

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

ADDRESSING APATHY IN THE CHURCH:
MOVING PEOPLE TOWARDS A BIBLICAL HEALTHY DISCIPLESHIP MODEL

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LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014

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In 1 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul speaks to the giving of spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit to individuals at the time of conversion. However, current statistics reveal that a large majority of church members are not actively serving their current ministry. The purpose of this project is to investigate the problem of apathy in the church, the failure of God's people to use their spiritual gifts and also present an effective model for solving the issue. A ministry filled with servants instead of spectators will help unify the body and more effectively reach the community for Christ. Research will consist of surveys to several pastors and church members from each congregation. The project will present widespread concerns, statistics, practical advice and a model for creating a more effective and healthy church.

Abstract Length: 133 words.

This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful family, my mom and my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ:

Juanita, you have been my greatest encourager and joy. I would never have completed my education or this project without your love and support. Melinda, Michelle, Jack, Casey and Branson, your prayers, support and encouragement have meant so much to me during this time. Thank you for being so patient and loving. Mom, thank you for reminding me repeatedly about God's call on my life. God used you and the love you showed me to bring me into a right relationship with Him. I look forward to seeing you in glory one day. I thank my Savior Jesus Christ who paid my sin debt and died for me. Only because of His death, burial and resurrection am I able to accomplish anything for the sake of the ministry. To God be the glory!

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INTRODUCTION

The Problem

The word “apathy” is defined by Webster’s Dictionary as: “Lack of emotion or feeling: impassivity, a lack of interest or regard: indifference.¹ It is this type of attitude and mindset that is greatly hindering the church of today. By and large, the church has become unrecognizable when compared to the biblical model expressed in the pages of God’s Word. The lack of overall health in the church as a whole at this particular time is due in part to the failure of the church to practice biblical discipleship and accountability. The apathy which exists in the church is evident not only in the members of the average church body but also among the staff including the pastor. Therefore, the church is failing to make disciples, who in turn also make disciples whereby the Great Commission given us by our Lord is being fulfilled. If the church is ever going to become the biblical church God intended it to be, where the gospel is spread and people are saved, then the church must first become spiritually healthy. The body of Christ must be transformed into a picture of spiritual health.

Somewhere along the line, it has become both acceptable and commonplace in our churches to simply be a part of the body but not contribute much of anything to the body or the ministry. The leadership in many churches has failed the body because of a lack of proper discipleship. Therefore, many church members simply come and sit and do not exercise their spiritual gifts or talents in the church. It is possible that many church members are not aware that they have spiritual gifts, or they have no idea what gifts they have been given. What is worse is the fact that pastors and church leaders have simply accepted this show of indifference and apathy. Instead of holding people accountable, they rely heavily on the same small percentage of church members who are not only exhausted from service but are probably serving outside of their gifts.

¹ *Webster’s II: New College Dictionary* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995) 52.

The apathy found in churches today concerning the use of spiritual gifts is easily linked to the church's failure to disciple its people. The church is designed to function as a community as seen in the Book of Acts. Luke wrote:

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people.²

In fact living in community is something Jesus established as He ministered to His disciples and helped them to grow in their faith. Stephen Macchia writes, "What Jesus developed with His disciples is embodied in the word *community*. When the disciples first encountered Jesus, they responded to his call, "Follow me...", and their lives were transformed. Living in community with Jesus, the disciples followed his teachings and example."³

As one considers the Acts 2 church and the environment in which Jesus taught and mentored the disciples, this whole idea of community is clearly seen as not only biblical but effective. What hinders many churches is the lack of commitment to biblical discipleship and a lack of commitment on behalf of church members who simply do not want to devote their time to ministry. As a pastor, this writer has discovered that many church members do not understand their responsibility as a member of the body of Christ, and they fail to see the value in using their spiritual gifts consistently. This is the point in which spiritual apathy sets in. In fact George Barna writes, "Most believers say their faith matters, but few are investing much energy in the pursuit of spiritual growth."⁴ Herein lies the issue; there is a lack of passion and desire among

² Acts 2:44-47a, NKJ. Unless otherwise stated, all scripture references come from the New King James Bible.

³ Stephen Macchia, *Becoming A Healthy Church: Ten Traits of A Vital Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI. Zondervan, 1999), 80.

⁴ George Barna, *Growing true Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 34.

God's people to grow. Many church members simply do not want to take part in a discipleship process whereby spiritual growth is achieved, gifts are discovered, and then effectively used in the ministry. This indifference towards the family of God, community, and a spiritually lost society is inexcusable within the church. Somewhere along the line, those whom the church deems apathetic have failed to recognize the responsibility they share in the mission of the church. Macchia writes, "God's primary goal is not to get each of us into the Great Commission. His goal is to get the Great Commission into each of us."⁵

What appears to be lacking in the church today is accountability. Church leaders have simply accepted the fact that a large percentage of their church members do not and will not serve in the ministry of the church. The lack of accountability has unknowingly condoned laziness and magnified the problem facing the church today. Macchia writes, "The need for accountability is great, and yet too few churches and individuals have accountability structures in place that are capable of producing fruit that lasts."⁶ When church leadership fails to place an emphasis on discipleship and the need for everyone to serve in the ministry, this not only sends the wrong message, but it also hinders the church from being able to function effectively and healthy as God designed it be. Church leadership must communicate to the entire body of Christ what the biblical expectations are when you agree to join that particular church family. This message should not only be communicated but also enforced should an individual fail to uphold their ministry responsibilities.

The apostle Paul speaks concerning spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians, "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are

⁵ Macchia, *Becoming A Healthy Church*, 151.

⁶ *Ibid*, 170.

diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.”⁷

The apostle Paul makes three very important points in this text that must be communicated to every church member if the church is to achieve spiritual health. First of all, while there are various different gifts and talents given, they are all given by the Holy Spirit. Ministries, spiritual gifts, and spiritual talents vary, but at the time of conversion, individuals receive these gifts from the Holy Spirit. The second point speaks to whom the gifts are given. Paul states that everyone receives the manifestation of gifts. When a person decides to follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit places upon them the gifts He so desires to be used for the kingdom. Such gifts will need to be discovered, crafted, and eventually practiced as one seeks to be used of God and serve in their current ministry.

The third point Paul makes deals specifically with the results of failing to use spiritual gifts and talents. The Holy Spirit gives gifts and talents for the profit of all. Therefore, when even one person fails to take their place in the ministry, they fail to use their gifts and talents, and the rest of the church and even the community suffers. Every person who makes up the body of Christ is genuinely cheated out of a blessing when one or more individuals fail to exercise their gifts. This affects the unity in the church, the ability for the church to be effective, and hinders the church’s ability to be 100% healthy as God designed it to be. This is why biblical discipleship is so very important. If even one person in the body is not serving in some way, the church has already failed to be completely healthy.

In his book “Church Transfusion” author Neil Cole writes, “For our churches to thrive, we must promote a culture that is constantly reinforcing these truths and expecting nothing less than

⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:4-7.

full surrender to the cause of Christ.”⁸ This type of surrender is what is greatly missing in the church today. The piece of the ministry puzzle that has been ignored and even forgotten is found in discipleship. The church has focused so much on winning people to the kingdom that they have failed to disciple properly and teach what it means to be a disciple. A big part of being a disciple of Christ is surrendering to His call on one’s life and growing in the faith so that one’s desire is to be used by God for His glory. The only way to be used by God is to exercise one’s spiritual gifts and talents. Cole argues, “Your church is only as good as its disciples.”⁹

Limitations

As stated above, the problem with apathy in the church is multi-faceted and involves many different variables. As much as every church leader would like to create a perfect church, this simply is not feasible or realistic. There are no perfect people and therefore no perfect churches. However, what this project seeks to accomplish is to provide a model for becoming a healthier and more effective church. There is significant room for improvement in the church today where discipleship is concerned. This writer hopes to bring a greater awareness to church members and church leaders concerning the spiritual condition of their church. This writer desires to provide insights into what a healthy church looks like and how to become such a church. The consequences of ignoring the problem or simply refusing to put forth any effort to fix it will be detrimental to the effectiveness of the church and lack the blessings and unity that only God can provide.

In an effort to be more specific concerning the limitations of the project, a couple of points must be made. The project will include the results from two surveys consisting of ten questions each. One survey is designed specifically for senior pastors concerning the current discipleship

⁸ Neil Cole, Phil Helfer, *Church Transfusion* (San Francisco, CA: Josset-Bass Publisher, 2012), 128.

⁹ Cole, Helfer, *Church Transfusion*, 129.

program and overall health of this ministry in their current church. Several pastors will take part in this survey and will include churches of all sizes. The research gained from these pastors will provide this writer and the reader with the depth of any discipleship ministry issue currently in existence. While several churches is not a large number of participants, the information gained will provide this researcher with a representation of what is taking place in most churches today.

The second survey is designed for church members to be given at the discretion of each pastor. This survey, while similar to the first, is indeed different in some respects. This writer will provide both surveys and the questions in this project. Therefore, many surveys will be completed from the churches, giving this researcher a good basis for how the average church member views discipleship. The information gathered will also reveal to what extent church members know their spiritual gifts, whether or not they are using them, and their desire or lack of desire to be involved in the ministry.

This writer has a description of the problem, and a solution will be provided as well. Again, the issue of apathy in the church is multi-faceted, so the solution is not perfect. However, the goal is to raise awareness of the problem and provide insights into becoming a healthier and more effective church. This project will provide much needed insights into the biblical foundation concerning discipleship, the theological foundations, historical foundations, and of course philosophical and practical information coupled with the research whereby application will be made. Taking all of this information and data into account, one must remember that change, even for the better, never comes easy. Neil Cole, in speaking about the costs of change writes:

These weedlike patterns of thinking and living are deeply rooted and won't be easy to remove. The church leader who seeks to fulfill his or her calling to make and release disciples will be working at cross purposes with the status quo and will find that upsetting that apple cart will indeed upset everyone involved. All this to say what almost everyone

already knows: implementing change is a painful and costly proposition. But as with anything worth doing, the benefits outweigh the costs. In fact, in the case of a church moving from inactivity to true discipleship, the benefits are so expansive as to render the costs insignificant. Insignificant as they may be in the overall scheme of things, they will nevertheless be painful to endure in the short term.¹⁰

The survey questions to be used in this project are currently posted on surveymonkey.com and are listed as follows:

(Pastor Survey)

Please circle the number that represents how you feel about the current condition of the discipleship process in your ministry.

- 1) *The church has an effective program for the discipleship of church members:*
Strongly disagree—1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree
- 2) *The church has room for improvement in the discipleship process:*
Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree
- 3) *The church diligently encourages the use of spiritual gifts:*
Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree
- 4) *A small percentage of church members do a large percentage of the ministry in the church:*
Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree
- 5) *There are people working outside of their gifts due to a lack of involvement by others:*
Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree
- 6) *More than 50% of current church members are **not** using their spiritual gifts in the ministry:*
Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree
- 7) *The use of spiritual gifts should be **required** by every church member so that the church can function as God designed it:*
Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree
- 8) *Apathy exists within the current structure of the church which allows people to sit and not exercise their spiritual gifts:*
Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree
- 9) *Your job as the pastor/leader of the church is made more difficult by the lack of involvement by a large percentage of church members:*

¹⁰ Cole, Helfer, *Church Transfusion*, 185-186.

Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree

10) *The overall health of the church is greatly hindered by apathy and a lack of commitment by church members to be involved in the ministry:*

Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree

(Church Member Survey)

Please circle the number that represents how you feel about biblical discipleship and your current practice of using spiritual gifts.

1) *God has given all believers at least one spiritual gift to be used in the ministry of the church:*

Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree

2) *The church cannot be healthy if every member is not functioning as a part of the body by using their spiritual gifts:*

Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree

3) *My current church stresses the importance of using spiritual gifts:*

Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree

4) *My current church provides a program/process whereby people can determine their spiritual gifts:*

Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree

5) *I personally know what my spiritual gift(s) are:*

Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree

6) *I personally exercise and use my spiritual gifts by serving in the ministry of the church:*

Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree

7) *I am currently serving outside of my gifts in some capacity due to the apathy that exists with other church members:*

Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree

8) *I do not know what my spiritual gifts are but desire to know them and use them to benefit the ministry:*

Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree

9) *I am not currently using my spiritual gifts but desire for someone to show me how:*

Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree

10) *I have no interest in being involved in the ministry by using my spiritual gifts. I am satisfied simply attending church:*

Strongly disagree---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---Strongly agree

These surveys will provide valuable information concerning the state of discipleship and overall spiritual health of churches today. This writer will also provide information concerning success stories, practical applications, and ministry methods which will help the church become more effective and improve the overall health of the body. However, this project will not bring change to an individual or a church; only God can do that. Also, all church leaderships who are anxious about changing the church should remember, the goal should not be to change the church but to allow God to change the people.¹¹ The willingness to change and the results of such a change will reap great blessings for the individual, the church, the community, and the kingdom of God. Scazzero notes, “When you do the hard work of becoming an emotionally and spiritually mature disciple of Jesus Christ, the impact will be felt all around you.”¹² Jesus has called the church to impact the world, and this is what a genuine disciple of Christ will do.

Biblical Basis

The Bible contains a significant number of scriptures which help lay the biblical foundation for discipleship in the church. This project will investigate and discuss all of the important passages of scripture and how they relate to the discipleship process. In his book “The Complete Book of Discipleship”, author Bill Hull writes, “Discipleship ranks as God’s top priority because Jesus practiced it and commanded us to do it, and his followers continued it.”¹³ The life of Jesus and the interaction he had with his followers, and especially his disciples, reveal to us both the command and the importance of discipleship. Therefore, this writer will reveal the biblical

¹¹ Peter Scazzero, Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 33.

¹² Scazzero, Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 36.

¹³ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2006), 25.

foundation for discipleship as seen in the ministry of Christ. Much of the discussion for this part of the project will come from the ministry of Jesus as seen in the four gospels.

In an effort to reveal a true understanding of what biblical discipleship looks like, this project will define several terms as a foundation to be used in the application process for a ministry or church. This project will provide definitions for the following words: disciple, disciple-making, discipleship, and spiritual formation. It is crucial for every church leader to fully understand these terms in an effort to bring the church into total submission to the command of our Lord as seen in Matthew 28:18-20:

And Jesus came and spoke to them saying, all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you and lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age.¹⁴

A proper understanding of all biblical terms concerning discipleship is important if a church is to effectively practice the disciple-making process. It is also important to understand what discipleship is not. There are many misconceptions among believers today whereby discipleship is defined as a program or simply just for the gifted or those in leadership. This project will address all these misconceptions. However, the call to discipleship and the source of why discipleship is practiced is also of great importance. There would be no need for discipleship without the living Christ. Discipleship is rooted in the idea of following Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer argues:

A Christianity in which there is only God the Father, but no Christ as a living Son actually cancels discipleship. In that case there will be trust in God, but not discipleship. God's Son became human; he is the mediator-that is why discipleship is the right relation to him. Discipleship is bound to the mediator, and wherever discipleship is spoken of,

¹⁴ Matthew 28:18-20.

there the mediator, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is intended. Only the mediator, the God-human, can call to discipleship.¹⁵

Discipleship is not something a person or even a ministry can choose for itself. There is a source which is Christ and a biblical calling as seen in scripture which reveals what effective discipleship looks like and how it is to be applied in the life of a believer and a church. True biblical discipleship requires an individual to do what Christ asked of his disciples; simply “follow him”.

Since this project is geared more towards the overall health of the church and the effectiveness of using spiritual gifts and the importance of unity, many scriptures found in the New Testament concerning the function of the church will be utilized in this work. Those scriptures include: Romans 12:3-5, 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1, 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, John 15:1-17, John 8:12, Colossians 1:17-20 and Matthew 5:13. This is by no means an exhaustive list concerning this project, however many of the biblical and even theological terms used in these passages will benefit the reader and the writer in an effort to accomplish all the Lord Jesus Christ has commissioned the church. “*All* is the Great Commission’s key word- *all* authority, *all* sacrifice, *all* out effort, *all* the time, for *all* people. How could anything else the church thinks up be nearly as important?”¹⁶

Biblical discipleship also requires significant responses on behalf of the disciple. These responses include: trust, grace, humility, submission, commitment, obedience, surrender, sacrifice, perseverance, and a willingness to suffer. Each of these variables will be discussed in either the biblical or theological foundation chapters of this project. Jesus said, “Also I say to you that you are Peter and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not

¹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 59.

¹⁶ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 27.

overpower it.”¹⁷ In view of discipleship, there are several facts concerning the church that need to be considered. Jesus builds the church. Jesus owns the church. The church is meant to grow. The church that grows will face opposition, and the church that Jesus builds is unstoppable.¹⁸ In view of biblical discipleship, the Bible is clear concerning the source, the process, the necessity, and its effectiveness when a body of believers not only desires but actually follows the very One for whom discipleship exists. Jesus referred to the church as “the light of the world.” Practicing biblical discipleship aids in shining that light into a dark world.

Historical Basis

The concept of discipleship precedes that of Christianity, as throughout history the need for guidance, wisdom, accountability, and mentorship has been greatly desired. Those seeking pre-Christian discipleship simply sought to avoid laziness, loss of focus, and the tendency to give into temptation. People simply longed to be nurtured, competent, accountable, and wise in decision-making. These desires led to the beginning of what we now call discipleship, although it has greatly evolved over the centuries.¹⁹ In determining the history of discipleship, it is important to consider the Greco-Roman world with great philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, and others who left their mark on this area of ministry. Discipleship has evolved from the Hebrew language to the Greek language and of course into the many different languages spoken worldwide today.

—This project will investigate discipleship as viewed by history and the individuals that were responsible for leading the cause for discipleship. This information will include former bishops

¹⁷ Matthew 16:18.

¹⁸ Neil Cole, *Organic Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 7-10.

¹⁹ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 52-53.

such as Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp of Smyrna. It is also important for this writer to include history concerning the Catholic philosophy including monks, mavericks, and their particular practices. This work will also discuss information concerning groups such as the Benedictines, the Franciscans, and the Dominicans. Each of these groups was influential in the discipleship process.

In looking at the history of discipleship, any project would be incomplete without mentioning the personal disciplines of great men such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, Thomas Cranmer, John Wesley, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. These men not only embraced the concept of discipleship, but they also greatly influenced the idea of community, unity, and a healthy body of believers as they set the example of what it means to follow Christ. This project will include the contributions of these great men and how they influenced Christianity.

However, the majority of the information concerning historical discipleship will come from the time in which Jesus walked the earth. The ability to be transformed into a biblical disciple is because of Christ and for the use of Christ and His ministry. “Five hundred years before Jesus was born, a disciple was one who committed his all to follow a master teacher. The meaning remained the same until the time of Jesus, providing our first major clue about what Jesus meant when he told his disciples to make disciples.”²⁰

Research in this area will include the Sermon on the Mount, the Pharisees, the disciples of John the Baptist, the Separatist disciples, the Zealots, first century discipleship, and of course the discipleship Jesus so effectively practiced. Much attention will be given to the first disciples as recorded in the Bible. These men lived in the daily presence of Christ and received first-hand instruction in the area of discipleship. Jesus taught them what it meant to follow Him and live in

²⁰ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 54.

community with others. This information is crucial for the church today if the body of Christ is going to minister and grow effectively and healthy.

For the first disciples, the bodily community with Jesus did not mean anything different or anything more than what we have today. Indeed for us, this community is even more certain than it was for them since we live in full community with the bodily presence of the glorified Lord. Our faith must become fully aware of the magnitude of this gift. The body of Jesus Christ is the ground of our faith and the source of its certainty.²¹

Therefore, history will help explain the importance of discipleship as it pertains to the body of Christ, living in community, and fulfilling the Great Commission given to the church by Jesus Christ, the greatest disciple-maker in history.

Theoretical Basis

Dietrich Bonhoeffer believed that theology of discipleship is to be built upon revelation. Discipleship should answer the question, “what does it really mean to follow Jesus Christ?” However, in order to answer that question, one must first understand who Jesus Christ is.²² Therefore, a study in Christology is crucial to laying the theological foundation for true biblical discipleship. This foundation should explain who Christ is and what it means to follow Him. This writer will research revelation provided in scripture concerning the identity of Jesus Christ. This research will provide information whereby Jesus is proven to be a Redeemer, Restorer, and the Reigning King who has taken His rightful place in heaven and in the hearts of many. It is important for every disciple of Christ to understand what the Bible says about Him and in faith believe the theological aspects concerning His existence, ministry, and authority to call disciples.

²¹ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 213.

²² Brant Himes, “Discipleship As Theological Praxis: Dietrich Bonhoeffer As A Resource for Educational Ministry,” *Christian Education Journal*, 8(2), (2011) 263-277. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview>

If an individual truly seeks to follow Christ in true biblical discipleship, it is important to have a foundation which reveals who Christ is and why He is worthy of being followed.

The research provided in this work will include both Old Testament (O.T.) and New Testament (N.T.) scripture pertaining to Christ as the Redeemer of the world. This includes the fulfillment of O.T. prophecy concerning His birth, life, death, and resurrection. Information concerning Jesus as a Servant will also be included and is very important in the context of laying a theological foundation. As a Restorer of men, Jesus met the needs of mankind both physically and spiritually. The provisions He made both in His earthly ministry and in eternity are a significant part of the foundation needed- theologically speaking. This project will reveal how Jesus restored mankind and fulfilled His Father's plan of redemption by dying for the sins of mankind.

As the reigning King, Jesus fulfilled the prophecies spoken of by Old Testament saints who revealed the oppression and eventual vindication Jesus would exact by being resurrected to live forevermore. In the Old Testament, King David experienced similar persecution, and Jesus simply repeated this pattern as He fulfilled all that was spoken of Him. This project will reveal these similarities. Through His death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus has the authority to call disciples and be imitated by His followers due to His current position as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The Bible tells us that Jesus came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.²³ Jesus was indeed a Servant who calls His people to be servants and to imitate Him through the discipleship process. As the reigning King, He empowers His people to be the followers He desires that the kingdom of God may grow and reach a lost people.

²³ Matthew 20:28.

In Matthew 7:24-27, the story is told about a wise and a foolish builder. The fool built his house on the sand, and when the wind and rain came, the house fell. The wise man built his house on the rock and withstood the storms. This of course is part of the Sermon on the Mount message Jesus preached where He reveals many insights to discipleship. This passage, along with many other passages, serves as a foundation for discipleship as it should function in the church today. This writer will research the following scripture in an effort to answer certain questions: Luke 14:26, 27, 28, 33, John 8:31-32, John 13:35, John 15:5, Acts 13:52, Matthew 26:19, and Matthew 28:18-20. Biblically speaking, an individual must: consider the costs of following Jesus, be willing to sacrifice, be willing to surrender, love others, bear fruit, glorify God, be filled with the Holy Spirit, obedient to the Master, and ultimately make disciples.²⁴

Therefore, in establishing a theological foundation for discipleship, this project will answer the question, “who is Jesus Christ?” It will also answer the question, “what does it mean to truly follow Him?” The answers to these questions are crucial in determining whether or not Jesus is worthy of being followed and understanding the requirements for being a disciple of Christ. The theology of discipleship must be built on the Christology of Christ as the church seeks to fulfill the Great Commission commanded in Matthew 28. The very words of Christ and the prophecies He fulfilled will successfully establish the foundation needed for discipleship in the church and in the believer’s life as desired by God.

Statement of Methodology

The final phase of this project will include information gathered from the questionnaires completed online by senior pastors and church members who have agreed to be a part of this research project. The information will help this writer provide insights to the problem of apathy in the church and how it is hindering the call to discipleship and the ability to reach the

²⁴ Dave Early, Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2013), 22-25.

spiritually lost. This writer will provide percentages concerning the answers given and provide an understanding of the data and the extent of the problems facing the church today. The issue of apathy is not simply in the body of Christ, but it also exists in the attitude and behavior of senior pastors and staff members who simply accept apathy as being normal. Biblically speaking, this is not acceptable.

The senior pastors who take part in this research will answer questions concerning how their church is currently functioning in the area of discipleship. They will speak to the overall health of the church in respect to the number of church members that are currently using their spiritual gifts and whether or not the church encourages that usage. They will also respond to whether or not the church provides a program for discipleship in an effort to help people to grow in their faith and be involved in the ministry. This questionnaire will reveal to what extent the senior pastor's job is made more difficult by the issue of apathy in the church.

The church members who choose to take part in this research will answer questions concerning their personal situation and beliefs when it comes to being apathetic. The answers they give concerning spiritual gifts will provide this writer with pertinent information which can be used to alert all ministry leadership of the problems facing the church today. They will respond to questions pertaining to how they view the church and their current discipleship program. They will reveal whether or not they know what their spiritual gifts are and if they are using them. These participants will also reveal whether or not they are currently working outside of their gifts or if they have no desire to use their gifts and be involved in the ministry. The answers to these questionnaires will simply help this writer prove the discipleship issues facing the church today and the need for a paper such as this to inform and guide church leaders in becoming healthier and more effective through biblical discipleship.

“A healthy church is a representation of the people of God coming together to accomplish the mission of God for the glory of God.”²⁵ The Bible provides certain absolutes which must take place in the ministry of the church if it is to be healthy and effective for the cause of Christ. These absolutes include witnessing, baptizing, nurturing, investing, surrendering, teaching, counseling, equipping, growing, encouraging, developing, loving, sharing, praying, leading, multiplying, worshipping, ministering, and planting.²⁶ All disciples should be proclaiming the gospel so that people may be saved and baptized. All disciples should be nurtured and nurture others, invest in people, love those people, and help others to grow in the faith. All disciples should be willing to sacrifice and surrender any and all things for the sake of the gospel. This includes time, money, talents, and possessions as the Lord leads. All disciples should be praying and sharing life together. Discipleship promotes community in the body of Christ whereby each member encourages others and leads others to a deeper walk with God. Church leaders need to lead by example.

Leaders should equip the body of Christ for the work of the ministry, teaching them what it means to truly worship God and be used by God in a great way. Leaders should provide godly counsel, biblical teaching, and help in the development of new leaders. A healthy church is one that is multiplying and therefore planting new ministries in new areas in hopes of reaching new people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. This kind of effective ministry takes the efforts and involvement of everyone in the body of Christ in order to fulfill the Great Commission. This writer will speak to these biblical absolutes in providing a guideline for success in the discipleship process.

²⁵ Early, Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 213.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 212-213.

This writer will provide very practical advice concerning effective discipleship and spiritual health for the church. What must be understood is that being an effective and healthy church is based simply on being a visible community in which the world sees Christ in every member of that community. This idea of community is clearly seen in the biblical evidence of Jesus and His disciples:

Jesus' community with his disciples was all-encompassing, extending to all areas of life. The individual's entire life was lived within this community of the disciples. And this community is a living witness to the bodily humanity of the Son of God. The bodily presence of the Son of God demands the bodily commitment to him and with him throughout one's daily life. With all our bodily living, existence, we belong to him who took on human body for our sake. In following him, the disciple is inseparably linked to the body of Jesus.²⁷

This type of community, which is also seen in the Acts 2 church, can and will make a difference in the town or city it resides in. The visible, effective church community as a whole can and will make a difference in the world if the entire body of Christ functions the way God has designed it to function by adhering to the absolutes spoken of in scripture. It would be pharisaical for an individual or for a church to claim that their model is the only way to become an effective, healthy church. In fact there are several models in use today that have been very effective in establishing a visible community whereby biblical discipleship is practiced and the church is impacting its community for Christ. These models include but are not limited to the traditional church, the attractional church, organic church, and the hybrid church. This writer will introduce each of these models in an effort to establish one specific model to be used in moving people and churches towards biblical discipleship and spiritual health.

The problem of apathy in the church is a significant issue and is greatly hindering the church's ability to make disciples and reach the spiritually lost. It is not acceptable to simply claim to be a believer and not be a disciple of Jesus Christ. When Jesus called His disciples, He

²⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 232.

called them to follow. If an individual decides to accept Christ and what He did at the cross as payment for their sins and desires to be a part of the body of Christ, then such a commitment includes sacrifice, surrender, and a willingness to deny oneself. There is no room for laziness or apathy in the family of God. All believers have been given spiritual gifts. These gifts are to be used to the glory of God. This is the purpose of mankind, to bring glory to God. Therefore, it is important for every believer to fulfill the biblical call of discipleship for the profit of all. This project seeks to help church leaders to fulfill this call in their own lives, in their ministry and in the lives of others as the family of God seeks to accomplish the Great Commission. The effectiveness of the church depends on the discipleship of its people.

Review of Literature

Many resources have been utilized and investigated in the writing and completion of this project. Several of these publications will be of particular value during this process. The book *Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a great resource for an individual seeking to really understand what it means to follow Christ. Bonhoeffer speaks specifically about what the call to discipleship entails and how an individual successfully answers that call. For the purpose of this project, it is crucial for a believer to understand the call of Christ in an effort to be used of God in a great way. Bonhoeffer posed the question; "What is said about the content of discipleship? Follow me, walk behind me! That is all."²⁸ It is a call followed for the sake of the call because of the One who does the calling.

Bonhoeffer explains that following Christ comes with a price. The grace an individual receives was costly as our salvation costs the Father His Son. This grace is not something earned but given by God. At the point grace becomes earned, it no longer qualifies as grace. However, with grace and the acceptance of the call comes obedience. Bonhoeffer explains how obedience

²⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 58.

is required in the life of a believer if one is to truly follow Christ. Obedience is an important aspect of this project as through obedience, an individual believes and lives according to the Word of God. Living according to scripture means fulfilling what God has called every believer to do; give of themselves for something bigger than themselves. This would include the usage of spiritual gifts and talents for the cause of Christ. In the book, Bonhoeffer also points to the Sermon on the Mount as evidence of what the Christian life looks like. Jesus faithfully modeled Christian living and the giving of oneself for a greater cause. The example He set for the church is to be imitated as the call to discipleship is fulfilled.

Author Bill Hull wrote a book entitled *The Complete Book of Discipleship*. This resource is also very valuable to this work as Hull provides important information concerning the origins, biblical foundations and history of discipleship. Each of these elements is crucial in gaining a proper perspective of discipleship and how it has evolved and been practiced over the centuries. Hull provides definitions for discipleship type terms and scripture to support the believer's responsibility to discipleship. He speaks specifically to the application part of discipleship which is of great value for this project. Hull speaks to certain principles this writer will address throughout this project. Those principles of discipleship include submitting to a teacher, learning from the words of Christ, learning from the ministry of Christ, imitating Jesus' life and character and making other disciples.²⁹

Hull also provides insight from great church fathers and theologians and their contributions to the discipleship process. This writer will provide information concerning people like Clement of Rome, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley and others. A proper understanding of how these men helped change the daily practices and tendencies of people is important. The wisdom and guidance they have passed down through the ages provides

²⁹ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 68.

Christians today with evidence of success as a believer truly follows after Christ and the blessings that come with such a commitment. The faithfulness of these men tests the commitments of Christians today and challenges followers of Christ everywhere to fulfill the call to discipleship.

The book *The Story of Christian Spirituality* is also a great resource for accessing information on church fathers and their contributions to the discipleship process. Various different authors in the book provide great insight into the men spoken about in this work. Information gathered includes not only church fathers and famous theologians, but the book also provides evidence and examples of Christian living from the ministry of Christ. This writer was also able to access and inform the reader on pertinent information concerning the personal lives of these great men of the past and their influences. The book provides insight into ancient traditions, cultural backgrounds, communal living and spiritual disciplines which helps believers today by leading them in a better understanding of discipleship.

LeRoy Eims wrote the book *The Lost Art of Disciple Making*. The book is immensely valuable to this work as Eims provides great insight into the early church and the disciple-making process. Eims focuses on the verse found in Acts 2:42 which states that the people of that day were devoted to the teachings of the apostles and to community. What took place in Antioch and Jerusalem back in the first century is still possible in the church today. Disciples were properly trained and then sent out to train others. In a day and age where programs and materials are relied heavily upon, the idea of community and one-on-one discipleship has all but vanished. Eims writes, “The ministry is to be carried on by people, not programs. It is to be carried out by someone and not by some thing.”³⁰

³⁰ LeRoy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 45.

Eims speaks specifically about Christ and how he invested in the disciples and trained them to carry on the work of the ministry after His death. Eims' philosophy on discipleship is based on personal relationships and accountability. This is the standard Jesus held the disciples to and should be emphasized in the church today. Developing spiritual depth, discovering spiritual gifts and stretching one's faith are all a part of the discipleship process according to Eims. One on one discipleship and training will help build a new believer in the faith and continue the growth process for years to come. Proper training leads to spiritually healthy people, a healthy church and a great impact on the community and in eternity.

In the book *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*, author N.T. Wright clarifies the discipleship process as seen in the New Testament. This project will look specifically at the writings of Paul found in Romans, 1 Corinthians and Colossians. The Gospel of John and The Sermon on the Mount will also be discussed. Wright provides information concerning the person of Christ and His sacrifice as well as what it means to be a living sacrifice today. Wright believes a long look at the life of Christ will greatly motivate a person to live for Him. Wright believes many Christians have created a comfortable Jesus of their own liking and are not truly sold out in living for Him.³¹ The scriptures found in the New Testament tell a different story. Discipleship is not something that can be accomplished on one's own terms. Jesus has set the bar and exemplified it for us and the scriptures reveal the standard.

Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament, is also a valuable resource in acquiring a biblical understanding of discipleship. The book has many different contributors as noted further in this work. Contributors used in this work are Melvyn Hillmer who wrote on discipleship as

³¹ N.T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), ix.

seen in the Gospel of John. Hillmer reveals discipleship as relational and action-oriented.³² These beliefs only enhance the work of this project as apathy in the church exists to an extent in every ministry. Linda Belleville, another contributor to the book speaks to the importance of imitating Christ as seen in the writings of Paul in the letter to the Corinthians. This spiritual discipline also benefits this work as believers today are called to love God and people. Evidence of this type of love is growing in the faith and sharing one's faith. This is the greatest example of what Jesus did when He walked the earth. A disciple should be defined by these two practices. The other contributor used greatly from this book is L. Ann Jervis. Jervis wrote a section on discipleship as seen in the Book of Romans. Paul, the author of Romans speaks specifically about being conformed to Christ. Paul also speaks greatly to the righteousness of God and in conformity, righteousness is attained. Jervis defines righteousness as "the manifestation of God's character."³³ The discipleship process does indeed teach the character of God and the responsibility believers have to imitate His character.

When a believer goes from learning to imitating the character of God, this can be viewed as transformation. God seeks to transform every new Christian into a faithful and loyal disciple of Christ. The book *Transformational Discipleship* written by Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley and Philip Nation is a real blessing in bringing clarity to this process. The authors use the term "metamorphosis" in explaining a long-lasting irreversible change in an individual.³⁴ This is how transformation can be defined. We often think of metamorphosis in respect to a caterpillar

³² Melvyn R. Hillmer *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publisher, 1996), 84, 89

³³ L. Ann Jervis, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1996), 143.

³⁴ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2012), 55.

becoming a butterfly but when you consider it from a spiritual perspective, you see this type of change take place in the heart and life of a person who has decided to follow Jesus. This project is about transforming people, a church, a community and maybe even a world with personal and biblical discipleship practices. The result would be a spiritually healthy people making disciples who in turn make disciples.

The practical side of this project will rely on several books containing a wealth of information but a few of them stand out among the rest. One such book is *Real-Life Discipleship* written by Jim Putnam. Putnam does a great job of defining discipleship and explaining how churches should be intentional and relational in the discipleship process. Putnam states that Jesus was an intentional leader ministering in a relational environment.³⁵ The church today must be intentional and relational. The reason apathy exists in the church today is due to the lackadaisical attitude of the church as it pertains to reaching the lost. The church is intentional in many areas, especially areas of in-reach but not outreach. The church is relational within itself but not in the community. Discipleship and the Great Commission require the church to get into the community in an effort to save the lost. Putnam does a good job of revealing the discipleship process, how it works and he even provides some warnings in an effort to best support the church.

A similar book as it pertains to the application of discipleship in the church is George Barna's *Growing True Disciples*. Barna's book provides strategies and models for effective discipleship. The models presented in the book and subsequently in this project are tested and have been effective for the cause of Christ. These models are: The Competencies Model, The Missional Model, The Neighborhood Model, The Worldview Model and The Lecture-Lab Model. Each of these models will be explained in detail later in this project. Along with these models, this writer

³⁵ Jim Putnam, *Real-Life Discipleship* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010), 35.

will discuss other effective models and create a model for the sake of this project. This model will be referred to as “The Community Model.” Barna also writes specifically concerning the importance of transformation in the discipleship process. He states, “The real obstacles to becoming fully devoted, zealous disciples of Christ are not money, time, methods or knowledge. The major obstacle is the human heart.”³⁶ Barna’s book provides a wealth of information in producing genuine followers of Christ.

Finally, a book written by Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey will be used to a great extent in this project. The book entitled *Disciple Making Is...* provides wonderful material for what is expected of the church in the area of discipleship. In order for the church to effectively carry out the ministry of discipleship, the church must be healthy. Earley and Dempsey clearly define a healthy church by using certain absolute characteristics mentioned later in this work. The importance of making disciples cannot be overstated as Earley and Dempsey reveal the responsibility of every believer and every church to do so.

Earley and Dempsey place the emphasis of disciple-making squarely on the shoulders of the local church and hold in high regard the Great Commission given to the church by Christ. The book covers the importance of preaching, teaching, baptizing, training and planting churches. These aspects of ministry are all part of the discipleship process. The book provides biblical and theological foundations for discipleship and timely principles in directing and challenging the church towards discipleship. Fulfilling the Great Commission is critical and forever tied to the discipleship process. The insights gleaned from this book will be shared throughout the project.

There are also several biblical texts that are crucial to this project regarding discipleship, community, the giving and using of spiritual gifts and the mission given to the church. Matthew 28:18-20 reveals the mission given to the church by Jesus Christ. The passage clearly states that

³⁶ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 166.

God's children are to make disciples of all people in an effort to spread the gospel message. This is the call to be a disciple and make disciples. In 1 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul speaks to the giving of spiritual gifts, the diversity of gifts and the unity required in the body of Christ. Verses 12-31 speaks specifically regarding the use of spiritual gifts and the bearing it has on the body.

In Romans 12:3-5, Paul speaks concerning gifts and service. This is also another important passage discussed in this project as Paul speaks to the grace that is given all believers. In Ephesians 4, Paul also speaks to the importance of using spiritual gifts and how obedience to that command brings about unity in the body of Christ. Acts 2:40-42 reveals what the body of Christ should look like. The early church was in unity and served each other and God by using the gifts given by the Holy Spirit. This church serves as a great example for the church of today and is also the focal point of the Community Model presented in this project.

Matthew 5:1-13, also known as "The Sermon on the Mount" is a message delivered by Jesus whereby He speaks to the characteristics of a disciple. The standard revealed here is significant yet attainable through Christ. The high cost of following Jesus is also seen in other passages of scripture pertinent to this work. Luke 9:23 reveals the discipline of self-denial and sacrifice. John 8:12 speaks similarly to Matthew 5 in that the church is to be light in a dark world. The idea of discipleship really centers on a disciple becoming like his master/mentor. This is why Paul speaks about the importance of imitating Christ in 1 Corinthians 11:1. He also speaks to the preeminence of Christ and His worthiness of being followed in Colossians 1:17-20. Finally, John 15 is important as Jesus reveals the nature of His relationship to all believers. The people of God are to bear fruit for the kingdom of God. Spiritual fruit is best accomplished by the use of spiritual gifts and through the spreading of the gospel.

CHAPTER ONE
BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP

Introduction

The call to discipleship is a command to follow. However, the idea of following someone biblically speaking means more than to simply tag along or to accompany. Jesus said, “If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.”¹ If an individual truly seeks to follow Christ and be a disciple of Christ, he or she must be willing to sacrifice and surrender to the greatest extent. When Jesus called the first disciples, the Bible tells us, “And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’ They immediately left their nets and followed Him.”² Those who choose to follow Christ make a commitment solely to the person of Christ. Bonhoeffer writes, “It is nothing other than being bound to Jesus Christ alone. This means completely breaking through anything preprogrammed, idealistic or legalistic. No further content is possible because Jesus is the only content. There is no other content besides Jesus. He himself is it.”³

The apostle Paul spoke about discipleship in his letter to the Philippians. He wrote, “Therefore my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”⁴

¹ Luke 9:23.

² Mark 1:16-18.

³ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 58-59.

⁴ Philippians 2:12-13.

The requirement for the disciple is to answer the call presented in scripture. When a person answers the call of Jesus, he answers with his whole life. This type of commitment requires faith which leads to obedience. It is a process whereby one goes deep with God and is transformed by God which leads to the fulfillment of the Great Commission.⁵ Therefore, in order to be a disciple of Christ, you must obey all that Jesus has commanded.

“Disciple” Defined

The word *disciple* means student or learner. It describes a protégé who learns and follows his teacher’s precepts and instructions. It speaks of a follower who adopts the lifestyle of his master.”⁶ This explains why Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”⁷ The idea of obeying everything Jesus has commanded in the scriptures is overwhelming to say the least. Accomplishing such a task is also impossible for mere man. The Bible tells us that with God all things are possible. Yet while perfection is not possible, the desire to live for Christ coupled with the grace of God leads a person through the process of discipleship and in a closer walk with God. The key to biblical discipleship is indeed found in Luke 9:23. A disciple is to deny oneself. Bonhoeffer writes, “When my will conflicts with his will, self-denial makes following his will possible. Jesus wants me to deny myself the right to be in charge of my own life.”⁸

“A disciple is a more serious Christian active in the practice of the spiritual disciplines and engaged in evangelizing and training others. A disciple, then, is the normal Christian who

⁵ Bonhoeffer, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 117-118.

⁶ Earley, Dempsey, *Disciple-Making Is...49*.

⁷ John 14:15.

⁸ Bonhoeffer, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 121-122.

follows Christ.”⁹ The greatest example of One who was engaged in evangelizing and training others for the sake of the Gospel is of course seen in the life of Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of John, Jesus in praying to His Father said this, “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”¹⁰

This passage begs the question; what work was Jesus referring to? Was it the work of redemption? Probably not, Jesus spoke about the work of redemption as He died on the cross. He simply said, “It is finished.”¹¹ In John 17, Jesus is praying for the disciples. He fails to mention miracles or the multitudes or anything else other than the men God had given Him out of the world. These were the men He invested in so deeply and passionately. “These men were His work. His ministry touched thousands, but He trained twelve men. He gave His life on the cross for millions, but during the three and a half years of ministry He gave His life uniquely to twelve men.”¹²

Jesus was indeed engaged in evangelizing and training others for the sake of the Gospel. His practice of spiritual disciplines and the fulfillment of the “work” His Father had given Him should serve as an example for disciples to follow today.

“Discipleship” Defined

“There is a discipleship deficiency in most churches resulting in a lack of transformation.”

¹³ Biblical discipleship is not about obtaining more information or modifying behavior. A true

⁹ Bonhoeffer, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 33.

¹⁰ John 17:4-5.

¹¹ John 19:30.

¹² Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making*, 28

¹³ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 16.

disciple of Christ will be an individual who has been transformed by the power of God. A truly transformed heart will lead to a change in behavior. “The distinguishing mark of Christian discipleship is a transformed heart, transformed affections. When someone becomes a true disciple, Christ radically changes the person’s appetite.”¹⁴ Therefore, a disciple of Christ is one who not only desires to follow Christ but is willing to sacrifice and surrender one’s own will for the will of God. A disciple follows the instructions of the Master and is transformed by adopting His lifestyle. This lifestyle includes evangelizing, training others and obedience in all things for the cause of Christ. Discipleship would be defined as one who is acting and living as a disciple as life transformation is taking place.

“Disciple-Making” Defined

“Disciple making in its purest form is helping people find Jesus and then helping them to grow and become all they can be for Christ.”¹⁵ This definition speaks to the very heart of the Great Commission Jesus commands of the church. According to Matthew 28:18-20; the church is to make, mature and multiply disciples. Fulfilling this command brings the greatest amount of glory to God. It should be noted that bringing Him glory is the reason mankind exists in the first place. The apostle Paul writes, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”¹⁶ A church which takes disciple making seriously and wins people for Christ and teaches them to grow in their faith and lead others to Christ will glorify God and fulfill the command given by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Disciple making is very similar to being a parent. In order to be a physical parent, you must have children. In order to be a spiritual parent, people must receive Jesus as Lord

¹⁴ Geiger, Kelley, Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 29.

¹⁵ Earley, Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...* 16.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:31.

and Savior. Natural parents want to see their children grow and develop. When they grow up, they will most likely marry and become parents in their own right, and they in turn will have children of their own. In a similar manner, spiritual parents want to see their children grow and develop as well.¹⁷

Therefore, disciple making is a process which includes conversion, spiritual growth and the sending out of an individual. An individual must make a conscious decision to receive Christ and what He accomplished at the cross as payment for their sins. A person must truly long and desire from the heart to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. Without Christ, there is no biblical discipleship process. The second step in the process is a commitment to develop one's character and capacity, learning to obey the Word of God and being willing to count the costs of following Jesus. Like salvation, this is a decision every individual must make for oneself.

Through the call of Jesus men become individuals. Willy-nilly, they are compelled to decide, and that decision can only be made by themselves. It is no choice of their own that makes them individuals: it is Christ who makes them individuals by calling them. Every man is called separately, and must follow alone.¹⁸

“Once a disciple is trained, the final step is sending. This comes from the “go” aspect of the Great Commission.”¹⁹

As Jesus trained the disciples, He did so by building relationships with each of them. As He ministered to the multitudes and led others to faith, He did so by building relationships. The true disciple of Christ understands that in order to fulfill the Great Commission, the imperative to “go” is a battle cry in an effort to win the world to Christ. The kingdom of God will grow when cultural and geographical barriers are torn down and God's people reach out to others with the love of Christ.²⁰ However, disciple making is not an easy task. Bonhoeffer writes, “It is not for

¹⁷ Earley, Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...* 17.

¹⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, N.Y: Touchstone, 1995), 94.

¹⁹ Bonhoeffer, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 34.

²⁰ Earley, Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...* 34.

us to choose which way we shall follow. That depends on the will of Christ. But this at least is certain: in one way or the other we shall have to leave the immediacy of the world and become individuals, whether secretly or openly.”²¹

Once again, this writer is reminded of what the Bible says is required of those who truly seek to follow Jesus; one must be willing to count the costs.

“Spiritual Formation” Defined

In Galatians 4:19 the apostle Paul writes “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you.” The word “formed” in the Greek means “to shape”. It can also be translated “conformed” or even “transformed”.²² What Paul speaks to here in Galatians 4 is the concept of spiritual formation. When an individual receives Jesus as Lord and Savior, that person has been justified before God. Justification means to be made right before God or to be brought into a right standing before God. This is something that happens immediately upon conversion. The sanctification of the believer is more of a process. Sanctification carries the idea of becoming more like Christ. In an effort to become more like Christ, a person must be transformed by the power of God through the moving of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, spiritual formation is the process by which an individual is transformed into a disciple of Christ.

Spiritual formation includes the practice of spiritual disciplines. These disciplines include Bible study, prayer, fellowship, service and worship. However, this is not an exhaustive list of disciplines. Dallas Willard describes disciplines by grouping them into two categories: disciplines of abstinence and disciplines of engagement. The disciplines of abstinence include solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, secrecy and sacrifice. The disciplines of engagement include

²¹ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 100.

²² Bonhoeffer, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 35.

study, worship, celebration service, prayer, fellowship, confession and submission.²³ The consistent practice of these disciplines is crucial to the discipleship process for every Christian seeking to be transformed by the Spirit of God. Willard writes, “The spiritual disciplines are a matter of taking appropriate measures. To reject them wholesale is to insist that growth in the spirit is something that just happens all by itself.”²⁴

All of the disciplines Willard mentions in his book are to be used at various times in the life of a believer. However, five of these disciplines stand out above the rest as being more significant and are to be used on an everyday basis. In the book “Transformational Discipleship” the authors reveal the most important disciplines to be the following: Bible study, prayer, silence, service and worship.

The spiritual disciplines are a set of practices used to draw us close to God. Believers should use disciplines to give a place for the Holy Spirit to speak and use God’s Word in our lives. Whether you are in a public discipline of worshipping with the church or the private discipline of confessing your sin to Christ, these are structured activities the Spirit uses to move believers toward maturity.²⁵

In the spiritual formation process, all of the disciplines mentioned have their place in the Christian life and serve very specific purposes. However, prayer is considered by many believers to be the most important in the transformation process. The opportunity to speak with God and have God speak to an individual far surpasses most other disciplines. This communication with God provides a believer the opportunity to be aligned with God’s will and plan. “The greatest ministry of discipling is prayer.”²⁶ Oswald Chambers also agrees with the importance of prayer among the spiritual disciplines. In his book “Christian Disciplines” Chambers writes,

²³ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of The Disciplines* (New York, N.Y: HarperCollins Publisher, 1991), 158.

²⁴ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 153.

²⁵ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 119.

Prayer is the evidence that I am spiritually concentrated on God, when to forethink is but to pray about everything and to live in actual conditions is to be thankful in anything. Prayer is not to be used as the petted privilege of a spoiled child seeking for ideal conditions in which to indulge his spiritual propensities ad lib-the purpose of prayer is the maintenance of fitness in an ideal relationship with God amid conditions which ought not to be merely ideal but really actual. The purpose of prayer is to reveal the presence of God equally present all the time in every condition.²⁷

Therefore, the many different spiritual disciplines are to be practiced in an effort for the believer to be transformed into an obedient, faithful and growing disciple of Christ, to be used for His glory in promoting spiritual health and reaching the lost. Spiritual formation is a very important part of the discipleship process and it should be encouraged greatly in the ministry of the church.

What “Discipleship” Is Not

The discipleship process has been diminished over time by Christians and the church alike. Discipleship is viewed by and even treated by many as a program or a production line. The biblical command to disciple people has been reduced to being a necessity for new Christians or church leaders only. It is also believed by many that discipleship is only for the literate and for those who need structure in their Christian lives.²⁸ All of these presuppositions and assumptions are incorrect. Many churches today are using discipleship programs as a way of communicating information and developing skills and then after a period of time, the individual graduates and moves on. Completing a program brings about a sense of finality when realistically speaking, discipleship is a way of life. It is something that must be pursued daily in the Christian life until that life no longer exists here on earth. Bonhoeffer writes, “When discipleship takes a place

²⁶ Geiger, Kelley, Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 123.

²⁷ Oswald Chambers, *Christian Disciplines* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1995), 117.

²⁸ Bonhoeffer, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 36-40.

alongside leadership, evangelism, preaching, worship, counseling, support groups and other programs, it ceases to be what it was meant to be: the heart of what it means to be a Christian.”²⁹

Discipleship is also not an assembly line whereby Christians are reproduced one right after the other. God doesn't use everyone in the same way. The goal of the church is to reach the world for Christ but God determines how that will be done and He will use people individually according to His purposes. However, discipleship is not a plan God ordained just for the sake of growing the church. “Discipleship is much more about the depth of character and spiritual passion of each disciple than it is a plan for church growth.”³⁰

Discipleship is not simply for new believers and church leaders. Yes, new Christians need to be discipled. They need basic training and understanding of what it means to follow Christ so they may grow in their faith. However, when one considers the spiritual disciplines mentioned previously in this work, it is understood that believers of all ages and experience need to continue in the discipleship process daily. If a Christian falls away from the daily disciplines, they fall away from the faith. Bonhoeffer writes, “Far too many Christians no longer practice the basics and are out of shape spiritually.”³¹ The idea that discipleship training is only for the use and growth of church leaders is also false. While church leaders certainly receive more training than the average layperson, the fact remains that all believers of Christ are called to be disciples. And a disciple is one who follows Christ and is being changed by Christ.³²

Discipleship is also not simply for those who are extremely literate or enjoy structure. A review of church history reveals many great servants of God who could neither read nor write.

²⁹ Bonhoeffer, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 36.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 37.

³¹ *Ibid*, 38.

³² Putnam, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 29-30.

Yet these people experienced spiritual transformation by attending church services and by the preaching of the Word. They also grew through prayer and the experiences of living by faith. God has the ability to meet all people where they are regardless of the attributes a person possesses.³³ While the daily practice of disciplines naturally provides structure, discipleship is not to be used for the sake of structure. Structure for the sake of discipleship will most likely lead to a program and as stated already, discipleship is not a program. It is when an individual actually internalizes spiritual disciplines that real growth and transformation take place.³⁴ When transformation takes place, then the follower of Christ is well on the way of becoming an effective disciple of Christ. Discipleship is wrongly defined in many ways when in reality it can be defined very simply as helping an individual to find and follow Jesus.³⁵

Discipleship in the Book of Romans

The call to discipleship is seen all throughout the New Testament. All four Gospels speak specifically to the idea of following Christ or being a disciple of Christ. Many of these scriptures have already been shared. However, the apostle Paul also spoke of discipleship, oddly enough without ever mentioning the word “disciple” or the word “follow.” Paul speaks of believers as being those who have faith. Instead of using the word “disciple” or “follower”, Paul uses words such as “beloved,” “called,” “justified,” or “elect.” He also uses phrases such as “slaves of God,” “children of God,” “heirs with Christ,” “brothers and sisters of Christ,” and “sons and daughters of God.”³⁶ However, Paul does address the concept of discipleship in the Book of Romans by

³³ Bonhoeffer, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 39-40.

³⁴ Ibid, 40.

³⁵ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 163.

³⁶ Jervis, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, 143.

encouraging his readers to become more like God. He speaks clearly to the idea of being conformed to the person of Jesus Christ.

In the Book of Romans, Paul uses the phrase “in Christ” several times in an effort to proclaim the importance of being conformed to Christ. This again is Paul’s way of encouraging discipleship and the “following” of Christ as a disciple. The continued use of this phrase also reveals the importance of Christ’ death as it pertains to being conformed to Him.

That Paul stresses the corporate nature, and so the ethical features of the “in Christ” theme indicates again the foundational role that the death of Christ plays in his thinking. Christ’s death was for all. Paul writes that Christ died for the ungodly (5:6), which, as he has demonstrated in the previous chapters, means every human being. Since Christ died for all, conformity to Christ—that is, being “in Christ” and so sharing in his death—means living a life for others and a life with others who are conformed to his death. The life of believers in Christ, therefore, is a corporate life (12:5).³⁷

The corporate life or the community of believers who seek to be conformed to Christ are to live this life together. All individuals who have received Christ a Savior are at the point of conversion “in Christ.” Therefore, each and every believer becomes a part of the family of God and possess the privilege and expectations of serving Him for the cause of Christ. Paul speaks of the body of Christ and the opportunity given to serve God in Romans 12:3-8.

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.³⁸

This passage in Romans 12 is one of two passages in the New Testament in which Paul describes the many spiritual gifts that can be given to a believer. These gifts are given according

³⁷ Jervis, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, 153,154.

³⁸ Romans 12:3-8

to God's design as He knits together the family of God in each body of believers to be used for the benefit of all and the glory of God. Just as Jesus came to earth to serve and to be a Servant (Matthew 20:28), all disciples must follow His example and become servants not only of one another but a servant of the living God. Understanding spiritual gifts and discovering and using gifts is important in the discipleship process. When a believer becomes a servant to all by exercising the spiritual gifts given by God, that person, the church, the community and the cause of Christ all benefit greatly.

However, one distinction should be made concerning the idea of Christian service. Is there a difference between serving and being a servant? Pastor and theologian Richard Foster writes,

Right here we must see the difference between choosing to serve and choosing to be a servant. When we choose to serve, we are still in charge. We decide whom we will serve and when we will serve. And if we are in charge, we will worry a great deal about anyone stepping on us, that is taking charge over us. But when we choose to be a servant, we give up the right to be in charge.³⁹

In an effort to follow Christ and His example as a servant, one must look no further than the story found in John 13:1-20. This of course is the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Upon completing such a loving gesture Jesus simply said this, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."⁴⁰ This is the type of service Jesus has called all disciples to emulate. It is a service fueled by humility and love which helps to conform any believer to the person of Christ. However, one must remember, Paul spoke of discipleship in terms of Jesus' death and the disciple's responsibility to share in His death. Paul spoke clearly concerning the "body of Christ" and how the church is an extension of Christ, who died so the

³⁹ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (New York, N.Y: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988), 132.

⁴⁰ John 13:14-15.

church would be brought into being.⁴¹ Through this sacrifice, a believer can be conformed to Christ and become a faithful follower of the living God.

Discipleship in First Corinthians

In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul encourages his readers to live a life worthy of God. He provides several models or examples of discipleship by pointing first and most importantly to Jesus, then to other churches and colleagues of his and even to himself.⁴² The idea Paul puts forth for his readers is the concept of imitation. He writes, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”⁴³ This is Paul’s call to discipleship. The call is not one of boasting on his part, ultimately Paul desired for his readers to imitate Christ. However, in the ancient world, it was commonplace for an individual to imitate someone of higher moral standards and behavior. Paul’s life had been greatly formed and shaped by the influence of Christ in his life. Therefore, what Paul was asking his readers to do was not foreign to them.⁴⁴

In order to fully understand the kind of discipleship Paul was calling his readers to, one must look at the previous discussion found in 1 Corinthians 10. In the preceding verses, Paul had been speaking to the Corinthian believers concerning Christian freedom. There was significant discussion among Christians in the church concerning the eating of meat tainted with idol worship. Paul provides freedom in this area as long as these believers did not participate in the worship and as long as they did not cause a Christian brother or sister to stumble. Once again, Paul speaks of servant hood, being conformed to the person of Christ. Jesus exemplified servant

⁴¹ Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Publishing, 2006), 178.179.

⁴² Linda Belleville, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1996), 120.

⁴³ 1 Corinthians 11:1.

⁴⁴ Belleville, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, 121.

hood and set aside certain rights and privileges in coming to earth and dying on a cross.

Therefore, practicing what is best for others can be defined as imitating Christ.⁴⁵

At the end of 1 Corinthians 10, Paul speaks of Christian liberty in terms of how a believer honors God. “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.”⁴⁶ Mankind was created by God to bring Him glory. The best way to bring God glory is through a life lived well for Him. This type of life requires a servant’s heart resembling the heart of the Savior. This is why Paul stressed the imitation of Christ. Emulating Christ is not a suggestion but a requirement in an effort to become a true disciple. “Setting aside one’s rights to serve others becomes not merely desirable but required of the disciple. In a society like ours that prides itself on personal rights and freedoms-first and foremost being ‘life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness’-this exemplar is much needed.”⁴⁷

The second passage found in 1 Corinthians where Paul speaks of discipleship and the use of spiritual gifts is found in 12:12-31. This passage varies from the Romans passage spoken of previously in this work. Paul’s speaks in great detail concerning unity in the body of Christ and the diversity that also exists. He also mentions different spiritual gifts not spoken of in the Romans 12 text. He mentions the gift of tongues, the working of miracles and discerning spirits. However, the mandate is clear, the body of Christ, while it has many members, is baptized into one body (12:13). Therefore, every part of the body has a function and is required to participate

⁴⁵ Belleville, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, 126.

⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:31-33.

⁴⁷ Belleville, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, 126.

in the using of spiritual gifts. If even one part of the body does not fulfill the role given by God, then the body fails to be completely healthy nor can it function as God designed. This is a communal and group effort by the body of Christ for the cause of discipleship for the sake of all people. This type of commitment was seen in the early church as revealed in Acts 2. “The Christianity practiced by the first Christians was more than following a religion, ritual, creed, or doctrinal statement. It was a vibrant relationship with God and with each other. Discipleship was not a program; it was a communal relationship.”⁴⁸ Community was a significant point to Paul’s message in 1 Corinthians 12.

Discipleship in Colossians

In the Book of Colossians, the apostle Paul speaks as a theologian concerning the eternity of Christ and His power to sustain the universe. Paul encourages his readers to express their faith daily and used the eventual coming of Christ as motivation. This expression of faith was to be done both individually and as a Christian community.⁴⁹ Paul writes,

And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.⁵⁰

In this passage, Paul refers to the church as a human body whereby Jesus is the “head.” The head controls the human body and therefore, Jesus controls the church and actually gives life to it. The life Jesus provides for the church was accomplished at the cross where He died for the sins of mankind and subsequently birthed the church. Paul had previously stated that Jesus was the

⁴⁸ Earley, Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...* 71.

⁴⁹ Michael P. Knowles, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1996), 181.

⁵⁰ Colossians 1:17-20.

image of the invisible God and that all things were created through Him and for Him (1:15-16) Therefore, in Colossians, discipleship is seen through the lens of Christ's role in creation and His work on the cross which fulfilled God's redemptive plan. Jesus provides mankind with the opportunity to be reconciled to God. However, He calls His disciples to more than reconciliation; He calls those who seek to follow Him to conformity.

The followers of Jesus become conformed not only to Christ himself, but also to the God whom Christ reveals. If humanity is created in the image of God and if Christ is the "image" of God in all its fullness, then redemption through Christ restores believers to their true identity, which is itself a reflection of the divine identity. This reflection of the divine identity, then, is then the true goal of Christian discipleship.⁵¹

Discipleship in the Gospel of John

The Gospel of John reveals many stories of how Jesus related to His disciples and to people in general as He ministered on the earth. A significant dynamic in discipleship is seen in how people relate to one another. Jesus was very relatable and therefore discipleship requires relationships. When a person enters a relationship with Jesus, the desire to serve Him should come naturally because of who Jesus is.

The longer you look at Jesus, the more you will want to serve him in this world. That is, if it's the real Jesus you're looking at. Plenty of people in the church and outside it have made up a 'Jesus' for themselves, and have found that this invented character makes few real demands on them. He makes them feel happy from time to time but doesn't challenge them, doesn't suggest they get up and do something about the plight of the world. Which is of course, what the real Jesus had an uncomfortable habit of doing.⁵²

There is no doubt; following Jesus requires the investment of a relationship and significant effort on behalf of the disciple. The relationship required is first and foremost a relationship with Christ but also disciples must be able to relate to each other and the world. In John 15, Jesus refers to himself as the "true vine", His Father as the "vinedresser" and every believer as the

⁵¹ Michael P. Knowles, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, 186.

⁵² N.T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*, ix.

branches. Jesus speaks of the intimacy that should exist between himself and his disciples. The relationship Jesus speaks of here is likened to that of Jesus (the Son) and God the Father. However, the point of this passage centers on the relationship of disciples to Jesus and the commands to “abide” and “remain.”

Jesus clearly states that He is the source for any and all believers longing to truly be His faithful disciple. Just as a branch must stay connected to the vine to bloom or bear fruit, Christians must stay connected to Christ in order to remain a healthy and useful disciple for the cause of Christ.

To remain in Jesus is to respond in faith to him and his revelation. It is to accept him as Messiah, the Son of God, the One sent by the Father. It is to be in union with him in a close personal relationship. To remain in Jesus is further expressed as remaining in his love. The disciple who remains in Jesus’ love demonstrates this in relationships with others.⁵³

Jesus also speaks to the importance of disciples loving one another as He has loved us (15:12). What He shares is not a suggestion but a command. He uses the word “friends” which once again speaks to the love and intimacy to be shared between those who make up the body of Christ. Keeping this commandment serves as proof of one who is truly following Christ, being conformed to the image of Christ and living in community with the body of Christ.

The call to follow Jesus has a physical and spiritual sense. The first disciples left John the Baptist to follow Jesus (1:37-43). This was indeed a physical leaving of their lives as they knew them but to “follow” Him was more of a spiritual nature. Following Jesus carries the idea of patterning one’s life after Him. It is becoming light in a dark world as Jesus did.⁵⁴ Jesus in speaking to His disciples said, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in

⁵³ Hillmer *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, 86, 87.

⁵⁴ Melvyn R. Hillmer, Michael P. Knowles, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, 89.

darkness, but have the light of life.”⁵⁵ The word “follows” means more than to physically follow someone. The word carries the idea of an individual giving himself totally to the person chosen to follow. It is also not a half-hearted type of following. Jesus made this point very clear in the Gospel of Matthew when He said, “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 Me is not worthy of Me.”⁵⁶ Jesus is saying that the love a disciple should have for Him should far outweigh the love one has for family. In fact the call to follow Jesus is a call to death, first of one’s spiritual self and possibly even one’s physical self.

A true disciple of Christ is one who walks in the light Jesus has provided through His life, death, burial and resurrection. In view of Jesus’ statement in John 8 is the Feast of Tabernacles which was known for using many lights. One also recalls the people of God following along in the wilderness due to the pillar of fire.⁵⁷ Jesus also stated of the church in Matthew 5, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.”⁵⁸ Therefore, the call of Jesus is physical and spiritual, individual and communal.

Discipleship in the Sermon on the Mount

The Beatitudes and Similitudes are considered by many to be the greatest message ever preached by Jesus. In the sermon, Jesus not only exposes the law and the sin of legalism, but He also calls all disciples to authenticity in following Him.

Matthew, of all the Gospels, makes it crystal clear. If the Son of Man is the King of the world, we who worship him are to follow him, and are therefore sent into the world with a Great Commission. We are to make disciples, learners, followers; we are to baptize

⁵⁵ John 8:12.

⁵⁶ Matthew 10:37-38.

⁵⁷ Hillmer, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, 89, 90.

⁵⁸ Matthew 5:14.

them to observe all that Jesus commanded. We are to be his agents, his ambassadors, in bringing the word of his kingdom to all his subjects.⁵⁹

In an effort to be a faithful follower of Christ, light in a dark world, an ambassador for Christ, an individual must be a part of a community, the body of Christ whereby that body is the salt of the earth. Jesus does not provide any options here for the church. He states, “You are the salt of the earth.”⁶⁰ Salt is a preservative and a cleanser. The church has the power and the responsibility of being salt to the world. Salt takes effect in both deeds and words. “The real salt is the true exposition of scripture, which denounces the whole world and lets nothing stand but the simple faith in Christ.”⁶¹ The call to be salt is a call to the church with a mission of saving the world. The church is to season the world with the flavor of Christ for if it fails to do so, then the world will go on without hope. The call of the church to be salt in the world is a call to authentic disciple-making and discipleship. The church, the world and eternity depends on it.

Chapter Summary

The call to discipleship is clearly seen in Matthew 28:18-20. If a believer and the church truly longs to be effective in living as disciples of Christ, it is important to understand what a disciple is, what a disciple is not, what disciple-making looks like and how spiritual formation takes its place in the process. The New Testament is rich in scripture explaining the call of discipleship, the call to follow Jesus and the costs of being a faithful and committed disciple of Christ. Jesus, John, Matthew, Luke and many others spoke specifically about the responsibilities of a disciple. Paul spoke in great detail about being conformed to Christ and the church’s responsibility to use spiritual gifts and talents in practicing discipleship. Being a disciple of Christ is both an

⁵⁹ Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*, 30.

⁶⁰ Matthew 5:13.

⁶¹ John R.W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978), 66.

individual and communal task to be attained. Being a disciple of Christ is not for the faint of heart. It will require humility, submission, commitment, obedience, surrender, sacrifice, perseverance, trust and suffering. However, the reward for following Christ cannot be compared to anything this world has to offer.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL DISCIPLESHIP

Introduction

Discipleship is just like anything else, it has a history. Discipleship and spiritual formation has progressed and changed as one century turned to another. The people, places and practices have been altered but the ministry of discipleship and its importance in the life of a believer and the church is still significant or at least it should be. The church of today, the church of tomorrow and the church of yesterday should have one very important goal in common, to imitate Christ in all things. This is what discipleship is all about. The church disciples in an effort to help people to grow in the faith become more like Christ and then share it with others in an effort to make more disciples. Many great men in church history have played significant roles in the progression of discipleship which has led to many great men today continuing to carry the discipleship torch. This section of the project will discuss the contributions of such men.

Clement of Rome

Clement of Rome lived during the end of the first century as is best known for a letter who penned to the Corinthian church. In the letter, Clement stressed the disciplines of prayer, fasting, humility and giving. Clement believed practicing these disciplines set believers apart from the world. He stressed the importance of reaching out to other people and serving as Christ did during His ministry. It is also important to note that the canon of the New Testament was settled some two-hundred years after Clement lived and so the discipline of Bible reading was not given the attention it is today. It is also true that the printing press had not been invented so books were not produced like they are today.¹ Therefore, the disciplines of Clement were very basic, yet important. According to Clement, if a believer practiced humility and love for others, these were

¹ Bonhoeffer, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 75,76.

the virtues most important for the church as it pertains to reaching the world. Clement believed that the people of God were to practice all things which lead to holiness.²

Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius lived from 50 to 117 and is credited with teaching the bishops of his day how to disciple a congregation. Ignatius believed, “The most important part of a disciple’s life was his life in Christ and in the community of Christ, so living in unity with Christ and those in the community was the central task of the leader.”³ Ignatius wrote seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor and his writings are credited with establishing an understanding of what Christian leadership should look like in the church. The responsibilities of a bishop put forth by Ignatius were many. However, as it pertained to discipleship and community, the bishop was responsible for leading the people in worship and prayer. He was to act as a sacrament in an effort to unify the church and the people of God. “Ignatius’s point originally was to call the church together in the face of dissension and divisions, such as those he heard about as he passed through the various churches of Asia.”⁴

Ignatius emphasized many of the same disciplines Clement viewed as important: study, prayer, service and worship. However, Ignatius believed unity to be of great importance in the Christian life. In fact, in a letter he wrote to the Ephesian church, Ignatius stated how he longed to be a disciple of Christ trained to love others as Christ would have him to love. This type of commitment brings about unity among God’s people. Pope Benedict XVI writes, “As can be seen, Ignatius is truly the “Doctor of Unity”: unity of God and unity of Christ, unity of the

² Pope Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 2-3.

³ Bonhoeffer, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 77.

⁴ Gordon Mursell, *The Story of Christian Spirituality* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 40.

church, unity of the faithful in “faith and love, to which nothing is to be preferred.”⁵ Ignatius believed that unity and love were powerful disciplines which helped each believer to best imitate Christ.

Polycarp of Smyrna

Polycarp was a disciple of John and was martyred for his faith in 156. He believed in caring for the poor, unity, community and dying for one’s faith. In his letter written to the Philippian church, Polycarp stressed these very attributes as well as prayer, fasting and scripture reading. “The Christian life, for Polycarp, must be one of active compassion, kept together and kept alive by prayer and by respect for the traditions inherited.”⁶ Polycarp also placed great value on the imitation of Christ. In his letter to the Philippian believers, Polycarp stressed endurance in the face of trials and the possibility of suffering for the cause of Christ. In his writings, Polycarp also points to the life of Paul and of course the life of Jesus and encourages the believers in Philippi to imitate those examples. “Thus the goal of imitation is not so much to recapitulate the Lord’s suffering (though in some cases that might happen), but similarly to experience resurrection, the goal towards which he urges the Philippians.”⁷ It is clear that Polycarp’s life, ministry and death were greatly influenced by discipline and the desire to be a disciple.

Socrates, Plato and Aristotle

Famous Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle had specific ideas and practices as it pertained to discipleship. However, they’re idea of discipleship did not have the spiritual context of the men spoken of previously in this chapter. Although in the Greco-Roman

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church*, 8.

⁶ Mursell, *The Story of Christian Spirituality*, 41.

⁷ Michael Holmes, “Polycarp of Smyrna. Letter to the Philippians.” *Expository Times* 118. No. 2 (November 2006): 59-60. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCOhost (accessed April 17, 2014).

world, being a disciple was given great priority. The word “disciple” comes from the Greek word “mathetes” and refers to a person following a master. The term also means “learner” or “diligent student.” This learning included both submission and vigorous training. The master would determine how the follower would follow in an effort to be a disciple.⁸ While it is believed that great Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were confused about God, it is important to note that they did help create some of the framework for Christian discipleship.

Aristotle was a student of Plato and Plato a student of Socrates. Socrates taught in such a way whereby power, desire and ethics were tied together. He simply sought to live the “good life” and be in harmony with all things. The teacher-pupil relationship was one where the student looked at a teacher as a hero, one to be imitated. This is how Plato viewed Socrates in an attempt to gain wisdom, happiness and understanding in life. In many respects, the teacher-pupil relationship was unhealthy because the student sought to a great degree to be pleasing to the teacher and in many respects, be just like the teacher. A prolonged relationship would sometimes create an unhealthy desire for the student to become the teacher in every way.⁹

However, the practice of accountability and one on one discipleship seen in Greek philosophers and students has greatly influenced the Christian world. One on one discipleship is a great way for a new Christian to grow in the faith as one is led by a mature believer in the faith. The idea of imitation has also greatly influenced the discipleship process among Christians. Paul writes, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”¹⁰ Once again, this chapter has already revealed the importance great church fathers have placed on the imitation of Christ. Therefore, while the

⁸ Bonhoeffer, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 53, 54.

⁹ Kieran Bonner, “*Eros and Ironic Intoxication: Profound Longing, Madness and Discipleship in Plato’s Symposium and in Modern Life*” *History of the Human Sciences* 2013 26. Originally published online 26 March 2013. DOI: 10.1177/0952695113479358. Sagepub.comezproxy.liberty.edu

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 11:1.

intents and desires of Greek philosophers may have been misplaced, the techniques of discipleship they help to create are beneficial when properly and biblically communicated and practiced.

Catholic Philosophy: Monks and Mavericks

In his book “The Christian Mind” author Harry Blamires writes concerning the mind of a Christian. He sets forth man’s lack of concern for people and the value and in some cases obsession placed on technology.

For here is no intention to depreciate the value of mechanical contrivances which minister helpfully to the satisfaction of truly human needs. Our concern is with the abuse of mechanical contrivances by men and women who succumb to their influence and allow their lives to be dominated by them. The car provides one example, television another, radio a third, and the cinema a fourth. Excessive use of these contrivances reduces man’s life to a sub-human level, replacing choice, decision, and purposeful activity by a drugged acceptance, a mindless inertia.¹¹

During the age of the early church, there were those who practiced Catholicism that greatly influenced Christian thought. Two such men were Origen of Alexandria and Athanasius. Alexandria was known as a brilliant theologian who not only faithfully read the scriptures but also changed the process of Christian thought. He was subsequently tortured for his faith but left a legacy concerning the discipleship of a believer. Alexandria believed in the literal, moral and spiritual senses of scripture and in the unity of all three is found the ability to grow in the faith. Therefore, a proper understanding of scripture, how to live according to scripture and focusing on Christ will enable every believer to grow spiritually. His focus was always on the scriptures and a proper application of it. Applying the truth of both the Old Testament and New Testament

¹¹ Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1978), 159.

would avail much in the growth of a Christian.¹² Alexandria's beliefs and influenced can be summed up best by the following statement:

I invite you- and so I conclude- to welcome into your hearts the teaching of this great master of faith. He reminds us with deep delight that in the prayerful reading of scripture and in constant commitment to life, the church is ever renewed and rejuvenated. The Word of God, which never ages and is never exhausted, is a privileged means to this end.¹³

Athanasius of Alexandria served as both a politician and a bishop during the time of the early church. He is considered by many to be one of the most important theologians of his era. His teachings focused on the person of Christ and how that affected the spiritual life of a Christian. Athanasius taught that Jesus was God, the second person of the trinity.¹⁴ The most famous work of Athanasius was his treatise: "De Incarnatione". In the writing, Athanasius speaks to the incarnation of Christ, the divine "logos" that was made flesh for the salvation of mankind. His basic belief was that God is accessible through Christ, His death and resurrection. Athanasius believed that a Christian could draw nearer to Christ through prayer and by practicing the sacraments of the church.¹⁵

Monasticism in the early church focused on the adherence to spiritual disciplines as a prerequisite for spiritual growth. Those who served as monks lived a life of humility, sacrifice, submission and service. They believed in living according to a specific rule. These rules and disciplines were taken from the life and ministry of Christ and applied to their own lives. Simply put, godliness was attained through discipline. Monks in the early church believed if they were

¹² Pope Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church*, 26, 27.

¹³ *Ibid*, 27.

¹⁴ Gordon Mursell, *The Story of Christian Spirituality*, 127.

¹⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church*, 47.

faithful, then others would be faithful and the church would grow and mature.¹⁶ This way of thinking certainly ties back to what Origen believed concerning spiritual growth by applying scripture and spiritual disciplines to the believer's life.

In his writings Origen insisted that the human spirit could ascend to the presence of God only if the turbulent desires of the body were brought into check. He was an ascetical thinker. He saw the body, mind and soul as so intimately related that spiritual progress could only take place if the body was disciplined, and the mind was purified by study.¹⁷

Therefore, the movement of Catholic practices in the early church had a great influence on the ministry of discipleship and the thought life of Christians seeking a close walk with God. The changes brought forth by Alexander and Athanasius was birthed from a desire for transformation among God's people in an effort to revitalize the church.

The Benedictines, Franciscans and Dominicans

Benedict of Nursia lived from 480-550 and was known as "The father of western monks". Benedict was the son of a wealthy landowner who studied in the city of Rome. However, he developed a disdain for urban life and moved to a remote village in an effort to seek a close walk with God. Throughout the years, Benedict found many monasteries and developed his own daily disciplines and practices in an effort to live a spiritual life. The model he put forth for the monasteries and was greatly influenced by the life of Christ and the disciples as well. Benedict focused mostly on obedience and sacrifice in living the life of a monk. Benedict viewed this as a stable and balanced life, one that was pleasing to God.¹⁸

Dietrich Bonhoeffer explains the Benedictine monks and their practices in the following way:

Benedict believed that the path to spiritual maturity came from a balance of study, prayer and work. Thus the Benedictine monks became known for their balanced approach to

¹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 83.

¹⁷ Mursell, *The Story of Christian Spirituality*. 57.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 62, 63.

life. They believed in finding closeness to God in ordinary life involving a daily pattern of meditation, reading and doing regular tasks. They also believed that knowing God entailed more than the religious rituals found in the church and that intimacy with God wasn't reserved for just the elite. The Benedictines melded the secular and the spiritual into one life- the life of God.¹⁹

The church of today is still teaching and practicing these very basic disciplines from many years ago. Spiritual growth takes place when an individual commits to spending time with God in both the scriptures and in prayer. Living for Christ today does require balance in this very busy world. The daily work of the Christian life includes serving God and serving others. All of these disciplines put together forms a great model for spiritual maturity.

Francis of Assisi lived from 1181-1226. He is the most well-known of the medieval saints and was also known to be a poet, mystic and founder of a religious order. By design, his life greatly reflected that of Christ as he chose poverty, cared for the sick and preached the gospel. His writings were few but significant. The order he established contained about 5,000 members and the theme of living as Jesus did, a life of poverty was firmly entrenched in his teachings. The life he lived and the principles he taught were extremely noble but did not come without opposition. Many of his own disciples rebelled against his interpretation and practice of poverty and thus Francis eventually resigned from the order.²⁰ However, the sacrifices Francis made and his desire to give what he had to the poor is a great example for what it means to fulfill the first and second great commandments spoken of in Matthew 22:36-40. Choosing to give rather than receive seems to be missing in the discipleship process today. While discerning to what extent an individual should choose poverty is up for debate, the practice and concern of it is still noble.

Dominic was an Augustinian monk who lived from 1174-1221. He stressed the importance of preaching in an effort to combat false teaching. Therefore, he established an order of preachers

¹⁹ Bonhoeffer, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 84.

²⁰ Mursell, *The Story of Christian Spirituality*, 101-103.

which he sent out into places such as Paris and Spain, areas known to be accepting of heresy. Dominic believed in being strong intellectually and this led not only to the rebuke of heresy but also a more spiritual life.²¹ The number of Dominicans grew rapidly and included one of the greatest philosophers of all-time, Thomas Aquinas. The Dominicans served churches and universities alike. They became very much in demand for preaching, teaching and for spiritual direction. They did much to improve the spiritual life of many in the towns and cities they frequented. Dominic was known to be a great man of prayer and his influence of spiritual life has been greatly experienced and carried forth throughout the centuries. His focus was on learning. Learning the scriptures was the focal point of the discipleship process. It is believed that Dominic and Francis met each other at some point and learned from and adopted certain practices from each other.²² While such a meeting lacks evidence to this point, living as Jesus did and learning the scriptures provides any believer the opportunity to grow in the faith. Men like Benedict, Francis and Dominic along with the Catholic church certainly played a significant part of establishing some basic disciples for discipleship which has carried over even into the twenty-first century.

The Reformation and Beyond

During the Protestant Reformation period, many of the ideas and practices of following Jesus or being a disciple of Christ were revealed through the wisdom of great men of God. One such man was Martin Luther. Luther of course is best known for having written his famous Ninety-five Theses which he nailed to the door of the church in Wittenberg. This written work of Luther was simply a protest against the church for what he viewed as improper behavior and sinful indulgences. The Theses was not received well by the church and Luther was excommunicated.

²¹ Bonhoeffer, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 85, 86.

²² Mursell, *The Story of Christian Spirituality*, 103-105.

²³ However, Luther made it clear that scripture and the message of Christ was the Christian's ultimate authority. He sought to distance the corruptness of the church from the trustworthiness of scripture. Luther taught that man could simply know God by what He revealed of himself through Christ's sacrifice at the cross. A proper understanding of this event coupled with salvation brought about transformation in the life of a new believer. This is where true discipleship begins and is nurtured through the sanctification process. ²⁴

John Calvin has been referred to by many scholars as the most important theologian of the sixteenth century. He focused much of his writings and ministry on the aspect of sanctification in the Christian life. ²⁵ The apostle Paul wrote the church at Philippi encouraging them to "work out their own salvation" which in essence sums up the sanctification process. It carries this idea of growing in one's faith or becoming a faithful follower and disciple of Christ. Calvin wrote a book entitled "The Institutes of Christian Religion" which was published in 1536. The book was very successful and influenced many believers at that time as they sought truth in the storm of theology surrounding them. ²⁶

Calvin taught that the daily sanctification of a believer was centered in the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the convicting work of the Spirit which brings people into a relationship with Christ. It is also the work of the Spirit to lead an individual in prayer and worship of God. He taught that the Spirit also leads every believer to serve God and others and therefore brings that person into an obedient walk with the Lord. The Holy Spirit makes it possible for a believer to imitate Christ in life and grow in the faith whereby this relationship between a believer and Christ is likened to

²³ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity* (New York, N.Y: HarperCollins Publishers, 1985), 22.

²⁴ Gonzalez, *The Story Of Christianity*, 31-32.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 62.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 63.

that of a sacred marriage.²⁷ Calvin taught that the union between man and Christ was important and is enhanced by way of prayer as a believer seeks to grow in the faith. In his book “The Institutes of Christian Religion” Calvin provides four rules concerning prayer and the role prayer plays in becoming a disciple. Christians should enter prayer with confidence, desiring intimacy with God and not an attitude of flippancy. The believer’s prayer should not be thoughtless but one should understand their own insufficiencies. Prayer should be motivated by one’s praise of God, giving Him the glory He deserves with no consideration of self-glory. Finally, a believer should pray with confidence that God will answer according to His will. The discipline of prayer provides opportunity for spiritual growth and the ability to better know and imitate Christ.²⁸

Thomas Cranmer, who lived from 1489-1556 greatly influenced daily Christian living with his book “The Book of Common Prayer” released in 1549. The book was the first of its kind as it provided the ordinary Christian with a daily guide for connecting with God in an intimate and effective manner. The book provided a church calendar complete with special days and events as well as scripture and prayers. Cranmer provided direction in prayer for various specific needs such as rain, peace and harvest. More than anything, the book helped Christians to implement structure and discipline in their daily lives.²⁹ Author Bill Hull expressed the tremendous influence of Cranmer’s work by stating:

I probably can’t overstate the impact of such a book at that time. If they could afford their own copy, families, small bands of believers, and individuals could meditate on the scriptures and spend time in prayer with some guidance. *The Book of Common Prayer* nourished a nation then and still feeds the world today. We might think of it as something like the first study Bible, but far more crucial in its effect. Discipleship is more difficult when disciples can’t have their hands on scripture. So, in spite of his weaknesses,

²⁷ Mursell, *The Story of Christian Spirituality*, 174.

²⁸ Anthony N.S. Lane, *A Reader’s Guide to Calvin’s Institutes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2009), 125,126.

²⁹ Mursell, *The Story of Christian Spirituality*, 248.

Cranmer should be honored for his role in giving people a real shot at personal spirituality.³⁰

John Wesley lived from 1703-1791 and is considered to be possibly the greatest influence in developing Christian discipleship. Wesley was an Anglican pastor best known as the founder of Methodism. Wesley focused his studies to a great extent on the holiness of God and the ability for believers to achieve holiness. This of course speaks to living a discipline life as a follower of Christ. While Wesley played an important role in the First Great Awakening and in the forming of effective laity, he also established something called “The Holy Club”. This ministry greatly resembles what the church refers to today as “small group ministry”. It was a ministry began by Wesley only after he witnessed the success of his mother’s Bible study in the home which greatly enhanced church attendance. “The Holy Club” meetings included Bible reading, sharing and the encouragement of one to another. The group focused on imitating Christ, evangelism and service to those less fortunate.³¹ These disciplines leads one to a life of holiness and the ideas and practices of Wesley are still affecting the church today as Christians seek to grow in their faith and imitate Christ.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dietrich Bonhoeffer lived from 1906-1945 and grew up in Berlin, Germany. He was a follower of Karl Barth and was considered one of the great theological minds of our time. He earned a Doctor of Theology at the age of twenty-one and gained significant fame as an author with the book “The Cost of Discipleship”. He also wrote “Life Together” which also brought him great acclaim in his effort to proclaim the need for biblical discipleship in the church. “The Cost of Discipleship” was birthed from Bonhoeffer’s study of the Sermon on the Mount in which

³⁰ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 99.

³¹ *Ibid*, 103.

Jesus very clearly speaks to the commitment He requires of those who seek to follow Him. The study of this passage changed Bonhoeffer's life and motivated him to give his life to the subject of discipleship.³² A study of the Sermon on the Mount will be addressed in the next section of this project as this writer will reveal the costs of following Jesus stated in His own words. In this section, some of the thoughts and views expressed by Bonhoeffer will also be included.

However, Bonhoeffer greatly influenced the discipleship process with his work "Life Together". The book speaks specifically about how the church should function as a community of believers. Bonhoeffer believed that the church needed to be the church Jesus designed it to be. The church should grow in holiness and faithfulness as each person grows in their relationship with Christ. The process of justification and sanctification are gifts given by God and move a believer and a group of believers (the church) into a faithful, loving community desiring to live for Christ. Bonhoeffer believed Christians and the depth of their discipleship was determined by their spiritual fruit. The church was also to be held to this standard. He believed that living for Christ daily, according to scripture, would allow for improved character, integrity and spiritual growth. Bonhoeffer taught that the church was to grow together in this manner and therefore be a resemblance of the Acts 2 church.³³ Bonhoeffer greatly influenced the ministry of discipleship before his death in 1945 but he continues to influence the process even today. Simply put, he believed that discipleship meant reading and living the Sermon on the Mount for that would constitute a Christianity including Christ. Discipleship in Bonhoeffer's thinking was simply a willingness to forsake all to follow Jesus.³⁴

³² Mursell, *The Story of Christian Spirituality*, 329.

³³ Joseph McGarry, Conformed to Christ: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Christian Formation. *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* (Fall 2012) 5.2, 226. Retrieved from Academic One File.

³⁴ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 107.

The Ministry of Christ

The earthly ministry of Christ begins with the calling of twelve men as documented in the Gospels. These twelve men were chosen specifically by Jesus to follow Him, learn from Him and carry on the ministry after His death and resurrection. Jesus very clearly asked these men to “follow Him”. In chapter one of this project, much detail is given as to what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Therefore, to avoid repetition, this writer will now focus on the disciple’s way of life under the authority of Christ. The life of a disciple is one of service, sacrifice and obedience to the commands of Christ. Just as the early disciples walked away from vocations and family to follow Christ, believer’s today must also be willing to do the same.³⁵

In Matthew chapter 5, Jesus delivers a message known as “The Sermon on the Mount”. In the biblical text, the message is contained in three chapters in the Book of Matthew. Although a multitude of people heard the message as many followed Jesus for the sake of His miracles, the message was directed to His disciples. Jesus longed to instruct those who had made a commitment to Him. This message was for those who had embraced the gospel and responded to the call of discipleship. Jesus desired His disciples to have a proper understanding of the life they would live as they followed Him. As for the others who simply sought after Jesus for what He could do or perform for them, there was no commitment or sacrifice on their part. They were not a part of the community of true disciples and therefore, this message was not communicated for their benefit.³⁶

Jesus not only exemplifies what He preaches in The Sermon on the Mount, but the message is designed to be used as a measuring stick for His disciples then and for His disciples now. While many may view what Jesus commands in this message as a bunch of do’s and don’ts, what Jesus

³⁵ Edward Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship* (London, SCM Press LTD, 1960), 13.

³⁶ Frank Matera, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 3.

truly desires is for all disciples to be totally devoted to Him. In the sermon, Jesus provides a roadmap for how to live for God as He also lived for His Father in heaven. Jesus longed for His disciples to imitate Him as they lived a life of faith and the message He speaks reveals the life He lived in obedience to His Father. For those who had committed to truly follow Christ, The Sermon on the Mount provided instructions for following Him and fulfilling His will.³⁷

Author Daniel Doriani further explains the purpose of the message spoken in Matthew 5-7:

We see, therefore, that the Sermon on the Mount is the word of King Jesus to his people. But Jesus' main goal in the sermon is not to declare laws, even laws for disciples. Above all, he describes the disciples' way of life under his authority. With about fifty imperatives in roughly one hundred sentences, we certainly hear Jesus' commands. Since the King has arrived and begun to reign, Jesus' commands explain how disciples ought to live under his authority.³⁸

Therefore, the life of a disciple as Jesus conveys it in this message is more descriptive in nature than it is commanded. In chapter five He speaks of the blessings of the kingdom and the nature of discipleship. He also speaks of righteousness in fulfilling the Law. In chapter six He speaks of prayer, fasting and devotion to God. Finally, in chapter seven He speaks of two destinations for eternity, the danger of false prophets and He compares true disciples to a builder.³⁹

Jesus begins the sermon by stating that true disciples are blessed. He states that disciples should be poor in spirit, meek, thirst for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peaceful and be willing to endure persecution. These attributes describe the life of a disciple who is truly committed and surrendered to Christ. Such a person is blessed because not only does a disciple share in the sufferings of Christ but Jesus says, "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is

³⁷ Matera, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 4, 5.

³⁸ Daniel M. Doriani, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Character of a Disciple* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2006), 8.

³⁹ Matera, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 13.

your reward in heaven.”⁴⁰ However, a reward in heaven is not the only blessing one receives for following Christ. When an individual pursues godliness and desires to imitate Christ, this mindset followed by proper actions brings about change in one’s life. Change is then viewed by way of a transformation where a person becomes all the attributes Jesus speaks of and in essence takes on the character of Christ.⁴¹

Jesus then refers to a disciple as “salt and light”. A disciple who truly follows Christ is an example to the world of God’s goodness, power and faithfulness. The world should see in the believer a peace and joy that can only come from God. Jesus goes on to discuss the path of righteousness for a disciple. This includes the sin of anger, unforgiveness, adultery of the heart or lust, theft, immorality, bearing false witness, humility, sacrifice, and love of others, even love for enemies. The disciple of Christ must clearly be willing to set aside any pride that exists in an effort to practice what Jesus has stated in Matthew five. This type of lifestyle is a call to righteousness and holiness. This is what separates the people of God from the people of the world. If a person lives a life of righteousness, then they become salt and light to the world. Dietrich Bonhoeffer described such a person as peculiar and extraordinary. It is a person who steps beyond normal circumstances to the type of righteousness Christ has called all believers to practice. Bonhoeffer believes when a Christian steps beyond the world and its standards, one actually gains victory over the world.⁴²

In Matthew 6, Jesus addresses the importance of prayer, fasting and devotion to God. He even provides a model prayer for the disciples to follow. He speaks of desiring the will of God above any other will. He speaks of forgiveness and overcoming temptations. He encourages his

⁴⁰ Matthew 5:12.

⁴¹ Doriani, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Character of a Disciple*, 24.

⁴² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 144.

disciples to focus on eternal things and not earthly things. He stresses the point that God is trustworthy and He can provide all one's needs and what is important for the disciple of Christ is to simply seek God first in every area of life and He will provide and bless. Once again we see the life Jesus is calling His disciples to under His authority. It is a life of devotion, sacrifice, surrender and faithfulness to God regardless of situations and circumstances. Jesus speaks specifically of how the world can distract a person from living as a true disciple. However, living for God should bring one such great peace and security that the temptations to live for the world can be overcome and defeated.⁴³

In Matthew 7, Jesus speaks concerning the sin of hypocrisy as one might judge another. He stresses the importance of reaching out to people in love instead of in criticism. He mentions how narrow the gate is to heaven and that many will fail to find it. He also speaks of false prophets and the many people they will lead away from God. Jesus also shares a very scary passage in which He reveals the damage done by false prophets. Jesus said;

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name and done many wonders in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'⁴⁴

Jesus paints a picture of many people who will believe of themselves to be a follower or a disciple of Christ but they never really committed or surrendered to the life Jesus calls one to live. It is a life Jesus reveals in The Sermon of the Mount with great clarity and understanding. A true disciple of Christ is not simply someone who claims to love Jesus or even know Jesus. The call of the first disciples was a call to abandon the life they once knew and to live a different life, one filled with sacrifice, surrender, persecution and humility. As Jesus closed the message in

⁴³ Doriani, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Character of a Disciple*, `181.

⁴⁴ Matthew 7:21-23.

Matthew 7, He does so by encouraging people to be doers of the word and not hearers only. Heeding this command would duly separate out those who have clearly found the narrow gate and those who have not. In response to the message, Jesus called for action. “The only thing which exists besides action is inaction. There is no such thing as intending to act and not doing it. Those who treat the word of Jesus any other way except by acting on it assert that Jesus is wrong; they say no to the Sermon on the Mount; they do not do his word.”⁴⁵

Discipleship as Jesus taught it was not exactly received well by everyone in those days. The Pharisees were students of the Law and studied intently the very words of Jesus. However, they had a tendency to carry things too far in an effort to be religious. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees time and time again for their misguided thoughts and behavior and even used them as an example of what a disciple is not. In “The Sermon on the Mount” Jesus said, “Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” The legalism and hypocrisy of the Pharisees was not to be envied or imitated. The Pharisees held to the letter of the Law without consideration of God’s grace. They also believed that true disciples were people who were educated and well learned. What they represented was not the kind of discipleship Jesus intended or exemplified.⁴⁶

There were other groups of disciples in Jesus’ day that possessed their own style and practice of discipleship. The disciples of John the Baptist were focused on repentance and seeking God. They desired to be servants and were willing to sacrifice even to the point of living in the desert. The group known as the Essenes was considered separatists who stood opposed to liberalism. Required admittance into the group included a two year period of gaining knowledge and being tested on the Torah. Then there was a political group known as Zealots who were not as well

⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 182.

⁴⁶ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 60.

versed in the Torah as they were in showing physical power. They were more of a military group than they were a soul-saving group of disciples. Discipleship in Jesus' day was basically viewed as a commitment made by an individual to a specific leader for a specific cause.⁴⁷ However, true discipleship, biblically speaking is only attained when a person answers the call of Christ to follow Him and all that following entails. Jesus has set the standard for following and the standard cannot be altered and still be considered biblical discipleship.

First Century

Discipleship in the first century can be described with five characteristics as seen in the church revealed in the Book of Acts. These characteristics are as follows: a decision to follow a teacher, memorizing the teacher's words, learning the teacher's way of ministry, imitating the teacher's life and ministry and raising up other disciples. These are the characteristics Jesus used to train His followers and a call to these same commitments today is still warranted.⁴⁸ Disciples such as Peter, James and John seemed to understand that Jesus had called them to reach people with the gospel and train them to live as they lived. As one looks at the early church described in Acts chapter 2, many of the attributes Jesus speaks of in "The Sermon on the Mount are evident. Luke described the church in this manner:

They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily in one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 60, 61.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 63, 64.

⁴⁹ Acts 2:42-47.

This passage provides evidence of spiritual disciplines being practiced in the early church. Disciplines such as continuing in the scriptures, prayer, fellowship, service, sacrifice, giving, thanksgiving and worship were daily practiced among the Acts believers. The church was in such unity and obedience to God that He was blessing it daily as many were being saved. Luke writes in Acts chapter 9, “The churches throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.”⁵⁰ Therefore, the church was walking with a purpose. The Greek word used here for “walking” is the word *poreuomena*. It is the same word Jesus used in the Great Commission when He instructed the church to “Go therefore and make disciples.” The church was busy about the work of training others to follow Christ, they were making disciples. These disciples were growing through the teaching of the scriptures and through their obedience to the scriptures. The church was growing and disciples were increasing because the disciplines of the church were being practiced in daily life.⁵¹

Chapter Summary

The process of discipleship has changed throughout the centuries as many great men of God have focused on various different aspects of spiritual disciplines. The views and differences presented by this writer from early church fathers, philosophers, the Catholic Church, various different groups, the Reformation period and even into the twentieth century have provided the reader with an abundance of information to digest. Much of what has been communicated in this project and by these men is very useful as one seeks to become a true disciple of Christ. However, the example Jesus has set before the church is the model every believer should seek to follow.

⁵⁰ Acts 9:31.

⁵¹ C.E. Autrey, *Evangelism in the Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1964), 16, 17.

While the others have historically influenced discipleship and led many people to follow Christ, the words of Jesus and His example are unequaled by any mere man. The path to discipleship is found in one's ability to imitate Christ and in fulfilling His command to make more disciples. He has not only given the church this responsibility, but it should be viewed as a privilege. Jesus said; "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."⁵² The keys Jesus has given the believer is access into kingdom living. It is the ability to live as a faithful follower and disciple of Christ. It allows every believer to practice spiritual disciplines which transforms an individual into a disciple of Christ. The keys also allow the disciple of Christ an opportunity and the ability to share the gospel message and make other disciples to the glory of God. Kingdom living and truly following Christ brings not only an abundant life on earth but also carries significant eternal blessings and reward.

⁵² Matthew 16:19.

CHAPTER THREE
THEOLOGY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Introduction

The theological part of discipleship is crucial if one seeks to truly understand how and why discipleship came to be. Spiritually and biblically speaking, discipleship is centered on a God who forsook the glory of heaven and came to earth as a Man to accomplish what man could not accomplish. The Bible says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”¹ God came to earth in the person of Christ to redeem the world and restore mankind to himself. Therefore, Jesus is both a Redeemer and Restorer as He paid the penalty for sin and provided a way to God through His substitutionary death at the cross. What Jesus accomplished through His death, burial, resurrection and ascension into heaven fulfilled Old Testament prophecy concerning the coming Messiah. What theology provides for the believer is a definition of Christology, an explanation of who Jesus is, what He accomplished and what it really means to follow Him. Theology can be defined as the study of God’s essential being, His influence on and His relationship to the universe as seen in scripture.² Therefore, it is through that influence and relationship whereby a believer seeks to become a disciple of Christ. This chapter will shed some light on these theological issues concerning Christ and discipleship.

Christ: Redeemer and Restorer

All throughout biblical history, the constant theme of God redeeming His people is present. The word “redeem” means to buy back or to make acceptable. It carries the idea of liberating a

¹ John 1:14.

² Elmer Towns, *Theology for Today* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2002), 7.

slave.³ The people of God, the Jews, the Israelite people and those who have sought after God through the centuries have been redeemed by the mighty hand of God. Redemption is made possible only through the blood of Jesus Christ and the penalty He paid at the cross. The penalty Jesus paid is best seen in what the prophet Isaiah reveals in the book which bears his name: “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.”⁴ Isaiah clearly paints the picture of the coming Messiah who would be crucified for the sins of the world. Through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, mankind would have the opportunity to be purchased by the blood of Jesus and presented acceptable before God.

Isaiah refers to Jesus as the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 as he speaks to His humble birth, eventual rejection, substitutionary death, wrongful execution, vindication and eternal rewards. Jesus came not to be served but to be a servant by redeeming the world from their sin. In fact the scriptures support this idea of Jesus being a servant; “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”⁵ Historically speaking, Isaiah writes in light of the Babylonian exile of God’s people. God allowed the nation of Israel to suffer as a result of their sin and unfaithfulness. Throughout time, God delivered His people in His time according to His will. However, the prophet Isaiah speaks in broader terms in reference to Jesus as the Redeemer of the world. Jonathan Lunde writes:

But because of his righteous life, his undeserved suffering functions as the curse remover for a nation. Isaiah has made it clear throughout his prophecy that the nation goes into exile because of its sin. Thus, the exile is the covenantal curse. Accordingly, when Isaiah

³ Jonathan Lunde, *Following Jesus: The Servant King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 244.

⁴ Isaiah 53:5.

⁵ Mark 10:45.

describes the Servant as taking up our pain and bearing our suffering, he is bearing the nation's curse.⁶

Therefore, where sin had left mankind stained and hopeless before God, through the death and resurrection of Christ, man was given the opportunity to be “bought” and “made acceptable” in God's sight. Jesus, the suffering servant, redeemed mankind through His sacrifice at the cross as a provision for sin. The apostle Paul wrote “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree).”⁷ Paul also wrote “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”⁸ Being a disciple of Christ begins with the suffering servant coming to earth, living a sinless life and laying down that life for the sins of mankind. Jesus is the redeemer of men's souls. “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence.”⁹

Jesus is not only a servant and a redeemer of men's souls but He also functions as one who restores men and entire nations. As seen already in the Book of Isaiah, God was busy redeeming His people from their sin even allowing them to face judgment for their lack of faithfulness and disobedience. Again we see a contrast between what was taking place with the Nation of Israel and what Jesus would accomplish through His life and death. In the Old Testament, God restored His people to their land and to their inhabitants and of course to himself. In the New Testament, Jesus restored people by the grace of God to the care of God. The restoration Jesus provided was both spiritual and physical. The relationship Adam and Eve once enjoyed in the Garden of Eden

⁶ Lunde, *Following Jesus: The Servant King*, 227.

⁷ Galatians 3:13.

⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:21.

⁹ Ephesians 1:7-8.

was taken away by the influence of sin. What God now offers through His Son is restoration through the forgiveness of sins. This of course is the greatest restoration an individual can experience. It is the kind of restoration which will last for all of eternity and the kind which will eventually bring a believer into the very presence of God.

However, in His earthly ministry, Jesus offered physical restoration as well. Once again, Isaiah prophesied about what the Messiah would accomplish through His restoration power.

Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, 'Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you.' Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing.¹⁰

In His earthly ministry, Jesus would not only restore people spiritually but He would also restore people physically. Through His healing ministry, the people who witnessed His miracles were also extended the invitation to respond to Him in faith. Therefore, through spiritual and physical healing, people were not only restored, but transformed by the power of God.¹¹

Through the grace Jesus offers, there is a sense of irony in how God has chosen to bring about redemption and restoration to mankind. Jesus chose and invested in twelve men to be His disciples. It is no coincidence that Jesus chose the same number as the tribes which made up an entire nation. Once again we see the contrast of redeeming a nation of people and the eventual drawing of people from all parts of the earth.¹² Therefore, what the prophet Isaiah provides for us in our understanding of the Nation of Israel and their redemption was simply a precursor to what was yet to come in Jesus' day and the redemption and restoration still offered today.

¹⁰ Isaiah 35:3-6.

¹¹ Lunde, *Following Jesus: The Servant King*, 255.

¹² *Ibid*, 244.

So why is determining the suffering servant (Jesus) as a redeemer and restorer of men important to the ministry of discipleship? The answer is actually quite simple: Jesus had a mission and those who seek to live for Him are called to participate in that mission. The mission is better known as “The Great Commission” whereby Jesus has instructed His followers to make disciples of all people. This is a call to share the gospel and lead people to a saving knowledge in Christ. It is a call to conversion and transformation. Simon Chan explains,

Conversion is nothing less than a miracle of new birth. Because the sinner is totally helpless without the grace of God, each conversion is an exaltation of divine grace. Grace is experienced not just as a power at work in the soul but as a gift that transforms a relationship of hostility and alienation into one of reconciliation and peace.¹³

Paul said to Timothy, “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and in love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit which dwells in you.”¹⁴ Paul was encouraging Timothy to reproduce character in others. It was a call to invest in others and to pass the message of the gospel along.¹⁵ It is a call for those who have been invited, to invite others. It is a call for those who have been healed to heal others. It is a call for those who have been restored to restore others. It is a call for those who have been transformed to transform others. By the grace of God, all believers are included in the mission of God to make disciples. Lunde writes, “This, then, should remind us always of the role we have in the world-that of responding in the empowerment of this grace to pursue others who yet need to come, regardless of their ethnicity, social standing, or moral purity.”¹⁶

Christ: The Messiah

¹³ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1998), 61.

¹⁴ 2 Timothy 1:13-14.

¹⁵ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 287, 288.

¹⁶ Lunde, *Following Jesus: The Servant King*, 249.

It was Job who prophesied of the Redeemer to come when he said, “I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.”¹⁷ In an effort to understand the theological basis for discipleship, this project with the help of scripture has revealed Jesus Christ as the “suffering servant” who not only restored mankind but redeemed him as well. Therefore, Christ is seen as the deliverer in the New Testament of what was prophesied in the Old Testament. His fulfillment of these prophecies creates an acceptance and hopefully a willingness by every believer to experience discipleship in an effort to become like Christ.

The historical books of the Old Testament describe the course of what happened between God and his people, from the deliverance at the beginning to the collapse of the nation and the kingdom. When asking to what extent Jesus Christ can be seen as the goal or fulfillment of this history, one must begin with the most elementary principles.¹⁸

The most elementary principle as seen in the Old Testament is the Messiah who came to earth in the person of Christ to deliver mankind from sin. The coming of the Messiah, spoken of all throughout the Old Testament plays a vital role in establishing man’s need for salvation and subsequent discipleship.

In Genesis 3, the Bible makes clear that man through his sin was now under condemnation. Adam and Eve understood this condemnation as they sought to hide from God the sin of disobedience. God communicated to Adam and Eve that the penalty for sin was death, both physical and spiritual. Therefore salvation and a Savior, one who could deliver mankind was greatly needed. In Genesis 3:15 God pronounces judgment on Adam and Eve and He promised that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent. The seed of the woman speaks

¹⁷ Job 19:25.

¹⁸ Claus Westermann, *The Old Testament and Jesus Christ* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing, 1968), 38.

to the prophecy concerning the birth of Christ.¹⁹ In fact, the apostle Paul confirmed this in his letter to the Galatians. Paul wrote, “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.”²⁰ God provided a way for salvation. God provided a way for man to be delivered from sin. God provided a way for those who come to Christ, to also have the opportunity to follow Christ.

In an effort to understand theologically how Jesus, prophecy and discipleship tie together, it is important to understand the term “Messiah.” The word “Messiah” is used thirty-nine times in the Old Testament and is translated “anointed.” In the Greek, “Messiah” is translated *christos*, which was the name designated for Jesus in the New Testament. While many men and women throughout time were given positions of power and considered to be anointed ones, the anointing of Jesus was greater and more significant.²¹ The psalmist writes of Christ, “Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.”²² Jesus was anointed for a much greater and more eternal work than anyone else regardless of position, time or culture. The people of God would eventually become the church of God and Jesus was the means by which the church would not only be founded but established. The deliverance spoken of in the Old Testament is confirmed in the New Testament through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The promised Messiah and deliverance is seen in God’s destruction of the world by flood. Due to the sinfulness of man, God saw fit to call upon Noah to preserve the “Seed” spoken of in Genesis 3 by building an ark for survival as the judgment of God fell upon the earth. God could

¹⁹ John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1969), 57.

²⁰ Galatians 4:4.

²¹ Walter Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 16, 17.

²² Psalm 45:7.

have destroyed all of mankind but true to His Word, God protected a remnant that would lead to the coming of the Messiah. Therefore, Noah and his family were protected from God's judgment and the Messiah was predicted to come through the line of Shem, one of Noah's sons. Scripture reveals that the God of Shem would indeed dwell in the tents of Shem.²³ The fulfilment of this prophecy is spoken of by John in the gospel book which bears his name, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."²⁴

The Abrahamic Covenant also serves as significant evidence for the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy through the life of Christ. Abraham was given a divine promise on at least six occasions in which God promised to fulfill a plan of blessing for all the families of the earth. In the short term, Abraham and his obedience would be the means of that blessing, but in the long run, the Messiah would ultimately fulfill the prophecy. Abraham's sons Isaac and Jacob were also a part of the divine promise and served as channels of blessing.²⁵ The fact that Abraham's offspring, or "seed" would be blessed serves as the emphasis to the promises God made to Abraham. Walter Kaiser writes, "The five-fold emphasis on the statement 'through you/your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed' pointed to the heart of the gospel as well as to the missions. Rather than the blessing being a work of the patriarchs, it would come from God as a gift."²⁶

The Old Testament describes a nation of people who were longing for the coming Messiah. Prophecy revealed through the Eden experience, the Pentateuch, the great flood and the

²³ Genesis 9:27.

²⁴ John 1:14.

²⁵ Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 46.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 47.

Abrahamic Covenant are far from the enormous amount of evidence the Old Testament provides concerning the Messiah. In fact a common thread regarding the coming Messiah winds its way all throughout the Old Testament, the books included therein and many of the important figures in Old Testament history. The Book of Psalms speaks specifically to the Messiah, His character and experiences. For example, Psalm 110 and Psalm 2 refer to the Messiah as a conquering King. Psalm 68 and Psalm 72 reveals His future triumph over evil and His messianic reign. However, remembering that the Messiah is a suffering servant, the psalmist speaks of the rejection He would experience in Psalm 118. Furthermore, Psalm 69 and 109 reveal the betrayal of men and Psalm 16 and Psalm 22 speaks to His death and resurrection.

In the days of Joel, the Messiah is referred to as a teacher. In the days of Hosea, He is referred to as the “Second David.” He would be the one from David’s line who would be enthroned as King with a kingdom like no other.²⁷ The Messiah is also seen in the following Old Testament books: Amos (9:11-15) Micah (2:12-13, 5:1-4) 1 Samuel (2:1-10, 2:27-36) 2 Samuel (7:13) Jeremiah (23:5-6, 30:9, 33:14-26) Ezekiel (17:22-24, 21:25-27, 34:23-31, 37:15-28) Daniel (7:13-14, 9:24-27) Haggai (2:6-9, 2:21-23) Zechariah (3:8-10, 6:9-15, 9:9-10, 10:4, 11:4-14, 12:10, 13:7) and Malachi (3:1, 4:2).

However, it is in Isaiah that the Messiah is best revealed and understood to be Servant, Redeemer, Restorer and Deliverer. As stated previously in this chapter, the great act of suffering endured by Christ is the work of the Messiah. However, the gifts provided by Christ through His sacrifice and death are revealed in Isaiah 55. This passage speaks to the abundant life available to all men who claim the name of Christ. In the text, Isaiah records the words of the Lord, “Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting

²⁷ Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 141, 142.

covenant with you-the sure mercies of David.”²⁸ The provisions of this “eternal covenant” are rich in mercy and eternal. The covenant centers on what God promised David in 2 Samuel 7:16. God offered David a throne, a dynasty and a kingdom.²⁹ What God offers through Christ today is also eternal and rich in mercy.

Regarding prophecy in the Old Testament, John Walvoord writes, “The remarkable aspect of the predictions, however, is the recurring testimony to His (Christ) deity.”³⁰ Isaiah speaks of how the Messiah would be born of a virgin (7:14), He would be worthy of the title “Immanuel” meaning “God with us” and that He would suffer and die for the sins of mankind (53:3-10). Through the fulfillment of this prophecy, Jesus provides all of mankind with the opportunity for a significant gift of the faith. Isaiah reveals this gift as the very presence of the Messiah. “Indeed I have given him as a witness to the people, a leader and commander for the people.”³¹ Jesus offers all men the opportunity to be delivered from sin. People who lived in a day and time before Christ walked the earth sought a Messiah to deliver them. People today who are without Christ also need to be delivered from sin so that they might enjoy the gifts of the faith. The presence of Christ and the opportunity to live for Him and become more like Him are indeed gifts of the faith. The facts scripturally speaking are very clear regarding Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Walvoord writes,

Taken as a whole, the Old Testament provides a remarkable picture of the coming Messiah. He is to be preceded by a messenger, to be a Savior and Deliverer, to execute the offices of Prophet, Priest and King, to be a cornerstone and foundation, to fulfill the expectation of an obedient Servant of Jehovah who would redeem His people, and is to

²⁸ Isaiah 55:3.

²⁹ Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 182.

³⁰ Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, 87.

³¹ Isaiah 53:4.

perform good and miraculous works. His works and teachings were to manifest the power of the Spirit of Jehovah.”³²

The Christology of Christ

The doctrine of Christ and understanding the deity of Christ is an important aspect of determining a theological basis for discipleship. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. He claimed to be the very Son of God and the Savior of the world. However claims need to be supported by scripture and evidence. Author Alan Spence defines Christology in this way,

Christology is a distinct discipline from one which seeks to show why Jesus is indeed worthy of the status that the church ascribes to him. Its primary concern is not to persuade the agnostic that he is the promised Messiah or to marshal evidence in support of his divinity for those who are yet to be convinced. It has to do, rather, with making sense of what is already there, that is, the faith and practice of the believing community.³³

The proof of Christ’s deity and divine attributes not only validates His claim to be the Son of God but it also reveals that He alone is worthy of being followed in a disciple-like manner. Jesus Christ was God in the flesh, the second person of the Trinity and equal with God in nature. Therefore, satisfying any questions regarding His claims is important in establishing a basis for imitating Him and becoming a disciple of Christ.

There are eight aspects to the claims Jesus made regarding His deity. There are the “I AM” statements found in the Gospel of John. Jesus claimed to be “The Way, the Truth and the Life”, “The Light of the World”, “The Bread of Life”, “The Resurrection”, “The Door”, “The Good Shepherd” and “The Vine.” Each of these speaks to the manner in which Jesus relates to the world and mankind. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament as duly noted earlier in this chapter. Jesus identifies himself as a part of the Trinity with the Father and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Jesus claims to be one with the Father (John 10:30). Jesus also

³² Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, 91.

³³ Alan Spence, *Christology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: T&T Clark Publishers, 2008), 6, 7.

claimed the ability to forgive sins (Mark 2:5-7) and He allowed people to worship Him (Matthew 14:33). Jesus claimed to possess the attributes of omnipresence (John 3:13), omniscience (Matthew 28:18) and omnipotence, that even nature would obey Him (Mark 4:39). Finally, Jesus claimed to have a special relationship to God by referring to Him as Father.³⁴ Each of these claims and the scripture which supports them establishes a foundation by which one can confidently project that Jesus is indeed worthy of praise, honor and glory. He is worthy of being imitated and followed by those who call themselves disciples.

The Christology of Christ and the task of proving His worth include many different aspects. This project could not possibly expand on all of them but simply seeks to mention a few more and then speak specifically regarding Christophanies. There are many names or titles that have been given to Christ: Jehovah, Master, King of Israel, Only Begotten Son, Rabbi, Lamb of God, Son of God, Lord, the Word and of course, Messiah. Elmer Towns states that these many names and titles simply reveal the character of Christ and His various works.³⁵ The claims of Christ are also validated by His birth, life, death and resurrection, as well as by the multitudes of people who witnessed these events. The miracles Jesus performed and the character and integrity with which He lived His life and eventually died serves as further proof of His deity.

However, Christology seeks to explain the person of Christ as it relates to the redemption of fallen man. Therefore, to detach Jesus from the story of creation as if He didn't exist at the time would be a grave mistake.³⁶ John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God."³⁷ Jesus was not only

³⁴ Towns, *Theology for Today*, 155, 156.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 160.

³⁶ Spence, *Christology: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 7.

³⁷ John 1:1-2.

spoken of as the Messiah in the Old Testament, but He actually appeared to man. Such an event is referred to as a Christophany, a visible, bodily manifestation of God before the incarnation of Christ.³⁸ The most common appearance of Christ in the Old Testament was as an angel of the Lord. He appeared in such a manner to Hagar in Genesis 16 and to Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22. He also appeared to Moses in the burning bush story found in Exodus 3 and to Gideon in Judges 6. He also wrestled with Jacob and appeared in a fiery furnace to save Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Therefore, the appearances of Christ, before His incarnation speaks highly of the place He was given by the Father theological speaking.³⁹ The very One who claimed to be God demonstrated God-like character in His life and ministry. The attributes of holiness and love are clearly seen in the person of Christ. His deity provides the evidence one needs to prove His claims and worthiness of being followed.

The Person of Christ

As defined earlier in this project, a disciple is one who adopts the lifestyle of his master. The master for all believers seeking to be a disciple is of course Christ. He is the One to be imitated. However, imitation in this case is not an easy task to accomplish. Jesus was without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). His character and attributes were many and everything He did was done perfectly and purposefully. In reality, Jesus acted like God because He was God in the flesh. Jesus proclaimed the will of God by standing in the place of God. In spite of His own perfection, He was referred to as a person who welcomes sinners and eats with them (Luke 15:2). He also

³⁸ Towns, *Theology for Today*, 173.

³⁹ Spence, *Christology: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 131.

told parables regarding the love God had for the lost and sinful and then Jesus revealed that same love and compassion for people in His own ministry.⁴⁰

He is a Savior worthy of being imitated in spite of the fact that He chose to become a man. The apostle Paul speaks of Jesus as one who made himself of no reputation but took the form of a bondservant and came in the likeness of men.⁴¹ The Greek term “*kenosis*” describes this transformation of God becoming a man. It means that He “emptied himself” of His deity. He willingly restricted His use of the power available to Him so that He might live among men and their limitations.⁴² Jesus himself faced trials and temptations just as man does. However, the character with which He responded is worthy of imitation. For example, when Jesus was tempted by the devil in Matthew 4, He responded by pointing to the Word of God, standing on the truth and denying the natural for the supernatural. Jesus didn’t sacrifice spiritual things for temporary things. He didn’t give in to the temptation of pride or ego but instead humbled Himself before His Father and worshipped Him alone.⁴³

The one over-arching, transformational theme to the character and person of Christ is love. Jesus said that the world will know His disciples by the way they love other people (John 13:34-35). Loving people as Jesus loved is the centerpiece of becoming like Christ. Everything else, all the other attributes are revealed through love. Love of others leads to compassion, sacrifice, humility and a willingness to serve.⁴⁴ Jesus showed compassion many times by healing the sick, raising the dead and saving the lost. He sacrificed greatly by simply coming to earth but

⁴⁰ Hans Schwarz, *Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 112.

⁴¹ Philippians 2:7.

⁴² Towns, *Theology for Today*, 191, 192.

⁴³ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 136, 137.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 140, 141.

eventually by dying on a cross. He showed humility by living as a man, turning the other cheek and even washing the disciple's feet (John 13). And Jesus came not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).

In his book "Beautiful Outlaw" author John Eldredge describes the person of Christ by applying several attributes to His life as seen in scripture. Eldredge states that Jesus was fierce, generous, honest, cunning, humble, true, loving, free, beautiful and even playful. Jesus was playful in the way He dealt with the disciples in John 21. Jesus appears to them on the shore after His resurrection and while they are fishing. He hides His identity at first and seems a bit playful in His dialogue with them.⁴⁵ He was fierce in the way He emptied the temple in John 2 and in the way He handled the Pharisees from time to time.⁴⁶ His generosity is seen in the miracle at the wedding in Cana and in a more personal way by the many people He healed. He was honest to the point of even being disruptive at times. This is clearly revealed in the story of Martha and Mary found in Luke 10 where Martha was distracted with all the preparations of having Jesus in her home while Mary simply wanted to sit and worship Him. Jesus sided with Mary and softly rebuked Martha.⁴⁷

Jesus was also free of religious and social prejudice. He frequently ate with sinners and He never placed the Sabbath in a higher regard than the needs of people. However, the freedom Jesus lived in is especially seen in John 4 when He meets the Samaritan woman at the well. In that day, Jews despised Samaritans and a rabbi would have never spoken with a woman of her background and character. She was not only a Samaritan but she was sexually loose. Jesus set all

⁴⁵ John Eldredge, *Beautiful Outlaw* (New York, NY: Faith Words Publisher, 2011), 5.

⁴⁶ Eldredge, *Beautiful Outlaw*, 35.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 69.

that aside so that He could minister to her.⁴⁸ It seems difficult to think of Jesus as cunning but calculating may be a better term to describe Him. Jesus was aware of what the Father had called Him to accomplish and He could ill afford to get caught up in the plans of people. He went toe to toe with the devil in the desert and outwitted him. The multitudes tried to make Him a political king and take Him by force and even attempted to throw Him off a cliff but He avoided all of that in an effort to fulfill the will of His Father. Jesus was very cunning in the way He spoke with the Pharisees and others who sought to discredit Him. However, Eldredge sees the cunning and calculated work of God in theology as well. He writes, “Setting eternity in our hearts was cunning, so that every last one of us would be haunted all our days with unmet longings that would cause us to seek the only Fountain that can quench our thirst.”⁴⁹

Jesus is also described as faithful and true (Revelation 19:11). Jesus was and is who He claims to be. He was true to himself and true to fulfill all the Father had for Him. He is a beautiful Savior in all His attributes and all His perfection. He is love in action both as He walked the earth and even now as He calls sinners unto himself.⁵⁰ He lived a life of righteousness unlike anyone else and while many failed to understand His ways, the life He lived spoke loudly of the attributes He possessed. Jesus simply pursued sinful man. “Jesus believed sin was far less contagious than love, mercy and justice. Rather than avoid sin and sinners, he cast himself into the mix. In this, Jesus manifests his righteousness, as one who pursues the ways of God in a world that does otherwise.”⁵¹ Jesus is indeed worthy of being followed!

What Does It Mean to Follow Christ

⁴⁸ Eldredge, *Beautiful Outlaw*, 85.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 106.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 137.

⁵¹ Greg Carey, *Sinners: Jesus and His Earliest Followers* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 104,105.

It was pastor and writer Peter Scazzero who compared Christians to lobsters. Lobsters must rid themselves of their old shell and grow a new one which enables them to grow. He writes, “In the same way, our growth into Christlikeness requires we get rid of our old, hard, protective shells and allow God to take us to a new place in him.”⁵² This new place requires all believers to follow Him. What does it mean to follow Christ? There are many who equate following Jesus with knowledge. In other words, the more Bible you know, the better a disciple you are. This could not be further from the truth. Jesus did not instruct His disciples to teach all He has commanded, but to teach obedience to all He has commanded (Matthew 28:20). Being a follower of Christ is not simply about how much knowledge you have but it is more about how one lives life. Does knowledge of God lead to obedience in the life of a believer motivated by a desire to be pleasing to Him?⁵³

In reality, following Christ begins and ends with a personal relationship with the Creator God. This requirement is something that must be experienced personally by every individual longing to be a follower of Christ. There are many people who simply experience God second-hand through books, stories, hearsay and other people’s opinions or experiences. A true follower of Jesus must live their life with Him daily. This type of commitment requires surrender and sacrifice to the headship of Christ in one’s life.⁵⁴ This is a decision which must be made by each individual as they stand alone before God. Christ desires to release every would-be follower of any and all connections with the world and bound the individual to himself. This requires a formal breaking of the hold the world has on an individual and places Jesus at the forefront of one’s life. Jesus becomes a Mediator, not only between the follower and the Father but He also

⁵² Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 197.

⁵³ Cole, Helfer, *Church Transfusion*, 130.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 132, 133.

stands between the follower and the world. A person no longer lives for the world but instead for Christ.⁵⁵

Being a follower of Christ does not allow for one to follow at a distance. It does not allow for one to follow when the mood is right or circumstances are favorable. True followers make a commitment to walk away from everything if necessary to be a disciple of Christ. This is the example the early disciples set as Jesus called them to follow. In Matthew 4, Jesus calls Peter and Andrew to follow Him. This was not a general call or a request to follow Him from one place to the next. It was a call to drop what they were doing and become a disciple of Christ and to never return to the vocation of fishing they had always known. The commitment Andrew and Peter entered into is best revealed in the words Jesus spoke in the text. “I will make you fishers of men.”⁵⁶ Peter and Andrew would now give their lives to catching the souls of men and not fish.

In similar fashion, Jesus called James and John who were also fishing and left not only their nets and boat but also their father who was with them. Jesus further validates the commitment of a true follower in Matthew 10 when He said, “He who loves father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”⁵⁷ Therefore, we see the sacrifice and surrender of the early disciples as they left not only their vocations but their families and in reality, their lives. This kind of sacrifice gets taken to a new level when Jesus calls Matthew, a tax collector to be His disciple. Matthew had a career, he was wealthy and he had a position of power. Yet when Jesus walked by the tax office and stared down Matthew and said, “follow Me” Matthew left all and followed. What took place between

⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 93, 94.

⁵⁶ Matthew 4:19.

⁵⁷ Matthew 10:37.

Jesus and His disciples was personal. The invitation to follow Him was an invitation to learn from Him, walk with Him, imitate Him and live life with Him. Jesus would teach them to become like Him.⁵⁸

“When God calls us, he invites us to die. And ironically, we’ll never be more alive.”⁵⁹ Living life as a follower of Christ means living life different from the world and differently than you used to live. It is a call to self-denial, or dying to self and submission to others. It is a call to service and relinquishing the right to run one’s own life. A true disciple of Christ no longer follows after their own heart, dreams and desires. Instead, Jesus becomes the leader and desire of your heart and He leads His followers according to His plan and purpose. In reality, a true follower of Christ must say “no” to self in order to say “yes” to God.⁶⁰

Discipleship requires obedience to all of these attributes clearly seen in the life of Christ but it also requires one to be faithful to the mission of Christ, the mission of making disciples. “When we follow Jesus, we embark on a treasure hunt where we learn about him and about his mission.”⁶¹ Reaching people with the gospel of Christ and showing people the love of Christ is the believer’s mission today. In an effort to be a part of this mission, each disciple of Christ should determine the spiritual gifts given by God to be used for the mission and for His glory. This entire project is about God’s people being properly disciplined to understand who God is and what He requires of His people (the church). Knowing and effectively using spiritual gifts is a crucial aspect of fulfilling the call of God upon the church. Hull refers to this process as finding the “sweet spot” where personal ministry is concerned. He writes, “That’s the place where your

⁵⁸ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 176, 177.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 117.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 119, 121.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 125.

talents and gifts, God's timing, and personal mission for you converge."⁶² Jesus gave His life for mankind. In order to be a true disciple, one must be willing to make the same sacrifice. Paul refers to this as "a living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1) Following Jesus means offering oneself to Him and His service for His glory.

Chapter Summary

The theological basis of discipleship requires a close examination of who Jesus was in the Old Testament and who He is in the New Testament which in turn reveals His worthiness of being followed in this day and age. Jesus was God in the flesh. He has always existed with the Father, even from the beginning. John referred to Him as "the Word" (John 1:1). He was the Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament who came to restore and redeem mankind from their sin and to himself. He was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy as the promised "Seed" protected through the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants seen in Genesis. All that was prophesied about Jesus in the Old Testament came to fruition in the New Testament exactly as stated. Jesus was who so many claimed He would be.

The Christology of Christ reveals His deity and validates His claim as the Son of God. The "I AM" statements coupled with the life of Christ reveal how He relates to all people and serves as further evidence of His deity. Jesus is the second person of the Trinity and His many names, titles and even divine appearances in the Old Testament reveal His deity and worthiness of being followed. His deity is also seen in His many attributes as Jesus was a picture of perfection and holiness. The greatest attribute He possessed was love. Love is what motivated Him and led Him to the cross. Love is what He commanded of mankind as He desires for all people to love God and each other. The love He showed not only in life but in His death reveals His deity for His love was a perfect love which redeemed mankind from sin.

⁶² Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 126.

Finally, following Christ requires more than words. Following Christ is a labor of love for the One who first loved us. Being a true disciple of Christ is not praying a prayer, joining a church or being baptized. Following Christ requires one to accept what the Bible reveals about Jesus, both Old Testament and New Testament. It requires sacrifice, surrender, and a dying to self. It requires obedience to His Word and faithfulness to carry out His mission. The evidence of theology which reveals Jesus as the Christ is overwhelming. However, answering the call of discipleship is more significant than most people realize. The call is a call to live with passion, zeal and purity.⁶³ Yet when the call of Jesus is properly and faithfully answered and one joins with other disciples and follows Christ wholeheartedly, the end result is eternal rewards and the praise of having been a faithful servant.⁶⁴

⁶³ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 58.

⁶⁴ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 129.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE COMMUNITY MODEL: BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP

Introduction

Why is effective discipleship not taking place in many churches? How far-reaching is the impact of such a ministry failure? And is it possible to stem the tide and create an environment where the people of God are growing as followers of Christ and are leading others to follow Christ? The body of Christ appears to be sick due to the lack of significant impact it is having on society. Something has gone terribly wrong and the mission Christ commands of the church appears to have become more of a suggestion in the mind of many believers. In fact, George Barna writes

Most born-again adults have a very narrow view of what they are striving to become as Christians, what spiritual maturity might look like in their lives, and what it would take for them to maximize their potential as followers of Christ. The dilemma is not that believers deny the importance of spiritual growth or have failed to consider the challenges it raises, but that they seem to have settled for a very limited understanding of the Christian faith and their potential in Christ.¹

Therefore, the problem of ineffective discipleship appears to be two-fold: many believers have simply settled for less than what God desires and even commands and the practice of “settling” has led to apathy, lethargy and just plain laziness. In Ephesians Paul writes, “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”² The word “equipping” comes from the Greek word “*katartismos*” meaning artist or craftsman. The word first appears in the New Testament in connection with Jesus calling His disciples. Peter, James, John and Andrew were mending their nets when Jesus called them to be His disciples. The word “mending” according to Ephesians 4 is translated “equipping.” The

¹ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 41, 42.

² Ephesians 4:11-12.

disciples were preparing their nets for action.³ The all important question facing churches today is simply this: Is church leadership failing to equip the saints or are the saints not willing to be equipped? This writer believes the possibility exists that both statements are true. There may be a significant epidemic of apathy in the church among church leadership and the body itself. This chapter will address the issue of apathy, define what a healthy church looks like and provide a model for spiritually healthy churches based on community as seen in scripture.

The Issue of Apathy

In his book “Transforming Discipleship” author Greg Ogden refers to the issue of ineffective discipleship as “malaise” which is just another word for lethargy or unhealthy.⁴ By and large the discipleship process in the church today is indeed unhealthy. The church is not making disciples and then reaching other disciples as effectively as it should be. In fact the numbers have decreased significantly over the past several years. According to church consultant Aubrey Malphurs, 80-85% of American churches has either plateaued or is dying. This lack of growth has led to less biblically trained disciples in the church and more unchurched people in our communities.⁵ It appears that leadership and church members share in this failure to produce disciples equipped for the ministry of Christ. The forthcoming case study information in this project will bear this out.

“The overall health of any church or ministry depends primarily on the emotional and spiritual health of its leadership.”⁶ Therefore, effective discipleship begins at the top with the leadership of the church and trickles down to each part of the body. Writer and church planter

³ Ray C. Stedman, *Body Life* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1979), 88.

⁴ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2003), 40.

⁵ Aubrey Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple-Making* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2009), 23.

⁶ Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 20.

Alan Hirsch makes an even stronger statement when he said, “The quality of the church’s leadership is directly proportional to the quality of discipleship. If we fail in the area of making disciples, we should not be surprised if we fail in the area of leadership development.”⁷ It stands to reason that all church leadership should reflect the character of God and pursue the mission of God. Making disciples is that mission and much of the success or lack thereof will be laid at the feet of leadership who are responsible for equipping the saints.

The lack of effective discipleship given by leadership is not primarily due to a lack of concern. However, when people fail to grow in their faith and fail to use their spiritual gifts and talents in the church, apathy sets in as church leadership has accepted this as normal and becomes busy with other tasks. It appears that most pastors and leadership have been diverted away from the mission to accomplish other things. Many pastors are considered to be program directors, administrators and caregivers. The time given to this part of the ministry steals away valuable time a pastor could use for equipping the saints.⁸ This type of distraction is not new to the church by any means. In Acts, the apostles were tempted to handle an issue in the church at Jerusalem by becoming table servants in an effort to fairly administer food to the widows. However, they determined that their primary call was to preach and pray and meet the spiritual needs of the people. They refused to be held responsible for a task they were not meant to be held responsible for.⁹

Another deterrent for church leaders in their effort to make disciples is programming. Many churches have adopted a program to lead believers through the discipleship process. However, the example Jesus set for the church with His disciples was more of a personal nature where He

⁷ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2006), 119.

⁸ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 41.

⁹ *Ibid*, 42.

greatly invested in them. Programs promote a classroom setting with many people involved and the focus is on gaining knowledge which sometimes never gets used in life. In a program, accountability is low and the commitment to finishing the course is greater than the commitment to actually practice the behaviors of effective disciple-making.¹⁰ One other significant concern regarding leadership and a pastor's responsibility to the discipleship process is the unwillingness to hold people accountable. A healthy fear of losing church members, tithes and people who actually do serve in the ministry motivates a lack of accountability in this area.¹¹ It is a fear of calling people to commitment even though the Bible states that each member of the body is important to the function of the body (1 Corinthians 12).

It would probably be fair to say that apathy exists among church members to a greater degree than it does among church leadership. The apathy that exists could be the byproduct of ineffective discipleship in the church. Many Christians simply have not been discipled properly. However, Aubrey Malphurs states that each believer is responsible for their own development and sometimes one simply chooses to resist the discipleship process.¹² Recent studies done in churches such as Willow Creek Community Church, reveals that many believers are failing to take responsibility for their personal development and spiritual growth. Part of the reason for this failure stems from simple disobedience to God's Word. The Bible clearly states that all believers are to live a life worthy of God's calling (Ephesians 4:1). A significant part of that calling is to grow in the faith and make disciples as previously supported in this work. Some of God's people simply choose to ignore this. The issue also exists whereby church members expect the church and the ministries of the church to accomplish their spiritual development for them. This would

¹⁰ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 43.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 50.

¹² Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple-Making*, 40.

leave the discipleship process as nothing more than the teaching and preaching of the Word of God in a worship service or a Sunday school class.¹³ However, this particular mode of practice cannot be defined as discipleship.

The apathetic mindset of many believers could be traced back to what people view as really important in this life. George Barna states, that a very small percentage of adult Christians actually pursue significant spiritual development. Many believers fail to set goals of spiritual development the way most people set family, career and financial goals. Barna states this is due in part because spiritual development is not seen as significantly important.¹⁴ Therefore, it is fair to draw the conclusion that many of God's people simply do not see the value in being a disciple of Christ and making more disciples. The emphasis of life appears to be on this life and not on eternity. In defining the condition of the church in terms of discipleship, Greg Ogden describes God's people as possessing a lifestyle whose values are not unlike that of the unchurched in society.¹⁵ Therefore, the church clearly finds itself in an unhealthy situation whereby the Great Commission is not being fulfilled and the ministry of discipleship if not forgotten is certainly ineffective for the cause of Christ.

Case Study

Surveys completed by numerous pastors and church members regarding the discipleship process in the local church, provides some valuable insights to the apathy that exists in this area of ministry. The survey completed by senior pastors reveals information that may suggest that the local church as a whole is not functioning as effectively as it should. (See graphs below) Nearly 43% of pastors surveyed believe that the church does not have an effective discipleship

¹³ Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making*, 41.

¹⁴ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 38.

¹⁵ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 29.

program for current church members. Results from other pastors also reveal a significant concern in this area as the survey revealed no positive responses to this question. Therefore, if the church does not provide an effective discipleship process, then how can God's people grow in the faith and be effective in the ministry? The survey also revealed that nearly 86% of pastors polled believe strongly that the church has room for improvement in the discipleship process.

According to the survey, some churches do a better job of encouraging the use of spiritual gifts among its church members. However, the percentages of those who believe the church is just somewhat effective in this area are just as high as those who claim to be very effective. Pastors revealed a middle of the road consensus when asked about effective programs in place for discipleship. None of the pastors who responded believes the church they pastor ultimately has an effective program in place. This is greatly concerning for the church going forward in an effort to make disciples and function effectively as a ministry. When God's people fail to exercise the spiritual gifts they have been given, then those people who are willing to serve often times work outside of their gifts. In fact the survey revealed that more than 57% of pastors believe they have people functioning in roles they don't necessarily feel called to due to the lack of involvement of other members.

The problem of apathy and the degree in which it exists obviously varies from church to church. However, among the pastors polled, 42% believe that more than half of their congregation is not currently involved in the ministry. Therefore, they are not using the spiritual gifts entrusted to them. The other responses reveal mostly an uncertainty regarding the percentages of those not involved but one thing is for sure, the church by and large is not as effective as it should be due to the apathy among its people. Should God's people be required to exercise their spiritual gifts? The survey revealed that 71% of pastors agree that all church

members should be involved. This writer is not sure why the number was not higher. The Bible clearly states that all believers have gifts and all gifts need to be used to the glory of God. The parable of the talents told by Jesus in Matthew 25 reveals the importance of using the resources given to man by God. The apostle Paul also reveals in Ephesians 4:12 that gifts are given for the work of the ministry and for the edification of the church. Therefore, God's people should understand their responsibility in exercising the gifts entrusted to them by God.

The extent of apathy within the current structure of the church revealed no overwhelming statistics as the responses were varied. However, nearly 60% of the pastors surveyed stated that their job is made more difficult due to the lack of involvement from a large percentage of church members. Therefore, the church is simply not completely healthy nor can it be effective in making disciples when such a large number of God's people are not functioning in the body. The overall health of the church is largely determined by each part of the body fulfilling its purpose. Paul wrote, "For the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ."¹⁶ Paul goes on to talk about the eye, the foot and hand as he expresses the importance of all the members of the body doing their part. The church is to function in a like manner whereby all members of the body of Christ are exercising their gifts and being used by God effectively for the furtherance of the gospel.

Surveys completed by church members provided some insight into the church regarding the discipleship process and current trends. This writer was pleased to find that more than 95% of people polled strongly agree that God has given all believers at least one spiritual gift to be used in the ministry of the church. The survey also revealed that more than 75% of those polled agree that the overall health of the church is greatly affected by the use or lack of use of spiritual gifts in the body. It is also interesting to note that 80% of church members who participated in the

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 12:12.

survey believe the church they belong to does a good job of stressing the importance of using spiritual gifts. If this is true, then in many cases the people of God are simply not paying attention or choose not to be involved in the ministry. This assumption is further made a reality by the fact that 73% of those polled believes the church does a good job of providing a program or process by which one can determine their own spiritual gifts. In fact 86% of people polled claim to know what their spiritual gifts are.

PASTORAL SURVEY GRAPHS

The church has an effective program for the discipleship of church members.

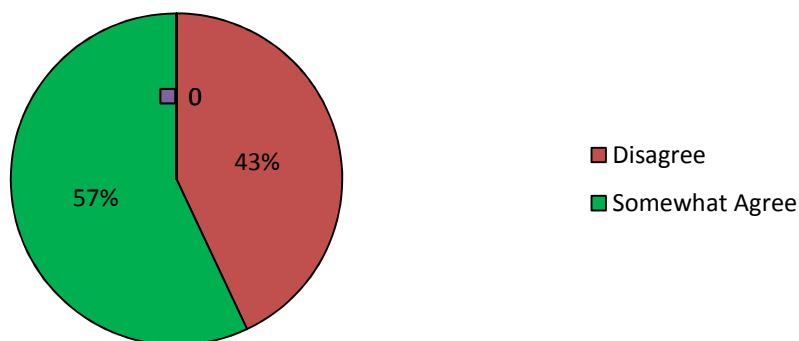


Fig. 1

The church has room for improvement in the discipleship process.

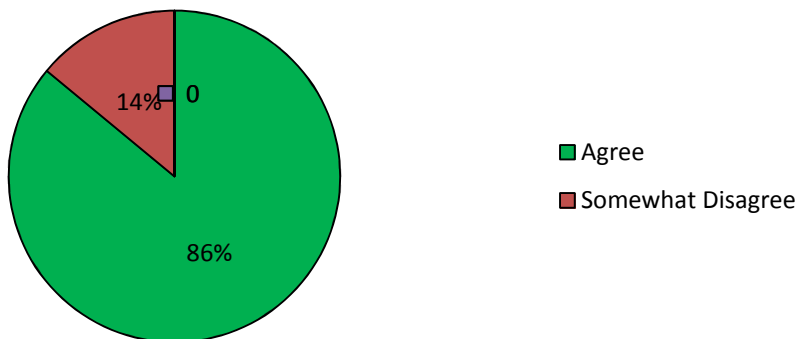


Fig. 2

There are people working outside of their gifts due to a lack of involvement by others.

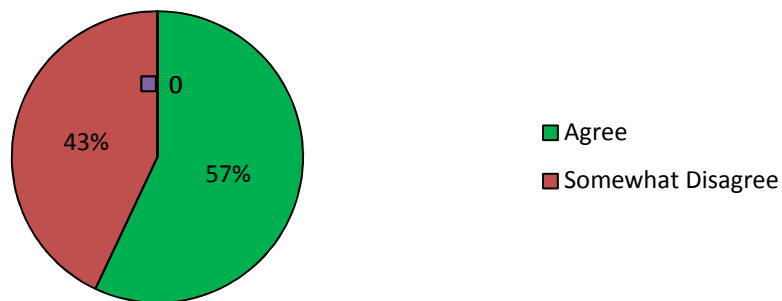


Fig. 3

More than 50% of current church members are not using their spiritual gifts in the ministry.

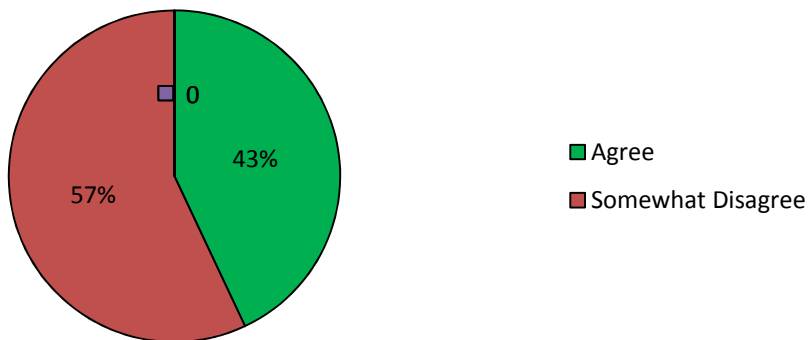


Fig. 4

Your job as the pastor/leader of the church is made more difficult by the lack of involvement by a large percentage of church members.



Fig. 5

CHURCH MEMBER SURVEY GRAPHS

God has given all believers at least one spiritual gift to be used in the ministry of the church.

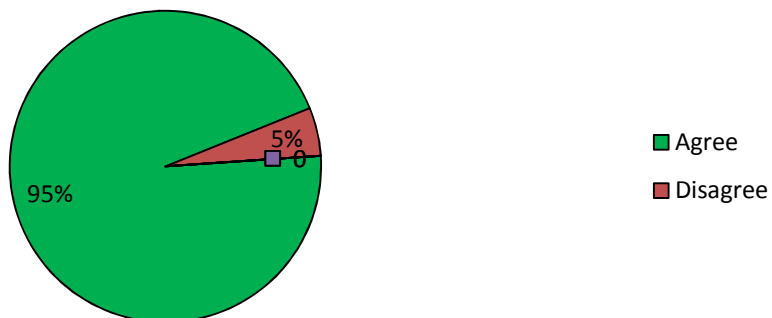


Fig. 6

The church cannot be healthy if every member is not functioning as a part of the body by using their spiritual gifts.

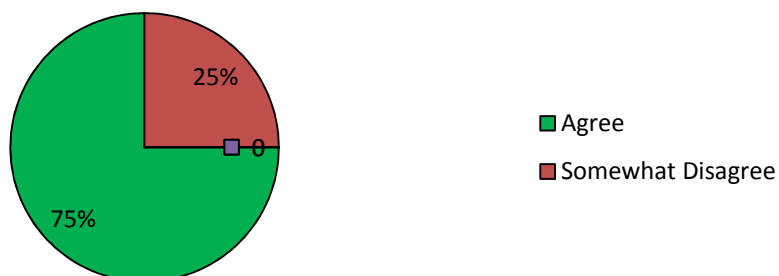


Fig. 7

I personally know what my spiritual gifts are.

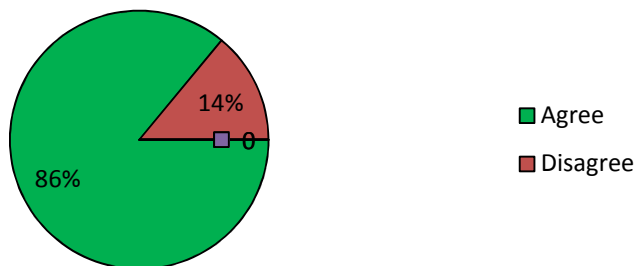


Fig. 8

However, where the rubber meets the road, the numbers don't seem to line up with reality. When it comes to using spiritual gifts in the ministry, 89% of church members polled stated that they actively serve according to their gifts. This statistic flies in the face of pastors who for the most part believe more than 50% of their people are not active in ministry. While the church members who participated in this study seem to agree with the biblical principle of having and using spiritual gifts, some of them stated they were working outside of their gifts. However, nearly all of them claim to understand spiritual gifts and are active in the ministry of their church. This writer believes the numbers gleaned from this survey could be a bit shaded in a positive way due to the fact that people who would take the time to complete a survey is probably not a microcosm of the people as a general rule who make up a church body. In other words, people who would help with such a study are probably more apt to serve in the church as well. However, this is just an observation. Overall, the surveys suggest that improvement in the area of discipleship in the church is needed.

Effective Models

Currently in the local church today, many different yet effective models for discipleship are being practiced. Many churches have been led to implement certain strategies with specific resources. The models presented promote a healthy church body and motivates people to live an effective Christian life. One such model is the "Competencies Model". This model focuses on the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. This model encourages ten core beliefs, ten practices and ten core values. The beliefs deal specifically with theology issues such as the Trinity, salvation by grace, the authority of scripture, one's identity in Christ and the importance of compassion and stewardship. The practices adopted deal specifically with surrender and commitment. Surrender to God in worship, prayer and Bible study. The commitment is one of

service to others through time, money faith and life. The virtues adopted can basically be defined as the Fruit of the Spirit revealed in Galatians 5:22-23.¹⁷

This model stresses the importance of small group ministry and community. Each group has a trained lay pastor and groups are determined by life-stage similarities. Sunday sermons are built around the core competencies and discussed within each group for further understanding and usefulness. Each group is responsible for caring for its members and reaching out to the community. Personal growth is achieved through annual evaluations which serve as an assessment for determining one's strengths and weaknesses. A person can then participate in a class which will strengthen a certain area of weakness.¹⁸ This model provides substantial accountability and opportunity for growth. It also stresses the importance of discipleship and making disciples.

The "Missional Model" is designed around six core values. Those values include being committed to Jesus Christ, adopting biblical standards for living, a commitment to a healthy family, being morally pure, evangelistic and socially responsible. These values are taught to new believers during an eight-week course which includes a yearly growth plan and accountability within the group itself. These small groups are crucial to this particular model as one grows in the faith with the support and accountability of others within the group. A person will remain in a growth group for about three years before moving to a service oriented group to better utilize spiritual gifts and talents.¹⁹

Similar to the "Competencies Model" this model forms groups based on commonality and stages in life. Much planning takes place within this model as children enter into it as early as

¹⁷ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 135.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 136-138.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 140, 141.

first grade. It is a model which simply walks a person through the process based on stage of life and personal development. The process simply moves a person from one stage to the next. Due to the simplicity of the six core values, instruction is specific and manageable during the disciple-making process. This model truly encourages self-direction and accountability but provides a person with the opportunity to fulfill God's call to live as a disciple of Christ.²⁰

The "Neighborhood Model" consists of a group of fifteen to twenty people who share a certain geographic location and meet twice a month. The group is led by a lay pastor who has been aptly prepared to lead and provides spiritual nurturing and care. The two monthly meetings consist of worship, teaching, fellowship and outreach. All members are encouraged to take part in a discipleship team of five to nine people whereby yearly growth plans are created and members are led through a discipleship curriculum. This is a three year process which requires a signed covenant and personal commitment. At the end of the three years, a person is prepared to make disciples and lead in an effective manner.²¹

The "Worldview Model" focuses on church participation, service and adopting a biblical worldview. This model proves a two year program whereby people can grow in their faith by specific readings, study and reflection throughout the week. The study covers theology and doctrinal issues. The material is very thorough in discussing conversion, baptism, the Holy Spirit, prayer, service, evangelism, community, the nature of God, Satan and apologetics. Group discussions and identifying real life issues is required. Biblical principles are established and

²⁰ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 142, 143.

²¹ *Ibid*, 145, 146.

participation in small group ministry is encouraged. This provides a person with spiritual care and the opportunity to grow in biblical knowledge and application in life.²²

The “Lecture-Lab Model” focuses on the sermon each week as it is communicated to each small group ministry. The goal is to educate people on the Bible and motivate them to live obediently to the Word. The sermons are delivered in an expository format over the course of several weeks with a focus on providing people with biblical principles to make good life decisions. Each message comes with an outline and homework to be done during the week. This work is then presented and discussed within a small group of about ten or so people. Each group is led by a trained facilitator who provides further instruction so the message delivered each week is not something forgotten over the course of time. The principles and biblical instruction is applied to each person’s life.²³

It may be important to note what a “model” is and how it plays into the function of the church.

“Model” refers to a description of a “system,” of a “phenomenon.” The church of Jesus Christ from the day of Pentecost has been a phenomenon, and we need to study how it works, and then design models that reflect the inherent properties of the system. There is a basic DNA of church structure, and if we can examine a strand of healthy DNA, we can perhaps create models to replicate it.²⁴

Various different models of church have been created over the years in an attempt to effectively grow the ministry of Christ. Different models are currently working in different areas with different people all to the glory of God. While one model works in a certain demographic, there is not guarantee it will work in another. It is true that God desires for the body of Christ to be healthy and to reproduce but various different churches while using similar principles may

²² Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 148-150.

²³ Ibid, 151, 152.

²⁴ Earley, Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...* 229.

actually function under a model suited just for them. This writer has provided several effective models already in this project and will present four other models that are currently being used although maybe not so effectively.

The most common church model in the United States today is known as the “Traditional Church.” In this model, the senior pastor oversees the ministries of the church and assumes most of the leadership. Deacons are usually very influential and some traditional churches may even be heavily influenced by certain families who have been a part of the ministry for years. By and large, evangelism is not the focus and discipleship takes place from the pulpit or maybe a Sunday school class. Change is usually frowned upon and leadership actually fulfills most of the requirements for ministry. This means that many of the people who make up the body of Christ in a traditional church are not using their spiritual gifts in the ministry. The pastor serves as more of a spiritual caregiver with minimal discipleship training and lack of vision.²⁵

The “Attractional Church” is also known as a “seeker church” in that it seeks to attract unbelievers. The focus of the church is evangelism whereby members are encouraged to spend time with the spiritually lost. The building and the Sunday services becomes the focal point of the ministry. The staff is responsible for running the church and creating an environment whereby people want to attend. The pastor is charismatic and very personable. People are drawn to him as a speaker and as a person. The church offers membership classes and encourages the involvement in ministry. The attractional church is a “come and see” church, an evangelistic church which usually draws large numbers of people.²⁶

²⁵ Earley, Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...* 230, 231.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 231, 232.

The “Organic Church” is a “go and be” church. The focus for this model is on relationships. This type of church is led by a board of teaching elders and small group leaders. It is a community minded model whereby groups are formed along relational lines and while they gather together as a church body on Sunday mornings, the focus of the ministry is within the small groups and the disciple-making which takes place within the groups. Each member is encouraged to use their spiritual gifts in the ministry of the church and in the community. The small group meetings are led by an elder who encourages and equips the group members for ministry. Significant time and effort is also spent in prayer, mostly for the spiritually lost. The goal is to create healthy disciples who become leaders and develop new churches which reach new people with the gospel.²⁷ It appears that the organic church may be the type of church model that can best saturate a region due to its informal nature and ability to relate.²⁸

Finally, there is the “Hybrid Church” model which combines some of the elements of the organic church and attractional church models. A hybrid church promotes both “come and see” and “go and be.” This model is led by a senior pastor and staff and focuses on the Sunday morning service. While it believes in making disciples, the system in place is busy at best. The church is filled with so many activities that its members tend to get lost in the busyness and much of what needs to be done does not get accomplished because of the daily grind of ministry. The church seems to be more inward focused because of all the programs and events which require many people to oversee. Therefore, outreach does not take place as it should. People in the church are more trained to run programs than win the lost.²⁹

²⁷ Earley, Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...* 232, 233.

²⁸ Cole, *Organic Church*, 27.

²⁹ Earley, Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...* 233, 234.

Having examined briefly several models being utilized today, church leaders must determine which model fits their situation best. It would appear that demographics, current environment, and current leadership would have to be considered. However, in a vacuum, while there are many principles that could guide pursuing a specific church model, perhaps two are more significant than the rest. When Jesus summed up the entire Law, He did so in one word; “love.” He instructed man to love God and love people.³⁰ A person’s love for God leads to a love for people. Jesus stated that the world will know His disciples by the way they love others.³¹ Therefore, love for others motivates God’s people to witness to the lost and bring them to Christ. Secondly, biblical leadership is concerned with the overall health of individuals. This requires humility, service and a willingness to equip the church. Biblical leadership is different from worldly leadership in that biblical leadership is driven by love and not selfishness. The will of God is what is important as opposed to the will of man. Therefore, the structure or model of a church should reflect the nature and character of God.³² God is love.³³ Since God is love, love should guide the focus and principles of the church and more specifically, the disciple-making process.

The “Community Model”

Acts chapter two reveals the early church model regarding discipleship. The focus of the early church was community. The Acts church met mostly in small to medium size groups in what was known as “house churches.” The early Christians broke bread together, rejoiced together and simply shared life together. The Acts church established an environment of sharing and

³⁰ Matthew 22:37-40.

³¹ John 13:35.

³² Earley, Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...* 240, 241.

³³ 1 John 4:8.

hospitality. In fact, even in the face of persecution from Saul and others who dragged Christians from the home in an effort to destroy the church, the early disciples continued to meet and seek God together. This community based church in the home was in place for nearly three hundred years until Constantine proclaimed the first church building in the fourth century.³⁴

While the discipleship process is multi-faceted containing many different principles and techniques, every ministry leader should remember that the church exists because of Christ and for the sake of His ministry. Therefore, when establishing a ministry paradigm of any sort, it is wise and should actually be required to study the life and ministry of Christ. When an individual studies the life and ministry of Jesus and the principles and techniques He used in mentoring people, a foundation for effective discipleship is clearly revealed. Jesus prayed for men to disciple. He would often times depart to a quiet place and communicate with His Father as He desired to invest in the lives of others. He built relationships with people so that He might reach them. Jesus invested into the life of Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman as well as nearly everyone He came in contact with in an effort to reach them with the gospel message.³⁵

It is the job of the disciple-maker to get new believers into an environment of accountability and to learn the Word of God in an effort to disciple them.³⁶ Jesus invited potential disciples to become a part of a group. He often times ministered to them as a group. We see this pattern played out in scripture as Jesus called and trained the Twelve. These men walked with Christ, learned from Him and experienced what ministry was all about by watching Him. Jesus gave them on the job training and as they grew through the process, they eventually reached a point of becoming a spiritual leader seeking to make disciples. One other principle Jesus employed and

³⁴ Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making*, 69.

³⁵ Earley, Dempsey, *Disciples Making Is...*, 147, 148.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 149.

was very significant to His ministry was how He prayed for His disciples. He prayed that God would protect them, unite them, fill them with joy and sanctify them through the Word. He longed for the disciples to be sent out in an effort to reach the world with the gospel. Prayer was a significant part of the Jesus disciple-making model.³⁷

What does Jesus require in the disciple-making process? The imperative is summed up in three parts: go, baptize and teach. The act of “going” implies being sent. Baptizing speaks to repentance and forgiveness while teaching reveals that discipleship is more than evangelism but also includes obedience and spiritual maturity.³⁸ The mission of Jesus was fulfilled in the Acts Church as the Word of God increased and multiplied. The Jesus model of discipleship requires more than simple evangelism; it must also include significant spiritual growth and a deeper walk with Christ. This type of discipleship not only leads to new conversions and the building up of the church body but it also leads to church plants as the ministry grows and matures.³⁹

The Bible does not provide a step by step process by which a church can follow the model of Jesus in making disciples. The principles previously discussed in this chapter and the scriptures bring forth a paradigm of how Jesus led people to faith and a deeper walk with the Father. Jesus did indeed teach, encourage and support His disciples as they grew in the faith. However, there are two principles clearly seen in scripture that should not be overlooked. Jesus was the supreme example of what it means to live an effective and godly life. During the early years, the disciples were quiet observers of Jesus and His ministry. They simply watched and learned. Part of the spiritual formation that took place among the disciples was accomplished simply by imitating

³⁷ Earley, Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...* 151, 152.

³⁸ Kevin DeYoung, Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishers, 2011), 46.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 51.

Christ and His life.⁴⁰ Secondly, Jesus knew the time would come when He would have to depart and the Twelve would be responsible for carrying forth the gospel and growing the church. In reality the ministry of Jesus would become the ministry of the disciples and so He had to prepare them and empower them to carry on following His departure. This is referred to as transitional leadership. This principle is lacking in churches today as the effectiveness of one's ministry is often determined by how well it does after one departs. Looking back at the ministry of Christ and the effectiveness of His disciple-making model, one must determine based on the progression of Christianity over the centuries that the leadership of Jesus was indeed effective.⁴¹

The foundation for the "Community Model" church will be established by the principles found in the Acts 2 church coupled with the principles seen in the ministry of Christ. The model will also be tempered with the successes and advantages of current models that are effectively discipling people for the sake of the Great Commission. The model is organic in nature as it is built on simplicity and relationships. However, it is hybrid as well as it combines elements of other models in an effort to establish an effective process. Every ministry established within the model will have a purpose. The purpose must be communicated to the church body so everyone is on the same page and understands the process. The process should then contribute to the mission of the church whereby people grow to spiritual maturity.⁴² The "Community Model" focuses on the opportunity the local church has to fulfill the Great Commission. The ultimate purpose of the church is to reach the people in the community with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Demographics, average incomes, crime rate and other considerations are not terribly important.

⁴⁰ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 83, 84.

⁴¹ Ibid, 96, 97.

⁴² Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making*, 88.

Every church is located in a certain area to reach that specific area and is responsible for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.⁴³

The “Community Model” for discipleship will follow the motto of “Sow, Grow and Go!” Professing believers already in the church are responsible with sowing into the lives of others, investing in people and building relationships. The ministry of Christ reveals how Jesus time and time again invested in the lives of people. He built relationships and gained the trust of people and sowed truth into their hearts and lives. The ministry of sowing is very biblical. The apostle Paul said, “As we have opportunity, let us do good to all.”⁴⁴ A significant aspect of “doing good” is sharing the gospel message. The parable of the sower found in Matthew 18 reveals the importance of sowing seed (God’s Word) into the lives of people. The Bible states that as God’s people sow seed, the seed is watered and God brings the results (1 Corinthians 3:6). However, there must be sowers of the Word, those who love people enough to invest in their lives.

Matthew 9 tells the story of how Jesus traveled through towns and villages proclaiming the gospel, healing the sick and meeting the needs of the people. Verse 36 says, “When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.” Jesus then said to his disciples, “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray you therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.”⁴⁵ The discipleship process begins with sowing, investing in people, sharing the gospel message and building relationships. Jesus told the disciples, “I will make you fishers of men.”⁴⁶ Being a fisher of people is personal; it requires intimacy, time,

⁴³ Gene Mims, *The Kingdom Focused Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2003), 71.

⁴⁴ Galatians 6:10.

⁴⁵ Matthew 9:35-38.

⁴⁶ Mark 1:17.

effort, sacrifice, bonding and growth.⁴⁷ It requires laborers for the kingdom to get out into the fields and do the work of the ministry. Sowing is intentional in nature. It calls all believers to understand the responsibility placed before the church to invest into the lives of people by showing them a better way of living. In referring to the church, Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.”⁴⁸ Gene Mims states that the church is to be salt and light to people without a clue or hope. He further explains the church by saying, “It is a family of God building relationships among people and pointing them to the Heavenly Father.”⁴⁹

Sowing into the lives of people can be accomplished in numerous ways. Obviously a committed follower of Christ who longs to reach the lost with the gospel can begin by reaching their own family, neighbors, friends, classmates, co-workers and even strangers. Such a task requires the individual to be strong in faith with an accurate understanding of the scriptures with the ability to present the gospel in a clear and precise manner. This would require prior discipleship and spiritual growth on behalf of the believer. Spiritual growth and instruction could be received and accomplished in a model such as the “Community Model” shared here in this project. The progress of the model in its entirety will be explained in the following pages.

The second step or principle in the “Community Model” is the imperative to “grow.” It is not enough to lead someone to a saving knowledge in Christ. Mature disciples of Christ must continue to invest in the lives of new believers if they are to truly understand their faith and what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Once again, this step in the process requires intentionality and a relational investment. If a new believer is placed in an environment conducive for spiritual

⁴⁷ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 126, 127.

⁴⁸ Matthew 5:13-14.

⁴⁹ Mims, *The Kingdom Focused Church*, 72.

growth, then maturity in Christ can be attained.⁵⁰ This writer desires the “Community Model” to be user friendly regardless of church structure. Therefore, whether in groups or in one on one discipleship, the principles expressed in this project can be effective. In other words, the material initially presented to a new believer is the same regardless of the environment.

The first step in the growth process is a basic understanding of the decision made in conversion and what the Bible says about the Christian life. This step in the discipleship process would consist of a fifteen week course which provides the new believer with some very important principles found in scripture. Much of the material is foundational while some of it is more applicable to daily life. The following information would be included in this process:

- **Salvation-** Romans 5:12, 6:23, John 3:3, 6:47, 1 Corinthians 6:19, 2 Corinthians 5:17-18
- **Eternal Security-** John 6:37, 10:27-29, Ephesians 2:8-9, 2 Timothy 1:12, Romans 8:38-39, Galatians 3:10, James 2:10, 1 John 5:13.
- **Baptism-** Matthew 3:13-17, 28:19-20, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-23, Acts 8:38-39, 9:18, 16:25-33, Romans 6:1-7.
- **Holy Spirit-** John 14:16-17, 14:26, 16:8-9, Galatians 4:6, 5:22-23, 1 Corinthians 2:11-16, 6:19-20, Ephesians 1:13-14, 2:22, 3:16, 4:30, 1 John 4:13, Romans 8:16.
- **Scriptures-** 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Proverbs 30:5-6, Psalm 12:6-7, Isaiah 40:8, John 10:35, Revelation 22:18-19, 1 Peter 1:23, James 1:21, Ephesians 2:8-9, 6:10-18, Psalm 119.
- **Prayer-** Hebrews 4:16, Philippians 4:6-7, Matthew 6:7-8, 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18, 1 Peter 3:12, Luke 18:1, James 4:1-3, Psalm 100:4, 1 Samuel 12:23.
- **God’s Will-** 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7, 5:18, 2 Peter 3:9, Romans 12:1-2, Ephesians 5:15-17, 6:5-8, 1 Timothy 2:3-4, 1 Peter 4:1-2, Ephesians 1:3-5, Philippians 2:13.

⁵⁰ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 129.

- **Local Church-** Acts 2: 41-47, 14:27, 1 Corinthians 6:19, 12:14-27, Ephesians 4:11-16, Matthew 4:19, 11:28-30, James 1:22-25, Titus 1:9.
- **Church Body-** Romans 8:29, 9:8, 1 John 3:1-3, 14-18, Hebrews 2:9-12, 1 Corinthians 3:5-10, 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, 5:11, Romans 12:13, Galatians 6:10, Philippians 1:3-6, 2:3-4, Ephesians 4:32, John 13:35, Matthew 18:15-17.
- **Giving-** 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 9:11, 13-14, 16:1-2, Romans 12:1, 2 Corinthians 8:3-5, 8, Matthew 6:19-21, Proverbs 3:9-10, Malachi 3:8-10, Acts 6:1, Exodus 23:16, 19, John 3:16.
- **Possessions-** 1 Timothy 6:10, Ecclesiastes 5:10-12, 12:13-14, Job 1:3, 20-22, Mark 10:23-27, Colossians 3:1-4, Luke 12:15, Philippians 4:19, Hebrews 13:5, Proverbs 16:8, 30:7-9.
- **Sin-** 1 John 1:9, 2:15-16, 3:4, 5:17, Romans 5:12, 7:14-25, 13:14, 14:23, 1 Corinthians 10:5, 13, 11:31-32, 15:45-49, James 1:13-14, 4:4 Genesis 3, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 12:5-11, Galatians 6:7-8, Proverbs 28:13, Romans 6, Psalm 119:9-11.
- **Freedom in Christ-** Romans 6, 8:12-18, 13:8-9, 14:13-15, 18, 22, Titus 1:15, Galatians 3:24-25, 5:13, 6:7-8, 1 Peter 2:16, John 15:1-8, Hebrews 12:5-11, Philippians 1:9-11, Ephesians 6:1-3, Matthew 22:37-38.
- **On the Job-** Ephesians 4:1, 11-16, 6:5-8, Colossians 3:22-24, 4:1, 1 Peter 3:15, 1 Timothy 5:8, Galatians 6:10, 2 Corinthians 3:2, 5:20, Matthew 5:14-16, Titus 2:9-10, Romans 12:11, Philippians 2:2-3, Mark 10:42-45, Genesis 39-50 (Life of Joseph)

- **The Lost-** John 15:18-21, 2 Timothy 3:12, Matthew 5:44, 10:35-36, Galatians 4:29, 1 John 2:15-17, 5:4-5, 1 Corinthians 8:3, 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, 6:14-18, 1 Peter 2:9, 11, 5:8, Proverbs 16:7, Romans 12:14, 20-21, 13:1-7, Philippians 2: 14-15, 3:20, 4:5, Acts 1:8.⁵¹

A thorough study of these principles and scriptures coupled with daily application; would provide the new believer with a great foundational start in one's new relationship with Christ.

Following the completion of the fifteen week new believer's class, each individual would be assimilated into a small group setting or placed in a one on one discipleship setting. This step would be totally dependent on the church and current opportunities or ministry environment. In a small group setting, the new believer would be assimilated in a group that is like-minded in age and life experiences. This individual would continue to learn and grow in their faith under the tutelage of a trained leader. Since people grow at different rates, the deployment of a disciple into the community or to serve as a leader would be determined by the leader or church staff. The same holds true for those disciplined one on one. However, the goal is to disciple these new Christians to become disciples and eventually leaders in an effort to make more disciples for the cause of Christ.

During the time each individual spends in a small group, they will also be challenged with connecting to the body of Christ through service. This will require each person to determine their spiritual gifts and talents. Gifts will be determined by spiritual gift inventories as well as day to day investment of leaders who can provide insights into possible gifts as viewed in daily life. As gifts and talents are determined, new believers need to be placed in a ministry within the church and become a part of the functioning body. This is critical if the church is going to serve the community effectively in reaching the lost and making disciples. Much like the human body, the church body should function in harmony with the sum of its parts.

⁵¹ *Biblical Discipleship*. 15 Volumes (Kansas City, MO: Reality Living Publishing, 1999)

When this does not take place, then the entire body feels the negative effect from it.⁵²

Therefore, each member of the body of Christ must do their part by being involved in the ministry and exercise their spiritual gifts for the kingdom.

All that is left now is the “Go” step in the process. Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples.” This is a “sending out” of disciples for the sole intention of spreading the gospel for the cause of Christ. Jesus was speaking of the disciples as He prayed to His Father when He said, “As You sent Me into the world, I have also sent them into the world.”⁵³ So what are disciples sent into the world to do? The answer is simple; to bear fruit. John 15:8 reveals the proof of discipleship is fruit-bearing. Spiritual fruit comes in the form of a godly life lived faithfully before the Lord in the character of Christ and it comes in the form of new disciples. If an individual is not bearing spiritual fruit, they are not a disciple of Christ.⁵⁴ The ultimate purpose for making disciples is to multiply more disciples in an effort to fulfill the Great Commission. The process begins with investment or the intentional sowing of a believer into an unbeliever. The new believer then grows through the discipleship process and becomes strong in the faith and eventually makes more disciples and leads others to make disciples. The effectiveness of such a model can only take place if each part of the body is functioning properly by the use of spiritual gifts both within the church and in the community.

Steps to Transition

“Change is a painful process. People get used to their surroundings and routines and become uncomfortable, even anxious or angry, when pushed to change them.”⁵⁵ The process

⁵² Earley, Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...* 187.

⁵³ John 17:18.

⁵⁴ Earley, Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...* 106, 107.

⁵⁵ Cole, Helfer, *Church Transfusion*, 185.

of taking an existing church in a new direction is always a significant challenge. Most people, especially older people resist change at all costs. Becoming a church that makes disciples and focuses on true discipleship will most likely be painful for the leadership team and the church as well. However, the long-term benefits far outweigh the temporary costs. Some people will leave the church in response to change and others will simply complain or wonder if the church is headed in the right direction. Therefore, unity in the leadership team and proper communication to all involved is crucial.⁵⁶

Success in transition comes when a church understands God's vision for the church and allows the ministry to be used as an instrument for God's will.⁵⁷ Ministry is similar to life in that it is ever-changing. The Christian life is filled with change. "The local church is to be God's expression of his radical commitment to change. God is about changing history, or perhaps better said, about making history."⁵⁸ Therefore, while change is often resisted in the church, it is required in an effort to achieve spiritual health and effective ministry. "Those who achieve change commit to a process that provides simple guidance in the midst of the complexity of seeking personal transformation."⁵⁹ This is where significant change begins to take place, when people take personal responsibility for their own lives, growth, spiritual gifts and involvement in the ministry.

⁵⁶ Cole, Helfer, *Church Transfusion*, 187.

⁵⁷ Mims, *The Kingdom Focused Church*, 13, 14.

⁵⁸ Erwin Raphael McManus, *An Unstoppable Force: Daring to Become the Church God had in Mind* (Orange, CA: Yates and Yates Publishing, 2001), 82.

⁵⁹ Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 41.

“Christianity has never touched a culture in a significant way without changing in a positive way.”⁶⁰ In an effort to effectively transition change into an existing church, Neil Cole describes the process in five steps: see it, want it, pray for it, pay for it and do it. Therefore, the process includes vision, communication of that vision, a desire to fulfill the vision, God’s hand upon the vision, a willingness to endure some resistance and frustrations and perseverance to see it through.⁶¹ The tendency for leadership to pull back from planned change due to resistance is indeed a reality and yet a devastating response for the spiritual well-being of the church. “The longer we serve a congregation and leave things the same, the more we confirm the status quo we were called to maintain. We do this, not primarily through our words but through our actions.”⁶²

In the “Community Model” the key to transition is unity within the body and the full support of all involved. Once the vision is communicated to the people, and a period of time has passed where questions are answered and the church body comes together, then leadership can proceed to effectively implement the model. The model would consist of three very important principles to be adhered to by all church members. Each principle is supported with scripture which has already been addressed at length in this project. Every church member will be required to tithe, serve in the ministry according to spiritual gifts and be involved in a small group. These principles provide a structure whereby people invest in the church financially and in the ministry. It also provides every person the opportunity to

⁶⁰ Elmer Towns, Ed Stetzer, Warren Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2007), 136.

⁶¹ Cole, Helfer, *Church Transfusion*, 40, 41.

⁶² McManus, *An Unstoppable Force: Daring to Become the Church God had in Mind*, 187.

grow spiritually through groups and become a disciple who makes disciples. Every church member should be required to sign a covenant with these principles clearly stated.

In an existing church, obviously there are people who are not fulfilling such a commitment and therefore it will take some extra effort to involve them. This would require the pastor or leadership member to go into the home and discuss the vision of the church, the discipleship process and encourage each member to be involved in the ministry. This is a significant part of the process as the church functions more effectively when every part of the body is involved. Once agreed upon, any failure to adhere to the covenant would require accountability by the pastor or leadership team.

All believers who seek to join with the church and move membership from another ministry would be required to attend a six-week “New Members” class in an effort to communicate the principles of the “Community Model” and could be presented to the church upon agreement to the covenant. This writer believes the “Community Model” will provide an environment which promotes unity, accountability, effective ministry and spiritual growth which leads to the development of new leaders. Each generation of Christians needs to develop leaders for the next generation. Dave Earley writes, “One of the primary goals of ministry is to reproduce additional ministers. The challenge is not to develop more followers, or even more helpers, but more multiplying leaders.”⁶³ The “Community Model” cures the problem of apathy in the church and moves people towards biblical discipleship and ultimately creates a more spiritually healthy church.

Summary

The issue of apathy in the church today is real and greatly hinders the church’s ability to make disciples and reach the community with the gospel message. Accountability appears to

⁶³ Earley, Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...* 165.

be a major symptom of the problem as pastor's and leadership teams have failed to hold people accountable for what the Bible requires of every believer in the local church.

Discipleship as revealed in the New Testament commands a person to be conformed to the image of Christ and to live as He lived. This requires practicing spiritual disciplines like prayer, surrender, sacrifice, humility, obedience and perseverance. It also requires a person to take responsibility for their own spiritual growth and use of spiritual gifts within the local church. Meanwhile, the church is to provide an environment for growth and disciple-making.

Discipleship historically speaking provides the church today with some great examples and principles from church fathers and theologians from the past. Men like Clement, Polycarp, Socrates and Aristotle all left their thumbprint on the discipleship process. More recent great men of God such as Martin Luther, John Calvin and Thomas Cranmer also provide great insight to what it means to be a disciple of Christ. This project also looked to the wisdom of Dietrich Bonhoeffer for guidance in desiring an effective discipleship ministry. However, it is the ministry of Christ which sheds the most light on what it means to be a disciple. Jesus of course is the ultimate example of spiritual disciplines and investing in the lives of people in such a way that lives change and people come to God. While history changes our opinions on the process, Jesus changed history and therefore one should imitate His example of what it means to be a disciple.

Theologically speaking, Old Testament prophecy and the fulfillment of that prophecy prove that Jesus is indeed the Savior of the world and defines the very person of Christ. Prophecy reveals that Jesus serves as both a Redeemer and Restorer of men and men's souls. He is the Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament and then revealed in the New Testament. He is the "Word" spoken of in John 1 in that He has always existed with the Father, even

before creation. He is also the only One worthy of dying for the sins of mankind due to the virgin birth and sinless life revealed in scripture. Christ's worthiness of being followed is further revealed by the appearances He made in the Old Testament before He became a man in the New Testament. He was the "promised seed" protected through the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants and took His rightful place in the Trinity. He is indeed the Son of God who came to take away the sins of the world.

Regarding application in the area of discipleship, several effective models were presented in this project. However, what is most important for church leadership today is for an effective model to be in place. It has never been a more important time to make disciples than it is today. As society and the current culture we live in attempts to tear away at the moral fiber of our world, teaching and living the Word of God is crucial to the future spreading of the gospel message. The "Community Model" presented is just a means to an end. People who love Jesus and want to fulfill His mission is what will help move a church towards spiritual health and a nation back to God. However, the responsibility falls squarely on the church. The Great Commission is too large a task for a select few. "A mission as expansive as this has no room for spectators. In fact, it requires the sacrificial investment of every adherent to the cause."⁶⁴ Making disciples is the responsibility of everyone considered to be a follower of Christ. If the church is to be effective in growing disciples and reaching the community for Christ, it must first be healthy. A healthy church is a spiritually mature church which reproduces life, disciples, leaders and new churches.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ McManus, *An Unstoppable Force: Daring to Become the Church God Had in Mind*, 207.

⁶⁵ Earley, Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...* 218.

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VITA

KEVIN HAROLD BROOKS

EDUCATIONAL:

Attended- Southeastern Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C. 1997-1999.

B.S., Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, 2008.

M.Div., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, VA, 2010.

MINISTERIAL:

License: July, 2001, Boulevard Baptist Church, Richmond, VA.

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Online Instructor, Hutchinson Community College, Hutchinson, KS, 2010-Present

Senior Pastor- Boulevard Baptist Church- Richmond, VA, 2001-2002

Senior Pastor- New Hope Community Church- Mechanicsville, VA, 2002-2006

College Pastor- Hyland Heights Baptist Church- Rustburg, VA, 2006-2009

Senior Pastor- Leesville Road Baptist Church- Evington, VA, 2009-Present

APPENDIX A

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 31, 2014

Kevin Brooks

IRB Exemption 1774.013114: Apathy in the Church: A Model for Spiritually Healthy Churches
Moving People toward Biblical Discipleship

Dear Kevin,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and that no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101 (b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
- (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and
 - (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and that any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption, or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

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