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THE BEREAN SCORE

Verifying the Fruit the Great Commission Was Always Measured

By — A Troika Ministries Position Paper

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ABSTRACT

The Great Commission was never "go and gather a following." It was "go and make disciples... teaching them to obey" (Matthew 28:19–20), and Scripture gives that commission exactly one verification test: "By their fruit you will recognize them" (Matthew 7:16). This paper argues that the church has spent a generation counting things Jesus never told it to count, and calling the count success, substituting attendance, reach, and platform size for the one metric Scripture actually authorized. It traces the biblical case for fruit as the sole legitimate test of a disciple or a leader, distinguishes the Troika Score and LIA, one instrument measuring an individual, from the Berean Score, a separate engine measuring a whole congregation on its own terms, and answers directly the objection any careful reader should raise: doesn't measuring a congregation's formation amount to spiritualized surveillance dressed in Scripture? The popularity era is not a moral failing to be shamed out of. It is a measurement error to be corrected.

I. The Wound This Paper Answers

A famine of formation and the oldest pattern in Scripture meet here at their root. The famine is not a shortage of churches, programs, platforms, or metrics. It is a shortage of the one measurement Jesus actually authorized. The church has spent a generation counting things it was never told to count, and calling the count success. Attendance, reach, followers, giving totals, and platform size are not sins to repent of. They are simply not fruit, and a body that has substituted them for fruit will not notice its own famine until a leader falls, because nothing it was measuring was ever built to notice character in the first place.

II. The Thesis

The Great Commission was never "go and gather a following." It was "go and make disciples... teaching them to obey" (Matthew 28:19–20). Jesus states plainly what that fruit-bearing purpose actually is: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last" (John 15:16). Fruit that lasts is not a private virtue held quietly; the lives being formed and reproduced are the fruit, and disciples are the ones being prepared for the place already prepared. Disciple-making has exactly one verification test Scripture ever gives it, and it is not attendance, applause, or algorithmic reach: **"By their fruit you will recognize them"** (Matthew 7:16).

The church can return to its actual mandate the moment it returns to its actual metric, and a Score built to make that metric usable at every scale exists for exactly that reason. The popularity era is not a moral failing to be shamed out of. It is a measurement error to be corrected.

III. The Vocation This Protects

This paper stands on the same doctrinal floor as the rest of this series: the Father prepared a garden, the Son prepared a place, and the Spirit is preparing us now to prepare a people for it, echoing Luke 1:17's picture of a people made ready for the Lord. The Great Commission is that vocation's marching order, and it names its own success condition explicitly: not converts counted, but disciples who are taught to obey, an ongoing, verifiable, observable transformation, not a one-time decision logged and left alone.

Fruit has always been the measure, and Jesus states this explicitly, not merely by inference. He does not merely warn that fruit will reveal a disciple; he states plainly that fruit is the very purpose a disciple exists to bear: "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John 15:8). Press on what the fruit actually is, and the two commands collapse into one. Jesus does not say a disciple bears fruit and also makes disciples, as though these were two separate assignments. Bearing fruit is how a disciple is shown to be a disciple, and the fruit appointed to last is reproduction, other disciples, formed the same way, sent to do the same thing. The people the Spirit prepares us to prepare are not incidental to the fruit Jesus said would last. They are the fruit.

But naming fruit as the measure does not, by itself, tell a church how to see fruit accurately, and Scripture is equally direct that appearance can counterfeit fruit long enough to deceive a congregation. A measure that can be faked is not yet a working instrument; it requires a discipline of examination alongside it. The Bereans in Acts 17 are commended by name for exactly this practice: "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11). Notice what is being verified, and by whom. It is not Paul verifying the Bereans' enthusiasm. It is the Bereans, the hearers, the congregation, verifying whether what they received against the Word actually held up. This is the literal pattern this paper's own instrument is named after: a body examining itself against Scripture, not a platform grading its own

performance. Paul commends this examination; he does not resent it or ask to be trusted on reputation alone. The verification is the honor, not an insult to his authority.

Paul turns the same discipline inward, to the church at Corinth, and makes it a standing command rather than a historical compliment: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves" (2 Corinthians 13:5). And Jeremiah, writing from the ashes of a nation that had stopped examining itself until it was too late, gives the same discipline its most sobering form: "Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD" (Lamentations 3:40). Three separate voices, a prophet writing from the ruin of a fallen nation and two witnesses from the church's own first years, give one identical instruction: examine, test, verify, do not assume.

IV. The Biblical Case — Fruit Is the Only Metric Jesus Actually Named

Jesus does not leave "how will you know a true disciple, or a false one" as an open question. He answers it directly, repeatedly, and in language that rules out every substitute the modern church has reached for since:

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them."
(Matthew 7:15–20)

Fruit, not eloquence, not crowd size, not the confidence with which a claim is made. The passage is explicit that a wolf can wear the clothing of legitimacy convincingly; the test that survives good disguise is the only test worth building an instrument around. Jesus draws the same distinction again later in the same Gospel, applied to leaders whose authority was assumed to be self-evident: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!... on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness" (Matthew 23:27–28). Appearance and fruit are set against each other twice in one Gospel, by the same voice.

Paul names what the fruit actually consists of, and he names it as singular, not a checklist a leader can pick and choose from: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22–23). This is the exact content this series' formation instruments measure, nothing added, nothing substituted, nothing modernized. The instrument did not choose nine virtues and go looking for Scripture to justify them. Galatians 5 named the fruit; the mirror was built to catch it.

God's own selection criterion for a leader has never been appearance, capacity, or reach. When Samuel assumed the tallest, most commanding son of Jesse must be the one, God corrected him directly: "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Popularity is an appearance metric. Reach is an appearance metric. A following is, definitionally, a measure of how many people looked at the outward appearance and were drawn to it. This is not a verse about ancient Israel's hiring practices. It is Scripture's own explicit rejection of the metric the modern church has quietly adopted anyway.

Finally, Scripture names what disciple-making leadership is actually for, and it is not a following at all. It is a body equipped to do its own work:

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (Ephesians 4:11–16)

"Tossed back and forth by every wind of teaching" is precisely the condition a popularity-measured church produces, a congregation whose stability depends on the platform's continued performance rather than its own formed maturity. A leader measured by reach has every incentive to keep the wind blowing. A leader measured by whether the body has been equipped to stand on its own has the

opposite incentive. Health, once the infancy is outgrown, looks like this: not one part performing while the rest watch, but the whole body, as each part does its work.

V. Why Popularity Became the Metric

No church consciously voted to replace fruit with popularity. It happened the way every silent substitution happens: the fruit is slow, private, and hard to quantify; attendance, reach, and giving are fast, public, and easy to put in a slide deck. A famine of formation is invisible in real time. A stalled attendance chart is not. Boards, denominations, and platforms all reward what is visible on a shorter timeline than character actually forms on, and over enough years, the visible metric quietly becomes the real one, not through a doctrinal decision but through a thousand small reporting choices that never had to justify themselves against Scripture, because no one was checking. The tragedy is not that churches wanted to be popular. It is that popularity was the only thing anyone had built an instrument to measure, so it became, by simple default, the only thing that counted.

VI. One Framework, Two Instruments, and a Third Engine at the Scale of a Body

This series does not build three unrelated assessments. It holds one theology, the fruit of the Spirit, the ABC framework, the same five formation bands, and measures it two different ways depending on what is actually being read: an individual, through one instrument in two vocabularies, or a body, through a different mechanism entirely, built for a different scale.

The individual instrument is, precisely, the same assessment in either register: the identical validated sixty-three-item assessment, the same items, the same scoring, the same validity scales, differing only in vocabulary, pastoral register for church and ministry contexts, professional register for marketplace and clinical ones. A person's formation profile is a person's formation profile whichever door they walked through to take it.

The Berean Score is not that same instrument administered to a crowd. It is a separate, lighter-weight engine that reads the same theology at the scale of a body. No congregation sits for a sixty-three-item survey; the Berean Score is instead built from a church-assigned constituency, Leader, Staff, Volunteer, or

Member, and a content-derived read of what members actually engage with, aggregated only once a cell-size floor of ten is met. It shares the individual instrument's fruit, its ABC spine, and its five bands. It does not share its instrument. A congregation is not an average of its members' individual results. It is measured on its own terms, at its own scale.

VII. How the Two Instruments Work Together — The Berean Score as the Verified Witness

The Berean Score reads a congregation's formation across four equally weighted constituencies, Leader, Staff, Volunteer, and Member, refusing the common failure mode where a church's health is judged entirely by how its platform is performing while the people in the pews are never asked anything at all. No constituency outweighs another; a healthy congregation cannot hide behind a healthy platform, and a struggling platform does not automatically mean a struggling body.

Alongside that four-constituency read sits the Member's Witness, the literal Berean act, rebuilt as a standing instrument rather than a one-time historical compliment. Rather than a bolted-on satisfaction question, the Member's Witness is derived directly from what members already capture in their own private church journal, classified against the ABC framework and the nine fruit, entry by entry, without ever exposing a single person's private words to anyone, and never surfaced in aggregate until a cell-size floor of ten is met. This is not asking whether a member liked the sermon. It is asking Acts 17:11's question in instrument form: does what I received hold up, and is it forming me?

This is where the two pieces complete each other. A pastor or leader takes the individual assessment and receives their own formation mirror, never a grade, never a verdict, never public. The congregation, read through the Berean Score, produces a body's formation mirror, never any individual's. Set beside each other, a pastor can see something no attendance chart has ever shown: not is my platform growing, but is what I am forming in this room the same fruit Galatians 5 names, and does the room's own witness agree with what I intended to plant. That comparison, intention against verified fruit, is the entire discipline of Acts 17:11, running continuously instead of once.

VIII. What This Replaces — Naming the Popularity Metrics Plainly

This paper does not ask a church to feel guilty about attendance, generosity, or a well-run service. It asks a church to stop mistaking any of the following for the fruit Jesus actually named. Attendance and reach are not fruit; a crowd can gather around a wolf in sheep's clothing exactly as easily as around a shepherd, and Matthew 7:15 says so explicitly, before it ever gets to the fruit test. Social following and platform size are not fruit; they measure how many people looked at the outward appearance and were drawn to it, precisely the metric 1 Samuel 16:7 names God as refusing to use. Giving totals, while a real and legitimate stewardship signal, are not a character signal; a congregation can give generously to a leader who is quietly hollowing out, and the two facts are not correlated closely enough to substitute one for the other. And sermon satisfaction, whether people enjoyed the message, is not the Berean question. The Bereans did not rate Paul's delivery. They tested his content against Scripture and asked whether it was forming them toward obedience.

None of these measurements are forbidden. They are simply demoted, kept as operational facts a church still needs to run its affairs, but never again mistaken for the one test Jesus said would actually reveal a tree's nature.

IX. Application — What Every Church Actually Needs to Do

Return to the actual mandate. Matthew 28:19–20 does not say go and gather. It says go and make disciples, teaching them to obey, an ongoing formation relationship, not a conversion event followed by attendance tracking. A church that has quietly redefined success as gathering size needs no new theology to correct this. It needs to reread its own founding commission.

Adopt a fruit-verification instrument at every scale it operates. A leader without a formation mirror is leading without one. A marketplace believer carries the same formation question into a room with no instrument built for it. A congregation without a Berean Score has no way to know whether its own platform's growth and its own people's formation have quietly diverged, which is precisely the gap this series has already described discovering only after collapse.

Let the Member's Witness be a genuine reverse-read, not a suggestion box. A church that only ever measures itself top-down, how well is the platform performing, has structurally excluded the literal Berean act from its own life. Acts 17:11 is not optional color commentary. It is the New Testament's own model for how a body stays accountable to truth rather than to a personality.

Stop reporting what is easy to report and start reporting what Jesus actually asked for. This will feel, at first, like reporting less. A famine of formation was never going to be solved by a more impressive slide deck. It is solved by a church willing to say, honestly, what its own fruit currently looks like, even when that number, mercifully, is never actually shown as a number at all.

X. How Troika Builds This Structurally

One sixty-three-item instrument serves two registers, pastoral and professional, differing only in vocabulary, never in construct. The Berean Score's per-entry, privacy-first foundation classifies a member's private church journal entry against the nine virtues and the ABC framework without it ever being read by a human or exposed raw, stored only on that member's own private record. A narrow leadership-facing view of one aggregated dimension shows a cell-floor-protected comparison of what a pastor intended to preach against what a congregation's own witness shows landed, without ever exposing any individual member's private words. The fuller, four-constituency Berean Score, assigning every church member a constituency, a constituency-weighted rollup, a standing Member's Witness beyond the journal-derived signal, a complete leadership dashboard, and a branded church-formation report, is a designed, sequenced build, not yet fully shipped, named here honestly as a future in progress rather than a feature already sitting in every church's hands today. And guardrails are non-negotiable at every phase: mirror, never verdict; never a leaderboard; never used for personnel decisions or membership screening; never a public church-versus-church comparison; a cell floor of ten before any aggregate is ever shown to anyone, including the accountability board itself; bands shown as words, never as numbers.

XI. The Honest Counter — Isn't Measuring a Congregation Just Spiritualized Surveillance?

A skeptical reader, particularly one who has watched churches misuse data before, has a legitimate concern: an instrument that reads private journal entries, classifies congregants by constituency, and reports on a church's formation, however careful the guardrails, sounds uncomfortably close to exactly the kind of institutional surveillance Scripture elsewhere warns against, dressed in the vocabulary of discipleship rather than corporate metrics.

The concern deserves to be taken seriously rather than waved off with a guardrails list, because the history of well-intentioned church data collection sliding into control is real and this ministry is not exempt from that risk simply by declaring good intentions. What distinguishes this architecture from surveillance is not the absence of measurement but the direction its findings are permitted to travel and the floor beneath which no individual is ever visible. Surveillance, in its ordinary sense, produces information a watcher holds over the watched, usable for reward, punishment, or control regardless of the watched person's consent or awareness. Every mechanism this paper has described runs the opposite direction: an individual's own journal entry is classified for that individual's own private record and is never read by another human being at all; a congregation's aggregate is never visible below a cell floor of ten specifically so no small group, let alone an individual, can ever be singled out from the pattern; and the resulting bands are words, not numbers, structurally resistant to ranking a person or a small group against another. A genuine surveillance system optimizes for identifying and acting on individuals. This architecture is built, deliberately and at real cost to its own usefulness as a management tool, to make that specific use impossible. Whether that design holds under future pressure, from a well-meaning leadership board wanting more granular data, from a denomination wanting comparative benchmarks between churches, is a fair thing to watch rather than assume, and this paper states the guardrails publicly, in print, precisely so a reader has grounds to hold this ministry to them if that pressure ever produces a different answer than the one written here.

XII. For the Pastor Wondering What This Would Actually Show

If you are a pastor reading this and quietly running the numbers on your own congregation, imagining what a Berean Score might currently reveal, notice which fear arrived first. If it was a fear about the platform, whether attendance would look thin against a formation measure, that fear is itself diagnostic of exactly the substitution this paper has been naming, and it is worth sitting with rather than dismissing. If it was a fear about the people, whether members would report feeling unequipped or unknown despite a well-run service, that fear is closer to the actual question Acts 17:11 is asking, and it is a more useful fear to have, because it points toward something that can actually be repaired. A congregation that has quietly become expert at filling seats and slower at forming disciples is not a scandal to be hidden. It is the single most common finding this whole framework expects to surface, precisely because the wrong metric has been the only one available for so long that almost no congregation has had an honest opportunity to find out otherwise. The Berean Score was not built to catch you. It was built to give you the one piece of information every other instrument in your church already assumes you have and does not actually supply.

XIII. Conclusion

The Great Commission was never a popularity contest, and Scripture never once measured a leader, a congregation, or a movement by the size of the crowd it could gather. It measured fruit, patiently, slowly, by a test built to survive a wolf's convincing disguise. A church can go back to Matthew 28's actual mandate the day it goes back to Matthew 7's actual test, and this framework exists to make that return usable: for the individual leader, for the marketplace believer, and for the whole body examining itself the way the Bereans once did, every day, against the Word, to see if what it is being told is actually true.

"By their fruit you will recognize them."

The popularity score is over. The fruit was always the only score that counted.

This paper introduces an architecture documented at far greater depth in Troika's forthcoming formation-assessment research. Scripture quoted from the NIV84.

