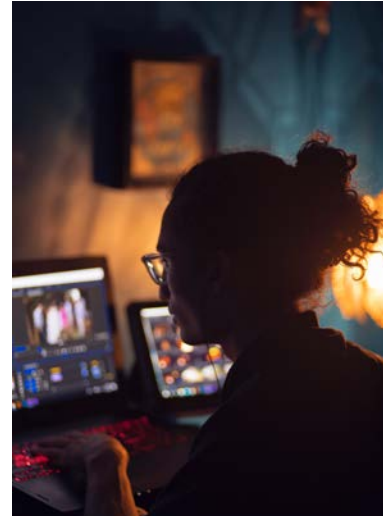




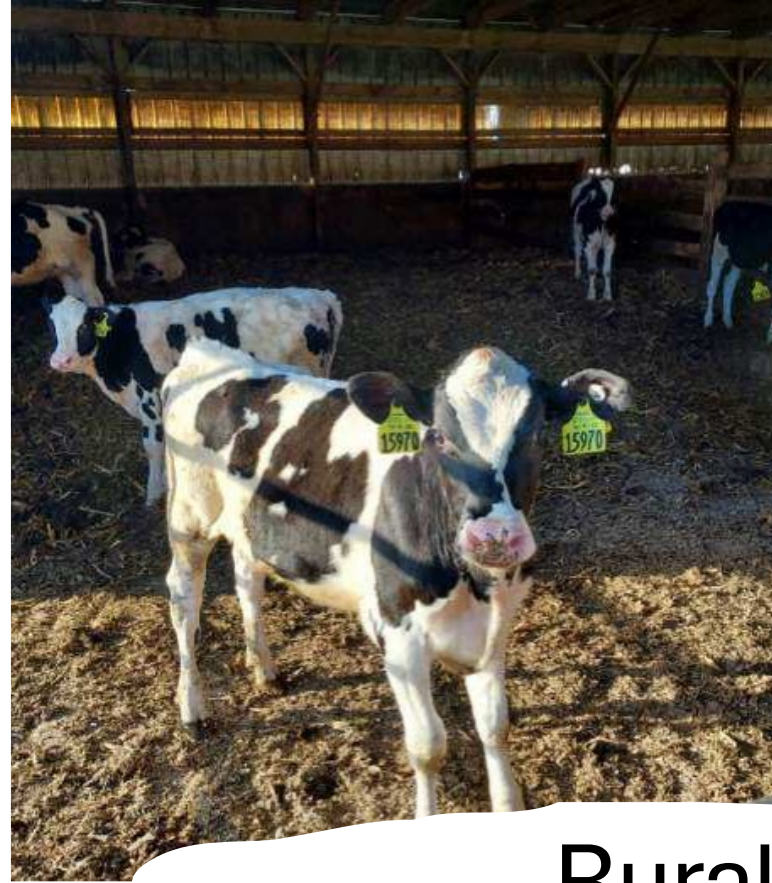
Discipleship as The Foundational Runway to a Fresh Expression Reality



# CROSSING THE DISCIPLESHIP CHASM



MATT LAKE



Rural Reality:  
We often see Jesus doing  
His best work and  
teaching here. Name some  
ways...



## Neil Cole:

*“Ultimately each church will be evaluated by only one thing. Its disciples. Your church is only as good as its disciples. It does not matter how good your praise, preaching, programs or property are. If you’re disciples are passive, needy, consumerist, and not moving in the direction of radical obedience, your church is not good.”*

# *Disciple*

Matthew 4:19

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”

Someone who has decided to follow Jesus, is being transformed by Jesus, and will be committed to the mission of Jesus



# Why the need for deeper discipleship and FX Focus?

## ...a Desert of Decline

- Ryan Burge shares “1/3 of current congregations are on the brink of extinction” (Medium, February, 2025, Eric Sentell)



# Failure to Embrace Discipleship... a Desert of Decline

- 100,000 churches could close by the year 2050 (this is  $\frac{1}{4}$  of all churches)

(Medium, February 2025, Eric Sentell)

- Church Membership plummeted from 70% to 47% in one generation

(Medium, February 2025, Eric Sentell)



# Failure to Embrace Discipleship... a Desert of Decline

Will McRaney notes that only **one percent** of churches in America are growing by conversion.

Similarly, podcast interviewer Carey Nieuwhof has reported that only **1%** of churches believe they are doing a good job of sharing the faith. (Barna Study, 2023)

# The Church's Discipleship Problem

Todd Wilson proclaims that 80% of American churches are either in decline or plateaued.



Do you have a  
discipleship  
problem?



Where do you see  
discipleship  
flourishing? Where not?

\*\*Have this conversation with your leadership

*Disciples*  
*(not volunteers)*  
*on*  
*Mission*

How do we get  
there?

# The Church's Discipleship Problem is a *WICKED* Problem

Wicked problems are, by their very nature, multi-factorial. They contain many layers of issues which must be addressed, and often those issues all occur at one time rather than in sequence. There is no ONE easy solution. No magic bullets. Just as the problems are multi-layered, so must the responses for potential solutions.



# Observe: Simultaneous Barriers to Discipleship

- **Cultural Upheaval** (what worked yesterday does not work today)
- **Irrelevant Measures** (we do not know how to measure healthy discipleship)
- **Focus on Information over Formation** (shared content does not = disciple)
- **Institutional Preservation** (focus on volunteers for us over God's Kingdom)
- **Passive Christian Spirituality** (desire for comfort over contending)
- **Culture of Instant Gratification** (authentic discipleship takes time)
- **Discipleship is not focused upon** (not as sexy as preaching/leadership, etc)



# 3 Layers of the Problem

**A focus on quick information over patient formation**

*We live in a culture of instant gratification*

# 3 Layers of the Problem

**An Orientation to functioning in the institutional church as the highest ideal (Church Volunteer culture over Disciple culture)**

*Irrelevant Metrics*

*Institutional Preservation/Blindness*

# 3 Layers of the Problem

**An Absence of apostolic practices in the wider culture beyond the institutional church**

*Passive Christian Spirituality—Focus on being cared for/comfort over serving and connecting with others*



## **3 Layers of Problems— All against a backdrop of cultural upheaval!**

ONE: A focus on quick information over patient formation

TWO: An orientation to functioning in the institutional church as the highest ideal

THREE: An absence of apostolic practices in the wider culture beyond the institutional church (spiritual obesity!)



Observe: Which discipleship layer is most pressing in your setting? Why do you say this?

ONE: A focus on quick information over patient formation

TWO: An orientation to functioning in the institutional church as the highest ideal—volunteer focus over discipleship focus

THREE: An absence of apostolic practices in the wider culture beyond the institutional church (spiritual obesity). Comfort over contending.

*\*\*Have this conversation with your leadership*

Multi-layered  
problems need  
multi-layered  
solutions:  
When we can  
name it we can  
navigate it





Our Story:

A Key Question:

**Is This All There Is?**

# The Answer To Discipleship Is Not One Dimensional:

- \*\*A class or a program that when you are done you are automatically like Jesus
- \*\*A list of rules and regulations
- \*\*A moral checklist
- \*\*A feel-good support group.
- \*\*A better or more robust Bible Study
- \*\*Found in isolation (the community is needed)
- \*\*Fixed with one person's job description
- \*\*Resolved with a siloed approach in churches  
(You would never stand for long on just one foot!)



# The Jesus Way: Formal and Informal





# THE JESUS WAY A Holy Tension

Truth---LOVE---Grace

Divine---LOVE---Human

Omnipotent---LOVE---Humility

Majestic---LOVE---Intimate

Formal---LOVE---Informal



# **A.P.E.S.T.**

**The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.**

**Ephesians 4:11-13**

**APEST is  
Formative  
and  
Generative**

**Formal**  
**Teachers**  
**Shepherds**  
**Prophets**

**Informal**  
**Apostles**  
**Evangelists**  
**Prophets**

# Gathered (Inherited)

Stable

Strong Discipleship

Comprehensive Ministry

Highly Visible

Centralized

# Sent (FX)

Nimble

Strong Evangelism

Specialized Ministry

Impacts Crevices

Decentralized

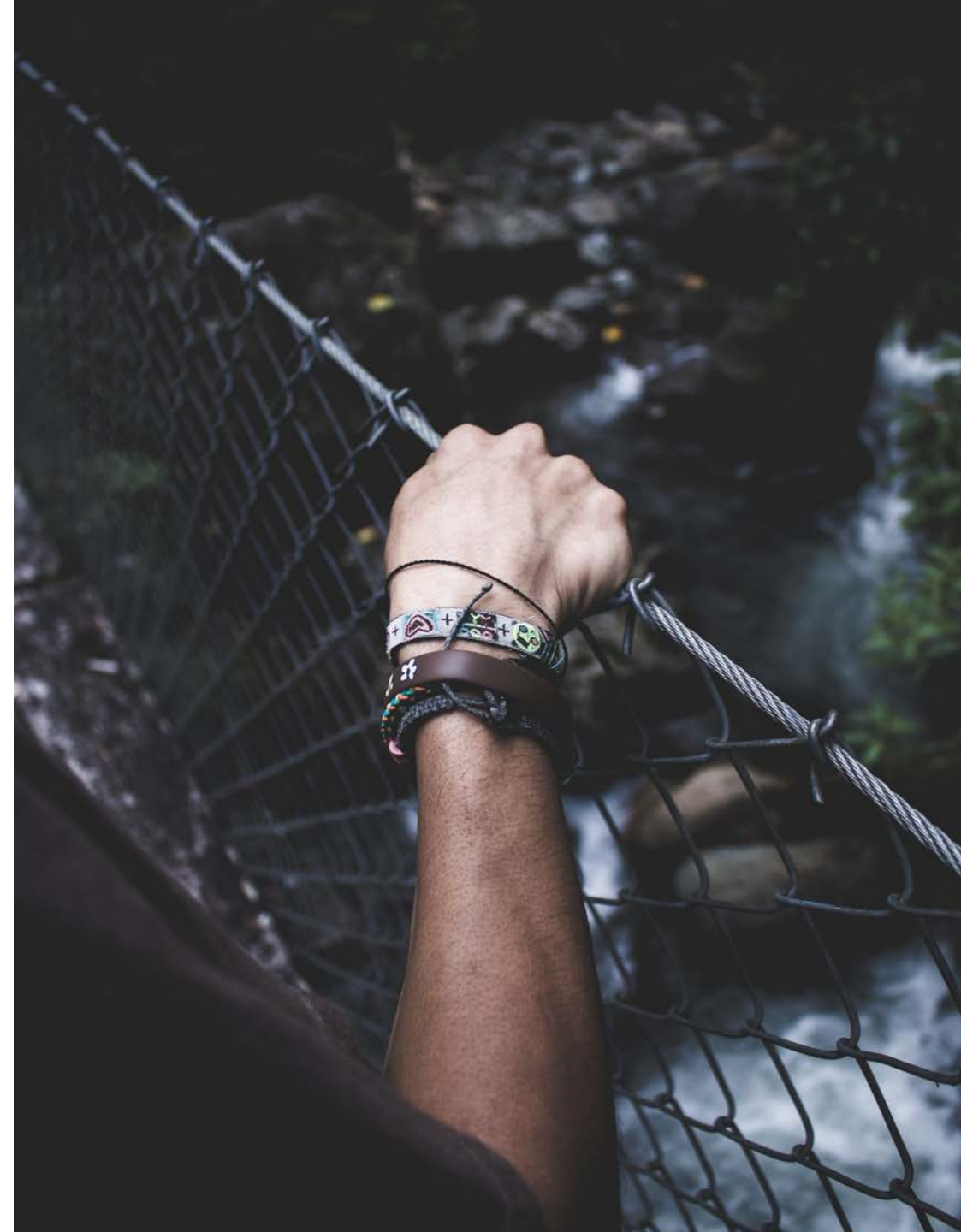


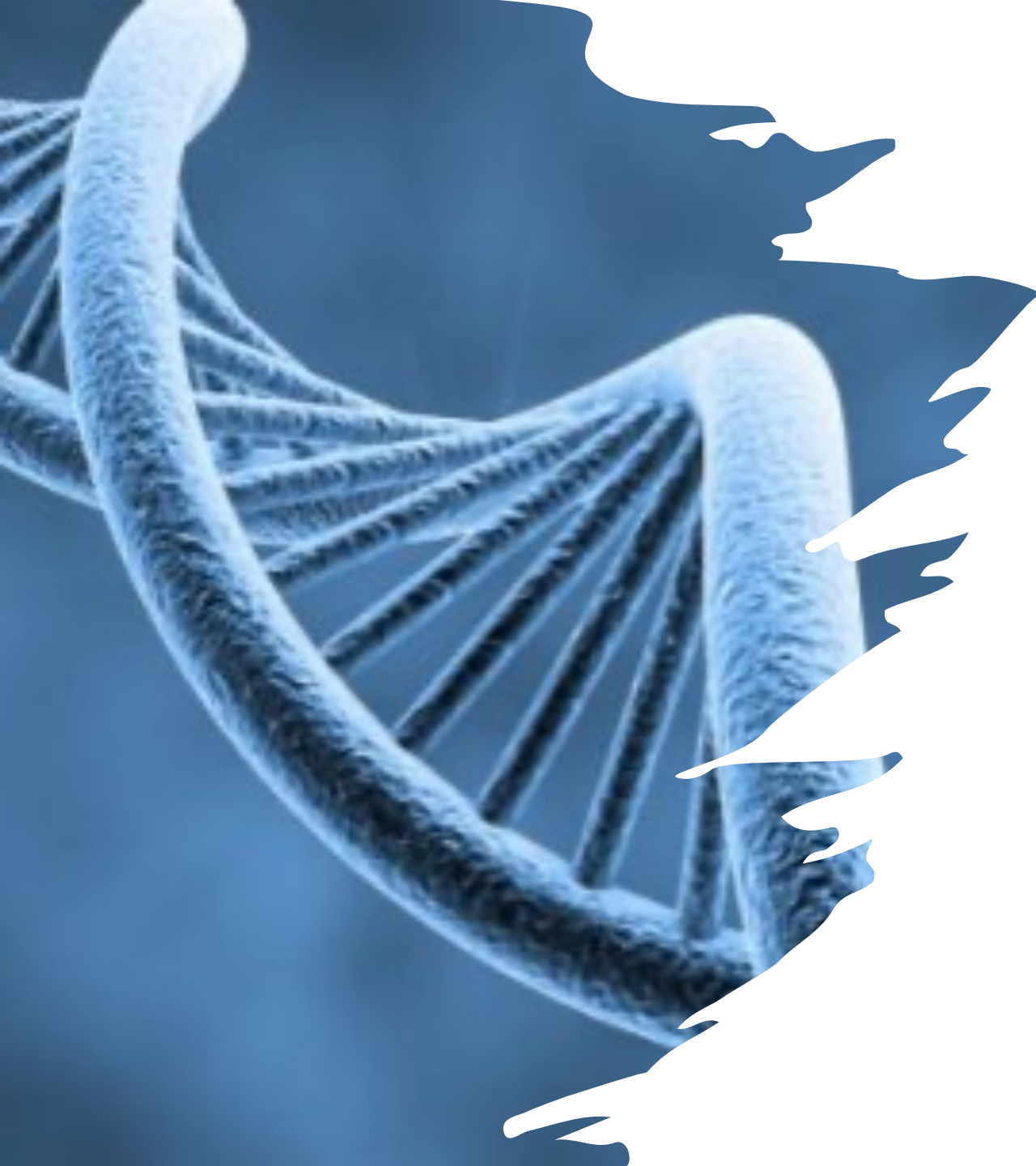
# Exercise: Is your church more...Gathered (ST) or Sent (APE)?

- Structured OR Flexible
- Intentional OR Organic
- Formal OR Informal
- Formative OR Generative
- Focused on Orthodoxy (right belief) OR Orthopraxy (right practice)

# Embrace the Both/And Tension

A bridge creates a way where there  
was no way





# BOTH *ST* and *APE* ARE NEEDED

Only Apostles and Evangelists leads to wide but shallow growth (wide but not deep)

Only Shepherds and Teachers leads to depth, but not connection with new people (deep but not wide—some would say spiritual obesity)

The tension between *APE* and *ST* is essential.

# Formal and Informal

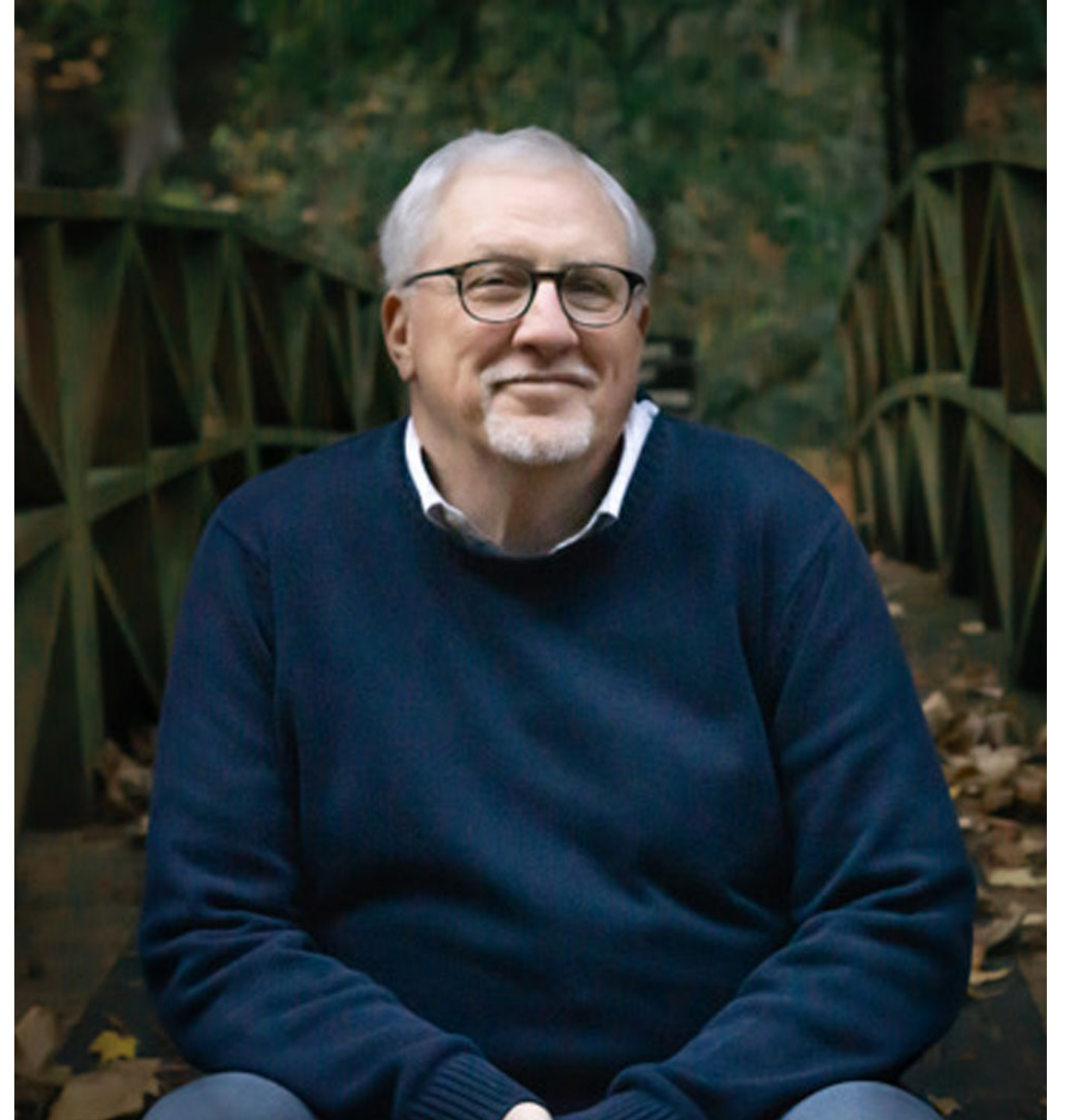
Matthew 11:1

With that, **Jesus** finished instructing His **disciples**, and He went on to preach and **teach** in the towns of *Galilee*

Matthew 10:1

**Jesus** called His twelve **disciples** to Him. He endowed them with the authority to heal sickness and disease and to drive demons out of those who were possessed.







How would you rate your **formal** discipleship culture on a scale of 1 (very little) to 10 (a lot)?

What is your **informal** discipleship rating?

Why? How can this change?

## Reflect: Seeds for Fresh Expressions Initiatives

In your ministry context where do you see a more “formal” shepherding and teaching focus that could use more “informal” apostolic or evangelistic DNA? What might the result be?

In your ministry context where do you see more of an “informal” apostolic or evangelistic focus that could use more “formal” shepherding and teaching DNA? What might the result be?





Formal Infused With Informal

Be still, and know  
that I am God

PSALM 46:10

Informal Infused with Formal DNA



“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

Every day they **continued to meet together in the temple courts**. 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 2:42-47**



# LAYERED APPROACHES IN HISTORY

The Early Church (Read Acts)

Formative/Gathered Elements (S, T):  
Teaching through catechesis,  
apologetics, Focus on Truth in Jesus  
Christ, Creeds, 3 year baptismal  
process, Usage of Didache as an early  
training manual

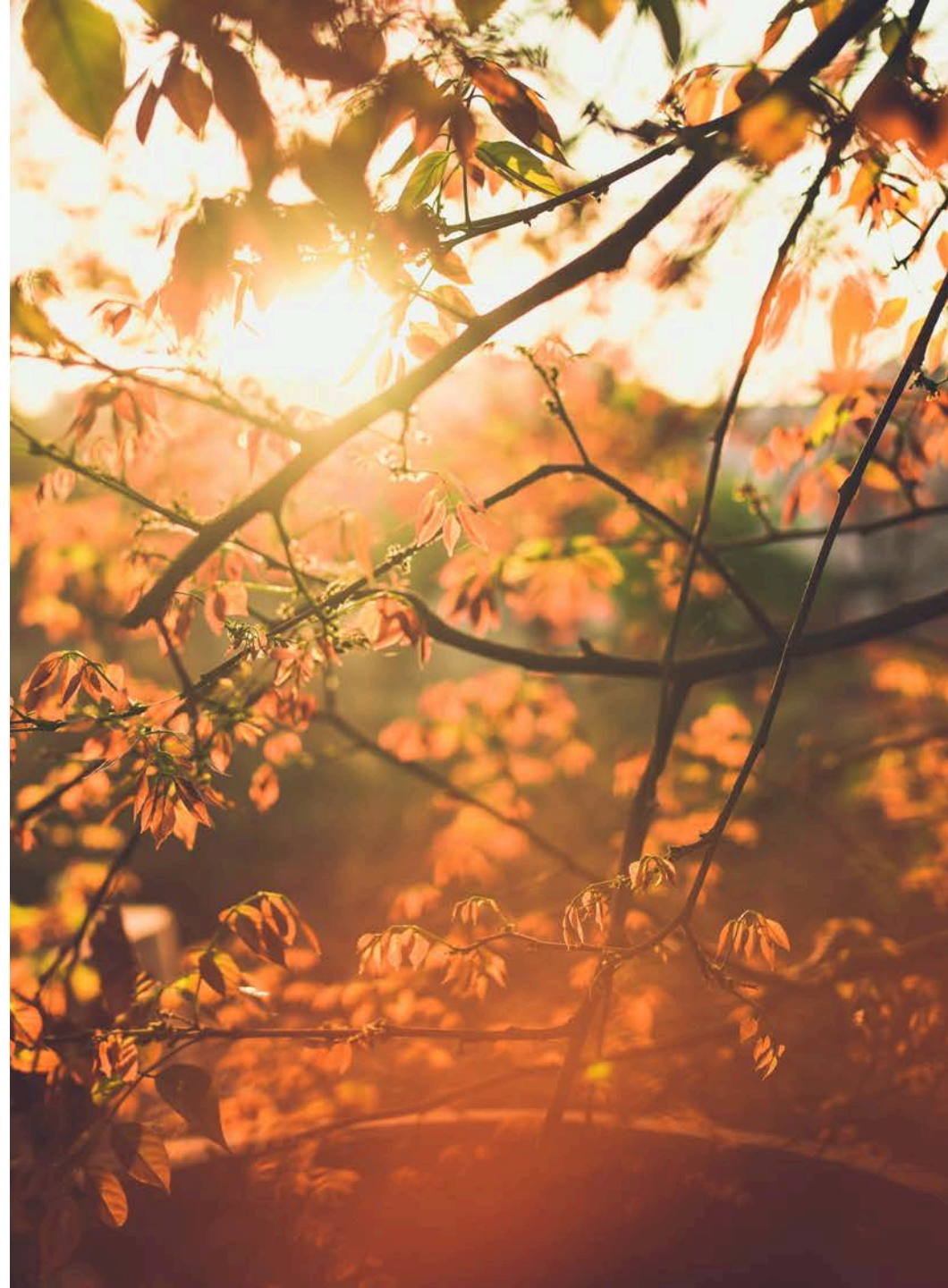
Generative/Sent Elements (A,P,E):  
Apostles going to new lands,  
Mentorship, Sharing good news in new  
ways, Healings, Powerful Experiences,  
Prayer focus, Holy Spirit leading, towns  
and villages

## Layered Approaches In History

The Wesleyan Movement (18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries—at height 1 in 4 in U.S. were Methodists)

Formative (S, T): Teaching through doctrinal resources such as the Articles of Religion, Confession of Faith, General Rules, Wesley's sermons and notes, Large worship gatherings, focus on orthodoxy (right belief)

Generative (A, P, E): “The World Is My Parish”—Wesley, Preached in fields and mines, life group focus (called “classes”), serve the broken/lost/poor, introduction of circuit riders and itinerant preachers, focus on orthopraxy (right practices)



Many churches  
offer no  
discipleship focus,  
or a focus on one  
layer of  
discipleship. Few  
hold multiple  
discipleship  
approaches in  
tension



Top down: (Program oriented)

Denominations/Movements

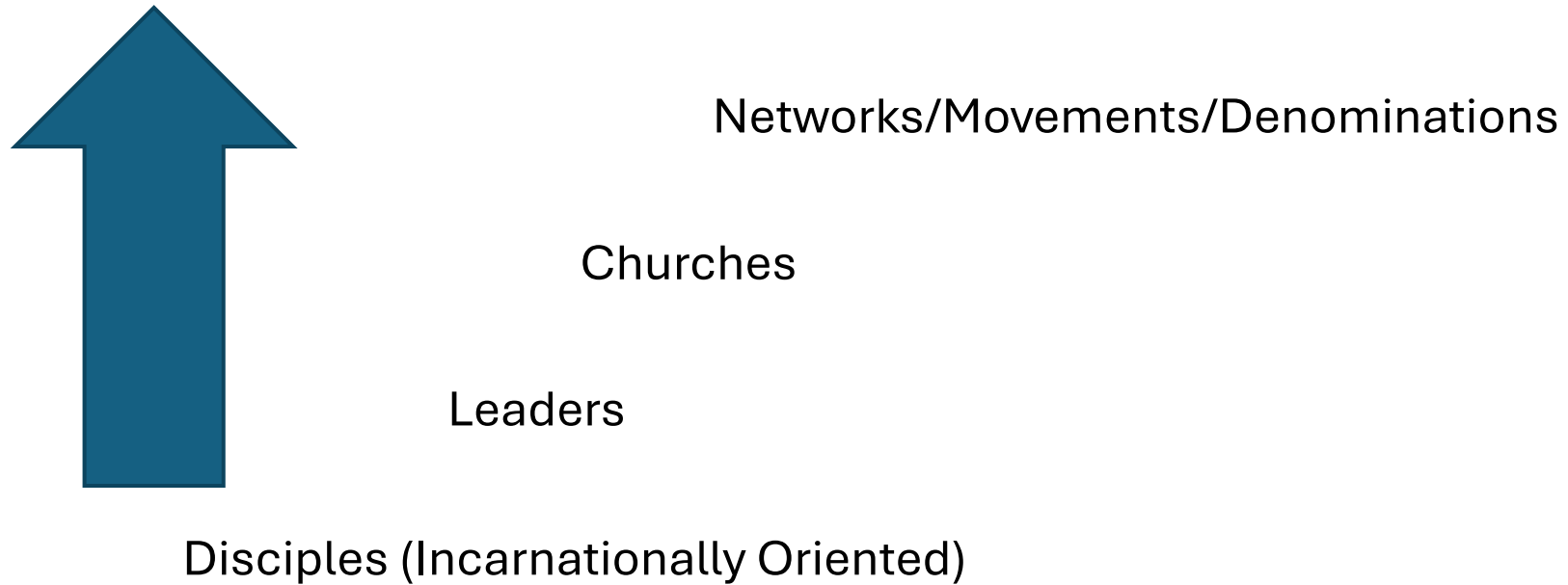
Churches

Leaders

Disciples

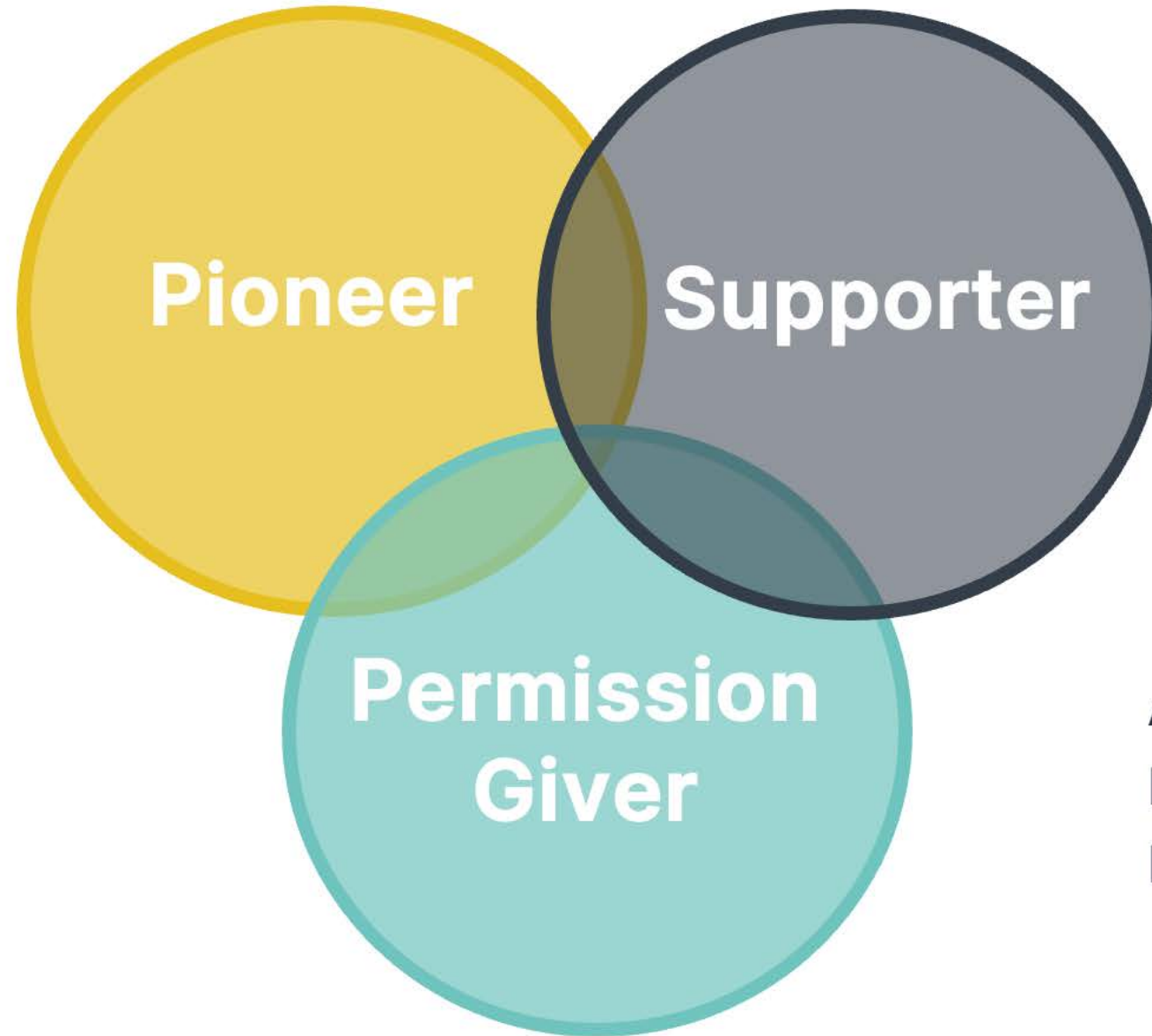
*This is backwards*





**A Multiplying discipleship movement comes from the bottom up (Jesus and 12 disciples--a lot with a few)**

# Key Roles in the FX Movement

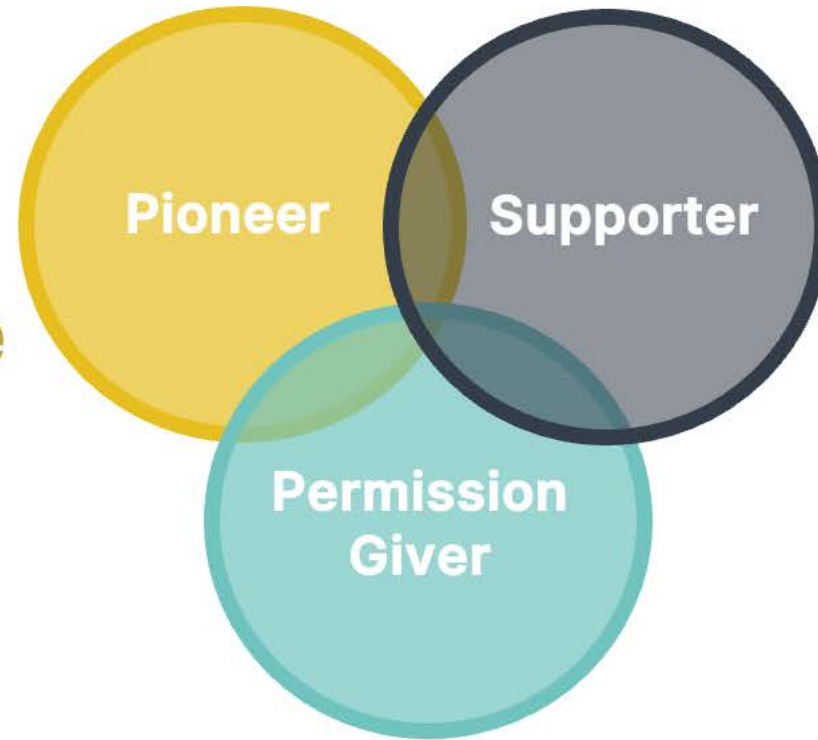


**All three are  
needed in this  
movement!**



# Key Roles in the FX Movement

**PIONEERS:**  
People who are passionate about mission on the edges.



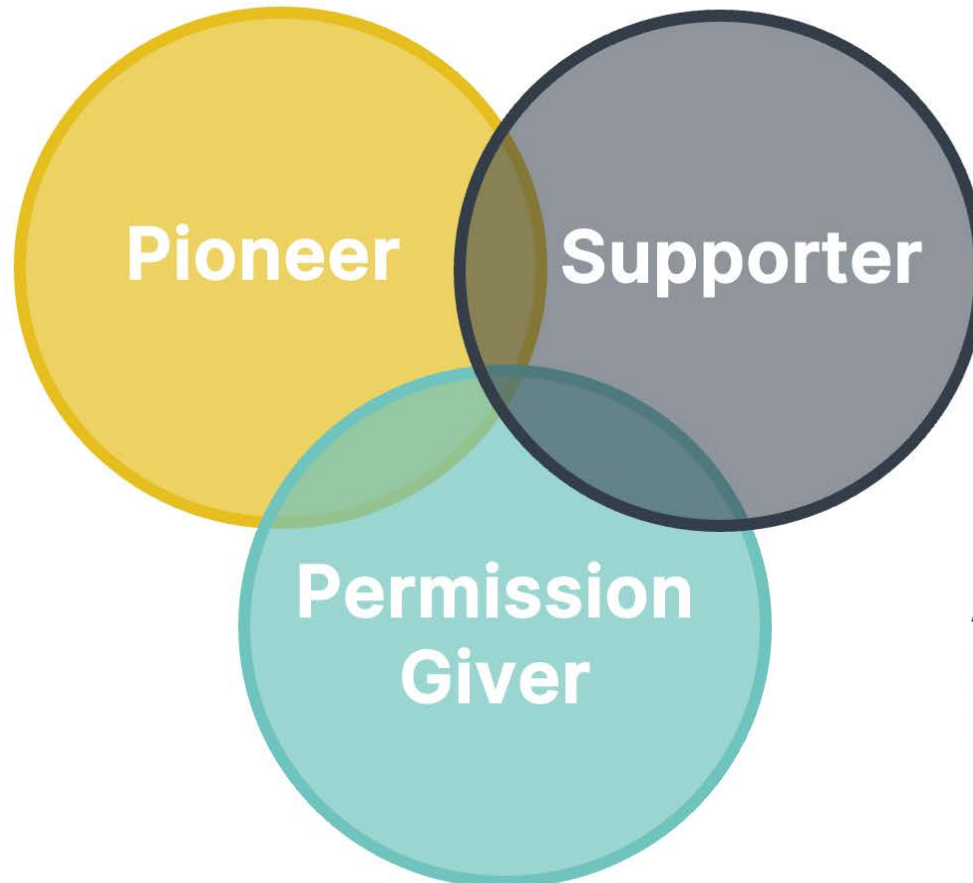
**SUPPORTERS:**  
People who are passionate about supporting and releasing pioneers.

**PERMISSION GIVERS:** People who use their role to foster release of pioneers and to influence the system to be more willing to experiment.



# Which One Are You?

## Key Roles in the FX Movement

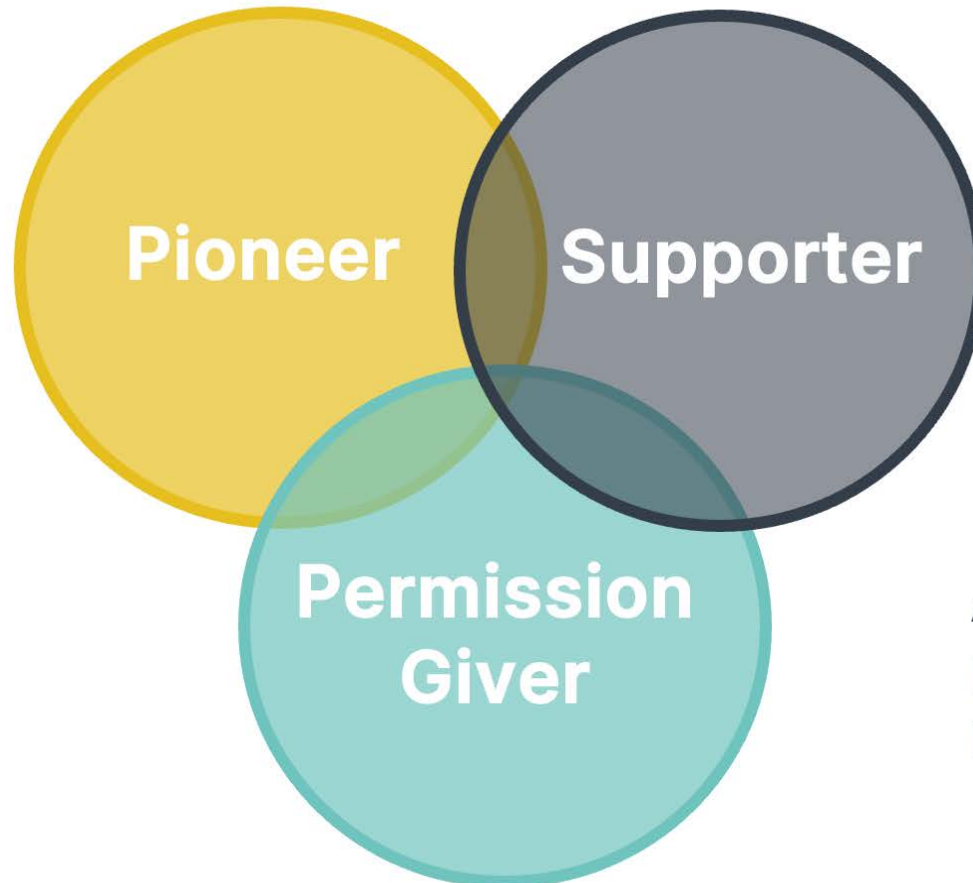


**All three are  
needed in this  
movement!**



# Prayer, Shining Eyes & Speak It

## Key Roles in the FX Movement



**All three are  
needed in this  
movement!**





Find your Paul Skenes



# DISCIPLE'S JOURNEY

We seek to create disciples in our context committed to the vision of *Transformation in Christ* (Romans 12:2). This means living into a dual expression of church that includes both Gathered and Sent communities.

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

**CONNECT**



**Connect** with God's people at First Church.

**DISCOVER**



**Discover** God's unique calling on your life.

**EMBRACE**



**Embrace** God's call as a leader.

**MULTIPLY**



**Multiply** disciples as you partner with a mentor.

## Step 2: DISCOVER (Formal)

Goal: OBSERVE/DISCOVER spiritual gifts and talents to explore ways we might use them to foster discipleship in God's Kingdom.

Objective: Explore discipleship in the context of the Kingdom of God in general, in the local church setting, and what it means for the individual. 6 Fall sessions each year.





## STEP 3: EMBRACE (Informal)

Embrace and commit to practices and experiences of a multiplying disciple utilizing one's unique gifts as **filtered through the discipleship tensions**. Dive more deeply into God's call by exploring practices and an understanding that leads to becoming multiplying-disciples. Congregationally celebrated!

# Running the Journey



Nursing Home Fresh Expression Leader

Code Blue Director

Messy Church

Children's Ministry Advocate and  
Devotions Creator

Church on the Mountain Leader

Youth Ministry Leaders

Worship Leader

Life Group Facilitator

New Life Group Leaders

Transform Leaders

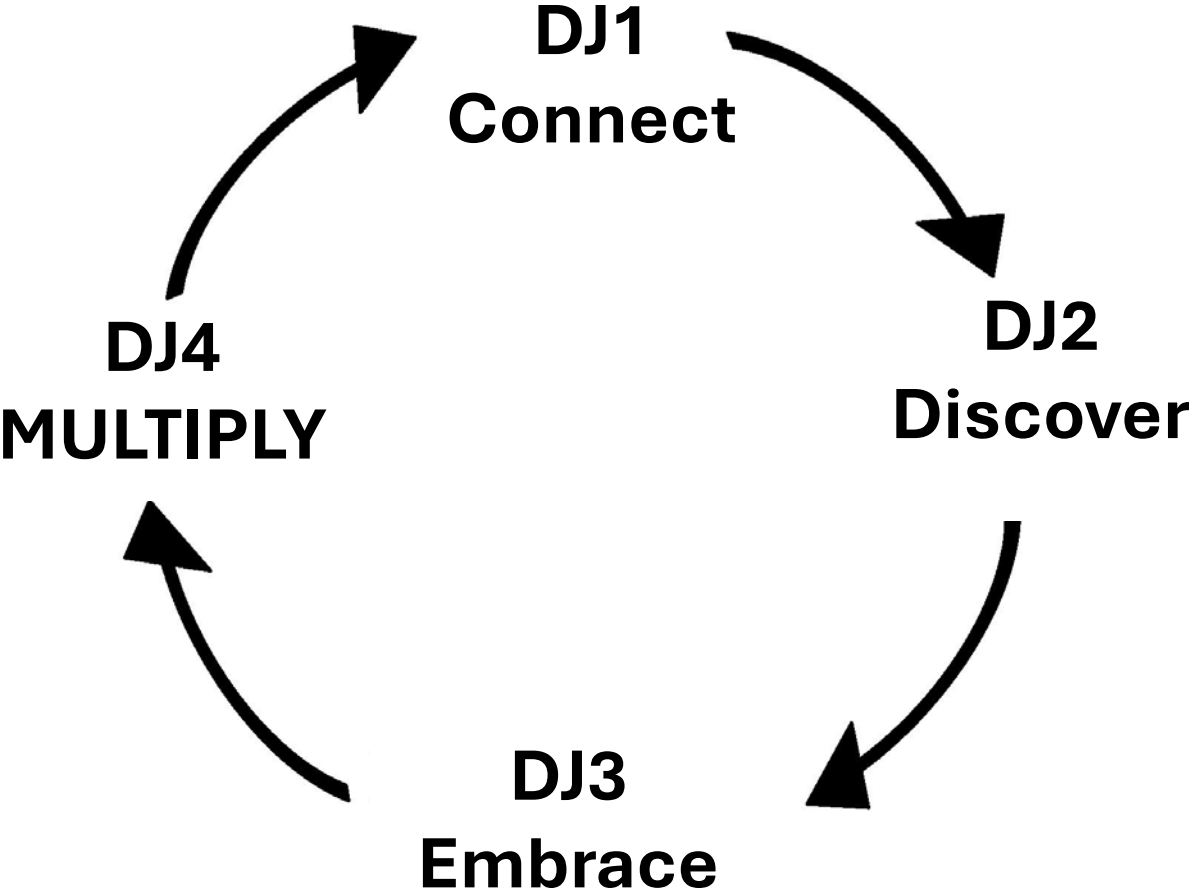
DJ 1 Facilitator

Redo Of Contemporary Service

Women's Retreat co-leader

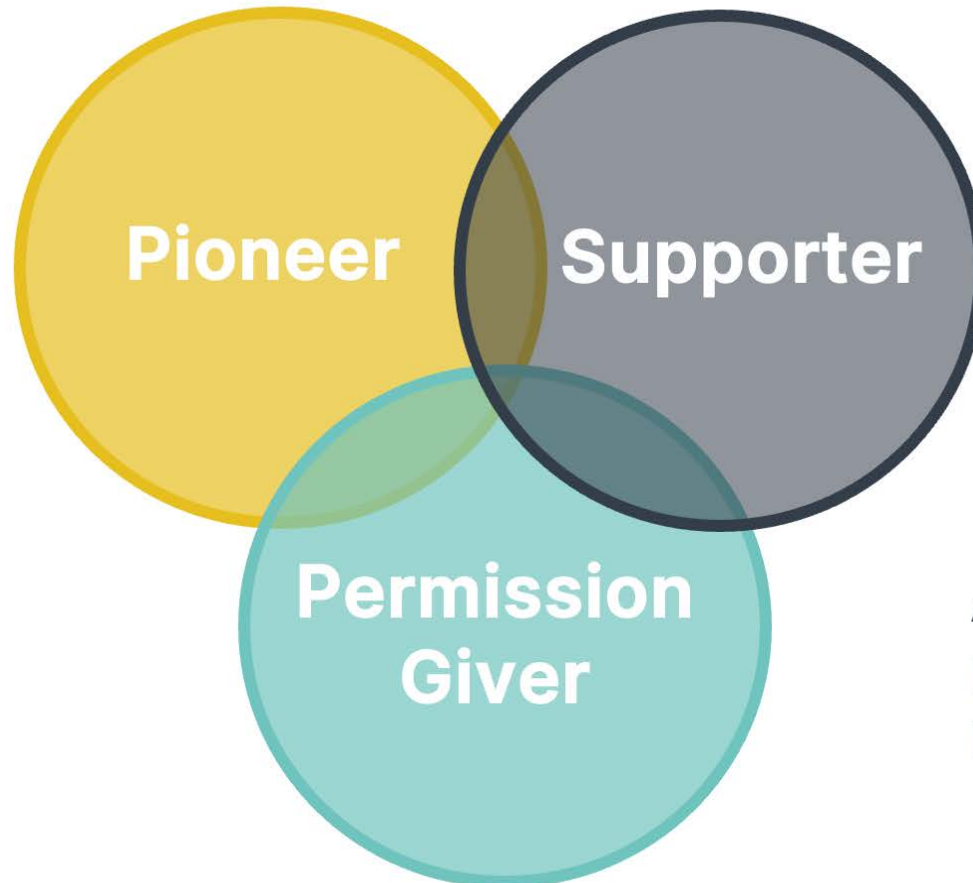
Painting & Scripture

# Take the Journey: Adaptive Discipleship Flywheel



# Which One Are You? Pray for each other

## Key Roles in the FX Movement



**All three are  
needed in this  
movement!**



**Lord what  
would you  
have me do?**



“Discipleship is not a class, it is a lifestyle”



QUESTIONS? THOUGHTS? REACTIONS?

# Reflect

What do you need to be measuring?

What must not change in your discipleship culture?

What must change in your discipleship culture?

How can formal and informal discipleship lead to FX possibilities?

How can you discover FX pioneers, supporters, and permission givers?

