From Content Consumption to Christlike Formation

Biblical teaching and shared practice in Christian community

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Christian teaching serves discipleship as believers receive God's Word, grow in accountable relationships, and practice obedience together. Digital tools can help connect these activities across distance and between gatherings. Their usefulness should be considered in relation to the people they serve and the faithful practices they support.

Teaching that leads toward obedience

Jesus commands His followers to make disciples, teaching them to obey everything He commanded (Matt. 28:19–20). James warns against hearing the Word without doing it (James 1:22–25). Romans 12 connects renewed thinking and lives offered to God with service, mutual responsibility, and sincere love (Rom. 12:1–21). Biblical understanding belongs within this life of worship and obedience.

Information is essential to discipleship. Believers need to know what Scripture says and understand its meaning. Formation involves the Holy Spirit enabling them to receive that Word and live faithfully within Christian community. A church therefore needs to ask how its teaching connects with relationships, spiritual practices, and responsibility for others.

Jay Kranda describes online classes, small groups, pastoral care, and service as parts of ministry beyond streaming. His church's additional membership commitment to pursue an in-person group illustrates how purposeful expectations can accompany digital participation. That example reflects his church's convictions and circumstances; it should be evaluated thoughtfully before being adopted elsewhere (Kranda 2024, 137, 199).

Ryan Panzer emphasizes purpose, experimentation, and adaptation in digital ministry (2022, 115–119). A useful starting question is what a particular practice will help people do. A prayer thread, for example, needs a purpose and people willing to respond. Adding another platform does not establish that relationship.

Let people observe faithful living

Paul's invitation to imitate him as he imitates Christ gives discipleship a visible, relational dimension (1 Cor. 11:1). People need opportunities to observe believers receiving correction, repenting, waiting patiently, practicing generosity, and caring for others. Relationships allow them to see the instruction they hear in the ordinary circumstances of life.

Model dependence on the Holy Spirit

Second Corinthians 3:18 identifies the Spirit as the One who transforms believers into Christ's likeness. This keeps us from assuming that a well-designed ministry process can produce maturity. Our responsibility includes teaching faithfully, modeling obedience, and cultivating relationships where encouragement and correction can occur. We remain dependent on God for the fruit.

That dependence should shape how leaders discuss progress. Participation in a group or service project can create opportunities for growth. The activity itself cannot tell us everything about a person's trust in Christ, motives, struggles, or response to the Word. Pastoral conversation helps leaders understand what visible activity alone cannot explain.

In my telephone interview with Kranda, he described tracking movement into groups and service while relying on group and ministry leaders to understand individual progress. Participation indicators can prompt pastoral attention, while relationships provide context those indicators cannot supply (Kranda, interview by author, November 10, 2026).

Connect understanding with compassionate presence

Daniel Yang, Adelle M. Banks, and Warren Bird describe a shift from attendance toward attachment, emphasizing healthy spiritual relationships. Their movement from mind to soul asks how churches can enter people's pain and demonstrate God's care (2024, "Eight Shifts to Start Becoming a Future-Ready Church" chart). These themes connect discipleship with the ways people listen, respond, and remain present to one another.

Someone may need a thoughtful conversation, practical assistance, or patient companionship. A digital message can open the conversation and help coordinate care. Leaders and members then need to discern what response fits the person and situation. Some needs call for direct contact or physical presence.

Our digital habits also deserve examination. Does a tool support attentive Scripture reading and prayer? Do its notifications repeatedly interrupt them? What expectations of availability does a group create? Romans 12:1–2 calls us to discern how our habits fit a life offered to God.

Make accountability accessible

Accountability can help believers name a faithful response to Scripture and invite another person to ask about it. Encouragement and correction should be grounded in the grace of God and directed toward the person's good. Leaders need to model humility and a willingness to receive the same care they offer.

Before interpreting limited participation as resistance, ask what makes participation difficult. Disability, caregiving responsibilities, work schedules, and discomfort with a particular tool may affect how a person can engage. A phone conversation or in-person meeting may be a better way to share a need and receive support. Clear expectations should be accompanied by careful listening.

Practice shared obedience between gatherings

In the small group I lead, we meet every other week for teaching and discussion. Our Romans 12 discussions offer a setting for connecting biblical instruction with life between gatherings. Prayer partners could encourage one concrete response to Scripture, supported by a rotating facilitator's weekly prompt in our existing group text.

Our planned Christmas support for an adopted family offers a possible shared practice in generosity and service (Rom. 12:8, 13). The family's expressed needs would guide support, and we would share personal information only with permission. Digital communication could help coordinate participation before our planned December 10, 2026 gathering. These arrangements remain proposed; this article does not report completed outcomes.

The way we serve deserves attention alongside what we provide. Are we listening to what the family says would help? Are we protecting their dignity? Can members contribute in ways suited to their circumstances? Are responsibilities shared, and do people follow through on agreed tasks? These questions make the project an opportunity to consider how Scripture shapes our conduct.

A leader can model this by listening before offering a solution, asking permission before sharing a personal detail, and responding humbly when a plan needs to change. Members can observe and practice such responses together. Completing a project provides a reason for gratitude and reflection, while continued relationships allow encouragement and growth beyond the event.

Look for evidence with pastoral humility

Evaluation would begin by asking whether we listened to the family, responded to their needs, and offered members meaningful opportunities to serve. At a later gathering, members could describe how Scripture informed a choice, where they needed help, and what they would do differently. Private conversation should remain available when a public response would be uncomfortable or inappropriate.

Over time, we would listen for reconciliation, burden-bearing, patient care, and helping others follow Jesus. Such accounts can direct pastoral attention and suggest adjustments to a ministry practice. They cannot fully measure the Spirit's work or establish that technology caused spiritual growth.

Discipleship keeps bringing us back to Christ and His Word. We teach, model faithful responses, encourage one another, and make room for correction and practical service. Digital practices are useful insofar as they help sustain that shared life with attention to the people involved.

Questions for reflection

- What opportunities do people have to see biblical instruction practiced in ordinary life?
- How does our approach to accountability express grace and invite honest conversation?
- How do we distinguish avoidance of responsibility from a barrier that needs practical accommodation?
- What shared act of obedience could grow from the passage our group is studying?

References

Kranda, Jay. 2024. Online Church Is Not the Answer: Beyond Just Streaming to Hybrid Disciple Making. HyperThinking Group.

Kranda, Jay. Telephone interview by David R. Williamson, November 10, 2026.

Panzer, Ryan M. 2022. The Holy and the Hybrid: Navigating the Church's Digital Reformation. Fortress Press.

Yang, Daniel, Adelle M. Banks, and Warren Bird. 2024. Becoming a Future-Ready Church: 8 Shifts to Encourage and Empower the Next Generation of Leaders. Zondervan.

About this article

Developed from my Week 4 initial discussion post and my subsequent replies for PM 7520, Community in the Hybrid World, at Grace Theological Seminary, November 2026. Class discussion prompted further reflection on modeled discipleship, dependence on the Holy Spirit, and the relationship between accountability and accessibility. This article develops my contributions without reproducing classmates' or the instructor's posts.

The small-group practices are proposals for consideration. The December 10 event is identified as planned, and I do not claim that the proposed practices have been implemented or have produced particular results. Scripture passages are referenced rather than quoted.