

**Full-Devotion at Oasis
Position Paper
2005**

I. Introduction

As pastors of Oasis Church, and as part of Christ's church universal, we are constantly in pursuit of fulfilling the great mandate of Jesus to the leaders of the church:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

- Matthew 28:19-20

Not only is this a command of God to us, but it's what we are most passionate about, as is reflected in our vision statement:

To be a church of fully-devoted followers of Christ.

It's important to note that this great commandment, which is our great passion, is also our greatest challenge. Why? Because the call to discipleship is a call to radical commitment to the kingdom of God. Both Jesus' declarations about discipleship, and the illustration of it in the early church, point to a life-style in which there are no close seconds to Jesus.

As leaders of this church, we are continuously assessing our progress of making fully-devoted followers of Jesus. Since radical devotion to Jesus ought to define everything that we are individually and collectively as a church, we have to address the question, "How can we do better in leading people into a life full-devotion to Jesus?"

Through much prayer, study, and dialogue, we are convinced that God has given us a mechanism to come closer to Christ's great mandate. It's what we call *Full-Devotion at Oasis*. We've observed that both biblically and practically, disciples are forged when the following 5 things are true about them:

Salvation - They have entered into a saving relationship with God and are striving to develop this relationship.

Sunday Morning Worship - They have committed to the corporate gathering of believers for worship, word, and sacrament.

Small Groups - They have entered into a community of godly relationships where accountability and care are experienced.

Stewardship - They have embraced the truth that everything they possess is on loan from God. As such, they've embraced the value of supporting the church

financially.

Service - They are actively exercising their spiritual gifts for the building up of the church.

We have taken these 5 S's of discipleship and have developed a process to affirm those who are already committed to a life of discipleship, and to challenge and move others into full-devotion. This procedure includes the following three things:

Full-Devotion Class

The Full-Devotion Class is a high-energy and engaging seminar of three sessions detailing vital information about what it means to be committed to the local church. The class will cover topics such as,

Salvation and the Christian Life
The History and Vision of Oasis Church
Doctrinal Essentials and Distinctives
The 5 S's of Full-Devotion at Oasis

Full-Devotion Meeting

When you have completed the classes, you will schedule an appointment with one of the members of the Full Devotion Team. At this time, you will be introduced to a pastor or an administrator who will assist you in either transitioning into church life and/or functioning in church life. This team will provide resources to aid you in finding your God-given gifts and avenues to exercise those gifts..

Full Devotion Agreement

Also, it is during this appointment you will be given the opportunity to let us know that they are committed to a life of discipleship at Oasis by signing a *Full-Devotion Agreement*. This serves both to solidify one's commitment and to provide the church with basic administrative information. Each year, we will ask those who have signed the *Full-Devotion Agreement* to reaffirm their commitment to Christ-following at Oasis by resigning this agreement.

II. Full-Devotion at Oasis is Biblical

It is our conviction that it is well within the Biblical prerogative of church leadership to adopt what we call *Full-Devotion at Oasis* (which will be from here on out referred to as FDO). This doesn't mean that the early church implemented the exact form which we are adopting. However, the underlying principles behind what we are adopting can be clearly located in Scripture. As such, FDO is merely an extension or development of the commitment found in the earlier church.

FDO is inferred from the demands and demonstrations of discipleship.

To start with, let's take the demand for commitment that Christ made to those whom in came in contact with. Jesus demanded nothing less than *everything* from those who would be his followers.

"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple...." "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."

- Luke 14:26-27

"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it."

- Matthew 10:37-39

"Jesus said to him, 'If you wish to be complete, go *and* sell your possessions and give to *the* poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.'"

- Matthew 19:21

Notice that the basic entry-level expectation that Jesus has for those who be considered his followers is full and all-embracing devotion to him. This is important to FDO, for some may feel that it calls people to a commitment which is inappropriate. But notice that the commitment asked for in FDO is far less intensive than the Biblical injunction. You might say that FDO is the silhouette of the radical minimum standard stated by Jesus; a basic structure meant to propel people towards the objective of full-devotion. This implies that no one who has accepted the high demands of discipleship would flinch at the expectations laid out in FDO, for it is merely the launch pad meant to thrust them towards the mark, the high calling of God in Christ.

An examination of the Biblical records also reveals that the early church wanted nothing more than to be propelled into full-devotion to Jesus. They took Christ's call to discipleship seriously.

"⁴¹ So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. ⁴² They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. ⁴⁶ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."

- Acts 2:41-47

What selfless devotion to one another and the cause of Christ! Using the early church as a spiritual barometer, it is indisputable that the church throughout history has fallen short of this radical minimum standard. It is indisputable that our church has much progress to make. As leaders of Oasis Christian Fellowship, we are compelled by our calling and position in the church to move those under our care nearer to what Jesus sets as the norm for all believers.

As such, we believe that FDO is an invaluable tool in the endeavor of making disciples. You might say that this mechanism is a way of reaching for the undeniable and paramount biblical objectives set for the church universal, and for our local congregation. It is our position that insofar as FDO moves people towards full-devotion to Christ, we regard it as nearly synonymous with discipleship.

FDO is inferred from the nature of the Church

Many of the Scriptural metaphors illustrating the relationship of each believer to the church powerfully supports both the goals and method of FDO. Each believer is said to be related to the church in a similar way as

A body part is related to the entire Body (1 Cor. 12:27)

A stone is related to a Temple (Ephesians 2:21-22)

A branch to other branches in a Tree or Vine (John 15:5)

A family member is related to a Family (Gal 6:10; 1 Tim 5:1)

Each metaphor suggests that each believer bears an intimate, interdependent, indispensable, and non-negotiable relationship to other believers. The significance of this is especially germane and challenging given the culture in which we live; a culture in which we are individuals who pursue our own goals for our own good and the good of our own, even if this adversely affect others. Or, we participate in what only immediately benefits us. This is somewhat alien both to Jewish culture and the Christian world view.

Consider that our union with a man Adam was so intimate, interdependent, indispensable, and non-negotiable that his fall became ours (Romans 5:12-21). What affected the root has affected the branches. Consider also that our union with a man named Christ is so intimate, dependant, indispensable, and non-negotiable that his righteousness is regarded as ours (2 Cor. 5:21). What the vine is, the branches became. In a similar way, God has created church as an organism, not just an organization. We are inescapably members of a larger reality.

This is pertinent to FDO, for some might react negatively to FDO because they believe that a person could still be fully-devoted to Christ even though they uninvolved and uncommitted to the local church. Our response is that “a fully-devoted follower of Christ who is minimally involved in the local church” is a contradiction of terms. Once we have been transplanted out of the world and placed into the body of Christ, due to the nature of this new union of individual to body, we now are obligated to serious commitment and involvement to that body.

“The church as an organism consists of all its members who are obligated to use their God-given talents and abilities for the mutual edification of the body. A Christian’s life in the body comes to expression primarily in the local visible church. Church members met together (Ac.1:13-15; 2:1; 4:31; 11:26; 20:7ff.; 1Cor.11:18; 14:19, 28, 35; Rom.16:5; Heb.10:25,etc.), prayed with and for one another (Ac.1:14; 12:5; Rom.12:2; 15:30; Col. 4:2, 3, etc), fellowshipped together (Ac.2:42; 2 Pet. 2:13; 1 Jn.1:3, 7; Jude 12), gave money (i.e., tithed) to pay the pastor’s salary and to help poor believers (Ac. 2:44-45; 6:1-6; Rom.15:26; 1Cor.9:4-14; 2Cor.9:1-15; Gal.2:10; Jas.2:15-16), assisted poor orphans and widows (1Tim.5:3, 16, Jas.1:27), admonished one another (Rom.15:14; 2 Thess.3:15; Col 3:16), loved one another (Rom.12:10; 2 Cor. 2:8; 8:7,8,24; Gal.5:6, 13, 14, 22; etc.), met for public worship (Ac. 20:7; 1 Cor. 14:23, 26, 34, 35, etc.), participated in the Lord’s Supper (1Cor. 11:18-34, etc.), submitted to the elders of the church (Heb. 13:7, 17; 1Thess 5:12-13), and listened to the preaching of the word (Rom.1:15; 1Cor. 15:11-14; 2 Tim. 4:2, etc). The church as an institution and organism on earth are co-ordinate. Under normal circumstances both of these aspects of the church were never to operate independently. The various gifts, function, services, meetings and so forth that took place were under the oversight of the church pastor and elders” (Schwertley, *Church Membership and Choosing a Church*).

To sum up, FDO may be inferred by the call to discipleship, the demonstration of discipleship, and the intrinsic nature of the church.

III. Full-Devotion is a Practical Tool for Leaders.

Given that FDO is supported by Christ’s call to commitment, the example of the early church, and the nature of the church, we will now list the ways in which FDO practically aids the leaders of Oasis to better lead towards biblical goals.

FDO clearly articulates the God-given and God-inspired vision of our church.

We believe that in addition to the general mandate given to all church leaders in all churches to fulfill the great commission, each church has a particular identity which makes their work distinctive (though perhaps similar). An analogy might be helpful here.

Let’s say that a group of people have the same destination of Los Angeles. Starting from Redlands, there are various routes and vehicles that could be adopted to reach L.A. One person may choose to take the 91 to the 5 in order to pick up some friends near Orange County. Still, another person may choose the 60 freeway. And still others the I-10. Differing routes, the same destination. In addition to the differing routes, one person may choose to roller blade to L.A., and another may choose a motor cycle. Still another person may choose an airplane. Same destination, differing vehicles.

When it comes to the great commission, each church has a distinctive identity and therefore a distinctive way of pursuing Christ’s mandate. Usually, the unique identity of each church is the reflection of things like the giftings of the leadership, the location of the church, and the congregants in the church. For instance, one church may feel

distinctively called and equipped to reach a particular ethnicity, whereas another church reaches effectively the impoverished in certain inner cities. Different giftings, same destination. Again, some churches may be effective in gathering the lost, still other churches may be highly effective in grounding believers. The same destination of discipleship, but differing emphases in that process.

Oasis Christian Fellowship has the destination of the great commission and a distinctive way of fulfilling it. FDO provides the venue to clearly communicate the unique God-given vision to us.

FDO clearly articulates ways in which each member contributes the fulfilling of the overarching vision of our church.

Put differently, it focuses people to more effectively accomplish the God-given vision. Light that is diffused is less productive than light that is focused. Focused light can be used to correct vision and can give the upper hand in combat. A focused people are an effective people. FDO is a tool to focus people.

FDO aids the leaders to properly care all those that attend Oasis.

We realize that even with the institution of FDO, we are always going to have a mixture of people. There are those who will only attend the church. There also others who will be partially involved. Finally there will be those who are completely committed. Identifying who falls into each group is important in how we are to shepherd the total church. For those who just attend regularly, we have the challenge to lead them from spectating to participating (even if partial). For those who are partially participating, we have the challenge of leading them from partial participation to full participation. For those who have committed to FDO, we are focused in equipping, encouraging, and empowering them in discipleship. FDO provides the measuring for leaders to identify where people are in their spiritual journey.

FDO provides an opportunity to educate people about what we believe.

FDO provides a forum to relate the essential doctrines of Christianity, as well as our position on non-essential doctrines of Christianity.

FDO provides a check for an easy-come and easy-go mentality.

We feel that a consumerist mentality has infiltrated the American church. By this we mean that many believers will go to a church (and serve in it) when that church meets their particular needs and matches their expectations. When that local church fails to meet those needs, or adopts some policy they disagree with, the 3 dozen or so churches in the area (and the church they leave) are treated like entrees in a buffet; they pick and choose. Sometimes multiple churches are attended at the same time, or 2 or 3 churches are cycled through seasonally. In either case, believers are under the mistaken notion that this is fine for the average believer. *FDO* helps us to counter the perpetuation this trend.

Overall, we believe that FDO is a powerful tool to realize the biblical model of the church as an organism.

IV. Questions about FDO:

Isn't FDO technically non-biblical?

Some may observe that neither Christ nor the early church established a detailed program like FDO. In this line of reasoning, the potential fault in implementing FDO isn't the concept, so long as it remains loose and vague. Rather, the fault is the specific robust form which it now takes, which is taken to be unnecessary and intrusive.

The problem with this position is that there are a number of things in the earlier church which start without precise definition and explanation, but come to have clear definition and explanation in post-apostolic Christianity.

Take something like the doctrine of the Trinity. It is universally recognized that the early church did not have the same degree of understanding about the Trinity as Christians in the 6th century. Why? It was through historical development and clarification through church councils which combated heresy that we come to adhere and confess the universal creeds of Christendom (like the Nicene and Athanasian Creed), creeds which define in a more precise way the essentials firmly held to in earlier generations. It's not that the early church didn't believe in the Trinity, but that they had a less clear understanding of the doctrine.

Here's an example a bit closer to home. It's highly unlikely that the early church had the same detailed and efficient system of money management that the church has today. Certainly they didn't possess budgeting software. Who knows, they probably didn't have detailed budgets. Certainly, they didn't possess the same principles of economics that we possess which enables us to make the most out of each dollar. This doesn't make the current way that churches work with money unbiblical. In the realm of finances, we allow for and often embrace whole-heartedly the inevitable advancement and development of money management.

In the same way, just because the early church might not have had something as detailed as FDO is no reason to jettison the notion. The concept of discipleship which underlies FDO allows for development and refinement.

Isn't FDO a form of discrimination?

Discrimination is the exclusion of a person no matter what. FDO is the inclusion of a person who is willing to take the necessary steps. We read in Acts 5:12-14,

“¹¹ And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things. ¹² At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. ¹³ But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴ And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to *their number*.”

- Acts 5:11-14

Note the phrase in verse 13, *“But none of the rest dared to associate with them.”* Here we have two groups of people. The first group described as “believers in the Lord,” and the second group described as those that held believers in high esteem. The second group wasn’t excluded by the members of the first group. Instead, the second group preferred not to be included with the first group. They probably opted out of joining the disciples given the kind of lifestyle and commitment that they adopted.

In the same way, FDO isn’t discrimination, for we welcome everyone to become fully-devoted at Oasis. As such, the decision to be FDO rests in the hands of everyone who hears the invitation.

As was mentioned earlier, FDO aids us in strategic discernment (not discrimination). FDO helps in discerning people’s spiritual state so as to inform our care for each person regardless of whether they have opted out of FDO. This is based on the irrefutable truth that people must be cared for differently given their circumstance. We see that Jesus dealt differently with the thousands that followed him than he did the 70 he sent out to preach. Jesus dealt differently with the 12 apostles than he did the 70. Further, Jesus dealt with his core group of 3 differently than he did the rest of the twelve. Discrimination? No. Strategic discernment? Yes.

What are the benefits of FDO?

If FDO is somewhat synonymous with discipleship, then this question could be rendered, “What are the benefits of discipleship?” The answer is that discipleship is the benefit of discipleship. Or, FDO is the benefit of FDO. When Jesus called people to follow him, he declared paradoxically, “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:35). It is in the losing of one’s life in discipleship that one gains it. It’s in FDO that one experiences the dynamic of body life.

On a more practical note, with FDO comes the benefit of training and opportunities for serving in certain positions of ministry. Furthermore, with FDO comes the benefit of potential leadership roles. Now, this doesn’t mean that those who have not yet gone through FDO (or have simply decided refrain from the process) can’t serve at Oasis. We have clearly defined areas in which a person may or may not serve.

If I’m already committed to the church, why formalize it through FDO?

Formalizing one’s commitment is a reinforcement of one’s commitment. Perhaps it’s analogous to the difference between serious engagement and marriage. Although a couple may be as inseparable during engagement as they are after the marriage, that commitment is powerfully reinforced by the formal commitment of matrimony. The significance of this reinforcement is stated well by another:

“There is great spiritual value in making a commitment to community. Monastic communities centuries ago recognized the all-too-human tendency to remain part of a community as long as it was comfortable or convenient. If it got too hard,

rather than solve interpersonal problems, people would move on to another community. Eventually, in addition to other vows taken in monastic life, many called their people to take a Vow of Stability, saying in effect: 'I will not easily leave.' In a similar way, when we commit to being a participating member, we say to one another, "I will not easily leave." Because of that kind of commitment, a few things are made possible: community, growth, protection, and mission" (www.willowcreek.org/membership.asp).

Why is there an annual reaffirmation?

There is a yearly reaffirmation of FDO because we all naturally lose focus and attention. This provides an important reminder and opportunity to refresh one's commitment. In this way, reaffirmations are similar to celebrating one's wedding anniversary.

Isn't the Full-Devotion Agreement unbiblical?

Some take Christ's prohibition of oath-making in the sermon on the mount as meaning that all forms of oath-making are wrong. Let's look at the passage,

“³³ Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' ³⁴ "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. ³⁶ "Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.”

- Matthew 5:33-37

Whatever Jesus means, he certainly cannot mean that all forms of oath making are prohibited. Why? Jesus later in his life responds to an oath (Matt.26:63-64). The righteous angel of Revelation 10:6 is described as having “swore by him who lives forever and ever.” The apostle Paul calls God as his witness in verifying his intentions towards the Corinthians (2 Cor.1:23; cf. Gal 1:20). Even Jehovah swore by himself (Hebrews 6:13). Among these there are other numerous famous and celebrative oaths made throughout redemptive history:

Jonathan and David (1Sam. 18:3,4; 20:16, 42; 2 Sam 21:7)
The Jews with each other to serve God (1 Chron. 15:12-15; Neh 10:28-32)
Moses to Caleb (Josh 14:9)
Ruth to Naomi (Ruth 1:17)
Boaz to Ruth (Ruth 3:13)
Elisha to Elijah (2 Kings 2:2)

In Matthew 5, Jesus was referring to the prevalent practice of frivolous swearing. One commentator notes that a man might swear a false oath “a hundred thousand times and

yet not be guilty of vain swearing.”¹ This man would have justified his behavior of not following through with his oath by saying that he didn’t “swear by God.” He might have sworn by heaven, or by earth, or even by the hairs of his own head, but in his mind this isn’t swearing by God. As such, he regarded such oaths as not being binding. Jesus counters this prevalent philosophy of promise making by insisting that all things belong God. To swear by anything is tantamount to swearing by God. As such, our word should be so sure and solid that our “yes” or “no” should be good enough.

V. Conclusion

We believe that Full-Devotion at Oasis is a God-send, for it will enable us to clearly communicate and define commitment to Christ and will serve as a tangible way for people to step up their commitment. Through this process we can properly equip believers for the work of service. Furthermore, it enables us to properly care for everyone who steps into the front doors of this church. We look forward with anticipation to the mighty things that God will do through our collective pursuit of fulfilling Jesus’ commandment.

¹ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. 1997. A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA

