

We want to talk about “Extravagant Discipleship, Unlikely Disciples” for the next 10 months. We can only talk about that, as we talk about our extraordinary Lord, Jesus Christ. Here’s how we will do it. On March 2 we want to dedicate the Senior Pastor Search Team to the task that lies before them. Extravagant discipleship includes change and prepares for change. On March 9 & 16 we are going to focus on Short Term Mission Trips. Unlikely disciples serve around the corner and across the globe. We want you to see the extraordinary things God has done with people you know in this congregation.

From March 23-Easter Sunday we will look at extravagant discipleship through the unique eyes of the book of Revelation. Yes, Revelation in four sermons with a break for Palm Sunday, which anticipated the coming Kingdom of God to earth.

From May 4-June 8 we want to see extravagant discipleship through the eyes of one unlikely disciple, Peter, as told in the Gospel of Mark. From June 22-July 27 we will examine extravagant discipleship as learned at the feet of the Master Teacher, Jesus Christ, as told in the Gospel of Matthew. From September 7-October 26, we will see extravagant discipleship in service to the underdog and the lost, as told in the Gospel of Luke. Finally, from November 2-December 28 we will see extravagant discipleship in union with our extraordinary Lord, Jesus Christ, as told by the Gospel of John.

This ten-month run through the book of Revelation and the four gospels will provide the biblical setting in which BVBC tries to take decisive steps to make disciples intentionally and more effectively among the hundreds of people who walk through our doors today and the thousands more to come in the next decade.

## The Challenge to BVBC

We have 1200+ adults in this church, according to our database. Pastor Karl tells me we have about 200 adults in Sunday School. Where are the other 1000? We have about 400 BVBC adults in small groups. Where are the other 800? Hundreds of people come through our doors, sit in a worship service, go away and return intermittently. Are you feeling the burden and opportunity I am feeling? Jesus charged us to continue His mission in the world. What shall we do about the hundreds of casual observers who walk through our doors? My sense is that we will have to be intentional about what we do in a way that we have not done before. We will continue to do what we have been doing in adult Christian education and small groups. It is good and effective. It is just not enough. We need some new ideas.

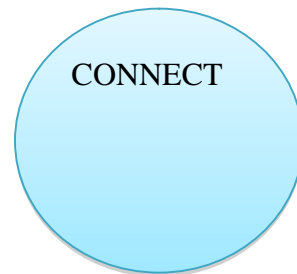
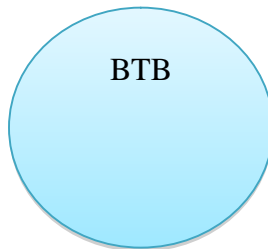
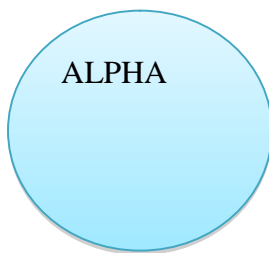
We also need something else. Jesus said, **“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”** (John 13:35) There’s a lot I don’t know about love, but I’m sure it means to learn your name and to let you know we’re always glad to see you. Here’s the challenge. Has Christ been so formed in us that the thought of Him and of worshiping Him here together Sunday by Sunday with fellow believers in a changing and uncertain world overrides our troubles and creates enough space in our

souls to say hello to someone we don't know and make that person feel at home?

I can talk until I am blue in the face about making disciples and the Great Commission, but until we care about the hundreds of people, who walk through our front and walk out again and come intermittently, all my talk is just religious claptrap, and new ideas will not be effective.

## Growth Paths

Here's a new idea that may help us be effective in making disciples. Let me introduce you to a Growth Path. A Growth Path is a series of courses that are connected in theme and can be experienced over a 6-24 month time period. Let me illustrate a Growth Path.



The Alpha Course is a ten-week course that gives everyone the opportunity to explore the meaning of life in a relaxed, friendly setting. Sessions begin with a meal, followed by a short video talk and time to discuss what's been taught. During the discussion, everyone is welcome to contribute his opinions and no question is considered hostile or too simple. Questions might include – Is there a God? Why am I here? Where did I come from? Where am I going? It is very interactive by design.

BTB, Basic Training in Bible is a six-week course that teaches you to find any verse in the Bible in 45 seconds or less. It also presents on-line Bible reading programs and how to use them, as well as on-line help in having a daily time of prayer. It too is interactive, not lecture.

CONNECT is a two Sunday event. It is our way of inviting people into the life of this congregation by means of personal friendship and a clear idea of our church's distinctive characteristics. We tell you our church's story, take you on a complete tour of

our building, introduce you to our mission and message, and offer some help in how you can get connected here, when you are ready.

Now, let me show you why Growth Paths hold great promise in our ministry together. First, they are adaptable. We can build dozens of Growth Paths. I showed you one example of a Growth Path. We could also build a Growth Path that began with the Financial Peace University course, followed by a course on Marriage Enrichment, and a Bible study on the Song of Solomon. I would love to take many of you on a Growth Path that began with a course on the four Gospels, followed by courses on the Trinity and the Uniqueness of Jesus in a world of many religions, and followed by a Bible study on Isaiah. You will notice that every Growth Path has a Bible study course. We call it Diggings. We want our congregation to dig into scripture. And by the way, one of the best sources for Diggings courses is our Christian Education classes on Sunday morning.

Second, Growth Paths are flexible. They are flexible in time. You don't have to do them back to back to back. Suppose, e.g., you took the Alpha Course in fall, 2014 from September through November. Then, you don't start the next course on Basic Training in Bible until after the Super Bowl. You would be done before Easter, and then you could do the Connect in May. You might do a Diggings course in summer, 2015. You might take those three courses on different days.

They are also flexible about location. You can have a Growth Path that meets in this building or in your home or at Catherine Rooney's. Flexibility of time and place is crucial for people who have become "crazy busy."

Finally, Growth Paths will ask of some people the dedication to be coaches and teachers. This is friendship taken one step further.

We are trying to be careful not to promise more than we can deliver. We want to start modestly, test the waters, and see if God will be pleased to prosper this strategy of intentional discipleship among the people who come our way.

## **Until Christ Is Formed in You**

After that level of detail, I think we need some inspiration. The Apostle Paul wrote the following words to the Galatian Christians: **My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.** (Galatians 4:19) It may seem strange for a man to refer to himself as being in **the pains of childbirth**. What would a man know about that? It's true men don't experience the pains of childbirth, but having been in labor and delivery with his wife gives a man an up close and personal view of those pains that leaves a permanent mark on him.

Even that doesn't do justice to the Apostle Paul. He lived in a world where labor

pains were not tucked away in a sequestered part of a hospital, and they were not muted by saddle blocks or general anesthesia. Birth and death and suffering of all kinds were far more transparent in Paul's day than they are in ours. He heard the groans and screams of what we innocently call natural childbirth. He saw the agony on the woman's face. He couldn't think of a more apt comparison to communicate the state of his soul as he anguished over the spiritual well being of the Galatian churches.

Instead of amusing ourselves with the spectacle of a man referring to himself as being in **the pains of childbirth**, we might better ask ourselves, "Does anyone here care that much about the spiritual well-being of Brandywine Valley Baptist Church?" It is so easy for a congregation and its pastors to settle into a routine and be really busy or just go through the motions and look really busy and never entertain the possibility that the congregation might be moving away from Christ, and never entertain the certainty that half the people in any congregation have no idea what following Jesus Christ is about. Remember the old Christian proverb: God has no grandchildren. Every congregation is one generation away from extinction. Do we care?

I don't mean: Do we care about what happens in Budapest or Jakarta or São Paulo. I mean: Do we care what happens to the 1500-2000 people, who walk through our front door and sit in this sanctuary? Do we care what happens to the 800-900 people, who walk through our front door and sit in this sanctuary and walk out again and come intermittently, and we don't know the state of their spiritual well-being? Is anyone here in anguish about that? Is anyone here in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in those 800-900 people?

We say our mission is to introduce people to Jesus Christ and help them to follow Him. Those 800-900 people give a face to that mission. We say our vision is to make the spiritual treasures of this congregation accessible to the spiritual yearnings of the Brandywine Valley one household at a time. Those 800-900 people give a face to those households. The words that express our mission and vision can be window dressing, or they can define who we are. They will define who we are only if there are sufficient numbers of spiritual leaders in this congregation, who are in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in those 800-900 people.

Forming Christ in people is costly. The comparison to childbirth suggests just how costly, if we want to see Christ formed in the hundreds of people who occasionally come to this church and stay away in droves from Public worship, Christian education classes, small groups, and opportunities to serve.

This is the price: Can we persuade people that we actually care about them with no hidden agendas and no sinister motives? No one person can care about very many people like that at one time. It takes a large cohort of people, who are willing to invest in other people's spiritual well being for significant periods of time with no guarantee of results. Jesus touched many lives, but He invested heavily in 12 men – one of whom betrayed Him to death, one of whom denied Him with a curse, and all of whom abandoned Him in His hour of need. But in time His investment in them bore fruit, and they set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire and the spread of Christianity to the ends of the earth. On a small scale every congregation needs people who will imitate the model of Jesus with His men.

**Take Aways**

So, what do we do with what we've heard? Please take your Connection Card. On the back is a rectangular window that says, "My next step today is to commit to one of the following." Three choices are available.

First, "Introduce yourself to someone you don't know every Sunday from now until the end of 2015." If you are willing to do that, tick the box.

Second, "Invite someone to the Alpha Course whom you know has dropped out of church." Thousands of people just in the zip codes 19803 and 19810 grew up in the Church and maybe even served in the Church, and they dropped out. Maybe you know family and friends who have done that. The Alpha Course could be their path to a restored relationship with Christ. If you are willing to do that, tick the box.

Third, "Be willing to learn more about being a coach." We have not talked about that. The important word is *learn*. If you are willing to do that, tick the box.

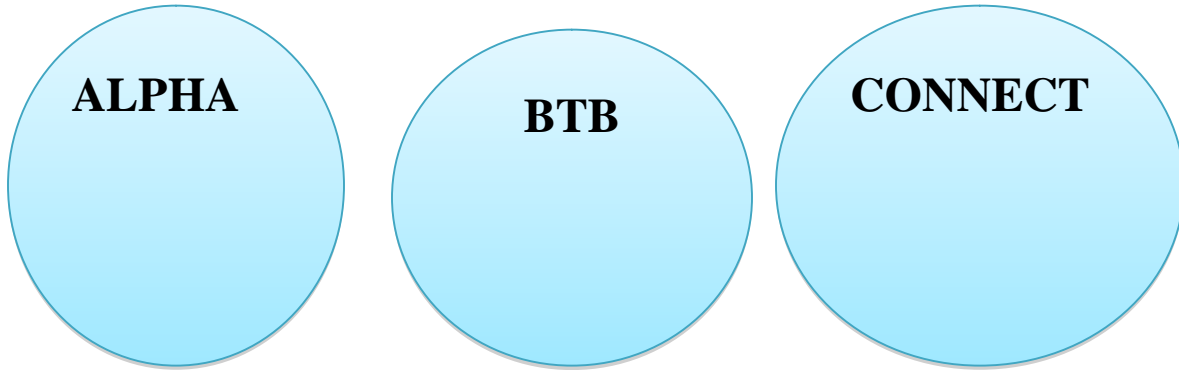
There is a fourth choice that is not on the card. Earlier, I showed you an illustration of a Growth Path. I'll put it back on the screen. If you would like to be part of that particular Growth Path, write GP on the card, and we'll be in touch with you about when it starts.

God has given us a chance to do something beautiful if people's lives by bringing them closer to Christ. Let's not miss it.

**A Growth Path**

- A series of courses
- Connected in theme
- Can be experienced over a 6-24 month time period.

## Sample of a Growth Path



### Two Characteristics

- Content can be tailored to individual needs
- Time and location can be flexible