RECOGNIZING TRANSFORMATION

By Philip Nation

An assignment without a means of gauging success normally ends with frustration or abandonment.

In the church, our work is to see disciples made. But can you really “measure” discipleship? A strong case can be made that it is ludicrous to measure transformation in a person’s life. Nevertheless, there are biblical injunctions that halt our progress into sin and prescriptions that lead us toward spiritual maturity. In the Transformational Discipleship project, we did not set out to randomly create objective measurements against which a person’s life would be deemed infantile, growing, or mature. We did, however, uncover attributes that indicate growth and/or the desire that growth is occurring.

The research revealed eight issues we named the “Attributes of Discipleship.” They are not new ideas necessarily, but they stand out as key ideas in the lives of Protestants in North America.
Bible Engagement

It should go without saying that believers will be engaged in the study of the Scriptures. Leadership, however, must often begin with the restatement of the obvious. Transformation can be recognized in a person when their mind is sharpened by the Bible, their perspective is shaped by the Bible, and their actions are directed by the Bible.

Seeking God

A person becomes a disciple of Christ because they intend to follow Him and become like Him. A continuous hunger should arise from this life. It is referred to in Scripture as our “first love,” and believers are commanded at times to return to it. Transformation is seen when our desire is to know God more deeply and experience His work more fully.

Exercising Faith

Can you measure a person’s faith? Probably not. But you can see it when it is put into action. Believers participating in the research noted that they knew the importance of living by faith as opposed to by personal strength. Transformation is seen in believers when risk-aversion is set aside and our lives are characterized by faithful obedience to God’s will.

Unashamed

From previous studies, “unashamed” was new to our list, but we were not surprised by its appearance in the research. It is natural to think that a person following Christ would be willing to publicize such a matter. The research noted that believers felt it appropriate, and even necessary, for others to know them as Christians and be held accountable for a life exemplary of that name. Transformation is evident when a believer is unashamed in presenting their own life as being aligned with Christ.

The old adage is that if you aim at nothing then you will hit it every time. At the very heart of Christianity is the work of making disciples for Christ. It should never sit at the fringe of our life or the church. Through work like that of Transformational Discipleship, we are able to better recognize when we are effectively reaching toward that goal.