading the whole church

The circle chapters each cover one part of a healthy church. This chapter is about how leaders keep all five going at once.

Left alone, every church drifts toward whichever circle its leaders love most. We have watched it happen, and we have done it ourselves. The churches that stay healthy have leaders who keep the whole picture in view. They live the circles themselves, they pay attention to how their people are really doing, and they let what they hear decide how they train the church next year.

That pattern shows up in every circle. Any church can follow it, from a single house church to a large multi-site church.

In this chapter: Shared commitments, The annual rhythm, A strategy for every circle, Keeping balance, Common pitfalls, Tools.



“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care.”

1 PETER 5:2

— SHARED COMMITMENTS

Everyone has a part

A church is only as healthy as its circles, so every level of the church commits to all five.

Elders and senior leaders

For every circle, the elder team commits to:

- **Personal example.** Living out each circle in their own lives.
- **Appointing leaders.** Raising up leaders who carry each value.
- **Consistent leadership.** Keeping each circle in front of the church year after year.

Ministry leaders

Ministries look different by age and stage. Every ministry leader still needs a clear, life-giving plan for each circle that fits the people they lead, and a sense of how those circles are actually going among their leaders and members.

Members

Every member shares a commitment to:

- Cultivating a meaningful personal devotional life.
- Investing in Life-on-Life Discipleship relationships.
- Living out Kingdom values in House-to-House community.
- Gathering as a church family for prayer, equipping, ministry, giving, celebration and proclamation.
- Living as witnesses in the world, and seeing the church faithfully plant churches as the Lord leads.



Grace across the breadth of the church. People in a church family are at different stages of life and maturity, and they are wired differently. We are not trying to perfect five practices. We want everyone growing in all five in an environment of love and grace.

— THE ANNUAL RHYTHM

Model, listen, train

Good shepherds pay attention to the flock. Then they act on what they see.

1. Model

It starts with leaders living the circles themselves. Leaders cannot give away what they do not carry.

2. Listen

Leaders listen in a few different ways at once.

- **In prayer.** Elders, ministry leaders and house church leaders ask the Holy Spirit what He is saying about each circle.
- **To members.** The elders survey the church every year to hear how people are living out each circle and where they need help.
- **To ministry leaders.** Each ministry leader keeps a pulse on what is strong, what is hard and what is needed in each circle among their people.

3. Train

What leaders hear shapes the training plan for the year ahead. Some of that training is churchwide, and some is built for a specific age or stage.



One way to schedule the year

- **Early in the year: Listen.** Send the annual member survey and gather input from ministry leaders.
 - **Mid-year: Discern.** Elders review what they heard, pray together and pick one or two circles to emphasize.
 - **Late summer: Plan.** Ministry leaders update their plans and build training around the emphasis.
 - **Fall and beyond: Train and celebrate.** Launch the training, and tell stories of growth along the way.
-

— A STRATEGY FOR EVERY CIRCLE

A one-page plan

Every ministry, house church network and church plant should have a short written plan for all five circles.

For each circle, answer four questions:

- 1 **What are we doing now?** The rhythms and environments that already serve this circle.
- 2 **What is working?** Where we see fruit.
- 3 **What is our next step?** One concrete action for the coming year.
- 4 **Who owns it?** The leader responsible for that step.



CIRCLE	WHAT WE DO NOW	WHAT IS WORKING	NEXT STEP	OWNER
● Personal Devotional Life				
● Life-on-Life Discipleship				
● House-to-House				
● Church Gathered				
● Witness in the World				

Keep it to one page. Long plans tend to sit in a drawer.

Know your bias

Every leader has a favorite circle. The trouble starts when it becomes the only one you lead from.

Most leaders are drawn to one or two circles, and their churches grow strong there. Meanwhile the circles they care less about slowly weaken, often without anyone noticing.

- **Name your bias.** Ask your team which circle you naturally champion and which one you tend to forget.
- **Build a balanced team.** Surround yourself with leaders whose passions and gifts are different from yours. A team with apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral and teaching gifts will keep more of the circles in view.
- **Rotate the emphasis.** Use the annual rhythm to put a weaker circle in focus for a season while keeping the others going.
- **Tell stories from all five.** When the church gathers, celebrate what God is doing in every circle, including the ones you are less excited about.

— COMMON PITFALLS

Where leadership drifts

Leading the whole church usually goes off track in one of these ways.

Strategy on paper only

PITFALL Plans get written and never looked at again.

INSTEAD Review the one-page plan with your team at least twice a year.

Listening without acting

PITFALL Leaders gather feedback and nothing changes.

INSTEAD Tell people what you heard and what you are going to do about it.

Surveys only

PITFALL Leaders rely on the numbers and forget to listen in prayer and in person.

INSTEAD Use all three kinds of listening together.

The same training every year

PITFALL Training gets scheduled out of habit.

INSTEAD Let what you heard in the listening season shape the training plan.

Leaders who stop modeling

PITFALL Leaders still talk about the circles but have stopped living them.

INSTEAD Ask every leader about their own life in the circles, starting with the elders.



— TOOLS

Key questions for leadership teams

Use these in elder meetings and leadership retreats.

- 1 Which circle is strongest in our church right now, and which is weakest?
- 2 Which circle does each of us naturally champion, and which do we tend to overlook?
- 3 What did we hear this year from the Holy Spirit, our members and our ministry leaders?
- 4 Which one or two circles should we emphasize next year, and why?
- 5 Does every ministry have a clear, life-giving plan for all five circles?
- 6 Are we living out each circle ourselves?

An annual planning agenda

- 1 **Worship and pray** together, and ask the Lord to speak.
- 2 **Share what you heard** from prayer, member feedback and ministry leaders.
- 3 **Celebrate** stories of growth from each circle.
- 4 **Discern** one or two circles to emphasize.
- 5 **Update** each ministry's one-page plan.
- 6 **Build** the churchwide and ministry-specific training plans.



Keep going. Healthy churches are built over years by leaders who keep showing up.

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

GALATIANS 6:9