

Measuring Discipleship in a Growing Church: Lessons from North Coast Church

One of the most persistent questions church leaders ask, especially as churches grow is deceptively simple:

How are we actually measuring discipleship?

Not just moments. Not just attendance. But by the movement of how people are being guided, encouraged, and formed over time.

That question surfaced repeatedly in conversations at **North Coast Church** as their leadership and staff reflected on the realities of growth. Strong teaching. Healthy culture. Clear theology. And yet, as complexity increased, leaders found it harder to see how people were moving spiritually between Sundays.

After a couple years of wrestling with this tension, Senior Pastor **Chris Brown** encountered the work that **Blue Van Dyke** and the **StudioC** team were doing around member engagement and discipleship formation at a personal level. It felt like a missing link, not a new theology, but a more tactical way of guiding people intentionally throughout the week.

What followed wasn't a shift in theology, it was a shift in clarity.

That clarity began by rethinking how engagement functions. Not simply as communication but as a way of guiding people toward deeper participation in the life of the church and a life with Christ.

Below are four lessons emerging from North Coast's early journey that may be helpful for any growing church seeking to better align engagement with discipleship, across both staff and members.



1

From Passive to Active Members

One of the first shifts North Coast began addressing was the difference between **passive participation** and **active engagement**.

Passive engagement often sounds like:

- “People are attending.”
- “People are receiving information.”
- “We sent the message.”

Active engagement asks different questions:

- What is someone responding to?
- What step are they being invited into?
- Is there a clear next step?

As Pastor Chris put it, the goal wasn’t to “*get people cleaned up*,” but to help people “*get our heart together and abide with Christ*.” Engagement became less about broadcasting information and more about guiding people into participation with purpose.

When language shifted internally, from attendance to next-step ownership, **alignment followed**.



Be a church where we don’t just get cleaned up and get our act together, but a church that gets **our heart together** and simply abides with Christ.

— Chris Brown

2

Define Your Discipleship Pathway

As North Coast’s leadership team wrestled with how to measure discipleship, one reality became clear: before movement could be measured, discipleship itself needed to be **defined clearly and shared consistently**.

North Coast wasn’t trying to invent a new theology of discipleship. What they needed was a shared mental model: a clear, agreed-upon pathway for what growth as a disciple looks like in their church context.

Without that clarity, leaders were left guessing. Different ministries emphasized different outcomes. Staff used similar language but meant different things. Discipleship was happening, but not always in a way leaders could see, align around, or support consistently.

Defining a discipleship pathway changed that.

Rather than forcing people through rigid steps, the pathway became a **common framework**, one that helped leaders and staff answer the same questions the same way:

Where is someone on
their journey?

What step makes sense
next?

Where are people tending
to stall or disengage?

Importantly, the pathway wasn’t just for leaders. Making it visible to everyone helped staff coach with greater confidence and allowed members to better understand their own next steps. Discipleship moved from being assumed to being articulated.

Measurement follows definition, not the other way around.

Once the pathway is clear and shared, leaders can see patterns of movement across the church. Instead of relying solely on intuition or anecdote, they gain visibility into where encouragement, invitation, or follow-up might be needed.

As Pastor Chris noted, many churches measure “nickels and noses”, giving and attendance, while discipleship remains harder to see. North Coast added this third lens: next steps. This reflects the priority to understand how well the church was guiding people along a shared discipleship journey.

What emerged wasn’t control, but alignment.

When leaders share a common understanding of discipleship, and can see how people are moving within it, they pastor with greater clarity, consistency, and confidence. The pathway didn't replace relationships; it strengthened them by giving everyone the same map.

"If our job is to guide people, then we have to know where they're headed, where they're starting from, and how to help them take the next step."

— Blue Van Dyke

3

Badges & Messaging as Ongoing Encouragement

Once the pathway was clearly defined and shared, the next question became practical: how do you consistently encourage people along that journey without overwhelming them?

Perhaps the most misunderstood shift was the role of discipleship badges and messaging. Badges were never designed as rewards or gamification. They are persistent encouragement and ongoing conversations that help people understand both where they are and where they could go next.

In the first six weeks after launching personalized dashboards in their mobile app, North Coast recorded 142,000 badge interactions, each one a moment of curiosity, reflection, or invitation. As Pastor Chris described it, these weren't transactions; they were conversations.

"Badges are simply ongoing conversations with people about what they need to do in discipleship."

— Chris Brown

Church in **Your Pocket**

We're putting it in your pocket, because we know you'll take it with you.



Messaging followed the same shift:

- From stage-wide announcements to personalized dashboards
- From campaigns to ongoing guidance
- From one-size-fits-all to relational and timely

Instead of broadcasting to everyone, leaders began communicating with intention across multiple channels. Its pastoring at scale without losing the personal touch.

As engagement became more visible, another question naturally surfaced: what does it mean to measure discipleship responsibly?

Data Is Wisdom, Not Control

One of the most common concerns church leaders raise when conversations turn toward measurement is whether data risks reducing discipleship to numbers. That concern surfaced early at North Coast as well and it needed to be addressed directly.

North Coast's leadership was clear: discipleship is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit, not a system. Hearts can't be measured. Transformation can't be forced. But leaders still carry responsibility for how people are guided, supported, and encouraged along the way.

The shift came when data was reframed. Not as a mechanism for control, but as a form of pastoral wisdom. Rather than attempting to quantify spiritual maturity, North Coast is now paying attention to patterns of movement:

Are people taking steps?

Which steps tend to stall?

Where does encouragement or follow-up need to happen sooner?

This kind of insight didn't replace relationships, it informed them. Data surfaced what pastors previously learned only through dozens of conversations and intuition.

Importantly, this approach shifted the posture of leadership. Measurement isn't about evaluating people; it is about equipping leaders to ask better questions, pull the right ministry levers, and shepherd with greater clarity.

"We can't measure a transformed heart but we can see whether people are taking the steps that make transformation more likely."

— Blue Van Dyke

When data is treated as wisdom rather than control, it doesn't constrain discipleship, it protects it. It helps leaders see where God may already be at work and where additional care, encouragement, or invitation could make a difference.



What Changed Beneath the Surface

While early engagement metrics are encouraging thousands of app interactions, prayer actions, and spiritual resources accessed, the most meaningful change has been internal.

- Staff now share a common language.
- Leaders & members see discipleship through the same lens.
- Engagement reinforces formation throughout the week, not just during services.

Alignment didn't just change what leaders could see, it changed how confidently they could lead. As Pastor Chris summarized it: *"We're not a church of size. We're a church of individuals, becoming family."*

"Data is simply wisdom, it helps us pastor people better."

— Chris Brown

A Question Worth Carrying Forward

Every church's context is different. But the question North Coast asked is one every growing church eventually faces: Are we aligned around how discipleship is being guided, supported, and measured?

Clarity doesn't replace the work of the Spirit. It supports it.

And when leaders can see movement more clearly, they can shepherd people more faithfully.

At StudioC, our role has simply been to help churches create that kind of clarity. Its by making discipleship pathways visible, engagement intentional, and pastoral wisdom more accessible.

Tools like Waypoint and ChurchIQ exist to serve that work, not replace it. It's to help leaders see what's happening and support people personally, even as churches grow.

Measurement doesn't replace the work of the Spirit. It helps leaders see where encouragement and care may be needed sooner.

Looking for an alignment partner to increase member engagement, deepen discipleship and grow *your church?*

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