Homiletical Discipleship: Developing An Approach to Small Group Study Based On Sunday Morning Exposition

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By:
Lance Cole

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The Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Dr. Charlie Davidson
Director – Doctor of Ministry Program
Mentor

Dr. David Hirschman
Associate Professor of Religion
Reader
ABSTRACT

HOMILETICAL DISCIPLESHIP: DEVELOPING AN APPROACH TO SMALL GROUP STUDY BASED ON SUNDAY MORNING EXPOSITION

Lance Cole

Liberty University School of Divinity, 2016

Mentor: Dr. Charles Davidson

Jesus promised to make Peter a “fisher of men,” while The Great Commission calls us to make disciples of all nations. The purpose of this project is to create a discipleship approach for the local church that helps teach the church’s members based on the Sunday morning sermon. One disciple making problem is that many people attend a church to spectate and not participate. Some sit for years listening to the pastor preach without having any desire to be an active disciple. Others completely leave the church after a short time. This approach for churches will teach them how to develop a discipleship system that continually disciples members during the week through teaching that was delivered on Sunday morning. Research done in the field of discipleship and preaching, the study of theological doctrine and historical tradition, as well as surveys of church members and pastors will be used to develop a successful approach for discipleship that is based on a pastor’s preaching.
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To my Savior, Jesus Christ: I pray that I listen carefully to the plans you have for me. I pray that you continue to give me the strength along this path of ministry. Thank you for my salvation above all, and the sacrifice that you gave for my sins. Amen.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

*And they devoted themselves to apostles’ teachings and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*[^1] - Acts 2:42 -

The way that the early church exploded was amazing. How the growth of a group comprised of just a few individuals after Jesus’ resurrection could blossom into a worldwide movement still baffles people today. It was a movement of the Holy Spirit to be sure, but it was also a result of the devotion of the individuals to their God. It was devotion to the One who had died because He loved them, and was then raised by the power of God. These early disciples were dedicated to the teaching of the apostles who learned from Jesus Himself. It is from this word, “disciple,” that Christians get the term “discipleship.” Discipleship is vital in the local church, but all too often the church fails in that endeavor. Correct preaching is important as well, but all too often the pastor teaches through a sermon on Sunday morning with no idea as to whether or not the people understood his message. It is important that the church take the time to truly disciple the congregation in a way that Jesus would approve. Discipleship should include real teaching, not simply wishing them the best of luck in their spiritual walk with Christ. Discipleship cannot be divorced from preaching, teaching, and evangelism, and it is through these things that the church grows numerically and strengthens its members individually.

The purpose of this thesis project will be to show the importance of discipling believers in the church through an approach that is based on Sunday morning exposition of the scriptures by the preaching or teaching pastor. Modern churches must not fail in fulfilling the Great Commission because Christians are either too lazy or too inept to disciple. The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate how, with proper teaching, a culture of sending out disciples to make other

[^1]: Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Version (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011).
disciples can be established in local churches. This will be done in our homes, communities, states, countries, and around the world. Making discipleship, through the proper teaching of the Word of God, a priority for the people and then giving them the tools to accomplish that priority, is the main goal of this approach and this project.

**Statement of the Problem and Limitations**

This project will open churches’ eyes to the realization that they do not disciple the people under their care well enough once they join the church. It will not only show them that this is something that they need to improve upon, but it will give them the way to do it. This project will formulate a ministry program for discipling someone based on the message that is delivered in the Sunday morning sermon. Like every other aspect of practical theology, discipleship and preaching can be viewed and interpreted in many different ways. For the purposes of this project, discipleship will be defined as “teaching Christians to understand and follow everything that Jesus commanded,” and preaching will be defined as “the public speaking of the shepherds of the church to instruct and inspire their congregations to live like Christ.” This is the author’s understanding of what discipleship and preaching are, both in the local churches and the universal church worldwide.

Certain limitations that this subject has is the factor that culture plays into how churches disciple people. Many cultures participate in church and practice their faith in many different ways. This researcher believes there is no method or program that can be directly copied as a template for all churches in all cultures. This project does not attempt to be that template either. Instead, this project will develop an approach for continued discipleship through the Sunday morning message. How the individual churches decide to preach and gather for discipleship will be up to them, although there will be suggestions throughout the thesis to help make that
decision. This project simply aspires to put an approach in place that will disciple the church’s members based on the teaching of qualified individuals within the church. In most churches this will be the pastor who delivers a homily of some kind on Sunday mornings, which is followed up by qualified teachers within the church. This may include other pastors, deacons, or lay leaders.

**Theoretical Basis**

There are two practical fields involved in the project: discipleship and preaching. The theoretical field, or doctrinal field, that is covered by this project is the field of *ecclesiology.* Preaching and discipleship are mentioned throughout the Bible, and each was carried out from many different perspectives, cultures, and in the backdrop of many events. Both of these must be accomplished. Fulfiling one without the other is failing to live up to the mission of the church.

Ecclesiology is the doctrine of the church and that is on what this project concentrates. There are many different ways that individuals can disciple their friends, family, coworkers, or other church members, but that is not what this project seeks to introduce. Instead, this project looks at the specific way the church can fulfill the charge of the Great Commission to teach believers all that Christ commanded.\(^2\) The church, throughout history, has seen her responsibility to the people in different ways. The right way to see her responsibility is that she is the institution, ordained by Christ, to take His message to the world once He was gone. Others can do evangelism and discipleship whenever they like, and that is their responsibility as individuals. However, it is the church’s responsibility as the lone institution, ordained by God, to do this for the world. The church is the people; it is not the building. It is a body of believers who worship God and have the same goals and objectives. One of those goals should be seeing disciples made of all nations by being active participants in discipleship.

\(^2\) Matthew 28:19-20
Statement of Methodology

The way this project is going to reach the solution of developing a viable discipleship model is to investigate what has worked or not worked for churches in the past, as well as what is currently working in the present. All churches have wanted to do this even if they did not know “discipleship” is what it was called. They knew their responsibility was to teach and to train. This project includes research conducted in the field of discipleship, surveys of church members, interviews with pastors, biblical ways discipleship was practiced by Jesus and the apostles, and finally development of an approach that can be implemented by every church no matter the size or cultural background.

Chapter two is going to show the nature of discipleship. An investigation will take place to show how the definition of discipleship was developed for this thesis. Biblical examples of discipleship, especially those given to us by Jesus, will be shown to give authority to any claims made in the chapter.

Chapter three looks at current church discipleship methods and practices. This chapter will show many ways churches are currently discipling their members in an effort to teach them the commands, morality, and character of God. Included in this section will also be the current mistakes that are being made in the area of discipleship, all of which the new approach presented will help to correct.

Chapter four deals with the importance of discipleship through preaching. Here the reader will understand the value of the spoken Word. Typically, and certainly for the purposes of this project, this spoken Word happens on Sunday morning. It is typically presented by the under shepherd of the church, usually titled “Senior Pastor” or “Teaching Pastor.” The examination of preaching and teaching on Sunday mornings will take place, as well as showing
how a pastor can prepare to use the Sunday morning message as a form of discipleship. Since preaching is currently being done by most on Sunday morning, pastors must make sure they are adequately prepared to deliver this form of discipleship.

Chapter five will develop the approach of Homiletical Discipleship based on the information gathered from the previous chapters. Included will be how to make this approach an intentional form of discipleship, the responsibility of the leaders, and finally the approach itself will be presented in this chapter. At its conclusion, every church should be able to incorporate this form of discipleship into their church with the ability to make small changes that best fit their type of congregation.

Chapter six will be a conclusion of the project. A summary will be presented, as well as the benefits associated with putting Homiletical Discipleship into practice. It is the hope of the author that after reading this thesis, individuals will understand the importance that preaching and discipleship play in the lives of Christians.

**Review of Literature**

A review of the literature used in this project will show the resources that were helpful in developing an approach to small group ministry based on Sunday morning exposition. Anyone who was raised in the church from a young age will have heard numerous sermons preached from the pulpit, and will have also been a part of numerous church small group or Sunday school ministries. There are a substantial number of books that have been published on each subject and many of those were used in the research leading up to the writing of this thesis. What follows is a summary of the main sources and how each was used to help develop the approach to small groups that was created.
Upon reading all the material, two things became very obvious to this author. First, there is a great need for continual discipleship to take place within the local church. Second, there is an equally important need for the preaching pastor to be the main teacher within local congregations. The sources will be divided into categories based on what type of resource it was. The three published categories were books, journals articles, and scripture references.

Books

Without exception, every book reviewed that dealt with discipleship noted that it is a discipline vital to the health of the local church. Every author agreed it was a biblical mandate for Christians to pursue in their everyday lives. They also agreed that it is something that is largely neglected by the local church. This author has attended many different churches in his lifetime, whether as a member or as an outside visitor. Each church had some form of discipleship, but no church had the same. There are many different programs for discipleship of children and teens, and many churches use programs for children, such as AWANAS, Children in Action, or Word of Life. However when it comes to the discipleship of adults, many church groups are left to fend for themselves.

Generally speaking, the discipleship of adults is left to a thirty minute block on Sunday morning where the pastor preaches, and maybe an additional forty-five minutes in Sunday school before that. Every book consulted agrees that this is not enough. People today are busier than they have ever been, and if the church does not step in with a discipleship approach that is designed to be incorporated into their schedules it will lose the battle for people’s time. The books reviewed for research were of the modern time period and were written in the context of a busy lifestyle. The information gleaned from these sources will give an accurate picture of what is needed to incorporate the pastor’s message into a small group study.
There were three major categories of books used. The first were books on discipleship, the second were books on preaching, and the third were theological reference materials.

Leith Anderson’s *The Jesus Revolution* breaks down the book of Acts in an informal commentary. Each chapter covers the high points of the early church and how the first followers worshipped God and discipled others. The early church set up camp in Jerusalem, and Anderson explains the growth and methods of this “community of faith” that led to the rapid expansion of the Gospel.³ His observations, as well as the scriptural references he uses, are very important in understanding the value that was placed on the apostles’ teachings. This will be used to show that without faithful and qualified leaders to shepherd new believers, the Gospel would not have progressed the way that it did.

*The Complete Book of Discipleship* by Bill Hull incorporates all areas of discipleship, but was mainly consulted for the historical evidence that it presented. Hull is considered by many to be the preeminent writer on the topic of discipleship, and he has numerous books published on the subject. While plenty of scriptural evidence is presented to support any claims Hull makes, the historical information that he presents is phenomenal. Hull takes the reader from pre-Christian forms of discipleship⁴ to what would be considered discipleship within the institutionalized church in early Catholicism.⁵ It allows the reader to see the progression of discipleship through the ages, and points to how the church today has arrived at the methods which are currently used.


⁵ Ibid., 74.
Disciple Making Is….How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence, written by Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey presents the foundation for disciple making, as well as a dissection of modern churches and the ways in which they perform discipleship. A main argument in the book, and the predominant reason it was used in this thesis project, is the need for churches to use small group ministries. Earley and Dempsey break churches down into three categories: a church “with” small groups, a church “of” small groups, and a church that “is” small groups. The argument for the church to have small groups is clearly stated, and thoroughly defended.

The need for discipleship is agreed upon by most pastors in America. The way in which the church facilitates that discipleship is where disagreements arise. In Dave Browning’s Deliberate Simplicity, he makes the case that simplifying the way the church functions and offers programs will actually help the health and growth of the church. Perhaps the most insightful section is where Browning discusses burnout. The suggestions and evidence he provides to showcase how the church can flourish when others are given a chance to work will be used, in this thesis.

Neil Cole’s book Church 3.0 presents ways to move the church forward, and keep up with modern trends that are happening in the world and culture. The church is broken into three parts: global changes, structural issues, and pragmatic concerns. The section on pragmatic concerns focuses on the issues every church will have to deal with moving forward in the 21st Century. Cole explains how the church should focus its discipleship ministries the way that Jesus did. Jesus was not concerned with getting people out of the world and into the church, but

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instead training people to carry His message back out to the world.\textsuperscript{7} This idea of carrying the message outside the church will be one of the intentional aspects of Homiletical Discipleship.

Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer have become known in theological circles for their ability to conduct research among churches and ministry groups. In a book they co-authored, \textit{Transformational Church}, these two leaders look at what it takes for churches to achieve their goals in the modern era. The findings of their research in regards to leadership within the church, and group discipleship within the church will be cross referenced with the findings among other authors cited.

\textit{Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow} looks at the way discipleship can successfully change people. The book discusses discipleship both within the church and outside of the church. The main section used in this piece of literature will be the discussion on the leaders who are doing the discipling. These leaders should always be mindful of the fact that the people taking part in discipleship will one day need to lead in discipleship on their own.\textsuperscript{8}

Acts 2:42 is a verse that shows the early church practicing discipleship, and multiplying as a result of it. In \textit{Simple Discipleship} author Tom Cocklereece engages discipleship in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century and, for this project’s use, breaks down Acts 2:42 to show how disciples can be made the same way today. Cocklereece shows three levels of ministry activity in discipleship: training for ministry, transitioning to serving in ministry, and ending up with that person equipping others for ministry.\textsuperscript{9} With any approach to discipleship, the development of the person being discipled is important, and Cocklereece shows how that progression should look.

\textsuperscript{7} Neil Cole, \textit{Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church} (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 166.


\textsuperscript{9} Tom Cocklereece, \textit{Simple Discipleship: How to Make Disciples in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century} (St. Charles: Church Smart Resources, 2009), 51.
Gospel Centered Discipleship is a book by Jonathan Dodson. Much like Simple Discipleship, Dodson has a section that discusses discipleship in the context of the Great Commission. The examination of discipleship versus evangelism shows that the two do not have to be divorced from ministry. From the pulpit, it is important to teach, disciple, evangelize, and inspire all at once. Looking at the way Dodson deals with discipleship and evangelism will help the pastor and small groups leader learn how to better minister to the people in their care.

Most churches do not focus on making and training disciples. This is the message of Jim Putman in his book Real-Life Discipleship. The first step in making disciples is having the desire to make disciples. Putman puts that at the forefront and it must be a part of any discipleship ministry, including Homiletical Discipleship.

Helping the reader better understand what real discipleship looks like, the Real-Life Discipleship Training Manuel was written by Jim Putman with the help of Avery Willis Jr., Brandon Guindon, and Bill Krause. This is supplemental to the Real Life Discipleship book, and builds on the principles in the book. One of those principles is the fact that spiritual growth happens best with others who also want to grow. Small group discipleship ministries were designed because of this principle.

While many churches offer small group discipleships, there are a number who still do not. Bob Farr and Kay Kotan’s book Renovate or Die: Ten Ways to Focus Your Church on Mission shows the importance of discipleship, but does so very specifically. The authors talk about the intentional nature of discipleship, but also the responsibility of the pastor in

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discipleship. A discipleship method that is centered around the pastor’s preaching on Sunday morning will certainly place a great deal of responsibility on the shoulders of the preaching pastor. This book helps explain why that is theologically accurate and biblically based.

*Discovering Discipleship: Dynamics of Christian Education* focuses on all of church education. Authors Dean Blevins and Mark Maddix discuss the types of educational programs and methods that have been put into practice in the church. The church educating its members is very important, and the authors see small groups as creating a context for education and the development of spiritual gifts.\(^\text{12}\) The unique aspect of this work is that it gives attention and credence to many different forms of church education. It does not simply focus on small groups, but on Sunday school and other forms of discipleship as well. For an approach like Homiletical Discipleship, understanding the different types of education churches have used will help develop this approach.

Michael Milton’s book, *Finding a Vision for Your Church: Assembly Required*, shows five defining marks of a true disciple based on Acts 2:42 and Acts 8:4. These five marks will be cross referenced with marks of discipleship that other authors put forth.

The danger present in small group discipleship is that the small group will simply become another commitment to manage and even to attend.\(^\text{13}\) How to prevent this from happening with small groups is crucial. Learning from M. Scott Boren’s book, *Missional Small Groups*, will help ensure that the new approach proposed by this thesis will withstand the test of busy schedules.

\(^{12}\) Dean Blevins and Mark Maddix, *Discovering Discipleship: Dynamics of Christian Education* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2010), 240.

Two of the books used were authored by Steve Gladen, and were written while he was serving as the small group pastor at Saddleback Church in California. The first is *Small Groups with Purpose: How to Create Healthy Communities*. Gladen discusses the first discipleship methods used by the early church, methods currently used by churches across America, and finally the discipleship methods used in small groups at Saddleback.

In the second book, *Leading Small Groups with Purpose*, Gladen focuses on the leader of the small groups. Leaders will have many responsibilities and many decisions to make. Gladen discusses these responsibilities and decisions and helps leaders understand how to best lead their groups.

“My vision is to see disciples made and churches empowered through the multiplication of small, reproducible discipleship groups.”

This statement sums up Greg Ogdon’s goal in his book *Discipleship Essentials*. Discipleship done for the sake of having a ministry the church can offer does not do the congregation any good. The point of discipleship, especially discipleship done in small groups, is to have those disciples multiply and train other disciples. Discipleship is meant to reproduce the fruits that have been seen in the life of Jesus and other believers. The findings of this book will help develop an approach to discipleship that reproduces disciples for Jesus Christ.

*Preaching with a Plan*, by Scott Gibson, presents the reader with a sobering look at what he calls the “critical connection” between planning a sermon and discipleship. This connection is vital to the work of this thesis project. When a pastor is preparing to take the pulpit, he must

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have a plan in mind as to how he is going to disciple the members of his congregation. His job is not simply oratory. Both discipleship and the preaching of the word are part of the ministry of a pastor. This book will help explain the need for a discipleship approach that combines the Sunday morning message and small group discipleship.

The presentation of a “robust practical theology of preaching” is the goal of Peter Adam in his book, *Speaking God’s Words*. While this book is very thorough on the subject of preaching, it falls short in the area of discipleship with the exception of one issue. That issue is how the sermon is to edify both the corporate body and the individual. This will be the focus of references used from this work by Adam.

*Him We Proclaim* is the next book referenced, and is a definitive work on the idea of preaching Jesus Christ from the Old Testament, New Testament, and all of the Holy Scriptures. Dennis Johnson is professor of practical theology at Westminster Seminary and presents an in depth look at how preaching should reach others with the message of Jesus Christ. The nature of preaching as a teaching exercise is reinforced throughout the book. It is the job of the preacher to educate the congregation, and that is done through discipleship.

This thesis will also use Robert Mounce’s *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* to show the connection between preaching and education. This book focuses on the *kerygma*, the message proclaimed by the earliest Christians. According to Mounce, preaching has a distinctive nature that cuts across time to bring the hearer, through the preacher, to the time and place where the Bible was written. Preaching, when done correctly educates and instructs.

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the congregation. Finding a way to take the preacher’s message and studying it more fully is the aim of Homiletical Discipleship.

Noted preaching professor Sidney Greidanus believes that preaching is an indispensable link in the chain of God’s redemptive activity. Discipleship programs are not a substitute for the preaching of the Word. Greidanus’ work will be used to show the necessity of preaching and the preached Word as part of discipleship in the local church.

As president and professor of practical theology at Covenant Theological Seminary, Brian Chapell has made many notable additions to the study of preaching. His work on the Fallen Condition Focus is used throughout seminaries today. The area of focus that will be used in this thesis project will be his expertise on the application of the Sunday morning message. His book, *Christ Centered Preaching*, tells the reader how to preach sermons with application in mind. How does the pastor ensure that the congregation is able to live out the message that is delivered on Sunday morning? To answer this question, the approach to discipleship presented in this thesis will use the information put forth by Chapell.

Haddon Robinson’s *Biblical Preaching, 2nd Edition* discusses the need for expository preaching. Most pastors recognize the need for expository preaching, but do not actually practice it in their Sunday messages. The approach to discipleship put forth in this thesis is based on Sunday morning exposition. Robinson explains why expository preaching is important and his book will be used to show that importance to the readers of this thesis.

*9 Marks of a Healthy Church*, by Mark Dever, lists nine things churches must be doing in order to be correct in their ecclesiology. One of those marks is expository preaching. Like

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Robinson’s book, Dever will be used to show the need of every preacher using Homiletical Discipleship to be preaching expositionally on Sunday mornings. It is the view of this author that whether you are using a small group discipleship method or not, expository preaching is the best way to convey God’s message to God’s people. *9 Marks* helps make that point in a way that is clear and concise.

*Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* examines the common things that three hundred churches did to revitalize their ministries. Ed Stetzer authors this book and his discussion of the discipleship and preaching found in these three hundred churches is where the interest of this thesis lies. If these churches implemented ideas that helped revitalize their churches, it is important for the approach to discipleship found here to reflect those findings and advancements.

Looking at history can give us valuable insight into the best way to conduct discipleship, whether the approaches used succeeded or failed. Acclaimed religious and social historian Rodney Stark looks at the history of the Christian movement from the time of Jesus to today. *The Triumph of Christianity* shows how Christianity quickly became the dominant religion in the world after the resurrection of Jesus. There are numerous examples of events that brought this about, but one of the most interesting things about the Christian movement was how closely linked its health was with the condition of the church’s leadership. Stark explains how untrained leaders, with no religious education or experience caused a decline in the moral condition of the papacy during certain eras in church history.\(^{20}\) Using these examples will help this thesis emphasize how important the leaders of the church are to the discipleship of the congregation.

*A Theology For the Church* is a systematic theology book, which collects input from some of the greatest protestant pastors and theologians of our time. It is edited by Daniel Akin,

president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and covers eight theological doctrines. Chapter seven discusses the doctrine of the Church. This chapter will be used to look at the theological basis for preaching, discipleship, and leadership within the local church. The doctrine of the Church is the longest chapter in this book and is extremely thorough in its evaluation of the historical and theological mission of the church. This information will help show the need for a substantive approach to discipleship within the local church.

Andy Stanley’s book, *Communicating for a Change*, presents a method he uses for ensuring that the audience understands what he is speaking or preaching about. This book will be used to develop the way to be sure that the audience understands the message.

David Platt is the author with the most books cited in this thesis. His books, *Radical*, *Radical Together*, and *Follow Me* were all used to specifically show what discipleship means for the church. Platt puts a great deal of emphasis on the mission of the church being to go out to make disciples. The idea of disciples who go out and make other disciples will be a key to the process of Homiletical Discipleship. It is part of the intentional aspect of this discipleship approach that is missing from many others.

Journal Articles

From the *Australiasia Catholic Record*, the article entitled “Christian Discipleship and Consecrated Life” explains the importance of community in one’s spiritual life. David Walker states that “the goal of Christian discipleship is to share deeply in the divine life by sharing in the life of Jesus.”21 Community is vital to the discipleship of individuals and this article will show the need for that in any program used for ministry in the local church.

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“The Sermon as a Work of Art,” by Cas Vas, shows the importance of the sermon in discipleship. Vas shows that there are many misconceptions about obstacles the pastor encounters as he delivers a sermon or homily, but sermons are “the wings upon which messages are carried to the listeners.” The sermon is the way of theological teaching given to us by God. It is the way that Jesus and the early disciples delivered their message. It was only after the hearing of the sermon, in whatever setting they were in, that additional discipleship was taking place. Homiletical Discipleship will endeavor to build on that principle in the 21st century context.

The Gospel of Matthew is one of the richest books in the Bible, and arguably the richest of the Gospels, when it comes to the subject of discipleship. It is at the end of Matthew’s Gospel that the Great Commission given by Jesus. This command to carry on His church and teach others has been the mission statement of the Christian church for over two thousand years. “Matthew’s Missiology: Making Disciples of All Nations,” gives insight into Matthew’s Gospel, showing the message of the entire book leading up to the Great Commission. C.S. Keener asserts that the Great Commission is no afterthought of Matthew’s, but instead summarizes the heart of the message of his Gospel. Christians cannot bask in the glory that they have been given through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. They are commanded to share that with the world in order to bring more people to the knowledge of that sacrifice.

The responsibilities of the pastor are noted again in “Perspectives on Preaching (in building up missional churches),” by Malan Nel. Not only are preachers to disciple others, but


they are also to go through discipleship on a path of lifelong learning. A pastor cannot expect his people to be engaged by the idea of discipleship and learning if they are not willing to take that on themselves. Pastors have a great responsibility to teach their congregations and must able to disciple them properly throughout the life of their ministries.

While most of the books and articles deal with a point of practical theology, mainly discipleship and preaching, David Kibble’s article, entitled “On Preaching the Need for Repentance,” deals with the sin that is prevalent in the world today, but largely unrecognized. Sin is the reason that people need constant discipleship. Learning how to live in the light of Christ’s sacrifice is important, but the world must also know why the sacrifice was necessary. Kibble gives the reader a sobering look at sin and the need for preaching repentance in the church.

“Why Do We Preach? A Brief Theology of Preaching the Word of God” answers its own question. Harold Wells explains what goes into good preaching and why that preaching is so essential in our culture today. Without a pastor delivering the Word of God on a regular basis, the church ceases to fulfill its purpose in this world.

Closely tied to the previous article is another from the same journal. “Three Goals for Preaching in our Context” explains the unique ways that preaching should be spoken in our culture. Without question, the message of the Bible is timeless and should not be altered in any way. However, the additions of television and other forms of media and technological


advancement have placed both advantages and disadvantages at the pastor’s feet.\(^{26}\) Understanding the culture in which they live will greatly aid pastors and discipleship leaders in developing disciples more effectively.

Staying within the discussion of cultural context, Guy Sayles’ article entitled “Preaching the Texts for Ordinary Time,” explains how to best engage the ancient scriptures in our modern world.\(^{27}\) The last article, “Time Made Strange: Preaching in Ordinary Time” by William Willimon, explains the same thing to the reader. Both of these articles help pastors understand the need to teach within our culture. Without doing this the pastor cannot properly teach his congregation the meaning of the Bible.

**Scripture References**

A biblical foundation is vital when doing any research or writing about theological matters. Without an individual’s initial assumptions or final conclusions being based on the authority of the Bible, whatever he/she has come up with is simply his or her opinion. With that being the case, there are many passages of scripture that were researched for this thesis project. Each will be mentioned in this review of the scriptural literature, but the review will start with the three main passages used. Those passages are Acts 2:42, Matthew 28:19-20, and Romans 10:14.

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Acts 2:42 reads, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” ²⁸ The book of Acts is important because it was written with the purpose of giving a correct account of the things that took place in the early church.²⁹ This passage is key because it indicates that the early church members submitted themselves to their leaders. In any situation, a person would want his or her leader to have both the necessary knowledge of the subject and the willingness to teach them that knowledge. When looking at the discipleship approach put forth in this thesis, it will become clear that the knowledge and teaching of the preaching pastor is key. Acts 2:42 explains the early church’s willingness to sit under the teachings of these early church leaders and the result was an unprecedented period of religious multiplication.

Matthew 28:19-20 is one of the most famous passages in the entire Bible. It is the Great Commission, given by Jesus Christ to his followers. The passage reads, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” ³⁰ The responsibility of every Christians is laid out before them by Jesus in this passage. Followers of Christ are to make disciples by baptizing others and teaching them to observe what He has commanded. Discipleship and teaching cannot be divorced, nor can preaching and discipleship. Therefore, this passage will help show the responsibility of the pastor and the discipleship leader to pass on the message of Jesus Christ.

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²⁸ Acts 2:42  
³⁰ Matthew 28:19-20
The third key verse in this list of scriptural passages is Romans 10:14, which pleads “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” Preaching is vital to the ministry of discipleship, so much so that the apostle Paul infers that people will not hear unless someone is willing to preach to them. This passage will show both the great need of someone to disciple others, and the need for the primary means of this to be the public preaching of the Bible.

While these three previous passages will show up many times throughout this thesis, there are numerous other passages that give us biblical accounts of the importance of preaching and discipleship. The first of these passages is Ephesians 4:11-16:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

This is one of the longest passages used, but it is needed to show the context of discipleship. Discipleship is not done simply out of one’s obedience to do what God has told one to do. It is done to grow the body of the individual being discipled as well as the body of Christ.

Mark 1:38, which reads “And he said to them, Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out,” shows one of the stated reasons for Christ’s

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31 Romans 10:14
32 Ephesians 4:11-16
33 Mark 1:38
coming. Surely He came to evangelize and disciple, but it appears He is doing these things in the context of preaching. The discussion of this passage will begin with the multiple facets of preaching in the context of education, discipleship, and evangelism.

Luke 19:10 is similar in that it states another reason Christ came: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” Is this a contradiction in the Bible, or could Christ have had multiple purposes in coming? Or, perhaps the two are not mutually exclusive. Yes, Christ came to seek and to save the lost. How is He going to save the lost? He is going to do it by preaching His message to many different people in many different towns.

1 Timothy 5:19 is used to show the respect that the congregations should have for their leaders. In a world where many pastors are treated as punch lines or punching bags, it is important to look at the respect that Paul is teaching his young disciple, Timothy, to show the elders: “Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.” This will be used to exhibit and clarify the importance of the congregation showing respect and submitting to the leadership of the pastor and elders who lead the church.

“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.” 1 Peter 2:2 poetically tells the reader that they need to continue along the paths of discipleship. This nourishment Peter talks about is capable only through the study of God’s Word. Disciples should yearn to know more, learn more, and do more for the kingdom of God. The way followers learn these things is to disciple others and be discipled themselves.

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34 Luke 19:10
35 1 Timothy 5:19
36 1 Peter 2:2
Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians is full of wisdom for churches to follow. In chapter three, verses one through three, he states,

“But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, no solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?”

Like the reference in 1 Peter, it is necessary to disciple new believers where they currently are in their spiritual lives. They cannot learn the doctrines of the faith until they understand the basics. This is important to know and implement when developing a small group ministry.

Hebrews 5:12-13 asserts “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.” Without continued discipleship a person may not develop the way they are supposed to. Here, the author of Hebrews is showing that there is relearning that is needed because the readers did not progress in their discipleship. The individuals here should have already been teachers, but instead are having to play the role of students again.

Acts 16:3 shows Paul taking young Timothy under his wing and teaching him through what might be called “field based ministry” or “student teaching.” This is an early example of one on one discipleship and the need for mentoring young leaders to lead others.

In John 13:34-35, Jesus gives a new command to His disciples. He says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for

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38 1 Corinthians 3:1-3
39 Hebrews 5:12-13
one another.”

40 Being discipled means you are becoming a disciple of Christ, and in order to be a disciple of Christ, you must have love for others. If any discipleship method fills those being discipled with knowledge, but they do not love those around them, then the ministry has failed. This is seen again in 1 Corinthians 8:1, in which Paul says “Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that all of us possess knowledge. This knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.”

41 Love is key in the discipleship of a church congregation.

Acts 6:1-6 illustrates the institution of the office of deacon within the early church. The reason for the implementation of this role was that certain people were being neglected and the elders of the church would have had to give up their jobs of preaching, teaching, and prayer in order to meet the needs of the community. This shows the most important job of the elders in the church is teaching, preaching, and praying. The early church fathers knew that God wanted them to be heavily involved in the discipleship of the church. Discipleship was not something they simply did on Sunday morning.

Luke 8:1 says, “soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him.” Jesus led by example and discipled those who would later lead the church, while at the same time he was teaching those who had never heard or were young in the faith. This is important because pastors and church leaders are often thought of as knowing what to do instinctively. This is a ridiculous notion, and Jesus knew that in order for the disciples to carry on after his ascension,

40 John 13:34-35
41 1 Corinthians 8:1
42 Acts 6:1-2
43 Luke 8:1
they would need to be discipled as well. The training of leaders is the only way the Gospel is going to progress through any form of discipleship.

Mark 16:15 gives the reader Mark’s condensed and lesser known account of the Great Commission. He records, “And he said to them, Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.” The mandate is clearly to tell others about Jesus. Used in conjunction with Matthew’s account, that means teaching the people what Christ commanded.

2 Timothy 2:15 is Paul’s instruction to Timothy regarding his reputation. “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” A pastor must be above reproach. He must have a good reputation, not only as someone who strives to do what is right, but also as someone who knows what he is talking about. In respect to the pastor, this verse will show the biblical basis for a well-qualified individual to lead the church and the discipleship of the church members.

“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.” These words from Paul in Philippians 3:17 may seem arrogant to our ears, but one must understand the context from which Paul was writing. These were very young Christians and they were often confused about what was the right thing to do in a given situation. Paul was giving them an example to follow when they were unsure about what to do. Instruction is still the responsibility of the pastor. The congregation is looking to their leader for guidance and direction, and he is to be the example to the church. Pastors must strive in everything they do to make sure that those whom they are teaching have someone to look up to and imitate if

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44 Mark 16:15
45 2 Timothy 2:15
46 Philippians 3:17
necessary. However, this is not because they are perfect or somehow more blessed than the average person. It is because they should be striving to imitate Christ.

Teaching is a major portion of both the role of the pastor and the purpose of discipleship. The following verses show where the Bible directly speaks to teachers and to teaching as it relates to the church. James 3:1 states “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness…” Teaching is viewed as a great responsibility before God. Because teachers are somewhat responsible for the spiritual growth of another individual, they will be judged more harshly by God. For this reason, anyone in a position of authority, teaching position, or certainly a pastoral role within any discipleship ministry, should be aware of this fact.

1 Timothy 4:13 again has Paul speaking to Timothy about the importance of preaching and teaching. He writes, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.” This verse will be used to show that in Paul’s mind, the ministries of scriptural study, preaching, and teaching are never mutually exclusive, but part of a grand design discipleship.

Galatians 1:6-10 demonstrates what happens when false teaching comes into the church. Heresy has always been a problem within the church and always will be. Paul sends this letter to the Galatian church to show how upset he is that the church is following a different gospel than the one that was told to them about Jesus Christ. This is important because it tells us that it is

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47 James 3:1

48 1 Timothy 4:3

49 Galatians 1:6
possible for false teachings to come into the church if there is not a steward, or stewards, who are there to make sure that what is being taught is, in fact, the true Gospel.

The story of Phillip and the Ethiopian in Acts 8:27-38 is one of the best examples of discipleship and evangelism used together in the New Testament. Here, Phillip finds a young man who wants to learn about God, but does not understand what he is reading. In fact, he says it is impossible to understand unless someone guides him through what he is reading. Phillip does not falter in his responsibility, but instead teaches the young man about Jesus. Discipleship can be both teaching and evangelism, especially for the new believers.

One of Paul’s last commands to Timothy is found in 2 Timothy 4:1-4, where he tells him to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” Teaching is vital to the ministry of the church, and it is something that can and should be done any time or any place. It is the goal of discipleship to teach someone who will then carry on those teachings.

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50 Acts 8:31
51 2 Timothy 4:2
CHAPTER TWO
THE NATURE OF DISCIPLESHIP

Churches will all agree that discipleship is important. All churches may not agree on the degree of importance, or the right way to go about discipling those in their care, but they all agree that it is a vitally important part of the Christian life. Figure 2.1 shows the results of one question that was asked from a private survey conducted by the author regarding discipleship. When asked to rate the importance of discipleship, fifty-nine percent of those surveyed said discipleship among Christians was vitally important. Another twenty-six percent said it was very important. Less than ten percent of those surveyed said that discipleship was either not very important or somewhat important.

Please rate the importance of discipleship among Christians:

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Figure 2.1 – Importance of Discipleship

With the obvious importance that discipleship plays in the minds of Christians, it is crucial to have an understanding of what discipleship is. There are many books written on discipleship, and each author has his or her own understanding of what discipleship looks like and the best way it should be conducted. This chapter will develop a working definition of what discipleship is, as well as how it is to be understood in the light of biblical evidence. These
insights will be the starting point for developing an approach to discipleship that is based on Sunday morning preaching. Numerous discipleship programs have been used throughout the history of Christianity. These ministries have utilized great ways of providing information and teaching to those who take part in them. However, there continues to be room for improvement and growth within the local church’s discipleship methods. To give the best chance of success, the discipleship approach presented through this project will attempt to resemble, as closely as possible, the type of discipleship that was conducted by Jesus and the early church.

**What Is Discipleship**

Ask one hundred different Christians what their definition of discipleship is and you will get one hundred different answers. Take into account the space and time that has separated the Christians today from the first Christians of the early church, and the task of nailing down a definition of exactly what discipleship is gets even harder. More important than having a definition everyone can agree on is the actual practice of discipleship. For discipleship to truly be biblical, it has to be effective. Discipleship cannot be something that Christians look at as an obligation. It must be something that becomes part of each individual believer. In the same way parents love their children and desire for them to learn and grow, Christians must love those around them and desire for them to learn and grow as well. It must be more than something else to check off a list. It must be a way to show the love that Jesus Christ has for each person. Because the early church had this heart for Jesus and for others, individuals came to know Jesus as Lord at an unprecedented rate.

The Bible gives today’s believer a clear record of what the early disciples did, but how much of that was discipleship? Certainly not all actions by the early church would fall into this category. Not all preaching, teaching, evangelism, or mission work falls inside the realm of
discipleship. However, discipleship has parts of each one of these ministries within its framework. Therefore, while realizing that not everyone is going to agree on the definition of discipleship, it is no less important to have an understanding of what discipleship is while moving forward with this project.

**Definition**

Numerous books, sermons, and theological writings have given a definition of what discipleship is. As stated in the beginning of this thesis project, our working definition of discipleship will be “teaching Christians to understand and follow everything that Jesus commanded.” For many this definition will be too general; for others, too specific. This definition is, of course, considering discipleship from a purely Christian perspective. The term itself goes beyond Christianity. It is, at its core, devotion to someone and that person’s teachings. You are a disciple of someone or something when you devote your life to learning from that person or thing. This was the case with the original disciples of Jesus Christ, and continues to be the devotion that Christians have to Christ today. Bill Hull explains discipleship simply as “learning from and following a teacher.”

This teacher can be a Christian or not. This teacher can be a good person or not. No matter what the subject being taught, if a teacher has a follower willing to learn from him or her, he or she has a disciple. For this project, and for any study of the Christian life, discipleship will have its roots in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Christian discipleship has four main elements: learning, fellowship, service, and evangelism. Each of these four aspects contribute to the whole of discipleship. Which component is the most important part is something that could be easily debated. However, when

any one of these elements is omitted, you no longer have Christian discipleship. It is not simply teaching. Teaching, even Christian teaching, is too simple for discipleship. Discipleship is part of the ongoing life of the disciple and the broader Christian experience. Discipleship involves life change. It is not about convincing others of your philosophy or turning them into nice, moral people. It is about launching a “rescue mission” for the world, and all followers have orders to take action wherever they are. In other words, it is about transformation. Discipleship changes one person into another. When this transformation occurs, there is an increasing hunger for more knowledge of Jesus and His Word, and when this happens, so does a change in behavior. This transformation is about learning and teaching. A disciple is taught how to be a follower of Jesus Christ, and then goes to teach others. Learning is the first phase of this transformation.

Becoming a follower of Christ is a call to be a lifelong learner. Even those who are in occupational ministry and are full time pastors continue their discipleship throughout their occupational careers. Pastors take part in continuing their discipleship through seminary classes, conferences, pastor groups, and many other forms of personal devotions. This allows these professionals to continue on the path of learning throughout their entire lives. Relationships in which Christians walk alongside other disciples to encourage, equip, and challenge each other to grow is imperative in the continuing discipleship of every believer. To become a disciple means that someone first learn as much as possible about this Savior that they follow. The Holy Spirit has already been at work in the lives of believers, but continual learning under someone who is more mature in the faith weighs heavily in the life that these believers have committed to.

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Christian’s life is a life of learning and faith. Salvation does not mean that learning is over. The Gospels, in which the life of Jesus is recorded, insist that faith means faithfulness to the teachings of Jesus, and as part of that faith, salvation means discipleship. Salvation is not the end of the Christian journey, it is merely the beginning. Once an individual understands that they are in need of a Savior, and that Savior is Jesus, they then enter into a lifetime of study and preparation to help come to this type of faith. The new Christian becomes the teacher as well as the learner.

Once someone matures in the faith, discipleship continues through the teachings of other individuals. Maturing Christians are still being discipled themselves, but they begin the process of disciple-making in their own lives. Disciple-making comes from the verb *matheteusate*, or “to make disciples.” This is the responsibility of every Christian, and something that this thesis will look at in multiple sections. The important thing to recognize is the progression from student to teacher-student. Mature believers do not one day become teachers and cease being discipled by others. They continue their studies as a student, while at the same time moving on to disciple other, less mature believers. They neither know everything there is to know, nor do they stay immature students forever. It is the responsibility and the duty of all followers of Christ to take the next step and become the one who disciples other Christians to maturity. Sometimes this takes place after new Christians become very serious about their new life in Christ. They seek to learn and are hungry to be discipled by someone who will teach them the word of God. Other times, discipleship takes place with someone who is searching for Christ, but not sure exactly where to find Him. In these cases, discipleship and evangelism can become intermingled and...

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support one another to make followers of Christ. Discipleship and evangelism are not the same thing, but they cannot be separated.

**Discipleship vs. Evangelism**

Evangelism is something that most Christians have heard of, and have learned is something in which they need to participate. Biblically, Jesus tells us that the Gospel will be proclaimed to the entire world before the world ends. This can only be accomplished through evangelism. However, evangelism remains one of the most difficult parts of living the Christian life. Many people feel uncomfortable sharing their faith with people who may not believe as they do. Nevertheless, evangelism and discipleship are not to be practiced solely by pastors. The congregation must participate in evangelism as well. Discipleship helps make sure the Christian’s lack of evangelism is due to insecurity about approaching new people, rather than being, as Thom Rainer fears, more concerned about their own needs rather than the eternal needs of the world and the community in which they live. Perhaps the best example of the Christian’s responsibility to practice discipleship and evangelism is found in the Great Commission. Here, Jesus is speaking to all believers when He says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” In these verses the reader sees both the command to go and seek out the lost, as well as the command to teach them everything that Christ commanded. An important thing to notice is the fact that the two are not mutually exclusive. If anything,

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9 Matthew 24:14


11 Matthew 28:19-20
discipleship and evangelism are more connected than any other disciplines found in the whole of Scripture. Jonathan Dodson speaks about the great commission when he says,

“If making disciples happens through gospel-centered going, baptizing, and teaching, the semantic distinction between evangelism and discipleship is superfluous. Disciples are made, whether for the first or the fiftieth time, through the gospel. Jesus’s real concern was not evangelism versus discipleship, but the good news.”

If the concern of Jesus was the Gospel and its power to work inside the lives of people, should that not then be the concern of each of his disciples? Everything done as part of the Christian disciple’s walk through life is done with the purpose of pointing to Jesus. Whether it is pointing to Jesus through the actions of one’s own life, or practicing evangelism and discipleship to help someone else point to Jesus with his/her life, it is all about giving honor to the Savior. The focus of discipleship and evangelism should be the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The two are united in their goal, but there are some differences.

Matthew’s Gospel presents Matthew’s perspective on discipleship. It is not limited to the evangelism of the unbeliever, but includes training so that those new believers that Christians share the Gospel with will become partners in the effort to share the Gospel with the world.

People are changed when they recognize Jesus as the Messiah and accept the redemption He gives them as a result of His work on the cross. However, that does not mean that new believers magically know the right decisions to make or automatically know what Christ would have them do in their every day encounters. That requires learning and training. Discipleship, even in the context of evangelism, has this type of training as its goal. This is so true of discipleship and evangelism that many people do not even like the word evangelism. Dave Browning at Christ the King Community Church International prefers the term outreach because evangelism is


sometimes viewed as something that only specially trained people can do.\textsuperscript{14} Combining evangelism and discipleship is understanding what the Gospel is truly about; reaching out to others, whether they are in need of maturing in their faith or developing their faith. Maturing happens with believers who already know Christ as Savior, but need some help understanding more about their faith. Seekers are those looking for faith, and it is through evangelism that the church helps them develop that faith. The agricultural example of ministry as planting (evangelism), watering (discipline), weeding (rebuking) and then harvesting (sending out) shows the steps that must be taken to make any personal evangelism approach successful.\textsuperscript{15}

Evangelism and discipleship can both take place on a personal or corporate level. Individual approaches, group discussion, and worship services can all be used to evangelize and disciple. But which of these is best? Which one presents the best chance for a life transformation? With the acts of evangelism and discipleship being largely left up to the clergy, you would think that the best place for these activities would be in the corporate worship service. However, most of those who study both evangelism and discipleship do not believe this to be true. Jim Putman, for one, believes the worship service is a support to the active believers and should not be used as the main evangelistic tool because conversions seldom happen because of a church service alone.\textsuperscript{16} In reality, all three forms must be used together to create a life change in anyone who is going through the process of discipleship. An example of this is Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip submitted to the authority of the church, the corporate body, but was also in tune with the will of God and took the initiative to share the Gospel. This was the case

\textsuperscript{14} Dave Browning, *Deliberate Simplicity: How the Church Does More by Doing Less* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 81.


with the Ethiopian eunuch, with whom Philip shared the Gospel and then traveled for a short time, teaching him as they went on their way.\textsuperscript{17} A combination of the early church having an approach to discipleship, disciples willing to carry out that approach, and individuals who took the initiative to train others outside of the walls of the church, led to the largest growth in Christianity that the world has ever seen. In order for this to take place, all those who profess to be disciples of Christ must be active participants in the process.

**The Need For All to Participate**

It has been said that in an average church there are twenty percent of the people who do eighty percent of the work. While the exact percentage may be off, it is not uncommon for people to experience burnout and feelings of being overwhelmed because there is a lack of help in fulfilling the mission of the church. This should not be the case. It is not the biblical model, nor is it right in our world today. In fact, this idea of an inactive church member is so foreign to scripture that it could actually be described as an oxymoron.\textsuperscript{18} Though the problem lies mostly in the hearts of the individuals, there are things that hinder the participation of church members, the biggest of which is programs.

The amount of programs that churches try to offer is partly to blame for the lack of participation. Lists of outreach opportunities and Bible studies make a church look like it is very active, but it is at the expense of developing relationships with those people that the programs are meant to disciple. Developing these relationships requires everyone to participate and take responsibility instead of having a few do the work on behalf of the many.\textsuperscript{19} Too often members of churches and those within the Christian community do not desire these relationships. They

\textsuperscript{17} Acts 8:27-38

\textsuperscript{18} Rainer, *I Am a Church Member*, 16.

\textsuperscript{19} Ogdon, *Transforming Discipleship*, 125.
want to uphold the American ideal of pulling yourself up by your bootstraps and succeeding through your own hard work. They do not want the benefits of being part of community because they are afraid of looking weak in front of others. Greg Ogdon has this to say; “Independence and self-reliance are enemies of community. Without vulnerability and an awareness of need there is no basis for community. Unfortunately it is often in the church that we find the façade of having it all together.”

Without the full participation of all those who claim the name of Christ there will be continuing gaps in the field of discipleship, especially within the local church. However, discipleship is not limited to programs and methods that are put forth by the church. There are always opportunities for individuals to engage other people who they may not find in the church.

Jesus told his followers to, “Go into the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.” He did not say, “wait for the people to come to you,” nor did he say, “confine yourselves to the local church.” God wants His followers to be active in their communities, their cities, their countries, and in all of creation. In order for this to take place, His disciples must seek out others. Discipleship provides educational opportunities for continual learning, and does so not only in churches, but also in homes, communities, and throughout society. There are people who are very open to talking about God, religion, and faith, but who do not feel comfortable walking into a church. While going to church is important and something that all believers should do, meeting the needs of a community out in the community makes the redemption process more effective for many new Christians. If everyone in the church would commit to this level of discipleship, that church’s community would be touched in a way that

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20 Ogdon, *Discipleship Essentials*, 181.

21 Mark 16:15

22 Blevins and Maddix, *Discovering Discipleship*, 293.
resembled the actions of the early church. Early church members knew it was the responsibility of each person to live a life that reflected Christ. It is the job of every disciple to invest in the lives of others whether they happen to be vocational pastors, deacons, or part of the laity.  

Along with being active in teaching and learning, discipleship is also social. It includes fellowship and living life together on a daily basis. The Christian life for the early church, and for the church today, is essentially social. Fellowship with other believers is not something that is optional for the church. Sharing in the sorrows and the joys of others helps develop the bonds of fellowship and community. In fact, the word “community” is derived from the Greek word *koinonia*, which means, “common,” and which described the early church in Jerusalem. This community was not something they did; it was part of who they were. The investments they made in the lives of their church community caused them to value the lives of the people in their geographical community. Developing a relationship with someone makes interacting with that person much easier in all areas of life. Church and discipleship are no different. Getting to know someone and what is going on in his/her life allows the person engaging in discipleship to better gauge how that person is progressing in spiritual maturity. It also demonstrates to the person that you and the church sincerely care about that person individually, and are not interested in only making yourselves feel good or in padding attendance numbers on Sunday morning. This does not take the place of personal study time and prayer, but it is just as important. The added benefit of fellowship enhances the growth of the individual in ways that

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personal time spent alone in study will not do.\textsuperscript{26} It is also a necessity for the health of the church because there are simply not enough church staff members to do all that needs to be accomplished.

Discipleship within the local church cannot be left solely to the pastors. Having every person participate is perhaps the most important part of discipleship within the local church. Noted pastor and theologian David Platt explains it like this:

“\textsuperscript{27}We will never have enough staff members to meet all the needs in our church or our city. If we want to multiply the gospel from our faith family to all the families of the earth, it will require not just a pastor or church staff but the entire body of Christ built up in love as each part does its work."

Pastors are imperfect people just like everyone else sitting in the congregation. To leave the work of discipleship to them without any help would not only be a poor strategy for the church, but it would be unfair to them as individuals. Will McRainey Jr. points out that, much like the enlisted service members versus officers in the US armed forces, the majority of those serving in the Christian life are volunteers, and not trained professionals.\textsuperscript{28} While pastors do get paid, they cannot be expected to do all of the work. They are paid for their experience, education, expertise, calling to shepherd the church, and numerous other factors that differentiate them from the rest of the congregation. The mission of the church is something that they think about constantly. It is a never-ending calling, and can be very burdensome. However, pastoring is what they are called to do, and because of that, they are compensated and get to work full time in this vocation. While their participation may seem more convenient than others, Rick Warren states that “if you only serve when it’s convenient for you, you’re not a real servant. Real

\textsuperscript{26}Cocklerreece, \textit{Simple Discipleship}, 49.


\textsuperscript{28}McRainey Jr., \textit{The Art of Personal Evangelism}, 44
servants do what’s needed, even when it’s inconvenient.” Understanding that each Christian has a part to play in the big picture of God’s work is the challenge of discipleship. It must be done collectively. Having the work done by only a few devout believers is a path to failure. More than the practical reason of succeeding or failing, there is another reason why each individual should be actively involved in discipleship. It is the model that is presented for the reader in the Bible.

**Biblical Discipleship**

With so many text books and materials available today on the study of discipleship, it is easy to forget that the best book written on the subject is the Bible. Scripture has been called “the mirror to show us our true self over against the self we are being called to be” because it shows what is needed to change. Within its pages you see lives changed completely, and the equipping of saints to carry on the work of the Gospel take place at a remarkable rate. This took place because the early disciples took seriously Jesus’ command to go and make disciples of all nations by teaching them to observe everything that he had commanded them. Modern disciples do not have that same sense of urgency, as was discussed in the previous section. In order for the church to fulfill its mission of making disciples, it must get back to the original way of thinking about discipleship.

Acts 2:42 says “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” This meant that they devoted themselves to growing and maturing, not only on the Sabbath, but every day of the week when they could

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31 Matthew 28:19-20

32 Acts 2:42
put into practice the things they were being taught.\footnote{Steve Gladen, \textit{Small Groups with Purpose: How to Create Healthy Communities} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 39.} Not only were the apostles and church leaders devoted to teaching and equipping new believers, but these new believers were devoted to those in authority. They made this act of discipleship a part of their lives. It was not something that they did if they had time for it, or on a simple schedule every Sunday morning from 11:00am to 12:00pm. It was something they experienced every day of their lives. The New Christians in the early church developed an expectation of studying that included searching the Scriptures together to find out exactly what it meant to be a follower of Jesus Christ.\footnote{Cocklereece, \textit{Simple Discipleship}, 49.} These early followers were so excited to experience salvation that they wanted to learn all that they could in order to live a life of gratitude for such an important gift. Today, followers of Christ take for granted the gift that they have been given and forget about the people in Acts 2:42. They have forgotten how important discipleship and training are because, in large part, they feel that they do not need any additional equipping. They know they sometimes sin and disobey God, but the need of salvation from sin does not resonate with them.\footnote{Kibble, “On Preaching the Need for Repentance,” 342.} A great deal of the discipleship portrayed in the Bible effectively made the people aware of why they needed Jesus.

Even the Great Commission, a passage thought of as the Christian’s marching orders, emphasizes the need for a change in people’s lives. It is not just going and spreading the Gospel, but actually seeing the Gospel change the lives of those who hear. This command to make disciples can be broken down into cross-cultural ministry (going), evangelism (baptizing), and Christian education (teaching).\footnote{Keener, “Matthew’s Missiology: Making Disciples of all Nations (Matthew 28:19-20), 3.} The education aspect of the Christian life is rooted in biblical
truth. No matter where Jesus and the disciples went, they did not heal the sick or feed the hungry without also teaching them the source of these good things. Sometimes the individuals were educated, but needed to be re-educated about what they thought they already believed. This can be seen in the rich young ruler, who thought he had done everything right until Jesus reinterpreted what it meant to serve God. The Great Commission and its command to evangelize, baptize, and educate was no afterthought of Matthew’s. It was a summary of his Gospel, and of the message that he wrote for the world. Guy Sayles writes, “This gospel intends to shape its readers into devoted disciples of Jesus who hear his words and act on them and who respond obediently to his commission to go and make disciples of all nations.” This command, however, was not followed out of obligation by the early Christians as is common today. It first required a change in their own lives in order to go out and change others.

The Christianity that was practiced by the early church was a relationship with God and with each other. It was not the practice of a religion, ritual, creed, or doctrinal statement. The modern church has made discipleship about attending classes, listening to speakers, and setting up dates on a calendar to be part of a group. These can all be helpful, but it was the relationships developed by the early church that led to their spiritual growth. These relationships were with God and with each other. The church sought after the will of God, and in doing so, found the importance of loving one another and seeing to the needs of those around them. They sought to help with the physical needs and the spiritual needs around them. Jesus, in the Gospel of John, gives all believers a new command to love one another the way that He loved them, and thus

37 Matthew 19:16-22
40 Earley and Dempsey, Disciple Making Is, 71.
show the whole world that they were disciples of Christ. Biblical discipleship required spending time with people, loving them, and caring for their needs. All too often, our churches today segregate themselves based on age, music, dress, church government, and pretty much anything else that can separate people. The concept of loving others for the sake of the Gospel rarely crosses the mind of the average Christian today. The idea of giving up one’s own preferences for the good of the corporate body is even less likely. This, however, is not the model seen in scripture. Scripture shows desperate people coming to the disciples asking for help of every kind, and those disciples showing them the love of Jesus. When this step was taken, the training for ministry began.

Once the early church received people who wanted to learn about what Jesus had taught, the learning process had already begun. The apostle Peter writes, “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.” The early church realized that these new believers were spiritual babies. They had to be cared for and nurtured along the path to maturity. If this were to take place today, the first thing many Christians would do is say something like, “You need to come to church with me! The music is great and the pastor is very funny.” However, the early church did not emphasize a single building. The spread of the Gospel happened so quickly that there needed to be a system that allowed for fast organization and intimate fellowship. The lifeblood of the church was small groups of believers gathering for prayer and worship. These Christians thought that life was an everyday occurrence and church should be also.

41 John 13:34-35
42 1 Peter 2:2
These groups of people who met in homes, or courtyards, or anywhere they could, became the source of encouragement for the new believer as well as the source of theological education. The discipleship they practiced was designed to “build up,” or “edify” the new believer. The Greek word for this is *oikodomeo* and the apostle Paul uses this word six times in chapter fourteen of First Corinthians alone to show the people there that their spiritual gifts were meant to “edify the body.” With the teaching and equipping that discipleship entails, the process cannot lose the encouraging aspect of the early church. People, both then and now, who come to Christ, do so from very difficult circumstances. The early church recognized that this was not only a time to teach individuals to follow the commands of Jesus, but also to show them the love of Jesus. They endeavored to show them that God Himself cared enough about them to come and die on a cross for their sins, so that one day they, and all who accept Jesus, could live eternally with him. Community was a critical element of the discipleship that was done in the early church. If the church today is going to succeed in any of its discipleship endeavors, they must get back to that sense of community. At the forefront of the failure to develop community is the work of the pastors. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul is writing to Timothy saying, “and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to men who will be able to teach others also.” Though the job of the pastor is to make sure that God’s people are being equipped as best as they can, pastors today often push that aside for other pursuits. Bill Hull writes, “Pastors and other leaders often don’t have the patience and commitment to disciple individuals. It’s just too tempting to build a larger congregation faster through preaching.”

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45 2 Timothy 2:2

is tempting to let ego and ambition take control of the ministry of any church, which leaves the discipling of the members as a second thought instead of the first thought. Churches cannot afford to lose the biblical ideology of making sure that the individuals are being taught first. Paul emphasized this with Timothy and Jesus emphasized this with his disciples.

Based upon this information about discipleship in the days of the early church, five defining marks of a true disciple can be put forward. According to Acts 2:42 and Acts 8:4, a true disciple is one who is grounded in the Bible, gathered in fellowship, gathered in worship, growing in prayer, and committed to witnessing. The Bible gives us examples of the early church being committed to this type of discipleship, and the results of their devotion. They did, however, have an advantage that we do not have today. The apostles received a first-hand look at this type of discipleship from Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christians today must also look at examples of Jesus’ discipleship with His early followers. Since we do not have Jesus in person, we must look to the Bible to be our authority and guide.

**Jesus and Discipleship**

No one can ever fully mirror the life of Jesus, for numerous reasons. No one is sinless, as Jesus was. No one is as knowledgeable as Jesus was. The reason for both is because Jesus was, and is, God. Jesus came to earth to die for the sins of the world, so that the creation that God so loved could be saved. But was that His only purpose? Mark 1:38 says that the reason Jesus came up out of Nazareth was to preach from town to town, spreading the message of God. Upon further reading of Mark, you realize that Jesus knew His main purpose was to lay down his

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48 Mark 1:38
life, but in order for that event to be understood, He had to teach. Discipleship was a major part of the earthly ministry of Jesus. Even with all the traveling and teaching that He did, He chose to have twelve individuals who followed Him everywhere. This group was not organized by accident. He gathered these twelve men, not to start a discipleship program, but to live alongside him in ministry. The plan of God was started and was put into place by having the Son of God teach these men in a very intimate setting. You see this same discipleship method being used by Paul with his disciple, Timothy. Timothy and Paul were together in a variety of situations, not just a classroom where Paul lectured, just like Jesus and the early disciples. This is not to say that there is no value in corporate teaching, or speaking to large crowds. Jesus often spoke to large crowds, as did Paul and the other disciples. With small groups and preaching engagements, both Jesus and Paul were focused on teaching for life change. Greg Ogdon writes, “Following Jesus’ method, Paul invested in individuals to make disciples. He too had his sights on the multitudes, but he knew that solid transmission of the faith would not occur as readily through speaking to an audience.” The corporate reading of the word, worship, and discipleship can all happen with large crowds. To ensure a transformation, however, there needs to be a close relationship between the ones being discipled and the one doing the discipling. Jesus had a perfect balance of the two in His ministry.

The relationships Jesus developed were not just with His disciples. They were not even only with Jews. One of the most interesting ways that Jesus really turned religion on its head was in His association with people who were viewed unworthy of such attention by a religious

50 David Putman, Breaking the Discipleship Code, 35.
51 Jim Putman et al., Real-Life Discipleship Training Manual, 93.
52 Ogdon, Discipleship Essentials, 21.
He was willing to do this not only because it was the right thing to do, but also because these were the people that He came to save. Jesus came to seek and save the lost.\textsuperscript{53} Sometimes those were Jews. Sometimes those were Gentiles. Sometimes those were good people who had made a mistake. Sometimes those were prostitutes and tax collectors who made a living out of sinful behavior. Wherever the person was in his/her life when meeting Jesus is where His discipleship began. Jesus proclaimed to His followers that being a friend to sinners was key to the Great Commission, and He demonstrated that we must genuinely love all people.\textsuperscript{54} In fact, the act of redemption is a relational act, and it shows Jesus’ relationship to both God and other human beings.\textsuperscript{55} He was right in everything He said, but His teaching was not designed to prove Himself right and the religious leaders wrong. His teaching was designed to shepherd a transformation in the lives of the individuals who heard. The love that Christ had for the individuals was reflected in His teachings, and should be reflected in ours as well.

While Jesus placed much importance on relationships and being a friend to sinners, His disciples today must not forget the importance that He placed on correct teaching. He warned the people twice in Matthew chapter twenty-four that false prophets would come claiming to be the Christ and lead many people astray.\textsuperscript{56} Jesus desired the correct teaching to be understood by all who heard Him and from all who would teach in His name after He was gone. Jim Putman writes,

“\textquoteright Yes, Jesus gathered a crowd and preached inspiring messages, but He went much further. He cared very much about the gospel message that would be delivered

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{53} Luke 19:10}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{54} Jim Putman et al., \textit{Real-Life Discipleship Training Manual}, 101.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{55} Graham Ward, \textit{Church and Postmodern Culture: Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 187.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{56} Matthew 24:4-5, 11, ESV.}
but cared just as much about the process of making messengers who could deliver the gospel message accurately.”

One reason that His message was so hard to hear at the time of His ministry was because so many religious leaders had changed the doctrine and direction that God had set for His people during the time of Moses. This movement was more than ushering in a new religion or way of looking at God. It was bringing the people of God back to God, and that required correct teaching. Jesus later explained to the people in Matthew 7:24-27,

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

Therefore, not only was correct teaching important to Jesus, but He went as far as to say that if you do not heed His warnings and listen to His words then you are a fool. This was certainly harsh language for His time, but it was necessary to fulfill the message that He came to give. That message was that entering the kingdom of God involved a change in lifestyle, a change in behavior, and repentance. Again, discipleship is about life transformation. This is not a school test where you can have the right answers, mark them on a piece of paper, and then pass the test. It must resonate so deeply within the soul of the one being discipled that it actually causes that individual to change behaviors and begin to live a different way. It causes people to move from a life that glorifies themselves to a life that glorifies God.

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58 Matthew 7:24-27
We can say that discipleship ranks as God’s top priority because Jesus practiced it and commanded us to do the same. Christians within the church, then, must understand their mission. Biblically speaking, a church is more than people doing the right thing. A church means embodying God’s intentions for the world, which were shown to us by the life of Christ. Discipleship is the only way that the new believer will learn to stop looking at Jesus as “Jesus Christ,” and start looking at Jesus as “Jesus the Christ.” Making sure any discipleship approach or program started by a church, or parachurch group, is actually leading to life change in individuals should be the first concern. As is seen through the example of Jesus, that is done through developing relationships and focusing on correct teaching.

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CHAPTER THREE

CURRENT CHURCH DISCIPLESHIP METHODS AND PRACTICES

While Christians as a whole know that discipleship is important, it is also true that many do not believe that the church is doing an adequate job in the ministry of discipleship. There are many reasons as to why discipleship is being executed poorly, but there seems to be one that overshadows all others. Based on the survey conducted for this project, over half of the participants identified the discipleship programs, or lack thereof, that churches employ as the main reason for lack of discipleship in the churches today.

What is the biggest problem with discipleship in the Church?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teachers/leaders</td>
<td>23.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The discipleship programs, or lack thereof</td>
<td>54.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The times that the programs are offered</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16.47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.1 – Problems with Discipleship

Developing an approach to discipleship that works in the church, or that the congregation is at least able to participate in, is a desperate need within the ministry of the local church.

Discipleship is more than just fellowship and giving members a group in which they can belong. It is the responsibility of the church to teach the members. It is part of the mission every local
church should have. Discipleship is a broad task, but it is how the church edifies its members through instruction and teaching.¹

Some will say that no discipleship program is wrong, but obviously some are not working. Again, there are many problems and mistakes, and these will be covered later in the chapter, but part of the issue is certainly the participation of the people. The same group of participants surveyed that said the discipleship programs in the church were to blame also admitted that they do not spend much time in discipleship during the week. Seventy-eight percent said they spend less than three hours discipling others, while eighty-six percent spend less than three hours being discipled (see figures 3.2 & 3.3).

How Much Time Do You Personally Spend Discipling Others During the Week?

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<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1-3 hours</td>
<td>37.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 hours</td>
<td>14.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+ hours</td>
<td>7.06%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.2 – Time Spent Discipling Others

How Much Time Do You Spend Being Discipled During the Week?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-1 hour</td>
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<td>1-3 hours</td>
<td>52.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 hours</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+ hours</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.3 – Time Spent Being Discipled

This time spent in discipleship is less time than that spent watching most football games, which people seem to have no problem sitting through at least once per week. Discipleship needs people willing to both lead and participate. Kent Hughes writes, “Show me a great church and I’ll show you some tired people, both up front and behind the scenes, because greatness depends on a core of people who are willing to put out as the situation demands.”

This is not to say that all church discipleship programs are bad, or even that all people respond the same to discipleship. It is simply stating the lack of discipleship in our churches as one of the core problems reflecting the lack of spiritual commitment that is in the world today. Throughout this chapter each of the discipleship methods currently employed by the local church will be discussed, dissected, and critiqued. Not only will the methods be called into question, but also the places where the groups meet, the steps that they take, and the mistakes that are made in the current discipleship of Christians. Education in a church may take on different forms, and it is important for the churches to utilize all legitimate means and technologies available.

At the end of this project, Homiletical Discipleship will be an approach added to that list of legitimate means.

**Preaching**

Preaching is the oldest and most widely practiced form of discipleship within the local church. It is the means of instruction that has been used by the Christian church from the very beginning. When the early church began, the Bible says that, “those who were scattered went about preaching the word.”

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3 Erickson, *Christian Theology, 3rd ed.*, 976.

4 Ibid.

5 Acts 8:4
other group based forms of discipleship, they will all generally meet in a gathering to hear the pastor preach to the congregation. Although it is the most common, many people do not consider preaching a form of discipleship. They may even see their attendance at the corporate gathering of the whole body of Christ as something that is done out of obligation rather than desiring to learn more about God’s will for their lives. Such an attitude among parishioners shows that they do not understand the purpose of preaching. The essential purpose of preaching is to teach the truths of the Bible, inspire action on the part of the congregation, stir the imagination, and to use the opportunity preaching presents to address the more controversial issues of our world.⁶ It is meant to be a time of teaching and discipleship, and the position that preachers hold has many advantages that other approaches to discipleship do not.

When a preacher steps into the pulpit, he gains the attention of everyone there. How long he holds that is up to him and the intent of the congregation to be discipled. Whether the group pays attention or not, this time is the only opportunity to disciple the local church as a whole congregation. Such preaching to larger groups reflects the message of the Bible, which in most books is directed not to just individuals or leaders but to the whole people of God.⁷ The lecture format does not allow a hearer to place personal bias into a passage, or misuse a verse out of context. In the Gospels, Jesus appointed the twelve apostles to go out and preach.⁸ It was extremely important to get His message spread to the people, and the way that He saw best to do that was through preaching. The trained professional has the sole task of interpreting and directing the people as to what the Bible says. This also puts a great responsibility on the pastor.

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⁷ Adam, *Speaking God’s Words*, 70.

⁸ Mark 3:13-15
When a preacher is in the pulpit addressing the congregation, whatever he says and does with the text directly affects the health of the church and the congregation.9 No one person has more spiritual influence over an entire congregation than the pastor.

Many discipleship programs take place in small groups of people, or one on one. The advantage of this is the opportunity for believers who are younger in the faith to seek advice and ask questions of people who have had more experience at living life as a follower of Christ. This is very important for the education, edification, and growth of the individuals. The difference between this and preaching is that the pastor has the opportunity to educate, edify, and grow the faith of the entire church. In small groups, the individual is the entity being discipled; in preaching, the church is the entity being discipled. Though individuals may be edified by the Sunday morning preaching, its purpose is to edify and see to the health of the church, or the entire congregation.10 If the whole church is healthy, certainly many of the individuals will be healthy. However, there can be very faithful followers in a church that is not led by someone who is preaching correctly. In these cases the church will have faithful people, but not fulfill the mission and purpose that God has for that local body of believers. The preaching in corporate worship on a weekly basis is vital not only to the health of the church, but also to its direction.

In addition to the health and direction of the church, preaching, more than any other form of discipleship, helps us bridge the gap from the biblical times in which the books were written, to our world and culture today. Discipleship groups and programs have as their main concern the spiritual growth and life change of the individuals being discipled. They do not concern themselves, in general, with the historical nature of the Bible or the events that were taking place


as the writers were putting pen to paper. The preacher is in a position to do this. He has the opportunity to not only describe God’s word to the congregation, but to also show the events that God used to bring about the works that the Bible describes. When all of these things are put together, it best shows the way that God redeems His creation. Because of this Dennis Johnson writes, “Contemporary preaching of the gospel, therefore, is an indispensable link in the chain of God’s redemptive activity which runs from Old Testament times to the last day.” Preaching is necessary to bring the people of God closer to God. All other discipleship ministries are valuable, and add to the spiritual growth of the believer, but they are never to take the place of or importance of preaching.

**Sunday School**

Without a doubt, the most commonly used form of discipleship within the local church today is Sunday school. This has served as the primary context of discipleship for over two hundred years, and remains the major teaching program of many evangelical churches today. It aids in getting people to church, as well as adding to the discipleship and teaching that they receive in the Sunday morning message from the pastor. These Sunday school classes initially started small, and over time grew larger. The effect class size has on discipleship has been studied by researchers, and there has been a push recently to make sure that these classes are not so large that they actually hinder the purpose for which they were created. Smaller Sunday school classes of about eight to fifteen people build community, provide a safe learning context, and allow people to be more likely to engage in dialogue and conversation about scripture and

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12 Blevins and Maddix, *Discovering Discipleship*, 236.
matters of faith.\textsuperscript{13} There has been such great success in the past with this model of learning that it continues to be very prevalent in churches today, even those who have other discipleship ministries such as weekly small groups and mentoring programs. Along with the preaching ministry of the pastor on Sunday mornings, Sunday school provides the core of most church’s education in scripture, faith development, and theology.\textsuperscript{14} Though the method is the same, the way that Sunday school is conducted has changed throughout the years.

Historically, Sunday school classes focused on teaching the Bible, but now they engage current topics and issues that people face.\textsuperscript{15} Many denominations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention and United Methodist Church, have Sunday school material available to their churches as an aid to the teachers in providing for their classes. Many different options are available, and some classes choose to switch from week to week, quarter to quarter, or year to year. Much like the style of preaching evolves from generation to generation, so does Sunday school. Its purpose of providing a more intimate, close knit time of teachings continues, but the recent criticism of Sunday school has been that it is becoming ineffective at discipling believers adequately.

For many, especially those in the Millennial generation and younger, Sunday school is outdated and something that grandmothers still engage in. They do not see the benefit in it, and some scholars agree that the way churches conduct Sunday school is wrong. John Hammett, professor of theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, writes,

\begin{quote}
“Sunday School may not provide what members need to grow. This is not to suggest that Sunday School classes should be abolished. They provide ongoing
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13} Blevins and Maddix, \textit{Discovering Discipleship}, 247.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 236.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 247.
avenues for teaching, fellowship, service, and evangelism. But they should be supplemented by thoughtful sequence of more specifically focused, short-term classes, designed for discipleship.”

For many people who have attended church their entire lives, Sunday school is the sacred cow. Even with the popularity of small groups and other types of discipleship methods, churches are extremely hesitant to change anything about the structure of their church’s Sunday school programs. Such hesitation has caused some churches to have infighting and struggles in their attempts to grow and attract new believers. In turn, some of these churches have dissolved and closed their doors for good. However, this may not be a bad thing. Alvin Reid writes, “Churches with untrained workers with an introverted focus in their Sunday school classes cannot survive – nor should they.” What Dr. Reid is saying is that churches can become too focused on themselves, their traditions, and their own personal gratification, so much so that they forget about the lost outside of their four walls. At its core, Sunday school is an internal form of discipleship. Its purpose is to teach the people inside the church, and educate them about the Bible. However, the teaching that is done should be showing the people their need to help the lost. Because of this need, there have been ministry leaders who have come up with strategies for running an effective Sunday school. Those who provide Sunday school in their churches would be wise to listen to these. The writings of professors like Dr. Reid would be a good place for churches to start.

Perhaps nowhere in the United States is Sunday school more prominent than in the Southern Baptist Convention. When Sunday school became a part of Southern Baptist life, it started with a very simple, three fold purpose: to teach the Bible, reach people with the gospel,

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and minister to the body of Christ.\textsuperscript{18} Anyone would agree that if those three strategies would have been followed Sunday school would not be in the current state found in many churches. Instead of a focus on life change and education, many classes have become social groups and gossip clubs. Therefore, the purpose of education is good, but the strategy needs to be developed more. Dean Blevins and Mark Maddix have, perhaps, the best strategy for developing an effective Sunday school.

First, congregations should cultivate relationships between Sunday school and congregational life. It should be a part of how the community as a whole forms and shapes faith. Second, understand the needs of learners and shape the teaching methods around them. Third, recognize the purposes that each Sunday school class has. Fourth, create a context for “affirmation and assimilation.” Fifth, the teacher should have a healthy personal and spiritual life in order to teach the group. Sixth, teachers should partner with God in the “transformation of the human person.”\textsuperscript{19}

The Sunday school classes that churches have cannot be internally focused if they wish to be successful. In the same way that preaching or small groups are intended to provide training for the believer to change the world, Sunday school leaders must recognize that as their purpose as well. It is true that the fellowship with the body of believers is great and should be practiced often. However, Sunday school is a time of discipleship, teaching, and training for its members. If churches do not return to this timeless principle within all of their discipleship models, the Sunday school will continue to fade and be seen as outdated.

**Small Groups**

Small groups are by far the fastest growing form of discipleship used by churches today. Not only are they popular, but when they are done well they are the best tool for disciple making.

\textsuperscript{18} Reid, *Introduction to Evangelism*, 300.

\textsuperscript{19} Blevins and Maddix, *Discovering Discipleship*, 237-238.
that churches have.\textsuperscript{20} They are built on the idea that spiritual growth happens best with others who share the goal of being a disciple of Jesus.\textsuperscript{21} This method has seen much spiritual fruit produced among its members, and will be integrated into the Homiletical Discipleship approach that is presented in this thesis. Because of the community nature of small groups, it allows the members to share their struggles, fears, doubts, and successes in a setting that is not as formal as a Sunday school class. It is because of this ability to form community and relationships with other Christians that small groups have found such a significance, and do so by mirroring the early church community in Acts 2:42.\textsuperscript{22} The way these early church members met together in community helped in the growth and sustainability of the early church. To some extent, the church has lost that community today. Paul’s reminder to the church at Thessalonica to “encourage one another and build one another up”\textsuperscript{23} is only possible when biblical community is found. The ability of these groups to encourage, discuss, interact, and fellowship with each other is far easier than for a church of hundreds to do corporately. Perhaps this is why so many churches have started encouraging their members to take part in these small groups. A survey conducted by Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer for their book “Transformational Church” surveyed churches that the authors viewed as “transformational,” and showed the following information about small groups:

- Small Groups are very important at our church – 77% strongly or moderately agree
- Our church regularly starts new small groups – 69% agree
- New Members are immediately taught about the importance of living in community with other Christians – 64% strongly or moderately agree.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{20} Early and Dempsey, Disciple Making Is..., 150.

\textsuperscript{21} Jim Putman et al., Real-Life Discipleship Training Manuel, 93.

\textsuperscript{22} Blevins and Maddix, Discovering Discipleship, 239.

\textsuperscript{23} 1 Thessalonians 5:11

\textsuperscript{24} Stetzer and Rainer, Transformational Church, 176.
This shows that churches who are able to transform themselves and grow place heavy importance on the use of small groups in their church ministries. The survey conducted for this project showed similar findings among the people surveyed. It found that most people believe small groups to be the best form of discipleship done today, and the reasoning for that opinion is based on 21st century trends in discipleship and biblical evidence for the best way of executing discipleship. This is presented in the following figures:

**What is the best form of discipleship done by churches today?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preaching</td>
<td>10.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School</td>
<td>8.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Groups</td>
<td>43.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>36.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3.4 – Best Form of Discipleship*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Evidence</td>
<td>30.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st Century Trends</td>
<td>35.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Studies</td>
<td>8.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>25.88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3.5 – Reasoning for Answer on Discipleship*
With all the evidence and the current trends in discipleship certainly leaning toward small groups, the reason for their success has come primarily from two things; the purpose of small groups, and the context in which small groups are set.

Each church, parachurch organization, or mission group may have its own specific reasons for developing small groups. Each of their small groups may have a different target audience or specific slant in the way members are discipled. However, every small group will be put together for similar purposes, the first of which is the study of the Bible. Although small groups may have a wide range of purposes and approaches, the study of the Bible is always part of how the groups shape the life of the church.25 Having a professional pastor lecture to a believer in a sermon is informative and helps disciple that believer, and cast vision for the church. However, when you couple that with those same members getting together and discussing what they have learned, it aids in the discipleship process. Some of the different types of small groups churches may use include covenant groups, support groups, basic accountability groups, ongoing accountability groups, and open or closed groups.26 Even within these very different groups, the intent of using the Bible to change lives remains the same.

Another purpose of small groups is to multiply; not only multiply in members, but to multiply in the number of small groups. Many churches grow so fast that they actually have to place those coming to their church on waiting lists to get into small groups. This is a failure on the part of the leadership in those churches to plan for their growth. Small groups are meant to be multiplied. They are meant to see disciples being made for Christ. Greg Ogdon states, “My vision is to see disciples made and churches empowered through the multiplication of small,

25 Blevins and Maddix, Discovering Discipleship, 243.
reproducible discipleship groups.”\textsuperscript{27} As any church looks at creating a small group ministry, and certainly for the purposes of the one being formed in this thesis, plans for how these groups will grow and multiply must be developed. That must be part of their purpose. If small groups fall into the trap of being self-contained, they will eventually experience the same problems that many Sunday school programs are finding. Gatherings cannot just be for Bible study; it must be for disciple making. That is why, when it is done “well,” it is the best tool churches have for discipleship. It provides the best and safest context for interacting with others in discipleship. That is the second reason why small groups are so successful - their context!

For people with limited knowledge of the Bible, or those who will not read their Bible on their own, reading and studying in the context of an intimate group gives them opportunities for learning and spiritual growth.\textsuperscript{28} Pastors, often encounter the person who feels uncomfortable coming into their church. Whether people feel they have been away too long, or they are unsure because they have never walked into a church before, the idea of coming into a group and worshiping corporately can be scary and intimidating. The small group creates an environment that is not nearly as formal as even the most contemporary church, and provides opportunities for a newcomer to interact and ask questions with the other members. The groups are predominately lay driven, and in every model they provide opportunities for life change and fulfilling the mission of God.\textsuperscript{29} The context in which small groups are presented is so attractive that many of the notable churches push their members to become part of their small groups. Saddleback Church in California is one of those churches. Their number one strategy for helping new

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{27} Ogdon, \textit{Discipleship Essential}, 230.
\textsuperscript{28} Blevins and Maddix, \textit{Discovering Discipleship}, 243-244.
\textsuperscript{29} Stetzer and Rainer, \textit{Transformational Church}, 197.
\end{flushright}
believers is to get them into a small group where they know the person will receive the guidance they need for their spiritual walk.\textsuperscript{30} It is impossible for one man, or one pastor, to fill the needs of an entire congregation. Individuals need help from their biblical community to truly grow in their spiritual lives. For this reason, a small group of four to ten members is the ideal size. Anything larger makes it difficult for everyone in the group to share.\textsuperscript{31} This size also allows for much easier accountability and teaching among the members. Small groups have even been suggested as being the answer to nominal Christianity in their ability to have members meaningfully involve themselves with other members in ministry.\textsuperscript{32}

Overall, the group dynamic of small groups has currently been seen as superior to Sunday school in its ability to grow and multiply disciples. It is yet to be seen whether or not this form of discipleship will begin to internalize itself. The purpose of teaching the Bible for life change within the individuals, as well as the context of more informal and intimate groups, makes small groups the best model of discipleship for most churches today.

**Mentoring**

Mentoring is one of the most overlooked forms of discipleship that churches have. Mentoring, much like Sunday school and small groups, can be achieved in many different ways. However, the majority of mentoring taking place in a Christian context is done by a more mature Christian taking the responsibility for the discipleship of a less experienced Christian. It helps the mentee see the love of Christ in action by placing a person in his/her life that genuinely cares for him/her. Matt Perman states “to have love as the guiding principle of our lives means that

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Gladen, \textit{Small Groups with Purpose}, 72.}
\footnote{Steve Gladen, \textit{Leading Small Groups with Purpose: Everything You Need to Lead a Healthy Group} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 160.}
\footnote{Akin, ed., \textit{A Theology for the Church}, 852.}
\end{footnotes}
our continual mindset in all we do should be “what will serve the other person?” If one truly wants to show the love of Christ, that individual will invest in the lives of others.

Because it is the lesser used of the discipleship methods, there is less information about churches formally taking part in mentoring ministries. For the most part, people mentor others on their own, or participate in this ministry without even knowing they are doing it. But there is great value in one-on-one discipleship. Many Christians, and certainly most ministry professionals, will agree with this. The most difficult hurdle to jump over when considering mentoring is time.

Mentoring does require that a great deal of time be committed to the cause. It involves a follower of Christ investing in the life of another. Sacrifices must be made in order to do it correctly. The Bible tells us that “iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.” This allows us to see mentoring to be a biblical principle. Greg Ogdon writes, “Discipling is by design individualized instruction. There is content to be absorbed, there are tools to be practiced, and there are personal lifestyle changes to be made.” Getting past the obstacle of time is something that requires individual sacrifice. Richard Stearns writes, “Of the three categories of assets we have to offer, the one we often consider least is time. Whether we are generous or stingy, most of us are much more careful and deliberate about what we do with our treasure than with our time.” Time can make a huge impact in the discipleship of another. Stearns goes on to say, “Time is money. But giving our time to kingdom causes has an even more important

34 Proverbs 27:17, ESV
35 Ogdon, *Discipleship Essentials*, 231.
dimension because of the eternal impact it can have.”

In his bestselling book *The Purpose Driven Life* Rick Warren writes, “Servants think of ministry as an opportunity, not an obligation. They enjoy helping people, meeting needs, and doing ministry.”

In small groups, everyone gets something out of the encounter. Each participant has time to learn, fellowship, discuss life events, and enjoy the company of the group members. Conversely, with mentoring, a great deal of work falls on the strong Christian trying to teach the younger how best to live. Some find there is not as much mutual benefit, and therefore not as much interest in taking part in this ministry. Though there are fewer of these ministries in churches, for those that are taking part in them, it is a biblical way to invest in the growth of young believers and members of their church.

**Places**

The next discipleship method and practice is not a program offered by the church. However, it is a vital part of any form of discipleship in which churches and individuals participate. It is the place that they meet for their discipleship. For the average church, all of the discipleship that is offered through preaching and Sunday school meets on the church grounds. Concerning small groups and mentoring, the trend has been that these groups meet off campus to create a more informal feel for the group. A growing number of churches are using a hybrid model where some groups meet on the church campus while others meet off.

While some people do not feel the location is as important as the message, it is actually a critical piece of whether or not there will be effective discipleship. In order for discipleship to be effective, the people must have a place to go. As for the best place to meet, further discussion is required.

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39 Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 176.
That discussion will start with meeting in the church building. Most church buildings today do not consist solely of a sanctuary or worship center where the people gather. Instead they are campuses with fellowship halls, classrooms, gymnasiums, and full kitchens to service the needs of the church. A great advantage to meeting at a church is the availability of a free resource that far exceeds the square footage of a person’s home or restaurant, but churches must be careful to not place so much emphasis on their great buildings and facilities. If someone’s association and identification of the church in a local community is with the building or programs, it reflects an overtly consumer-driven, customer-designed approach that has been created to simply attract people to that church.\footnote{David Platt, \textit{Follow Me: A Call to Die. A Call to Live.} (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2013), 152.} Still, there are great benefits to using the church as the meeting place. As was discussed earlier, an advantage of Sunday school is that it brings people to the church that will then stay for the worship service. These two Sunday meetings are forms of discipleship that the person gets in a single morning. Worship is also an important part of being a Christian. Worship was a vital part of the young and growing church in Jerusalem during the early days of the Christian church.\footnote{Anderson, \textit{The Jesus Revolution}, 21.} It continues to show that same vital importance today. People enjoy coming to worship together, and they get to hear the expertise of the pastor. Preaching is a form of discipleship, and it would be impossible for a pastor to make his way to multiple homes to preach to different groups in one morning. Sunday school conveniently puts people in a place where they will not be rushed to finish their group and then drive to church for corporate worship. With these two forms of discipleship it is decidedly best for them to stay where they are on the campus of the local church.
Small groups and mentoring are different from the Sunday worship service and Sunday school in that they can take place any day of the week. However, some churches offer services on days other than Sunday, such as a Saturday evening service for instance. This has not become a normal practice, and in the opinion of this writer will never be for the majority of churches. The average church that a Christian will attend will have Sunday services, usually taking place in the morning hours. The discipleship programs are different in that they are often designed to meet other days of the week. For these groups, meeting off campus in homes or coffee shops promotes deeper fellowship within the small group. This may not work best for some groups if they are in geographical or socio-economic places that do not allow for this. For example, rural and some suburban areas might not have coffee shops or places that would be conducive for small group meetings. If the majority of the people in the church are poor or middle class, their homes may not be big enough to accommodate even groups that are small in size. These considerations must be taken into account when looking at the best place to gather. In the case of rural churches, many of the members have their own keys to the church building. It would be easy for them to meet during a weeknight at that location. However convenient, this does not take advantage of the benefits of meeting off campus. Off campus meetings create a sense of community and companionship because they allow people to relax and feel connected, while enjoying a sense of being part of their community. Meeting in the church alone for all discipleship ministries may also stunt the growth of the church numerically, and the believers spiritually. The early church, for example, had no centralized building. They experienced

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42 Gladen, *Small Groups with Purpose*, 57.

43 Blevins and Maddix, *Discovering Discipleship*, 225.
explosive growth throughout Jerusalem by meeting in temple courts and houses.\textsuperscript{44} The early church was visible to the community, while the church today is content to place itself in a bubble, away from the concerns of the world outside its walls.

The fact that the early church was neither centralized nor institutionalized cannot be overlooked. If the church desires for the Gospel to be spread to its community, members must live life in their community. Discipleship must be part of their everyday lives, and also their church lives. The places that people meet for discipleship will have limitations based on geography, but using this as a way to be visible to the community is extremely important.

**Mistakes**

Many mistakes can be made in discipleship. At the heart of these is the assumption by some Christians that they either are not qualified to minster, or are not supposed to minister. For many, ministry is something that professionals do. There are pastors in churches, missionaries in foreign countries, chaplains in hospitals and parachurch organizations, and evangelists who travel the country spreading the word of God. It is not just individuals who are at fault in this assumption. Churches do not emphasize the importance of laity serving in ministry within their churches. Most churches do not tap into the hidden talent they have within their congregations because they are not focused on making and training disciples.\textsuperscript{45} This training is what is meant when one uses the word “discipleship,” however, most churches attempting to provide opportunities for discipleship are not focusing on training up new disciples. They are, at best, hoping to give the disciple more spiritual knowledge, and, at worst, they are simply trying to add to their own numbers at church. This section will consider the mistakes that are made by modern

\textsuperscript{44} Gladen, *Small Groups with Purpose*, 37-38.

discipleship methods and programs. These mistakes will be categorized in the following divisions: failing to train for ministry, failing in leadership, and failure in evaluating the discipleship method.

The first mistake made concerning modern discipleship methods is the failure to train for ministry. As stated earlier, if the idea is simply to fill the participant with Bible knowledge, there are numerous books, DVDs, and pastors on television who can give someone more information. The advantage of discipleship is having someone come alongside you while you are growing and maturing in your faith. Letting the participants know up front that this discipleship is actually training for ministry will go a long way in making sure they know it is more than just a Bible study. It will also show them, from very early on, that part of their responsibility as a believer is to minister to others. Serving God means that we train for ministry, serve in ministry, and then equip others for ministry. While having Bible knowledge is absolutely beneficial, it does not do any good if it is not put into practice. Scott Boren says this about small group discipleship;

“Most of us are just managing commitments and juggling activities and relationships, and as a result, the small group becomes just another meeting on the calendar. Jesus does not see things this way. He tells his disciples that the way his followers relate to one another in their everyday lives is a mark of being his disciple.”

The way that we invest in the lives of others marks whether we are a true disciple of Jesus Christ or not. The new commandment He gave to His followers was to love one another. This investment cannot be a discipleship program based on a lecture model where someone gives others information and then expects them to pass a test. Discipleship, unlike classroom teaching,

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46 Cocklereece, Simple Discipleship, 51.
47 Boren, Missional Small Groups, 103.
48 John 13:34-35
should be viewed as parents’ investment in a child who stays with them through infancy, childhood, adolescence, and finally into adulthood.\textsuperscript{49} This is something that cannot be done at the individual level. This must be the policy at the church-wide level for discipleship to be done correctly. Everyone must know that their job after being discipled is to then go and make disciples, teaching them to obey all that Christ commanded.\textsuperscript{50} Disciple making is investing in people, not running a program at your church.\textsuperscript{51}

A separate, but equal, mistake made in churches is the lack of leadership. Decisions like determining the purpose of small groups, the way they are organized, how to teach, and when disciples are ready to then go and make disciples, are all decisions that are made somewhere among the people at the leadership level. Again, this does not mean that all leadership in discipleship ministries has to be pastoral. Lay leadership is a crucial and necessary part of the success of any ministry within the church, especially discipleship. However, there must be some training and discipleship of leaders as well. Most of the leadership mistakes that happen occur before there is a leadership development program started.\textsuperscript{52} Too often leaders are set up to fail. They are not given clear guidelines and they are expected to lead a group without any clear goal. The ones that are not a little scared often end up being too proud and arrogant. They think they know what the others need to hear and are ineffective at discipling those believers. Ironically, it is often not those who possess the most knowledge that make the best leaders. Neil Cole, a church multiplication expert, says “Doctrine is not the best path to unity anyway….Humility is

\textsuperscript{49} Ogdon, \textit{Discipleship Essentials}, 230.

\textsuperscript{50} Matthew 28:20

\textsuperscript{51} Earley and Dempsey, \textit{Disciple Making Is…}, 148.

\textsuperscript{52} Jim Putman et al., \textit{Real-Life Discipleship Training Manuel}, 65
the only true path to unity.” While most will agree that the senior pastor is the person within the church who exercises the most discipleship, and is most qualified to disciple others, they themselves would rather be discipled by lay leaders than the pastor (see figures 3.6, 3.7 & 3.8).

### Who Does the Majority of Discipleship at Your Church?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior Pastor</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate/Other Pastors</td>
<td>15.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay Leaders or Deacons</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Teachers</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.6 – Who Does the Majority of Discipleship at Church**

### Who Do You Feel is Most Qualified to Disciple Members Within the Church?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior Pastor</td>
<td>46.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate/Other Pastors</td>
<td>18.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay Leaders or Deacons</td>
<td>25.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Teachers</td>
<td>2.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.7 – Who is Most Qualified to Disciple**

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You Would Be More Likely To Attend a Small Group Study If It Was Taught By Whom?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior Pastor</td>
<td>13.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate/Other Pastors</td>
<td>26.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay Leaders or Deacons</td>
<td>38.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Teachers</td>
<td>14.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.8 – Who is Best to Teach Small Groups**

Based on these findings, pastors are not the best individuals to facilitate small groups. This is partly because some pastors themselves are often the arrogant, or even lazy ones. Rodney Stark explains how this is not only a problem now, but was with the early church as well. He writes this about Emperor Constantine making Christianity the state religion:

> Constantine’s favor transformed the church from an institution based entirely on member contributions and led by a clergy of but modest means into an institution based on immense state support and led by a rich and powerful clergy recruited from the upper ranks of society. He thereby created a lazy monopoly institution….

Prior to the church becoming institutionalized, there was tremendous growth and spiritual passion. It was after this institutionalization that the clergy became driven by wealth, power, and status. Before, the simple men who loved God and studied His word were able to lead the people because they cared more about the people than they did themselves.

Not only should pastors take care not to be arrogant or lazy, but they should also not try and do everything themselves. This fails to make sure the people being discipled know that they

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are expected to disciple others in the future. Pastors should find qualified leaders among their staff and laity who are able to lead in discipleship. If the structure of a church’s discipleship is not set up to share the load with the pastors, they will not have time for their families, let alone time to become a friend to sinners. Setting up leaders to disciple the congregation is a major part in beginning Homiletical Discipleship, as will be seen in chapter five.

A major mistake made by churches is in the evaluation of how the discipleship of the congregation is progressing. Anyone who has ever run a successful business, sports team, school, or non-profit organization will tell you that evaluations are crucial. Churches often have evaluations of their staff, finances, church property, and membership rolls. However, their discipleship and teaching programs are often left unchecked. This is one reason that many of them end of failing or ceasing to exist. These things are often seen as taking care of themselves, whereas the new lights or sound system for the sanctuary are pressing matters. David Platt writes in his bestselling book “Radical” that, “One of the unintended consequences of contemporary church strategies that revolve around performances, places, programs, and professionals is that somewhere along the way people get left out of the picture.” This is also true of evangelism, missions, care for the poor, and certainly discipleship. The church should be evaluated and so should the staff and membership rolls over time. Included in what is evaluated must be the status of the discipleship within the church. Are people participating in discipleship? Does the church see any fruit being born through baptism? Are there life changes happening in the spiritual lives of the members? Are marriages being renewed? Is forgiveness being offered? These are things far more important than the number of people you can collect on a roll book.


Many discipleship models fail to acknowledge and track the emotional growth from infancy to emotional adulthood.⁵⁷ Some may feel this cannot be tracked. They may ask “how do you evaluate someone’s spiritual and emotional growth?” A starting place would be to talk to them. Leaders should not assume or take for granted that things are working. Whatever system is used, evaluating the programs is vitally important.

The evaluation of the health of the church is also important. This is primarily the pastor’s responsibility. Questions like, “How important is the gospel to the members of the congregation?” “How important is it being displayed to the people in the congregation?” While it is ultimately the pastor who has the most control over this, the whole congregation can help evaluate. Other staff members and deacons would be very helpful in the task of evaluation. They must check to see if the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the central message of the church. If the church does not emphasize the gospel and its use in everyday life, those being discipled will make other things central, like community, mission, convenience, comfort, or legalism.⁵⁸ Evaluation of all levels of discipleship within the church is important, and must take place for discipleship to be effective.

⁵⁷ Peter Scazzero, The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives, updated and expanded (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 47.

⁵⁸ Dodson, Gospel Centered Discipleship, 144.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH PREACHING

This thesis project, with the goal of developing an approach to small group study based on Sunday morning exposition by the pastor, is built on the idea that preaching is important. This does not mean it is simply important for us to hear or that it is important for the pastor to perform a sermon as part of his job responsibilities. It means that preaching is important to discipleship. This discipleship is both for the church corporately and the members individually. In the opinion of this writer, the current church discipleship ministries done through programs, as well as the discipleship presented from the pulpit, is inadequate for creating and growing disciples. The discipleship shared through the spoken Word should carry with it power, inspiration, and most importantly instruction for spiritual growth. This chapter will look at how discipleship is done through preaching, and how important this is to the continued discipleship of believers. The purpose for this is to provide a foundation for chapter five, which will demonstrate how Sunday morning exposition can be used in small group studies to make and grow disciples.

Why Preaching is Vital

How is someone to believe in Christ if they have not heard about him, and how can they hear about Christ if nobody is there to preach to them?\(^1\) This question, which the apostle Paul presented to the church in Rome, is still present with us today. Paul knew that preaching carried a power to tell and to teach about the risen Christ. For the church today, preaching has often been turned into a stage for entertainers or a platform for the utterly dull. However, some have

\(^1\) Romans 10:14
kept the pulpit and its importance at the forefront of their minds as they deliver God’s Word. They realize the importance of the words they say, and take great care in preaching for instruction to the best of their ability. Throughout the New Testament, the way that the apostles and church leaders spread the message of Christ was through preaching. It was the way that Christ discipled large groups of people. It is still necessary for the discipleship of church members if they desire to grow closer to God. This discipleship, done through preaching, carries with it great importance. It must be communicated clearly.

Communication

The pastor, speaker, or homiletician’s ability to exegete, perform hermeneutics, or interpret the cultural richness of the Bible means very little if these things are not presented in a sermon that communicates effectively to the listeners. Communication is vital to all discipleship, but especially to preaching. The pastor is alone on the stage and the attention is on him. The words that he says are taken to be the truth, and if that truth is based on the Bible it has the ability to change lives. For most people, preaching is probably their first interaction with the discipleship ministries of the church. The first teaching they hear about how God provides for their life, or what He requires of their life, will come from the pastor. Even the early church, which met in homes would often have a sermon delivered to them in the home as well as the synagogues. Paul traveled and preached in these locations, as did Peter and the other disciples. But how does a pastor get a fresh word to the congregation today? How is he going to be able to communicate something new and interesting that two thousand years of pastors have not been able to say? The pastor must be mindful of this, because even devout Christians are expecting

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2 Acts 20:20
something good to happen when they come to church. The regular church attenders know the process of what is going to happen in the sermon, but return hoping that the pastor will be able to provide for them the lens through which the pastor looks at life.³ When delivering a sermon, the pastor not only has the task of communicating clearly, but also of communicating something that is worth hearing.

When it comes to preaching in Western culture, there are many different philosophies and ideas about the best way to communicate using a sermon. New and innovative ways of styling the sermon are being used, and many of the sermons heard today sound nothing like the messages the previous generations had. It has been said that preaching today is in an “age of experimentation or desperation” where preachers use narrative, expository, and conversational styles in their preaching.⁴ While some believe that one style over another is better, or shows more reverence for God and the office the preacher holds, the main goal in preaching should be discipleship. If a certain style is teaching, instructing, and discipling the members according to the Word of God, then it is effective preaching. This attention to discipleship can be hard with the many distractions pastors face today. More important than members worrying about parking, programs, music, or even the preacher, is focusing on what is preached – the Word of God.⁵ Reading the Bible corporately as a church is discipleship. Letting the words of Christ and the early church leaders transform the lives of the readers is a great way to draw closer to God. Having a preacher who looks at the Bible and studies the instructions that it has for people, then delivers that to the people, is extremely important for the health of the church. It is the way that God has established for His people to hear from Him.

³ Vas, “The Sermon as a Work of Art,” 373.
⁴ Crittenden, “Three Goals for Preaching in our Context,” 40.
⁵ Dever, 9 Marks of a Healthy Church, 55.
Preaching the Gospel

While communication is important, communicating the wrong things is worse than failing to communicate clearly. The message that is delivered by the pastors must be delivered with the Gospel in mind. Pastors must ask themselves, “How is this going to expand the kingdom of God?” Paul’s words to Timothy remind us of the importance of not just preaching, but preaching the true Gospel. He says,

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.6

This is not only a command for Timothy to preach the Word of God correctly, but also a warning that there will be many in the future who preach incorrectly. Harold Wells writes, “Certainly the life experiences, insights and personality of the preacher are valuable instruments through which God speaks; yet it is appropriate that our preaching is disciplined by faithfulness to Scripture...”7

This spoken Gospel from the pulpit by pastors teaches the congregation how they are to go out and disciple others. It teaches the church how to disciple with a correct message. This has been one of the major benefits of preaching throughout the ages. Preaching has the ability to disciple others correctly. The primary way that the Gospel can be protected from being reduced to a

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6 2 Timothy 4:1-4

human projection or construction is through preaching.⁸ Without preaching, discipleship would be reduced to the laity finding information in their own personal study whenever they could, and then going out to disciple others with whatever time they had left. Preaching should be teaching designed for future action. It is the body of Christ listening to God’s Word for the purpose of being discipled and becoming disciples.

One of the best ways that preaching discipled people that one-on-one or group discipleship cannot is in the preacher’s ability to make the past come alive. Often those being discipled hear stories, even the story of the Gospel message of Jesus and wonder, “how could this relate to my life today?” This is why pastors are more than just preachers. They are more than just teachers. They are story tellers and poets who take the written Bible and make it come alive for the church today. Robert Mounce explains preaching in this way; “as the preacher proclaims the divine act of redemption, the barriers of time are somehow transcended and that supreme event of the past is once again taking place.”⁹ The preacher has the advantage of delivery. Groups and one-on-one discipleship have the advantage of being informal and providing something that feels like everyday life. But preaching has a communication style that is only found in this form of discipleship. It has imagination! It has the ability to make the text be understood, but also experienced. It is this advantage that every preacher, including Jesus, has utilized to better disciple the listeners. The protestant reformer John Knox wrote,

    Preaching does more than recount and explain the ancient event. The Spirit makes the ancient event in a very real sense an event even now transpiring, and the preaching is a medium of the Spirit’s action in doing so. In the preaching,

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when it is truly itself, the event is continuing or is recurring. God’s revealing action in Christ is, still or again, actually taking place.\textsuperscript{10}

With the preacher’s ability to communicate in a way that makes discipleship come alive, it is imperative that preaching stay a part of the church’s discipleship ministry.

**Discipleship in Preaching**

Many people do not consider preaching a type of discipleship ministry. Even if you ask them “Then what is it?,” they would answer “Well, it’s preaching.” Discipleship is so often viewed as something done outside of the corporate gathering, and that anything done within the corporate group, such as preaching or worship singing, is not put into the category of discipleship. Sometimes this is because the preacher is too dull, and other times because the preacher is too entertaining. Others simply do not see discipleship as something that is done in a lecture, or speech format. In their view, it involves asking questions, brainstorming with other believers, and experiencing discipleship together. They do not understand that hearing the Word of God delivered publically for the purpose of growth and life change is discipleship. These points are illustrated in figure 4.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the best form of discipleship done by churches today?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preaching</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sunday School</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Small Groups</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentoring</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4.1 – Best Form of Discipleship**

Most people surveyed believe that the individual discipleship programs are best. Even Sunday school, which is seen as dying by so many, nearly beat out the public teaching of the Word through preaching. However, this is in contrast with the Bible, in which Paul tells us that for the sake of the elect and their knowledge of the truth, God entrusted him with the ministry of preaching.¹¹ Not through the ministry of small groups, mentoring, or any other discipleship method, but through preaching God entrusted His people to be taught. Moreover, Paul also affirms that the teaching activities of a preacher are done “with all wisdom.”¹² This is a bold claim, especially today considering many people feel that the status of American pastors needs improvement (see figure 4.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In Your Opinion, Please Rate the Status of Pastors in America (all Pastors):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terrible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.2 – Status of Pastors

However, Paul’s claim in this passage from 1 Corinthians is stating that there is comprehensive wisdom found in Gospel proclamation.¹³ It is a tool for discipleship that is God ordained and God honoring. It is not the only approach to discipleship, and that needs to be made clear, but it

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¹¹ Titus 1:1-3
¹² 1 Corinthians 1:18-25
¹³ Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 83.
is also important to realize it is a very large part of all discipleship done within a church. It is something that God uses to bring His salvation to people today, to build His church, and to bring His kingdom.\textsuperscript{14}

One obstacle to overcome is with preachers themselves. It has already been alluded to that many preaches are just boring and dull. If discipleship is going to be accomplished through the spoken word, it cannot be dull. Being boring is not something that the church can afford. For preaching to be successful it must achieve a lively homiletic, and not lack passion in a way wherein it sounds to the congregation as if the preacher does not even believe what he is saying.\textsuperscript{15} However, there must be balance. The pastor cannot be an idol for the congregation to worship. Too often churches have dissolved or found themselves with a lost identity because they put too much emphasis on a pastor who stepped down from the pulpit. Neil Cole writes this warning in his book “Church 3.0”:

\begin{quote}
In most churches, people are told to read the Bible but rarely develop an appetite for it. I hear the common mantra of “I try to read my Bible, but I never understand it. It makes so much more sense when I hear my pastor explain. These are sheep who know their pastor’s voice, but it is not Jesus’ voice.”\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

Pastor worship is a real danger in many churches, and pastors should take care to put the emphasis on the message they are delivering and not on themselves as the messengers. Everything that any church leader accomplishes is through the grace of God. If the words of the pastor aid in the spiritual growth of the congregation, it is because it is God speaking through them. The preacher has the job of delivering a sermon to the people that is true to the Gospel and meant for spiritual growth. The preaching is what will lead to discipleship, not the preacher.

\textsuperscript{14} Johnson, \textit{Him We Proclaim}, 9.

\textsuperscript{15} Paul and Wenham, \textit{Preaching the New Testament}, 236.

\textsuperscript{16} Cole, \textit{Church 3.0}, 229.
Necessity of Preaching

With all of the aforementioned points, it is easy to see why Gospel centered preaching is important in churches. It is especially important if a pastor or a church member finds that their church is not performing or fulfilling the mission of God the way that it is supposed to. In these cases, it is often up to the pastor, or whoever is doing the majority of the preaching, to fix the problem. Fortunately, there are many helpful resources to improve one’s preaching. Pastors constantly go to seminars, read books, and listen to podcasts to learn how to be a better preacher, because turning a church around requires good preaching.17 Too often, churches look to other things to improve the church, when the heart of discipleship rests with the preaching being delivered on a weekly basis. Looking for help beyond the pulpit is not a new development for churches. Jeff Crittenden writes, “Beginning in the late seventies, preaching began to take a back seat to other aspects of ministry, such as outreach, community development, and counseling, with the acquiring of psychological tools being encouraged in programs like Clinical Pastoral Education.”18 For churches to survive and for discipleship to be effective, preaching cannot be pushed to the back seat. It must be infused with the other forms of discipleship, such as placing it in cooperation with small group ministry, as this project will provide an approach for. Preaching is something that pastors should be compelled to do. Paul stated that he could not boast about his preaching, because he is compelled to preach by God.19 Those who are called into the ministry of the spoken Word have the same compelling spirit laid on them as well.

17 Stetzer, Comeback Churches, 91.
18 Crittenden, “Three Goals for Preaching in Our Context,” 40.
19 1 Corinthians 9:16
Preaching as Teaching

After establishing that discipleship in preaching is necessary, the next task is to recognize that preaching is a form of teaching. It is not the type of teaching where a test is given and answers are marked correct or incorrect. Preaching teaches character; the very character of God. Matthew 11:1 says that, “When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.”

Two things are important to note here. The first is that Jesus is taking time to instruct the disciples in a form other than preaching. This would be more like a mentoring or small group discipleship model. This project is not advocating that these are bad, or even less important than preaching. The reason this project is placing the Sunday morning message into a small group is because both are extremely important for discipleship. It is likely that Jesus was further explaining something to the disciples that he had previously preached on, as was his custom. Jesus’ model is exactly what this project is suggesting churches implement.

The second thing to note from Matthew 11:1 is that after this small group study with the disciples, Jesus again went to teach and preach. He never once gave up the ministry of preaching. It was the way he discipled the people, and the small group discipleship was how He was training others to do the same. Therefore, although Matthew lists teaching and preaching separately, the use of preaching here is sufficiently broad enough to include it as a teaching ministry. Preaching is more than motivational speaking. It must be instructive to benefit the church. It is meant to be the main source of teaching for the people of God.

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20 Matthew 11:1

21 Mark 4:10-12; Mark 4:34

Describing preaching as a show can be both good and bad. This description has negative connotations because preaching is not designed to be entertaining. It is good to use humor and excitement in preaching, but all of that is a byproduct of its true purpose. The purpose is to instruct the people in the church about the will of God. However, describing preaching as a show is somewhat accurate because the people are focusing on the preacher. They are listening to what he has to say, and watching what he does. Pastors often do something to help the people understand what they are saying, such as telling jokes, stories, or using some other kind of illustration. Even Jesus told parables to help instruct the people. He did not give them the information and wish them the best of luck at trying to understand the teaching. He put the message in their context so that they could grasp what He was saying. Preaching has reached a point where it must change in some ways in order to be successful in instructing the people. In the book *Renovate or Die*, Bob Farr and Kay Kotan state the following about the evolution of preaching:

> Our whole context has changed. What we do with our fifteen to thirty minutes of public speaking has dramatically shifted. Just the idea of public speaking for fifteen to thirty minutes is an old mode of interacting if you want your message to be received. The idea of someone speaking and people giving time to sit quietly and listen without interaction is becoming less and less likely given the world today. Yet we also know that people are hungry for life guidance. Just look at the growth of personalized coaching, which always consists of at least a monthly thirty-minute session. Look at the number of people willing to sit and watch Oprah for sixty minutes every day or at least once a week. There is willingness to give leaders a chance at helping people find meaning and helping them interpret what is relevant in their lives.\(^\text{23}\)

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Preaching publically is not outdated, but may need to be updated in some cases. However, there is the possibility of going too far in making preaching interesting to the people. There can start to be too much focus on the show and not enough focus on the message.

In North America, we have shifted from relationship communities to stage-driven methods of doing church. This stage driven style is ultimately a result of putting too much emphasis on the music and the preaching as collective parts of a show. The attitude of “come and look what we’re doing” instead of “go and do what we’re teaching” is a cancer that has infected many churches, especially in America. This stage-driven, come and see, mentality is certainly the reason why many people have failed to recognize preaching as a vital discipleship ministry. The message gets lost in the light show, fog machines, loud band, and casual look of the pastor. This can happen just as easily with traditional services that put too much emphasis on having things exactly the way they have “traditionally” been. It is the pastor’s responsibility to make sure that the entire worship experience revolves around the public instruction of God’s Word through preaching. If any part of the show gets in the middle of that, no matter how many people hear and experience the worship, the entire service has failed to fulfill its mission of discipling the people. As will be shown, Homiletical Discipleship ensures the message is the focus by continuing to emphasize and instruct the congregation during the week. This instruction is accomplished by using the scripture that was read by the pastor that past Sunday morning. Even with this approach, the burden on making sure the service reflects the teaching of Scripture is going to fall on the pastor. This is not something new. This burden has always fallen to the pastor, and should fall on the pastor. The great teacher and preaching pastor Charles Spurgeon wrote:

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24 Stetzer and Rainer, Transformational Church, 175.
Unless we are instructive preachers, and really feed the people, we may be great quoters of elegant poetry, and mighty retailers of second hand windbags, but we shall be like Nero of old, fiddling while Rome was burning, and sending vessels to Alexandria to fetch sand for the arena while the populace starved for want of corn.\textsuperscript{25}

This is a great quote by Spurgeon that is even more relevant today than it was for the people of his time. If Spurgeon felt the need to teach this principle during his lifetime, imagine what he would think of the state of preaching today. He would be appalled at the lack of instruction for the sake of entertainment and numbers. Those who preach must find a balance between being instructive in their preaching and also engaging the audience so that they listen to what is being said. Paul tells Timothy in his first letter to this young pastor to, “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.”\textsuperscript{26} Teaching through the public speaking of God’s Word has always been, and must continue to be, the main focus of preaching. Even in the stage-driven, “come and see” culture of today, teaching must be what is important in the mind of the pastor and those in discipleship ministries.

The Message

With so much concern about how the sermon is presented, the message contained in the sermon is often the second thought of preachers; however, as Spurgeon so correctly told us, the message is what is important. Some of the best public speakers in history have inspired people to do terrible things. Hitler, for example, inspired a whole country to follow him in bringing the entire world into war. Was Hitler successful? If the measure of a success is numbers he was. He was able to attract large crowds everywhere he went; however, just like any other form of public speaking, Christians should know that the measure of a success for preachers is not their ability to draw a crowd. The measure is how well they are able to instruct the crowd that they do

\textsuperscript{25} Charles Spurgeon, \textit{Lectures to my Students} (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 74.

\textsuperscript{26} 1 Timothy 4:13
have. That means that success is not found in numbers, a great show, or the ability to entertain. Success is found in the ability to teach disciples of Christ. Pastors should not be afraid to tackle hard subjects or things that are made controversial by the culture in which they find themselves.

Hershael York says this to pastors:

The way you handle the Word in the pulpit is the way your people will handle the Word in their lives. In other words, if you don’t preach the difficult passages when you come to them, if you skip over something just because it seems hard for a modern audience to comprehend, then you are teaching them to do the same.\(^{27}\)

Success is found in how well God’s Word is accurately delivered to the people. Measuring this can be difficult because the only one who can truly measure the accuracy is God. However, there are things we can do to make sure our message is as close to God honoring as possible.

Western countries, and certainly America, are consumer driven capitalists. We are very accustomed to having things our way and being told that we, as the customer, are always right. This has made its way into the church so clearly that now churches market themselves in the same ways as department stores. The American church has lost its emphasis on teaching and traded it for messages that are more popular because they are more marketable to our consumers.\(^{28}\) Focusing on preaching that teaches the congregation, and not the marketing to get people there to hear, is the first step in developing a God honoring message. The preacher must prepare a message to be delivered, and then deliver that same message whether twenty people or two thousand show up. To fail in this step is failing to use the biggest advantage that preachers have. That advantage is that a live preacher has immediate interaction with the whole church.

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Although televangelists and satellite pastors have the ability to speak to more people, they ultimately fail where preachers succeed. The advantage preachers have is that they are live and immediate, and must take advantage of that with good openings, clear points, and one ending.29 As was mentioned in the previous section, communication is very important, but the message is more important. A live preacher has a huge advantage over the realms of communication and material. They can see the reaction in the eyes of their hearers. They can recognize what they need to expand on or what they need to quickly move on from. Preaching is a ministry focused on ensuring the maturity of the listeners; it is not about the numbers.30 Satellite campuses can include huge numbers of people that hear the voice of one preacher, but they are not served as well as those who hear and interact with the single preacher who is live with his audience. This is true of most every educational program. This is why schools hate seeing thirty to forty kids in a class for a teacher to lecture. This is why anyone with means, including pastors, often looks to private schools to send their children, instead of public institutions. Even the churches who focus their attention on growing their numbers through satellite campuses prefer their own personal learning in small environments, whether that be seminars, seminary classes, or small group pastor studies. The larger numbers are inevitable when preaching to a crowd, but focusing on numbers over the message does not lead to the maturity of the believers. Without mature believers, the kingdom of God is not served to its fullest. When looking at who fails to lead people to maturity, Bill Hull targets those in charge. He says, “Often pastors and leaders are the culprits. We make it acceptable to be Christian


30 Gibson, Preaching with a Plan, 71.
without becoming like Christ.”

A sermon and worship service that is focused on the message bringing about maturity will help ensure the people know what it means to follow Christ.

Marketplace Preaching vs. Church Preaching

Preaching live, concentrating on the message, and making sure that your message is engaging are all very important. It is also important to realize at what time the preaching must be done in a church context. This project, and the approach to discipleship that will be presented, is based on preaching that is done in churches on Sunday morning for discipleship. Although it is the most popular, church preaching is not the only type of preaching that there can be. There is also marketplace preaching that takes place all over the world, and too often finds its way into our church. Preaching for evangelistic purposes is marketplace, whereas preaching designed to edify Christians is appropriate for the pastor to proclaim on Sunday morning. All preaching will be evangelistic in some ways, and perform edification in some ways. Dennis Johnson says “Of course edification presupposes evangelism, since only those who have been reborn by the Spirit and who have trusted Christ will have the power to change their patterns of behavior for the good.”

The sermons Jesus preached could be considered evangelistic because they were proclaiming Himself as the Christ. However, they were delivered to people who already believed in God. They already believed the Messiah would come. They already looked to God for direction in their lives, and depended on Him for their provision. It is in conversations and small intimate meetings that He evangelized, such as with the woman at the well. This is the model that is appropriate for pastors to use with their messages. Sermons are

31 Hull, The Complete Book of Discipleship, 120.

32 Johnson, Him We Proclaim, 26.

33 Ibid., 39.

34 John 4:4-26
for discipleship and edification of the believers. If Sunday morning messages become evangelistic, most of the people hearing the message will be getting information that they already know and believe. There can be no growth and maturity when this happens each Sunday.

Whether someone is in the marketplace doing evangelistic preaching, or pastors are in their pulpits preaching for edification, the audience to which they are preaching must be considered. This is a major part of preaching for discipleship. With evangelism, the pastor can often talk about life experiences or stories of faith in which God has helped himself or people he knows. With preaching for edification, your sermon is based solely on the text. It is about teaching the members of the congregation what the text has to say for their lives. In doing this, the pastor’s words must be chosen more carefully, and the teaching must be done more concisely. Because of this, pastors preaching for edification on Sunday mornings cannot really do a good job of exegeting a passage of more than two or three paragraphs.³⁵ Marketplace preaching has more freedom to skip around because the focus is on bringing someone to faith. Sunday preaching must narrow its focus to preaching a message that will teach about a specific passage to a group of people who already believe that passage to be true. This preaching is the type that leads to the discipleship of the hearers, and it is the type of preaching that is used for this project.

Case for Expository Preaching in Discipleship

The small group study approach that will be presented in this thesis is based on Sunday morning exposition. A presupposition of the preaching delivered by the pastor on Sunday morning is that it will be expository preaching. People may not all have the same definition of expository preaching, so the definition used for this thesis will be “the preaching of an entire

book found in scripture, starting with the first verse of the first chapter and systematically working through the last verse of the last chapter.” It is in this section that the case will be made that this is the best type of preaching to be used for the approach, as well as for discipleship in general. Our starting point will be addressing why expository preaching is needed.

The Need for Expository Preaching

There are many different types of preaching that can be done in churches. Some of the most popular are expository preaching, topical preaching, or preaching from a lectionary. All of these forms have teaching as their purpose, but only expository preaching takes the listener verse by verse, and chapter by chapter through an existing book of the Bible. Some argue that expository preaching is not necessarily the best way, while others argue that it is so vital to the spiritual growth of the church that it is the only style that should be used. In his book “9 Marks of a Healthy Church” Mark Dever not only lists expository preaching as the first mark of a healthy church, but also says it is far and away the most important mark of them all.36 This is the attitude of many preaching scholars and pastors who see expository preaching as the best way for God to speak to His people today. The teaching that can be done by looking at the whole passage of scripture ensures that nothing important is missed by the teacher or the student. With other forms of preaching, the pastor or homilitician will often skip things that he either does not view as important, or simply does not have time to cover. The expository preacher makes time because every verse is covered in his preaching.

Not only is expository preaching important for the churches who are seeking to disciple their parishioners, but it is also important for those churches that are in decline. In his book “Comeback Churches,” Ed Stetzer investigated 300 churches that were plateaued or declining, and showed how they turned that pattern around to become a thriving church again. In that book

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36 Dever, 9 Marks of a Healthy Church, 38.
he says that “Comeback churches are passionate about the Word of God and their preaching reflects that,” as well as “There does not seem to be only one approach, although the slight majority of comeback pastors used a verse-by-verse style of preaching.”

So not only does expository preaching not hinder the interest of the listeners, but, in a majority of churches researched by Stetzer, it was the style of preaching used to grow their churches once again. Expository preaching works as a way to grow numbers and interest. More than that though, it serves as the best way to cover all the material possible in an effort to use the whole Bible to disciple God’s people. Like Paul, we must “not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God,” especially if that shrinking is caused by the fear of being uninteresting.

Expository Preaching and Culture

One of the big reasons expository preaching is not used, especially by those who have failed to go through seminary, is that they feel the culture today does not lend itself to hearing an expository message. They are much more likely to pick one of the flashy topics that are used today like sex, dating, money, politics, marriage, or prosperity. They fail to recognize that the Bible has plenty to say about each one of those subjects within its pages. If they simply preached expositionally, they would get to teach each one of those with the added benefit of exposing their people to the cultural and historical background of the subjects. The failure of the Gospel to be communicated is in the people’s inability to hear it, not their inability to understand what it says. Pastors should not fail to preach expositionally because they fear members of their congregation would not understand. That is underestimating their intelligence and thinking

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37 Stetzer, *Comeback Churches*, 91.

38 Acts 20:27

to oneself, “I am the pastor and I understand, but my people are not smart enough to grasp this.” Not only is our culture ready to hear the whole Bible, but our culture needs to hear the whole Bible.

Today’s culture is more selfish than ever before, and people are more intent on having things their own way. Expository preachers may switch to another form because they feel they will lose members if they don’t, or may even be pressured by their members to change their style. Pastors must never give in to what they know is best for discipleship simply because they are chasing success. Like children, congregations often do not want what is best for them.

Listen to what Mark Dever has to say about expository preaching and culture;

There are today some criticisms of such expositional preaching. Some suggest that today we need a less rational, more artistic, less authoritarian and elitist, more communal and participatory way of communicating God’s truth that this ancient method of one person standing up front and talking in a monologue to others. We need video clips, they say, and dialogues and liturgical dance. And yet there’s something right and good about this ancient method that makes it appropriate, perhaps even especially appropriate, for our culture today. In our isolatingly subjectivist culture where everyone’s just into their own things, in this anti-authority culture where everyone is confused and confusing, there is something appropriate about us all gathering together and listening to one who is standing in the place of God, giving His Word to us as we contribute nothing to it other than hearing and heeding it. There is an important symbol in this process in and of itself.40

It is right because it is teaching. It is true because it is based on the Word of God. If pastors were serious about the position they hold they would be sure their teaching was close to the Bible. They would not go off on topical tangents, interjecting their opinions about what is best in today’s world. This is why James warned that not many people should become teachers, because teachers of God’s Word are held to a higher standard.41 Even pastors are sinful people,

40 Dever, 9 Marks of a Healthy Church, 54.
41 James 3:1
and sinful people often have wrong opinions. Failure to keep a sermon “anchored” to the text being preached hinders the text from accomplishing its purpose. As expositors, pastors should take care to preach what is actually in the text without their own bias. Expository preaching aids the pastors in accomplishing that task.

Topical vs. Expository

Perhaps the style of preaching that is sought after more than any other is topical. This is most assuredly because pastors believe that this type is best understood by their congregations. However, it is still not what is best for discipleship, which means it is not best for fulfilling the purpose of preaching. This section will compare topical and expository preaching to show why topical preaching is not the best way to disciple through the sermon.

As has been already mentioned, one of the criticisms of expository preaching is that it is not as interesting as topical. People understand topical better, or others might say they stay engaged with topical longer. However, Mark Driscoll offers another criticism of expository preaching that has little to do with the audience’s ability to understand. The problem has to do with the limitations of working through every single word. Driscoll says;

The danger of expository preaching is that it can fall into worshipping the words of the Bible and ignoring the God who speaks through them. It can also lead to getting so bogged down in examining every word in such painstaking detail that the big themes and concepts of the book are lost altogether.

These are interesting criticisms because they are not based on cultural trends. They are actually based on concerns that using expository preaching will miss the main ideas that God wants the hearers to understand. This is a valid argument for wanting the people of God to best understand

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God’s instructions; however, painstakingly looking at each word makes it far less likely to miss an important concept than skipping over entire passages. This falls into the same category of people who pick out random Bible quotes to associate with something going on in their life. Many of those quotes, such as Jeremiah 29:11, were written for a specific people, at a specific time, and for a specific reason. Yes God wants us to have a future and a hope, but there was a specific reason why God gave those words to Jeremiah. It is worth noting that Driscoll later says in the same book that, as a general rule, it is wise for the majority of preaching to be expository and to use other formats only as needed. This shows that even a pastor who has a small criticism of expository preaching still views it as the best style for discipling a church.

Reversing every good thing that has been said about how expository preaching teaches the congregation can be used as a criticism of topical preaching. It does not go verse by verse, so something could be missed; it assumes people cannot understand a deep topical study of the Bible; it is newer, and it is not best for a culture that is accustomed to being catered to. All of these could be said and have been said about topical preaching. Curtis Thomas has, what he thinks of as, four main problems with preaching topical sermons;

First, it places most of the burden on the preacher to decide what God’s people need to hear. In contrast, expository messages, working verse by verse systematically through the Scriptures, accept the wisdom of God who inspired His Word and who knows what His people need. Second, topical preaching forces the pastor to spend time continuously coming up with new topics rather than spending time with a passage, itself, digging out the thoughts and applications that God has already determined are needed. Third, the congregation usually does not know ahead of time what portion of God’s Word is going to be dealt with and thus they are not given the privilege of getting into the Word ahead of time in anticipation of the message. Fourth, as a general rule, topical preaching does not teach the congregation to know how to interpret and apply the Word for themselves.

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44 Jeremiah 29:11

45 Driscoll and Breshears, *Vintage Church*, 93.

These are all valid points, and should be considered by any preacher who wishes to engage in topical messages. Perhaps the most important of all is the fact that the preacher is giving himself the authority to determine what is important enough for the people to hear and what is not. It is not up to the preacher to do this. Certainly when the pastor encourages personal Bible study he does not say, “Skip the parts that you want to,” or perhaps, “It’s fine to study only what you like, everything else isn’t that important.” This is the first step in having the congregation choose for themselves what are the important things to follow. Preaching expositionally is the best way to ensure that churches are discipled with the whole Bible, and not just the Bible that the pastor chooses.

**Preparing to Disciple Through Preaching**

Every step along the way has been important, but the preparation stage is perhaps the most important. Communicating is critical to success, and so is making sure that the sermon does not turn into a show. All of these things together make a successful sermon, and successfully disciples the congregation; however, it is in the preparation stage that the pastor makes sure all these things will happen. It is here that preparations are made for the message to be delivered in a way that brings honor to God, and properly disciples the people. Proverbs 21:5 states, “The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty.”

This warning against haste is certainly true of discipleship delivered through preaching. If someone is called to preach, they are called to prepare themselves to preach. The preparation to preach does not mean making sure the jokes are funny and that the transitions flow. That is a part of speaking that can be rehearsed before preaching if the pastor wishes.

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47 Proverbs 21:5  
Preparing to preach means the pastor is preparing to disciple the group that God is putting in front of him. Scott Gibson writes, “I discovered that preachers do plan, but they tend to plan with their own agenda in mind – knowingly or unknowingly.” Even those who try to ensure they are preaching God’s own words by using expository preaching can fall victim to their own bias opinions if they do not take the planning process seriously.

Focus

When planning to disciple through preaching, the pastor must be focused. This does not mean focused as in undistracted, but focused on what his job is as the preacher. The church belongs to God, and the pastor’s role is to discover God’s vision for the church and equip the congregation to live out that vision. The equipping part is where preaching enters in. It is through this medium that the people of God hear from him. The preacher must decide what the text is saying, and then focus his energies into delivering that to the congregation. Just because the preacher is going to say it does not make it right. Pastors have a huge responsibility to make sure the words they are delivering are God’s. The only way he can do that is through focusing on his preparation through study and prayer. A congregation can be quickly and easily swayed into heresy or untruth if the preacher does not deliver the Word of God correctly. Paul was astonished at how quickly the Galatians had deserted the Gospel of Christ for a different gospel that was preached to them by another preacher after Paul left. The same is true for our congregations today.

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49 Gibson, Preaching With a Plan, 66.

50 Farr and Kotan, Renovate or Die, 18.

51 Galatians 1:6-10
The question that arises is “So what is the focus of the passage?” Each one is different and each has its own specific instruction from God. One place on which every passage focuses is the saving work of Jesus Christ. This is where a small group study based on the sermon is very helpful. Every passage, New and Old Testaments, points to God’s work in the world to save it from sin. It is eventually saved through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. This must be mentioned in every sermon. Bryan Chapell calls this the “Fallen Condition Focus,” and it reveals the text and the sermon’s purpose.\textsuperscript{52} This concept is something that a small group Bible study, such as Homiletical Discipleship, would be beneficial by looking deeper into after the sermon is over. The Fallen Condition Focus is not a textual idea, but it is a Gospel idea that is found in every text of the Bible. In the preparation stage, the pastor must look at things like the Fallen Condition Focus to deliver to the congregation, who has probably not recognized this for themselves in the text. Preparation cannot simply be picking a text, putting it in an outline, and then delivering it in lecture form to the congregation. Preparing for a sermon must go deeper than preparing for a simple speech. The pastor must be focused on bringing his congregation closer to God. He must be focused on the act of discipleship and teaching, not just the act of speaking.

Life of the Pastor

After the pastor has chosen the text, preferably by following through the book expositionally, he then has to preach it in a way that is not so dull that it puts people to sleep. Although the pastor has put in the study time and he has the message that God wants him to deliver, he still must realize he is delivering that message to other people. The sermon design

\textsuperscript{52} Bryan Chapell, \textit{Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 48.
must be addressed from the point of view of the audience, not the preacher. The pastor must take into account how listeners are viewing the sermon. Too often pastors, especially young pastors straight out of seminary, will come into a sermon with theological terms that nobody knows except the classmates they had while in school. Thinking about the way a sermon is presented from the audience’s point of view will help the expository sermon be grasped by the audience.

The audience also wants to hear about how this is personally important to the pastor. Pastors may be looked at as different people because of the job that they hold. Though this be the case, they certainly should not do it to themselves. The congregation wants to know the pastor is a normal person, who deals with the same normal things that everyone else does. Steve Gladen writes this:

> If we want our people to be real, it has to start from the top. People are more endeared to us through our weakness than our strength. Pray for the lead pastor to use personal experiences in his messages so people can see him or her as a real person rather than up on a pedestal.

The relationship between a pastor and his congregation goes a long way in helping the congregation be discipled through the sermon. If the pastor cannot demonstrate in his own life how he is living out the principles he is preaching about, it will not inspire the congregation to do so with their own lives. Change must start at the top with the pastor.

The other thing the pastor must do is show scripture in the present age. It was mentioned earlier how the pastor can bring the past alive through his sermons. In order to do this he has to bring the past alive in the present imagination of the hearers. Making the preaching relevant to the people causes them to want to listen. If it is just another story about what God did way back

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54 Gladen, *Small Groups with Purpose*, 121.
when Rome was still an empire, there will not be much interest. However, if it is a story about what God did, and then how He is doing greater things for us today, the people will listen to that. Preaching in the here and now requires both a careful study of the biblical text, and a keen awareness of the world in which we now live. The pastor must be skilled at recognizing both if he is to properly disciple the people in his church. Discipleship is about relationships, and relationships require individuals to think of others. Even though the pastor is preaching in front of many people, each one of them must feel like they know the pastor. The people must feel like they have a relationship with the speaker and that the words he is speaking are important for their lives today.

**Pastor as Disciple**

Part of the drawbacks of being a mature Christian in a discipleship ministry is that you end up doing the discipling. You are the teacher helping the others become better followers of Christ. This is certainly true for pastors. They often find themselves teaching and preaching so much that they have little time for their own continued learning. There is far too much to know about God than could ever be learned in a lifetime. There is always something new for even the most seasoned pastor to learn. Pastors must be lifelong learners if they want to preach with the potential God has given them. Malan Nel writes;

> Lifelong learning is a journey of studying and listening to the biblical text; it is listening to the congregation and the context; it is also listening to other partners in this journey: those who lived before us and those who try to make sense of our world, sharing the same timespan.

That is a very poetic statement, and it shows what being a disciple of Christ means over a lifetime. Setting the example for others is part of the pastor’s life. A congregation who sees a

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56 Nel, “Persepctives on Preaching (in building up missional churches),” 5.
pastor take his own discipleship seriously is a congregation who will take their discipleship seriously. Pastors who discuss matters with other pastors, pastors who lean on elders or deacons for help and guidance, and pastors who invest in their own discipleship through other means are pastors that people will follow.

Preparing to Disciple

Although most people can agree that it is a good idea for a pastor to plan his preaching, discipleship-driven planning for preaching seems to be a presumption in the minds of many pastors. They assume that since they have read their Bible, developed an outline, and are going to deliver that outline in spoken form that they have accomplished the task of discipleship. However, discipleship through preaching is so much more than just recitation of some talking points that have been put together. It is also more than just imparting knowledge to a group of people so that they will have a higher biblical IQ. Discipleship done through preaching is planned with the idea that every sermon delivered, each and every Sunday, will be life changing to the individuals who hear.

Wayne McDill says, “While we may agree that faith is the desired response, we really do not plan our sermons for faith….Much preaching has as its aim to unload a sermon without making a fool of the preacher.” There are lots of reasons why discipleship may not occur in one’s preaching, but fear should not be one of them. If preparation has been done well, the pastor should know the material about which he is preaching. Anxiety or nerves may still make their way into a sermon, but it should not be because he is uneasy about the material. That material should be well planned, with discipleship in mind. Even when a preacher does consider


58 McDill, *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*, 188.
sermon planning, he may not put planning sermons and discipleship together, or discipleship may not be the goal when he is delivering the sermon. Every stage of the process must come together. For discipleship to be accomplished through preaching the planning and the delivery must be with the end goal of discipleship in mind. More than that, the sermon must be prepared and preached with the congregation in mind. To plan purposeful preaching two things must be considered; the first is the spiritual maturity of the congregation, and the second is the needs faced by your congregation.

Every church is different and every congregation is different. Pastors must take into account the knowledge of the congregation, and the situations in which the members are going to find themselves. A church in a metropolitan city in New York is going to be very different than a church in rural North Carolina. Some churches have individuals with very high Bible knowledge, while others have very little Bible knowledge. The survey conducted for this project asked the participants to rate the Bible knowledge of the average Christian in America. The result is shown in figure 4.3 on the following page.

In Your Opinion, Please Rate the “Bible Knowledge” of the Average Christian in America Today.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Rating</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not very</td>
<td>27.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>70.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>1.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>1.19%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.3 – Average Bible Knowledge


60 Ibid., 86.
Less than three percent of people surveyed thought that the average Bible knowledge of Christians in America was very high or expert level. Pastors need to recognize this when they speak to their congregations. There are always going to be older members who went to church all their lives and could probably quote as many verses from memory as the pastor. During his preparation time, the pastor must determine how he can disciple low knowledge groups and high knowledge groups at the same time.

In addition to recognizing the Bible knowledge of his congregation, the pastor must also be aware of the needs within his congregation if he wishes to disciple effectively. The subject is going to change from sermon to sermon, but the object of the sermon is always going to be the listeners. It is always going to be their discipleship on which the sermon should focus. This can be through a passage of praise for what God has done, a passage of warning against sin, a passage of instruction for Christian living, or any other type of passage that may be found in the pages of scripture. Since the object of the sermon is the people, from the very beginning the sermon must grapple with the needs of this contemporary audience. Pastors must address the subject of the text, and therefore, the infallible theological principle that God presents in the text. This must be done in a way that is relevant to the discipleship of the twenty-first century audience. One way to address this audience in the preparation stage is to consider what major objections and questions the audience might have, and then try to address those in the sermon. Thinking of the questions that high biblical IQ members and low biblical IQ members have could quickly fill up the sermon time. The pastor must find ways to address the questions

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62 Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 185.
without saying “and some of you may be asking yourselves,” or “one of the questions people have is.” It must flow from the teaching so that often times the audience never even realizes they would have asked that question. This will also help address specific needs or even sins within the pastor’s church. Dennis Johnson writes, “Congregational involvement can be further heightened by aiming the sermon at specific needs in the congregation, by addressing the sermon, as the text before it, to specific questions.”63 The discipleship of a church is going to involve the church. This does not mean it will involve the building, but the people. Focusing the sermon on the people and letting the text speak to them through the pastor will accomplish discipleship.

**Application**

Application is not where all the discipleship in a sermon occurs. This is a misconception by some who think that all discipleship is made up of is looking for what to do in the real world. Discipleship is more than that. It is learning about Christian living for sure, but it is also about learning why Christians should live a certain way. Discipleship involves learning about the very character of God. Though this is true, application is where part of discipleship is taught. It is where one realizes how to apply the words of scripture to one’s own life. Paul told Timothy, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”64 The sermon should include teaching, reproof, correction, and training for the people in the congregation. The applications are the good works that they then go out and do with the training and discipleship they have just received. To accomplish this, Andy Stanley preaches

63 Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 184.

64 2 Timothy 3:16-17
with a form of sermon delivery he came up with where the audience is taken through a series of steps within a sermon. The “me” stage is orientation, “we” is identification, “God” is illumination, “you” is application, and “we” is inspiration.65 The “you” is very accurate for application because, as was mentioned earlier, the object of the sermon is the audience. Hershael York has stated that “application is what makes the Bible come alive and makes sermons practical.”66 As pastors prepare to disciple through preaching, application is something that absolutely must be considered.

What is Application

It has been said that there have been five phases of preaching in the United States, and that we have moved out of topical preaching and into an application style of preaching.67 What is application? What is this part of a sermon that seems to grab so much attention from both the preacher and the audience? It is the part of the sermon that elicits a response from the audience. The other parts of the sermon serve to teach about the character of God and inspire people to want to live for God. These sections of the sermon may even be what God uses to open someone’s heart to believing in Him as savior. After all of that information is received, application then says “Okay, now that you know this information, go and do this with it.” If discipleship is one part knowledge and one part action, application is the action that is taught. Preaching that does not contain application serves the mind, but preaching with application serves Christ.68 Too often Christians have the head knowledge of what they are supposed to do.

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65 Andy Stanley and Lane Jones, Communicating for a Change (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2006), 120.

66 York and Decker, Preaching with Bold Assurance, 11.

67 Farr and Kotan, Renovate or Die, 45.

68 Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 54.
but, for whatever reason they justify to themselves, end up not doing it. This is the great challenge of application. How does the pastor get the hearers of his message to not only retain the knowledge that he is delivering, but also use that knowledge in a way that helps expand the kingdom of God. Application is the discipleship tool within a sermon that helps the pastor accomplish that goal.

Application Preparation

As the pastor is going through his sermon preparation, the application preparation has some specific things that need to be considered. Application begins with an end goal in mind, which should answer the question from the audience of “What do you want me to do with this on Monday morning?”69 Stanley takes this further by saying that this end goal should be one single idea that is communicated and that the pastor hopes to accomplish.70 This planning and preparation is in conjunction with the rest of the sermon. Application should not be something that takes place for two minutes at the end of the sermon right before an invitation is given. It should permeate throughout the whole sermon. Every time a point is made about the will of God for our lives, an application should follow.

Application planning should actually take place before the planning of how the sermon is going to be delivered. All the details of the applications given will take shape as the sermon is developed, but the “general thrust” of the application at every stage should precede the development of that particular part of the message.71 This means that the pastor should not force the application to fit with the words he has already said. The application is more of the starting

69 Farr and Kotan, Renovate or Die, 45.

70 Stanley and Jones, Communicating for a Change, 101.

71 Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 213.
point than the ending point of sermon development, even though it comes after the talking points of each section of the sermon. Application helps pastors choose what they need to say and what information supports the response for which scripture is asking. This choice is necessary because they are only going to have a few minutes each week to explain what the passages mean. Application helps narrow the pastor’s focus to what is really important, and keeps him from going off on tangents or “chasing rabbits” that have very little to do with what the passage actually says. In short, it helps the preacher disciple the congregation better by literally telling them how the passage says they should live their lives.

Meeting People’s Needs

On top of giving information about living the Christian life, application also helps by meeting the needs of the people. Sometimes people just need a push in the right direction, and application accomplishes that too. Bryan Chapell says, “Applications must provide proper motivation as well as relevant instruction.” He also lists areas of common concern that application addresses:

(1) Building Proper Relationships
(2) Reconciling Conflicts
(3) Handling Difficult Situations
(4) Overcoming Weaknesses and Sin
(5) Lack or Improper Use of Resources
(6) Meeting Challenges and Using Opportunities
(7) Taking Responsibility
(8) Honoring God
(9) Concern for Social/World Problems

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72 Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 212.
73 Ibid., 219.
74 Ibid., 218.
All of these things are common issues that are addressed through the text of scripture, using application. When done right, application can meet many different needs no matter what situation the individual is facing. In discipleship, especially discipleship through preaching, there is a great deal of information that is delivered to the people. Some of it is brand new and they have the opportunity to experience things that they had never learned before. However, all of that “head knowledge” and Bible knowledge does not mean that the person is a disciple unless he/she goes into the world and uses that knowledge. Therefore, if we are going to disciple correctly through the preaching of the Word, application must be involved. In fact, if pastors want the individuals to conform to the will of God, and have the spoken Word grip their souls, then his approach to preaching must have application as its ultimate goal. All along, this thesis has been expressing the importance of a life change in the lives of the people being discipled. Pastors look to see people transformed into full-fledged followers of Jesus Christ. Application aids in this process by filling the needs in their lives, and showing them how to help fill the needs in the lives of others.

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CHAPTER FIVE

HOMILETICAL DISCIPLESHIP: INFUSING PREACHING INTO SMALL GROUPS

This thesis has been building up to this chapter. Here is where the actual approach of Homiletical Discipleship will be presented. The building of this approach was based on all the information that was gathered and reported in the previous chapters. It is designed to be a supplement to the information and application that is taught on Sunday morning, but take place away from the formality of the church in order to stimulate mature growth. Participants will get discipleship through the formal teaching of the Word on Sunday morning, and then receive additional teaching through relationship building during the week. This approach recognizes that learning takes place in all of life, and that effective adult discipleship requires diverse learning opportunities.\(^1\) The preaching of the Word is vital and should never be given up by the church or anyone wishing to truly disciple people; however, the effectiveness and value found in small groups, especially those that meet off campus in informal settings, must be a part of discipleship in our culture today. Therefore, through the research compiled, this author is convinced that the physical preaching of the Word and the intimacy of smaller groups is necessary for the complete discipleship of Christians who wish to do the work of God. Prior to writing this thesis, interviews were conducted with pastors to see what other experienced ministry professionals thought of this approach to discipleship, and of discipleship in general. Some of the relevant information from those interviews is what follows.

**Pastor’s Interview Responses**

Each of the pastors that were interviewed was done so on the condition of anonymity. This is not because they did not want their names or their church’s names mentioned, but as a

\(^1\) Blevins and Maddix, *Discovering Discipleship*, 293.
preemptive condition set forth by the interviewer in order to receive the most honest responses to each question. All pastors interviewed are currently pastoring in churches located in North Carolina, but come from a variety of backgrounds. The pastors will be identified as Pastor A, Pastor B, Pastor C, and Pastor D, with their churches sharing their letter for identification. After compiling the data from the interviews, three areas of importance stuck out: the length of the sermon that each one preached on Sunday morning, the importance of small groups as part of discipleship, and the obstacles that are faced both in preaching the Word for discipleship and using small groups for discipleship.

Length of Sermon

The length of each pastor’s sermons is within ten minutes of each other. That range is from twenty-five to thirty-five minutes, with two of the pastors saying they preach for exactly thirty minutes every Sunday. Based on current trends in preaching, it seems that thirty minutes is about how long most sermons take. This calculation puts each of the pastors interviewed close to the average that was found when conducting the survey of church members.

| How Long Does the Pastor’s Sunday Morning Messages Usually Last During a Worship Service? |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------|
| 10-20 minutes                                 | 10.59%   |
| 20-30 minutes                                 | 48.24%   |
| 30-45 minutes                                 | 35.29%   |
| Longer than 45 minutes                        | 5.88%    |
| Other                                         | 0.00%    |

Figure 5.1 – Length of Sermon
When asked if this was sufficient time to teach the congregation, the answers differed. Pastor A and Pastor D said that this was all the time they were willing to teach. Pastor A referenced the fact that if you use too many points the main idea will not sink in to the audience, while Pastor D wished to respect people’s time and not keep them there longer than necessary. On the other hand, Pastor B said that a little more time would be helpful, and that thirty minutes forces you to compress certain ideas about your sermon. Pastor C simply said “there is never enough time.” When asked if the length of the sermon was changed based on the audience, the answers varied but would all be placed in the “no” category. So each of the pastors thought that, for different reasons, around thirty minutes is the right amount to preach during a Sunday morning service. When the survey participants were asked if the time spent preaching by their pastor was enough to relay the message of the sermon, most answered yes.

**Do You Think Sufficient Time is Spent Preaching So That The Congregation Learns the Material Being Presented By the Pastor?**

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<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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</thead>
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<td>22.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5.2 – Sufficient Time**

The discipleship approach presented here will incorporate preaching that tries to stay at the thirty minute mark. This is sufficient time to explain the subject, and forces the preacher to cut out any “fluff” that may be funny or entertaining, but does not aid in the discipleship of the
congregation. The fact that there is a discipleship small group that will pick up the subject of the sermon helps the preacher know that he can cover all the major points of theology within the sermon, while the small group leaders can fellowship with a little of the “fluff.” It is also worth noting that, in the survey, participants were asked if more time should be spent preaching on Sunday or discussing the material in a small group. The overwhelming majority chose the small group option.

**Would Additional Time on the Sunday Morning Subject Be Spent During the Sunday Morning Sermon Time or In A Small Group Discussion?**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Morning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small Group</td>
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<tr>
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**Figure 5.3 – Additional Time on Sermon Subject**

**Opinions on Small Groups**

The second thing that was interesting about the interviews was that each of the pastors thought that small groups were a huge part of discipleship within the local church. It is worth noting that all four of the pastors who participated have active Sunday school programs in their churches, but view small groups as more important that Sunday school. Pastor C, who is the most experienced pastor in the group with forty-one years’ experience, said that as their church began small groups they did so without changing Sunday school because Sunday school is still a “sacred cow” in many people’s minds. For churches that are established and have not been planted in the past thirty years, it seems like this is the only way small groups work. Combining
Sunday school and small groups lets those who hold to the tradition of Sunday school keep that method of discipleship, while also opening up small group discipleship to the rest of the congregation. When asked “What is the most important method available to churches today for the continual discipleship of individuals?,” each pastor answered that small groups were that method. The pastor’s opinions differed on what method best brought people into the church, but once they were members, the consensus was that it was small groups that best developed their spiritual growth. This supports the information that was presented in the small group section of chapter three.

Small groups were always a major part of Homiletical Discipleship. The preaching of the Word from a trained ministry professional is the heart of this approach, but the small groups are the lifeblood that keeps discipleship moving. Through the preparation and cooperation of the pastor, group leaders, and the participants, the small group is going to be what continually disciples the individuals to grow in their faith. The groups will not be successful unless there is cooperation with faithful preaching. At the same time, preaching without follow up does not ensure that the individuals hearing the messages are actually being discipled. Both used in conjunction with each other will be the success of this approach.

Obstacles

Lastly, since Homiletical Discipleship will rely on the Sunday morning preaching and the use of small groups, the pastors were asked to describe some of the obstacles they have found that hinder their church member’s success in grasping the main point of the sermon. They were then asked about the obstacles facing small group success in churches. As expected, each of the pastor’s responses differed. Starting with obstacles to preaching, Pastor A said that biblical illiteracy was the problem. Pastors not recognizing the illiteracy of their church and then
preaching badly from the pulpit hurts the church even more. Pastor B said that worldly
distractions kept many people from focusing on the message that was delivered. Pastor C stated
that the congregation was not “hungry enough” for hearing a word from God, and that they were
not “prayerfully seeking truth.” Finally, Pastor D said that the biggest obstacle was commitment.
Sometimes it was a lack of commitment on the pastor’s part, but sometimes it was a lack of
commitment on the part of the congregation. Not surprisingly, each of the pastors put some
blame on the congregation as an obstacle in grasping the Sunday morning message.

Homiletical discipleship will seek to change this obstacle by having the pastor and small
group leaders focus on the attentiveness of the people. Some pastors are just boring, and it will
be up to the small group leaders to be very honest with the pastor in these cases. Other times, the
congregation may have “checked out” of a good sermon. The small group leaders will then be
tasked with “intentionally” letting the people know they are to respect the under-shepherd that
Christ has placed in their church, and to listen to his words. Either way, whether the pastor or
congregation is to blame, this approach to discipleship has a system of checks and balances to
ensure the people are being discipled. It is not about pride, and everyone involved will be there
because they want to become more committed followers of Christ.

The other question was about the obstacles facing small groups. Again, the answers by
each of the pastors differed greatly. Pastor A thought that the tradition of the church was so
heavily tied to Sunday school as being the only acceptable form of discipleship, that this other
discipleship method was hindering the small group growth of the church. Pastor B said that
commitment to the process was an issue. Groups seemed to work for a while, but people soon
failed to take part in discipleship. This is a warning Bill Hull gives when he says, “Starting
groups is easier than maintaining them. How you start a group determines whether you can
maintain it.” Pastor C said the same obstacle for the congregation grasping the sermon affected small groups. The people simply are not hungry to be fed spiritually. Finally, Pastor D stated that qualified leaders to take charge of the groups were the biggest issue. Looking back through this thesis, each one of these issues was addressed, especially the need for all to participate and the need for qualified leadership.

The approach presented here will address each one of the issues and obstacles in the planning phase of Homiletical Discipleship. No approach is perfect, and no discipleship attempt is without its hiccups. However, planning will solve many problems before they arise.

**Intentionality**

One of the marks of Homiletical Discipleship will be its intentionality. In their book “Renovate or Die,” Bob Farr and Kay Kotan write this; “People don’t just become disciples through osmosis by being in church. They need to be fed with intentional faith development opportunities.” Because of this, Homiletical Discipleship is structured so that each group is starting from the same place and for the same purpose. The intentional aspect of the groups is one and the same. Their purpose will be to make disciples, who then go out and make disciples. Through this, the universal church will grow numerically and qualitatively, with all of this happening because Christ supports and sustains His body. The approach should not become an idol in the same way the pastor should not become and idol. The direction in which the groups go will differ, depending on who is in the group demographically, and on the needs of the group spiritually. Meeting each other’s needs and bearing each other’s specific burdens is how we

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2 Farr and Kotan, *Renovate or Die*, 32.

fulfill the law of Christ.\textsuperscript{4} However, no group will deviate from the type of discipleship for which the leadership is striving because they will have guidelines. The subject discussed in the groups will be the subject of the sermon, and the object of the application will always be the people and how disciples should act in the context of the scripture.

The reason for the guidelines is not to restrict the growth or participation of the people being discipled. Again, it has an intentional purpose. Young believers, who are being discipled, are prone to try and do the right things for the wrong reasons.\textsuperscript{5} Hearing the words on Sunday morning and taking the application seriously is where many young believers start. They leave church on Sunday and want to do everything right as they walk out of the building. This seems admirable on the surface, but what they are doing is going out and doing something that the preacher tells them is right. If the preacher has done his job, he has explained in the sermon before the application why the actions he is telling the congregation to take are those same actions Christ would take. However, for the young believer, more information is needed. They need to talk about that subject more and have someone place those principles in real world situations. This is the value of having a small group continue to study the sermon after it has been preached. In his book “Radical Together,” David Platt says, “True faith in Christ inevitably produces great work for Christ, not works fueled by the flesh in an attempt to earn our way to God, but works fueled by faith in a life that is abandoned to God.”\textsuperscript{6} A young believer would hear the instructions on what to do, but they would have no idea what doing it in a way that was “abandoned to God” was all about. The timeless truths that are preached on Sunday morning are of the upmost importance, but they must be coupled with discipleship during the week. To be

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{4} Galatians 6:2
\item \textsuperscript{5} Jim Putman, \textit{Real-Life Discipleship}, 104.
\item \textsuperscript{6} Platt, \textit{Radical Together}, 30.
\end{itemize}
clear, this is not just for new believers either. Many people who have been in church for a long time still need help understanding things about the Bible. As was pointed out earlier, even pastors need continued discipleship in their lives. Even those men that preach the Word on Sunday morning need people in their lives to continue to sharpen them for the sake of the Gospel being spread. It is with this intentional task of helping each other gain understanding that these groups are formed.

How is the success of the groups measured? Are the groups successful if they are filled in a week, or are they successful if at the end of the time nobody has any questions left unanswered? The answer is neither, but rather what the people do with the information that has been given to them on Sunday morning and in the group time. A good way of thinking about it is to say that leaders recognize success by the number of leaders they unleash into God’s mission, and not by the number of followers that they gather.\(^7\) Again, the intentional purpose of these groups is to help create disciples for Jesus Christ who then go and make disciples for Jesus Christ. A small number of Christians who take this calling seriously and strive to accomplish this goal is far better than having a high number of groups with a high number of people who do nothing but sit and talk about their faith. Sitting for any reason is not why God instituted the Church. God designed the church, whether that constitutes assemblies of Christians or local churches, to be a visible and living testimony about Christ to the rest of the world who is watching.\(^8\) All of the material presented, the discussions that take place, and even the sermons that are preached in the churches using this approach will be with the sole purpose of raising disciples who make disciples. Churches who take part in this ministry will do so because the

\(^7\) Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 216.

\(^8\) Akin, ed., *A Theology for the Church*, 817.
members have a heart for their community and for the world. Thom Rainer writes, “When a church ceases to have a heart and ministry for its community, it is on the path toward death.”9 Homiletical Discipleship helps assure that the people within a church know it is their responsibility to reach out to the community. It is intentionally a “go out to the world” model and not a “world, come to us” model.

Leaders

Leadership is a crucial part of anything that is successful. It is also the reason why many things fail. When the early church started to diminish and have serious problems come into the fellowship, the leadership was a major reason why. Even in those cities that were considered to be Christian, attendance for worship services was low and the instruction given to those who served in the clergy, as well as the laity, was almost nonexistent.10 Because of their lack of discipleship, both of the leaders and of the new believers, the church experienced a terrible time of failure and frustration. The world today is experiencing similar frustrations because the church has not fulfilled its mission in the world. As part of Homiletical Discipleship, the leadership will be chosen very carefully. Leadership will be divided into two categories; pastoral leadership and lay leadership. Both will have a tremendous amount of responsibility, and it is through their believing, teaching, living, and dependence on God that those groups under their care will become disciples of Christ.

Pastoral Leadership

If leadership starts at the top, then the church’s pastor is where the discussion needs to begin. These are the shepherds of the church who, with God’s guidance, set the direction of the

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local churches that they lead. One instance is in Acts chapter sixteen, where the Holy Spirit actually forbids the disciples from preaching in Asia.\textsuperscript{11} They were only aware of this because of their dependence on God. The pastor must spend time in prayer and communication with God to correctly lead the church. Affording him the time to do this is vital to the health of a congregation. In order for the pastor to be able to lead and cast the vision for the church, his role must be defined for the congregation and agreed upon by all. If a church is pastor-centered instead of pastor-led, Homiletical Discipleship will not work. Bob Farr and Kay Kotan best describe what it means to be a pastor-centered church:

A church must also be pastor-led rather than pastor-centered. Pastor centered means a pastor is hired to care for the congregation, entertain the congregation, and do ministry for the congregation. In a pastor-centered church (the norm in established, declining churches), the pastor thinks, “This is not my church; it’s their church. Therefore, I need to help them find their way.” In this case the pastor unknowingly acts more like what Jesus called a hired hand rather than a shepherd. So the pastor has to wait for a congregation to decide its vision, its activity, and its ministry. Then the pastor will simply carry out those wishes. In the pastor-centered model the laity’s role is to come a little bit, do a little bit, give a little bit, and say a whole lot. So the pastor follows the congregation and they inevitably and unknowingly miss the joys of ministry. They spend most of their time in committee meetings believing this is church ministry while missing out on the fruits of real hands-on ministry. If a church is to come alive, the role of the pastor and laity needs to look more like Ephesians 4:11-15. If the church wants to come alive, it must move to a pastor-led model of governance rather than a pastor-centered model. In a pastor-centered church, there is too much of a pastor-fetch mentality and too much of a laid-back laity watching from the sidelines. In a pastor-led church, a pastor’s first responsibility is to lead, then equip, and then serve. These are connected. One without the others will not work.\textsuperscript{12}

This pastor-led, rather than pastor-centered, model is what churches must be willing to use in order for Homiletical Discipleship to work. John chapter ten says,

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the

\textsuperscript{11} Acts 16:6

\textsuperscript{12} Farr and Kotan, \textit{Renovate or Die}, 17-18.
wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”

A church that is pastor-centered has a hired hand. In a correct discipleship method that is pastor-led, there is going to be a great deal of planning and leading done by the pastor, but most of the physical discipleship in the group is done by the laity. It must involve both groups to be successful. The passage from Ephesians chapter four that was referenced says that, “he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” The average pastor is extremely overworked because the congregation expects him to do everything. Not only is the expectation there, but too often the pastors enable the congregation by volunteering to do jobs that should really be left to the laity. Too many how-to books suggest pastors do other things to be effective, but these pastors are already burning out because they are attempting too much. The ministry of many pastors has been reduced to “overseeing buildings, budgets, meetings, and problems.”

Nowhere in that list is preaching, teaching, discipling, leading, or any of the jobs that pastors are actually supposed to be doing. Discovering a new approach to discipleship, such as the one to be presented here, is not meant to be another added responsibility for the pastor. It is meant to be a way for the pastor and the congregation to focus their efforts on serving, with the goal of making disciples who then make more disciples. This discipleship will transform a church into a “shepherd-led” church, where the sheep are thriving, highly valued, and highly motivated.

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13 John 10:11-13
14 Ephesians 4:11-12
15 Browning, Deliberate Simplicity, 36.
16 Earley and Dempsey, Disciple Making Is..., 223.
followers of the shepherd’s leadership. This shepherd is of course the senior or lead teaching pastor in a church.

As part of being the shepherd, the pastor looks after the sheep. More than simply “babysitting,” the pastor guides and teaches the sheep to fulfill the mission God has for them. Once the congregation becomes accustomed to doing the work of the ministry, the pastor’s vision can really be put into practice. They must be willing to give the work of the ministry away to the members, and then the pastor can spend more time praying, teaching, and equipping. Deacons were first instituted in the book of Acts because the pastors thought to themselves, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the Word of God to serve tables.” Pastors are servants to be sure, but they are servants of God and His will. Leaders cannot function as pez dispensers that present a sugary treat anytime somebody asks them for something. Their job is not to deliver information, but to equip for service. Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey state that, “Pastors are to train or equip the saints, and the saints are to do the work of ministry.” So while Homiletical Discipleship will not be pastor-centered, with all of the work falling on the pastor, it will also not be congregationally-centered with the pastor not doing anything. He will set the vision and guide the congregation to accomplish the goals that God has for his local church. Following a small group study approach based on the Sunday morning sermon will allow everyone to stay focused on the task of discipleship.

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18 Gladen, *Small Groups with Purpose*, 84.

19 Acts 6:2


From a pastoral leadership perspective, the goal of Homiletical Discipleship is to make sure pastors do not simply give information, but are ministers of what Bryan Chapell calls “Christ’s transformation.” In order to do this, the pastor must be spiritually right with the Lord himself. Paul tells his young disciple Timothy to “present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” A pastor must not only speak the correct words, but present himself in daily life as one worthy of the office that he holds. A pastor who is sinning unrepentantly, or has some deep issues that affects the way he discipless, is not going to be able to fulfill his duties to the church. This was the issue with the papacy during a certain period in the history of the Catholic Church. Young men with no prior religious service became popes because of politics, and this resulted in the moral condition of the papacy being “squalid.” The same can be said of many churches today. Taking numbers out of the equation, both small churches and mega churches are having issues with leadership. The issue is not in their ability to attract members, but more in their ability to disciple in a way that allows God to change their members. They are content to receive a paycheck for their work on Sunday morning, or worse, to use the pulpit as a way to expand their fame for their own personal glory. Floyd Barackman says that, “Under the Lord Jesus the general care and oversight of the local church belongs to spiritually gifted men who are divinely called to this office and who are spiritually qualified for their work.” The pastorate is not a job; it is a divine calling to make disciples of all nations. The ongoing development of personal and congregational spiritual

22 Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 57.

23 2 Timothy 2:15


maturity is a significant role in pastoral leadership. The pastor is responsible for the discipleship of his congregation. He must recognize this fact and take care to enhance his own spiritual maturity if he is going to be able to disciple effectively.

The last dimension of pastoral leadership to be discussed here is that pastoral leaders need to be respected. Too often congregations disrespect pastors to the point that they feel they must leave the church in order to perform ministry. The pastor is the main teacher within the church, no matter what form of discipleship or programs they have. Paul instructs Timothy, “Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.” This shows the respect that the office of pastor deserves. If one person has an issue with the pastor, that is not enough evidence to complain. It must be on the word of others. As the key leader in discipleship, it will be important for the congregation to give the pastor the respect that he deserves. This will be aided by the leadership of the laity.

Lay Leadership

When Moses first led the Israelites out of Egypt, they were operating in a pastor-centered sort of way. Moses father-in-law, Jethro, felt the need to approach Moses and tell him that having all the people come to him to dispute their problems was not good, and that he needed to appoint other men to help in this matter. The same can be said of current church discipleship. Too much emphasis is placed on the pastor or other leaders to do all the work. Homiletical Discipleship seeks to empower the laity to lead by giving them a guideline, but letting them facilitate the group.

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27 1 Timothy 5:19

28 Exodus 18:13-26
As we saw in chapter three, most people agree that the senior pastor is best qualified to disciple, but would rather be discipled by other lay members (see figures 3.7 & 3.8). This seems like an odd answer to the questions about who is best qualified to do the discipling and who people would prefer to have disciple them. Why would individuals not want to be discipled by the person they feel is most qualified to disciple? Many times people are more comfortable with somebody that they see as being more like themselves. A pastor, even if he is the same age, gender, and has the same interests as the person to be discipled is still a pastor. Prospective disciples are not as comfortable interacting with him as they are with other members of the church. For this reason, discipleship should be facilitated by the laity. These leaders should move beyond being teachers who dispense information, much like the pastors who are pez dispensers, and move into being facilitators who encourage the exchange of dialogue and discussion. This will require the participation and commitment of lay leaders, which is often harder to achieve than working with staff members. Not only is it harder to get the right unpaid volunteer to work out, it is also much harder to change out those volunteers when things are not working. For this reason, many churches that are financially stable have opted for putting more staff on the payroll rather than leaving discipleship to the laity. The drawbacks of this “solution” are having members less comfortable than they would be with another lay person, as well as diverting funds away from other ministries like feeding the hungry or giving to foreign missions. Those participating in discipleship ministries must understand that leadership is not only vital to discipleship, but that it should also be the end result. If pastors disciple the same groups who

29 Gladen, Small Groups with Purpose, 58.
30 Farr and Kotan, Renovate or Die, 57.
31 Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, Transformational Discipleship, 215.
consist of the same people, they are not developing leaders. They are only achieving the further education of students. Discipleship methods must train disciples who then go out and train disciples. The student becoming the teacher should be the end result, and all of those students will not end up being pastors. Doctors, lawyers, teachers, mechanics, waitresses, bankers, and members of every other profession should be involved in making disciples if those individuals are truly followers of Christ. Allowing leaders and participants to make mistakes and leave with questions is a way they learn as they grow in Christ.  

These leaders should consist of the laity, but they cannot be just anyone who wishes to teach. One of the warnings that Jim Putman lists for discipling others is putting spiritually immature people in leadership positions. He says, “Before we place people in an important leadership position, they must have proven character over time, no matter what they can do with their natural abilities.” While wanting to make sure that our leaders are spiritually mature, discipleship developers must not fall into believing the myth that facilitators must be “highly trained spiritual superstars.” The facilitators of the small group discipleship correlated with the morning message do not need to be highly educated. They certainly do not need to have seminary or other advanced degrees. More than anything else, they must be people who are open to allowing the Word of God to be the deciding factor in the decisions of their life. David Augsburger states, “only an authentic witness can give an authentic witness.” It is much more important for the person to love and seek after God, than for him/her to be able to quote the entire book of Ephesians.

32 Cole, *Church 3.0*, 229.


34 Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 175.

35 Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship*, 176.
When hearing this, some will raise the question “how do you keep heresy out of the church without trained leaders?” First of all, the leaders should be trained. They will be trained and will be given direction and help in their teaching. They do not, however, have to have former seminary training and pass a battery of tests as if they are going through an ordination council. Secondly, as Neil Cole points out, heresy can never be eliminated one hundred percent and the best solution is to have better trained people in the pews.\textsuperscript{36} This task falls on the pastor to preach for discipleship in his sermons, and for the facilitators to teach for discipleship in their groups. The intentional aspect of discipleship, even though it had its own section in this thesis, must continually be stated to the pastors and the facilitators.

Leaders should also understand the realities of life. Dean Blevins and Mark Maddix, in their book “Discovering Discipleship” state, “Faith formation is never divorced from the realities of life, which makes it important for the Christian educator to understand the shifting tides of the culture.”\textsuperscript{37} Discipleship leaders must love people and understand the things that they are involved in within the world. They cannot place themselves in a spiritual bubble that keeps the world out. They must remember that people are in the world and we are called to love people, and to make them disciples of Christ. In everything they should pursue love, and trust the spiritual gifts that God has given them.\textsuperscript{38} These are not special qualifications, or things that must be studied through systematic theology books or the writings of past theologians. These are qualifications available to everyone if they will trust in God to provide them. Disciple makers do

\textsuperscript{36} Cole, \textit{Church 3.0}, 224.

\textsuperscript{37} Blevins and Maddix, \textit{Discovering Discipleship}, 291.

\textsuperscript{38} 1 Corinthians 14:1
not need to be pastors, charismatic leaders, great communicators, or innovative thinkers, which is why it is important for everyone to take part in discipleship.\textsuperscript{39}

**The Approach**

Finally, the approach of Homiletical Discipleship begins to take shape. As leadership, preaching, discipleship, and small groups come together to make disciples for Christ, the approach that is formed will be the heartbeat of ministry for the churches that use it. Any change is difficult, but the reality is that most churches are not conducting their discipleship in a way that is effective. Pastors cannot worry about the seven words that often kill churches; “We’ve never done it that way before.”\textsuperscript{40} If the pastors are apprehensive about discipleship, the congregation will be as well. This is a new form of discipleship that is built on the fundamental need for preaching and the cultural need for discipleship to take place in small groups. This is how sound doctrine is passed on to others. Sound doctrine is defined as, “truth lived out in our character to the betterment of others.”\textsuperscript{41} This approach is all about others. It is not about the pastors, the lay leaders, or even the church. Discipleship should be about the people being discipled, and so this approach is. Therefore, with all the information and research being considered, the following five steps make up the process of Homiletical Discipleship:

**Step 1: Organization**

Homiletical Discipleship is organized around the preaching of the pastor. It is the pastor who ultimately decides the book that he is going to be preaching through, and therefore he is the person who decides the subject. Because of this, the pastor must communicate often with the

\textsuperscript{39} Platt, *Radical*, 90.

\textsuperscript{40} Reid, *Introduction to Evangelism*, 334.

\textsuperscript{41} Cole, *Church 3.0*, 228.
small group leaders. The following schedule is how the communication between pastor and lay leaders is organized:

Six weeks before the start of the new series, the pastor contacts the small group leaders with the new sermon series, book of the Bible used, and title of the series. The leaders will read the selected scripture in preparation for their teaching. They will begin making notes and looking for ways to tie in the message to everyday life. This is done independently of the pastor, in order to generate their own ideas that could be used. One week out, the pastor gives the leaders his outline for the message the following Sunday and the curriculum for the upcoming small group. On Sunday morning the pastor delivers his message, intentionally aiming for the purpose of discipleship. It is also during this time that the pastor gives the group leaders his outline and curriculum for the following week. One day during the week the groups will meet to further disciple through the message that was preached on Sunday morning using the curriculum provided. There will be an evaluation period every three months between the pastor and all of the small group leaders. This will be a scheduled meeting and needs to be attended by all involved. If there are any questions between these meetings, the leaders will be encouraged to talk to the pastor directly.

This schedule helps show how, even though the groups have no hierarchy among the members and facilitator, the pastor is always the one who guides the groups. Admittedly, this requires a lot of preparation and advanced planning on the part of the pastor. This load can be lightened by letting the pastor and the congregation know what their responsibilities are. The pastor’s main job is to preach the Word and pray, not to see to the physical needs of the church building or programs.\textsuperscript{42} Members of the congregation help see to the needs of the church.

\textsuperscript{42} Acts 6:1-6
building and of the programs that are provided. As more disciples are made, the local church will be better tended to by the increase in disciples.

The sermon that is presented must be done with the intention of discipleship. If this does not take place it will handicap the small group leaders, as well as fail to be biblical preaching. Disciples of Jesus who were denying self and making other disciples of Jesus is how the gospel penetrated the world to begin with. Transforming the lives of the hearers, and not entertaining them, must be the focus of the leaders. The main thing that the hearers remember cannot be a joke or an extravagant moment that happened in the service. They must remember the message of the service. If too much of the church’s attention is spent on putting on a weekly show for the audience, the pastor will be too busy planning the show instead of creating a system by which people are discipled. The service can be contemporary, traditional, or blended, but the emphasis must be on the message. It cannot be on the laser lights, fog machines, humor of the speaker, or “wow factor” that so many churches strive for. The message must be the focus. The believers must be joining their lives together for the purpose of “maturing in the faith and engaging in God’s mission.” They are not there to watch a court jester entertain them. They are there to hear the very Word of God.

Step 2: Curriculum

The curriculum for each group will be the same. The lay leaders may decide the best way to present that curriculum to their groups, but the material should always be the same for all groups. The curriculum is not a book that points out, “Say this here.” Instead, it is a guide for the leaders on how to lead their groups. Included with the outline, which is given to the leaders a

41 Platt, *Follow Me*, 179.
45 Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 175-176.
week in advance, they are also given the curriculum guide with four questions for starting the groups. Those questions are: “What is this passage about?, How does it relate to me?, How does it relate to Christ?, and What should I do now?” Each of these questions intentionally points at a specific aspect of the discipleship. Those different aspects are instruction, relevance, Christ-focused, and application of the principle learned.

A careful observer will notice that each of these four questions and their aspects are things that a good pastor will cover in the sermon. The question “What is this passage about?” deals with the instruction provided for the congregation. Here is where the individuals should learn some information they have not heard before, or refresh their memories with important things they need to be able to recall.

The relevance portion, which answers the question “How does it relate to me?,” is showing the individuals why this is important to them. People are accustomed to being given information, but much of it is not really important. Many men can name the starting lineup for their favorite baseball team, but that information does not help them in their everyday life. This section helps enlighten the group about why the information covered should be important for them to know.

“How does it relate to Christ?” helps bring the group back to thinking about the Fallen Condition Focus. How does this passage, and every other passage in the Bible, relate to the risen Christ that we worship as part of our faith? This supports a Christ-focused attitude throughout the group, which hopefully carries over to their lives outside of the church. It is important that the pastor and group leaders continually point to the need that we have for a Savior.

Near the end of the send step of this approach to discipleship, the application is again presented to the group with the question “What should I do now?” The application will surely
have been covered by the pastor on Sunday morning; but this is a chance for the group leaders and the individuals to think about what they should do with the information. People come from different backgrounds, and even though the passage means one thing, people can use that to improve on different parts of their lives. What one person uses to help with finances could also be helpful for another person in their relationships. Here the group leader takes the question and helps focus on how participants can use the Word of God to go into the world and make disciples. This is also a time to remind the group of the applications that the pastor listed for them on Sunday morning. If the group leaders have taken good notes with the outline and curriculum provided for them, this should not be a difficult task.

Also included with the curriculum is specific information about the passage that may not have been mentioned in the sermon due to time. This preparation will also help the pastor become a more focused speaker, knowing that he does not have to input every piece of historical background during the sermon. The small group can discuss that later in the week. It allows the sermon to be life changing, and the small groups help individuals understand better how their lives were changed. Following is the outlines and curriculum for Jonah 1:1-17, as well as Colossians 1:15-23, as an example of what the curriculum guidelines look like. This can be found in figures 5.3 through 5.9 on the following pages.
Exegetical Outline
Jonah 1:1-17

Unifying Theme
The Sovereignty of God Over Creation

I. JONAH RECEIVES A COMMAND FROM THE LORD TO GO TO NINEVAH (1:1-2).

II. JONAH DOES NOT WANT TO OBEY, SO HE RUNS AWAY AND SEEKS PASSAGE TO TARSHISH (1:3).

III. THE LORD IS DISPLEASED WITH JONAH AND ORCHESTRATES EVENTS TO PUT HIM BACK ON THE RIGHT PATH (1:4-17).
   (a) The Lord sends a storm to distress the ship on which Jonah is traveling (4).
   (b) The sailors recognized this storm was from God and sought a way to stop it (5-9).
   (c) Jonah and the men knew God was displeased with Jonah. They agreed to have Jonah thrown into the sea to save the ship (10-16).
   (d) God caused a great fish to swallow Jonah and he sat in the fish for three days (17).

IDEA: We must be faithful to the will of God. Trusting Him to make the best decisions and direct our calling is the only way to please Him.

Figure 5.4 – Exegetical Outline of Jonah 1:1-17
Homiletical Outline (Jonah 1:1-17)

**Unifying Theme:** The Sovereignty of God over His Creation

**Section Theme:** Disobedience

**Title of the Sermon:** Disobedience to the Sovereignty of God

**Main Idea of the Sermon:** God’s Will is not dependent on our Obedience.

**Introduction:** No! I don’t want to! I don’t like that! These are what every parent has heard sometime in their life. We want to look back at the child and say “I don’t care.” What is right and what is necessary is not dependent on whether or not everyone agrees with it or likes it. This is a lesson that Jonah learns the hard way in his book of the Bible.

**Transition Sentence:** God can say “I don’t care” just like any parent.

**Sermon Division:** Jonah receives his marching orders.

**Explanation Summary:** v. 1-2 – Jonah receives instruction by God to go to Nineveh and proclaim His word to the people.

**Illustration:** This is much like a football coach giving a play to the quarterback. He then has to relay the message to the rest of the team so the outcome that the coach wants can come about.

**Transition Sentence:** However, it is always possible for the QB to change the play between the coach and the team, thus changing the outcome.

**Sermon Division:** Disobedience to God is always an option.

**Explanation Summary:** v. 3 – Jonah refuses to go, and books passage on a ship to Tarshish.

**Illustration:** The foolish QB has changed the play, and now he is left all alone without the coach to help him.

**Transition Sentence:** But the coach is always still the one in charge.

**Sermon Division:** Disobedience can yield some nasty results.

**Explanation Summary:** v. 4-17 – The Lord sends a storm and the sailors know that one of them has displeased God. They find out it was Jonah and together they all decide he should be thrown overboard to save the ship from certain doom. God goes further and has Jonah swallowed by a fish for three days.

**Illustration:** So the play does not go well, and once all information is gathered we know it is the QB’s fault. Therefore, the coach publicly shows his displeasure for the player’s disobedience. It is uncomfortable for the player and does not please the coach – although I can’t help but think God got a little bit of a laugh out of this one.

**Conclusion:** We have a responsibility to follow the will of God. It will not be easy and we will continually fall short and sin. However, blatant disobedience will not go unanswered by God.

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**Figure 5.5 – Homiletical Outline of Jonah**
Curriculum: Week One (example)

Jonah 1:1-17

Review of Information:
- Israel in Jonah’s time was at the top of international politics. Their nation was prosperous.
- Jonah was a prophet, which means he would have been well known by the nation.
- Ninevah was the name of the city and the province, and the entire province may have been what the author had in mind.
- Jonah was not a missionary, he was a prophet. Evangelism was not a usual part of his messages.
- Jonah was not questioning God’s ability to find him by running. More likely he was hoping God would give the task of Ninevah to someone else.
- It is ironic that the pagan seamen tell Jonah he should be praying.
- The Great Fish, was probably a whale but we don’t know for sure.
- Is there something that we are running from God about? Is there a ministry he has for our lives?

Additional Information:
- Jonah was a prophet of the preclassical period, which included Elijah and Elisha. Most preclassical prophets addressed God’s words to a king, whereas classical prophets (like Hosea and Amos) addressed their messages to the people of Israel. 
- Consider casting lots on the ship, versus casting lots for Jesus clothes. Comparison?
- Ninevah is similar to Sodom and Gomorrah in that God always knew the city was sinful. Now, their sin has reached a point that God’s patience is now overshadowed by His sense of justice.
- Jonah pleads much like Abraham did for Sodom, but Abraham succeeded in trusting God where Jonah failed.
- What Jonah was swallowed by is not as important as God giving Jonah a hardship to teach him a lesson……Does this happen today?

Questions for Discussion:
What is this story about? (Instruction)
How does it relate to me? (Relevance)
How does it relate to Christ? (Christ Focused)
What should I do now? (Application)

Time of Prayer:

Figure 5.6 – Curriculum, Jonah 1:1-17

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Exegetical Outline
Colossians 1:15 – 1:23

Unifying Theme
The Preeminence of Christ

   A. Christ is the “alpha”, the Creator and Sustainer of all things (1:15-17).
   B. He is the head of the Church, the people of God (1:18).
   C. The full divinity of God rested in Christ and through his sacrifice, He reconciled the world to God (1:19-20)

II. THE ENEMIES OF GOD BECOMING FRIENDS (1:21-23)
   A. We were separated from God because of our behavior (1:21)
   B. We have become friends of God not through our good behavior, but through the sacrifice of Christ (1:22-1:23a).
   C. This reliance of Christ is the point of the Gospel, and Paul now willfully places himself as a servant of the Gospel.

IDEA:
Paul’s purpose here is to explain the full divinity and majesty of Christ. It is because of this fact that he was a worthy sacrifice for the sins of the world. Now, because of this sacrifice we are no longer enemies of God but can be his friend.

Figure 5.7 – Exegetical Outline of Colossians 1:15-23
Homiletical Outline (Colossians 1:15-23)

**Unifying Theme:** Only Christ could have accomplished what He did.

**Section Theme:** Preeminence

**Title of Sermon:** The Fullness of God

**Main Idea of Sermon:** Jesus Christ is Fully God

**Transition Sentence:** Who is the second member of the Trinity/what does it mean to be the Son?

**Sermon Division:** Christ is God and creator.

**Explanation Summary:** v. 15-17 – Christ is the image of God, and by Him all things were created. He is above every ruler and it is through him that things are held together.

**Illustration:** We have all heard examples of how to explain the Trinity. An egg being an egg even though it has three parts, water being able to exist in solid, liquid, and vapor form. What this passage tells is us beyond contestation or simple explanation. It tells us that Christ is God, Christ is creator, and Christ holds all things together.

**Transition Sentence:** Being God, Christ is the head of all believers.

**Sermon Division:** The church is under the headship of Christ, our God.

**Explanation:** v. 18 – This states very plainly that Christ is the head of the church. He is the first to be resurrected and he is above all things.

**Illustration:** Many different models of church today. Congregational where we vote on everything, elder ruled where they make decisions, a CEO type model where the pastor solicits advice but the ultimate decision rests with him. In all of these we must remember that Christ is the head of the church. It is through him we must conduct the business of the church, asking ourselves what He would have us do in each situation.

**Transition Sentence:** Through the sacrifice of Christ, we can now be reconciled to the Father.

**Sermon Division:** No mortal man could sacrifice for the sins of the world. It had to be God himself.

**Explanation:** v. 19-23 – Because the fullness of God was in Christ, he could carry the sins of the world and cast them away. Somebody had to die, we couldn’t do it, so through his loving mercy he took that burden from us.

**Illustration:** Billy Graham being stopped on his way to a Revival.

**Conclusion:** Christ is FIRST! Everything you can imagine that this word means is true. Only he could save us and we are grateful that he was willing to do so.

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Figure 5.8 – Homiletical Outline of Colossians 1:15-23
Curriculum: Week 1 (example)

Colossians 1:15-23

Review of Information:
- Christ is fully God, and is co-eternal with the other members of the Trinity.
- He has been present and active since the moment of creation.
- It is through Christ as the second member of the Trinity that all things are held together.
- He is the source of our salvation and the guiding focus of our obedience to God.
- He was resurrected from the dead, as we will one day all be resurrected.
- It is He who is the head of the Church. Not a pastor, or group of theologians that explain things about God. He is the head of the corporate, universal church, that is comprised of everyone is claims the name “Christian” and is obedient to His teachings.

Additional Information:
- The passage is written in the structure and form of a hymn. It is generally agreed up that the author inserted this here, possibly after finishing the rest of the letter.47
- Christ is seen in this hymn as not only “sustainer” who holds things together, but also “guardian” over the things that he holds together.
- Interesting that never once is “Jesus” used in the text. It is always “Christ” meaning “chosen one of God.”
- Firstborn of the dead – emphasis on resurrection.
- The reconciliation that was needed between “all things” and “Christ” was needed ever since the fall of humanity in Genesis 3.

Questions for Discussion:
What is this story about? (Instruction)
How does it relate to me? (Relevance)
How does it relate to Christ? (Christ Focused)
What should I do now? (Application)

Time of Prayer:

Figure 5.9 – Curriculum, Colossians 1:15-23

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Again, this is just an example of what the curriculum and outlines may look like. Ultimately, in each church the pastor will come up with his own outline, information for review, and additional information while keeping the discussion questions the same. These guidelines provide direction for the group leaders, which is the easiest way to gain momentum.\(^48\) It is important that they understand the instruction, relevance, Christ-focused message, and application for each small group session that takes place. This gives the group leader the freedom to look at the group’s needs, while still being unified with the remaining groups in the church. The information and questions provided will also help the facilitator reign in any discussions that stray too far off the topic at hand.

At the end of this discipleship session, anyone that takes part in these groups should know the information found in the book studied. They should not just be able to rattle off information as if they were studying for a test. They should be able to tell how the information is applied to a life that lives for Christ. The sermon on Sunday morning can never be all-inclusive because the pastor is also battling time constraints. Most services last between sixty and ninety minutes. For Homiletical Discipleship, the sermons should be planned to last as close to thirty minutes as possible. Based on the information gathered in the survey, this is the ideal time to get the information presented, and then have the small group leaders add to the discussion during the week. This does not allow much, if any, time for the sermon to include “fluff” that is meant to be strictly entertaining. Even with these time constraints, the pastor can choose what to emphasize. A pastor should never choose what to believe and what not to believe, but we can choose what to emphasize.\(^49\) The pastor wants to make sure to have time to publicly address pitfalls that may be happening in his own church in order to keep people focused on the

\(^48\) Gladen, *Small Groups with Purpose*, 56.

\(^49\) Browning, *Deliberate Simplicity*, 41.
The pastor takes the limited time he has and preaches what should be emphasized to the congregation. The small group leaders can then look at additional information within the text and come up with additional applications that may not have been highlighted. These two together make it far less likely that anything is missed by the members of the church. The goal of Christian discipleship should be to share life by sharing in the life of Christ. All aspects of ministry, including preaching and small groups, should move toward the one goal of developing mature, healthy believers in Jesus Christ. With the combined work of preaching and small group discipleship, churches will draw closer to that goal.

Mentioned at the end of the curriculum is a time of prayer. This is where members of the groups get to speak to God in whatever way is on their hearts. The facilitators can decide to make this a time of guided prayer based on what they think the needs are, or a time of prayer requests for things that may be going on in the lives of the individual members. Anything that is worth doing is worth going to the Lord in prayer about. James tells us to “confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” This time of prayer and accountability should take place in every group.

Step 3: Choosing Leaders

The first thing sought in a leader is going to be that he/she is a character-driven leader. Character-driven leaders lead with the mind of Christ and resist the temptation to lead for their

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50 Dodson, *Gospel Centered Discipleship*, 144.


52 Gibson, *Preaching with a Plan*, 69.

53 James 5:16
own glory.\textsuperscript{54} Too often leaders have success and they begin to think that it was because of them and not God that good things are happening. As we said earlier, heresy can never be prevented one hundred percent, but character-driven leaders are less likely to fall into heresy. Heresy usually occurs because of one or more of these three reasons: a strong and opinionated leader who wants followers, a biblically illiterate group, and finally the use of scriptures out of context.\textsuperscript{55} Homiletical Discipleship helps avoid or at least decrease these by letting the pastor guide the teaching and scriptural context, and by helping choose character-driven leaders instead of people who are popular and can draw a crowd.

With the small group leadership, another aspect of Homiletical Discipleship will be the rotation of leaders. When leadership is rotated, either from session to session or from study to study, other Christians are empowered to move beyond their comfort zones.\textsuperscript{56} Therefore, Homiletical Discipleship will have two leaders per group, and they will rotate the facilitation of the groups from week to week. The author has seen this strategy work very well with both Sunday school teachers and small group facilitators in his church. Though the leaders may not be facilitating that week, each leader must be prepared to lead the group every week. This aids in multiple ways. First, if one of the leaders is unexpectedly sick or absent, the other can take his/her place without having to cancel. Second, it allows the pressure of the group, especially at first, to be spread out and shared among the leaders. Third, mixing up the facilitator allows different styles to emerge, which helps keep the group fresh for the participants on a weekly basis. Fourth, the participants see others leading from week to week, which enforces the intentional idea that discipleship is meant to train disciples who make disciples. One day they

\textsuperscript{54} Stowell, \textit{Redefining Leadership}, 126.

\textsuperscript{55} Cole, \textit{Church 3.0}, 239.

\textsuperscript{56} Gladen, \textit{Leading Small Groups with Purpose}, 124.
will be the ones who help disciple other people. Lastly, the facilitator knows that there will be another person there every week who has prepared to lead the group if necessary, which will allow him/her to have someone to look to if others are not participating in the conversation. A second leader in each group is not too much to ask for since it has already been established that facilitators do not need to be religious rock stars or biblical scholars. Peter Scazzero writes, “The key to successful spiritual leadership has much more to do with the leader’s internal life than with the leader’s expertise, gifts, or experiences.”

There is a word of caution to be passed on about choosing group leaders. Homiletical Discipleship is based on the biblical idea that the pastor will be a man of God who is himself a character-driven leader and meets the qualifications put forth in the Bible. Homiletical Discipleship would be beneficial to any church, but to be a biblical model, the pastor who delivers the message each Sunday should be a man. However, the small group discipleship is led by a facilitator and this position is open to males and females. The wonderful women of God that are found in every church have much to share about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

A second caution that should be in place is that with the rotation of leadership, the group leaders should not be family members, especially husband and wife. This is because events that affect one so often affect the other, and every group should have a leader each week if at all possible.

A third warning is that, though it is not a rule or determining factor in Homiletical Discipleship, the author strongly feels that the facilitator in a group should not be a divorced

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57 Scazzero, The Emotionally Healthy Church, 20.

58 1 Timothy 3:1-7

59 1 Timothy 2:12-15
person. So much of the Bible speaks of marriage and relationships, and the subject will certainly come up in discussion. Divorced people have much to share about being a disciple of Christ, and should take part in discipleship the same way others do. However, as a church sponsored program, it will be difficult for some people to sit under the leadership of someone whose marriage has dissolved. This is especially true of someone who is going through a difficult time in their own marriage. As was stated, this is not a rule but simply the opinion of the author about how this approach would work best. Even if a church decides to alter the leadership model, all leaders should still put the emphasis on making disciples who then go and make disciples. No church should fall into the warnings of Hebrews chapter five, where the people should have been teachers but still act as if they are children. All participants should grow and mature to the point that they are able to go out on their own and make disciples.

After leaders are selected, they will receive leader training. Here the leaders will be instructed on three aspects of this type discipleship: first, they will be introduced to the organization of the approach and taught how to understand the outline and curriculum. They will meet with the pastor and be instructed to bring the outline into the church service with them so that they can make notes on each of the sermon divisions and be ready to facilitate the group. They should be able to clearly see the sermon division in the pastor’s preaching if he practices expository preaching. Their ability to understand the sermon, not be an expert, will be vitally important to their groups. They can then not only discuss the sermons and disciple better through this approach, but also teach the participants how to get the most out of the Sunday morning sermon. Obviously, in order to do this, the leaders must attend church. If they cannot attend, they need to watch the video or listen to the audio recording of the sermon. If the church

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60 Hebrews 5:12-13
does not record their services, the leader who missed the sermon will need to pass leadership that week to the other facilitator.

Second, they will read through the Nature of Discipleship that is found in this thesis. It is important that they understand the biblical concept behind discipleship and how important continued discipleship is to the growth of individuals. This will be printed for them read during their own time.

Lastly, discipleship leaders will be instructed on how the church will intentionally focus their discipleship. This is going to be different for each church, but the same for each group. A rural church may wish to disciple with the intention of caring for their neighbors. A metropolitan church may disciple with the intention of clearing their neighborhood of crime. Each church is going to be different, but there should be a focus on making disciples who change the lives of the people around them. This means that the church should disciple its members to reach out to their community first. Then they should branch out to their city, then their county, their region, their state, and then as far out as they can get. These are the three aspects of this discipleship approach that the group leaders should be taught before they enter leadership. Figure 5.10 will help explain this intentional principle.
Step 4: The Groups

The groups and the places they meet will be the most flexible of the steps in Homiletical Discipleship. How the groups are put together is not as important as the content. The members of the groups can be at different points in their spiritual journeys, and some may take part in different groups throughout the year to find the one that best fits their needs. This is another advantage of having each group teach the same curriculum. What follows are some of the types
of groups that churches can use to help facilitate this discipleship ministry. These are only suggestions, and each church will have to find what works best for its members.

Geographical Groups – These are groups that are formed by people who live in a certain geographical area. Some advantages to these groups are that they: (1) are in close proximity to each other which allows for more contact outside of church and group meetings, (2) the members do not have to travel far to attend group meetings, and (3) they mix ages and generations which give different perspectives. Some disadvantages are that the people in these groups may have nothing in common. They may not get along as well as groups that are formed by age, interests, or other common factors.

Gender Groups – These groups meet in all female groups and all male groups. Some advantages here are that married couples can attend and not have to secure a babysitter because the other spouse is watching the kids, new people are often more comfortable in a group of their own gender, topics can be discussed that may not be proper or comfortable in mixed company, and accountability can be exercised better between people of the same sex. These groups are also more likely to be able to address specific needs. Disadvantages are that you only get the opinion of one gender, as well as the fact that spouses must work even harder to have time with each other during the week.

Life Stage Groups – These groups include people who are in the same stage of life. This means senior adults meet with their same age, families with children meet together, married couples with no children meet together, singles meet together, and so on. The advantage to this approach is that these groups will have more in common with each other than any of the others. Logistically, it will be easier to arrange child care for these groups, and the people in these groups are more likely to meet outside of church to participate in life activities together. The
main disadvantage is that not all churches have multiple people who are in the same stage of life. Some churches have only one or two singles in their entire church. Everyone would be able to participate except for them. Some churches have too many members of every group and they have to put people on a waiting list to get into small groups. Each of these is unacceptable and is a failure of the church to fulfill its mission.

It is of this author’s opinion that all these groups should be utilized. This ensures the best chance that everyone has a group that they can attend. While there is some flexibility in the groups participants can choose, there are some guidelines that should be followed.

First, each group member should attend the same worship service in order to build community.\(^{61}\) This will not be a problem if the church has only one service, but may be a big problem if there are multiple services. Ultimately, this should be a rule that is followed for any church that institutes Homiletical Discipleship. This follows the example of the early church in Acts who attended the temple together and met together to worship in their homes.\(^{62}\) Even with the same sermon, the pastor may not emphasize the same things in each service. He must preach to the needs of the congregation, and those congregations may look very different, even in the same church.

Second, the groups should be about relationships. If either facilitator or the members feel the group is turning into a lecture, this should be brought to the attention of the facilitator who is over the group. Influencing people only happens when you have a relationship with them.\(^{63}\) With a lecturer, the group is too hierarchical. Greg Ogdon writes, “As long as there is the sense

\(^{61}\) Gladen, Small Groups with Purpose, 61.

\(^{62}\) Acts 2:46

\(^{63}\) Ronnie Floyd, 10 Things Every Minister Needs to Know (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 2006), 93.
that one person is over another by virtue of superior spiritual authority, however that is measured, few people will see themselves as qualified to disciple others.” The pastor will lecture on Sunday morning, but the groups are designed to teach people how to disciple others, and to show them that they can do it. Everyone within the group must be on equal footing, and that can only happen if the groups are facilitated and not subjected to lecturing.

Third, the groups need to meet off the church grounds if at all possible. Not only that, but the groups should decide what day and time they are going to meet as well. This should be something that is decided before the groups starts so that there will be no confusion. The reasons for these specific guidelines are covered in the next section.

Lastly, the size of the groups should be between four and seven participants, along with two group leaders. This allows for the groups to stay small, while at the same time training others to lead in discipleship. When a group adds enough members to reach eight participants, one of the group leaders will start another group of four. One of the former participants will step into the role of “leader” for this new group. This way you have each of the original group leaders able to further help a “new” leader in the facilitation of the group. This allows for a mentoring type relationship between the more experienced leader and the new leader of the group. It also demonstrates for each person in the group the progression from student to teacher. They see a new leader discipling others after being discipled, which is the mission of the groups; making disciples who go out and make other disciples.

Step 5: Choosing Places

The places and times that each group meets are very flexible, but need to take place away from the church campus if at all possible. They also need to take place at a time besides Sunday morning. This is when Sunday school typically takes place and it is still a vital part of

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64 Ogdon, *Transforming Discipleship*, 142.
many churches. If the participants truly want to grow in Christ, they will take every possible opportunity to learn. This means participating in a small group study and Sunday school. Meeting outside the church building provides a more informal setting where dialogue can happen more freely. This can take place in homes, restaurants, parks (if the weather is nice), or other public places. The place that is chosen will likely be left up to each group, and should be so. This environment should be a place where the group participants feel they can fellowship best. The instruction aspect of this approach can happen anywhere.

The only word of warning that should be given is to not have the groups take place in an area that could send the wrong message. This is a time of discipleship, not reaching out to evangelize the community. The groups should not meet in bars, night clubs, areas of town that are known to attract trouble, or anywhere else that may send the wrong message about the church. If the groups would like to take another day during the week to go out into these places to evangelize, that would be a great idea. It would actually be fulfilling the intentional purpose of getting out and making other disciples. However, for the personal growth of the individuals, group time should not take place anywhere that could be distracting to their maturing as disciples.

As far as the time goes, that too can be left up to the groups. Other than during Sunday morning, which may interfere with Sunday school, any other time during the week would be acceptable. Many of the people within the church will be working, so lining up the schedules of everyone involved may be a problem. Therefore, the facilitators should choose the day and time they are going to meet and then let the members of the church sign up, depending on what is best for them. This also helps ensure that different types of groups are formed and not just geographical, gender, or life stage groups. As you can see from the following figure, Sunday and
Wednesdays are popular for discipleship. However, the choice should be left up to the group and group leaders as to which day they meet.

In Your Opinion, What Day of the Week is Best For Discipleship?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>53.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>21.25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.11 – Best Day for Discipleship.

Step 6: Evaluation

As was mentioned in Step 1: Organization, there will be an evaluation phase for this discipleship approach once every quarter. The pastor will meet with each of the small group leaders together. At this meeting, each leader will be able to discuss both the concerns and the successes of the small groups from his or her perspective. It is extremely important that each group leader attend these meetings and honestly participate in the conversation. Only through this type of evaluation will the small groups remain successful. It is also at this meeting that the pastor will discuss his ideas for the future. He will not be required to give the leaders his next
sermon series until six weeks before the current series ends, but it will be helpful to the group leaders if they have an idea of where the pastor’s vision is going to take the church. Meeting once every three months allows the group leaders the freedom to know they are not having their every move dictated by the pastoral leaders of the church. It also allows the pastor sufficient time to prepare for his upcoming sermon series without having to attend a meeting every week, or even every month; however, if churches feel that more frequent meetings are needed to successfully implement this approach, they have the freedom to do so. The quarterly meetings are simply what the author feels is necessary to keep the discipleship within the church on a focused goal.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

Homiletical Discipleship is designed to aid in the discipleship process. It is not meant to take the place of other ministries, and it is certainly not meant to take the place of the church. Too often, people looking for faith will spend time in their homes watching televangelists, or ego driven preachers on television and think that they are being spiritually fed. However, with this form of spiritual stimulation there is no community. There is no one to walk alongside them and help them grow to maturity. By combining the Sunday morning message with a small group the individuals are getting weekly instruction and the support of a community around them.

Benefits of Using the Homiletical Discipleship Approach

To conclude the argument for using Homiletical Discipleship five specific benefits have been listed. Based on the biblical evidence, research conducted, and surveys from everyday Christians, this author concludes that these benefits should be experienced by everyone participating in Homiletical Discipleship:

Unity

There are many great theologians and pastors in our world today who write books and other study material to grow a person’s spiritual maturity. These should be taken advantage of by everyone as part of their own personal devotion time with the Lord. The benefit of the discipleship argued in this thesis is that all church members in a given body of believers are unified in what they are studying. It helps stimulate conversation outside of the church when they experience life together. They will not run into the problem of one person talking about something they read, while everyone around them has never read that piece of literature. The
church body is unified in how it grows, and is led by the direction and vision of the pastor who God has set over the congregation. In reality, many of the problems that churches have are not secret to the congregation or laity. They are well known and often go unaddressed out of the church leaders’ fear of angering people. This discipleship approach allows the pastor to recognize these problems, address them to the whole congregation through a sermon series, and then have the laity study them during a mid-week small group. They are unified in their study from week to week. This unity also allows for better discipleship of younger believers in the faith. Someone who has just come to faith may have an easy time understanding the encouraging writings of pastors like Matt Chandler or David Jeremiah. However, they will be nowhere close to ready for the timeless theological truths that are written by people like John Calvin or Martin Luther. The unity of these groups allows the more mature members to feed these immature Christians in a way determined by their own needs without going over their heads.

Correct Teaching

Anybody who is a good speaker can attract a crowd. However, not everyone who attracts a crowd, or sells lots of books, provides correct teaching. Christ-seeking members of a congregation go to the church they do because they believe the pastor is delivering to them the Word of God. This discipleship approach allows the pastor and leadership of the church to know that their congregations are not being led astray by any discipleship methods or programs that they are offering. Many churches will seek to empower the laity by allowing them to teach whatever they want in Sunday school or small groups, with no discernment over what is being taught. This can lead to dysfunction and division within the church. To be fair, every church is going to have dysfunction and division to some extent, but Homiletical Discipleship will help
minimize this. By the pastor choosing the sermon series that he believes God is guiding him to teach, and then having the small group leaders build off of the sermon, the teaching should be as close to what God wants as it possibly can. Again, the responsibility of the pastor and lay leaders to make sure they are spiritually right with the Lord is crucial.

Expanding Knowledge

Having teaching reinforced on a weekly basis is important for those young Christians in the faith, as well as the more experienced Christians. Teaching and facilitating helps individuals learn material more thoroughly than they would by simply reading it, and hearing the teaching coming from someone who is a lay person helps the younger Christians develop into disciples who make disciples. As was mentioned in chapter two, discipleship involves life change. Focusing on one passage, one series, and one book at a time allows the individuals who take part in discipleship to have a deeper understanding of that scripture. When they have a deeper understanding of scripture, they have a better understanding of how God wants them to live their lives. When they understand what God has in store for their lives, they are able to confidently go out and fulfill that purpose. The expanded knowledge they receive from this focused attention to the same material helps them mature spiritually and grow the Kingdom of God by making other disciples.

Focused Mission

Much in the same way that Homiletical Discipleship helps ensure correct teaching for everyone, it also helps everyone stay on a focused mission. If one member of the congregation is listening to a pastor through audio, video, or print he/she may hear him say something like “care for the poor and those in your community who cannot take care of themselves.” Another person in the congregation may listen to a prosperity gospel preacher say “God wants you to be wealthy,
have nice things, and experience all the blessings that He gives you in this world.” Those are two very different messages that may be heard by different people in the same church. With this discipleship approach, they can stay focused on the task of making disciples who make disciples. It is up to the pastor, in his sermons, to make sure that the congregation knows the prosperity gospel is false and that what Jesus wants of us is to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

1 “Small groups provide a context for people to learn, use, and develop their spiritual gifts and graces for ministry.”

2 These small groups do that in a way that is unified, has correct teaching, expands the knowledge of the people, focuses them on mission, and holds everyone accountable.

Accountability

Many small groups provide the benefit of holding their members accountable. When you experience life with someone on a weekly basis it is easier to keep track of the things that are going on in their lives. Small, intimate, groups help people feel comfortable asking for help and seeking guidance on situations that occur in their life. This is especially true of sins that they may be tempted with during the course of the week. Through learning together and prayer, this accountability aids in the spiritual growth of all the members.

The added benefit of Homiletical Discipleship that is unique to this approach is that it also holds the pastor accountable. He is the one who must make sure that he is truly involved in the discipleship of the people within his care. It is easy for someone to write a sermon from week to week on things in which they are interested. They can make those sermons entertaining and attract a great number of people. It is harder when pastors are systematically taking an entire

1 Matthew 28:19

2 Blevins and Maddix, Discovering Discipleship, 240.
church through a book of the Bible, and then making sure that the small group leaders are prepared to disciple with the same material during the week. Pastors deserve respect and deserve the benefit of the doubt whenever their congregations question something about what they are doing. However, they are still men born into sin and are susceptible to making mistakes. Those who truly want to make a difference and disciple those people in their care will accept the accountability that comes with using an approach like Homiletical Discipleship.

**Summary**

Homiletical discipleship is not perfect, but based on the information provided in chapter three it is easy to see that discipleship in our culture today is failing. Pastors must find some way to ensure the spiritual growth of the members of their church. Homiletical discipleship offers one way to do this. The same problems that can occur with any small group could find their way into Homiletical Discipleship. However, the benefit of using such an approach outweighs any potential risk.

Small groups are necessary to build the community that helps individuals grow spiritually. They are the best way that people are learning in our cultural context, as well as the way that Jesus chose to teach the disciples. Even after preaching to massive groups of people, He kept these twelve men as his traveling companions, teaching them along their travels. The small group model presented makes sure to give proper guidance to the individual leaders and participants, which is the only way that they will work. However, these groups should never be looked at as more important that the Sunday morning preaching.

Preaching is necessary to give the type of instruction that is seen in the Bible. Combining this with small groups is the most logical way to ensure the discipleship of the people within the church. The pastor understanding his role as leader and visionary will certainly aid in his
preaching. This project has sufficiently provided the reader with an enhanced understanding of why preaching is necessary, as well as how the pastor can prepare to disciple through his preaching. Preaching expositionally will best ensure that the message of God reaches His people, and the small groups help the members of the church understand that message in a better way. Intentionally concentrating on the message of God for the people of God will create disciples for Christ, who then go out and make more disciples for Christ.

In everything the church does, including discipleship, God’s will must be placed above anything else. This approach must go through stages of evaluation, just like Sunday school or any other form of discipleship provided by the church. Honoring God by focusing the church on the mission of making disciples is what sets Homiletical Discipleship apart from other discipleship programs. It is not intended to create Bible scholars, future pastors, or evangelists who bring many souls to Christ. These may all come as an unintended result, but it is designed to show people the need to invest in the lives of those around them, while at the same time giving them the tools needed for this service.
APPENDIX A

SURVEY RESULTS

Thank you for participating in this survey: Homiletical Discipleship: Developing a Small Group Study Method Based on Sunday Morning Exposition Lance Cole Liberty University School of Divinity You are invited to take part in a research study that accumulates data that will help develop a small group study method based on the Sunday morning message that is preached by a pastor. You were selected as a possible participant because of your participation in corporate gatherings of the church. I, Lance Cole, am a Doctor of Ministry candidate at the Liberty University School of Divinity and will be conducting this study. Background Information: The purpose of this study is to develop a better way of participating in a small group Bible study. This method will take the message given on Sunday morning by the pastor, who should be the best theological mind in the church, and break that down into a weekly study that is done in several groups and led by the laity. Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following: 1: Complete a twenty-seven question, anonymous survey that should take no more than ten minutes.2: Do not share the answers you gave with anyone else who may be participating in this study. Risks and Benefits of being in the Study: The study has no risk to the participant. There will be no immediate benefits to the participant, however the information received from the study may lead to a method that the participant’s churches wish to incorporate into their own discipleship programs. Compensation: There will be no financial compensation for your participation. Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private by the administrator (Lance Cole). All reported information will be kept confidential, and all received information will be locked securely by the administrator at all times. Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is completely voluntary and will not affect your standing with the administrator, your local church, or your denomination. Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Lance Cole, and you are free to ask him any questions that you wish. You may contact him by phone at (336) 906-5398 or email at lncole@liberty.edu. You may also contact my Doctor of Ministry Mentor, Dr. Charlie Davidson, at cdavidson@liberty.edu If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu. Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

IF YOU WOULD BE WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS SURVEY PLEASE CLICK YES

- Answered: 86
- Skipped: 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
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</table>
**What is your age?**

- **Answered:** 85
- **Skipped:**

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<td>18-25</td>
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<td>26-49</td>
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<td>42.35%</td>
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<td>70+</td>
<td>8.24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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**How many years have you been a Christian?**

- **Answered:** 84
- **Skipped:** 5

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<th>Answer Choices</th>
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<td>2-5 years</td>
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<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20 years</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+ years</td>
<td>72.62%</td>
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How many years have you been attending your current church?
• Answered: 85
• Skipped: 4

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<td>12.94%</td>
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<td>2-5 years</td>
<td>16.47%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>27.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20 years</td>
<td>16.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+ years</td>
<td>27.06%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

What is the denomination/affiliation of your church?
• Answered: 85
• Skipped: 4

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Responses</th>
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<td>Baptist</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesleyan</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>4.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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</table>
**What is the average size of the church you attend?**

- Answered: 85
- Skipped: 4

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<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>0-100</td>
<td>22.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-499</td>
<td>68.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500-999</td>
<td>2.35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1000+</td>
<td>7.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is the location of your church community?

- Answered: 84
- Skipped: 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>22.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>39.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In your opinion, please rate the "Bible Knowledge" of the average Christian in America today:

- Answered: 84
- Skipped: 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not very</td>
<td>27.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>70.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>1.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>1.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In your opinion, please rate the status of the Church in America:

- Answered: 85
- Skipped: 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terrible</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
<td>77.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>8.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>7.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great</td>
<td>1.18%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In your opinion, please rate the status of pastors in America (all pastors):

- Answered: 85
- Skipped: 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terrible</td>
<td>1.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
<td>50.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>Unsure</td>
<td>21.18%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>25.88%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great</td>
<td>1.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is the biggest problem with discipleship in the church?

Answer Choices

- The teachers/leaders
  - 23.53%  
  - 20 responses

- The discipleship programs, or lack thereof
  - 54.12%  
  - 46 responses

- The times that the programs are offered
  - 5.88%  
  - 5 responses

- Other
  - 16.47%  
  - 14 responses

Total 85

How much time do you personally spend discipling others during the week?

Answer Choices

- 0-1 hour
  - 41.18%  
  - 35 responses

- 1-3 hours
  - 37.65%  
  - 32 responses

- 3-5 hours
  - 14.12%  
  - 12 responses

- 5+ hours
  - 7.06%  
  - 6 responses

Total 85
How much time do you personally spend being discipled during the week?

- Answered: 84
- Skipped: 5

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices -</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>0-1 hour</td>
<td>34.52%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-3 hours</td>
<td>52.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 hours</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+ hours</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
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</table>

What is the best form of discipleship done by churches today?

- Answered: 85
- Skipped: 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices -</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preaching</td>
<td>10.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School</td>
<td>8.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Groups</td>
<td>43.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>36.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</table>
Is your answer to the previous question based on:

- Answered: 85
- Skipped: 4

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Evidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>21st Century Trends</td>
<td>35.29% 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Studies</td>
<td>8.24% 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>25.88% 22</td>
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On what day of the week is most of your church's discipleship done?

- Answered: 85
- Skipped: 4

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>16.47% 14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>3.53% 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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</table>
In your opinion, what day of the week is best for discipleship?

<table>
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</tr>
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<td>Monday</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>21.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
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How long does the pastor’s Sunday morning message usually last during a worship service?

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<td>20-30 minutes</td>
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<td>30-45 minutes</td>
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<td>Longer than 45 minutes</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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How important is the preaching of the pastor on Sunday mornings?

- Answered: 85
- Skipped: 4

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<th>Answer Choices</th>
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<td>Somewhat</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
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Do you feel sufficient time is spent preaching so that the congregation learns the material being presented by the pastor?

- Answered: 85
- Skipped: 4

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Responses</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>61.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>22.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>16.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Would additional time on the Sunday morning subject be better spent during Sunday morning sermon time or in a small group discussion?

- Answered: 85
- Skipped: 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Morning</td>
<td>14.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group</td>
<td>78.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>7.06%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Respondents: 85

What does your church currently do for group Bible studies?
Mark all that apply.

- Answered: 85
- Skipped: 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School</td>
<td>78.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Groups at the Church</td>
<td>54.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Groups Outside the Church</td>
<td>42.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midweek Bible Study</td>
<td>62.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11.76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Respondents: 85
At your Bible studies, how often is the Sunday morning message studied more thoroughly?

- Answered: 83
- Skipped: 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>24.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>31.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>32.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Times</td>
<td>10.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every Time</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you believe your church and other churches would benefit from more time being spent studying the Sunday morning message, or is the information already thoroughly covered?

- Answered: 84
- Skipped: 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We would benefit from more time.</td>
<td>69.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information is thoroughly covered.</td>
<td>20.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>10.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who does the majority of discipleship at your church?

- Answered: 84
- Skipped: 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Pastor</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate/Other Pastors</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay Leaders or Deacons</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Teachers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Who do you feel is best qualified to disciple members within a church?

- Answered: 82
- Skipped: 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Pastor</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate/Other Pastors</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay Leaders or Deacons</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You would be more likely to attend a small group Bible study if it was taught by whom?

- Answered: 83
- Skipped: 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior Pastor</td>
<td>13.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate/Other Pastors</td>
<td>26.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay Leaders or Deacons</td>
<td>38.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Teachers</td>
<td>14.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please rate the importance of discipleship among Christians:

- Answered: 84
- Skipped: 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Very</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>26.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vital</td>
<td>59.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Doctor of Ministry
Thesis Project Interview Questions

How many years have you been a pastor?

How many years have you pastored your current church?

Describe the small group Bible studies that your church uses.

Approximately how long does your sermons last on Sunday morning?

Do you feel that is sufficient time to teach the subject of each sermon? (Elaborate)

Do you consider the congregation when deciding how long to preach?

Describe how your small groups relate to the Sunday morning sermon.

How important, in your opinion, are mid-week small groups? (Elaborate)
What day of the week is best for small groups?
More important or less important than Sunday School? Why?

How important is it, in your opinion, that mid-week small groups discuss the Sunday morning message? (Elaborate)

Between small groups, Sunday school, music in worship, and Sunday morning preaching which do you think is most important in bringing new believers into the church? Why?

Between the same groups, which do you think is most important for continual discipleship of believers once they have come into the church? Why?

Do you see any age or demographic discrepancies that would change your answer to either of the previous questions? For instance, in the answer the same when dealing with people in their twenties versus people who are older than sixty? If so, explain why you think that is?

Have you received congregational support or discontent when discussing Sunday morning messages during small groups?

What, in your opinion, is the number one obstacle for church members grasping the message that is preached on Sunday mornings?

What, in your opinion, is the number one obstacle among small groups in the church?
Bibliography


October 15, 2015

Lance Cole
IRB Approval 2306.10151S: Homiletical Discipleship: Developing a Small Group Study
Based on Sunday Morning Exposition

Dear Lance,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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