

# Understanding Boundless

Toward a Biblical Vision for the College & Singles Ministry at TBC

TBC College Ministry  
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# Introduction

Except for those rare, exploratory trips, I highly doubt you regularly jump into the car without at least an *idea* for where you want to go. Typically, we know where we're headed—or at least where we'd like to end up—before we start driving. But knowing where you're going is only half the battle. You also need to know how to get there.

The same is true, in a metaphorical sense, in the church. The temptation is to jump in the ministry car, so to speak, crank that baby up, and hit the highway—without really thinking through *where* we're going or *how* to get there. Often, we serve without really knowing what we're trying to achieve or how to measure success. Is our destination (i.e. ultimate aim) more people coming to Boundless? Greater participation at our events? More people signed up to serve in children's ministry? Or, we may even have the *wrong* goals, such as wanting others to lavish us with praise, or being the trendy ministry where all the LU students want to be. So it's important we think through our ultimate purpose in Boundless.

But even when we get the destination right, we may not give much attention to the journey, or what it takes to get there. We may assume the journey is short, or relatively easy, instead of realizing that it's long and costly. When the people we're serving hurt us, or someone you're discipling takes a while to grow, we easily lose heart. Or, we might assume that because we've looked at the map once or twice, we know the map by heart. We don't realize that the actual road signs are often mislabeled. We're constantly tempted to get off track in ministry, and we have to constantly reevaluate whether or not we're still on Christ's path, pursuing ministry his way.

But God has been so gracious to us in his word. He's dropped the pin on our ultimate destination, a destination that's far more glorious and rewarding than we dared ever to imagine. He's told us very clearly what our ultimate purpose should be in ministry. He's told us what to aim at, and how to measure success. On top of that, he's also supplied us with the map, a map that's perfectly accurate. He's plotted the course for us to take. He's supplied us with a ministry strategy that helps us determine how to spend our time, resources, and energies on the *right* things: on the kinds of activities he's promised to bless.

What follows is our working attempt to capture what the Christ desires his church to be about, and his directives for how he wants us to carry it out. Obviously, it is distilled and applied to Boundless. It falls into three parts: the biblical purpose of Boundless, the biblical strategy for achieving that purpose, and the practices and activities we implement to make it happen.

# Part One: Purpose

The purpose of Boundless, as a sub-group of the congregation within TBC, is simply an extension of the purpose of our church as a whole and applied particularly to college-aged Christians. To say it in a sentence: our goal is to please Christ by discipling college students and young adults to maturity in Him. It's incredibly important to know why we exist and what our aims are as a ministry, because it helps us filter the limited time and resources we have in a way that is most glorifying to God, and ultimately most productive for his kingdom. So, let's take some time below and think a little more carefully through our purpose in Boundless.

## Pleasing Christ

In all we do, our *highest aim is to please our Lord, not men* (2 Cor. 5:8-9; 1 Thess. 2:1-20). As our ascended King, Jesus calls the shots for his church, which means he's in charge of our ministry in Boundless. And through his word, he's told us *what* he wants us to do (Matt. 28:19-20, et. al.), *how* he wants us to do it (1 Cor. 3:10-15), and to entrust the results to him (1 Cor. 3:6-7). It's not our job to be innovative, or to try and figure out what's popular among the demographic we're ministering to, but to simply be faithful stewards of what he's entrusted to us (1 Cor. 4:2). We plant and water, but he causes the growth (1 Cor. 3:7). He promises to reward our faithfulness when he returns (1 Cor. 3:14; Rev. 11:8), and to bless that faithfulness with eternal fruit (John 15:16). So, our fundamental aim in Boundless is to be pleasing to the King.

## Discipling Students and Young Adults

Our King has also been clear about what he wants us to do: disciple the nations (Matt. 28:19-20). So, in Boundless, we seek to please the Lord *by focusing our ministry efforts on discipleship*. In all we do, we ask this question: is this helping others learn to follow Christ in the context of the local church? In particular, we're focusing our discipleship efforts in Boundless on students and young adults. In God's providence, Lynchburg has become a "college town" since the growth of Liberty University. Every year, an influx of new students descends upon our town, which affords us with a tremendous opportunity to influence for Christ's sake (more on this below). Beyond college students, we've included in our focus a group we're calling "young adults," which catches graduate students and single career folks, as well as the newly married who have yet to transition classes. Regarding young marrieds, we do, however, want to either transition them to another class that can give them more particularized equipping in marriage, or bring them onto Boundless leadership where we can provide the mentoring they need among the married folks on the team.

## Maturing in Christlikeness

But how are we measuring success in discipleship? The simple answer is this: as we see our young adults *growing in maturity*. As they learn to trust Christ when it's hard. As they learn to live like him in the world. As they grow in their discernment by practicing the truth. As they bear the fruit of his Spirit in their relationships with others. As they grow bold in gospel witness. Or, to put it in the language of Matthew 28, as they are taught to obey *all* that Christ has commanded. In Boundless, even though in many ways it is a transitional ministry, we still strive to disciple with this in focus: the full maturation of our members in Christ. So, that's our goal: to please Christ by discipling college students and young adults to maturity in him.

## Part Two: Strategy

Not only has Christ set the goal for us, but he has also given specific instruction for how we should pursue that goal of discipling others to maturity in Christ. Discipleship happens in the context of the local church through a *faithful shepherding* ministry. So, in Boundless, our “strategy” is to faithfully shepherd our members in the context of the church.

### Faithful Boundless Pastors

This faithful shepherding happens, initially, by the pastors appointed to Boundless. When we look at the NT, we see a clear shepherding structure emerge, starting with Christ, the King. Christ is the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4), the Great Shepherd of the sheep (Heb. 13:20). Christ appointed his apostles (Luke 6:13, 22:29) who then installed long-term, qualified elders (or pastors) in the churches they planted (Acts 14:23). Elders then trained more elders and continued the replication through the ages (2 Tim. 2:2). These local pastors (or elders) are tasked by Christ to shepherd his church on his behalf (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

But what does faithful shepherding involve? Faithful shepherding begins by (1) knowing Christ’s sheep and living openly among them in close proximity (1 Pet. 5:2). Pastors can’t help sheep they don’t know, and sheep won’t truly follow shepherds *they* don’t know. Faithful shepherding also involves (2) clearly teaching Christ’s word, because the Lord has promised to save and sanctify through his word. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16), and Christ intends to set his people free by the truth (John 8:32). So, pastors shepherd by preaching the word at all times (2 Tim. 3:16), in formal settings and in private counseling scenarios (Acts 20:20), with tremendous patience, love and sincerity. Faithful shepherding also involves (3) praying for Christ’s sheep. They struggle in prayer so that the saints may stand fully mature in all the will of God (Col. 4:12). They believe that God will glorify himself by answering their prayers for fruit in the lives of those they shepherd, so they pray fervently (John 15:7-8). Faithful shepherding happens, indirectly, by (4) modeling for the saints what it looks like to follow Christ (1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7-8). That’s why these men must meet certain qualifications of Christlike character before they become elders (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1). The saints need practical and tangible examples of what it looks like to follow Christ. And finally, (5) they shepherd by raising up and training others to follow in their shepherding footsteps (2 Tim. 2:2). They know that ministry multiplies as they replicate themselves slowly, over time, in the lives of those who can teach others also. These are the marks of a faithful shepherding ministry in a local congregation.

By God’s grace, TBC is committed to providing faithful shepherds for Boundless who will get to know, teach, and pray for the Boundless members, while modeling (albeit imperfectly!) at close range what it looks like to follow Christ. At this moment (summer, 2021) due to the size and demands of the ministry, Boundless has a vocational (i.e. paid) college pastor as well as a non-vocational elder, who together oversee the ministry.

## Faithful Boundless Leadership Team

Like we saw above, faithful shepherds are tasked with training up others who can multiply their efforts (2 Tim. 2:2). We do this through our Boundless leadership team. We've chosen faithful believers who are *already* clearly burdened for the growth of the saints. We are continually striving to equip these leaders to extend Christ's shepherding influence among the Boundless members. Our leaders seek to do this in the following ways. They take initiative to get to know the students, showing hospitality to them and faithfully praying for them. If a student doesn't seem to know the Lord, or they lack assurance, our leaders seek to clarify the gospel with them. When students confess sin to them, they come alongside them offering any counsel they can, and acting as a bridge back to the pastors. They work to help our students see the value of the local church, and to integrate them into it via baptism, membership, and service. As they're serving, they help the students identify their gifts as they see where they excel (and don't excel) in the body. Like their pastors, they, too, model what faithfulness looks like in their various spheres of life: personally, at home, at work, in school, and in the church. And finally, our leaders labor to see our students also taking on a burden for the souls of others, to see them burdened for the conversion and discipleship of their coworkers and classmates.

## Faithful Boundless Members

As the pastors and leaders give their efforts to this kind of shepherding ministry, the Lord eventually produces a growing core of Boundless students, who are maturing themselves and are very influential with the other Boundless members. Ministry multiplies exponentially and the saints are built up, protected from lies, equipped to extend the gospel, and devoted to good works. Thus, "the body...makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (Eph. 4:16). This, we believe, is the biblical strategy for making disciples: the strategy of a faithful shepherding ministry from the top down.

It's also my prayer that out of this maturing core group of Boundless students, several things happen. First, it's my prayer that the Lord would raise up future pastors and missionaries, and that we would have the privilege of training and sending them here at TBC. The goal of the great commission is not just that TBC is healthy, but that TBC replicates that health in the form of *other healthy churches among the nations*. It's an incredible privilege to already have a partnership with The Expositors Seminary right here at the church to help us train these men for ministry. And beyond that, it's also my prayer that the Lord would raise up future counselors/disciplers, and that we would be able to train them as well in our Biblical Counseling Training Center.

Second, it's my prayer that the Lord would start faithful marriages and future families as these singles meet one another and develop friendships in our midst. What a blessing to have a church that's committed to helping singles date and marry well, in a way that honors the Lord and brings them the most joy. Not that we pressure our students to marry—we recognize the tremendous value of singleness. But we also know that marriage is the norm for the believer

and God's provision for our desire for intimate companionship. We also recognize the cultural trend of the devaluation of marriage, as well as the extension of immaturity and adolescence. We want to work against these currents, encouraging our young folks to mature, take responsibility, and get married, instead of wasting precious time and living lives full of lust and lack of self-control.

Third, it's my prayer that this core group would become the future key members of the local church, either the one they transition to after college or here at TBC. I pray that some would stick around and become key members here. As we disciple them in these formative years and then transition them to other areas of the church, they will infuse those areas with more health and discipleship instincts. As the years progress, they will become the core of the church. They will become future elders, future deacons, future small group leaders, future women's ministry leaders, future disciplers and counselors.

Fourth, I pray for gospel influence on campus and in the workplace through our students, who are being transformed. Liberty is full of unbelievers, and also very weak believers enslaved to sin who need Christ and his word. Not only that, but Liberty is offering *false solutions* via the LU Counseling Program. To be able to infiltrate the university at the grassroots level and watch our students influence other students toward Christ and his church is thrilling to me! It's my prayer that they learn to articulate their biblical convictions in a compelling, bold, and joyful way to their fellow classmates and professing Christians, as well as coworkers, for the glory of Christ.



# Part Three: Implementation

It's one thing to have a strategy and quite another to implement it. So, how do we actually pursue this shepherding strategy in Boundless? We have three ways we try to do this in Boundless: in and through our weekly gatherings, through hospitality, and through one-on-one discipleship relationships.

## Purposeful Gatherings

We implement this shepherding strategy initially in and through our weekly Boundless gatherings<sup>1</sup> (as well as any other special events we may choose to offer, such as the Devoted Conference). Boundless gathers twice during the week, on Thursday nights and Sunday mornings.

**Thursday Nights.** Our main gathering is on Thursday nights during the fall and spring semesters from 7:00 to roughly 9:00 pm. During these times, we have several emphases. The first is *clear, Biblical teaching*. Like we saw earlier, Christ uses his word to both save and sanctify, so our primary job in the gatherings is to make his voice clear through the teaching (and singing) of Scripture. Since Christ appointed his apostles and prophets to pen Scripture, and since the Spirit inspired those men to write it, we give ourselves to understanding and teaching the intention of those authors. We want to know what Isaiah or Paul or John intended when they wrote Scripture, and we want our sermons to clearly explain their intent, and to apply it with precision to the lives of our students. When we do this, lies are exposed, people are converted, and lives are transformed by the truth. So, on Thursday nights, we dedicate close to an hour each week for this teaching. After the teaching is finished, we also have designed it in such a way as to allow open-ended follow up from the word just taught. It's such a benefit we don't have to rush out to something else, and can linger for several hours if necessary, fielding questions and talking through the implications of what we just taught.

This leads us to our second emphasis during these gatherings: what we call *vibrant body life*. One of the tale-tell signs of a genuine believer is the love they have for others, especially other believers. We know that Christ intends his people to reflect him, and he is transforming us to that end. So, in our Thursday night gathering, we want to leave time for that fellowship. We want to have time for our group to catch up with each other and deepen their friendships. Each week several of our ladies make desserts and snacks, which encourages folks to linger and get to know each other more deeply. This open-ended time also affords our leaders opportunities to

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<sup>1</sup> It goes without saying that the *Boundless* members are most fundamentally TBC members and are best equipped through the Sunday corporate gatherings. Boundless is *supplemental* to the Sunday corporate services. In other words, even if we didn't have a "college ministry," per say, our college-aged members would still be equipped and by the Sunday morning gathering. That said, we believe the Boundless ministry enhances our equipping and shepherding of these folks tremendously.

meet new people, and to follow up on their discipling relationships. We know that, as friendships develop, they'll be more inclined to spend time together outside of the gathering, as well as more comfortable to reach out when they're in sin and need help.

This leads us to our final emphasis during these times: the emphasis on the *limitations of college ministry*. That might sound paradoxical, but it's true. We emphasize week in and week out that our students *must* fully integrate into the wider church body at TBC. Inevitably, students invite their friends to come on Thursday nights, which means there's a bit of a revolving door on those nights. It's our hope and prayer that the teaching, combined with our emphasis on biblical ecclesiology, will convict some who are either substituting their local church life for campus life at LU, or just have minimized the importance of the church altogether, to fully commit to TBC (or the church they're half-heartedly attending in town, if it's healthy). We talk often about the importance of church membership, of baptism and communion, of the corporate services, of utilizing your gifts in serving, and of getting to know the other demographic of saints in our body (families, and seniors). With so much going on at LU's campus, we disciple the students to prioritize the local church. This also influenced why we chose Thursday nights as our meeting time—so that it wouldn't compete with LU's student leadership functions on Wednesdays.

**Sunday Morning (Sunday School).** Our second gathering occurs on Sunday morning for Sunday school, from 9:15-10:15 am. The main difference in this gathering is that it has a fixed ending point and is intended to supplement and compliment the corporate service which follows. For these reasons, we try to make the teaching more interactive, often covering topics that the elders believe the students need to think through. My goal is to "reason through the Scripture" with them, frequently working from the issues back into the text. I will pose questions for them to answer, to help them clarify and articulate their convictions. We also use this time to allow some of the TES students and other Boundless leaders to teach.

**Special Events.** In addition to these weekly gatherings, Boundless will also offer special fellowship events through the year. In the fall, we typically go to the [Devoted Conference](#). This event is a weekend retreat in Ridgecrest, NC, where we join other likeminded college ministries for several days of teaching and fellowship. Most of the participating churches are connected to our [Expositors Seminary](#) network, which affords a great opportunity for our students to meet other students who share the same love for Christ and his word. Each year we choose a topic that we believe is especially important for the college-aged Christian to understand. The Lord has used these weekends to deepen both our convictions in the word and our relationships with one another.

So, as you can see, our Boundless gatherings are designed purposefully to help us carry out this shepherding strategy. As important as the gatherings are, there are other ways we intentionally implement shepherding beyond our formal times together. The next way we do this is in what we'll call our pursuit of a hospitality culture.

## Hospitality Culture

Like we said earlier, a major evidence that a church is healthy is that there is tangible, radical love among the members. One of the clearest and most tangible ways this is expressed is when outsiders are freely, gladly and generously welcomed into the lives of others. The Bible calls this “hospitality.” To be hospitable means you love strangers. In other words, you welcome other Christians into your life that you don’t know that well. You open yourself and your heart up to them, as well as your possessions. If you have a home, you welcome them into it. If you have resources, you’re willing to share them. You intentionally pursue getting to know new people so that you can meet their needs, help them grow in Christ, and connect them more deeply into the body. That’s hospitality.

But why are we so radically hospitable? Because at TBC and in Boundless, we realize that Christ has first welcomed us (Rom. 15:1-7). When we were dead in our sin and enemies of the gospel, Christ came and died for us to redeem and cleanse us. That’s the ultimate act of hospitality—the sacrificial love of strangers. He welcomed us in, Paul says, and Christ wants us to now bend that out in the proactive pursuit of others. Christ’s generosity is contagious, and he wants his followers to gloriously stand out in how we risk ourselves and our resources to love the stranger. Will we get hurt? Will we be taken advantage of? Will our love be under-appreciated? Sometimes. But what drives us is what we’ve experienced: the radical hospitality of Christ himself.

There are almost limitless ways that hospitality plays out in our church, but we’ve found one particular application very fruitful: Sunday lunches. Several of our leaders will host a weekly lunch, directly after the morning service. They’ll invite as many students as they can comfortably (and sometimes *uncomfortably*) house and enjoy a meal together. For a first-time visitor to be asked into a leader’s home for a meal that very Sunday makes a lasting impact. We’ve learned it’s not about the food. What impacts them is the love and generosity and warmth they experience, the very warmth of Christ. As we welcome them, we welcome them not just into our homes but into our lives. They get to know our kids. They see how we respond to others in conversation. They watch how we treat our spouses. And we get the privilege of learning about them, too. It’s a tangible expression of our love for them, and it helps them learn to trust us, even when we must sometimes say hard things to them in love.

## One-on-One Discipleship

Another way we implement this shepherding ministry is through one-on-one discipleship relationships. When it comes to discipleship, all we mean is helping others follow Christ better. Or, to say it differently, we want to take spiritual responsibility for the growth and development of others in Christ.

But what does that look like? It starts quite naturally as we befriend others and get to know them. As this happens, the Lord begins to reveal areas they need help in. And since we know

them, we come alongside and teach them how the Scriptures address their problem. We may not always know how to counsel someone in a particular scenario, but we're committed to helping them get it. We've purposed in our hearts to stick with them through their problems and walk with them in their pursuit of Christ. We offer ourselves as an imperfect model to follow. We help them evaluate progress and eventually teach them to do this very thing with another person. That's the essence of a discipleship relationship. It's full of joy and eternal reward along with a great deal of sacrifice, and the discipler learns as much if not more than the one being disciplined.

How does discipleship happen in Boundless? The Boundless gatherings often lead to hospitality, which we pray leads to individual discipleship relationships. But we're often more proactive, too. As pastors, we personally disciple some of the Boundless students, but we can't get to every single member in the same way. That's why the pastors must replicate other leaders (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). As we become aware of needs, we will often connect our students to other Boundless leaders, and even to other TBC members outside of Boundless. Then we'll help guide them along in the discipleship process. Additionally, as the Boundless leaders get to know the students, these discipling relationships often happen naturally. And finally, even our maturing Boundless students end up discipling the younger, incoming students. As the pastor, I try to keep track of who is discipling whom as I pray regularly through all the members on our Boundless roster. If someone is not being disciplined, I pray for them and then try to find opportunities to connect them with another person who is equipped to help them. Our goal is that *every member* is being personally disciplined unto maturity (Col. 1:28). Although we often fall short of this ideal, we strive to make it a reality in our ministry.

## Conclusion

So that's a brief sketch of what Christ says his church should be about, as well as his strategy for seeing it accomplished. He wants us to make disciples in the context of the local church. May the Lord himself strengthen us to this end for much eternal fruit!