

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

BY THIS THEY WILL KNOW:

DISCIPLESHIP PRINCIPLES TO TRANSFORM THE CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

BY THIS THEY WILL KNOW: DISCIPLESHIP PRINCIPLES TO TRANSFORM THE CHURCH

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Current research indicates that ninety-five million individuals in America do not attend church. Nearly forty percent, of this group, have a negative impression of Christianity.¹ The purpose of this project is to study the forces that are transforming the American culture, and the dynamics that are perpetuating a bad image of Christianity. The author will evaluate the current state of spiritual formation in the Christian community, and make recommendations for developing an effective discipleship strategy for the church. The impetus for this paper is the Great commission issued by Jesus as recorded in Matthew 28:19. The paper will incorporate historical data, current research, surveys, and evaluations of churches that have developed successful discipleship programs.

Abstract length: 115 words.

1. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity... and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 24.

This thesis is dedicated to:

Steve, my pastor and friend – you taught me that fidelity for the gospel is evidenced by
a heart for people.

Scott, my big brother – you taught me to love every word that proceeds from the mouth of
God.

Mom and Dad, you demonstrated strength in humility, and grace in adversity-
You are my heroes!

Maria: Babe, this arduous journey was made possible because of your encouragement;
it has always been **our** project – You remain my inspiration and love!

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INTRODUCTION

Why the Topic is Relevant to Ministry

In 2010, nearly 133 million people attended church every Sunday in America.¹ To put that number in perspective, if the total attendance for the National Football League (NFL), Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Basketball Association (NBA) and the National Hockey League (NHL) for the *entire* 2010 season was added together, it would be approximately one hundred and thirty-three million.² In other words, the total number of people that attended a major professional sporting event in an entire year was approximately the same as the number of congregants that attended church on an average Sunday morning.

With such a large segment of the population participating in the religious spectrum, on a regular basis, one would think that the American church was highly successful in developing ardent followers of Christ, influencing the culture and attracting new members. Yet the data proves otherwise. Despite the modest growth in church attendance during the past few years, the image of Christianity has diminished precipitously.³ The purpose of this paper is to study the dynamics affecting the perspective of Christianity, and to propose a biblical solution to strengthen the church.

1. Gallup, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/141044/Americans-Church-Attendance-Inches-2010.aspx>, (accessed January, 2012).

2. ESPN.com under reference tabs, (accessed February, 2012).

3. According to Gallup, in 2010, 43.1% of Americans reported that they attended church weekly. This was a modest gain from 42.1% in 2008 (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/141044/Americans-Church-Attendance-Inches-2010.aspx>). However, Gallup also reported that the number of Americans that identify themselves as Christians has dropped from 91% in 1948 to 77% in 2009 (<http://www.gallup.com/video/117394/Christianity-Slow-Decline.aspx>).

Background Leading to an Awareness of the Problem

The author of this thesis does not work in fulltime vocational ministry; rather in the secular market place. In this arena, the author consistently rubs shoulders with Christians and non-Christians. Over the past twenty years, two critical observations have been noted.

First, away from the church, Christians are often indistinguishable from non-Christians.⁴ Secondly, Christians are frequently more concerned about altering the political landscape rather than transforming the hearts of men and women.⁵ As a result, Christians are defined by the world, primarily by what they oppose.

Rationale for Choosing This Topic

C. S. Lewis rightly identified the mission of the Church: “The church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became man for no other purpose.”⁶ The problem is that the church is teaching people how to become Christians, but not disciples. This has produced a community of casual Christians and a weak and ineffective church. The rationale for this topic is to understand the implicit commands of Jesus and to develop a strategy to produce passionate followers of Jesus who will manifest the character of Christ to a fallen world. “The quality of a church’s disciples determines the health

4. This of course is a generic statement and does not describe every Christian.

5. The author is not advocating that Christians abstain from the political process. In fact, Christians, as good citizens, must participate. However, their citizenship in this world is penultimate to their citizenship in the Kingdom of God.

6. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Harper, San Francisco: 2001), 199.

and effectiveness of the church.”⁷

Christ must permeate the church, before the church can invade the world.

Statement of the Problem

Although 78 % of Americans identify themselves as Christians⁸, 67 % of Americans believe that their purpose in life is to “enjoy blessings and gain the maximum benefit from their options and temptations.”⁹ Despite the fervent effort of the church to influence the thinking and behavior of their congregants, the lives of believers are largely indistinguishable from non-believers. The incongruence, between the message of the church and the conduct of Christians, is symptomatic of a major failure of the church to make disciples. Moreover, the insipid and inconsistent faith manifested by the majority of those professing to be followers of Christ has generated cynicism toward the Christian community from the unchurched. The mistrust and stereotyping of Christians, by the unchurched, is particularly acute among the younger generations. As a result, more young people are choosing to leave the church or remain outside the church.

The author believes the problem stems from a mindset within the Christian community that people can become Christians without becoming followers of Christ. Pastor and writer Bill Hull asserts, “The contemporary gospel has given permission to the largest portion of the church to simply sign off on the basic facts of the gospel, get their sins forgiven, acquire assurance of

7. Charles T. Crabtree, “The Crisis of Discipleship in the American Church” *Enrichment Journal* Winter (2008) Viewed online at http://enrichmenjournal.ag.org/200801/200801_022_Discipleship.cfm (accessed February, 2012).

8. Frank Newport, *This Christmas, 78% of Americans Identify as Christian* December 24, 2009. Viewed online at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124793/This-Christmas-78-Americans-Identify-Christian.aspx> (accessed February, 2012).

9. George Barna, *Grow Your Church from the Outside* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2002), 16.

entry into heaven, and then do a few religious duties until Christ returns.”¹⁰ This misconception has erroneously placed Justification at the finishing line, rather than the starting line of the Christian life.

Terminology Defined

Understanding special terminology is important to this project. Therefore, the following definitions are provided to establish common ground and clarity: Christian spiritual formation, disciple of Jesus Christ, discipleship, disciple-making, emerging church movement, spiritual disciplines, and Unchurched.

Christian spiritual formation, as used in this paper, is a contemporary term that describes the biblical process of being transformed into the image of Christ.¹¹ It is derived from several passages in the New Testament. For example, in his letter to the Galatians Paul wrote, “until Christ is formed in you.”¹² The English word “form” is from the Greek *morphe*, which means to shape. Again, in 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul wrote that “we . . . are being transformed (*metamorphóomai*) into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, the

10. Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading a Body of Believers on the Journey of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2010), 12.

11. To preclude misunderstanding, this paper will include “Christian” when describing the transformation process. The term “spiritual formation” is a popular buzz word that often describes practices and traditions antithetical to the Christian faith. Some equate the Spiritual Formation movement with theological liberalism, which is susceptible to Eastern philosophies such as Contemplative Spirituality Mysticism. The centerpiece of this system is pantheistic (God is all) and panentheistic (God is in all). Even within the ecumenical community spiritual formation is pursued by non-biblical means. For example, psychologist Gerald G. May wrote, “Spiritual formation is a rather general term referring to **all** attempts, means, instruction, and disciplines intended towards deepening of faith and furtherance of spiritual growth. It includes educational endeavors as well as the more intimate and in-depth process of spiritual direction.”(emphasis mine) Gerald G. May, *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit: A Psychiatrist Explores Spiritual Direction*. 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 7.

12. Galatians 4:19.

Spirit.” This verse makes it clear that spiritual growth is a divine work carried out by the Holy Spirit.¹³

Much has been written about Spiritual formation in recent years. In fact, the Center for Christian Leadership at Dallas Theological Seminary developed a curriculum to help students grow in character and maturity. One of their books includes this helpful definition for the Christian’s transformation, “The process by which God forms Christ’s character in believers by the ministry of the Spirit, in the context of community, and in accordance with biblical standards. The process involves the transformation of the whole person in thoughts, behaviors, and styles of relating with God and others. It results in a life of service to others and witness for Christ.”¹⁴ Spiritual formation is best understood as the sanctification of a believer.

The term disciple is derived from the Greek word *mathetes*, which means a “learner” or a “pupil.” In the Greco-Roman world, *mathetes* referred to a diligent student that ardently followed a master. In fact, in that culture the life of a disciple was generally understood to necessitate an apprenticeship, a relation of submission, and a life of rigorous training.¹⁵ Apprehending this concept is pivotal to understanding the biblical usage of the word disciple. According to Michael Wilkins, New Testament professor of language and literature at Talbot School of Theology, “Disciple is the primary term used in the Gospels to refer to Jesus’ followers and is a common referent for those known in the early church as believers, Christians, brothers/sisters ... The term was used most frequently in this specific sense; at least 230 times in the Gospels and 28 times in

13. Other verses that confirm the spiritual transformation of the believer are: Romans 8:27-29, 12:2.

14. Center for Christian Leadership at Dallas Theological Seminary, *Identity: Investigating Who I Am*, Transforming Life Series (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004), 11.

15. Michael Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciples in Matthew’s Gospel: A Reflection on the Use of the Term “Mathetes,”* Novum Testamentum Supplements, vol. 59 (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1998), 12, 15-41.

Acts.”¹⁶ It is apparent from this definition that all Christians are disciples. There is no distinction between a Christian and a disciple, because every true Christian is a follower of Christ. In fact, “the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”¹⁷ Moreover, the term disciple, as understood from the historical, cultural, and biblical context, signifies a relationship characterized by commitment and zeal.

A closely related derivative of “disciple” is the word discipleship; which simply means the state of being a disciple.¹⁸ It is commonly used to describe the ongoing life of a Christian or the process of maturation. Another similar, but distinct phrase is “disciple-making.” This verb (*matheteusate*) speaks to the action of making or reproducing disciples (Matt. 28:19).¹⁹

Spiritual disciplines are those intentional and regular biblical practices of Christ-followers, which position them before God, so that He can transform them. In short, they are tools for training that “develop intimacy for God and fitness for serving.”²⁰ The spiritual disciplines include, but are not limited to, Bible reading, prayer, fasting, serving, giving, journaling and worship.

The term “emerging church” is a generic expression that refers to a diverse group of churches and organizations that have adopted a progressive methodology designed to reach the

16. Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 40.

17. Acts 11:26.

18. The suffix “ship” added to disciple means “the state of” or “contained in.”

19. A distinguishing feature of “disciple-making” is evangelism. In this verse the verb *mathēteuō* is in the imperative mood and expresses a command to the hearer to perform a certain action by the order and authority of the one commanding. Cited from: <http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?b=Mat&c=28&v=18&t=KJV#conc/19>, (accessed March, 2012).

20. Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 195.

postmodern generation. The movement began in the late twentieth century when several young pastors were brought together by The Leadership Network to share ideas.²¹ Out of the original constellation three streams have emerged: *Relevants* who seek to update worship, and preaching styles without reshaping theology; *Reconstructionists* who are theologically evangelical, yet are dissatisfied with the current church form; and *Revisionists* who are theologically liberal and question key evangelical doctrines.²² The emerging church movement fractured in 2007. In fact, many organizations have dropped the name “emerging church” so as not to be confused with the theologically liberal and unorthodox views of the groups associated with the “emergent village.”²³

The “unchurched” is defined by the Barna Research Group as “a person who has not attended a Christian church service at any time during the past six months, other than for a special event, such as a wedding or funeral.”²⁴ Although the size of the unchurched population varies from year to year, it traditionally makes-up about one-third of the American adult population. In mid-2000, Barna estimated the unchurched population at 95 to 100 million.²⁵

Statement of Limitations

Every generation of the church faces difficult challenges. The problem with image that

21. A nonprofit organization founded by Bob Buford, designed to help Christian leaders maximize their impact.

22. Mark Driscoll, “A Pastoral Perspective of the Emergent Church,” *Criswell Theological Review* 3, no. 2 (2006): 87-93.

23. While all “Emergent” people would consider themselves part of the emerging church; not all “emerging church” people align themselves with the “Emergent” or emergent village.

24. Barna, *Grow Your Church from the Outside*, 23.

25. Ibid.

confronts the twenty-first century church has always plagued the Christian community. Believers in the second century were accused of sexual sins and cannibalism. These charges arose from Christian gatherings known as “Agape” or “Love Feasts” and from the Lord’s Supper.²⁶ This project will not alleviate the suspicion and hostility directed at the church from the world. The paper is designed to take an honest look at how well the church is following the mandate of Jesus to make disciples.

The investigative research will be limited by the following criteria:

First, the scope of the project is the contemporary church in America. Although discipleship is a timeless facet of the church, the problems identified in this paper will understandably change with time. The research presented is only a sample, and not necessarily indicative of every church in America. Finally, the author will present data from personal surveys. While this information is insightful, it must be noted that these were not professional surveys.

Theoretical Basis

The impetus for this project is rooted in the words of Christ to His church, “go and make disciples.”²⁷ Additionally, Jesus informed His disciples that they were the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-14). Interestingly, this incredible declaration came on the heels of Jesus’ enunciation of the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:3-12). These kingdom blessings, as described by Christ, were countercultural to the Jewish society and could

26. Bruce Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 42.

27. Matt. 28:19.

have easily led many to believe that Jesus was calling His followers to separate from the world.²⁸ Yet Jesus proclaimed the opposite. Significantly, His disciples were instructed to permeate the culture as redemptive agents.²⁹ Understanding the biblical picture of a disciple is critical for the church to carry out its mission.

Theologically

One of the most interesting and intimate theological facets of being a disciple of Christ is that it begins with the personal call of Jesus. Christ summarized the call to discipleship when He stood on the banks of the Sea of Galilee and called to Simon and Andrew, “Follow me.”³⁰ This was in stark contrast to the Early Jewish and Greek traditions of the First Century. In that culture, it was considered dishonorable for teachers to seek out their followers.³¹ However, undaunted by the rabbinical tradition and the social stigma, Jesus condescended and demonstrated the purpose of His incarnation (Luke 19:10). Michael Wilkins writes, “At the inauguration of his kingdom mission, Jesus establishes a new pattern [discipleship], because he is the one who takes the initiative to seek out and call these brothers to enter into a relationship with him.”³² Thus discipleship begins and rests with the sovereign call of God. Jesus explained this to His disciples

28. Craig Bloomberg, *The New American Commentary Volume 22 – Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 102.

29. In this passage, Jesus uses the metaphor of salt and light to describe their character.

30. Matt. 4:19.

31. Craig S. Keener, *Matthew, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 97.

32. Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 180.

when He told them, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.”³³

The next distinctive element of discipleship is the radical nature of the call. Jesus summoned those who would follow Him to forsake everything. This was made clear to a great crowd clamoring to follow Jesus during His ministry in Perea. “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.”³⁴ By this, Jesus was not implying that devotion to family be discarded; rather, the closet human relationships, even family bonds, must never impede one from following Christ.

It is significant that the radical proclamation of self-denial issued by Christ was not aimed at a select group of ardent followers, but to all called to follow Him. This was illustrated clearly in Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus gathered the twelve and began to teach them “that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected.”³⁵ He then called the crowd to Himself and said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” In this remarkable statement Jesus not only defined the scope of His charge, “anyone,” He also prescribed the extent of self-denial, “take up his cross.” Thus the lives of all disciples, not just a few, are synonymous with the very life of Christ. For Jesus inextricably linked the life of a disciple to His own life.

This must be viewed in the context of the Jewish culture. The discipleship that Jesus described had no parallel in Judaism. Unlike the Rabbis that bound their disciples to the Torah

33. Jn. 15:16.

34. Luke 14:25.

35. Mark 8:31.

(law), “Jesus bound his disciples to himself.”³⁶ He was demanding that those who follow Him surrender to His authority without reservation. All ties to human affections must be broken before discipleship could be realized. This was the heart of the issue in Jesus’ discussion with the rich young ruler. The young ruler was drawn to Christ, but he was unwilling to dispose of his possessions. (Matt 19:16-22). His affinity for this world became a stumbling block, and he rejected the Lordship of Jesus.³⁷ Interestingly, the high call to discipleship is highlighted immediately after this event by Jesus’ conversation with His disciples. As if to punctuate the resolve and life of faith needed by a disciple; Peter replied, “we have left everything and followed you.”³⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer captures the essence best when he writes, “when we are called to follow Christ, we are summoned to an exclusive attachment to his person.”³⁹

The church would be wise to recognize the radical call of Jesus to discipleship and to understand that the severity of Jesus’ words. Many sought after Christ only to turn back after learning of the high cost (John 6:66). Leon Morris offers this about responding to the call of Jesus: “During the first part of Jesus’ ministry, people were attracted by his teaching and flocked around him. Many attached themselves to him, some of them wholeheartedly, some very loosely. But then came a time when their allegiance was tested. The real nature of the claims of Jesus

36. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 105.

37. It must be noted that Jesus addresses individuals uniquely; as evidenced by the narrative in Luke’s Gospel immediately following the rich young ruler. Here, Zaccheus only gives away half of his income (Luke 19:1-10). Additionally, Jesus tells a parable to encourage those listening to invest their money (talents) wisely for God’s use (Luke 19:11-27).

38. Matt.19:27.

39. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (United States: Touchstone, 1995), 59.

became apparent. The true disciples were sifted from the false, the deep from the shallow.”⁴⁰

Those who would seek after Christ must be willing to surrender all.

The third distinctive element of Jesus’ call to discipleship is holiness. This distinguishing mark not only identifies the new character of the believer, it also identifies the eternal purpose of God. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes, “he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”⁴¹ It is important to recognize that holiness is the aim of God’s call for all Christians, not just a few “super-Christians.” God summons His children out from the darkness of this world, and into the brightness of His presence. As a result, believers are presented “holy and blameless and above reproach before him.”⁴² This is the heart of the gospel, that “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”⁴³

Therefore, the forensic basis of a Christian’s righteousness is the imputed righteousness of Christ that stems from a judicial act of God; whereby the believer is sanctified (1 Cor. 6:11), and set free from sin (Rm. 6:18). However, this glorious redemptive act is only the starting point of the Christian life. Although the believer is freed from the dominion of sin (Rom 6:14), there is an ongoing struggle with the peripheral power of sin (Rom 7:23). Thus God continues His gracious work in the believer making him or her actually holy. This progressive work, known as

40. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 338.

41. Eph. 1:4.

42. Col. 1:22.

43. 2 Cor. 5:21.

sanctification, is a “process by which one’s moral condition is brought into conformity with one’s legal status before God.”⁴⁴

Interestingly, while salvation is solely of God (Jon 2:9; Eph. 2:8-9), in sanctification, God and man cooperate.⁴⁵ In fact, Scripture exhorts the believer to work at becoming holy. “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also **be** holy in all your conduct.”⁴⁶ Other commands given to the Christian to pursue holiness include:

- “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”⁴⁷
- “For this is the will of God, your sanctification (holiness) that you abstain from sexual immorality.”⁴⁸
- “Flee from sexual immorality”⁴⁹
- “let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”⁵⁰

Finally, the goal of discipleship is to transform the believer into the likeness of Jesus. “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.”⁵¹ The

44. Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 968.

45. This is not to imply that man’s and God’ role are equal in sanctification. God’s work is primary and man’s secondary. Phil. 2:12-13 provide the biblical picture for sanctification. Here the apostle Paul exhorts believers to work out (*katergazomai*: to bring to completion) their salvation; but then Paul adds “for it is God who works in you.”

46. 1 Peter 1:15, emphasis mine.

47. Heb. 12:14.

48. 1 Thess. 4:3.

49. 1 Cor. 6:18.

50. 2 Cor. 7:1.

51. Rom. 8:29.

phrase “to be conformed to” (*symmorphos*) indicates more than just an external or superficial likeness; it signifies the complete character of a person.⁵² Of course this was the thrust of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount when He warned about the motives of the heart. It is not sufficient for His followers simply to appear to be righteous. True disciples need to transform their inward disposition toward sin. While this is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit, God has commanded all believers to participate. For example, the believer should:

- Study Scripture (Ps. 1:2; Matt 4:4; John 17:17)
- Pray (Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6)
- Worship (Eph. 5:18-20)
- Make disciples (Matt 28:19-20)
- Fellowship (Heb. 10:24-25)
- Self-control (Gal. 5:23; Titus 1:8)

The apostle Paul understood the sober call to discipleship and labored vigorously to “present everyone mature in Christ.”⁵³ He admonished the church to ensure that men and women not only receive Christ as Lord, but also pattern their lives after Jesus.⁵⁴ Paul was greatly concerned that believers move beyond spiritual infancy (1 Cor. 3:1-2) to become wise (2 Tim 3:15), pure (1 Cor. 6:18), and godly (1 Tim. 4:7). He fervently prayed for the complete sanctification of believers (1 Thes. 5:23). Significantly, Paul understood that his role as a mentor necessitated strenuous work. He describes his toil as a struggle, as if he were enduring an athletic

52. Erickson 1996, 970.

53. Col. 1:28.

54. In this passage, Paul uses the term “walk in him” (Col. 2:6) to describe the life and conduct of a Christian. This is a familiar theme of Paul throughout his epistles: Col. 1:10, 4:5; Rom. 6:4, 8:4, 13:13; 1 Cor 7:17; 2 Cor. 5:7, 10:13, 12:18; Gal. 5:16, 25, 6:16; Eph. 2:10, 4:1, 17, 5:2, 8, 15; Phil. 3:16-18; 1 Thes. 2:12, 4:1, 12; 2 Thes. 3:11.

event. He labored with all his God-given strength to present the full gospel. Paul passionately believed in the principles of discipleship and the importance of spiritual leaders setting an example. Accordingly, he told the Corinthian church to “imitate me.”⁵⁵ Then he sent Timothy, his beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind the Corinthians of the ways of Christ. This was the heartbeat of Paul.

Statement of Methodology

The proposed design of the project involves an introduction and four chapters. These sections are sequenced to provide: a brief overview; theological rationale; an analysis of the contemporary culture; problem recognition; contributing factors; successful models; and recommendations

The sections are:

- Introduction: Overview
- Chapter 1: The Challenges Facing the Church
- Chapter 2: An Insider’s Look
- Chapter 3: Developing a Discipleship Growth Models
- Chapter 4: Conclusion

Introduction

The introduction to this thesis will serve as a mini-project. The goal is to emphasize the biblical mandate and the contemporary relevance of discipleship. Four important components will be included in the introduction. First, a statement of the problem will be presented. This will identify the focus of research, and state what the project will do. Next, a statement of limitation will describe the framework of research. The theoretical basis will link the project to a biblical

⁵⁵. 1 Cor. 4:16 NIV; Paul instructed the Corinthians to imitate him because he imitated Christ (Eph. 5:1; 1 Tim. 4:12).

foundation, and provide an historical perspective. Finally, the introduction will conclude with a Literature review.

Chapter One: The Challenge Facing the Church

Chapter One will give an overview of the contemporary culture and identify the problems confronting the church. The goal of the chapter is to educate the reader to the dynamics that are perpetuating a negative image of the church. This section will include an historical framework to postmodernism, immigration and syncretism.

Chapter Two: An Insider's Look

Chapter Two will address the importance of a discipleship and analyze the current landscape of discipleship in the American church. This chapter will incorporate data from Barna Research Group, Pew Research Group, and LifeWay Research. Additionally, a case study, of a current social issue will be provided to demonstrate how the demeanor of Christians is impacting the perspective of the unchurched.

Chapter Three: Developing a Discipleship Growth Model

Chapter Three will evaluate the church honestly and answer the question, “why is it failing to make disciples?” Despite the billions of dollars spent each year remodeling and revamping, the American evangelical church continues to lose ground. The goal of this chapter is to identify specific deficiencies and determine where improvements can be made. Surveys will be sent to pastors or church leaders to determine if churches are intentionally conducting

discipleship. Another survey will be sent to Christians to ascertain the depth of their discipleship training.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

Chapter Four will summarize the study and make recommendations for improvement. A holistic model, designed to permeate all ministries within the church, will be presented.

Literature Review

Books

The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a powerful book on discipleship and the bedrock for this thesis. Bonhoeffer exposes the dichotomy between cheap grace and costly grace. Cheap grace, the enemy of the church, is that which embellishes a person for one hour a week on a Sunday morning. “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline.”⁵⁶ Conversely, “costly grace is the incarnation of God.”⁵⁷ Costly grace is the soul awakening grace that harkens the believer to turn from the world and passionately follow Christ. *The Cost of Discipleship* is an inspiring book that prompts the child of God to their true calling, “Therefore be imitators of God.”⁵⁸

Growing True Disciples by George Barna is an invaluable resource for discipleship. The Barna Research Group consistently has their finger on the spiritual pulse of Christianity. In this book, Barna identifies the challenges facing the church in America. Although many churches

56. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 44.

57. Ibid., 45.

58. Eph. 5:1.

have discipleship programs, few are actually producing disciples. His studies reveal that activities alone do not forge disciples. Churches must adopt a philosophy of ministry that makes spiritual growth the apex of all they do.

Growing Your Church from the Outside, by George Barna is an ecclesiological treasure chest. For those who desire to understand the unchurched and how to reach them, this is a must read. This book provides a piercing look at the attitudes, values and perceptions of those who have rejected the church.

Above All Earthly Pow'r: Christ in a Postmodern World by David F. Wells is an informative book that provides keen insight into the ethos of postmodern thought. Wells begins with a sweeping overview of the historical roots that gave birth to the philosophical thought that dominates our current and complex culture. Understanding the reactionary disposition of modernity and postmodernity is pivotal to developing a ministry that is biblical as well as attractional. His analysis and critique of contemporary evangelicalism is right on target. The church must seek to communicate sound theology before adopting progressive methodology.

The Training of the Twelve by A. B. Bruce is an informative book on discipleship. Originally published in the nineteenth century, this classic has been endorsed by a large array of church leaders, including Charles Spurgeon. What makes this book so powerful is the way Bruce uses the narratives of the gospels to demonstrate how Jesus trained His disciples. This significant book is theologically sound and biblically true.

Membership Matters by Chuck Lawless is an insightful book directed at moving pew occupiers into membership and ministry. As with many biblical solutions, the thrust of this book is counterintuitive to the world. At a time when moral relativism is rampant and congregational commitment low, Chuck Lawless encourages churches to set high standards for its members and

guests. Not surprisingly, his study reveals that high expectations are a facet of successful church growth.

Unchristian by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons presents an uncompromising look at the church in America. Sadly, their research reveals that sixteen to twenty-nine year olds are increasingly turning away from Christianity. This is a must read for all ecclesiastical leaders. In order for the church to communicate and express Christ to the culture, it must first understand the intensity of the negative perceptions held by the new generation.

The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ by Bill Hull is a comprehensive resource aimed at the central issue of Christianity - discipleship. The impetus for this book is the author's passion to make disciples, and his disdain for the church that has neglected its primary responsibility. Hull is critical of the consumer mindset of the contemporary church that freely offers grace for forgiveness, but fails to emphasize "the radical nature of following Christ."⁵⁹ This book provides a great overview of discipleship and a road map to addressing the problems facing the church.

Another book by Bill Hull, *Christlike: The Pursuit of Uncomplicated Obedience*, is equally as valuable. In this text, Hull clarifies the objective of a disciple's life – to influence others. Based on the words of Christ in John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full;" Hull submits that the abundant life of a disciple is the key to transforming the culture. Of course this necessitates a life embodied by Christ. This is one of the unique features of Christianity – the followers become like its leader.

The Lost Art of Disciple-Making by Leroy Eims is a great book for establishing a solid foundation for discipleship. This concise and lucid text begins with the apostolic formula for

59. Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*, 17.

making ardent followers of Christ, and then moves to the present need for discipleship training. The practical and relevant approach is essential for any church that wants to: meet the basic needs of growing Christians; train potential workers; and develop mature, godly leaders.

Postmodernism 101: A First Course for the Curious Christian by Heath White is a helpful text that provides a concise introduction to postmodern thought. This is a good starting point for Christians who want to understand the current cultural worldview.

Internet

<http://www.perimeter.org> is the website for Perimeter Church located outside Atlanta Georgia. This church has an excellent discipleship program called “Life-on-Life.” The church describes their program as “a process for transferring spiritual life from one person (a Discipleship Team Leader) to another in the context of small groups of 5 – 10 people (a Discipleship Team).” The author of this paper visited this church and met with the Director of Church Resourcing.

LifeWay.com is the web address for LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention. Lifeway is one of the world's largest providers of Christian products and services. Of particular interest for this project is the research arm of Lifeway ministries. Overseeing this division is Dr. Ed Stetzer, an expert in church planting and missiology. There is a wealth of information regarding discipleship, emerging trends, and theological issues. Additionally, they have a spiritual formation inventory available online to assess spiritual development from the perspective of seven domains of biblical maturity.

<http://www.discipleshiptools.org/> Discipleship tools is a ministry of *Into Thy Word*, an international agency developed to “help equip and train pastors and church leaders worldwide to

grow deeper in their walk with Christ and impact others around them.” This site has numerous resources to help individuals or churches design a discipleship program.

www.disciplers.org Discipler Training International is a non-denominational ministry created by former missionaries to Bolivia, who served with New Tribes Missions. This is one of the best sites for providing free ready-made lessons for discipleship training.

Scripture

The backbone to this project is the Great commission issued by Jesus: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁰ This is the mission of the church.

However, before Jesus issued and empowered the church with this directive, He explained what a disciple should look like. He gathered a crowd on a side of a mountain and described the character of Kingdom children: meek, merciful, and pure in heart. He underscored the positive beatitudes with a condemnation of attitudes and behaviors that are antithetical to being a disciple: anger, lust, and retaliation. He set a seemingly unattainable standard, “be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.”⁶¹ This theme was consistently communicated throughout His ministry as He cautioned His followers to consider the cost of discipleship (Matthew 10:38, 16:24; Mark 8:34, 17:22; Luke 9:23, 14:25-33).

Yet Jesus did not leave His disciples without hope; or the ability to conform to the divine standards. He illustrated the basis of Christian living with an agricultural metaphor of a vine

60. Matt. 28:19.

61. Matt. 5: 1-48.

abiding in a branch. The imagery demonstrated the necessity of remaining in Christ in order to bear fruit. (John 15: 1-9)

The apostles understood the high calling of discipleship and communicated it in their epistles. Peter instructed his readers to be obedient children and to “be holy in all your conduct.”⁶² John spoke of Jesus’ life of obedience as the pattern for Christian living. Therefore, those who claim to be followers of Christ must walk in a similar manner (1John 2:6).

The apostle Paul recognized that the life of a disciple was radically different. He described this new lifestyles as one controlled by the Spirit, and contrasted it against the old life controlled by the flesh (Gal. 5: 16-26). He admonished believers to “set their minds on thing that are above,” to “put to death” sins of the flesh, and to “put on” the attitudes and behavior indicative of a true Christian. (Col. 3:1-14) And he instructed believers to “work-out (bring to completion) their salvation with fear and trembling.”⁶³ Finally, Paul presented himself as a model for the church as he described his work and toil to present all believers “mature in Christ.”⁶⁴

62. 1 Pt. 1:15.

63. Phil. 2:12.

64. Col. 1:28.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CHALLENGE FACING THE CHURCH

From Mayberry to the Jersey Shores

One of the most popular television shows of the 1960's was *The Andy Griffith Show*. During the eight years that the sitcom appeared on TV, it never placed below seventh in the Nielsen ratings, and in its final season it occupied the number one position.¹ Many reasons have been given to explain the enormous success of *The Andy Griffith Show*. However, without exception, critics and viewers alike point to the simple, value saturated principles depicted in the series, as an endearing attribute.

Forty-one years after the final episode of *The Andy Griffith Show* aired, a new television show catapulted to prominence – *Jersey Shore*. This cultural phenomenon has captivated millions of viewers worldwide. In fact, it is MTV's most viewed series telecast ever.² The show has become so popular that the University of Chicago and the University of Oklahoma offer classes on the cultural relevance of *Jersey Shore*.

Both, *The Andy Griffith Show* and *Jersey Shore* are indisputable icons of their era. Yet despite their titanic status, the two shows have little in common. *The Andy Griffith Show* portrayed fictional characters that enjoyed homespun humor and beliefs. The storyline always posited traditional values, and clearly distinguished right from wrong. Conversely, *Jersey Shore* is a reality show without a reality base to it. The characters are not guided by right or wrong, but by their passion and self-asserted truth. The stark difference between these two shows represents

1. <http://www.classictvhits.com/tvratings/index.htm> (accessed February 10, 2012).

2. TVbytheNumbers.com (accessed February 10, 2012).

more than artistic evolution; the seismic shift is emblematic of a culture in transition – from Modernism to Postmodernism.³

The emergence of the postmodern ethos is unmistakably changing the American culture in new ways. The transition is not only manifested in television shows like *Jersey Shore*, but across the entire landscape of society. Attitudes and dogma are being radically altered. As a result, Postmodernism, the contemporary mind-set, is defining the context in which the Church must carry out its mission. Additionally, the generational shift from Baby Boomers to Generation X and Millennial, is accelerating the philosophical revolution in our society. Finally, the massive immigration flow into America, from non-Christian countries, is dramatically influencing the culture through spiritual diversity. The coalescing of these three elements is producing a perfect storm that is radically altering worldviews. The turbulent mixing of this tempest is creating powerful currents aimed at the Church. As a result, the spiritual front of America is changing.

This transition is dramatically altering society's perspective of the church. According to research conducted by the Barna Group, "Christianity has an image problem."⁴ A large part of society is skeptical about Christianity. In fact, the number of individuals that remain outside the church swells with each generation.

³ See "Postmodernism" page 28.

4. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity... and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 11.

Generation	Age (2007)	Percentage of Generation who are outsiders to Christianity
Boomers	42-60	27%
Generation X	18-41	37%
Millennial	16-29	40%

Figure 1. The Outsiders

Most Christians are ignorant about the changing winds of thought. However, if the church wants to influence the new generation, it is critical for ecclesiastical leaders and Christian counselors to understand the trajectory of transformation.

Historical Perspective

For the church to be successful in ministering to the emerging culture, it must understand how the present is connected to the past. The torrent of change that the Western world is experiencing did not happen overnight. Rather, twenty-first century attitudes' were precipitated by two historic and tectonic movements in ideas. The first occurred around the turn of the sixteenth century, and the second is transpiring now. Each of these developments shaped and fashioned peoples' ideology – particularly the way they viewed the Church.

Western society can be divided into three major historic periods:⁵

1. Premodern / Medieval AD 600 - 1500

5. It is important to understand that history is not defined by sharp edges. The years depicted by each period are approximated to suggest when cultural paradigms slowly gave way to new dogma.

2. Modern / Enlightenment AD 1500 - 2000
3. Postmodern / Emerging AD 1968 - ?⁶

The Medieval or pre-modern era is often referred to as the Dark Ages, because of the intellectual darkness that occurred in Europe following the collapse of the Western Roman Empire.⁷ During this period, reason and education were greatly suppressed by superstition or cowed by tradition. Moreover, the worldview was characterized by faith in God and trust in authoritarian practices. Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury, summed-up the medieval mindset with his axiom, “For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand.”⁸

The medieval culture began to decline at the dawn of the Sixteenth century.⁹ Events associated with Columbus, Copernicus, Galileo and the rise of nationalism helped to fracture the premodern paradigm. Another pivotal event, which contributed to the demise of the medieval order, was the Protestant Reformation. The doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, advanced by Martin Luther and other reformers, weakened the ecclesiastical authority of the church. The dispute between Luther and the Catholic hierarchy became a way-station to the modern period; as tradition gave way to reason. In fact, the hallmark of the modern era was confidence in the

6. There is some discussion that postmodernism is giving way to “transmodernity;” however, Phyllis Tickle believe that postmodernism will remain vibrant for an extended period. Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Bakers Books, 2008).

7. The term Dark Ages more accurately depicts the Early Middle Ages (5th-10th Century).

8. *The Ontological Argument* by St Anslem, viewed at <http://philosophy.lander.edu/intro/articles/anselm-a.pdf>, (accessed February 15, 2012).

9. The transition from pre-modern to modernism primarily occurred in Europe. Although many Asian countries are now modernized, the majority of Islamic societies remain pre-modern while simultaneously embracing modern technology.

human power to reason. The French philosopher, René Descartes, captured the spirit of the new philosophical attitude with his statement, “I think, therefore I am.”¹⁰

At this point, it is critical to see that the worldview of modernism was not formed in a vacuum; it was a reaction to Pre-modernism. The ideological thrust of the modern era flatly rejected the philosophy of the pre-modern period. Men sought to liberate themselves from the darkness of the Middle Ages through knowledge and reason. In the beginning, understanding was a means for attaining certainty about God. However, as the intellectual movement progressed, God was soon usurped, and reason became the king. In fact, the initial goal of the Enlightenment period was to unfetter man from the concept of a Godly ordered universe.¹¹ The heart of this aggressive ideology demanded freedom from authority. Truth, defined by science and human wisdom, was all that was needed for understanding life and for navigating humanity out of darkness. This anthropocentric outlook eviscerated reliance on God and made man the arbitrator of morality. Belief and confidence in reason quickly turned to hope in progress. Through autonomy and science, humanity had determined that they had the power to usher in utopia. Indeed the modern era saw a rapid expansion of scientific, industrial, and political progress – but utopia never came.

The bright expectations of the Enlightenment period failed to materialize. Reason was supposed to transform humanity by eliminating dissent among nations. But even those countries most influenced by the Enlightenment could not prevent the needless slaughtering of millions of lives. Events like the First and Second World Wars, the Holocaust, and the Cold War clearly

10. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy* (USA: BN Publishing, 2007), 31.

11. Although the enlightenment thinkers were not unified in their theology (some were theist, some were deist and others were atheist), they did share common ground in their rejection of superstition and their trust in reason to pry open the mysteries of the universe.

demonstrated the failure of reason to unify. Science had also failed to usher in peace. The intellectual might that invented the polio vaccine also developed weapons of mass destruction. Author David Wells says of the Enlightenment, “It had made extravagant promises about life, liberty and happiness, but in the modern world it had become increasingly difficult to see where those promises were being realized.”¹²

Perhaps the 1960s most depicted the contrast between the hopes of the enlightenment agenda and the abject failure of the modern era to achieve them. The decade began with bold and progressive initiatives. President Kennedy proclaimed that “the world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty.”¹³ Yet despite The Civil Rights’ movement, the Great Society and the expanding Space program, the plight of humanity seemed unaltered. The darkness associated with the assassination of Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy and the mounting casualties in the Vietnam War cast a large shadow on the promises of utopia. As a result, a countercultural movement coalesced and began to question the modern supposition of progress – it was the harbinger of postmodernism.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is the name given to the philosophy or worldview that is dominating contemporary Western culture. It is not a theory or a creed, but a complex way of looking at things. It was born out of a rejection to modernism, which in turn, had spurned the Middle Age confidence in authority. While the postmodern worldview retains the modern distrust of

12. David Wells, *No Place for Truth, Or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), 286.

13. Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (United States: Harvard University Press, 1998), 276.

authority, it jettisons its confidence in reason and that which underpins reason – objectivity. For the postmodernist truth is not found, but created by individuals – whatever one believes. Instead of embracing human reason as the avenue to truth, postmodernism advances multiple truths that lead to preferences. Truth, therefore, is subjective.

Postmodernism also harbors “incredulity toward metanarratives.”¹⁴ These are the big overarching stories that orders and explains experience or knowledge. Because postmodernists distrust grand stories about history, science or religion, they do not include metanarratives into their search for truth. Instead of universal narratives that inform, postmodernists shift the locus of knowledge to micronarratives - one’s perspective. Micronarratives allow personal experience to be the arbiter of truth.

Significantly, postmodernism rejects scientific authority in favor of virtual reality, which advocates trusting only what ones senses can verify. Because individuals perceive the world uniquely, virtual reality permits each person to create his or her own reality. Finally, postmodernism replaces individualism of the Enlightenment with tribalism. This element is evident in the numerous reality television shows where the “community” determines truth. Charting the differences between modernism and postmodernism:

Modernism	Postmodernism
Objective Truth	Subjective Truth
Metanarrative	Micronarrative

14. A phrase coined by Jean-Francois Lyotard in his book *The Postmodern Condition*, (Minneapolis, MN: University Of Minnesota Press, 1984). *Meta* (beyond) and *narrative* (story); a metanarrative is a story told about another story. Postmodern philosophers use the term metanarrative as a critique; they see metanarratives as tools to justify power structures.

Scientific Discovery	Virtual Reality
Individual	Community

Figure 2: Modernism vs. Postmodernism

Generational Transition

The second major paradigm shift that is interwoven in the dynamics of cultural migration is the generational transition from the Baby Boomer to the Millennials. There have been fifteen generations from the writing of the Constitution in 1786 and the present. Each generation was unique, and each influenced the trajectory of society differently.¹⁵ However, the intersection of the three most recent generations (Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials) is particularly dramatic due to the changing philosophical mindset. Again, if the church is going to be effective at penetrating the culture, it must understand the contours and complexities of the emerging generation. The latest generation is vastly different from the preceding one. More importantly, Generation X and the Millennials hold a different perspective of Christianity.¹⁶

Overview of the three most recent generations:

	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Millennials
Birth Dates	1946-1964	1964-1984	1984-2000
Defining Moment	JFK Assassination	Shuttle Explosion	Columbine Shooting
View of Authority	Challenge View	Ignore Leaders	Indifference to Leaders

15. The term generation is used in a broad sense to reflect the collective thoughts of the people born during a specific period of time. It is a tool for analyzing generational concepts, not to identify how each individual thinks.

16. Frequently, the term “Buster” is used to describe Generation X, and “Mosaics” to denote Millennials.

Authority Saying	“No Problem”	“No fear”	“Whatever”
Characteristics:	1. Defiant 2. Get Ahead 3. Conquest 4. Live to Work	1. Coasting 2. Get Along 3. Community 4. Work to Live	1. Searching 2. Get on a Team 3. Collaboration 4. Work and Live

Figure 3: Overview of Generations

One of the most significant factors distinguishing Generation X and the Millennials from the Baby Boomers is the family structure. According to the Census Bureau, there was a tumultuous shift in the structure of the nuclear family from the 1960's to the 1990's. The traditional two-parent family, prominent in 1960, became less prevalent; single parent, blended, and the extended families became more commonplace.

The shift in the family formation can be attributed to two main reasons. The first is the increase of pregnancies in unmarried women. Over the past decades, the proportion of births to unmarried women has increased dramatically, rising from 5.3 percent in 1960 to 32.2 percent in 1995,¹⁷ and has leveled at 40.8 percent in 2010.¹⁸ The second major factor is the rise in the divorce rate. From 1960 to 1980, the divorce rate more than doubled — from 9.2 to 22.6 divorces per 1,000 marriages. As a result, approximately half of the children born to married parents in the 1970s witnessed their parents divorce, compared to only about 11% of those born in the 1950s.¹⁹ Overall, during the past three decades of the twentieth century, the number of children living in single-parent families increased steadily. In 1960 the Census Bureau reported

17. Child Trend Data Bank, “Births to Unmarried Women” viewed at <http://www.childtrendsdatbank.org/?q=node/196> on February 12, 2012.

18. National Vital Statistics Report Vol. 60, Number 2 Births: Preliminary Data for 2010; viewed at http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr60/nvsr60_02.pdf, accessed February, 2012.

19. W. Bradford Wilcox, “The Evolution of Divorce,” *National Affairs Articles* no 1 ~ (Fall 2009)

that nine percent of children lived in single-parent families; however, at the turn of the century that number had risen to twenty-eight percent.

One of the consequences of these new family units is that children from Generation X and the Millennial generation lacked the nurturing and protection that was afforded to the Baby Boomer generation by the traditional two-parent family. Moreover, during the past few decades, divorce was so widespread and disruptive that the effects impacted an entire generation. The deleterious consequences of divorce were verified in a twenty-five year study, conducted by Dr. Judith Wallerstein. In her research, Wallerstein discovered that the impact of divorce is not fully realized until the children of divorce reach adulthood. When adults divorce, it “affects personality, the ability to trust, expectations about relationships and the ability to cope with change.”²⁰ This dynamic is radically altering opinions about family and relationships. For example, Generation X and Millennial adults are more anxious, and cautious about marriage. Wallerstein states, “young men and women from divorced families enter young adulthood anxious about love, commitment, and marriage because they are so afraid of failing and being hurt....one way this anxiety plays out is to avoid commitment altogether”²¹ As a result, adults from these generations are marrying later than the Baby Boomers.

When Generation X and Millennial adult marry, they choose not to follow their parents’ example. Unlike the Baby Boomers, these later generations are putting their families first and their jobs second. Remember, the Generation X children were the first to be termed “latchkey kids.” These were the children who came home to empty houses because both parents worked to pursue the American dream. Now, these children are grown and are intentionally building

20. Judith Wallerstein, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), 298.

21. *Ibid.*, 150.

different family structures from the ones they were born into. They are choosing to spend more time with their families.

Immigration

The third component driving the cultural transformation is immigration.²² Although immigration has always been a part of the American story, the latest wave of migration is significantly altering the religious spectrum.²³ This is due in large-part to the rescinding of the National Origins Act of 1928, and the passing of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965.²⁴ The new Act removed the previous stringent immigration regulations and replaced it with more lenient guidelines. As a result, the immigration spigot was fully opened. Additionally, the 1965 law paved the way for the massive influx of Middle Easterners, Latinos, and Asians. Unlike the great wave of immigration that America saw in the nineteenth century, the vast numbers of Twentieth and twenty-first century immigrants were non-European.²⁵ America had lifted the lamp beside the golden door and welcomed the tired, the poor, and the huddled masses yearning to breathe free²⁶ from every nation.

22. The focus of this study is the religious implications of immigration; not the other issues associated with immigration.

23. The genesis of America incorporates the story of immigration. This country was forged by the millions of Europeans that came to the New World seeking religious freedom, and new opportunities.

24. The Immigration Act of 1924, or Johnson-Reed Act, was enacted to limit the annual number of immigrants to America. As a result of the Act, immigration went from 706,896 immigrants in 1924, to 38,119 in 1945. The Act also severely restricted non-Westerners from acquiring American citizenship. U. S. Department of the State, Office of the Historian, <http://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/ImmigrationAct>. Accessed January 10, 2012.

25. From 1820 to 1964, 82% of the thirty-five million immigrants were European. However, from 1981 to 1990, only 15% of the 1,013,620 immigrants were European. Census Bureau.

26. Adapted from Emma Lazarus, *The New Colossus*, Statue of Liberty National Monument.

As the twenty-first century began, America had become a melting pot. Individuals from every nation came to the shores of freedom. However, in contrast to the earlier migration, waves of immigrants that were predominantly Judeo-Christian in their religious affiliation, the new torrent of immigrants brought the religious traditions of the world. Their arrival created a new multiethnic society and ushered in religious pluralism. In fact, America has become the most religiously diverse nation in the world.²⁷ According to Gordon Melton, “The United States is currently home to more than 1500 different religious organizations.”²⁸ Islam, Hindu, Buddhism, Jain, Zoroastrian, and Sikh are some of the new religions that are reshaping the religious community in America. The assimilation of these new religions into the American fabric was evident in 1987, when the first Buddhist chaplain was appointed to the armed services; and in 1993 when the first Muslim chaplain was appointed.

An interesting permutation to the expanding religious supermarket is the parallel culture of spiritual interest that is not grounded in orthodox religion. Although spirituality in America has not always been tethered to religion, the new spiritual quest seems to have been invigorated by religious pluralism spawning from immigration. The influence of immigration is seen in the dramatic growth of Eastern religions during the past several decades. The number of Buddhists, for example, has swollen from thirty thousand to two and half million; Hindus have grown from one hundred thousand to one million.²⁹

The renewed zeal for personal spiritualism is thriving in postmodernity. Not only have

27. David Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 108.

28. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, (London: Gale Research, 1999), 15.

29. David B Barrett, George Kurian, and Todd Johnson, *World Christianity Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 772.

Eastern ideas permeated mainstream, but they are also invading the church. A national study revealed that 20% of church members believe in reincarnation, 24% read their horoscope weekly, and 11% believe in trance channeling.³⁰ Moreover, it appears that the combined force of postmodernism and religious plurality is blurring America's perception of religion. According to Barna research, 44% of Americans think that "the Bible, the Koran and the Book of Mormon are different expressions of the same spiritual truths."³¹ When generational factors are included, the concept of God shifts from the traditional divine deity to an amorphous God. Younger adults are increasingly describing God as a prototype; or an interchangeable "superior being."³² They believe that all religions or faiths are the same. Although the nomenclature changes between religions, the contemporary culture does not distinguish between the gods of every faith - all roads lead to the same god.

Even Christianity has become part of this universalist understanding of faith. Less than thirty percent of Millennials believe that the Bible is totally accurate in all the principles it teaches.³³ Even more disturbing, only three percent of Millennials believe that there is an absolute truth, and that it comes from the Bible.³⁴ This is, of course a component of postmodernism, the predominant worldview of Americans under the age of thirty-five. However,

30. Robert Fuller, *Spiritual but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 69.

31. George Barna, "America Draws Theological Beliefs from Diverse Points of View," October 8, 2002. Online at <http://www.barna.org>.

32. Barna, *Futurecast* (Austin, TX: Tyndale, 2011), 65.

33. Ibid., 133. Overall, only forty-five percent of adults strongly believe the Bible is totally accurate. However, that number is expected to decrease precipitously as Millennials enter adulthood.

34. Ibid., 137. Overall, only thirteen percent of American adults believe there is an absolute truth and that it is found in the Bible.

the most alarming component marking the ferment of American spirituality is the absence of vibrant Christians to model faith. Believers cannot simply profess Jesus; they must follow Him as well.

Image

There is a large disconnect between the church of the modern era and the rising generation of adults. Nearly two out of five young adults (38 %) claim they have a bad perception of Christianity; one-third of young adults assert that they do not want to be associated with Christianity because of its negative image. Furthermore, seventeen percent of young adults claim they have a “very bad” perception of the Christian faith. While these numbers seem minor, it must be noted that the size of these groups has tripled during the past decade. In 1996, Christianity enjoyed an eighty-five percent approval rating from those outside the church, including atheist and agnostics. Now, there is a growing tidal wave of enmity and resentment toward Christianity among the youngest generation.

Interestingly, the primary reason why individuals dislike Christians is not grounded in theology, but is born out of a disdain for the demeanor of believers. According to research conducted by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, Christians “have become famous for what we oppose, rather than who we are for.”³⁵ A national survey conducted by Kinnaman and Lyons identified how young adults view Christians:

1. Ninety-one percent of young adults perceive present-day Christians as anti-homosexual.
2. Eighty-seven believe Christians are judgmental.

³⁵. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity*, 26.

3. Eighty-five percent think Christians are hypocritical.³⁶
4. Eighty-two percent believe Christianity teaches the same basic ideas as other religions

Only a small minority perceive Christianity as genuine and relevant. In fact, among young adults 84 percent say they personally know a Christian; yet only 15 percent recognized a significant lifestyle difference manifested by Christians.³⁷

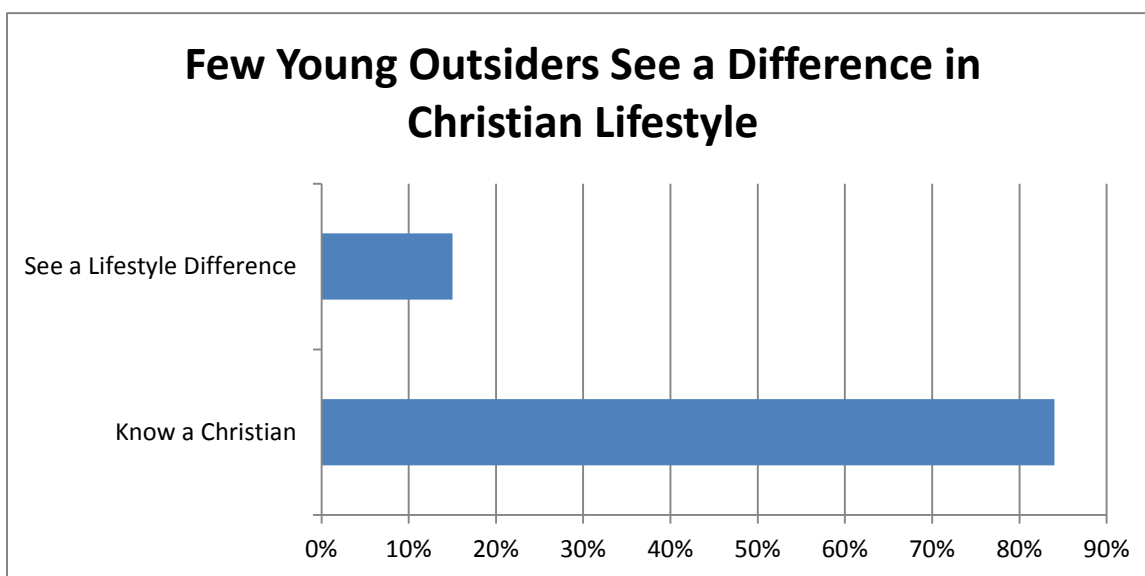


Figure 4: Lifestyle Gap

Whether these perceptions are valid or not, are not issues the church should refute; in this contemporary culture perception is reality. More relevant to the church is ascertaining how these images were forged, and how Christians can model the excellences of God’s grace more faithfully.

Sadly, the image problem of Christianity is not merely the perception of those young adults outside the church. Increasingly, it is a view shared by young Christians who attend

36. Kinnaman and Lyons, 27. Other unfavorable images included: too involved in politics, out of touch with reality, “old-fashioned,” and insensitive to others.

37. Ibid., 48. (includes the chart)

church. Fifty-two percent of American churchgoers, age 16-29, believe Christians are too judgmental. Nearly half of these young churchgoers identified Christians as hypocritical – saying one thing, but doing another. Sadder still, one-third believed their faith is old fashion, while one quarter of young adults who attend church believe that Christianity is boring and insensitive to others.³⁸ In the famous words of astronaut Jim Lovell, “Houston, we have a problem.”

Spiritually Shallow and De-Churched

An interesting, and seemingly ironic twist to the image problem facing the church is that despite the bad press, Americans overwhelmingly profess to be Christians. Two thirds of all Mosaic and Busters (age 18-42), and seventy-three percent of Boomers (age 42 and above) state they have made a commitment to follow Jesus Christ.³⁹ These statistics are amazing, yet puzzling. One would think that with so many people embracing Christianity, while simultaneously criticizing Christian hypocrisy that the landscape of the church, as well as the American culture would be radically transformed. However, the perception of the church remains jaded. The apparent contradiction, between the words and the actions of professing Christians, brings into question the religious vitality of those espousing the Christian faith. Specifically, how deep is the faith of those who identify themselves as Christians?

Ascertaining the faith of professing Christians

One significant tool for measuring the depth of a person’s faith is a worldview assessment. Apprehending the worldview of an individual not only sheds light into the cause of

38. Kinnaman and Lyons, 34.

39. Mosais are the same as Millennials and Busters are the same as Generation X.

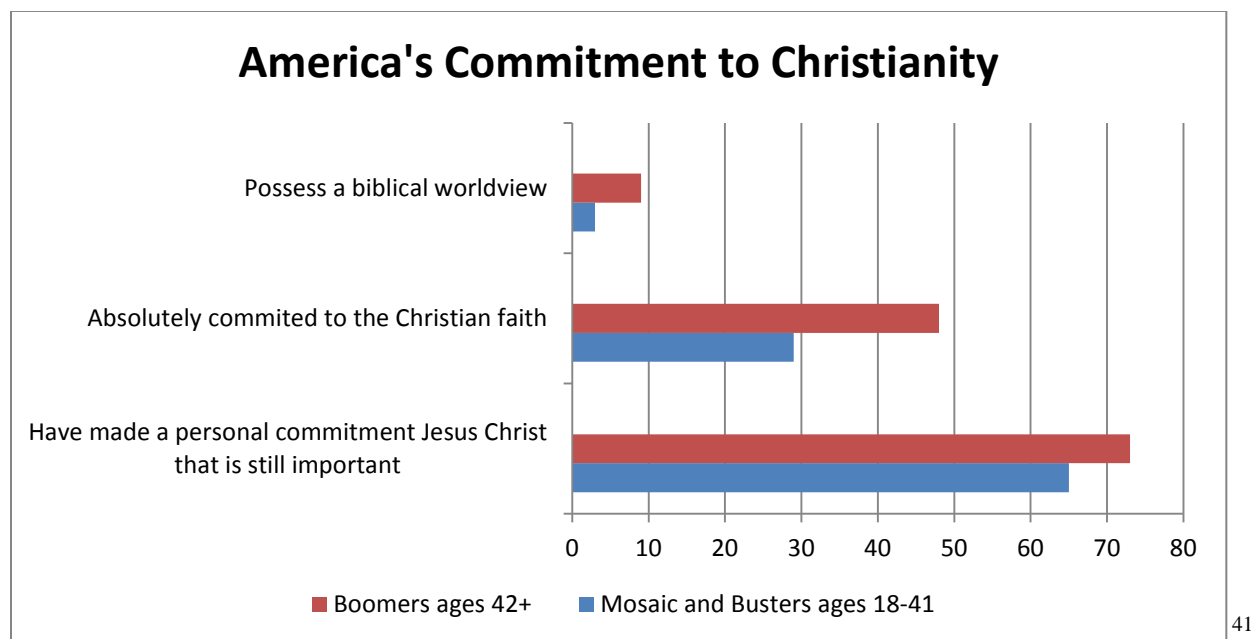
their actions and attitudes, it also opens a window to expose their core foundational belief system. In other words, people behave in accordance with their intrinsic worldview. For example: those who interpret and respond to life by the light of what scripture teaches hold to a biblical worldview. Conversely, the absence of a biblical worldview will be demonstrated by secular behavior. Moreover, the absence of a biblical worldview will be indicative of a weak or missing biblical faith. For research purposes, the Barna Group has identified eight components that can determine if a person holds a biblical worldview:

- God created the universe and continues to rule it
- Jesus Christ lived a sinless life
- Salvation is by grace, (it cannot be earned)
- Satan is real
- The Great commission is a mandate for all Christians
- Absolute moral truth exists
- The Bible is the arbitrator of truth
- The Bible is accurate in all of its teaching⁴⁰

With so many Americans identifying themselves as Christians, it seems reasonable to assume that most people possess a biblical worldview. Yet the research reflects that only three percent of Busters and Mosaics, and only nine percent of Boomers embrace the components that define a biblical worldview. To help put that number in perspective, out of the approximately sixty million adults that claim to follow Christ, only three million manifest a biblical worldview. Notably, the specific elements that kept “born-again” adults from having a biblical worldview

40. These components are listed by Barna, *Futurecast*, 137; and by Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 75. This is not a complete list of elements associated with a biblical worldview.

are: the belief in an absolute moral truth; the existence of Satan; and belief that salvation can be earned.



41

Figure 5: America's Commitment to Christianity

Although these statistics do not bode well for the church theologically, the research does help explain the sociological incongruences. As stated earlier, people behave in accordance with their worldview. The survey merely verified this truth. Church members are not acting like Christians because they do not have a foundational belief system tethered to the Bible. This is why Christians are perceived as hypocritical and judgmental; their actions and attitudes, though antithetical to the Bible, simply reflect what captivates their hearts. Jesus made this point abundantly clear “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”⁴²

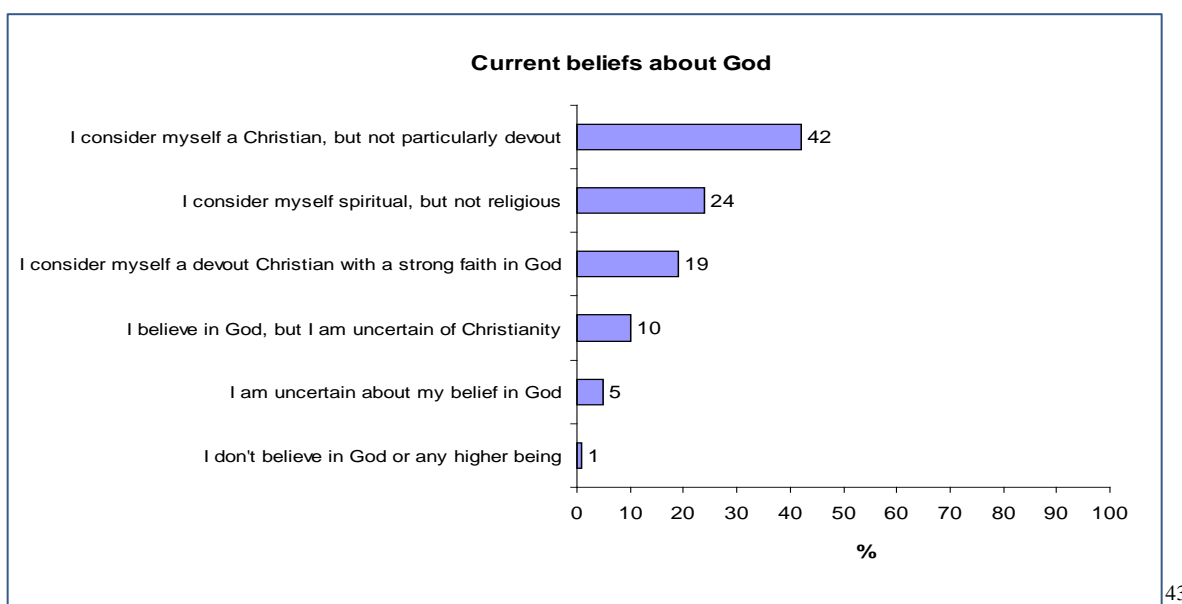
41. Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 75-76.

42. Matt. 12:34

In fact, the inextricable connection between a person's heart and their demeanor is highlighted by research that focused on the lives of people holding a biblical worldview. In contrast to the former group, individuals that firmly establish the Bible as the framework and lens to see the world, live substantially different from other Americans, and from other believers. Clearly what a person believes, matters. The question for the church, and this paper is, "Why do so many Christians fail to possess a biblical worldview?" More specifically, "How did millions of people embrace a costless faith, and what can the church do to transform the hearts of their congregants?"

The De-churched

Within the ranks of Christendom a particular subset needs to be considered. It is a growing segment of adult Christians known as the "de-churched." Unlike unchurched individuals who never had a meaningful relationship with the church; de-churched individuals once were active congregants within the church. In fact, many of these individuals grew-up in the church; but, now they no longer affiliate with a church or a denomination. It is estimated that there are approximately twelve million formerly churching adults in America. Significantly, over sixty percent of these adults still profess faith in God and consider themselves Christians.



43

Figure 6: Spiritual Assessment of the De-churched

Many explanations have been purported to elucidate the factors precipitating the growth of the de-churched population. In 2006, LifeWay Christian Resources studied the thoughts and feelings, of a sample group comprised of formerly churchd adults, to help understand why they decide to drop-out of the church community. The reasons for their exodus varied. However, near the top of the list, and perhaps tangential to the all other reasons, was “disenchantment with the pastor / church.”⁴⁴ When this factor was broken down an interesting picture developed. Those that fled the church did so because they grew weary of aberrant Christian behavior they saw manifested in the church. This supplemental study supports the research, issued earlier by the Barna Group, and further indicts the church of Christ-less character.

43. LifeWay Research power point presentation “Formerly Churchd Adults” viewed at <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-surveys-formerly-churched-part-1-of-2> (Accessed March 5, 2012).

44. LifeWay Research surveys formerly churchd viewed at <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/Article/LifeWay-Research-surveys-formerly-churched>, (accessed March 5, 2012).

Additionally, a number of these de-churched individuals jettisoned their ecclesiastical connections because they became disenfranchised with the false gospel they were promised. According to Matt Chandler, senior pastor of The Village Church near Dallas, Christians walk away from the church because they are taught a shallow, feel-good message of Christianity that does not work in real life.⁴⁵ Although many of these believers were in the church for years, they were never taught that tribulations will arise (1Pe 4:12); and that God uses trials to strengthen the believer's faith (Jas 1:2-3). Thus, when a major problem developed that did not fit into their prosperity paradigm it unhinged their weak and immature faith.

A sober analysis of this narrative and the research presented point to a systemic problem that plagues the church – superficiality of faith. Believers do not fully comprehend the implications of following Christ. This happened because the church failed its mission to produce disciples. Although the church fervently proclaimed the good news of the gospel, it did not cultivate the hearts of those who answered the call. As a result, there is a discipleship deficit. John Stott accurately said, “We have experienced enormous statistical growth, without corresponding growth in discipleship.”⁴⁶ Others such as Bill Hull have observed that “the crisis at the heart of the church is a crisis of product.” Even Christian Columnist Cal Thomas noted, “The primary problem in the culture.... isn't the abortionist. It isn't the pornographers or the drug dealers or the criminals. It is the undisciplined, undisciplined, disobedient, and biblically ignorant church of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁷ It appears that the church is a mile long, but only an inch deep.

45. Matt Chandler - De-churched viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?gl=US&hl=iw&v=XzTm3W2Ai7s> (accessed April, 2012).

46. “Make Disciples, not just Converts,” *Christianity Today* 43, no. 12 (October 25, 1999). Viewed at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1999/october25/9tc028.html?start=2> on March 5, 2012.

47. Cal Thomas, interview with *Christianity Today* 38, no. 5 (April 25, 1994).

Perhaps, the International Consultation on Discipleship summed up the problem best in their joint statement:

Acknowledgment of the Need

As we face the new millennium, we acknowledge that the state of the Church is marked by a paradox of growth without depth. Our zeal to go wider has not been matched by a commitment to go deeper. Researchers and pollsters have documented the fact that many times:

1. Christians are not that different from the culture around them. When the desert wind blows, it shapes the sand, and the Church has become more like the sand than the wind.
2. We grieve that many within the Church are not living lives of biblical purity, integrity and holiness. The need is in the pulpit and pew alike.
3. The lack of true discipleship has resulted in a lack of power in the Church to impact our culture.⁴⁸

The twenty-first century church is besieged by cultural moral relativity and low congregational faithfulness. Yet the greatest threat facing the church is its unwillingness to obey Jesus' commands to make disciples.

48. The Eastbourne Consultation, *Joint Statement on Discipleship*, September 24, 1999.

CHAPTER TWO

AN INSIDER'S LOOK

In the preceding chapter, the negative disposition toward Christianity was evaluated predominantly from the impressions of those outside the church. This section will peer at the problem from a different perspective – from the eyes of those inside the church. The goal of the chapter is to ascertain if the claims of the unchurched and the de-churched are supported by an honest assessment of the spiritual life of today's congregants. In other words, is there is a disparity between where the church is and where it is called to be? Moreover, how are some church groups responding to the contemporary culture? To assist in the analysis a case study of a contemporary issue will be presented.

The State of Discipleship

Many church leaders have relied on the size of their church, budget, or building to define success. Although these metrics are important, they fail to measure the critical issue of spiritual transformation. A more effective approach, which conforms to the biblical mandate of making disciples, is to assess the spiritual maturity of congregants. A number of insightful studies have been conducted to measure the spiritual temperature of the church. One of the best analyses was conducted by LifeWay Research. They surveyed twenty-five hundred church-attending Protestants, in 2007 and 2008.¹ The Spiritual Formation Inventory (SFI) administered, was

1. In addition to the wide scope of participants involved in the survey, the longitudinal axis of the study substantially contributed to the veracity of the research. LifeWay made observation in May of 2007 and again in May of 2008 to measure spiritual progress. The data presented in this section is taken from: Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville, B & H Publishing Company: 2008), 7-49. Lifeway Research is an arm of LifeWay Resources.

comprised of seventy-five questions that evaluate an individual's doctrinal beliefs, plus seven biblical domains of maturity:

- Learning
- Obedience
- Service
- Evangelism
- Faith
- Worship
- Relational

The large sample pool was representative of America in terms of geography, gender, and age. Moreover, there was an equal distribution of all denominational categories. In other words, the scope of the survey was wide and diverse so that it would accurately capture the spiritual formation of Christians in America. Specifically, the SFI was designed to measure the attitude and behavior of professing Christians. Each individual received a composite score derived from the SFI (0% to 100%; where 100% is complete conformity to biblical standards). Based on these scores, the sample group was divided into four segments depicted on the graph below (represented by the four colors).

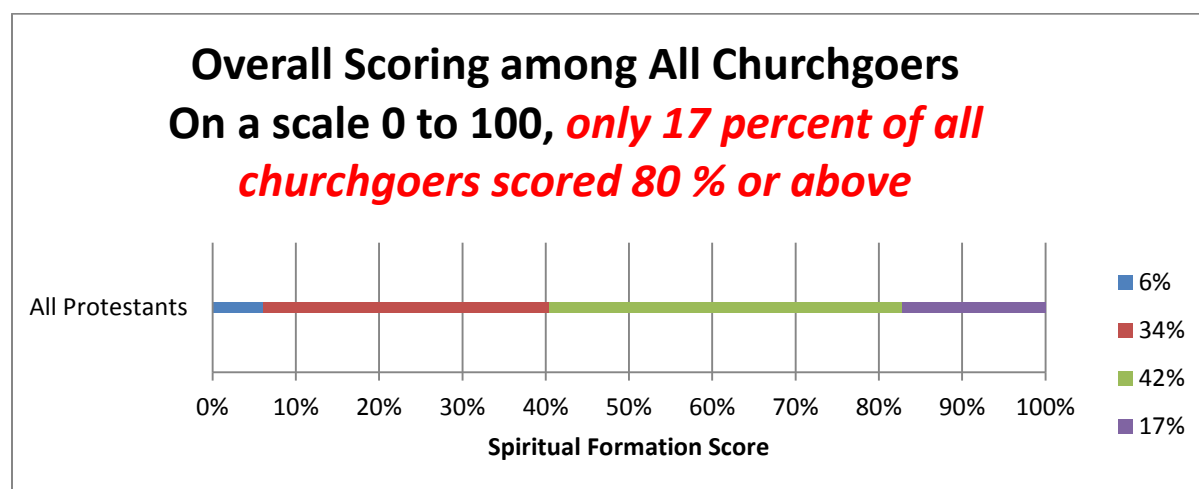


Figure 7: Spiritual Formation Scores

The graph depicts a disturbing picture of American Christianity. Out of the 2500 churchgoers surveyed, only 17% (the segment in purple to the far right of the graph) scored 80% or higher. Forty percent of the group (the brown and blue segments on the graph) scored less than 40% on the SFI. These mediocre results should sound the alarm regarding the spiritual maturity of the body of Christ.

To no surprise, there was a significant correlation between a respondent's spiritual formation score and his or her belief system. As discussed earlier, an individual's view and understanding of biblical doctrine will manifested itself in the character of his or her Christian faith. Therefore, at the core of a biblical worldview is the strong conviction that the Bible is true and trustworthy. With this in mind, the sample group was asked the following question: How much do you agree/disagree: The Bible is the written word of God and is totally accurate in all it teaches?

Sadly, only 54% of those surveyed indicated that they "agreed strongly" with the question. This means that on an average Sunday, nearly half of the congregants sitting in church do not fully embrace the word of God as the source of Truth for life. This statistic alone should serve as a wake-up call for pastors and church leaders. If a Christian does not believe that the Bible is God's written revelation given to man, and that it is inerrant and plenary inspired by the Holy Spirit, then his or her faith and spiritual formation have no solid footing. No wonder Christians are perceived as shallow and hypocritical – their actions are reflecting an immature faith.

For Christians, the Bible is imperative, and foundational for shaping faith and spiritual discernment. Therefore, if a believer has a distorted perspective, or a low view of Scripture, it will have a corollary impact on his or her understanding and acceptance of other biblical

doctrine. This was clearly evident when the sample group was queried about the doctrine of soteriology.²

When asked: *How much do you agree/disagree: Eternal salvation is possible through God's grace alone; nothing we do can earn salvation?*

Only 58% strongly agreed with this statement.

When asked: *How much do you agree/disagree: Christians must continually work toward their salvation or risk losing it?*

Only 23% strongly disagreed.³

When asked: *How much do you agree/disagree: If a person is sincerely seeking God, he/she can obtain eternal life through religions other than Christianity?*

Only 32% strongly disagreed.

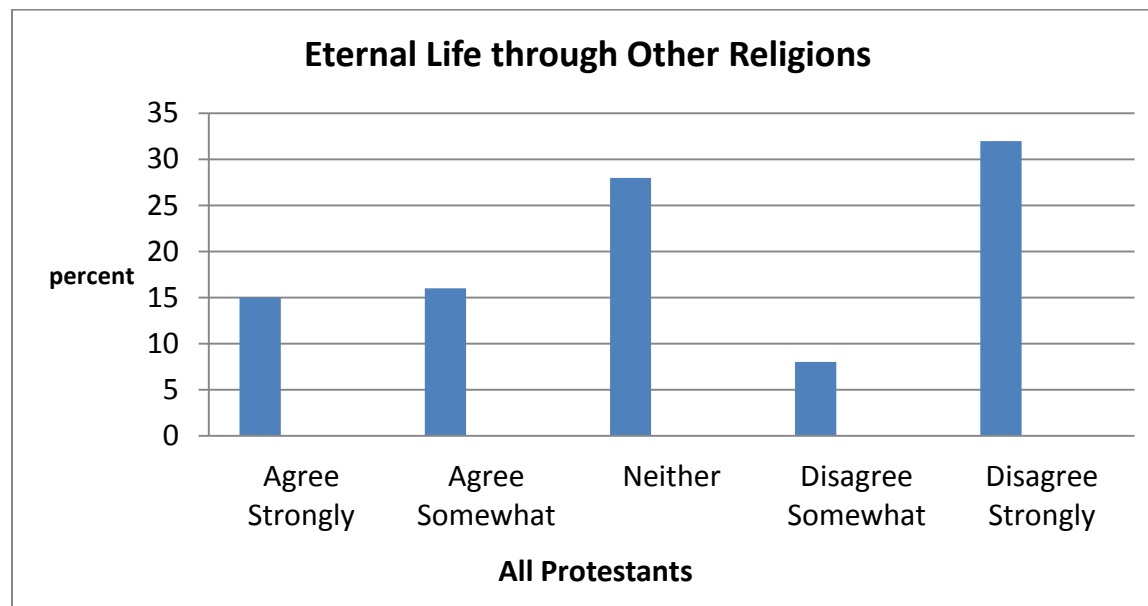


Figure 8: How Protestants view the exclusive claims of Christianity.

2. As part of the LifeWay survey, 12 basic Christian beliefs were measured.

3. Another 10% disagreed “somewhat” with this statement. Thus more than half of the Christians surveyed believe that their salvation can be lost, and that it is up to them to keep it.

These results are staggering. In fact, these statistics show that the pluralistic society is shaping the church more than Christianity is influencing the culture. Moreover, if 59% of Christians do not treasure the exclusivity of the gospel, then the present church is in serious trouble.⁴

To exacerbate this dismal picture, LifeWay polled teenagers in 2007 to glean insight into their beliefs. Their study found that 69% of the teenagers surveyed agreed that they were going to heaven because Jesus died for their sins. However, when LifeWay probed deeper, they discovered that the majority of this group was confused about salvation. In fact, they combined additional criteria to earn salvation. For example, 60% also agreed they will go to heaven because they are kind and religious. The research indicates that only half of the teenagers that attend a Christian church depend solely on the grace of God for salvation.⁵ This is particularly disturbing because these teenagers represent the future of the church.

Additionally, in a more recent survey conducted by LifeWay, pastors were questioned about the exclusivity of the Christian gospel. While the results clearly indicate that pastors are less universalistic than their parishioners, still 23% of the Protestant ministers surveyed did not “strongly disagree” with the statement that one can obtain salvation through religions other than

4. A similar survey was conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2008. Their results were almost identical to LifeWays. Fifty-seven percent of those classified as Evangelical believe that many religions can lead to God. When mainline protestant churches were asked the same question an astounding 83% percent believed that other religion could lead to God. Additionally, 82% percent believed that there is more than one true way to interpret the teachings of Christianity. *Religion in America: Non-Dogmatic, Diverse and Politically Relevant*, June 23, 2008. Viewed at: <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/876/religion-america-part-two> (accessed April 5, 2012).

5. *LifeWay Research finds teenagers confused about what it takes to get to heaven*, May 23, 2007. Viewed at <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-teenagers-confused-about-what-it-takes-to-get-to-heaven> (accessed April 12, 2012).

Christianity.⁶ Although ostensibly this is a small minority, one must remember that this statistic represents pulpits. When viewed through this lens, it is incomprehensible that 23% of the pulpits in Protestant churches, will be occupied by pastors who do not fervently embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Other Doctrinal Questions:

With respect to the resurrection, LifeWay asked: “How much do you agree/disagree: Jesus died on the cross and was physically resurrected from the dead?” Interestingly, 72% of the sample group strongly agreed. This is a puzzling statistic for a number of reasons. First, the percentage of Christians that strongly affirm the resurrection (74%) eclipses the percentage of those that affirmed the inerrancy of scripture (54%); which is the foundational basis for belief in the resurrection. Secondly, the response is paradoxical; because roughly twenty percent of the respondents deny the literal resurrection of Jesus, yet embrace Christianity. Why would someone follow a dead man who did not conquer sin or death? The resurrection is so critical to the Christian faith that the apostle Paul said, “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.”⁷

With respect to the doctrine of original sin LifeWay asked:

How much do you agree/disagree: Every person is born a sinner due to the sin of Adam being passed on to all persons?

6. *Pastors Uphold Christian Exclusivity, Poll Finds*, March 12, 2012. Viewed at <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/Research-poll-Pastors-uphold-Christian-exclusivity> (accessed April, 12, 2012). This survey was very complex. For example, pastors in large cities are more likely to believe that other religions can provide salvation. Additionally, education levels seemed to play a role in one’s belief. However, regardless of the demographics, the thrust of the study indicates that a segment of Protestant pastors have been influenced by the culture.

7. 1 Cor. 15:17.

Only 56% agreed strongly”

With respect to the doctrine of the Trinity LifeWay asked:

How much do you agree/disagree: There is one true God who reveals Himself to humanity as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (commonly referred as the Trinity)?

Surprisingly, only 70% strongly agreed – that means that nearly a third of those Protestants surveyed do not fully embrace the historical, and orthodox Christian understanding of the Trinity.

With respect to the impeccability of Jesus, LifeWay asked:

How much do you agree/disagree: Jesus may have committed sins while in human form on earth?

Only 54% disagreed strongly. The response to this doctrinal question is disturbing. How can any Christian believe that Jesus may have sinned? This is not a mysterious doctrine hidden from the believer; the apostle Paul boldly proclaimed the basis of a believer’s righteousness. “He made Him **who knew no sin** to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”⁸ Obviously, this goes back to a weak biblical foundation in the lives of churchgoers.

With respect to the attributes of God, Lifeway asked:

How much do you agree/disagree: God is the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect Deity who created the universe and still rules today?

Only 74% strongly agreed.

8. 2 Cor. 5:21, emphasis mine.

With respect to the doctrine of Satan, LifeWay asked:

How much do you agree/disagree: Satan is a real being, not just a symbol of evil?

Only 58% agreed strongly. Again, this is indicative of a low view of Scripture.

With respect to the doctrine of eschatology, LifeWay asked:

How much do you agree/disagree: Christ will return a second time to gather believers to Himself?

Only 67% strongly agreed. This question did not test a person's knowledge regarding the various schools of thought, in terms of eschatological systems; rather it simply inquired about the blessed hope of Christ's appearing (Titus 2:13).

With respect to the doctrine of Hell, LifeWay asked:

How much do you agree/disagree: There is a literal place called hell?

Only 54% strongly agreed. Again, this response is indicative of a weak biblical foundation in congregants and the cultural seepage that is influencing the church.⁹ Obviously, Christians are being swayed by contemporary thought that spurns the existence of an eternal place of torment for the wicked. Yet, both the Old and the New Testament are replete with the motif of God's judgment. Theologian Wayne Grudem states, that the doctrine of an eternal physical Hell is "one of the most difficult doctrines for Christians to affirm today. It also tends to be one of the first doctrines given up by people who are moving away from a commitment to the Bible as absolute truthful in all that it affirms."¹⁰

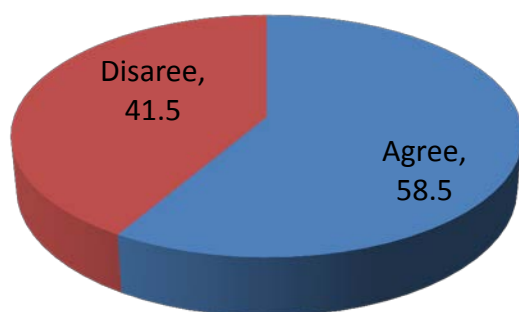
9. The term "cultural seepage" is used by Brad Waggoner to describe "the incipient invasion of ideas, perspectives, and beliefs that are contrary to a biblical worldview" (Waggoner 2008), 27.

10. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 1151, note 16.

Summarizing the Results

When LifeWay totaled the scores on these twelve basic doctrinal questions, only 58% of the sample group responded in accordance with the traditional, orthodox position. These numbers indicate that there has been an erosion of basic biblical knowledge, which is

Figure 9: Do churchgoers agree with Traditional, Orthodox Christian Doctrine?



foundational to a biblical worldview. As a result, churchgoers are conducting themselves antithetical to the Christian faith. Additionally, the lack of biblical fidelity among congregants is indicative of a church not zealously embracing its mandate to make disciples. But are the

anemic results totally the responsibility of the church, or do congregants share in their lack of spiritual maturity?

A study conducted by the Barna Research Group paints an interesting picture of spiritual development among born again adults.¹¹ When representatives from this group were asked about their goals in life, 80% claimed having a deep personal commitment to the Christian faith as a top priority. Yet when those same believers were asked to identify the most important thing to accomplish in life, only twenty percent selected something directly related to spiritual growth. It appears that the majority of believers are willing to acknowledge the importance of discipleship, but unwilling to take any steps in pursuit of spiritual formation. In fact, the survey revealed that nearly a third more of the respondents selected “being a good parent,” “raising good kids,” and

11. Barna, *Growing True Disciples* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2000), 32.

“having happy kids” as more important than “doing God’s will” and “raising my kids to be Christians.”

According to the Barna research, most Christians understand their responsibility to grow spiritually; however, they believe (ironically) they have already mastered the principles of the Christian faith. Therefore, all that is necessary is spiritual maintenance, not spiritual development. As a result, few born again Christians are committed to spiritual growth. When the Barna Institute asked believers about the intensity of their commitment to discipleship, two-thirds said they were too busy to invest the necessary time. Moreover, one quarter confessed a lack of interest or motivation to grow spiritually. Consequently, the majority of Christians fail to set spiritual growth goals. In fact, surveys reveal that a meager 20% of Christians establish objectives for personal growth.¹²

The lack of passion to be godly is not just a feature evident in Barna’s research. In October of 2010, LifeWay Research conducted a study to ascertain the impression of Protestant pastors of their flocks; particularly the emerging generation. Incredibly, 82% of Protestant pastors agreed with the statement, “I am concerned that the emerging generation of children, teens and young adults is not embracing the Christian faith to the same degree as their parents.”¹³ A similar study found that 65% of pastors are concerned about entrusted the future leadership of the church in the hands of the Millennial generation.¹⁴

12. Ibid., 32-33. Overall forty percent assert that they set goals; however; roughly half of this group set goals that were not measurable; such as “to become a better Christian” or “to grow spiritually.”

13. LifeWay Research: *Pastors question Millennials' commitment to Christian faith*; viewed at: <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-Pastors-question-Millennials-commitment-to-Christian-faith> (accessed March 25, 2012).

14. The study was conducted in November 2009, and referenced in *Pastors Question Millennials' Commitment to Christian Faith*, <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research>, accessed on April 12, 2012.

Responding to the Culture

The research proffered by LifeWay, Barna, and Pew all lead to the same conclusion – there is a problem within the church assimilating and understanding the Word of God. The data clearly indicates that church members are biblically illiterate. Either the fundamentals of the Christian faith are not being taught, or church members are dismissing them. However, the superficiality of biblical knowledge among church members is only half the problem. The challenges facing the church are much broader than merely failing to recognize and assent to biblical doctrine, as important as that is. The church has also erred in its biblical approach and response to the contemporary culture.

Rejecting the Culture

Many Christians are not bothered by the rejection of the postmodern / post-Christian culture. After all, the Bible is replete with the idea that Christians will be hated by the world.¹⁵ According to this perspective, Christians are to be light, and by nature, light casts out darkness. Therefore, it is only natural that adherents of biblical truth will grate against the current morally relativistic culture. Concepts like plurality of religions, subjective truth, and tolerance of abhorrent behavior are not only antithetical to the Word of God, but they are also nonsensical. How can everyone be right if one side claims to be the “only” truth? This violates the law of non-contradiction and the principles of logic.

At least this is the position proffered by numerous Christian pastors, theologians and authors. These defenders of the faith oppose the contemporary worldview, and soundly dismiss

15. Matt. 5:10-11, 10:22, 13:13; Luke 6:22, 21:17; I Cor. 1:18.

misguided individuals who are beguiled by postmodernity. Though zealous to promote sound doctrine, they are unable to dispense grace. Consequently, these representatives of the church are callous and uninterested in developing relationships with those outside the ranks of Christianity. Adherence to biblical principles is so important that they refuse to engage the pluralistic society; instead, they isolate themselves within the portals of the church. Is this the right response? Will this strategy draw the next generation into the church; or will the church become a remnant without influence? How should Christians respond to the criticism, and to the changing world?

Acquiescing to the Culture

On the other side of this issue is a group of pastors and church leaders hungering to communicate the gospel in a fresh, new way. Their heart beats for the emerging generation, which views the church as irrelevant.¹⁶ Although there is a wide spectrum of organizations that use “emerging” to describe their ministry, not all are evangelical. Some have radically sought to contextualize Christianity for the postmodern culture.¹⁷ This has led to prioritizing the relational aspect of Christianity over the doctrinal truths of Scripture, and in many cases, leads to a complete deconstruction of orthodox Christianity. Key biblical truths, such as the deity of Christ,

16. Dan Kimball, a pastor and leading voice in the initial Emergent Church movement, uses the term “emerging generations” to describe those individuals, generally between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. This segment of the population has most been influenced by postmodernism and consequently are growing up in an increasingly post-Christian America. Kimball writes, “Emerging generations don’t have a basic understanding of the story of the Bible, and they don’t have one God as the predominant God to worship. Rather, they are open to all types of faiths, including new mixtures of religions.” Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 15. Also, as documented earlier in *unChristian* by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, 24-26; the emerging generation has a negative view of Christianity.

17. It would be impossible to distinguish each group in terms of their theological bent; moreover, it is not the intent of this paper to evaluate the entire emerging strategy. However, the author would like to note that he supports all those pastors that unequivocally affirm an evangelical doctrine. For example: Mark Driscoll and Dan Kimball.

the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, and the authority of Scripture are minimized or dismissed. For example, Rob Bell, the former pastor of Mars Hill Bible church asserts that the virgin birth of Christ is non-essential.¹⁸ Regarding the Bible, he wrote, “This is part of the problem with continually insisting that one of the absolutes of the Christian faith must be a belief that ‘Scripture alone’ is our guide. It sounds good, but it's not true.”¹⁹

Another unsettling facet of the rhetoric of those within the emergent church movement is the intentional and frequent use of ambiguity and equivocation. Prominent leader Brian McLaren states, “I have gone out of my way to be provocative, mischievous, and unclear, reflecting my belief that clarity is sometimes overrated.”²⁰ While obscurity and vagueness are popular components of our postmodern culture, the obfuscation of Scripture ultimately undermines the authority of Scripture. Interestingly, McLaren frequently correlates his disputes with Modern theology to Martin Luther’s struggle with the church in the sixteenth century.²¹ Yet history reflects that Martin Luther was a strong proponent of the perspicuity of Scripture. He wrote, “Christ has not so enlightened us deliberately to leave some part of his word obscure while commanding us to give heed to it, for he commands us in vain if it does not give light.”²²

18. Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan: 2006), 26-27. Although Bell affirms belief in the historic Christian faith (page 27), he cast doubt on his affirmation, and creates doubt in the readers mind by proposing that future evidence may discredit the orthodox Christian view.

19. Ibid., 67.

20. Brian McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan: 2004), 23.

21. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions that are Transforming the Faith* (New York, Harper Collins: 2010), 16, 17, 18, 227, 257, 275.

22. Gordon E. Rupp, and Philip S Watson ed., *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1969), 163.

The problem with the Emergent church leaders is that they have abandoned all biblical boundaries. In their eagerness to contextualize the postmodern form, they have compromised biblical truth and created a new gospel. “Not that there is another one.”²³ The challenge for the church is to “find the balance between using some elements of the culture without being co-opted by the culture.”²⁴

The Biblical Response

Although the Bible does not give specific instruction regarding postmodernity, Christians can enter a postmodern world with assurance. Even in stormy times, as the tide of human culture vacillates, God is an “everlasting rock” who does not change, and the gospel is “an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”²⁵ Additionally, the Bible does provide guiding principles for loving and caring for people, even those who ridicule Christianity. In fact, the Bible provides a picture of the perfect response – it is found in the incarnation of Jesus.

In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul states, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”²⁶ This incredible verse captures the essence of the divine incarnation. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, laid aside the majesty and riches of heaven and cloaked Himself with robes of poverty. It was through Jesus’ humble obedience that humanity was reconciled to God.

23. Gal. 1:7.

24. Elmer L. Towns, and Ed Stetzer, *Perimeter of Lights: Biblical Boundaries for the Emerging Church* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 45.

25. Isa. 26:4, and Heb. 6:19.

26. 2 Cor. 8:9.

The Bible depicts Jesus as a pursuer of men and a friend of sinners. Although He always extended grace to those who needed it most, He never compromised the holy standards of righteousness. Perhaps the most vivid picture of Jesus' compassion for the lost is found in the fourth chapter of John's gospel. In this incident, Jesus traveled the unconventional route through Samaria to meet a forsaken woman. This story demonstrates that Jesus' love and understanding had no boundaries. Not only did Jesus breach the rigid social custom to converse with a woman; He reached out to a woman who was a social outcast. Tenderly, Jesus offered this woman living water to quench her spiritual need. Then, after extending grace and friendship, Jesus illuminated the sin in her life so that she could be cleansed.

It is apparent from this incident that Jesus did not unveil the woman's sin to ridicule or judge her, but to emphasize her deep need for a Savior. It is as if Jesus, the great physician, showed this woman an X-ray of her spiritual condition, so that she could be healed (repent and believe). But, Jesus prefaced the divine prognosis with compassion and tenderness. This is the model the church needs to emulate. It is incumbent upon Christians to learn how to respond to people the same way Christ did. Jesus was firm with sin, but gracious to sinners. Interestingly, Jesus saved His most critical words for the Pharisees. These hypocritical religious leaders focused on external issues, while their insides were unclean. (Matt. 23: 27) This is a stern warning for the church.

Case Study

One of the biggest challenges presently facing the church is the issue of responding to the "Gay Community." While the thrust of this paper is not designed to solve this specific problem, this challenge does represent a watershed moment for the church. For that reason, the author has

selected this issue as a case study; to examine how the image of the church is being shaped by the words and actions of Christians regarding homosexuality.

As previously reported, Christianity is under attack for its attitude toward homosexuals. Not only did “anti-homosexual” top the list of negative attributes incumbent to Christianity, it is also the most influential issue coloring the perception of young people regarding the sincerity of Christians. Young people are paying attention, and unfortunately this is what they are hearing and seeing:

- Hurricane Katrina and 9/11 were God’s judgment against homosexuals
- “God hates gays” websites with Bible verses
- Demeaning comments by pastors and Christian leaders
- Opposition to gays in the military and public office, by Christians

Although these examples may be the exception; nevertheless, they are forging negative images of Christianity for those outside the church. How can the church communicate the love and grace of Christ if it demeans people? It is one thing to affirm the Bible’s position on homosexuality. However, it is another thing to attack homosexuals personally. As a result, most young adults believe that the church is cruel, and inconsistent in providing a biblical response. Moreover, the church is perceived as hypocritical because it does not condemn other sexual sins, such as adultery or fornication as vehemently as homosexual sins.

The church must unite and communicate not only to the gay community, but also to the world, which is a response grounded in the Bible. Truth must be proclaimed, but only when accompanied with love (Eph. 4:15). Perhaps Billy Graham’s words in a news conference are a good starting point:

I’m going to quote the Bible now, not myself, that it [homosexuality] is wrong, it’s a sin. But there are other sins. Why do we jump on that sin as though it’s the greatest sin? The

great sin in the Bible is idolatry, worshipping other things besides the true and living God. Jealousy is a sin. Pride is a sin. All these things are sins. But homosexuality is also a sin and needs to be dealt with and needs to be forgiven, and that's why Christ came and died on the cross.²⁷

The issues surrounding homosexuality provoke strong feelings for most people.

Moreover, an aggressive media and political activists have highlighted this topic and made it a tinder box for Christians. Society is watching, and drawing conclusions about the church. Although the challenge is complex and emotionally charged, the church must engage the culture as Christ did – with love and compassion. Homosexuality is not the unpardonable sin. Therefore, homosexuals should not be treated as if they are unpardonable.

Theology of Change

In many ways, contemporary America is similar to the world in which Jesus was born. At the dawn of the first century, Palestine was a crossroads for people and cultures. Religion, politics, and languages divided its more than two million people.²⁸ The intermixing of nations had begun under Alexander the Great's desire to Hellenize the world. When the Greek empire gave way to Roman Rule, Rome became the temple of the world. All the pagan religions of the conquered world were received and fused into the philosophies of Rome's imperial reign.

In the midst of this foreboding backdrop, one religious group tenaciously emphasized their traditions and practices in order to set themselves apart from the syncretistic culture. These pious leaders, known as the Pharisees (separated ones) were noted for their strict observance of Jewish law and their intolerance for those who were deemed unclean. It was chiefly against these self-righteous religious leaders that Jesus spoke His message of grace.

27. Bay Area Crusade Press Conference, September 24, 1997.

28. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 4.

In contrast to the ostentatious demeanor of the Pharisees, Jesus frequently withdrew from the masses to spend time with His band of disciples. For nearly three years, He taught them about life in the Kingdom of God. He demonstrated compassion as He fed the hungry, healed the sick and gave life to the dead. He taught them about servant leadership as He washed their feet. He introduced them to a New Covenant built upon love and forgiveness; and then, He sent them into the world to make disciples of men.

Although the disciples would no longer enjoy Jesus' physical presence, Christ did not leave His followers alone. On the heels of Jesus' ascension, a new community was forged; born in the power of the Holy Spirit. This company of people, known as the Church (*ekklesia* – the called out ones), were joined together by faith and new life in the risen Lord. Their auspicious beginning was marked by, fellowship, worship, service and explosive growth. They lived as members of the Roman Empire, yet their citizenship was in the Kingdom of God.²⁹

Interestingly, Jesus never instructed these citizens of heaven to change the political climate. He never talked about a Sunday School Department, Youth Group or a Men's ministry. He simply said, "Make disciples." All the other issues may be important, but they are only penultimate. The mission of the church is to become and to reproduce spiritually mature zealots for Christ.³⁰ This was the pattern of the New Testament Church, as recorded in the book of Acts. Believers "devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers." These followers of Christ were committed to spiritual formation as

29. Philippians 3:20.

30 .This is an adaptation to the definition of discipleship given by George Barna in his book *Growing True Disciples* (Ventura, CA: Issachar Resources, 2000), 20.

evident by their actions and their “generous hearts.” As a result, God granted them “favor with all the people” and “the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”³¹

The church is called to be a light to the world to reflect God’s glory and to “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.”³² Believers are to act like children of God and to illuminate the gospel, not to denigrate the world. This is true for every generation. In fact, the apostle Paul wrote to the young church at Philippi exhorting them to act like children of God, so that “in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights of the world.”³³

This does not mean Christians must abstain from the political process, or capitulate to ungodly behavior. Light by nature dispels darkness; however, light can also be used to illuminate a path home. This was the thrust of Isaiah’s prophecy: “I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”³⁴ This is the inherent character of the church. By virtue of their rebirth, Christians are to engage life with integrity, respect and compassion. This necessitates a different perspective articulated by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor who was executed for his opposition to Nazi socialism. Bonhoeffer understood his civic duty in the face of Hitler’s cruel regime, yet his life was imbued with Christian humanity. As a prisoner in a German concentration camp he wrote, “Nothing that we despise in the other man is entirely absent from ourselves. We must learn to regard people less in the light of what they do or don’t do, and more in the light of what they suffer.”³⁵

31. Scripture from this paragraph is taken from Acts 2:42-47.

32. Titus 2:10.

33. Phil. 2:15.

34. Is. 49:6; the apostle Paul applied this passage to his ministry to the Gentiles: Acts 13:47.

35. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 10.

Aligning Christian Theology with Christian Behavior

The major problem facing the church today is that the lives of believers are virtually indistinguishable from unbelievers. As a result, Christians have lost credibility and their testimony has been discredited. If the church hopes to reverse this trend, and impact the lives of individuals, as well as, influence the culture, it must address two major deficiencies. First, it must root out spiritual lethargies and evoke a renewed hunger for spiritual growth in the hearts of congregants. In a recent poll, nine out of ten people described themselves as a “Christian.” Forty percent of those interviewed claimed to be committed to Jesus Christ personally. Yet, when asked about their life goals, not one of the adults interviewed said that his or her goal was to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ.³⁶ Sadly, this survey included pastors and church leaders.

Christians can successfully witness and sway a hostile world, when their walks are consistent with the word of God. The world will take note when “followers of Christ” demonstrate a zeal for knowing, loving and serving Jesus with all their hearts, minds, strength and souls. Additionally, believers must put biblical principles into action; they cannot pass on what they are not practicing. Thus, the second arena that desperately needs to be addressed is discipleship. If the church hopes to convey the image and character of Christ, it must intentionally develop and implement strategies for spiritual formation. These include:

- Emphasize people-driven ministries rather than program driven
- Emphasize building character rather than structures
- Stress biblical principles not just biblical knowledge

Emphasize personal growth - Discipleship is a lifelong commitment, not a program

36. Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 11-12.

God calls Christians to be “imitators of God.”³⁷ Moreover, the apostle Peter instructs believers to conduct themselves honorably; so that the world “may see your good deeds and glorify God.”³⁸ However, believers must work in concert with the ministry of the church. In fact, the spiritual edification and nurturing of the saints is the task of the church. By the word of God, in conjunction with the Holy Spirit, church leaders are to “equip the saints for the work of the ministry.”³⁹ In the Greek, the word “equip” refers to restoring or completing something to its original conditions. The implication of Scripture is that the church is to disciple believers to maturity, so that they can minister to the community. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the famed Baptist preacher of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, recognized and embraced discipleship as a God given mission to the church. He said, “God will not cause his children to be born where there are none to nurse them; he will be sure not to send converts to churches which do not want them.”⁴⁰

Discipleship will not solve every cultural problem. However, discipleship will transform the hearts of the congregants, so that Christians can be known for their authenticity and passion for God. When this occurs, the church can impact society and attract new members.

37. Eph. 5:1.

38. 1Pt. 2:12.

39. Eph. 4:12.

40. “Additions to the Church” a sermon viewed at <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols19-21/vols19-21.htm>, (accessed April, 2012).

CHAPTER THREE

DEVELOPING DISCIPLESHIP PRINCIPLES

The data presented in the previous chapters illuminates the deficiencies of the church with respect to developing mature and zealous followers of Christ. Simply stated, there is a significant gap between where the church is and where it is called to be. Elucidating this deficit is an important process that cannot be overlooked. Unless the church recognizes and embraces the reality of the problem, transformation will not occur. The journey to rectification must have a starting point for change to take root.

With that in mind, the goal of this section is to consider biblical principles of discipleship that can restore the zeal of Christianity in the church. Specifically, the ministry of Jesus and Paul will be analyzed. Their lives are fascinating, and informative. In particular, their approach to discipleship is acutely instructive and decreative. However, Jesus not only commanded His church to make disciples, He demonstrated the process. Likewise, the apostle Paul presented himself as a model, “I urge you then, be imitators of me.”¹ Therefore, the starting-point for any discipleship strategy must begin by drawing principles from Jesus and Paul.

To augment the process, this chapter will also flesh-out opportunities, afforded by the contemporary culture, to make disciples.

1. 1 Cor. 4:16.

At the Feet of the Master

“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son.”² This insightful verse highlights the exact nature of God’s timetable. His perfect plan demanded the precise political, cultural, and religious condition be in place before Jesus was sent into the world. Interestingly, the Father did not select a society that was woven together by a prolific mass media network. There was no internet, twitter, or television; there was not even a printing press to help Jesus disseminate the gospel message. God could have easily used computers, TVs, and cell phones; but He rejected the slick Madison Avenue approach.³ Instead, Jesus selected a small band of men and trained them for three years, and then sent them into the world to make disciples.

The evangelistic campaign begun by Jesus may have seemed inauspicious at first, but within a matter of years it had “turned the world upside down.”⁴ What is so remarkable is that His simple, yet effective plan centered on just a handful of men. In fact, Jesus invested so much time with His twelve disciples, as opposed to everyone else, that it can only be described as a deliberate strategy. Incredibly, none of the men Jesus chose as His protégés held prominent positions in the religious community. They were not clerics or scholars⁵; but common men who lived unpretentious lives. Yet these ordinary men were demonstratively transformed by their association with Jesus Christ; and in turn, they by the power of the Holy Spirit transformed the course of history.

2. Gal. 4:4.

3. This is not to imply that technology is inherently bad; rather it illustrates the value of relationships.

4. Acts 17:16.

5. Peter and John were described by the elders and scribes as “uneducated and untrained.” Acts 4:13.

Relational and Intentional

Several key components stand out if one studies the methodology of Jesus in order to glean an effective training strategy for discipleship. First, Jesus intentionally invested time in the lives of others. In fact, the foundation of Jesus' ministry was relationships; specifically the training of the twelve. For three years Jesus spent nearly every hour of the day and night with His disciples.⁶ He ate, slept, and walked the dusty roads with His band. Even as His popularity grew, Jesus narrowed His ministry down to the apostolic company. A quick survey of the narrative presented in the Gospels reveals that Jesus increased His time with the disciples as His ministry progressed.⁷

Although Jesus did not forsake the multitudes, His emphasis to train the Twelve was paramount throughout His ministry. In fact, Jesus frequently wove His interaction with the crowds into a training tool to teach the disciples. This was clearly seen in the feeding of the five thousand (John 6: 1-15). On this occasion, Jesus decided to test the disciples' faith by asking them to do what was humanly impossible. Their prominence in this event underscores the significance of the learning experience for them. Unveiling their faithlessness was an important facet of the educational program. But this was not an isolated episode. Jesus' every action taught and advanced these men so that would be the bearers of the Gospel.

This principle, of concentrated association with a few as opposed to the masses, is highlighted by Jesus' selection of a smaller group within the twelve. Notably, Jesus chose Peter,

6. Leroy Eims estimates that Jesus spent 13,140 hours training His disciples over the course of 3 years. Eims notes that if a church designed a discipleship program that included 7 hours of training a week (a high figure) that it would take 36 years to match the time frame of Jesus. Leroy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 187-188.

7. Scholar Henry Latham maintains that emphasis of Jesus' ministry shifted from the multitudes to the twelve after the ordination of the apostles. Henry Latham, *Pastor Pastorum: or, The Schooling of the Apostles by Our Lord* (London: Deighton Bell and Co.: 1895), 188-269.

James and John to accompany Him into the sick room of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51); to the Mount of Transfiguration where they beheld the Lord's glory (Mark 9:2; Matt. 17:1; Luke 9:28); and finally to attend Jesus as He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33; Matt. 26:37). These events demonstrate that Jesus proportioned Himself deliberately to accommodate the necessity of training a few. The principle at work is "the more concentrated the size of the group being taught, the greater the opportunity for effective instruction."⁸

This strategy seems paradoxical for the One of who was "the savior of the *world*."⁹ Moreover, it stands in stark contrast to the conventional wisdom of many contemporary churches. Far too many gifted pastors have diligently worked to build a thriving ministry, then "for the sake of the ministry," they isolate themselves from individuals. The rationale behind this thought is to maximize a pastor's exposure, so that the world can be reached. Yet this is not what Jesus did. The Lord, who was perfectly omniscient, understood the powerful principle of mentoring; and He did not waiver from that mission.¹⁰ Instead of seeking to impress the crowds, Jesus stayed engaged and concentrated on just a few, so that His instructions were more effective, and His students were better trained.

Of course emanating from the teaching pattern of Jesus is the biblical duty of pastors to train others to do the work of ministry, as outlined in Ephesians 4:12. This necessitates focusing time and talent on fewer people in the church to prepare them. Again, this was the model of Jesus. He deliberately invested time in His disciples, in order to build a strong foundation of

8. Robert E Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 2010), 26. Dr. Coleman also points out that the principle of concentration was evident in the Old Testament as well. There, God selected the small nation of Israel for redemptive purposes. Moreover, within the nation, God selected the branch of David of the tribe of Judah (endnote 5, p 126).

9. John 4:42, emphasis mine.

10. Jesus did not deviate from His plan by capitulating to the demands of the multitudes. He often had to withdraw from the crowds as they sought to "take him by force and make him king" (John 6:15).

leadership for future growth. He trained the apostles so that they could carry-on His work. That is the hallmark of discipleship – reproduction.

As a result of the time Christ spent with His followers, intimate bonds were forged; as evidenced by the young apostle John leaning upon Jesus as they ate (Jn. 13:25). Imagine the depth of love that would prompt John to rest his head on the bosom of God. Yet this was characteristic of their cherished fellowship, and the bedrock of their relationship. “Having loved *his own* who were in the world, he loved them to the end (*to perfection*).”¹¹

Significantly, the riches of Christ’s love formed the foundation of the apostles’ ministry, for they were commanded to love others **as** Jesus loved them (Jn. 13:34, emphasis mine). This attribute was so important that Christ labeled love as the identifying mark of discipleship. Finally, “It was by virtue of this fellowship that the disciples were permitted ‘to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.’ Knowledge was gained by association before it was understood by explanation.”¹²

A Process

Another distinctive feature of Jesus’ discipleship training is that it was a process, not a program or a project. The disciples continued to grow in faith, even after Jesus was raised from the dead (John 2:22). Interestingly, Luke’s gospel provides an excellent foreshadowing of the progression that would mark the journey for Jesus’ followers.¹³ The incident began when Jesus boarded Simon’s fishing boat, the hub of Simon’s vocation. Next, Jesus asked Simon to move

11. John 13:1, emphasis mine.

12. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 38.

13. Luke 5:1-11.

the boat away from land, so that Christ could use it as a platform to teach those on the shore. Finally, Jesus instructed Simon to move to deeper water and to lower his fishing nets. As each step progressed, Jesus required more and more from Simon. The narrative crescendos with Simon gathering a multitude of fish from the same water that was previously barren to human effort.

This account demonstrates the stages of growth, marked by the necessity of increased faith in the life of a disciple. Jesus initiates it, as He invades our lives and begins to rearrange our priorities. Each step is designed to develop trust, and to fashion the believer into the image of Christ. Incumbent in the process of discipleship is the acknowledgement by the disciple that Jesus is Lord. This was evident in the life of Simon. It occurred when Jesus encroached upon Simon's vocation, on the fishing boat. When Simon saw that Jesus was Lord over the fish and the sea, he cried out, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."¹⁴

What makes this event so powerful is the contrasting reaction of Peter, as depicted in the preceding chapter. On that occasion, Jesus restored Simon's mother-in-law from a high fever, healed other people with various diseases, and cast out demons. Yet, according to scripture, Simon never spoke a word. Incredibly, these miraculous events did not awaken Simon to his own spiritual need. It was not until Jesus intruded into Simon's sacred arena – the work place; that is where Simon first called Jesus, Lord. Jesus was obviously calling Simon to surrender all that he cherished. Jesus explained it this way, "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."¹⁵ This is not to suggest that Peter had surrendered completely

14. Luke 5:8.

15. Luke 14:33.

to Christ at this point. It would take three more years before Peter would attain a position of self-abnegation; this however, was an important first step of that process.

In His seminal book, *The Training of the Twelve*, Alexander Bruce demonstrates that Jesus meticulously took His disciples through a process whereby they grew in responsibility and faith: “The twelve arrived at their final intimate relation to Jesus only by degrees, three stages in the history of their fellowship with him being distinguishable.”¹⁶ Bruce identifies these stages as:

1. “Come and see” -This was the initial four or five months of Jesus’ ministry. During this phase the disciples were introduced to Jesus and His ministry.
2. “Come and follow me” – The next level of commitment was marked by the disciples leaving their professions to follow Christ. This phase lasted ten months
3. “Come and be with me.” - During this twenty month period Jesus prepared His disciples to carry-on His ministry.

A fourth phase can be added to the stages above:

4. “Remain in Me”- This segment began in the Upper Room and continues on, in the life of the church.¹⁷ This period is marked by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

It is highly significant that as Jesus concluded His ministry, He spoke intimately with His Father in His high priestly prayer (Jn. 17:1-26). In this prayer Christ tells the Father, “I glorified Thee on earth, *having accomplished the work* which Thou hast given Me to do.”¹⁸ What was the work Jesus accomplished? Certainly this statement anticipates victory on the cross (“It is finished.” Jn. 19:30). However, a careful reading of this passage will uncover forty references to

16. A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publication, 1979), 11.

17. This fourth chapter in discipleship is not part of Bruce’s stages, but was adopted from Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 170.

18. vs. 4, emphasis mine.

Jesus' disciples. Clearly, "These men were His work. His ministry touched thousands, but he trained twelve men. He gave His life on the cross for millions, but during the three and half years of ministry He gave His life uniquely to twelve men."¹⁹

The Heart of Paul

After Jesus, the apostle Paul provides perhaps the best biblical model for discipleship. Throughout his epistles, Paul depicts himself as a spiritual parent caring for his spiritual children. He wrote to the Thessalonians, "But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children."²⁰ This autobiographical verse provides great insight into the heart and strategy of Paul. First, it demonstrates his paternal solicitude for those under his care. Like Jesus, Paul established love as the foundation of his ministry; and he vigorously communicated it in his epistles.²¹ To the Philippians, Paul warmly wrote, "I hold you in my heart," to the church at Ephesus, Colossae and Thessalonica, Paul said, "I do not cease giving thanks for you (Eph. 1:16; 2; Col 1:3 Thes 1:3). To his young disciple Timothy, Paul wrote, "I long to see you."²²

Not only was love an important attribute of Paul's direct ministry, it was the cornerstone of his pastoral instructions. He commanded others to love. To Timothy, Paul wrote, "The aim of our charge is love."²³ For the Philippians he fervently prayed, "That your love may abound more

19. Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making*, 28.

20. 1 Thess. 2:7.

21. Although the epistle to the Galatians does not include an opening acclamation, Paul does refer to the Galatians affectionately as "my little children" (Gal 4:19). Moreover, the urgency in which Paul confronted the theological defection obviously was borne out of his love and concern for the Galatians.

22. 2 Tim. 1:4.

23. 1 Tim. 1:5.

and more, with knowledge and all discernment.”²⁴ To the church at Corinth, Paul said that without love, spiritual gifts are worthless. For Paul, the thrust of the gospel was to produce loving people.

Of course, flowing out of Paul’s love for people was his commitment to see them mature in the Lord. This was the theme of his life, as vividly portrayed in the book of Acts. After returning from his first missionary journey, Paul was so burdened for the people that he said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.”²⁵ Paul did return to Syria and Cilicia, “strengthening the churches.”²⁶ Later, he “passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.”²⁷ Although these are known as Paul’s second and third missionary journeys, they should be referred to as his “first and second discipling journeys.”²⁸

While Paul rejoiced greatly over the conversion of a soul, he never saw that as the end product. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul wrote, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil.”²⁹ Paul clearly understood the cost of his labor. His journeys were arduous and dangerous.³⁰ Yet Paul was not deterred by hardship; in fact, he consistently pressed on, to train men and women in righteousness. He reminded the Ephesian elders that “for three years I did not cease to

24. Phil. 1:9.

25. Acts 15:36.

26. Acts 15:41.

27. Acts 18:23.

28. An expression used by Leroy Eims in his book *The Lost Art of Disciple Making*.

29. Col. 1:28-29.

30. 2 Cor. 11:16-33 provides a thorough review of the privation and peril Paul experienced.

admonish each one with tears.”³¹ Paul was even willing to surrender his own personal desire to be with the Lord, in order to remain with the Philippians for their “progress and joy in the faith.”³²

Coalescing a Strategy

Discipleship Demands Proximity

Perhaps the most obvious feature of Jesus and Paul’s ministry is that they closely associated themselves with individuals and small groups. For Jesus, it was His band of twelve. In similar fashion, Paul mentored individuals through relationships. Men like: John Mark, Silas, Titus, Timothy, Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Justus, Epaphras, Luke, and Demas, were all transformed because of Paul’s willingness to invest in their lives. So why is the church not emulating this strategy? “If Jesus, the Son of God, found it necessary to stay almost constantly with his few disciples for three years, and even one of them was lost, how can a church expect to do this job on an assembly line basis a few days out of the year?”³³

Part of the problem resides in the misunderstanding of the term “discipleship.” Unfortunately, within the Christian community “discipleship” has become synonymous with “teaching.” Although teaching is a crucial component of the process, biblical discipleship as modeled by Jesus and Paul, constitutes a deeper interaction between the mentor and the disciple. As a result, the church has almost exclusively relegated the duty of discipling to the corporate

31. Acts 20:31.

32. Phil. 1:25.

33. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 47.

arena. In other words, the discipleship is accomplished through preaching, small groups, Sunday school classes and seminars. While these methods are important, and should be included in church strategy, they were not the primary means that Jesus and Paul used to mature men.

Jesus was engaged in the lives of His followers; and was able to tailor unique lessons for each disciple. For example: To cultivate faith, Jesus asked Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?”³⁴ To remind James and John that suffering is the prelude to glory; He asks, “Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?”³⁵ To admonish and correct Peter’s impetuosity, Jesus said, Get behind me, Satan.”³⁶ These are but a few of the illustrations that highlight the benefit of the immediacy of discipleship. The old adage “Ministry demands proximity” is a necessary and powerful ingredient of spiritual mentoring. “The impact of proximity upon a teacher’s success with students should be obvious. It provides an effective means of assessing how well they are truly learning their lessons.”³⁷ Jesus and Paul understood and demonstrated that discipleship is enhanced greatly through proximity-oriented relationships.

Active Participation

Another fallacy associated with discipleship being defined by “teaching” is found in the assumption that maturation is achieved merely by the acquisition of knowledge. Certainly knowledge is an important facet of Christian growth; but by itself, it is of no use. Imagine having all the pieces to a jigsaw puzzle, but lack the instructions or the template. This would make

34. Jn. 6:5.

35. Matt. 20:23.

36. Matt. 16:23.

37. Mitchell, *Leading, Teaching, and Making Disciples: World-Class Christian Education in the Church, School and Home* (Bloomington, IN: Cross Books, 2010), 263.

construction of the puzzle extremely difficult. Sadly, this analogy describes many Christians. Far too many believers have learned Bible stories, but not biblical principles. Multitudes have memorized random scriptures, but do not know how to connect the dots between the verses. They have bits and pieces of biblical truths but lack a coherent picture of the Christian life. What they need is an overview of Christian doctrine, systematically taught, so that they can understand how these verses and stories fit together. Just as the box top picture serves as a reference for putting the puzzle together, disciples need a biblical reference for navigating the Christian life.

Finally, the term “teaching” is traditionally associated with passive learning. Most people experience this method in the academic arena. It is also the primary mode of educating in the church, through sermons and Sunday school lessons. In these settings, students and congregants generally have little interaction with their teachers. In most cases, the learner assumes the role of a listener. Yet the biblical picture of spiritual formation is far from the sedentary life. To the contrary, Paul exhorts believers to “train” or “exercise” themselves for godliness (1 Tim 4:7). The Greek verb here, *gymnazō*, (forms the English word gymnasium) is in the active voice indicating the subject (the believer) is the one performing the action. The image Paul is trying to project is an athlete engaged in rigorous, self-sacrificing exercise in preparation for a competitive contest. Elsewhere in scripture, Paul describes the maturation process as warfare for the believer (Romans 6 and 7). The obvious implication of these two references is that Christians are actively engaged in spiritual formation, and that discipleship is dynamic.

Components of Discipleship

Perhaps the best place to begin is by developing objectives for Christian spiritual formation. To help, this paper will incorporate the research results from an extensive study

conducted by Barna Research.³⁸ They evaluated dozens of churches across the nation with successful discipleship ministries. Their analysis identified nine characteristics indicative of efficacious discipleship shared by these churches:

1. *Passion* – All the churches that were surveyed` agreed that unless congregants are passionate at becoming Christ-like, discipleship will not occur.
2. *Depth* - The ultimate objective is to move Christians out of their comfort zone and the superficiality that plagues Christendom.
3. *Maturity* – This describes the end product; a believer that has reached their highest earthly potential in Christ. The manifestation of depth.
4. *Practice* – Implementing what is gleaned from discipleship training.
5. *Process* – Understanding that discipleship is a growth journey. Total sanctification cannot be achieved on this side of Heaven. However, believers should cooperate and enjoy the maturation process.
6. *Interactive* – Disciples are forged in communities, not isolation. Interaction provides accountability, objectivity and encouragement.
7. *Multi-faceted* – There is no single tool that can shape a disciple. Thus, all the ministries of the church must be involved in discipleship.
8. *Lifelong* – The church must emphasize that discipleship is a permanent process. There may be obstacles and set-backs; but spiritual maturity takes a lifetime.
9. *Christ-like* – Jesus is the model.

38. Barna, *Growing Disciples*, 87-105.

Planning

These nine objectives are essential elements of discipleship. However, these components will not self-propagate – they need to be cultivated. Additionally, for discipleship to be successful, it must be intentional. This necessitates a great deal of work and planning. The process begins when God’s people capture a vision that beckons them to become a disciple-making church. Then a comprehensive strategy is developed to direct labor and allocate resources.

A vital part of the planning process is the crafting of a “clear, crisp and compelling definition of discipleship.”³⁹ It is difficult to build something without first defining what the end product is. Therefore, it is incumbent upon leadership to understand thoroughly what they are producing. Moreover, the definition must be in practical terms, so that leadership can easily communicate what “successful discipleship” looks like to congregants. Although this step seems so instinctive and fundamental, a large percentage of pastors report that they did not have clear goal for discipleship:⁴⁰

39. Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 96. According to Barna, the absence of a clear definition was an attribute of flawed disciple making approaches.

40. Survey conducted by present author.

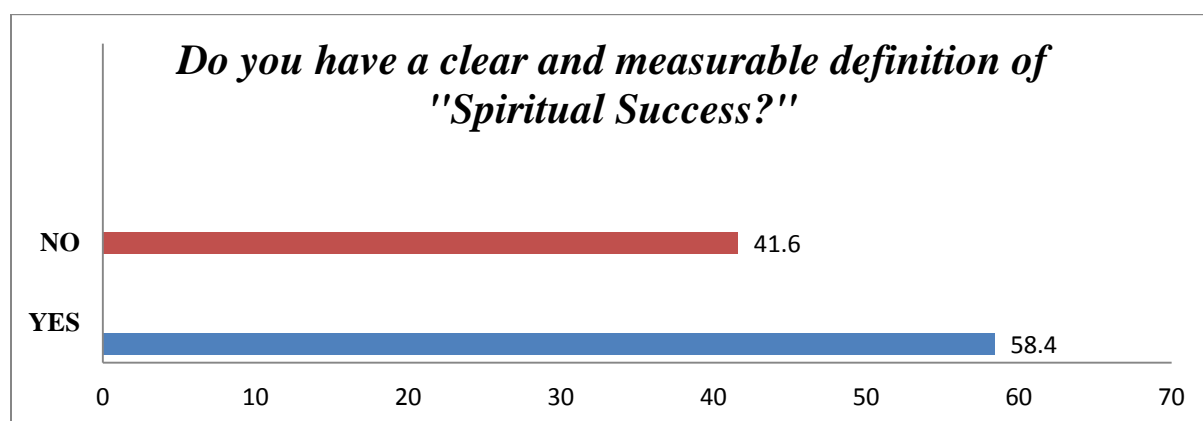


Figure 10: Spiritual Success

When nearly half of the pastors surveyed acknowledged that they do not have a target to aim at; it is no wonder why the church is not producing zealous followers of Christ. The sad truth is that many churches are not only missing the mark, they are settling for cheap imitations of spiritual success.⁴¹ Often these facsimiles dumb down Christianity or ignore biblical principles. While a definition will not solve every problem, it will provide objectivity for leaders and congregants.

Holistic

Another essential ingredient that flows out of proper planning is logistics. For spiritual formation to be successful, it must be holistic. This means coordinating all ministries so that they support discipleship. From top to bottom, spiritual growth must be a priority. This may necessitate eliminating programs that divert people's attention or church resources.⁴² Of course, this step is for those churches that are serious about spiritual formation. In a recent survey when pastors were asked: *"Is discipleship one of your top priorities"* 76% responded "Yes." However,

41. For the purpose of the survey question, "spiritual success" was intentionally not defined to allow pastors the greatest latitude in responding. However, the author defines "spiritual success" as maturity.

42. This is not necessarily advocating a "Simple Church" approach; rather, it suggests that discipleship must permeate all the ministries of the church.

when those same pastors were asked about the integration of church programs and discipleship, a different picture emerged. Only 37% of the churches polled actually linked “all” their ministries to spiritual formation. An almost equal percent of churches (32%) only integrated “some” of their programs to discipleship.

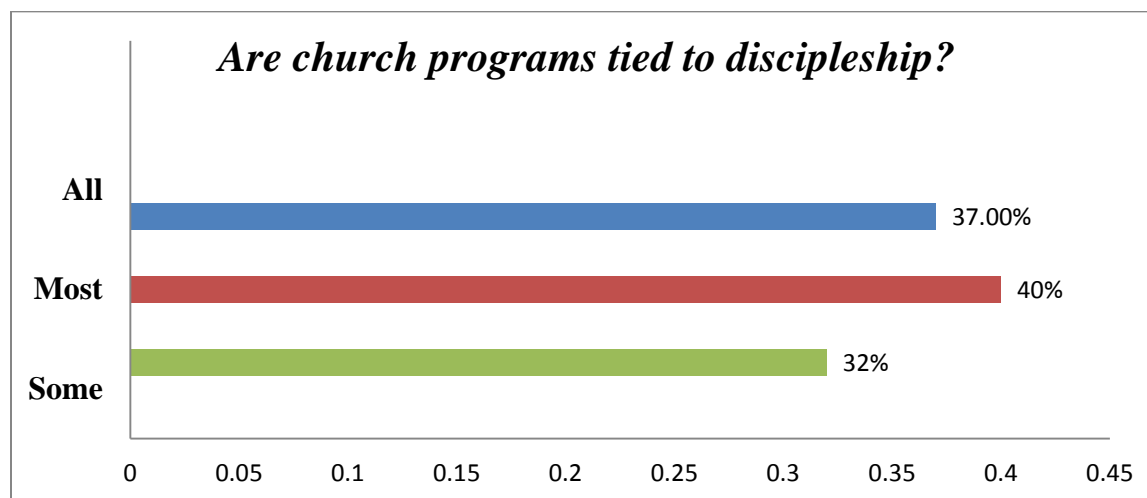


Figure 11: Church Programs and Discipleship

Church leadership cannot merely talk about the spiritual maturation of their congregants, it must work diligently to ensure everything is in place to facilitate the growth of believers. The core of every ministry must focus on worshipping God, and producing godly people. Equally as important, to the vitality of discipleship, is the enthusiastic support of leadership; specifically the senior pastor. For spiritual formation to be a priority in the church, the senior pastor must promote it by words and deeds. Sermons must frequently advocate spiritual formation, and the senior pastor must be actively engaged in fashioning the hearts of people through discipleship.

An attribute to holistic training that is often neglected or intentionally ignored, is age diversity. This is particularly acute in “Seeker Churches” and in Sunday school classes where congregants gather strictly because of age affinity. However, this restrictive fellowship is antithetical to scripture. In Titus chapter 2, Paul instructs Titus how to teach sound doctrine in

the local church. In this instructive passage, Paul distinguishes different categories or groups of people making up the congregation; among these are: older men, older women, young men and young women. The concept is that a diversity of parts contributes to a healthy and complete body. The inherent variety within the body complements and builds-up the individual parts. This does mean that the gathering of homogenous groups for fellowship is wrong. However, there should be no division or faction within the community of believers. For the health of the church, these affinity groups must reconnect with the “body,” for operate worship, to nourish, and be nourished by other believers.

Additionally, Paul explicitly commands the older women “to teach what is good, and so train the younger women.”⁴³ Interestingly, Paul does not assign Titus, the pastor, the duty of training the younger women; that is reserved for the older women. The same principle applied to the younger men; they are to serve as role models for the other men in the church. The implication of Paul’s exhortation is that there is to be a blending of generations, so that godly behavior can be modeled and wisdom disseminated throughout a diverse company of believers. The transferring of knowledge across generations will occur only as relationships are built.

Balanced Approach

Finally, spiritual maturation occurs best when a “balanced approach” is utilized. In other words, for a church to be highly successful at developing faith in the lives of believers, it must incorporate both personal and corporate discipleship into their strategy. Each approach has a unique and complimentary role in spiritual formation. Moreover, each approach is anchored in

43. Titus 2:4-5

the centrality of God's word. Although this is the biblical pattern for discipleship, most churches neglect it.

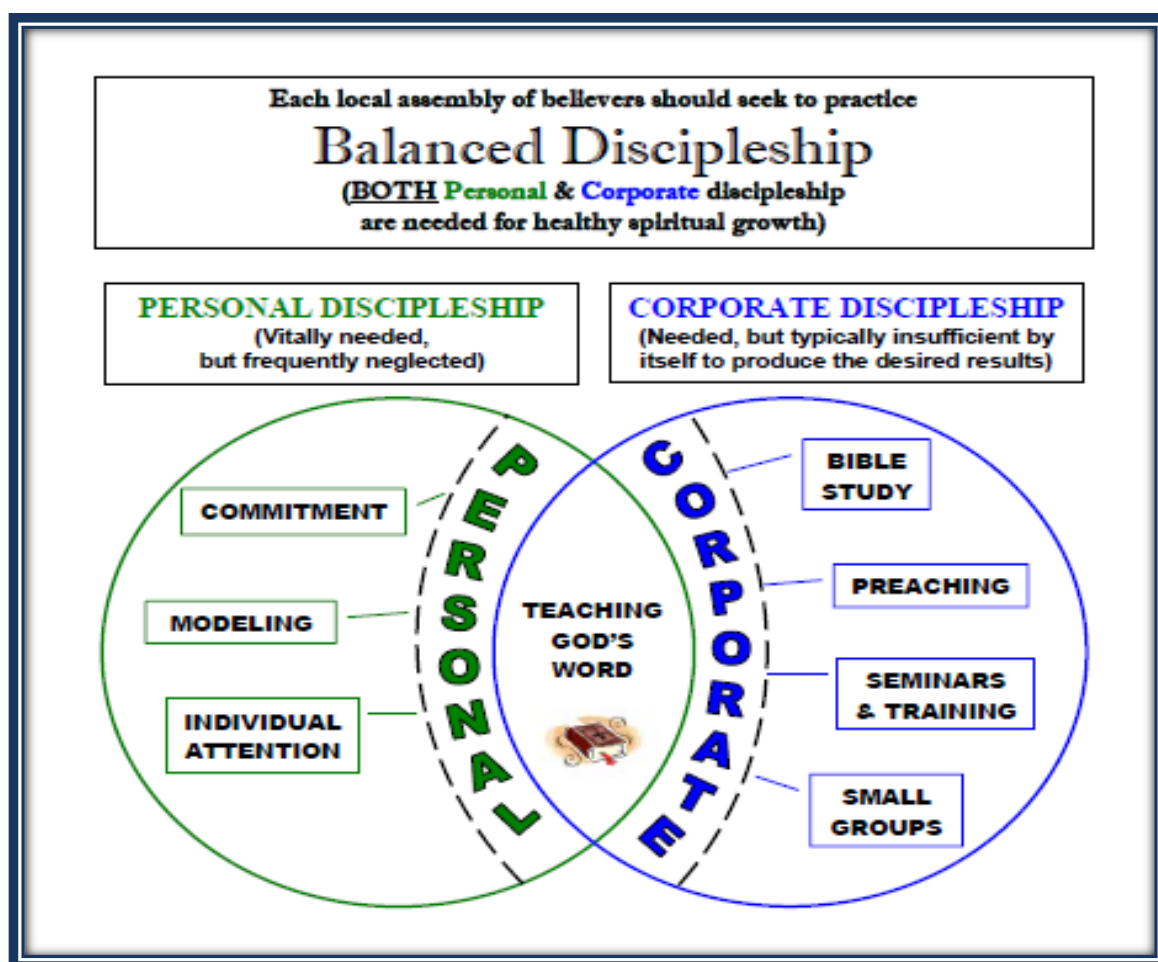


Figure 12: Balanced Discipleship

Corporate Ministries

Corporate discipleship includes: preaching, Sunday schools, small groups, and Bible studies. These gatherings are indispensable for spiritual formation. In fact, the body of Christ is instructed to unite in worship corporately and to address one another:

44. Discipeler Training International: <http://disciplers.org/lessons.shtml>, viewed on March 2, 2012

Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.⁴⁵

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.⁴⁶

The Role of Small Groups

Small groups are gathered communities of believers, who want to know God intimately, to grow together in Christ-like character, and to go in the power of the Holy Spirit. Small groups exist to honor God. As such, small group ministries are a vital component of the corporate strategy for discipleship. The principles that make small groups so effective are:

1. We are made in the image of an “us” *“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”*⁴⁷

We are fashioned in the image of an eternal community: Father, Son and Spirit. We were made for relationships.

2. Jesus modeled it. Jesus began His earthly ministry by forming a small group. (Matthew 4:18-22, Luke 6:13-16). It was in the context of a small group that Jesus taught and modeled spiritual knowledge (Luke 8:10).

3. We are to grow in community:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. **All the believers were together** and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

45. Eph. 5:19-21.

46. Col. 3:16.

47. Gen. 1:26, emphasis mine.

Every day **they continued to meet together** in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and **ate together** with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”⁴⁸

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship **with one another**, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”⁴⁹

“**Let us not give up meeting together**, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”⁵⁰

“Submit to **one another** out of reverence for Christ.”⁵¹

So foundational was the community to the early church that the writers of the New Testament consistently used the phrase “one another” to describe the mutual and sacrificial relationships between believers. In fact, the New Testament records the expression “one another” one hundred and nine times; the majority of these occurrences refer to the dynamic, deep caring concern for each other. This was part of the blueprint God provided to build the church and to cultivate unity. The early church demonstrated their devotion to one another by celebrating communion together, and by sharing their possessions with one another. The Greek word used by the New Testament writers to describe the intimate friendship associated with their fellowship is *koinonia*, which means joint participation.

Small groups model the *koinonia* of the early church, and are thus an excellent vehicle for integrating younger members into the church. Not only do they provide a community for developing relationships and accountability; small group ministries are designed to be a safe haven. This is an important factor for many of the Generation X and Millennials who

48. Acts 2:42-47, emphasis mine.

49. 1 Jn. 1:7.

50. Heb. 10:25.

51. Eph. 5:21.

experienced instability or fragment families in childhood. As a result, they are now drawn to the stable and communal environment provided by the small group structure. Additionally, the affinities displayed in these small groups reflect the Christian character to the world. Francis Schaeffer rightly said, “Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful – Christian community is the final apologetic.”⁵²

There are two types of small groups that need to be considered: open and closed. As the name implies, open groups are generally accessible to new members. This is advantageous for attracting new congregants, but ineffective in building deeper intimacy required for spiritual growth. It is difficult to forge relationships if the dynamics of the groups are constantly changing. Conversely, closed groups restrict the influx of new participants, and tether existing members by covenant to the group.⁵³ This design feature allows the group to focus on developing trust and accountability between members. As a result, closed groups are more stable and predictable. More importantly, members of closed groups experience greater relational momentum, which leads to the development of an authentic community and spiritual growth.

The key to effect small groups is leadership. Group leaders are the shepherds. They supply vision, direction, and support. Therefore, churches must select their leaders wisely. At a minimum, leaders should be competent, committed, and caring. They must possess the personal skills to organize and run a group, they must fully embrace the vision of the church, and they must have the capacity to deploy grace. To assist these individuals, it is imperative for churches

52. Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of a Christian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 14-15.

53. Typically, groups are only closed for a season to preclude stagnation and inward focus. For example: at North Point Community Church, in Atlanta, covenant groups meet for 18-24 months. Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, *Creating Community: 5 keys to Building a Small Group Culture*, (Sisters, Oregon, Multnomah: 2004), 108-109.

to provide initial and reoccurring leadership training.⁵⁴

New Members Class

One specific ministry that should be the cornerstone to discipleship is the New Members Class. This training is indispensable to the church and vital to the spiritual maturation of new believers. Research clearly demonstrates that Membership classes are the perfect stage to communicate the vision of the church and the expectations of congregants. Additionally, membership training provides the forum to teach the core beliefs of the church that are so necessary for young Christians. Membership classes are great for getting new members connected, and they identify the uniqueness of the church and the high value placed on membership.

An interesting shift in the strategy of scheduling New Membership classes has materialized in the past decade. Previously, the popular means of training new members was through a one-day seminar. However, a more recent trend of training has emerged that incorporates multiple classes spread-out over several weeks.⁵⁵ The advantages to multiple sessions are numerous. First, new members are afforded more time to spend with the senior pastor.⁵⁶ Additionally, class members are given the opportunity to forge deeper relationships with other members. These two factors are highly significant because relationships strengthen a

54. See training manual, Appendix A.

55. Chuck Lawless, *Membership Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 37. In 1997, 70% of the churches surveyed by the research team at the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth, conducted a one-day class. In 2002, 57% of the churches surveyed met in multiple sessions.

56. The vast majority of New Membership classes are taught by the senior pastor; or another leader with the assistance of the senior pastor.

member's commitment to the church. These strengths make multiple sessions an excellent discipling tool to move individuals toward spiritual maturity.

In terms of subject matter, the top three subjects addressed in new Membership classes are: doctrine of the church, expectations of members, and explanation of the church's

mission/vision.⁵⁷ Churches that conduct multiple sessions typically develop a discipleship progression strategy that moves individuals from "Learning" → "Living" → "Leading." Another popular model of illustrating the training process is the baseball diamond. The diamond depicts the educational process (movement), and the bases represent the classes.⁵⁸



Class 101: *Connecting Through Membership*

Goal: Introduction to doctrine, and expectations.

Class 201: *Growing Maturity*

Goal: How to grow in your personal relationship with Christ.

Class 301: *Serving in Ministry*

Goal: Equipping to serve.

Class 401: *Communicating the Mission*

Goal: Placing in ministry

57. Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 78.

58. The "Life Development Process" designed by Rick Warren (Saddleback Church) is often credited as the prototype for many of the present models offered by churches. Pastor Warren outlines the complete process in his book, *The Purpose-Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

New Membership class is not the end-all to discipleship; rather, it is the starting point. The fundamentals taught in this setting should provide a sturdy theological foundation for future building. Churches that establish high standards and communicate their expectations are highly successful at attracting those who have dropped-out. “People want to serve and know that they are contributing something significant.”⁵⁹ Additionally, these individuals hunger for sound biblical teaching. The “de-churched” consistently identify application of the Bible to their lives as an important factor for returning to the church.

Personal Discipleship

Jesus understood that disciples are not mass-produced, but are custom-made through intimate personal relationships. A. B. Bruce summarized Jesus’ methodology as, “the careful, painstaking education of the disciples secured that the Teacher’s influence on the world should be permanent; that His Kingdom should be founded on the rock of deep indestructible conviction in the minds of the few, not on the shifting sands of the superficial evanescent impression on the minds of the many.”⁶⁰ This is the hallmark of personal discipleship – investing in a few so that the world may be reached. Eugene Peterson cleverly writes, “Jesus, it must be remembered, restricted nine-tenths of His ministry to twelve Jews, because it was the only way to reach all Americans.”⁶¹

59. *LifeWay Research conducted the study among 469 non-churchgoers in September 2006.* lifewayresearch.com (accessed May 2012).

60. A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, 13.

61. Eugene Peterson, *Traveling Light* (Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 182.

Personal discipleship is mentoring or coaching a more narrowed audience of one, two, or three individuals. Personal discipleship is not a small vision, but a concentrated focus. It is the intentional investment of oneself, into the life of another. It is deliberately choosing to walk beside a brother or sister, to encourage, correct and challenge them to be more like Jesus. It necessitates a heart-felt passion to ensure that the gospel is embedded deeply into the life of one person, so that he or she can, and will train another. This was not only Jesus' strategy, it was also Paul's: "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."⁶² Paul focused on individuals. He recognized that each believer is unique and needs individual attention: "We proclaim Him, admonishing **every** man and teaching **every** man with all wisdom, so that we may present **every** man complete (mature) in Christ."⁶³ You know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring **each one** of you as a father would his own children,⁶⁴ **For I have given you an example.**"⁶⁵

Both Jesus and Paul understood that Christianity is more caught than taught. In other words, modeling, or demonstrating the Christian life is more effective for shaping behavior than words alone. Even secular educators tout the powerful influence of modeling. Professors at the University of Tennessee and Wake Forest University state, "What all children need, and some

62. Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 21.

63. Col. 1:28, (emphasis mine).

64. 1 Thess. 2:11, (emphasis mine).

65. Jn. 13:15, (emphasis mine).

need more of, is models, explanations, and demonstrations”⁶⁶ This was how Jesus trained His disciples; as He walked with them, He taught them about Kingdom life. Greg Ogden aptly writes, “The manner in which the Lord works is incarnational: life rubs against life.”⁶⁷

Paul also occupied the trenches. First, he patterned his life after Christ, the supreme example; then he encouraged others to model him. “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”⁶⁸ This is the biblical way to train disciples and to teach people to love God and to love people. Intimate modeling passes on Christlikeness, not programs. This is the thrust behind Jesus’ statement, “but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.”⁶⁹

Another attribute of personal discipleship is generational progression. It is easier to teach disciples how to reproduce themselves by showing them, rather than merely explaining the process. Paul worked tirelessly to train men, so that they would train other men. This is evident in his instructions to Timothy: “The things which *you have heard from me* in the presence of many witnesses, *entrust these to faithful men* who will be able to *teach others* also.”⁷⁰

The Pauline Pattern:

Paul → *Timothy* → *Faithful Men* → *Others*

The above pattern suggests several strategic features. First, the discipleship process is intentional – the discipler must be deliberate and proactive. This dynamic is depicted in the

66. Richard L. Allington and Patricia M. Cunningham, *Schools That Work: Where All Children Read and Write* (University of Michigan: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon, 2007), 54.

67. Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 21.

68. 1 Cor. 11:1.

69. Luke 6:40.

70. 2 Tim. 2:2.

relationship between Paul and Timothy. Paul was engaged in Timothy's life actively, as a wellspring of encouragement. He wrote to Timothy, "I am reminded of your sincere faith."⁷¹ As his spiritual father, Paul prepared Timothy to assume his role as a pastor and missionary (1 Cor. 4:17). As a mentor, Paul monitored Timothy and offered reassurance and advice as needed. When Paul detected trepidation in Timothy, he gently admonished him and provided three metaphors to describe how Timothy should proceed: with the discipline of a soldier; the vision of an athlete; and the patience of a farmer. (2 Tim. 2:3-7) Paul's actions vividly demonstrate the purposeful nature of discipleship.

A further implication flowing from Paul's pattern is the necessity for discernment in discipleship. Paul directed Timothy to entrust "faithful" men with proven spiritual character. In other words, Timothy was to seek out competent men who in turn would pass on the truths to the succeeding generation. This is a difficult challenge that requires great judgment and prayer. Because discipleship is an investment, Timothy had to guard his time carefully. For this reason, Paul urged him to select men who were responsible and teachable. This is an important lesson that all pastors must learn.

Finally, what does a discipler model? Perhaps the three greatest attributes that a mentor can demonstrate are: faith, hope, and love. These are the keys to the Christian life. Each one is indispensable to the believer. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him (God)."⁷² Christians are to move from "self-dependence" to "God-dependence" (Proverbs 3:5-6). Faith defines the Christian life. Similarly, hope describes the Christian life. For the believer, hope is the certainty of what we are to become; and therefore is made manifest in joyous expectation. Finally there is

71. 2 Tim. 1:5.

72. Heb. 11:6.

love – the goal of the Christian life (Matthew 22: 37-40; 1 Timothy 1:5). These three virtues are so important that Paul lauded the Colossians for possessing them (Col. 1: 4-5), and exhorted the Corinthians to abide in faith, hope and love (1 Cor. 13:13).

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once wrote, “Before I learn to believe in their redeemer; more redeemed his disciples would have to look!”¹ This outlook sums up the perspective of many Americans. They are leery and critical of Christianity because of Christians. Certainly, one could reasonably argue that society has always held a disdain for Christians. But the malevolence directed toward Christians of the early church era was borne out of their fervent passion to live the gospel; not their insipid faith cloaked in hypocrisy. In fact, sociologist Rodney Stark illuminates the radical nature of early Christianity in his book *The Rise of Christianity*. Stark poignantly writes, “All questions concerning the rise of Christianity are one: How was it done? How did a tiny and obscure messianic movement from the edge of the Roman Empire dislodge classical paganism and become the dominant faith of Western civilization.”² The simple answer is that: the early church was invaded with the life of God, and believers lived as authentic Christ-followers.

As remarkable as the early church was, the manifestation of God’s power and fervent Christian behavior was never intended to be an aberration that enveloped only that epoch. God’s design for His children, for all ages, has remained fixed – they are to reflect passionately the

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 71.

2. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 3.

glories of the eternal creator.³ Christians do this by turning from the tugs of the world, the flesh and the devil; and by submitting to the work of the Holy Spirit, so that they can be conformed into the image of Christ. Interestingly, this adaptation is really who we are. “Because God has planted His own likeness in our personalities, it is our destiny to be like Him.”⁴ The apostle John affirms the eschatological hope that believers have in his first letter: “Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”⁵ Christians are the image bearers of Christ.

This is the thrust of discipleship – to help mature the child of God, so that they can reflect the character of God. The divine template for this transformation is discipleship,⁶ as modeled by Jesus and the Apostle Paul. Although this was the means, and the directive for the church, the church has become complacent and fearful. Sadly, ecclesiastical leaders are unwilling to proclaim the conditions of discipleship as annunciated by Jesus. Author Greg Ogden writes,

What are the reasons for our reluctance? We are afraid that if we ask too much, people will stop coming to our churches. Our operating assumption is that people will flee to the nearby entertainment church if we ask them to give too much of themselves. So we start with a low bar and try to entice people by increments of commitment, hoping that we can raise the bar imperceptibly to the ultimate destination of discipleship.⁷

3. God's zeal for His own glory is unmistakable (Habakkuk 2:14). We were created for His glory (Isaiah 43:7; Ephesians 1:4-6); and we are instructed to do all things for His glory (Matthew 5:16; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Peter 2:12,4:11) .

4. Lawrence O. Richards, *Christian Education: Seeking to Become Like Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 21.

5. 1 Jn. 3:2.

6. The primary agent in sanctification is God. Jesus earned our sanctification for us (1 Corinthians 1:30); the Holy Spirit works within the believer to make them holy (1 Peter 1:2) and to produce the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Yet the believer is to work in concert with God (Philippians 2:12-13).

7. Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 49-50.

Yet, when LifeWay Research surveyed former church individuals, the top motivating factor reported by these individuals to return to church regularly was a desire “to become closer to God.”⁸ Moreover, the two most frequent reasons given by young people for staying in the church related to the role of the church in spiritual maturation: “Church was a vital part of my relationship with God” (65 percent); and “I wanted the church to help guide my decisions in everyday life” (58 percent).⁹ This data clearly suggests that setting the bar too high is not an impediment that spurns Christians.

Significantly, when the author of this paper surveyed Christians regarding discipleship, 30% reported that they desired to be discipled.¹⁰ Sadly, an equal number of Christians did not know what a disciple or discipleship was. Additionally, 78 % reported that they are unaware of a discipleship ministry in their church. What makes these statistics so alarming is this survey was given primarily to young people.¹¹

“The Disciples were increasing in Number”¹²

So how can the Twenty-first century church rekindle the efficacy and fervor depicted by the First Century Christians? An interesting clue to recovery is found in the six chapter of the book of Acts. During the early formative years, a great need arose among the Hellenistic widows

8. <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/Article/LifeWay-Research-surveys-formerly-churched-part-1-of-2> (accessed April 12, 2012).

9. <http://www.lifeway.com/ArticleView?storeId=10054&catalogId=10001&langId=-1&article=LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church> (accessed April 12, 2012).

10. Interestingly, 27 % of the respondents were “unsure if they wanted to be discipled.” This number corresponds closely to the number of respondents who did not know what discipleship is. Perhaps these individuals would also want to be discipled if the church explained the biblical importance.

11. Seventy-one percent were between 20-30 years old.

12. Acts 6:1.

that threatened the unity of the church. What is significant about this event is the manner in which leadership addressed the challenge. Rather than being distracted by this urgent and real need, the apostles selected responsible men to deal with the problem. In other words, they allowed able men (deacons) to do the work of ministry, so that they (the apostles) could devote themselves “to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”¹³ Their action not only demonstrated excellent leadership principles, it established a vital priority for the church – prayer and ministering the word.

Of course, it must be noted that these same disciples were students of Jesus. How often was the Old Testament explained to them, and how often did they hear Jesus pray for them? They gleaned from the Master, and now they are implementing what they learned. This is the heart of discipleship; this is the pattern that the church must adopt. For the church to move forward it must return to making disciples. Here is how that would look:

- The senior pastor is an irrepressible advocate of discipleship.
- Church membership is granted only when a person covenants to participate in a focused, demanding discipleship process.
- All ministries intimately tied to discipleship outcomes.
- The number of programs are minimized to focus the church on discipleship
- All teaching of the church is substantively coordinated.
- Church’s mission statement serves as a practical tool for identifying ministry outcomes.¹⁴

A Recommended Model

Thus far, this paper has presented principles for discipleship rather than concrete programs. This is because disciples are not shaped by programs, but by vulnerability, truth and

13. Acts 6:4.

14. Hull, 307-308.

accountability. These features are found only in intimate relationships, and these are the necessary ingredients for the Holy Spirit to precipitate growth. Additionally, churches, like individuals, are unique; they have distinct strengths and weaknesses. Numerous factors, such as congregational size, resources, and geography play a dynamic role in crafting a plan. Therefore, there is not a “one size fits all” strategy. Perhaps that is why the marketplace is pregnant with discipleship resources. In fact, a recent search on the internet drew nearly forty-eight million (48,000,000) discipleship sites. With that caveat in mind, the following proposal is only a recommended starting point, and must be adjusted for each individual church.

1. **Vision:** *The Vision of First Baptist Church is to “present every man complete in Christ.”*¹⁵
2. **New Membership Class:** The New Membership class represents the front door of the discipleship ministry at First Baptist Church. The purpose of the class is to present, in an informal setting, the: staff, the vision, and the ministries at First Baptist. Additionally, the class will lay the foundation for discipleship. The class will consist of four sessions, taught twice a year (May and September).

Sessions:

- 1st - Introduction dinner: getting to know the church staff, vision, and expectation of membership (1.5 hours)
- 2nd – The Fundamentals of the Faith: God, man, sin, grace (2 hours)
- 3rd – The Christian Life: Disciples of Christ (1.5 hours)
- 4th – Community Life: serving (1.5 hours)

All congregants desiring membership at First Baptist must complete the class.

15. Col. 1:28.

- 3. Small Groups:** The function of small groups is to serve as a catalyst for spiritual growth in the context of a biblical community. Thus, small groups are a vital facet of the discipleship process at First Baptist Church. The goal of the small group ministry is to enflame a passion, in our congregants, to love God and people above all else. The thrust of small groups is discipleship; through relationships. Therefore, the majority of our small groups will be closed for a specified season (typically 18 months); to facilitate the development of trust and accountability between cell members. New groups will be formed to accommodate new members. Unique affinity groups, as approved by Pastor of Discipleship, will remain open.

The hierarchy for smalls groups will be: The Pastor of Discipleship Training; Area directors; Cell leaders. The prerequisite for becoming a cell leader is leadership development training in accordance with the small group training manual. Additionally, cell leaders will receive annual refresher training, and meet quarterly with their area director to discuss pressing issues.

Small groups will be organized geographically, and will meet every other week.

- 4. Sunday school:** Electives, such as The Crown Ministry course, or specialized theological topics, will be offered periodically as needed.
- 5. Discipleship:** Personal discipleship will occupy a high priority at First Baptist Church. Teams of 3 to 4 members will form covenant groups.¹⁶ The teams will consist of a discipler (a pastor or trained leader) and 2 or 3 disciples. The role of the discipler is to guide the group, provide wisdom and to model Christ-like behavior. The primary teacher is the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

16. See covenant agreement in Appendix; each member must sign.

The members will all be of the same sex (men with men and women with women). The team will meet for one year (48 lessons).

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Number of Lessons</u>
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FOUNDATIONS OF THE FAITH:

1. The Bible	2
2. God	2
3. Man	2
4. The Law	1
5. The New Covenant	1
6. The Savior	2
7. Redemption	3
8. The Holy Spirit	2
9. The Church	3
10. The Ordinances	1
11. Christian Responsibility	2
12. Eschatology	3
13. The Resurrection	1

AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY:¹⁷

1. The Great Imitation	1
2. The Real Thing	1
3. The Secret	1
4. Two Splendors	1
5. Death vs. Life	1
6. The Enemy Within	1
7. Pots, Pressure and Power	1
8. Time and Eternity	1
9. Our Highest Motivation	1
10. The Glory of Ministry	1

TRENCH WARFARE:

1. Love, Sex and Marriage	3
2. Children	2
3. Finances	3
4. Character	2

17. Ray Stedman, *Authentic Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1996).

5. Serving	2
6. Go	1

- 6. Leadership Training:** Specialized training for all ministry leaders will be provided to ensure that all ministries are focused on discipleship. Additionally, personal discipleship leaders will receive initial training and meet with the Pastor of Discipleship Training quarterly.
- 7. Sermons:** will emphasize biblical principles.

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APPENDIX A

Pastor's Survey

1. What is the most important mission of your church?

- ☒ Evangelism
- ☒ Service
- ☒ Discipleship
- ☒ Worship
- ☒ Fellowship
- ☒ Teaching
- ☒ Other

2. Do you have a specific or an intentional discipleship process?

- ☒ Yes
- ☒ No

3. How do you disciple?

- ☐ One-on-one mentoring
- ☐ Small Groups
- ☐ Men's or Women's Ministry
- ☐ Other

4. Is the senior pastor involved in discipleship?

- ☒ Yes
- ☒ No

5. Do you have a clear and measurable definition of "Spiritual Success?"

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

6. Do you have a New Member's Class?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

7. Is spiritual formation a component of your children's ministry?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

8. Are church programs tied to discipleship?

- ☐ All programs relate to discipleship
- ☐ Most programs relate to discipleship
- ☐ Some programs relate to discipleship
- ☐ None

9. Is discipleship one of your top priorities?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ It is important, but not one of our top priorities.
- ☐ No

10. What is the size of your congregation?

- ☐ Less than 200
- ☐ 200 - 500
- ☐ 500 - 1000
- ☐ Greater than 1000

APPENDIX B
Christian Survey

1. Are you a Christian?

- ☐ Yes (Please answer questions 2-8)
- ☐ No (Please skip to, and answer questions 9 -10)

2. What Church do you affiliate with?

- ☐ Assembly of God
- ☐ Baptist
- ☐ Bible/Nondenominational
- ☐ Catholic
- ☐ Church of God
- ☐ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
- ☐ Lutheran
- ☐ Methodist
- ☐ Presbyterian
- ☐ Other

3. How often do you attend church?

- ☐ Regularly (3-4 times per month)
- ☐ Frequently (1-2 times per month)
- ☐ Infrequently (special occasions or holidays)
- ☐ Rarely or Never

4. Do you know what a disciple or discipleship is?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not really sure

5. My church has a discipleship program.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure

6. Have you ever been discipled?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

7. Would you like to be discipled?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

8. My age bracket:

- ☐ Under 20
- ☐ 20-30
- ☐ 30-40
- ☐ 40-50
- ☐ above 50

9. (Continued from question 1) Have you considered attending a Christian church?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Not really
- ☐ Definitely No

10. Would you like to learn more about being a follower of Jesus Christ?

Yes
No

APPENDIX C**Small Group Training Manual**

Small Group Training Manual

First Baptist Church



Table of Contents

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Vision

The Mission of First Baptist Church is to spread a passion to love God and people above all else.

Our Vision is:

KNOW God intimately—John 17:3

- *Acknowledging* that we are broken and in need of God's grace
- *Worshiping* the Triune God made known through the gospel
- *Praying* will permeate who we are and all we do

GROW together in Christ-like Character—Acts 2:42

- *Applying* all aspects of the gospel to all aspects of our lives
- *Encouraging* one another in core biblical beliefs, practices and virtues
- *Developing* disciples by shepherding and equipping

GO in the Holy Spirit's Power—Acts 1:8

- *Sharing* the gospel through relationships with those around us
- *Cultivating* a kingdom mindset as we serve people in the name of Christ
- *Sending and supporting* laborers to fulfill the "Great Commission" among all peoples
- *Reproducing* through planting churches locally and globally

Biblical Basis

I. We are made in the image of an “us”

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” (Genesis 1:26)

We are fashioned in the image of an eternal community Father, Son and Spirit.

II. Jesus is our model

Jesus began His earthly ministry by forming a small group. (Matthew 4:18-22, Luke 6:13-16). It was in the context of a small group that Jesus taught and modeled spiritual knowledge. (Luke 8:10)

III. We are to grow in community

“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42-47)

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)

“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:25)

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:21)

Strategy

Three primary ministries reinforce and lead to deeper levels of commitment along the path of “Know, Grow and Go:”

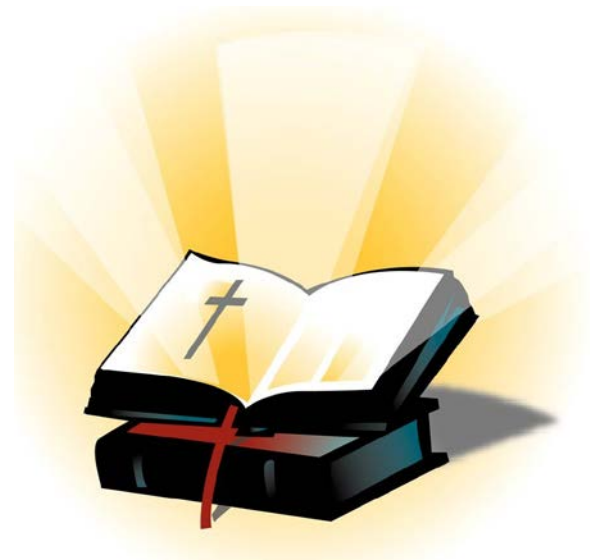
1. Worship Services
2. Sunday Classes
3. Small Groups

Our goal is to be a church of Small Groups; rather than a church with Small Groups

- The primary focus of Small Groups is to support and encourage one another in our spiritual formation in Christ.
- Small Groups are an excellent setting for spiritual formation because God intends for us to grow in the context of community.

Group Types:

1. Geographic/ Vine Groups
2. Men's / Accountability
3. Women's / Accountability
4. Singles
5. Student
6. Discipleship
7. Prayer
8. Support
9. Recovery
- 10 Ministry / Service Focus



Defining a Small Group

A Small Group is a community of believers, gathered: to know God intimately, to grow together in Christ-like character and to go in the power of the Holy Spirit. Small Groups exist to honor God.

Guided by a Leader

A group leader is someone who leads the lesson / discussion and sees to it that the goals of the group are being met. The leader also trains apprentices and turns in reports.

Regular meeting times

Preferably weekly or twice a month. The goal here is that you meet often enough to get to know one another and recognize when someone is not connected or struggling.

Opens God's word

Time is set aside to examine, to read, and to discuss God's Word.

United in Serving

Jesus said that He did not come to be served but to serve. Groups need to focus on serving inside the group and outside the group. Organize the group to involve as many people as possible. Match gifts with serving opportunities.

Pray for one another

An essential element of small groups is prayer. Time will be set aside to intercede for group members, and to pray for church and group growth.

Spiritual Leadership

Healthy shepherd groups are led by committed, mature believers, who serve and care for the group. Additionally, group leaders actively seek to train new leaders.

Biblical Principles:

1. Leaders must be mature (1 Tim 3:6).
2. Leaders are to care for the flock (Acts 20:28).
3. Leaders must reflect the character of Christ (1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pt. 5:1-5; 1 Thess. 2:4-12).
4. Leaders should equip the flock for the work of service and develop new leaders (Eph. 4:12; 2 Tim 2:2).
5. Leaders respect, support and submit to church leadership (1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17).



The Role of a Leader

1. Attend regularly scheduled leadership training.
2. Pray for and coordinate weekly Small Group meetings. Prepare for the lesson and lead the discussion.
3. Pray daily for everyone in your Small Group and for your Coach.
4. Be a “Life Coach” to your Small Group members, developing them into future hosts.
5. Provide a supportive atmosphere in which Small Group members are able to discover and develop their spiritual gifts.
6. Identify and mentor apprentice leaders in order to prepare them in their ministries.
7. Maintain unity by representing the philosophy of ministry and theology of First Baptist.
8. Be open to counsel from your Coach and provide highlights and concerns about your small group regularly.
9. Lead the group in service or ministry projects.
10. Encourage members to invite people who are outside the church.
11. Guide the group toward reproduction of another group in 12-18 months.

How to Lead a Group

Guidelines:

- Have a clear plan and a stated purpose for the group
- Establish group meetings as a priority for all members
- Encourage everyone to participate in group discussions. Do not allow anyone to dominate.
- Maintain a respectful atmosphere. Everyone has the right to their own opinion, feelings, and there are no dumb questions.
- Ensure sensitive matters are not repeated outside the group meetings
- Promote growth
- Encourage members to help one another in time of need
- Motivate group members for a mission project
- Create social activities (see appendix)

Establish the agenda: The Four W's

- **Welcome:** Refreshments, Group Building Activities - "Ice Breakers" (see appendix) 10-15 minutes
- **Worship:** (Ministry to God) praise / adoration / thanksgiving, and prayer. 5-10 minutes
- **Word:** Bible Study / Discussion 35-40 minutes
- **Works:** Prayer, accountability groups, plan activities

Leading a Discussion

The key to leading a Bible study is asking good questions.

Good leaders always help the members of their group discover biblical truths by themselves. Therefore, they lead a discussion rather than preach a sermon, and they ask open ended questions.

There are four major types of questions to aid this process:

1. Introducing the Discussion

Learn to ask a question or questions that will lead the group members into the scripture or the topic of study and “break the ice” between members.

2. Guiding the Discussion

The point of these questions is to dig deeper into the passage.

- ▶ What did *the writer* intend to say?
- ▶ What did you *feel* as you read these words?
- ▶ Why do you *think* God put this passage in the Bible?
- ▶ Who will *paraphrase* this passage in their own words?
- ▶ *Who else* would like to comment on that?

During this time, helping the group stay on track is important. If your group starts “chasing rabbits,” gently say “That’s very interesting, but we’re off topic. Let’s get back to the passage.”

3. Summarizing the Discussion

One of the most important roles of a group leader is to help the group summarize the discussion so they will be able to apply it to their lives.

- ▶ Who will try to summarize the main things we are learning (or we have said) in just one or two sentences?”

- ▶ Would you say anything different or in addition to what he (or she) said?”

4. **Applying the Discussion**

Application questions can be the most powerful part of your discussion. Help each member of the group verbalize how they will apply the Bible passage to their lives. Ask such questions as:

- ▶ What facets of tonight’s discussion resonated with you?
- ▶ Specifically, how will your life be different because of what we studied tonight?

Grow your Group

- Pray for new people on a weekly basis
- Invite new people on a regular basis to your group
- Use the “empty chair” every week to remind people that you are open to growth
- Use a marker board to write the name of the people you are praying for to invite to church or to your group
- Use Sunday morning to go “fishing” for new people
- Pay attention to new members who come into the church
- Cast the vision, to start a new group from your group, on a regular basis

Multiply your Group

- Set group growth goals
- Consistently communicate to your group the value of multiplying
- Pray for group growth

- Use the suggested growth methods
- Select and train an apprentice
- Make sure your apprentice is taking the necessary training
- Grow your group until it averages between 14-16 people per week.
- Develop a strategy and a projected” new group” birth date
- Discuss your progress and plans with your group’s coach
- Announce and promote the new groups beginning date

Handling Difficult People

1. How to Control Talkative Members:

- When one or two group members seem to be monopolizing the discussion, calling for contributions from others often helps: “What do the rest of you think?” or “Jack, what do you think?”

In some situations you may have to take control of the discussion more strongly, and you may have to talk privately with the “talker,” explaining the necessity of group participation. You may be able to enlist him to help you draw others in. This will help him become more sensitive to the contributions of other people.

2. How to get back on track: Recognize that the discussion has gotten off on a tangent, and inform the group:

- “This is interesting. However, we’ve left our topic. Perhaps we could discuss this further after the group but for now....”
- Or present a thought provoking question to draw the discussion back to the initial topic.
- Having an attitude of acceptance toward the tangent is important. Maintain the respect for each member’s opinions.

3. How to handle “wrong” answers: If something is said that is inaccurate or unbiblical, you may want to solicit a view point from someone else:

- “Okay, what do others think?”
- “Does anyone know other Scripture passages that may help us here?”

- Restate the issue, or ask another question that would help clarify or stimulate further thought.
 - Always try to keep the person from losing “face” or becoming embarrassed, if possible.
4. How to handle silence: Don’t be afraid of pauses, or silent moments. If you give everyone time to think, they will bring up good points and ask good questions as the discussion progresses. By being patient, you may be surprised with the number of excellent thoughts the group comes up with. These silent times may seem uncomfortable, but don’t be embarrassed or feel as if you must say something.
 5. How to handle difficult questions: Don’t be afraid of saying “I don’t know” when a difficult question is asked. If you don’t know the answer, don’t pretend to. You can always look for the answer later, or ask someone else in the group to research it. There is no merit in being thought of as a supposed “know it all”, only to find out you don’t.

Starting a New Group

1. Pray about the type of group you feel the Lord is leading you to start.
2. Talk with the Small groups Pastor or your district coach.
3. Build a prospect list.
4. Select an apprentice for the new group.
5. Pray for the people on your prospect list.
6. Work the prospect list. Mailings, phone calls, church chats, invitation cards and bulletin announcements.
7. Meet regularly for the first 4-5 weeks. About the 5th week begin talking about the group covenant and determine ground rules for your group.
8. Continually cast the vision to grow and develop

Selecting the Right Home

The Small Group Host has the important ministry of hospitality. They accomplish this ministry by thinking about the needs of the guests.

It is the host's responsibility to:

- Eliminate distractions that could hinder a person from being able to focus on spiritual matters. (pets, answering machines, etc.)
- Be prepared.
- Make sure people feel completely welcomed and wanted. Hosts are likely to be the first people with whom newcomers come in contact, so they have a tremendous opportunity to initiate an atmosphere of love and acceptance to all who walk through their doors
- Make sure that the meeting room is tidy and pleasant. Also, make sure that the bathroom is clean and supplied.
- Check the lighting. Be sure the room where the small group is held is well lit.
- Adjust the temperature. A room that is too cold can make it very difficult for people to get comfortable. They will be less likely to fellowship. A room that is too hot can cause people to fall asleep. Rooms warm up when warm bodies show up.
- Plan to have light snacks or dessert following your discussion. Food is a great catalyst for community-building. A great way to involve more people is to have a sign-up sheet for people to bring snacks.

Training an Apprentice

Pray that God would send an apprentice.
Look for someone who is in your group

Look for someone who has F.A.I.T.H.

- Faithful
- Available to meet with
- Integrity/ Character
- Teachable
- Heart for God

Have your apprentice read and sign: *Job Description: Apprentice Group Leader* found in the appendix.

Assign some responsibilities to your apprentice each week.

- Ice Breaker
- Introduction to the lesson
- Prayer Time
- Outreach Projects
- Leading the Lesson

Meet with your apprentice before and after the GROUP time.

Encourage them to attend training sessions with you.

Monitor and evaluate his/her progress.

Help them start a new group.

Check with them periodically to see how they and their group are doing.

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Suggested Activities

It is important to involve your group in other activities outside the setting of a Small Group Meeting. One of the purposes of Small Groups is to develop relationships, and a sense of community. Therefore, in order to get beyond certain perceived or actual barriers between relationships, you need to periodically do fun, social activities. Below is a list of ideas to use when planning an activity:

Summer barbecue

Pool party

Games: Outburst, Encore, Pictionary, Charades, etc.

Horseback riding

Hay rides (include hot apple cider, and s'mores)

Bowling

Christmas party

Christmas caroling

Progressive dinners

Volleyball, horseshoes, badminton, roller skating, skiing, croquet

Miniature golf

Scavenger hunts

Birthday parties

Concerts, symphony, ballet, opera

New Year's Eve party

Picnics in the park

Valentine's Day banquet

Camping

White water rafting

Icebreakers

Where were you born?

What type of family were you raised in?

What is the one thing about you that is unique? (That is, what is something that is true about you that probably is not shared by anyone else in this group?)

Who is someone who has influenced your growth as a Christian disciple? What did they do?

How did you end up at this Small Group meeting?

What is your favorite childhood memory?

What was Christmas like when you were a child?

Where did you live when you were growing up?

Appendix

What was your greatest struggle as a teenager?
What is your earliest recollection of God?
What did you want to be when you grew up?
What is the farthest place you have ever traveled to?
Who was your favorite teacher, and why?
How do you feel the church (in general) has helped you as a person?
What is a time during the week that you can relax?
What do you most like about your life's calling?
What do you least like about your life's calling?
What is one thing that gives you satisfaction?
Which household chore would you like never to have to do again?
How do you work on your relationship with Christ during the day?
What is your greatest joy in your faith?

Icebreakers

What is your greatest struggle in your faith?
If you could change one thing about your life, what would it be, and why?
Where would you live if you could move anywhere in the world, and why?
How would you like to see your closest relationship develop in the next year(s)?
What area of your faith would you like to work on in the next few years?
If you could have three wishes come true, what would they be?
If you could write one news headline for the whole world to see, what would it be?
What is your greatest anticipation of the future?

Childcare

Childcare for adult Small Groups will be the responsibility of each individual group. Parents may decide to share the expense for a babysitter, or may choose to delegate that responsibility to a different parent each week. There are several high school and college students who enjoy babysitting, and you may want to contact them for your childcare needs.

Various Bible based children's curriculum (books, worksheets, videos) are available in most Christian bookstores. Please feel free to contact our Children's ministry staff for ideas and suggestions.

Of course, this is not a time for children to be unsupervised and it is definitely the responsibility of the child's parent should anything be broken or destroyed while in a host home.

Job Description: Apprentice Group Leader

Ministry Overview

The Group Leader Apprentice helps facilitate group discussion and leads other areas of the group meeting—such as icebreaker activities and prayer—as requested by the Small-Group Leader. This individual should also participate in all areas of group life both as a member of the group and as the apprentice leader.

Finally, a Group Leader Apprentice should operate as a prayer partner with the Small-Group Leader, and should engage with the Group Leader to evaluate group meetings and progress.

Ministry Qualifications

A Group Leader Apprentice should be:

- Faithful
- A person who understands the church's vision for the community
- Someone who is eager to learn
- Someone who is a natural leader in the group (influential)
- Someone who fulfills the qualifications of being a Small Group Leader

Responsibilities

A Group Leader Apprentice will move along the following growth and leadership track:

1. Observe the Small-Group Leader
2. Help the Group Leader
3. Imitate what the Group Leader has done, with his or her help
4. Have the Group Leader watch as you lead the group
5. Lead the group on your own
6. Find your own apprentice

Appendix

I have read and understand the Ministry Qualifications and Responsibilities of a Group Leader Apprentice.

[Name of Apprentice]

[Date]

[Name of Group Leader]

[Date]

Vita

PERSONAL

Born: June 18, 1955

Married: Maria Shea Brown

Children: Danielle

Chris

Gregory

EDUCATIONAL

B.S., Arizona State University, 1978.

M.A., Trinity Theological Seminary, 2009.

M.A., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011.

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES

Member, American Association of Christian Counselors 2011- present.