

# Speak out!



**T**his ministry year, we want to put special focus on our vision objective of “growing disciples.” We want to wrestle with what it means to be a disciple and how to grow as disciples.

Perhaps the most famous Scripture on discipleship is Jesus’ statement at the end of the Gospel of Matthew. Speaking to His disciples, Jesus says:

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)*

This statement is known as the Great Commission because it is seen as the defining mission of Jesus and His disciples after His ascension. It reveals the authority of Jesus, the authority in which He now sends His followers out to go and make disciples, or apprentices, of Jesus.

While few of us would downplay these words of Jesus, a 2020 survey indicated that only one in five Christians say they are involved in some sort of discipleship activity. Dallas Willard, one of my favorite writers on the topic of discipleship, once said that the greatest challenge within North American Christianity was the idea “that we can be ‘Christians’ forever and never become disciples.” Willard describes that as “The Great Omission within The Great Commission.”

At Eastbrook, we want to do everything we can do to make sure we are moving in the right direction to grow as disciples. We don’t want to leave discipleship to chance or to hope. Amidst the many things happening in our lives and in our cultures, as best as we can, we’d like to be intentional about growing disciples as a church family. And that’s why we want to put special focus on discipleship for this coming Fall and beyond. In this issue of *Speak Out!* you’ll encounter stories of discipleship in different venues and different lives, but all building off our calling to be disciples who grow with Jesus while also inviting others to be disciples of Jesus as well.



Matt Erickson  
Senior Pastor, Eastbrook Church



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## Dig In to Discipleship

This fall, we’re taking a closer look at how discipleship is happening at Eastbrook Church. To help get the conversation started, we introduced a Discipleship Survey. This anonymous survey will help our pastors, staff, and leaders shape the future ministry of Eastbrook by giving us a better handle on where our church members and attenders are at in their own discipleship journey. We’re asking the entire church to complete the survey by September 10! Learn more and find the link online at [eastbrook.org/discipleship](http://eastbrook.org/discipleship).

Curious to learn more about what we find? Join us at the next Leadership Community gathering on Monday, October 30 at 7 pm in the Worship Hall. Pastors Matt & Jim will be walking through the results of the Discipleship Survey, and our leaders will dig into what this information means for Eastbrook ministry moving forward. This gathering is for anyone at Eastbrook who is in a leadership role—join us!



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# Baptism: Walking in Faith

by Megan "Mac" Littell

**B**aptisms at Eastbrook are a time for celebration as people publicly declare they are dead to sin and alive in Christ. The practice offers a tangible expression of this faith milestone.

Caleb Morici was baptized earlier this summer, along with others at Eastbrook who wanted to take this step of faith. Caleb, 27, shares that baptism is an important piece of his discipleship and spiritual growth.

One Sunday during a sermon, Pastor Matt Erickson mentioned baptism as a next step. Caleb's interest was piqued because earlier, he had been reading a passage in the Gospel of Matthew about John the Baptist. As our God is wont to do, He used multiple methods to invite Caleb to consider baptism, aligning Caleb's heart and preparing him to take this step of faith.

Wanting to be filled with the Holy Spirit and renew his commitment to be a follower of Jesus, he attended a Baptism Preparation Class. This class provided knowledge, biblical context, and reinforced the "why" of baptism in a way that Caleb found helpful.

**"I was a believer, but now I wanted to start following," he says.**

On the day of the baptism, Caleb found himself questioning if he was ready for this because he knew he still had things to work on. Pastor Jim Caler provided guidance and encouragement, reminding Caleb that baptism is not an act demonstrating our perfection, but it's about the commitment to walking with Jesus. In courage and faith, Caleb took the step to be baptized in the freezing waters of Lake Michigan. Pastor Jim was the one to baptize him.

That day on the beach, Caleb felt supported in ways both expected and unexpected. His invited family and friends came to support him, along with new friends he had met a few days prior at a 20s and 30s cookout event. These new friends came to witness his step of faith and pray with him afterwards (see inset photo, above). Caleb describes the day as "uplifting" and says, "I felt so loved!" This story

of the body of Christ coming alongside one another is a great reminder that the life of discipleship and commitment to Jesus is not walked alone.

Through different seasons of falling back from faith, God has consistently invited Caleb back to Himself using sermons, scripture, the baptism class, leaders who answered questions, and friends who offered encouragement.

Caleb has a renewed faith. Baptism provided a crucial moment for him where he took a conscious step into a new walk with Christ. It was a milestone he will not soon forget.

**"I'm not just speaking it, I'm doing it," he says. "Faith becomes walking."**

Eastbrook Church baptisms take place each September and June in Lake Michigan. Prior to baptism, we ask you to take a Baptism Prep Class. Find upcoming dates for classes and baptisms online at [eastbrook.org/baptism](http://eastbrook.org/baptism).



# JESUS IN SKIN

by Jess Eckert



**“AT THAT TIME THE DISCIPLES CAME TO JESUS, SAYING, ‘WHO IS THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?’ AND CALLING TO HIM A CHILD, HE PUT HIM IN THE MIDST OF THEM AND SAID, ‘TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS YOU TURN AND BECOME LIKE CHILDREN, YOU WILL NEVER ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. WHOEVER HUMBLING HIMSELF LIKE THIS CHILD IS THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.’” (MATTHEW 18:1-4)**

*Humility is a common thread woven into the stories of three long-time NextGen ministry volunteers (shown, from left): Melody Stoltenberg, George Sze, and Michelle Buck.*

*Michelle moved to the Milwaukee area about six years ago from St. Louis. She has three adult children and works as a corporate tax accountant. On Sunday mornings, you’ll find her nestled in the Kindergarten classroom, graciously welcoming families and teaching their children all about Jesus.*

*Melody and her family have been at Eastbrook for almost twenty years. She has three grown sons, and has served in many service roles with both adults and children. She thoroughly enjoys her role as a special education aide at a local school in this season, and spends Sunday mornings teaching babies and toddlers at our church.*

*George and his family have been at Eastbrook since “the Maryland School days” in the 1980’s. He recently retired from his vocational job and is taking some time away from serving to discern what’s next for him. In the past, you may have encountered him teaching fifth grade students how to dig into Scripture.*

*These committed adults, along with many others, pour their hearts and souls into Sunday School classes, and have learned a thing or two from those smaller in stature along the way. Pull up a kid-sized chair, grab a snack, and get ready for some anecdotes of God working in and through the lives of a few veteran volunteers.*

## WHAT ARE YOUR EARLIEST MEMORIES OF SUNDAY SCHOOL?

**MELODY:** As a child in my own Sunday School classes, I remember learning Old Testament stories. They created in me a wonder and a desire to ask questions that shaped my growing faith.

## WHAT SPURRED YOU TO SERVE IN THE NEXTGEN MINISTRY AT EASTBROOK CHURCH?

**MICHELLE:** When my children were young (in St. Louis), there was a need, so I stepped into it. Now that my children are grown, I have the time and space to teach. I think it’s so important to have teachers to be able to keep classrooms open so parents can be in service and the children can have the Word of God brought to them at their level.

**GEORGE:** I became a helper in my son’s class and then followed him up the grades. God called me, I followed Him in obedience and did my best. It’s been a privilege to serve as long as I have. There are lots of memories.

**MELODY:** I started when my sons were in school. I distinctly remember Dawn [Schuessler, Eastbrook’s Preschool & K4 Coordinator] asking me to help. I filled in where I was needed without a question.

## WHAT AGE GROUPS HAVE YOU SERVED?

**MICHELLE:** I am in the kindergarten classroom every week. I like to provide consistency for the kids and the parents can trust who is watching their kids while they are in service!

**MELODY:** Over the years, I have taught a range of students, ages three through third grade. Again, I help where I’m needed and right now that is in the nursery.

**GEORGE:** For many years I taught fifth grade at Eastbrook. I really loved that age group. They are pre-junior high, on the verge of the next season of childhood, and they are still curious and wanting to learn. Right now, God led me into a season where I retired from my job and am taking time off of serving in the Sunday School classroom to ask God what is next for me.

## GEORGE, AS YOU LOOK BACK ON YOUR EXPERIENCE AND WORK WITH GOD TO DECIDE WHAT’S NEXT, WHAT IS SOMETHING THAT STANDS OUT TO YOU ABOUT YOUR TEACHING EXPERIENCE?

**GEORGE:** It is encouraging to see students who were in my classes years ago who are now adults. They will address me by name and remember the things that I taught them years ago. It goes to show the impact you can have as a teacher and I’m thankful for the ways God used me. It’s a great feeling!

## OVER THE YEARS, WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MISSION AS YOU’VE DISCIPLED KIDS?

**MICHELLE:** It’s about so much more than reciting Bible verses. I love to engage the kids in small group and large group time physically to make the Bible less intimidating. I may have them wear costumes or act out the Bible story to learn in different sensory ways and repeatedly so that each story builds a foundation for their faith. I like to say it is being Jesus in skin to people—treating others well, modeling what’s being taught. We are leading children to Christ at the heart level.

**GEORGE:** Instilling a love for the Word of God is the motivation I have, so that seeds can be planted. I know that I may not see the harvest, but God is faithful and He is working. It's not about what I can do, but what God can do. I hope they fall in love with Jesus. I do my part and trust God with their lives.

**MELODY:** I desire to love on each child as Jesus did in the Bible. I like to meet each child right where they are at to welcome them into the Kingdom of God. I like to provide opportunities for them to have ownership within the classroom through clean up, helping with teachings, and welcoming friends who are slow to warm up. I like to lead by example. It's a joy to experience the wonder within the teachings and that comes by being intentional and present.

## WHAT IS ONE WAY YOU SAW GOD AT WORK IN THE CLASSROOM?

**MICHELLE:** I have seen kids so excited for God that they lead their parents to Christ! God is powerful!

**GEORGE:** God has put a love for the Bible in my heart and He has given me the opportunity to see fifth graders learning to love the Word, too. Sometimes the kids know more than me! It is amazing to be humbled and to see God growing someone else's faith in big ways.

**MELODY:** Most recently, as a new group of young children moved up to the next level, some were very distressed. God gave me the ability to mentor each little one and provide a supportive, safe, fun, accepting and welcoming environment for them. Seeing their relationships develop with me and with the other children is beautiful. They are ready to listen, wonder freely, and ask and answer questions about God.

## HOW HAS GOD USED YOUR SERVICE TO IMPACT YOUR OWN FAMILY?

**MICHELLE:** My sons followed me into serving in the kids' ministry. I never forced them — they saw me doing it for so many years and volunteered themselves. That's always beautiful to see a heart of service reach the next generation.

**MELODY:** Similarly, each of my sons became helpers as they became older than the grade my husband and I were teaching. It was a family affair.

## WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED AS YOU'VE MINISTERED TO KIDS?

**MICHELLE:** I've learned a lot from the kids. You can have a lesson prepared, but then a child asks a question and it causes you to think about a passage and dig deeper into Scripture. There are so many Christian ideas and concepts that I understand as an adult but when asked to put those concepts into words that a child can

understand, I learn something new along the way.

**GEORGE:** I've learned that it can't be about me. It's not self-seeking. It's about the kids' development and planting seeds that can hopefully grow into a strong faith.

**MELODY:** God has shown me to look less at my timetable and more at the needs of children. It has been beautiful to be in the moment with the children and see their "aha" moments. This only comes when I am led by the Spirit and don't rush the learning.

## IF YOU WERE TO TALK TO A PROSPECTIVE VOLUNTEER, WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE?

**MICHELLE:** You don't have to be a teacher to do it. You only need a servant's heart, to like kids, and have patience. Parent helpers are the best!

**GEORGE:** The most important thing is to have a servant's heart and serve with the gifts He's given you. It can feel intimidating to start out as a teacher, but coming alongside someone and helping can be a great way to start. You'll find it's not babysitting — we are impacting kids for eternity!

**MELODY:** As I know from my own experiences, taking care of yourself first makes it possible to be present with the children. Volunteer for what is feasible for your time by looking at options to help: days, service times, evenings, weekly, bi-weekly, monthly are all options available. Be sure to volunteer in an area that will utilize the gifts God has given you. Feel free to explore opportunities before making a commitment. You won't regret it. ■

*Praise God for being the One who disciples us as we walk in obedience to Him! He is the Good Shepherd and it is an honor to be used by Him to uplift and lead others into loving relationship with Christ our King!*

*Let's pray for:*

- *Michelle and her kindergartners in Sunday School that their faith would be strengthened*
- *George and his discernment and obedience to follow where God leads him next*
- *Melody and her NextGen littles that they would know the love and comfort of their Savior even now*

If you would like to serve in one of our NextGen ministries, from working with littles in the Nursery or Preschool, to serving as a Buddy for a child with special needs, teaching Kids' Sunday School, working with choirs, or volunteering with our Middle or High School kids, take a first step by filling out the NextGen Application online at [eastbrook.org/nextgenapp](http://eastbrook.org/nextgenapp). Looking to talk to someone on our NextGen team? Reach out to NextGen Pastor Laure Herlinger; [lherlinger@eastbrook.org](mailto:lherlinger@eastbrook.org), 414.228.5220.





## GET TO KNOW AN EASTBROOKER:

# Joran Weitzer

by Sue Gilliland

**Joran Weitzer grew up at Eastbrook and now serves as the Coordinator for Student Ministry Worship. He spends a lot of his time at rehearsals in the Church Office basement! But for Joran, his job is really about relationships with God and one another. He sat with fellow church member Sue Gilliland to speak about his journey of faith and discipleship.**

### **How did you first come to faith in Jesus?**

Growing up, my parents set a faithful example. They talked about God and scripture, and lived it with so much joy! I also had a great knowledge foundation from Eastbrook Church and from Eastbrook Academy. But what really made an impression on my fourth grade brain was seeing adults at church joyfully serve kids. I wondered, what's so compelling about being a Christian that they'd spend their free time this way? In fifth grade, I put it together: God wanted a relationship with me! Because of sin, I'd been missing out on that, but it was available to me through Jesus.

### **You've had struggles, and the Holy Spirit has used them to shape you. Tell us about some of them.**

In eighth grade, I went through a storm. I didn't live in a typical household; my mom and dad were committed to foster care and adoption — right now, I'm the oldest of seven children, and five are adopted. My parents have a deep, godly love and desire to shepherd these kids, but fostering and adopting is not a peaceful process. Dealing with scars and trauma can be very hard. That year seemed especially chaotic, loud, and angry, and because of my siblings' very real needs, I wasn't getting as much attention at home. At school, I struggled with how to fit in and who my friends were. I started to feel isolated and distant from God, but instead of opening up to others, I put up a front. I was helping to lead worship in youth group, but my heart was far away and falling into some sinful habits.

Then I hit rock bottom and finally understood that I didn't deserve God's love. I felt the Holy Spirit grip me as I experienced true grace. This really transformed me. I became more open to serving others on worship teams, mission trips, and at Fort Wilderness camp (later, I even met my wife, Bonnie, at Fort!) I saw leaders model truly living for the Kingdom, and I began to see my life as an offering to God.

When I started college, I also faced a struggle. I began as an engineering major, but soon God nudged me: was I choosing that path for financial security and prestige? I went into a season of prayer, and the Holy Spirit shifted my perspective. I realized the greatest highlights of my life had been serving others, whether on a mission trip, at church, or on the university campus. God showed me that He'd created me to serve people in full-time ministry. After that, I changed my major, and that has led to more growth and a lot of "Holy Spirit moments."

### **Much of your servant leadership has involved discipling others through music and worship, in some form. What do those things mean to you?**

Music clears the noise out of my head and settles me down so I can see who I am and who God is. Then I can admire God and wait for Him to speak.

Growing up at Eastbrook, I saw worship modeled as global and loud and beautiful. Whether it involved banners or choir or orchestra, there were multiple ways to worship God. In sixth grade, I started learning the guitar and just loved it. Some of the youth leaders showed me how to play it in worship and brought me under their wing to mentor me. Those relationships were so important.

In high school, on a mission trip, I experienced an amazing worship service at our sister church in Guatemala. We were all singing with the same heart and passion but in different languages. I remember thinking, "God is even bigger than I imagined!" I knew I'd always want to be involved in musical worship.

As musicians, we have to realize we're the tour guides, not the "attraction." We help people come to the feet of God. The spiritual focus comes first, and the musical and technical aspects and desire for excellence follow.

### **How does that concept work in youth worship ministry here at Eastbrook?**

We want to create a culture that feels like a family, where people are known and loved and can share burdens and be vulnerable, where we experience God individually and communally. This means our "rehearsals" aren't just music practice. They might include Bible study, games, team building, or worship. We look for adult leaders who deeply love God and will give time to invest in relationships. We help students steward the gifts God has given them, including musical and technical gifts, and their leadership skills for future service.

### **So, where do you see your own leadership and future service moving? What would you like to work on in the next year?**

As a church, we're focusing on discipleship: following Jesus, our Rabbi, step by step. I'm asking: Am I ready to slow down? To make space to sit with God? To allow time for relationships? As a church, are we ready? I know it's hard for me to eliminate distractions, which are idols. But if we pursue that spiritual discipline, we can form each other to be more like Christ. ■



# THE DISCIPLESHIP JOURNEY:

## *Where Am I?*

As you have read in this issue of *Speak Out!*, one of our main areas of focus for this ministry year is discipleship. **A disciple is someone who is following Jesus, being changed by the Holy Spirit, and committed to the mission of God.**

In order to help our team of staff and leaders better understand what it looks like to be on the journey of discipleship to Jesus, we have put together some snapshots of what faith looks like at different stages.

Some things to keep in mind while you read these descriptions:

- No journey is linear. We may find ourselves in one of these stages at one point in life and another at another stage—that is completely normal.
- The tools we list here are suggestions and by no means exhaustive. Let us know what you think about our suggestions and if you have your own. Reach out to Pastor Jim Caler a [jcaler@eastbrook.org](mailto:jcaler@eastbrook.org) with your ideas!
- No matter where we find ourselves along this pathway, God is always pursuing us, loving us, and drawing us closer to Himself. What a gift!

While this model is by no means perfect, we hope that it helps you to find yourself along the journey of faith. Read through the following snapshots of discipleship and let us know: where are you?

### I AM A PRE-EXPLORER

A Pre-Explorer is someone who does not have a relationship with God and is not interesting in knowing God. (Ephesians 2:1-2)

**Tools for a Pre-Explorer:** Support Groups, Serving Opportunities, Alpha Course, Sunday Worship Services



### I AM AN EXPLORER

An Explorer is someone who believes in something but is not fully ready to commit to God, Jesus, or Christianity. They are seeking & curious. They may be exploring other faith traditions, attending a church or other religious meetings. They are looking for answers. (Jeremiah 29:13)

**Tools for an Explorer:** Sunday Worship Services, Alpha Course, Support Groups, Bible Studies & Sunday Morning Classes



### I AM A NEW DISCIPLE

A New Disciple believes in Jesus. They have made a decision for Christ, are learning what it means to be a Christian, and are excited about their new life in Christ. New Disciples are hungry for answers: reading Scripture and praying. They may serve in the church. (Acts 2:42-43)

**Tools for a New Disciple:** Small Groups, Eastbrook 101, Connection Retreats & Connect Events, Bible Studies & Sunday Morning Adult Classes, Support Groups



### I AM A GROWING DISCIPLE

A Growing Disciple is just that: actively growing. They serve regularly and are connected in community.

They are learning and practicing spiritual disciplines and have an intermediate understanding of Christianity. They have a regular devotion and prayer life outside of church. (Philippians 2)

**Tools for a Growing Disciple:** Eastbrook 201, Local & Cross-Cultural Mission Trips, Wilderness Experiences & Discipleship Retreats, Support Groups, Mentoring



### I AM A CHRIST-CENTERED DISCIPLE

A Christ-Centered Disciple is a mature Christian with a solid grasp of Scripture. They are sacrificial: focused on giving their life away. Their faith is fruitful as they reproduce themselves, making new disciples of Christ. They ask how they can fully invest themselves for God as they learn to lead others and live a Spirit-led, faithful life. (2 Timothy 2:2)

**Tools for a Christ-Centered Disciple:** Eastbrook 301 & 401, Serve as a Mentor, Lead a Bible Study/Small Group, Teach a Sunday Morning Adult Class ■



Find more information about each of these tools on our church website at [eastbrook.org](http://eastbrook.org). Not sure where to start? Reach out to Pastor Jim Caler today; [jcaler@eastbrook.org](mailto:jcaler@eastbrook.org), 414.228.5220 x213.