

Liberty University School of Divinity

**A Mixed Methods Approach to the Implementation of *Simple Church*  
at Greenhouse Community Church**

A Thesis Project Submitted to  
the Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Ministry

by

Jeffrey Michael Wheeland

Lynchburg, Virginia

October 2019

Copyright © 2019 by Jeff Wheeland  
All Rights Reserved

Liberty University School of Divinity

**Thesis Project Approval Sheet**

---

Daniel Russell, Ph.D.  
Professor  
Liberty University School of Divinity

---

Adam McClendon, Ph.D.  
Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program  
Liberty University School of Divinity

## THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Jeff Wheeland

Liberty University School of Divinity, 2019

Mentor: Dr. Daniel Russell

The majority of Evangelical Churches in America are declining. The majority of Christian and Missionary Alliances churches in America are also declining. Greenhouse Community Church of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Houston, Texas was in decline. Greenhouse Community Church lacked a simple discipleship plan. Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger wrote *Simple Church* and discovered after conducting research that vibrant, growing churches in America had a simple discipleship plan, whereas declining and plateaued churches had a complex plan or no plan at all. A mixed methods approach of both quantitative and qualitative research was applied to the congregation at Greenhouse Community Church with the intention of providing congregational clarity on the discipleship plan of the church. Furthermore, an increase in attendance at worship services, small groups and ministry teams was also intended. This thesis project provides a step-by-step example of a simple church discipleship plan implemented in a church with before and after results.

Abstract Length: 156 words

## Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Personal Background.....	1
Ministry Context.....	5
Statement of the Problem.....	10
Statement of the Purpose.....	11
Researcher’s Basic Assumptions.....	11
Definitions, Delimitations, and Limitations.....	12
Thesis Statement.....	13
Preview.....	14
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature.....	15
Theological Foundation.....	15
Theoretical Foundation.....	22
Thom Rainer Literature Review.....	23
Eric Geiger Literature Review.....	41
Dissertations, Journal Articles and Denominational Literature.....	46
Church Growth Literature Review of Pastors and Consultants.....	51
Chapter 3: Research Methodology.....	61
Intervention Design.....	61
Implementation of the Intervention Design.....	64
Focus Group.....	64
Anonymous Pre-Test Questionnaire.....	67
Interventions with Sermons, Signups, and Sermon Based Small Groups.....	70

Anonymous Post-Test Questionnaire.....	80
Interviews.....	83
Chapter 4: Results and Reflection.....	86
Results of Intervention.....	86
Church Growth and Discipleship Plan.....	86
Overview of Simple Church.....	92
Love God Through Worship Services.....	99
Love People Through Small Groups.....	104
Serve the World Through Ministry Teams.....	109
Reflection on the Research Results.....	112
Church Growth and Discipleship Plan.....	112
Overview of Simple Church.....	113
Love God Through Worship Services.....	114
Love People Through Small Groups.....	114
Serve the World Through Ministry Teams.....	115
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	117
Review of the Chapters.....	117
Future Research.....	119
Results Compared to Published Work.....	120
Lessons Learned.....	122
Direction.....	122
Continuation.....	123
Subtraction.....	123

Invitation.....	124
Concentration.....	125
Assimilation.....	125
Repetition.....	126
Reduction.....	126
Clarification.....	126
Simplification.....	127
Results in Other Settings.....	127
Recommendations.....	129
Bibliography.....	131
Appendix A: Sample Letter to Focus Group.....	138
Appendix B: Sample Consent Form for Focus Group.....	139
Appendix C: Sample Letter to Congregation for Pre-Test and Post-Test.....	141
Appendix D: Sample Consent Form for Pre-Test and Post-Test.....	142
Appendix E: Sample Letter to Sermon Based Small Group.....	144
Appendix F: Sample Consent Form for Sermon Based Small Group.....	145
Appendix G: Sample Letter to Interview Participants.....	147
Appendix H: Sample Consent Form for Interview Participants.....	148
Appendix I: IRB Approval.....	150
Appendix J: Four Sermon Outlines used for intervention.....	151

## **Abbreviations**

C&MA      *Christian and Missionary Alliance*

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Well-composed pictures are framed so that the subject and background can be understood. In the same way, Chapter 1 of the paper is meant to frame the study. This introductory chapter is organized into eight sections: (1) personal background; (2) ministry context; (3) statement of the problem; (4) statement of the purpose; (5) researcher's basic assumptions; (6) definitions, delimitations, and limitations; (7) a clear, concise, and meaningful thesis statement; and (8) preview of the chapters in this thesis project.

### **Personal Background**

The first section in this introductory chapter is my personal background as it relates to my need for Simple Church. This section is organized into ten parts: (1) conversion and calling; (2) church experience as a child and teenager; (3) college; (4) continuing education and pastoral experience; (5) change in churches; (6) combat US Army Chaplaincy; (7) comeback to Fallen Timbers Community Church; (8) creation of a discipleship plan; (9) continuous growth; and (10) change to Greenhouse Community Church.

I was born on March 9, 1974 in Honolulu, Hawaii. As a child, I thought that good people went to heaven. When this was shared with my parents, they corrected my misconception and shared the true plan of salvation with me. At the age of four years old, I invited the Lord Jesus Christ into my life. Jesus says in Revelation 3:20, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."<sup>1</sup> At the age of twelve years old, I surrendered my life to the Lord and pledged to do whatever He wanted me to do. A few months later, I sensed God calling me to be a Christian leader for my

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New International Version (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1984).

generation. Although I had a conversion experience and sensed a calling, there was not a simple, clear discipleship plan to disciple me in the church our family attended.

Our family attended a Christian and Missionary Alliance church during my childhood and teenage years. Each of these churches was program-driven and traditional. A number of these churches had Sunday School, Sunday Morning Worship Service, Sunday Night Worship Service, and Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting. I grew up going to Boys Brigade and Youth Group on Wednesday nights. While each of these churches were Bible-believing, there was not a simple, clear discipleship plan to disciple me, or for that matter, the congregation.

I went off to Wheaton College near Chicago to prepare for the ministry. As a college freshman, I ran for Class President and won. For the next three years I served as class president for approximately 600 students. My platform was simple; Unity through Pizza, Unity through Prayer, and Unity through Projects. I had a “what” and a “how.” While I was a student, I was also on a US Army ROTC scholarship. We were trained to be infantry platoon officers. We were also trained in the nine principles of war. One of the principles we were trained in was a term called “Economy of Force.” This means to put as much firepower on the objective as possible; in other words, “focus.” Focus is one of the key elements in *Simple Church*.<sup>2</sup> While I had a simple, clear plan for leading my class, I was not taught a simple, clear discipleship plan in the context of the local church, nor did I see it modeled in the local church.

After I graduated from Wheaton College, I continued my education at Dallas Theological Seminary. I also served as the Senior Pastor of North Hills Community Church, a Christian and Missionary Alliance Church in Fort Worth, Texas. North Hills Community Church was a typical programmatic church with Sunday School, Sunday Morning Worship Service, Sunday Night

---

<sup>2</sup> Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 60.

Worship Service and Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting. I focused my attention on evangelism, visitation and preaching the Sunday morning Worship Service. The church grew from 30 people when I started to over 100 people when I left. While I led people to Christ, I did not have a simple, clear discipleship plan to disciple new converts, or for that matter the congregation.

I changed churches a few months after I graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary in 2002. I left North Hills Community Church in Fort Worth, Texas and moved to Fallen Timbers Community Church near Toledo, Ohio. This church was also a part of the Christian and Missionary Alliance and, as a new church plant, had tremendous potential. Before the church started, the Great Lakes District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance decided to purchase 35 acres of prime real-estate where the church could one day build. This church did not have Sunday School, but instead had Small Groups, and my first Sunday attendance was 116 people. I accepted the call to be the Senior Pastor with the vision of doing a few things well. While I understood the need to be focused, I did not have a simple, clear discipleship plan for the congregation.

After two years at Fallen Timbers Community Church, I was called up to Active Duty as a US Army Chaplain in the combat zone of Iraq. During my deployment, I led 52 people to Christ. Even though I was an effective evangelist, I did not have a simple, clear discipleship plan for discipling the soldiers.

When I came back from the war in Iraq, I came back to Fallen Timbers Community Church to serve as Senior Pastor. The media in Toledo, Ohio gave me a lot of attention and the church also spent thousands of dollars on advertising. When I came back, I was greeted by 293 people during our Worship Service in 2006. The church leveled out to averaging 224 people in

2006. While the church had grown, I still did not have a simple, clear discipleship plan for the congregation.

This all changed in October 2007 when the District Superintendent of the Great Lakes District, Rev. Jeff Brown, wanted the pastors in the district to read *Simple Church* by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger. I found myself so excited as I read through the book. It was the best book, outside of the Bible, I had ever read. *Simple Church* was the simple, clear discipleship plan that I had been missing my entire life. While I had experienced evangelistic fruit and some church growth, I did not have a simple, clear discipleship plan for the congregation until I read *Simple Church*.

After I read the book and shared my insights with the church board, there was a consensus among the leaders that we needed a simple discipleship plan. I implemented *Simple Church* at Fallen Timbers Community Church by sharing the three action steps. Now that the church had a simple, clear discipleship plan in place, the church's numerical growth soared. On my first Sunday in 2002, Fallen Timbers Community Church had 116 people. On a Sunday in the Spring of 2017, Fallen Timbers Community Church had an attendance of 688 people. The church grew by the hundreds. After implementing *Simple Church*, we had continuous church growth every year.

In 2017, after nearly fifteen years of ministry, I resigned as the Senior Pastor of Fallen Timbers Community Church and became the Pastor of Greenhouse Community Church of the C&MA in Houston, Texas. While this church had great potential, it was declining and did not have a simple, clear discipleship plan.

## Ministry Context

The second section in this introductory chapter is the ministry context. The section is organized into nine parts: (1) denominational association of GCC; (2) doctrine; (3) district; (4) distinguished events in GCC's history; (5) distinctives of GCC; (6) demographics; (7) data; and (8) decision to accept the Pastor position at GCC.

The denomination to which Greenhouse Community Church belongs is the Christian and Missionary Alliance. The Christian and Missionary Alliance was started in 1887 by Dr. A.B. Simpson in New York City. Simpson was the pastor of Thirteenth Presbyterian Church in New York City. He would go down to the docks in New York City and evangelize to the Italian immigrants working on the docks. He led over 100 Italian immigrants to Christ, but when he tried to bring the new converts to his church, the church leaders said no. So, Simpson left that church and started his own independent church with seven people. Michael Yount writes, "When Simpson moved to New York City, he made it his goal to reach the city for Christ through evangelism. He made the Gospel Tabernacle an evangelistic center for the city. He never traveled as an itinerant evangelist, but his focus was on the city and the world."<sup>3</sup> The C&MA was founded and focused upon world-wide evangelization. There are well-known Christian leaders that have had their roots in the Christian and Missionary Alliance including, pastor and author Dr. A.W. Tozer, evangelist Dr. Billy Graham, and apologist Dr. Ravi Zacharias. Billy Graham also served as a Youth Pastor at a C&MA church in Tampa, Florida. Billy Graham writes, "I was vice president of the young people's ministry for the Christian and Missionary Alliance churches

---

<sup>3</sup> Michael Yount, *A.B. Simpson: His Message and Impact on the Third Great Awakening* (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF & STOCK, 2016), 63.

in the state of Florida, and all the CMA churches had invited me, in that role, to visit and speak to their young people.”<sup>4</sup>

The doctrine of the Christian and Missionary Alliance is that Jesus is our Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King. There are controversial doctrinal issues where the Christian and Missionary Alliance has taken a doctrinal stand, in addition to the Statement of Faith. For example, the C&MA in the United States does not ordain women, nor are women allowed to serve as elders. The C&MA also believes in a continuation of the gifts. This means that all the spiritual gifts, including tongues, prophecy, and healing are for today. While the C&MA believes in tongues, it does not believe that every believer filled with the Holy Spirit will speak in tongues. A.B. Simpson originated the phrase, “Seek not, forbid not.”

There are areas in which the Christian and Missionary Alliance does not take a doctrinal stand. For example, the denomination does not take a position on the age of the earth. Also, the denomination does not take a doctrinal stand on the believer’s eternal security. I personally hold to eternal security, but there are pastors in the C&MA who believe one can lose his or her salvation. Furthermore, there are both Calvinists and Armenians in the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

Greenhouse Community Church is a part of the Southwestern District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. The boundaries of the Southwestern District are Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and the part of Louisiana that is west of the Mississippi River. The district recently celebrated its 94th District Conference. At one time, Greenhouse Community Church was the largest church in the district and was one of the highest giving churches to the District Operating

---

<sup>4</sup> Billy Graham, *Just as I Am* (New York, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 59.

Budget. Currently, there are 42 churches in the district. Each accredited church is required to give 8% of its General Fund offering to support the work of the Southwestern District.

After reading *Parkway Fellowship Celebrating 75 Years*<sup>5</sup>, I noticed seven distinguished events in the history of Greenhouse Community Church. Please note that Greenhouse Community Church used to be called Parkway Fellowship. First, the church was chartered as a Christian and Missionary Alliance church in Houston, Texas by the Secretary of Texas on June 21, 1937. A second distinguished event in the history of Greenhouse Community Church was in 1957, under the leadership of Rev. Marvin Eck when Sunday morning attendance often was above 200 people. This was the largest the church had been in her history. A third distinguished event was in 1962, when the Viet Cong captured Dr. Ardel Vietti. Dr. Vietti was a medical missionary from the church. A fourth distinguished event was that the church planted two ethnic churches, a Vietnamese church and a Chinese church, in 1985. A fifth distinguished event was in 1994, under the leadership of Rev. Edwin Mangham, when the church introduced double services. A sixth distinguished event was when Rev. David Seckinger became Senior Pastor in 1994. Under his leadership, the Greater Houston Multiplication was started, and four churches were planted from this initiative. A seventh distinguished event was when they sold their property and were able to acquire seven acres of land on Greenhouse Road in Houston and built a 3-million-dollar facility debt free. Over the years, the Greenhouse Community Church has changed locations, changed names, and changed Pastors. The church has had 14 Senior Pastors and has also raised up many for full-time Christian ministry both in the United States and around the world.

---

<sup>5</sup> Norma Delavan, *Parkway Fellowship Celebrating 75 Years* (Houston, Texas, 2012).

There are six distinctives of Greenhouse Community Church. The first distinctive is a history of church planting. The church has planted at least eight churches in her history. The second distinctive is location. Real estate uses the phrase “location, location, location.” Greenhouse Community Church has an ideal location. The church is located on a 7-acre parcel of land just a half of a mile north of I-10 in Houston. I-10 in Houston is one of the busiest roads in the world. The third distinctive is that the church is debt free. The church recently completed a 5-million-dollar building project debt free. Romans 13:8 says, “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.” Jeff Berg and Jim Burgess write, “A non-borrowing ministry does not need to pressure people to meet looming loan-payment deadlines. Non-borrowing ministries simply present the ministry need, then trust God to provide through the generous giving of His people.”<sup>6</sup> The fourth distinctive is generosity. Paul writes in II Corinthians 8:2, “Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.” Greenhouse Community Church is extremely generous in their financial giving. Last year, over \$178,000 was given to the General Fund. At one-point last year, the congregation numbered only 33 people. The fifth distinctive is the Wednesday night prayer meeting. Acts 1:14 says, “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” While many churches no longer have a prayer meeting, Greenhouse Community Church has continued the Wednesday night prayer meeting. The sixth distinctive is kindness, a fruit of the Spirit. People have mentioned to me the kindness of the congregation.

The demographics of the community in which the church is located can be understood by the following:

---

<sup>6</sup> Jeff Berg and Jim Burgess, *The Debt-Free Church* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1996), 37.

The population within this area is highly diverse. Those who identified themselves as; Anglos 46.0%, comprise of the population; Hispanic or Latino 33.3%; Black or African American 11.5%; Asian 7.8% and others combined 1.1%.

The median age of individuals living in this area is 31.2 years of age.

Adults in this area are defined as very educated. Eighty-five percent of the population aged 25 and older are high school graduates as opposed to the national average of 80.4%. Fifty-eight point seven percent are college graduates as opposed to the national average of 24.4%.

The giving potential for the population is considered very high. The average annual household income is \$76,075.

The greatest household concerns of those adults living within the population are having a satisfying job/career, finding life direction, achieving a fulfilling marriage, righting social injustice, managing aging parental care, and making time for recreation and leisure.<sup>7</sup>

The demographics of the church can be understood by the following:

Our church demographics are as follows: GCC is comprised of approximately 60 adult members and/or regular attendees with a children’s attendance of approximately 20 ranging from new-born to age eighteen. Of the adults, approximately one third are single, divorced, or widowed. The remaining two thirds are comprised of married couples. The congregation has become reflective of the community around us and is comprised of a mix of people of Anglo, Hispanic, African American, and Asian descent. The vast majority of the congregation lives within a ten-mile radius from the church and therefore has a Houston or Katy address.<sup>8</sup>

The data on Greenhouse Community Church shows a numerical decline over the years.

Year	Attendance	Baptism	Conversion
2009	102		31
2010	101	1	8
2011	79	5	1
2012	75		
2013	75		
2014	60		3
2015	58		2
2016	75		1
2017	73		2 <sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Greenhouse Community Church Profile, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Greenhouse Community Church Profile, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Statistics given to me by Rev. Bill Mangham of the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

Greenhouse Community Church declined in attendance from 2009 to 2017. For six years, the church did not baptize anyone. For two years, there were not any reported conversions.

I was a candidate for the Pastor position at Greenhouse Community Church in 2017. The District Superintendent, Dr. Mark Searing, gave my resume to the pastoral search committee. In November 2017, I came to Houston with my family as a candidate. After a unanimous vote from the search committee, the District Superintendent extended the call to be the Pastor of Greenhouse Community Church, and I decided to accept the call. I moved to Houston and started as Pastor at Greenhouse Community Church in December of 2017.

The second section in this introductory chapter is the ministry context. This information sets the stage for understanding the problem.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The third section in this introductory chapter is the statement of the problem. The problem this project will address is the lack of a simple, clear discipleship plan at Greenhouse Community Church. The former Senior Pastor of Greenhouse Community Church, Rev. Stan Newton, wrote the following in 2017 for the Annual Report:

Discipleship is a life-on-life process, and that occurs best in one-on-one and small group environments, which requires connection. Unfortunately, we have not been making those connections, because we are not seeing proportional attendance and participation spikes in our Small Group ministry. We of course recognize the great value of corporate worship and the public proclamation of God's Word, two foundational bricks in our broad vision document, but the sharp-edge metric to determine whether we are hitting our target of disciple-making or not is a bit dull.<sup>10</sup>

The former Senior Pastor realized that the church was struggling when it came to discipleship. The problem was that the church did not have a simple, clear discipleship plan.

---

<sup>10</sup> Pastor's Report, Greenhouse Community Church Annual Report to the Members, 2017.

## Statement of the Purpose

The fourth section in this introductory chapter is the statement of the purpose. The purpose of this project is to implement *Simple Church* at Greenhouse Community Church so that it will improve the disciple making process. The researcher wants to focus on implementing *Simple Church* at Greenhouse Community Church because it will provide (1) congregational clarity about the discipleship plan; (2) attendance growth at the worship services; and (3) increased involvement in small groups and ministry teams.

## Researcher's Basic Assumptions

The researcher believes that when *Simple Church* is implemented, there will be three noticeable results. First, there will be congregational clarity about the discipleship plan. Second, there will be attendance growth at the worship services. Third, there will be increased involvement in small groups and ministry teams.

First, when *Simple Church* is implemented, there will be congregational clarity about the discipleship plan. God is a God of plans. He gave Noah a plan to build the ark. He gave Moses a plan to build the tabernacle. He gave Nehemiah a plan to build the wall. He gave Solomon a plan to build the temple. Yet, many churches have no plan when it comes to making disciples. Thus, there is confusion and not clarity. However, when *Simple Church* is implemented, the congregation will have clarity about the discipleship plan. Rick Warren makes the point that God will send new people to a church that knows how to disciple them.<sup>11</sup> Thus, there seems to be a connection between God blessing a church with numerical growth and having congregational clarity about how to disciple people.

---

<sup>11</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1995), 51.

Second, when *Simple Church* is implemented, there will be attendance growth in the worship services over the long-term. Thom Rainer writes, “So here is the practical language: In general, churches that are vibrant and growing are simple. The vibrant churches are much more simple than the comparison churches.”<sup>12</sup> In a way, to grow larger there is a need to have a smaller focus.

Third, when *Simple Church* is implemented, there will be increased involvement in small groups and ministry teams. There will be an increase in the number of opportunities to sign up, and an increase in the number of people attending small groups and serving on ministry teams.

The researcher believes that when *Simple Church* is implemented, there will be three noticeable results. First, there will be congregational clarity about the discipleship plan. Second, there will be attendance growth at the worship services. Third, there will be increased involvement in small groups and ministry teams.

### **Definitions, Delimitations, and Limitations**

A *Simple Church* is defined as, “[A] congregation designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth.”<sup>13</sup> Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger provide an expanded definition of Simple Church.

A simple church is designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth. The leadership and the church are clear about the process (clarity) and are committed to executing it. The process flows logically (movement) and is implemented in each area of the church (alignment). The church abandons everything that is not in the process (focus). Clarity. Movement. Alignment. Focus.<sup>14</sup>

This contrasts with and is differentiated from the Simple Church Global Network. The Simple

---

<sup>12</sup> Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 67.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.

Church Global Network has the following on their website:

What is a Simple Church?

Simple Church is a global network of house churches.

Simple Church gathers in homes for fellowship, food, relational Bible study.

Simple Church is lay-led by common people trained as Simple Church planters.

Simple Church is overseen and coached by other Simple Church planters who are on the front lines.

Simple Church accepts God's invitations to join Him in his missionary work.

With Simple Church, everyday life is the mission trip! Our mission field is right here in our neighborhoods.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the Simple Church book is about a simple process for making disciples in a church of any size. In contrast, the Simple Church Global Network is a house church network.

The first delimitation in this project is that research will only be conducted on Greenhouse Community Church attendees and members over 18 years of age. Not every Christian and Missionary Alliance church that lacks a simple, clear discipleship plan will be included in this research, but only Greenhouse Community Church in Houston, Texas.

There are two further limitations in this research project. First, while a pre-test and post-test questionnaire will be given out at Sunday morning worship services, not everyone will fill out the questionnaire. Second, some congregational attendees or members may not give honest answers but may rather inflate their self-reporting or state what they believe the project researcher will want to see.

### **Thesis Statement**

The seventh section in this introductory chapter is a clear, concise, and meaningful thesis statement. When Simple Church is implemented, it provides clarity to the congregation about the discipleship plan of the church and helps increase attendance in worship services, small groups, and ministry teams.

---

<sup>15</sup> Simple Church Global Network Website, "About Us." Accessed October 21, 2019.

## **Preview**

The thesis project contains five chapters. Chapter 1 was an introduction and a statement of the problem. Chapter 2 will be a review of the literature. Chapter 3 will share the research methodology of this thesis project. Chapter 4 will share the results of the research. Chapter 5 will be the conclusion of the research project and will share the possibilities of future research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of the Literature**

The second chapter is a review of the literature and is organized into two main foundations: (1) The Theological Foundation, and (2) The Theoretical Foundation. The Theological Foundation provides relevant Scripture passages that provide a biblical foundation for having a simple discipleship plan in the church. The Theoretical Foundation examines books, dissertations, and journal articles while seeking to find a step-by-step example of a simple church discipleship plan implemented in a modern-day church.

#### **Theological Foundation**

The first foundation of the review of literature is called “Theological Foundations.” It makes sense to start the search looking for answers in the Bible since God’s Word is compared to a foundation strong enough to build a life. Jesus talks about this type of foundation in Matthew 7:24-25. The Theological Foundations is organized into two sections: (1) the broad overview of pastoral epistles and (2) the specific look at principles found both in scripture and the book *Simple Church*.

The first section is the broad overview of the pastoral epistles. There is a biblical precedent for organizing a church. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus to help them pastor in an organized manner.

The apostle Paul wrote the book “I Timothy” to Timothy while he was the pastor of the church in Ephesus. The purpose of the letter was to help Timothy know as the pastor how to conduct himself in the church. The letter also helps a pastor communicate how elders, deacons, women, children, widows and slaves are to conduct themselves in the church. While relevant to all kinds of believers, his letter is applicable to pastors in particular.

The apostle Paul wrote the book “II Timothy” to Timothy while he was the pastor of the church in Ephesus. The reason for Paul’s letter was to exhort Timothy to preach the Word of God. Paul continued to impress upon Timothy the importance of teaching sound doctrine because in later times, people will turn away from sound doctrine. II Timothy has practical guidance for church leaders, especially pastors.

The apostle Paul wrote the book “Titus” to Titus while he was the pastor of the church in Crete. Paul’s reason for writing to Titus was two-fold. First, Paul wanted Titus to organize unfinished work in the church in Crete. Second, Paul wanted Titus to appoint elders. Paul goes on to explain the qualifications of an elder. Furthermore, Paul addresses how older men, younger men, older women, younger women, and slaves are to conduct themselves. Titus is particularly helpful to pastors and elders in a church.

There are a number of similarities between I Timothy, II Timothy and Titus. First, they each cover the importance of teaching in the context of the church. The letters to Timothy and Titus also share how different groups of people are to conduct themselves. While these pastoral epistles are helpful for pastors in leading a church, they do not provide a step-by-step example of a simple church discipleship plan implemented in a church with before and after results. Now that a broad overview of the pastoral epistles has been looked at, we will now turn to a specific look at the principles found both in the scripture and in the book *Simple Church*.

The second section is the specific look at principles found both in scripture and *Simple Church*. Scripture provides us with principles that relate to the implementation of a simple discipleship plan in the church. These principles include, but are not limited to, discipleship, planning, church growth, loving God, loving people, serving, clarity, movement, alignment, and focus.

God wants Christians to make disciples. Jesus said in Matthew 28:19-20, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” We are to make disciples. J.S. O’Malley writes,

The concept of discipling is related to the goal of encouraging and measuring growth in Christian discipleship through the behavioral change that would result from a consistent application of biblical principles to personal and corporate Christian living.<sup>16</sup>

Jesus gave us those words to help us understand what was meant by making disciples. Making disciples involves baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded. The strength of His words is that He cogently makes the point of what discipleship making does and He also provides his followers with assurance that He is with them in this endeavor. This scripture passage is for all believers, since all believers are to be making disciples.

Throughout Scripture, God gives people plans. For example, in Genesis, He told Noah to build the ark and gave him plans to do so. Henry Morris writes,

In order to preserve both human and terrestrial animal life on the earth, God instructed Noah to build a huge bargelike structure called an ark, in which the occupants would be saved from destruction in the coming Flood. According to God’s instructions, the Ark was to be designed for capacity and floating stability rather than for speed or navigability.<sup>17</sup>

He gave Moses plans for the construction of the tabernacle in Exodus, Nehemiah plans for the rebuilding of the wall in Jerusalem, and Solomon plans for building the temple. In Matthew 10, Jesus gave plans to His disciples for how they were to carry out ministry. The author’s intention behind these passages was to show that God is not a God of aimlessness or confusion, but rather

---

<sup>16</sup> J.S. O’Malley, “Discipleship Movement,” in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1984), 319.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1976), 181.

a God of plans and order. While these passages are helpful in understanding that God is a God of plans, the scripture itself does not provide a step-by-step example of a simple church discipleship plan implemented in a church with before and after results.

Not only does God give plans, but He also brings growth. Matthew 16:18 says, “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” Jesus says this to Peter, and we can see that nothing will prevent Christ’s church from being built. Acts 2:46-47 states, “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 9:31 states, “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.” Paul writes in I Corinthians 3:6-8, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So, neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor.” Thus, God brings about church growth, but there is indication from this passage that there is human responsibility in growing a church. These passages reveal the heart of God that His kingdom would grow and advance. Church leaders would benefit by meditating on these passages. While these passages discuss church growth, they do not discuss the human responsibility behind church growth, namely having a simple and clear discipleship plan.

*Simple Church* makes the argument that there is a connection between having a simple, clear discipleship plan and experiencing church growth. Three action steps are mentioned in *Simple Church*, namely Love God, Love People, and Serve the World.

The command to Love God is seen throughout Scripture. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

Matthew 22:34-38 states,

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, we are called to Love God. Jesus gives us practical applications as to how we can know if we love God. He says in John 14:21, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.” The authors of these passages want to remind us of the importance of loving God.

We are called by Jesus to not only love God but to love others. Jesus says in Matthew 22:39-40, “And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Warren Wiersbe writes,

But love for God cannot be divorced from love for one’s neighbor; so Jesus also quoted Leviticus 19:18 and put it on the same level as the Shema. All of the law and the Prophets hang on both of these commandments. We might add that the teachings of the Epistles in the New Testament agree with this statement. If a man really loves God, he must also love his brother and his neighbor (I John 3:10-18; 4:7-21).<sup>18</sup>

The apostle Paul makes the argument that anything else done without love, no matter how great it may seem, is worth nothing. Paul writes in I Corinthians 13:1-3,

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

---

<sup>18</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament Volume 1* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Cook Communications Ministries, 2001), 81.

The apostle John states in I John 4:19-21,

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Again, we see the call to not only Love God but to also love others. The authors want us to know that it is not enough to love God, we also must love one another.

The third action step mentioned in *Simple Church* is to Serve the World. Jesus says in Mark 10:43-45,

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The context of this passage was that two brothers, James and John wanted to sit right next to Jesus in His kingdom. They were being selfish. Jesus tells them that true greatness is found in serving others. In the Old Testament, Joshua tells the people in Joshua 24:15, "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Serving God is a challenge and a choice.

*Simple Church* has four elements, namely, (1) clarity, (2) movement, (3) alignment, and (4) focus. These four elements will be discussed from a biblical and theological framework. Clarity is an element that we see mentioned in Scripture. Paul makes the argument for clarity in I Corinthians 14:7-8, "Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?" Paul also has the intention to present the gospel clearly, as he states in Colossians 4:4, "Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should." Paul's point was the importance of clarity. As a church leader he does not want ambiguity but clarity.

Movement is also an element that is seen in Scripture. Peter declares in 2 Peter 3:18, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.” Peter implies that there is movement in the believer’s life to growth and maturity. Edwin A. Blum writes, “Green (*Peter and Jude*, p. 150) says, ‘The Christian life . . . is like riding a bicycle. Unless you keep moving, you fall off!’ John says that the knowledge of God and Christ is ‘eternal life’ (John 17:3). But as Paul says, Christians never in this life attain all there is in Christ; so their goal is to know Christ in a fuller; more intimate way (Phil 3:10-13; cf. Eph 1:17).”<sup>19</sup> He does not want to see a believer remain status quo or even backslide, he wants to see movement and progress in the believer’s life.

Alignment is also seen in Scripture. Paul writes in I Corinthians 11:16, “If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice-nor do the churches of God.” In other words, there was alignment among the churches on the doctrinal issue in question. They were on the same page, doctrinally speaking. This passage helps church leaders understand the importance of alignment, cohesion and unity in the context of churches.

Focus is an element in *Simple Church* and is also evidenced in the Scripture. Jesus was focused. He says in Matthew 15:24, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” The apostle Paul writes in Philippians 3:12-14,

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Paul was focused on the “one thing.” Gordon D. Fee writes,

---

<sup>19</sup> Edwin A. Blum, “2 Peter,” in *The Bible Expositor’s Commentary*, ed. by Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 289.

The analogy is in three parts. First, he pictures the runner as one who is not distracted by other things, presumably by others in the race. The imagery is probably that of the runner who is in the lead and does not look back to see where the competitors are; rather he focuses all his energy on the goal.<sup>20</sup>

Leaders in the Bible were focused on the work and people to which God had called them. These passages would be helpful for church leaders to meditate on, all the while understanding that the Lord Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul were very focused. This element of focus also applies to the local church in having a discipleship plan.

The first foundation provided a theological foundation for having a simple and clear discipleship plan. This theological foundation had two sections: (1) a broad overview of the pastoral epistles and (2) a specific look at principles that were common to both scripture and the book *Simple Church*. After looking in scripture for a step-by-step example of a simple church discipleship plan implemented in a church with before and after results, none was discovered. We must now turn to a theoretical foundation for help in what we are looking for.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The second foundation provides a theoretical framework and is organized into four sections: (1) Thom Rainer Literature Review, (2) Eric Geiger Literature Review, (3) Dissertations, Journal Articles and Denominational Literature, and (4) Church Growth Literature written by pastors or consultants. In this chapter, I move from specific literature written by the authors of *Simple Church*, to more general church growth literature. My intent is to find a step-by-step example of a *Simple Church* discipleship plan implemented in a congregation.

---

<sup>20</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 347.

## Thom Rainer Literature Review

The first section is the Thom Rainer Literature Review. This section is organized into three subsections: (1) overview of Thom Rainer's life, (2) Simple Church, and (3) Sampling of Works arranged by the year the book was written by Rainer. Significant attention will be given to *Simple Church*.

### **Overview of Thom Rainer's life**

The first subsection is an overview of Thom Rainer's life. Rainer was born in Alabama and attended the University of Alabama for his undergraduate degree. He earned his Master of Divinity and his Ph.D. from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Rainer pastored churches and was the founding dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism, and Church Growth at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Rainer then became the President of LifeWay, the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention. Rainer recently stepped down from LifeWay. Most notably for this project, Rainer co-wrote *Simple Church* with Eric Geiger in 2006.

### **Simple Church**

The second subsection is Simple Church. *Simple Church*<sup>21</sup> was written by Rainer and Eric Geiger in 2006. *Simple Church* shares evidence that churches that have a simple discipleship process are growing, whereas, churches that have no discipleship process or a complicated discipleship process are not growing. This book is more streamlined than Rick Warren's book titled, *The Purpose Driven Church*. Simple Church can be defined as,

A simple church is designed around a straight forward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth. The leadership and the church are clear about the process (clarity) and are committed to executing it. The

---

<sup>21</sup> *Simple Church* refers to the book while Simple Church can also be used for the specific church growth paradigm.

process flows logically (movement) and is implemented in each area of the church (alignment). The church abandons everything that is not in the process (focus).<sup>22</sup>

*Simple Church* was intended to provide a streamlined approach to discipleship as opposed to having countless programs.

Chapter 1 is titled, “The Simple Revolution has begun.” In this opening chapter, Rainer and Geiger share the story of Pastor Rush. Pastor Rush is overwhelmed with staff issues and sermon preparation. Furthermore, he is frustrated by the lack of a simple, clear discipleship plan in the church where he serves. His understanding at this point can be summed up by the following:

Something must change, but Pastor Rush is struggling with where to begin. He understands the what. He has a sense of what the church should be doing. He believes the church should be committed to evangelism, prayer, helping people build relationships with believers, seeing people grow deeper, serving, and worship. He also has a sense of the why. He deeply desires to see God glorified. He struggles with the how. One burning question has entered his mind: How can we structure all of this to come together to make disciples?<sup>23</sup>

This chapter shares that Jesus was a master at making the complex simple. For example, there were 613 commandments found in the first five books of the Old Testament. Jesus had the ability to say that the most important one of them all was to love God. Thus, simplicity is illustrated by Jesus. Simplicity is also illustrated by several companies that are financially growing in their field. Companies that are simple are as follows: Apple, Google, Southwest Airlines, and Papa John’s. The authors state that there is a connection between simplicity and growth. This need for simplicity is also translated to the local church. The authors articulate what must be done, “To have a simple church, leaders must ensure that everything their church does

---

<sup>22</sup> Rainer and Geiger, 67-68.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 22.

fits together to produce life change. They must design a simple process that pulls everything together, a simple process that moves people toward spiritual maturity.”<sup>24</sup>

Chapter 2 is titled, “The Simple (and Not-So-Simple) Church in Action.” This chapter compares two different churches. One church is called “First Church.” The second church is called “Cross Church.” They are both large evangelical churches. This, however, is where the similarities end. First Church is a traditional church with well-known staff. They have missions, visions, and purpose statements that most of the staff cannot even articulate. They also like to hold big events. The problem is that this church has not grown in five years. They are a plateaued church. Cross Church does not have well-known staff, but they are a staff united around the purpose of the church. Very simply, their purpose is to love God, love people, and serve the World. The staff can articulate the purpose of the church. Instead of trying to pull off large events, they try to solve ministry needs in the context of small groups. Cross Church is a growing church. Rainer and Geiger sum up this chapter by saying,

We leave First Church impressed with the staff and the members. Their commitment to Christ is real. But so many of the people at First Church are tired and confused on how to “do church.” Likewise, we leave Cross Church impressed with the people and the members. But we did not see weariness and frustration on the faces of the people at Cross Church. Instead we saw excitement, joy, and anticipation. Two real churches. Two very different responses.<sup>25</sup>

The chapter closes with a question as to which church better resembles the one you attend.

Chapter 3 is titled, “Simple Church: An Extreme Makeover.” The chapter starts with an overview of the TV show, “Extreme Makeover: Home Addition.” This is used to draw the analogy that many churches need an extreme makeover when it comes to their discipleship process. A contrast is drawn between vibrant/growing churches and comparison churches.

---

<sup>24</sup> Rainer and Geiger, 26.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 55.

Vibrant growing churches are those churches that have grown at a five percent or greater rate each year over a three-year time frame. Sadly, less than two percent of churches fit into this category. Comparison churches are churches that “had not grown or had declined over the same three-year period.”<sup>26</sup> Rainer and Geiger write, “So here is the practical language: In general, churches that are vibrant and growing are simple. The vibrant churches are much more simple than the comparison churches. A simple church strategy is effective.”<sup>27</sup>

A simple church is designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth. The leadership and the church are clear about the process (clarity) and are committed to executing it. The process flows logically (movement) and is implemented in each area of the church (alignment). The church abandons everything that is not in the process (focus).<sup>28</sup>

Then these four elements; clarity, movement, alignment, and focus; are then defined. Rainer and Geiger “Clarity is the ability of the process to be communicated and understood by the people.”<sup>29</sup> People understand the simple, clear process. The authors of *Simple Church* define movement as “the sequential steps in the process that cause people to move to greater areas of commitment.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore, there are clearly defined next steps for a person to take. The authors also define alignment as the “arrangement of all ministries and staff around the same simple process.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, all age groups in the church have the same age appropriate discipleship process. Rainer and Geiger define the element of focus as “the commitment to abandon everything that falls outside of the simple ministry process.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, if some program does not fit into the simple, clear discipleship process, it is not implemented or, if in place, is eliminated. The chapter concludes with two illustrations of men that excelled in focus. The first illustration is that of

---

<sup>26</sup> Rainer and Geiger, 65.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 76.

King Hezekiah. He eliminated the high places and even the bronze snake because they were shifting their worship focus away from God. The second illustration is that of artist Hans Hoffman. He also understood the importance of eliminating non-essentials. In conclusion, churches must also focus and eliminate non-essentials if they are to be vibrant, growing churches.

Chapter 4 is titled, “Three Simple Stories.” This chapter shares the stories of three churches that are different denominations, different sizes, and in different parts of the country, but they all have a simple process for making disciples. The first church is Immanuel Baptist Church in Glasgow, Kentucky. The city has only 16,000 people, over one hundred churches. Immanuel had a simple process for making disciples and doubled within two years. They went from 150 people to 300 people. Tony Cecil was the Senior Pastor at Immanuel Baptist Church:

Tony and the group chose to describe their discipleship focus as a process. They call it Connecting, Growing, Serving. First, Immanuel seeks to connect people to God and others. They desire to see people become “connecting believers.” Next they challenge “connecting believers” to become “growing believers” by engaging in opportunities for deeper spiritual growth. Finally, the process ends with “growing believers” committing to become “serving believers.”<sup>33</sup>

Immanuel Baptist Church wants people to connect to God through Worship. Then they want people to grow in an adult Bible Fellowship. They are then encouraged to join a serving small group.

The second church mentioned is Christ Fellowship of Miami, Florida. This church wanted to simplify the discipleship process. The authors write about the simplification, “They committed to one statement that would feature their simple process: Connect to God, others, ministry, and the lost.”<sup>34</sup> This discipleship process is further clarified:

---

<sup>33</sup> Rainer and Geiger., 88.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 93.

The final step in the process is to connect to the lost . . . Since the last step in the process is not a program, people are challenged to do three things a week at Christ Fellowship. Come to a worship service, be in a small group, and serve in a ministry team. Simple. These expectations are stated clearly to people in the church.<sup>35</sup>

Christ Fellowship also eliminated their Sunday night worship service, and they combined Sunday School, Wednesday night discipleship classes, and home groups under small groups. The church had a Friday night fellowship for high school students where food was served, and 300-400 students would attend. But the gospel was not shared, and this Friday night fellowship did not really fit into their process, so it was eliminated. Rainer and Geiger elaborate, “The program was reestablished after the Saturday night service to engage more kids in the student ‘Connect to God’ program. By placing the food and games on top of the Saturday night service, more kids are now in a student worship service.”<sup>36</sup>

The third church that was used as an illustration was Northpoint Community Church near Atlanta, Georgia. This church was planted by Andy Stanley and started off with a very simple discipleship process. The process is illustrated by a house. “They call it the ‘Foyer to the Kitchen.’ They seek to move people to the kitchen where they will be in community groups with others.”<sup>37</sup> Today, Northpoint Community Church is one of the largest churches in the United States. It has a culture of excellence and focus.

Chapter 5 is titled, “Clarity: Starting with a Ministry Blueprint.” Clarity is the first of the four elements in Simple Church. Clarity has five keys. According to Rainer and Geiger, one must define it, illustrate it, measure it, discuss it, and increase understanding of it. Most comparison churches cannot define their discipleship process. This is because they do not have one, or it is

---

<sup>35</sup> Rainer and Geiger, 95.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 99.

too complicated. Vibrant churches are not only able to define their discipleship process, but they are also able to illustrate it. Third, a church also needs to measure the steps within their discipleship process. For example, counting the number of people involved in worship services, small groups, and ministry teams. A church also needs to discuss the discipleship process. This needs to happen not only from the pulpit but also among the leaders of the church. If the leaders do not understand the process, then it is not going to work in the congregation. To increase understanding, it is essential that the simple discipleship process is spoken about from the pulpit, discussed in small groups, and lived out by the pastor and leaders.

Chapter 6 is titled, “Movement: Removing Congestion.” This chapter shares how Jesus used movement with His disciples. Luke 5-6 shares how Jesus called His disciples. Luke 7-8 shares how Jesus built His disciples. Then, Luke 9 shares how Jesus sent His disciples. Thus, there was movement in training the disciples. The opposite of movement is congestion. This chapter states that many churches have congestion and lack movement. This chapter encourages programs to be placed along a process, sequencing in programs, clear next steps for new believers, and a new members class.

Chapter 7 is titled, “Alignment: Maximizing the Energy of Everyone.” This chapter shares the importance of every age group in the church using the same ministry process. Three benefits are shared when a church has alignment in the discipleship process. The three benefits are that there will be an increase in understanding, a promotion of unity, and a process that is shared by the entire family.<sup>38</sup> This chapter also shares the challenges of alignment,

The most challenging aspect of alignment is pulling existing ministries and existing staff in the same direction, especially if they have been moving in opposite directions. It is much easier to align new people and new ministries to the overall direction. If they do not fit, you simply do not allow them to begin.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Rainer and Geiger, 181-182.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 187-188.

Furthermore, a church is encouraged to hire around the same discipleship process, which promotes unity.

Chapter 8 is titled, “Focus: Saying No to Almost Everything.” This chapter shares the stories of different people in Scripture that were focused, including David and the apostle Paul. It also shares the stories of different society leaders that have been focused, including Michael Jordan, Steve Jobs, and Jack Welch. Churches that are vibrant and growing, stay focused and use existing programs to meet ministry needs, as opposed to adding special events. If a special event is used it should be attached to a current program in the church as opposed to having a stand-alone event. Rainer and Geiger write, “You must eliminate nonessential programs, limit adding more programs, reduce special events, and ensure the process is easy to communicate and simple to understand.” In other words, if some programs do not fit the discipleship process, growing and vibrant churches are more likely to say no than comparison churches. Growing churches are more focused than comparison churches.

Chapter 9 is titled “Becoming Simple.” This chapter returns to Pastor Rush. He has been thinking and reading Scripture. He realizes that there is a lot of activity, but there is also a lack of disciple-making. The congregation is not carrying out the work of ministry with excellence. Pastor Rush realizes that they need to change. The authors of this book share a challenge that churches must change or die. To become a Simple Church, the authors share four necessary steps: Clarity, Movement, Alignment, and Focus. Emphasis is put on focus. The authors state, “In time it is important that you eliminate programs and events that do not fit. They are a distraction from the process, and they prohibit your church from enjoying all the benefits of a simple church.”<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Rainer and Geiger, 240.

*Simple Church* was written to help churches grow and become vibrant. As the research indicates, there was a connection between having a simple, clear discipleship process and being a growing and vibrant church. The strength of this book is that it has the potential to provide a church with direction. One weakness is that at the time of writing, neither Rainer nor Geiger were Senior Pastors in a church. It is one thing to write about a simple process, but it is quite another to lead a congregation through a simple process. A second weakness is that it does not provide a step-by-step example of a simple, clear discipleship plan implemented in a church congregation with before and after results. This book would be helpful to pastors of a church where there has been a decline or plateau and where there is no clear discipleship plan or there is a complicated plan.

Now that an introductory understanding of the book has been provided, it is possible to see if he wrote a companion piece for transitioning a church to a simple, clear discipleship plan. The next subsection is organized by the year the book was written.

### **Sampling of Works**

The third subsection is a sampling of works arranged by the year the book was written by Rainer. One should note that there seems to be a shift in the writings of Rainer around the year 2000. Rainer's early books focus on evangelism and the Southern Baptist Convention, but his writings after the year 2000 focus on church growth and the broader evangelical church as opposed to simply the Southern Baptist denomination. As one surveys his works, he or she will notice a shift in focus and audience over the years.

Rainer's doctoral dissertation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary is titled *An Assessment of C. Peter Wagner's Contributions to the Theology of Church Growth*. The reason Rainer wrote this dissertation was to give a history of the leaders of the church growth

movement, namely Donald McGavran and Peter Wagner, and to share the specific contributions of Wagner. McGavran was a missionary with the Disciples of Christ in India. He wondered why some churches grow while others do not. His research allowed him to conclude in the homogenous unit principle. The homogenous unit principle meant that people like to become Christians without crossing social, cultural or linguistic barriers. Because of his work, McGavran became a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary. At the time, Fuller was the center for the church growth movement. Eventually, his pupil, Wagner, became a professor of church growth at the Fuller Theological Seminary. In this dissertation, Rainer focuses on the work of Wagner. Wagner discusses prayer, power evangelism, and Pentecostals as they relate to church growth. The strength of this dissertation is that it provides one with an understanding of the church growth movement. A weakness is that it is hard to read for the average pastor. So, Rainer turned this material into the first part of *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology and Principles*. The dissertation could help pastors understand the importance of having goals and having a strategy for church growth.

Rainer wrote *The Book of Church Growth* in 1993. The book is intended to be a standard textbook for church growth. Rainer breaks the book down into four parts. The first part is called, "The History of the Church Growth Movement." The second part is called, "A Theology of the Church Growth." The third part is called, "Principles of Church Growth." The third part discusses prayer, evangelism, and receptivity, but a focus is placed on prayer. Rainer calls prayer "the power behind the principles."<sup>41</sup> Rainer states, "I am often asked: 'What is the first step you would take toward growing a church?' My answer is consistent: Start a prayer ministry."<sup>42</sup> The

---

<sup>41</sup> Thom Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 1993), 175.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

fourth part is called, "Concluding Matters." While there are several principles mentioned for church growth, prayer must be the priority. The strength of this book is that it helps pastors understand what step to take first to see church growth. The weakness is that despite the principles about growth, Rainer does not discuss implementing a church plan for disciple making. This book will help pastors know what to do first if they desire to see their churches grow.

*Effective Evangelistic Churches* was written by Rainer in 1996. The purpose of this book was to understand common factors of effective evangelistic churches. Rainer writes of 576 Southern Baptist Churches out of 40,000 Southern Baptist Churches that were evangelistic. He defines evangelistic churches as those that baptized at least 25 people in one year and those that had a baptism ratio of less than 20 members per 1 baptism. He notes three significant characteristics of these 576 effective evangelistic churches. First, the churches believed that preaching was the primary reason for their evangelistic effectiveness. Second, the churches believed that prayer was the secondary reason for their evangelistic effectiveness. Third, the churches believed that Sunday School was the third reason for their evangelistic effectiveness. Once people were baptized, these effective evangelistic church leaders identified three factors in assimilating these new converts. They are listed as follows: (1) expectations, (2) relationships, and (3) involvement. A strength of this book is that it shares three characteristics that effective evangelistic churches have in common. A weakness is that it does not provide a systematic plan to disciple new converts. This book could help church leaders understand what it takes to see more evangelistic converts.

Rainer wrote *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church* in 1999. Rainer's intention was to close the back door of churches so that people will be

assimilated. Rainer writes of the importance of having people attend Sunday School in keeping people in a church. A strength of this book is that it helps pastors understand how to keep people in your church. A weakness is that it does not offer a reproducible plan for church-level discipleship. This book could help pastors understand the importance of getting people connected to a small group or Sunday School. The point is that people need a smaller group of people in a church, where they can develop a personal relationship with others.

Rainer wrote *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* in 2001.<sup>43</sup> The aim of this book was to understand what caused unchurched people to become involved Christians in a church. This book shares the data on 353 former unchurched people that had become Christians and were now attending a church. The common factors of what led these unchurched to become Christians and involved in a church were several, including but not limited to (1) biblical preaching with excellence, (2) a culture of excellence in the local church, and (3) relationship of a Christian wife with her unbelieving husband. A strength of the book is that it provides insights on reaching the unchurched. A weakness is that the work does not offer a step-by-step plan to disciple the newly church. This book could help pastors understand how to reach the unchurched.

Rainer wrote *Breakout Churches* in 2003. This book was intended to share characteristics of churches that were led to growth by a Senior Pastor, experienced a numerical decline under that same Senior Pastor, and then were led to sustained growth under the same Senior Pastor. Rainer states that there are very few churches like this in the entire United States. This book seemed to be a Senior Pastor's edition to the book written by Jim Collins called *Good to Great*.

---

<sup>43</sup> One should note that around the year 2000 Rainer has had a significant shift in his writing. Before the year 2000, Rainer focused on researching the Southern Baptist Convention. However, since the year 2000, Rainer has been doing research among the broad evangelical church.

Rainer focuses on factors such as a pastor's prayer life, sermon preparation, longevity, and commitment to excellence as factors that were involved in breakout churches. A strength of the book is that it can provide areas for a pastor to work on to see numerical growth in the congregation he pastors. A weakness is that it does not help pastors make organizational changes for disciple making. This book could help pastors understand the factors that can cause a church to grow again.

Thom Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III wrote *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* in 2008. The book's purpose is to share how to win back young adults that have left the evangelical church. The book shares that two-thirds of young adults between the ages of 18 and 22 drop out of the church. The book also explores the reasons why. There are several reasons why these young adults left including being too busy, seeing the church as judgmental and non-authentic, and lacking community. This book also provides a solution. There are four parts to the solution. First, the church must have a clear structure to disciple people. Second, the church must have spiritual depth in preaching and small group environments. The book states,

While "deep" preaching is normative in essential churches, it is likewise important for church members to be involved in small group Bible studies. The healthy churches we have consulted and researched over the years all make small-group Bible study a priority. Some churches call it Sunday School; some call it small groups.<sup>44</sup>

Third, the church must have high expectations. Finally, the church must be about the work of evangelism. The authors write,

Regardless of perspectives, two realities are clear. First, evangelism is not an option for Christians or for churches. The Great Commission is a mandate. Second, every church we have studied that is effectively reaching and retaining young adults is highly intentional about evangelism. No exceptions. Period.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Sam Rainer, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of dropouts* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 199.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

So, if the church wants to retain young adults it must complete the following four actions, simplify, deepen, expect, and multiply. A strength of the book is that it shares four actions that must be taken to see young adults stay in the evangelical church. The weakness is that the authors fail to write about how a pastor could or should go about implementing a discipleship plan. This book could help pastors understand what four actions to focus on in order to see young adults come back to the evangelical church.

Thom Rainer and Art Rainer wrote *Simple Life* in 2009. The intent of the book was to teach people how to simplify their lives. According to the authors, the people researched and interviewed for this book, many of whom would call themselves Christians, are too busy. They long for a simpler life in the following areas: (1) time, (2) relationships, (3) finances, and (4) God. This book was like *Simple Church* in that it also had the four main elements found in *Simple Church*, namely clarity, movement, alignment, and focus. The book also shared the importance of not only a “what” but also a “how.” A strength of the book is that it provides examples of how people could simplify their lives. A weakness of the book is material on a congregational discipleship making plan is missing. This book could help people in general transition to a simpler life, whereas *Simple Church* was written for church leaders.

Thom Rainer and Jess Rainer wrote *The Millennials* in 2011. The book shares characteristics of millennials, those born between 1980 and 2000. According to the book, millennials are focused on family, friends, and education. Millennials have been so hurt by divorce that they tend to live together before marriage, and once they marry, they want commitment. The book shares that millennials are not workaholics. In fact, given the choice, millennials would take extra time off from work to visit family and friends as opposed to receiving a pay increase. To reach millennials, a church must be outward focused and

demonstrate integrity and authenticity. Millennials are encouraged to invite their friends to church. A strength of this book is that it provides a general understanding of the characteristics of millennials. A weakness is that the book does not provide a simple church discipleship plan implemented in a church to disciple millennials. The book would be helpful to anyone seeking to understand millennials and how to reach them.

*Simple Church: Updated Edition* includes the new Chapter “What We’ve Learned” was written by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger in 2011. The purpose of the book was to share six lessons learned since they first wrote *Simple Church* in 2006. They wrote about the six most significant lessons learned after writing *Simple Church*. They are listed as follows: (1) church drift, (2) thinking process is a Mammoth Shift, (3) Simple is Reproducible, (4) Simple Requires Aligned Staffing, (5) Simple is wise stewardship, and (6) Simple Creates Space for Missional. A strength is that it provides six lessons learned that are not discussed in the initial *Simple Church* book. A weakness is that the updated edition still lacks a step-by-step example of a simple church discipleship plan implemented in a church with before and after results. This book could apply to people that have read the original *Simple Church* book written in 2006, but it does not provide a step-by-step example of a simple church discipleship plan implemented in a church.

Rainer wrote, *I am a Church Member: Discovering the attitude that Makes the Difference* in 2013. This book shares the biblical basis for membership that can be found in I Corinthians 12. The book shares that members of churches must refrain from gossip, and they must refrain from making the church about their preferences and desires. Furthermore, members must pray for their pastors. A strength of this book is that it shares church member’s expectations. The weakness of the book is that while there is a focus on membership, Rainer does not provide a

discipleship plan suited for a Simple Church. This book could be given to church members and prospective church members so that they know what is expected of them.

*Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* was written by Rainer in 2014. Rainer's aim was to share twelve ways to keep a church alive. He shares common characteristics of churches that died including, but not limited to, a lack of prayer and a lack of purpose. He clarifies by saying, "As the church lost her purpose, she slowly but surely began to die. The process was typically lengthy, but death did come. A church without a gospel-centered purpose is no longer a church at all."<sup>46</sup> A strength of this book is that it shares specific ways to keep the church one attends alive. A weakness is that the book fails to show an example of a church that transitions to a simple discipleship plan to make disciples. The book can help church members that attend churches where there is a current decline or plateau.

Rainer wrote *I Will: Nine Traits on the Outwardly Focused Christian* in 2015. The purpose of the book is that Christians would be outwardly focused. This book shares nine traits of the outwardly focused Christian. The book *Simple Church* is never mentioned, but reference is made to the worship service, small groups, and serving. Rainer provides biblical rationale and illustrations as to why a church member should be involved in these growth opportunities. When it comes to being involved in groups, Rainer writes,

Those church members who became involved in some type of group in the churches were five times more likely to be active in the church five years later compared to the worship-only attenders. (We did not include those who moved to another community, became incapacitated, or died in the dropout category.) I had to check the results a second time. They were astounding. More than 83% of those who joined and were involved in a small group were still active in the churches. But only 16% of those who attended worship services only remained in the churches five years later.

---

<sup>46</sup> Thom Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 75.

A strength of the book is that it shows the statistical rationale for the importance of being involved in a small group. A weakness is that it emphasizes nine traits, which is a lot to cover. This book can help Christians that want to become more outwardly focused, but it does not show the pastor how to create a plan for the overall church.

*Becoming a Welcoming Church* was written by Rainer in 2018. This book's intent is to share characteristics of a church that is welcoming to new people. This book talks about the awkwardness of the meet and greet time and how it would benefit a church to remove this. It also states that church attendees must break up the "holy-huddle" and greet new people as it is entirely possible to attend a church where no one talks to you. An up-to-date website is critical for new people to attend a church. It was shared that 7 out of 10 church visitors look up the website before they attend the church. A church should also mention a safe space for children on the church website. Lastly, the book states that a welcome center is also critical in assimilation. The strength of this book is that it provides church leaders with information that would be helpful in welcoming new people to the church. A weakness is that it does not cover how to verbalize a church-wide discipleship plan to a congregation. This book is applicable to church leaders that want to welcome and retain first time guests .

Rainer wrote *We Want You Here* in 2018. The intent of this book was to share that what keeps some people from attending church is the false assumption that to attend, one must be perfect. This book shares that on Facebook, people project a perfect personal image. Rarely do people share the pain in their lives. This view of perfection can keep people from attending church as some may think, "if I just have these areas of my life put together, then I will come to church." Rainer encourages people to come to church just as they are. He shares from personal experience the benefits he received from being a church dropout, to attending a worship service,

and being in a small group with several men in the church. Rainer stresses that the church is made up of broken, imperfect people, and the church desires to reach out and minister to them. A strength of this book is that it shares what keeps some people from attending church. A weakness is that it does not provide a specific growth plan for the church. This book is for church leaders to understand why some people are not comfortable attending church. It is also for people that believe that they need to be perfect before they can attend church.

*Scrappy Church* was written by Rainer in 2018. This book is intended to provide encouragement to pastors that are not leading a mega-church. This book is also intended to provide direction to churches that are not growing. Rainer offers encouragement to pastors and church leaders that want to experience turnaround in their churches. Three points are mentioned on this turnaround cycle: (1) outward deluge, (2) welcome readiness, and (3) backdoor closure. The first point on the turnaround cycle is “outward deluge,” or an intentionality about reaching the community. The second point on the turnaround cycle is “welcome readiness.” This section also mentions the importance of having a good website that includes the worship service times and the address of the church. The third point on the turnaround cycle is “backdoor closure.” Rainer writes of a pastor that led a turnaround: “He would speak from the pulpit and in informal conversations about the importance of community groups, of being involved in a ministry through the church, and of being a joyful giver.”<sup>47</sup> A strength of the book is that it provides pastors that are not pastoring mega-churches with three areas of focus. A weakness is that it does not provide a step-by-step example of a simple church discipleship plan implemented in a church. This book’s audience accounts for more than 99 percent of pastors in America, since they do not pastor mega-churches.

---

<sup>47</sup> Thom Rainer, *Scrappy Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 89.

The first section of this Literature Review is the Thom Rainer Literature Review. This section was organized into three subsections: (1) overview of Rainer's life, (2) *Simple Church*, and (3) sampling of Rainer's works arranged by the year the book was written. My intent in looking at the works of Rainer was to find a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan implemented in a congregation. However, I was not able to find this. Therefore, a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan implemented in a congregation is needed. I will now look to the Eric Geiger Literature Review for a step-by-step example.

#### Eric Geiger Literature Review

The second section is the Eric Geiger Literature Review. This section is organized into three subsections: (1) overview of Geiger's life, (2) sampling of Geiger's works arranged by the year the books were written, and (3) an email from Eric Geiger's office. My intent in looking at the works of Eric Geiger is to find specific steps in how to transition to a Simple Church discipleship plan.

#### **Overview of Eric Geiger's Life**

Eric Geiger is the co-author of *Simple Church*. Eric Geiger graduated from Louisiana Tech and then went on to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, where he earned his master's degree and his doctorate. He has had experience as an Executive Pastor at Christ Fellowship in Miami, Florida, and he was also a Vice President at LifeWay. Today, he is the Senior Pastor of the Mariners Church in Southern California.

In the book *Simple Church*, the authors share the story of how Geiger, as a student, came into Rainer's office with unusual excitement. Geiger shared the results of his findings on church growth, namely that there is a connection between church growth and having a simple process to

make disciples. Since Geiger is the originator of the idea, it would be beneficial to look at his works for steps.

### **Sampling of Geiger's Works**

*Simple Student Ministry* was written by Eric Geiger and Jeff Borton in 2009. The aim of this book was to advocate *Simple Church* at the youth ministry level. This book was written three years after *Simple Church* was written and shares an opening story of a youth pastor that holds an all-nighter for the youth group. The youth pastor is exhausted and wants to spend time with his young son, but he also does not have his lesson finished for Sunday. The author makes the point that there must be a better way in youth ministry for making disciples than simply having a full calendar. The four elements that are covered are clarity, movement, alignment and focus. The book also argues for the “what” and the “how.” Towards the end of the book, the authors try to help youth pastors and leaders articulate their “what” and their “how.” The strength of the book is encouraging worn out youth workers that there is a better way to do youth ministry. A weakness of the book is that it was not as simple as it could have been. *Simple Student Ministry* could be improved by encouraging small groups immediately following the Worship Service for teenagers. The small group discussion could be based on the “sermon” given to students at the Youth Worship Service. I believe a simple diagram, as seen below, would help youth pastors better design a simple and clear discipleship plan.

What		How
Love God	through	Worship Service
Love People	through	Small Groups
Serve the World	through	Ministry Teams.

This book would help youth workers in the church and para-church ministry understand the need to transition to a Simple Church model for youth ministry.

Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation wrote *Transformational Discipleship: How people really grow* in 2012. The purpose of the book is to share that there is a lack of transformation in the church among Christians. However, the goal of church leaders must be spiritual transformation for the congregation. What does this spiritual transformation look like?

The authors write,

The Life Way Research team discovered that certain factors are at work in the lives of believers who are progressing in spiritual maturity. We refer to them as the attributes of discipleship.

1. Bible Engagement
2. Obeying God and Denying Self
3. Serving God and Others
4. Sharing Christ
5. Exercising Faith
6. Seeking God
7. Building Relationships
8. Unashamed

The eight attributes are biblical factors that consistently show up in the life of a maturing believer.<sup>48</sup>

The sweet spot of believers being transformed is when there is the intersection of truth, healthy leaders, and a posture of dependence on Christ and other believers. The strength of the book is that it identifies the eight attributes that need to be in the life of a growing Christian. The weakness of the book is that it does not cover an overall discipleship plan for a church. This book is helpful to understand individual Christian growth attributes in a growing Christian.

*Creature of the Word: The Jesus-Centered Church* was written by Matt Chandler, Josh Patterson, and Eric Geiger in 2012. The authors' intention was to define characteristics of a Jesus-centered church. This book focuses on the characteristics of a Jesus-centered church. A

---

<sup>48</sup> Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 59.

Christian in a Jesus-centered church will worship, be in community, serve and multiply. Other topics are mentioned, including preaching, leadership, committees, contextualization, and ministry. The strength of the book is sharing what a Jesus-centered church would look like. The weakness of the book is that it lacks an implementation guide for a simple discipleship plan. This book is for pastors that desire to see their church centered on Jesus.

Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger wrote *Transformational Groups* in 2014. When the book was written, both authors served LifeWay Publishers. The intent of this book was to show the importance of being involved in small groups. Even though they were both extremely busy, they chose to continue investing their time in leading small groups because they saw how important community is in the life of a Christian. This book lists disappointments when it comes to small groups. First, many churches had no one that was overseeing what was taught in the small group. Second, people were more interested in personal comfort than they were in correction. Third, people tended to have an inward focus as opposed to an outward focus. The authors state that growth happens through community. They write,

Scripture constantly paints the picture for us that growth happens in community, and there we see the eternal value. Growth happens in community because the Bible places community as a critical step of obedience for the Christ follower. So, the Christ follower outside of community is living in disobedience. Community is assumed-if I am out of community, I am out of God's will.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, in heaven we will be in community. This book also focuses on the right leaders and the right discipleship practices that small groups should engage in. The strength of this book is the rationale for why Christians need to be involved in a small group. This book would be helpful to pastors that want to transition the church where they serve to having greater emphasis

---

<sup>49</sup> Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger, *Transformational Groups* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2104), 15.

and involvement in small groups; however, it is not enough for a pastor wanting to do a full *Simple Church* paradigm.

*Designed to Lead* was written by Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck in 2016. The purpose of the book is identifying what it takes for local churches in America to develop leaders. First, churches must have a conviction to develop leaders. The book argues that if you do not have a conviction to develop leaders, it will not happen. Second, churches must have a healthy culture to develop leaders. The authors define culture by stating, “Culture is the shared beliefs and values that drive the behavior of a group of people.”<sup>50</sup> Third, a church must have a construct; in other words—systems to develop leaders. Geiger writes, “Sadly, in many churches there is no plan. In every church research study, I (Eric) have been involved with, the lack of intentionality in most churches has been painfully obvious. In *Simple Church*, we found that most churches have no process of discipling people.”<sup>51</sup> A plan is necessary to develop leaders. Finally, conviction, culture, and constructs are all fundamental in developing leaders in the local church. A strength of this book is that it shares what must be in place for a church to develop leaders. The weakness is that it does not provide steps for integrating a discipleship plan for leaders. This book is appropriate for pastors and church leaders that want to develop leaders in the context of their church.

### **Email from Eric Geiger**

I wrote to Dr. Eric Geiger about additional work done on *Simple Church*. His administrative assistant replied:

Hi Jeff,  
Hope you are having a great day and congratulations on your DMIN at Liberty University! My name is Dawn Marraccino and I have the privilege of being Eric’s

---

<sup>50</sup> Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 15.

<sup>51</sup> Geiger & Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 181.

assistant at Mariners Church (I am also a fellow Liberty Alumni). Due to the number of emails Eric receives I answer many of them, I hope you don't mind. Eric is grateful that you reached out and that *Simple Church* has been useful to your ministry and impactful to you.

Unfortunately, no additional research was done after the book and it's not presented in another place. I'm sorry I'm not able to get you the information you need. But again, so grateful you took the time to reach out and share about how *Simple Church* has influenced you and your ministry.

Warmest Regards,

Dawn Marraccino  
Executive Assistant to Eric Geiger  
Mariners Church  
5001 Newport Coast Drive  
Irvine, CA 92603  
949-769-8206<sup>52</sup>

This email clearly shows there is still a need for material that addresses the problem at Greenhouse Community Church.

The second section is the Eric Geiger Literature Review. My intent in looking at the works of Eric Geiger was to find a step by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan implemented in a congregation. However, I was not able to find one. Therefore, a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan implemented in a congregation is still needed. I will now turn to Dissertations and Denominational Literature.

#### Dissertations, Journal Articles, and Denominational Literature Review

The third section consists of dissertations produced at seminaries, journal articles, and denominational literature. This section is organized into three subsections: (1) dissertations written on *Simple Church*, (2) journal articles related to *Simple Church*, and (3) denominational literature. My intent in looking at dissertations, journal articles, and denominational literature is

---

<sup>52</sup> Dawn Marraccino, Dr. Eric Geiger's assistant responded to my email in 2018.

to find a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan implemented in a congregation, and the next logical step would be to look in seminary literature.

### **Dissertations**

Craig A. Webb wrote a Doctor of Ministry Thesis Project titled *Equipping Active Deacons to Implement the Simple Church Process at Gladeville Baptist Church, Gladeville, Tennessee*. The aim of Webb's dissertation was to provide the deacons of the church where he served with an understanding of the book *Simple Church*. Webb served on staff at this church and was also a Doctor of Ministry Student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. The church where he served wanted to transition to a Simple Church as defined by Rainer and Geiger. Because the leadership needed to be on board, Webb chose to meet with deacons on a Friday night and conduct three sessions of training with a pre-test and a post-test. The strength of this dissertation was that it helped church leaders better understand the Simple Church process. There were three weaknesses, though. First, the sample size of Craig Webb's dissertation was too small. He gave a pre-test to only eight deacons. Second, the dissertation was focused on only eight church deacons rather than the congregation. Third, the manner in which Webb taught *Simple Church* to the deacons was an antithesis of *Simple Church*. The information was presented in a one-night event for church deacons. *Simple Church* encourages moving away from one-time events to ongoing small groups. This dissertation would be helpful for pastors who want to help deacons better understand the concepts of *Simple Church* but stopped short of communicating to the congregation.

Debra M. Douglas wrote a Doctor of Educational Ministry Dissertation titled *Equipping Lifeway Ministry Multipliers to Train Women's Ministry Leaders in Transitioning to and*

*Leading in the Simple Church Model*. Douglas' intention was to transition women's ministry leaders to the *Simple Church* model. She provides women with an understanding of *Simple Church* with a pre-test and post-test. The strength of the dissertation is that it took a process and tried a specific implementation on women's ministry leaders. The weakness of this dissertation is that Douglas writes of events in women's ministry. Again, the *Simple Church* model intends to move away from events and have ongoing small groups instead. This was a failure to properly understand the Simple Church Model. Furthermore, she failed to share specific results of improvement from the pre-test to the post-test.

### **Journal Articles**

"Church is simple. No really" is a journal article written by Angie Ward in *Leadership Journal*. The aim of this journal article is to summarize *Simple Church* by Rainer and Geiger. Ward mentions the four components of *Simple Church*. The strength of her journal article is that she condenses the book down into a journal article. She also interacts with the book and argues that church growth could wrongly be assumed to be spiritual growth. She also believes that the implementation of *Simple Church* is not really that easy. The weakness of this journal article is that it fails to give a step-by-step example of how to implement the book. The book would be very applicable, as she writes for church leaders that are overwhelmed with complexity in the churches where they lead.

Another significant journal article is "Books for ministry" in *Christian Century*. This journal article has seven church leaders identify books that have been helpful to them in their ministry. The strength of the journal article is that it provides a short, simple synopsis of helpful books. One church pastor in the journal article, identifies *Simple Church* as a helpful book. In this journal article, he provides a very brief overview of the book. The weakness of this journal

article is that it does not provide an implementation guide for developing a simple discipleship plan. This journal article applies to church leaders that see the benefits to a simple discipleship plan.

### **Denominational Literature**

Christian A. Schwarz wrote *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Church*. The intention of this book is to share eight essential qualities that a healthy church should have. The findings of Schwarz's research have been used around the world. The Christian and Missionary Alliance in the United States and Canada have used his work to help revitalize churches and help them experience numerical growth. The strength of the book is that it provides eight essential qualities that characterize a healthy church. The weakness with *Natural Church Development* is that it has eight essentials. For a church that is struggling with decline and plateau, these eight qualities can be overwhelming. Furthermore, it lacks a step-by-step example of a simple church discipleship plan implemented in a church. This book would be helpful to church leaders of a declining or plateaued congregation who see qualities that their church is lacking. Caution is needed that the reader not be overwhelmed with so many qualities that an attempt at implementation is overwhelming and complex.

Terry Smith wrote, *Changing Course: Leading Older Churches in a New Direction*. Terry Smith is now Vice President for Church Ministry for the Christian and Missionary Alliance of the United States. His intent is to help older congregations that are in decline experience growth. Smith addresses the typical areas that must be addressed if a church is to be revitalized and grow again. Smith writes, "Many churches can be turned around, but it takes time, prayer, persistence, patience, and some key strategic changes made in the right way."<sup>53</sup> He

---

<sup>53</sup> Terry Smith, *Changing Course* (Church Smart Resources, 2014), 13.

also writes of the importance of the right leader. The right leader will be a pastor that is gifted in public speaking, easily engages others in conversation, and is willing to put in upwards of 60 hours a week. Smith is helpful in that he gives an objective standard for when a church is being revitalized. He says that when churches start winning souls for Christ, they are revitalized. The strength of the book is that it provides case studies of older and declining churches that reversed that decline and experienced numerical growth. This encourages pastors that it is possible to see growth in congregations that are older and have declined. The weakness of the book is that it does not outline the how-to of developing a discipleship plan. The audience of this book would be pastors that are pastoring older and declining congregations that desire to see numerical and evangelistic growth.

*Parkway Fellowship Celebrating 75 Years* was written by Norma Delavan in 2012. The purpose of this booklet was to provide a history of Parkway Fellowship, now called Greenhouse Community Church of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. The church started in Houston, Texas in June of 1937. The book shares historical benchmarks of the church, as well as a listing of the names of the pastors and when they served the church. One pastor had a gift in discipleship. Under another pastor, double services were introduced. Rev. David Seckinger, Pastor from 1994-2008, started small groups. No mention is ever made of the church having a discipleship plan. The strength of this booklet is that it provides a detailed history of the church. The weakness of the booklet is that it does not mention any discipleship plan that the church adopted. This booklet is helpful to people that have attended the church over the eighty-year history of the church.

The third section consists of dissertations, journal articles, and denominational literature. This section was organized into three subsections: (1) dissertations written on *Simple Church*, (2)

journal articles, and (3) denominational literature. My intent in looking at dissertations, journal articles, and denominational literature was to find a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan implemented in a congregation. However, I was not able to find this kind of source. Therefore, a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan implemented in a congregation is still needed.

#### Church Growth Literature Review of Pastors and Consultants

The fourth section consists of general church growth books. This section is organized into two subsections, (1) Church Growth books written by pastors and (2) Church Growth books written by consultants. The selected church growth books share one of the three steps of *Simple Church*. The first step is to Love God through Worship Services. The second step is to Love People through Small Groups. The third step is to Serve the World through Ministry Teams. These church growth books may also share one of the four elements of *Simple Church*, namely (1) clarity, (2) movement, (3) alignment, and (4) focus. My intent is to find a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan implemented in a congregation.

#### **Church Growth Books Written by Pastors**

*Visioneering* was written in 1999 by Andy Stanley, founding pastor of Northpoint Community Church in Alpharetta, Georgia. The intent of the book is to look at Nehemiah's life as a leader and make applications from his life to our lives. Stanley states, "A vision is always a solution to a problem. It addresses a felt or perceived need. Can you state your vision or visions succinctly? If given the opportunity, could you communicate convincingly, in one sentence, exactly what you feel God is calling you to do?"<sup>54</sup> The strength of this book is that it helps an individual understand God's vision for his or her life. The weakness is that discipleship as

---

<sup>54</sup> Andy Stanley, *Visioneering* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc, 1999), 89.

presented in this book is more personal than it is church wide. Stanley has written several books for pastors and churches, such as *7 Practices of Effective Ministry* and *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend*, but none could be used as an implementation guide for Simple Church.

*Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests into Fully-Engaged Members of Your Church* by Nelson Searcy with Jennifer Dykes Henson. Searcy's aim is to provide a plan for churches to move first time guests to active members of the church. Searcy writes of starting a church in New York City that started with over one hundred people, but week by week, it declined. He then focuses on follow-up with first-time guests at the worship service by writing them a hand-written note and including a gift card. He shares the results:

Oh, what happened at The Journey after my little conversation with God? Well, from the low point of 35 in August of 2002, we grew to a weekly average of 110 by November of the same year. The next November, we broke 300 for the first time. By November 2004, we had grown to over 500; and by November 2006, we were at over 1,000 in attendance, with an average of 35 first-time guests each week.<sup>55</sup>

The strength of the book is that it is practical in giving examples of writing notes to visitors. The weakness of the book is that it does not discuss how to increase the number of visitors to one's church. This book would help church planters and any church that does not have an assimilation plan in place.

*Deliberate Simplicity* was written by Dave Browning. The author's purpose is to show that a new church plant with little money can grow. This book is like *Simple Church* in that it proposes a very simple focus for a local church. Browning shares this example:

Before Steve Mason agreed to pastor County Christian Center in Laurel, Washington, he had a few stipulations. He made the group of fifty adults commit

---

<sup>55</sup> Nelson Searcy, *Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests into Fully-Engaged Members of Your Church* (Ventura, California: Regal, 2007), 23.

that the church would focus its energies on three things, and three things only. He asked them to agree that the church would focus on

1. Worship
2. Small Groups
3. Outreach<sup>56</sup>

The strength of this book is that it shows how a church can start with very little startup funding; e.g., less than five thousand dollars. Another strength is that it is very simple. A weakness of this book is the potential possibility for doctrinal error. To promote small groups, Browning gives an example of getting people to join a small group when the church was meeting at an Elk's Lodge. He told the people that wanted to join a new small group to meet under the Moose head after the service. When they did so, he just appointed a leader. He had no idea of this leader's doctrinal background. A better name for the book would be *Deliberate Simplicity for the Small Church Plant*. This book would be very applicable to the new church plant that does not have the advantage of significant funding.

*The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission* was written by Rick Warren, the founder of Saddleback Church in Southern California. The aim of this book was that churches would become purpose driven as opposed to program driven. Rick Warren writes that there are five purposes of the church. Purpose #1 is to "Love the Lord with all your heart." Purpose #2 is to "Love your Neighbor as yourself." Purpose #3 is to "Go and Make Disciples." Purpose #4 is "Baptizing them." Purpose #5 is "Teaching them to obey." This book was revolutionary because many churches were program driven. The strength of the book was that it provided a guide as to what churches should be doing. The weakness of the book is that it did not specifically share how a church should be doing the purposes. As one of my former staff members shared, "Just about any activity in the church could be justified under Rick Warren's

---

<sup>56</sup> Dave Browning, *Deliberate Simplicity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 35.

purposes.” Specificity is needed. This book would be helpful to church planters since Rick Warren shares the story of the church he planted in Southern California.

Kevin Myers wrote *Home Run: Learn God’s Game Plan for Life and Leadership*.

The author’s purpose in this book is to encourage people struggling with a lack of direction. He shares his experience as a struggling church planter in the suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia. He studied the life of Joseph in the Old Testament and uses the baseball diamond as an illustration of how to win in life. He used this baseball diamond to teach his people how to grow and shared that the church grew dramatically after his understanding of character development. Today, his church is the largest Wesleyan Church in the United States. The strength of this book is that it provides people with a direction for their lives. The weakness of this book is that it does not provide a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan in a church. The book would be helpful for people and organizations that lack direction.

Craig Groeschel wrote *It*. The reason the author wrote this book is to describe churches that have growth and momentum. Groeschel writes about the importance of focus. He states,

If you aren’t interested in having it, take on a lot of ministries. The more a church does, the less likely they are to have it. Why? Because it is impossible to have 187 effective ministries in one church. It’s challenging to have three very effective ministries. Many great businesses understand this principle. One example is In-N-Out Burger. Not only is their food delicious, but the chain is also very profitable. They offer only a few items.<sup>57</sup>

Groeschel makes the argument of seven principles that are characteristic of churches with momentum and growth. They are “vision, divine focus, unmistakable camaraderie, innovative minds, willingness to fall short, hearts focused outward, and kingdom-mindedness.”<sup>58</sup> The strength of this book is that it helps church leaders understand the characteristics of churches

---

<sup>57</sup> Craig Groeschel, *It* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2008), 59.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

with growth and momentum. The weakness of this book is that, like the other pastoral sources in the review, there is ambiguity in the implementation of the principles described. So, resources from church growth consultants will be explored.

### **Church Growth Books Written by Consultants**

Robert Coleman wrote *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. The reason he wrote the book was to share the plan that Jesus Christ used to make disciples. The book is broken down into eight chapters that focus on the plan of Jesus to make disciples. The strength of the book is that it reviews gospel accounts of how Jesus discipled people. The weakness of the book is that it does not provide a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan implemented in a church. The most interesting part was an interview with Billy Graham. During the conversation, Graham shared that if he were a pastor, he would spend a couple of years with approximately twelve people and then have those twelve invest in the lives of others. This book is helpful for pastors and church leaders, since the author of the book interviews Billy Graham about how he would spend his time if he was the Senior Pastor of a church.

Elmer Towns authored *The Ten Most Influential Churches of the Past Century: How They Impact You Today*. Towns shares the histories of these unique churches. One of the churches he mentions is The Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea. This church focuses on the cell group, or what people in the United States might call the small group. Towns writes about the Senior Pastor's focus: "During his recuperation, Cho came up with a plan to use small cells, placed strategically in every part of the city, to reach and nurture people for Jesus Christ."<sup>59</sup> After the Worship Service, small groups are the major focus of *Simple Church*.

---

<sup>59</sup> Elmer Towns, *The Ten Most Influential Churches of the Past Century: How they impact you today* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2014), 70.

*Becoming a Healthy Church: Ten Traits of a Vital Ministry* was written in 1999 by Stephen A. Macchia. The purpose of the book was to help pastors understand the ten traits of a healthy church. The spiritual soil in New England could best be described as “rocky,” using Jesus’ parable about the soil. There seems to be a spiritual renewal that has come to churches in New England. Macchia identifies ten common traits that these churches share, including “Learning and Growing in Community” and “A Commitment to Loving and Caring Relationships.”<sup>60</sup> The strength of this book is that it provides traits that are necessary for a church to become healthy. The weakness of the book is that it does not provide step-by-step examples of a simple discipleship plan implemented in a church. This book would be helpful for pastors that are ministering in a hostile or indifferent environment to Christianity.

Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson wrote *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too*, in 2007. The aim of this book is to help church leaders understand how declining and plateaued churches can make a comeback and grow again. This book lists several comeback factors, including “Connecting People through Small Groups.”<sup>61</sup> The strength of this book is that it lists several comeback factors. The weakness of this book is that it fails to mention a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan implemented in a church. This book would be helpful to pastors and church leaders leading churches that are experiencing decline or plateau.

*Pursuing the Dream of Organic Christianity Reimagining Church* was written by Frank Viola in 2008. The purpose of this book is to share a vision of community and leadership in the context of the house church. Viola argues against the traditional church and the megachurch.

---

<sup>60</sup> Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church: Ten Traits of a Vital Ministry* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 7.

<sup>61</sup> Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), vii.

Instead, he believes in the “house church.” The strength of this book is that it shares what a fully functioning bible based small group could look like. The weakness of this book is that it provides a discipleship model based in a house church or small group environment while neglecting to provide a discipleship plan for any church that is medium or large. Furthermore, it lacks a step-by-step example of a simple church discipleship plan implemented in a church. This book could help small group leaders and pastors with a vision of what a small group could look like.

Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey wrote *Disciple Making Is...: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence*. The purpose of the book is making disciples in the context of a small group. This book argues that disciples are those who obey everything Jesus taught. The strength of the book is that it offers some very practical advice. The book shares a specific way to lead a small group.

#### Sample Weekly Group Agenda

WELCOME: 6:50-7:20 p.m.\*

Informal greeting: 6:50-7:05

Icebreakers: 7:05-7:20

WORSHIP: 7:20-7:30 p.m.

WORD: 7:30-8:00 p.m.

WORKS: 8:00-8:20 p.m.\*\*

WITNESS: 8:20-8:30 p.m.

\*You should start at 6:00 p.m. with a shared meal at least once a month.

\*\*Gender-specific accountability groups of two or three<sup>62</sup>

The weakness of the book is that it lacks a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan implemented in a church. This book would be applicational for pastors trying to train small group leaders in a simple method to lead a small group.

Carl F. George and Warren Bird wrote *How to Break Growth Barriers: Capturing Overlooked Opportunities for Church Growth*. The aim of this book is to share how to break

---

<sup>62</sup> Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 151.

several church growth numerical barriers, including the 200 barrier, the 400 barrier, and the 800 barrier. The authors break this book down into three parts: “Part 1: Identify Your Vision. Part 2: Learn How to Ranch. Part 3: Break Specific Growth Barriers.” In Part 1, the authors share the importance of the “what” and the “how” of vision. They write,

Second, know how God wants it done. Numerous Old Testament accounts illustrate that God not only told his children what he wanted them to do, but he frequently told them how to do it. The procedures for constructing the ark, the tabernacle, and many other elements of God’s plan were spelled out in enormous detail. The how was very significant.<sup>63</sup>

In Part 2, the authors make the argument that to see a church move beyond the 200-person barrier, the pastor must transition from being a shepherd to being a rancher. A strength of this book is that it helps readers understand how to break church growth numerical barriers. A second strength is that it provides a reader with an understanding of vision, in that someone must not only understand what God has called them to do, but also how He is calling him or her to carry out what he or she is called to do. A weakness of the book is that it does not provide a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan. This book would be helpful to pastors trying to understand how to break numerical church growth barriers in the church where they pastor.

Gary L. McIntosh wrote *Biblical Church Growth* in 2003. He argues that there are nine principles that are essential if a church is to experience growth and vitality. McIntosh shares a church that has recorded over 300 decisions for Christ in one year, and yet the church worship attendance was only 85 people.<sup>64</sup> He writes,

This church was following the first two principles of biblical church growth but had neglected the third. They did not have the right process-discipleship! Simply stated, “life-giving churches make disciples by finding the lost, folding them into

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>64</sup> Gary L. McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth: How you can work with God to build a faithful church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2003), 62.

the body, and building them up in the faith. They balance their disciple-making process around the three elements of evangelism, assimilation, and maturation.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, McIntosh believed that the reason the church did not grow larger was because the church lacked a discipleship process. McIntosh also argues for the importance of a plan in experiencing biblical church growth. A strength of this book is that it shares nine principles that are essential for biblical church growth. A weakness is that it fails to mention a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan implemented in a church. This book would be helpful for pastors in evaluating their ministry in comparison to the nine principles for biblical church growth that McIntosh shared.

*The American Church in Crisis* was written by David T. Olson. The purpose of the book is to share that the American Church is in crisis. He writes that when a congregation has an older membership, an older Senior Pastor, and the church is over 40 years old, it is likely to be in decline. Olson shares the problem, but he also shares the solution to the problem. He writes about three components of a thriving church, which are spirituality, chemistry, and strategy.<sup>66</sup> He states, “The third leg of the stool is strategy, a process of sequential actions that produce fruitful ministry in line with God-directed goals.”<sup>67</sup> The strength of this book is that it shares three components of a thriving church. The weakness is that it does not share a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan implemented in a congregation. This book would help pastors of a declining or a plateaued church understand the three components necessary to seeing growth and vitality.

---

<sup>65</sup> Gary L. McIntosh, 62.

<sup>66</sup> David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 2008), 136.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

For this portion of the review, close to a dozen well-known consultants were reviewed; however, none have produced a solution to the problem facing Greenhouse Community Church. Another dozen experts could be reviewed, but with the same results. A lot of advice and principles get covered but the writers stop short of outlining specific steps to transition a congregation to a Simple Church discipleship model.

The fourth section was the General Church Growth Books Literature Review. This section was organized into two subsections, (1) church growth books written by pastors, and (2) church growth books written by consultants. My intent in looking at a Church Growth Review of the Literature was to find a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan implemented in a congregation. However, I was not able to find this. Therefore, a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan implemented in a congregation is needed.

The second chapter was a review of the literature and was organized into two foundations: (1) Theological Foundations, and (2) Theoretical Foundations. It is important to be biblically based and not just pragmatic. So, a theological foundation was laid. From there, a more practical framework was formed. In the second part, I moved from specific literature written by the authors of *Simple Church* to more general church growth literature. My journey mirrored the path any pastor would take to discover resources. My intent was to find a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan implemented in a congregation. However, I was unable to find a step-by-step example in the review of literature. Therefore, a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan must be generated. This leads to Chapter 3, where a methodological approach to generating a step-by-step example of a Simple Church discipleship plan will be shared.

## Chapter 3

### Research Methodology

According to Tim Sensing, “DMin projects are not designed just to understand phenomena but to provide the minister an opportunity to impart pastoral leadership that implements change.”<sup>68</sup> The goal of the research is intervention. Following this paradigm, Chapter 3 is organized into two sections. The first section is the intervention design. The second section is the implementation of the intervention design.

### Intervention Design

The problem as stated in Chapter 1 is that Greenhouse Community Church did not have a simple, clear discipleship plan. This situation led the researcher on a journey to find a published solution to the problem.

Chapter 2 was a review of literature. The review of literature has shown that although Thom Rainer has written books that touch on the Simple Church process, he never created a step-by-step example of a simple church discipleship plan implemented in a church with before and after results. While Eric Geiger developed a Process Design Survey to help church leaders understand how simple and streamlined their respective churches were, he never wrote a step-by-step implementation guide to help churches implement *Simple Church*. The review of literature also covered dissertations on Simple Church as well as church growth resources that emphasize a discipleship plan. However, none of this literature was adequate to achieve the goals of the research project as outlined in Chapter 1.

---

<sup>68</sup> Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 63.

So, if the literature does not exist, how can the needed data be gathered and analyzed? The answer is a valid and reliable research project. Traditionally, research projects can have a qualitative design, a quantitative design, or a mixture of both.

First, qualitative research will be explained and evaluated. Creswell defines qualitative research below:

Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures; collecting data in the participants' setting; analyzing the data inductively, building from particulars to general themes; and making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible writing structure.<sup>69</sup>

Simply stated, qualitative research is open-ended. Tim Sensing writes, "Qualitative methods are preferred for DMIN projects."<sup>70</sup> The strength of qualitative research is that it allows the participant to express feelings, opinions, and thoughts. The weakness of qualitative research is that it can be perceived as too subjective.

Second, quantitative research will be explained and evaluated. Tim Sensing quotes Patton on the difference between qualitative and quantitative research.

Validity in quantitative research depends on careful instrument construction to ensure that the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. The instrument must then be administered in an appropriate, standardized manner according to prescribed procedures. The focus is on the measuring instrument – the test items, survey questions, or other measurement tools. In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument.<sup>71</sup>

Therefore, Sensing believes that in qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument. Whereas in quantitative research, the measurement tool is the instrument. Creswell defines quantitative research as follows:

---

<sup>69</sup> John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Fifth Edition Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (London: SAGE Publications, Inc. 2018), 250.

<sup>70</sup> Sensing, 62.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 220. (Quotes Patton, Qualitative Research), 14.

Quantitative research is means for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. These variables can be measured, typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analyzed using statistical procedures. The final written report has a set structure consisting of introduction, literature and theory, methods, results, and discussion.<sup>72</sup>

Simply stated, quantitative research is closed-ended. The strength of quantitative research is that it can provide the researcher with hard, objective data. The weakness of quantitative research is it can provide the researcher with an incomplete narrative that looks at objective numbers without an adequate understanding of participants' feelings, opinions and thoughts.

A third possibility is a mixed methods approach. Creswell defines a mixed method approach when he writes,

Mixed methods research is an approach to inquiry that combines or integrates both qualitative and quantitative forms of research. It involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the mixing or integrating of both approaches in a study.<sup>73</sup>

More recent research designs have sought to combine qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Tim Sensing writes, "My biases lean towards project theses that are qualitative in nature, but a multi-methods approach is flexible enough to use quantitative tools."<sup>74</sup> The rationale behind this approach is that it allows the researcher to maximize the strengths of the respective methodology and minimize the weaknesses of individual research methodology. Furthermore, by using a mixed methodology, the researcher can verify the research finding with the other research methodology. For this research project, the researcher will use a mixed methodology because it will best address the actual problem.

The qualitative methods used for this research project will include the focus group, the sermon based small group, and the interviews. These qualitative methods were chosen to give the

---

<sup>72</sup> Creswell, 250.

<sup>73</sup> Creswell, 249.

<sup>74</sup> Sensing, 50.

researcher an adequate understanding of the participants' feelings, opinions, and thoughts. The ingredients for the focus group, the sermon-based small group, and the interview can be seen in detail in the implementation of the intervention design.

The quantitative methods used for this research project include an anonymous pre-test and an anonymous post-test. The ingredients for the anonymous pre-test and anonymous post-test can be seen in detail in the implementation of the intervention design.

At its core, this research project is an intervention. Now that the intervention design has been covered, the ingredients of the intervention design can be seen in detail under the second section, titled, "Implementation of the Intervention Design."

### **Implementation of the Intervention Design**

The second section is organized into eight tasks: (1) Focus Group, (2) Anonymous Pre-Test Questionnaire (3) Week #1 Intervention with sermon, signups and small group, (4) Week #2 Intervention with sermon, signups, and small group, (5) Week #3 Intervention with sermon, signups, and small group (6) Week #4 Intervention with sermon, signups, and small group (7) Anonymous Post-Test Questionnaire, and (8) Interviews. These eight tasks embody my intervention with the problem.

#### **Focus Group**

**Task 1** is the Focus Group. This phase is organized into eleven ingredients: (1) the purpose and objectives of the project's intervention, (2) the steps to be taken for each task, (3) the people involved, (4) the places where the activities will occur, (5) the timelines and duration of activities, (6) the ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality, (7) the resources required, (8) the types of data that will be collected, (9) the tools for gathering

information needed, (10) protocols for using tools, and (11) the analysis/evaluation procedures and methods required.

The purpose of the focus group is to understand from the leaders of the church if there is a connection between having a simple, clear discipleship plan as shared in *Simple Church* and seeing (1) church growth, (2) increased involvement in small groups, and (3) increased involvement in ministry teams.

The steps for this focus group are as follows: first, send out recruitment letters and consent forms to the leaders of the church. Second, set up the tables, pizza, salad, and dessert in the church's community hall. Third, set up the consent form table, where those who forget to bring their consent form can sign a copy for my records. Fourth, print out copies of the focus group questions. Fifth, set up the video camera to record the words of each person speaking in the focus group. Sixth, welcome the leaders and open the focus group in prayer for the meal. Seventh, pass out the focus group questions and open in prayer for the start of the focus group. Eighth, start video recording the focus group and when the focus group questions have been answered, close the meeting in prayer and stop the video recording. Finally, transcribe the responses to the focus group questions.

The people involved in the focus group were leaders in the church - the elders and their wives, the youth director, and finally, the pastor and his wife. The focus group took place on Wednesday January 2, 2019 in the Community Hall of Greenhouse Community Church. The approximate timeline of the focus group can be seen below:

Meal provided for those in the Focus Group	5:30 p.m.
Start Time of the Focus Group	5:50 p.m.
End Time of the Focus Group	6:30 p.m.

The ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality were shared in the consent form. Please note that a copy of the informed consent and confidentiality statement is included in the thesis project appendices. The required resources were a video camera and a handout with focus group questions. The focus group questions can be seen below:

1. Why do churches grow? What are your thoughts?
2. Do you believe there is a connection between church growth and having a discipleship plan? Explain.
3. How should a believer be discipled?
4. What is Simple Church?
5. How many times have you heard the pastor talk about Simple Church?
6. The three action steps in the discipleship plan at Greenhouse Community Church are to...
  1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
7. What are some reasons why people don't attend a worship service every week?
8. What are some reasons why people don't join a small group?
9. What are some reasons why people don't serve on a ministry team?

The types of data that will be collected for the focus group will be the answers to questions from the focus group. The tool for gathering this information will be a video camera. The recording device will be turned on for the opening prayer to start the focus group. The individual operating the video camera will be instructed to turn the video camera off at the end of the focus group questions and the closing prayer. The data will be analyzed to observe similarities, clarity, and confusion, and the participants will be given pseudonyms.

## Anonymous Pre-Test Questionnaire

**Task 2** is the Anonymous Pre-Test. This phase is organized into twelve ingredients: (1) the purpose and objectives of the project's intervention, (2) the steps to be taken for each task, (3) the people involved, (4) the places where the activities will occur, (5) the timelines and duration of activities, (6) the ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality, (7) the resources required, (8) the types of data that will be collected, (9) the tools for gathering information needed, (10) protocols for using tools, and (11) the analysis/evaluation procedures and methods required.

The purpose of the Anonymous Pre-Test is to understand from the congregation if there is a connection between having a simple, clear discipleship plan as shared in *Simple Church* and seeing (1) increased worship attendance, (2) increased small group involvement, and (3) increased ministry team involvement.

The steps to be taken for this anonymous pre-test are as follows. First, send out recruitment letter and consent form to the congregation of the church. Second, put the anonymous pre-test under the chairs in the Worship Center. Third, place pens in the pockets of the chairs so that the congregation can fill out the anonymous pre-test. Fourth, read consent document and instruct the congregation that if they choose to participate, they will be given five minutes to take the anonymous pre-test. Finally, at the end of the worship service, instruct the congregation that they can put the anonymous pre-test on a back pew near the exit of the Worship Center.

The people involved in the anonymous pre-test were people in the congregation of Greenhouse Community Church. The anonymous pre-test took place on Sunday January 6, 2019

at the 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. worship services in the Worship Center at Greenhouse Community Church. The approximate time of the anonymous pre-test can be seen below:

9:30 AM worship service

Consent form read and instructions given 10:00 a.m.

Conclusion of anonymous pre-test 10:05 a.m.

Anonymous pre-test collection 10:30 a.m.

11:00 AM Worship service

Consent form read and instructions given 11:30 a.m.

Conclusion of anonymous pre-test 11:35 a.m.

Anonymous pre-test collection 12:00 p.m.

The ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality were shared in the consent form. Please note that copies of the informed consent and confidentiality statement are included in the thesis project appendices. The resources required were a photocopy machine and four-page handout including the consent form and anonymous pre-test. The anonymous pre-test questions are below:

#### Pre-test Anonymous Questionnaire

1. Why do churches grow?
2. Do you believe there is a connection between church growth and having a discipleship plan? Explain.
3. How should a believer be discipled?
4. What is Simple Church?
5. How many times have you heard the pastor talk about Simple Church?
6. The Discipleship Plan at Greenhouse Community Church is to...

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

7. I attend a Worship Service...

-Once a month

-Twice a month

-Three times a month

-Every week

8. I currently am involved in a church-sponsored small group

-YES

-NO

-UNABLE

9. If not, why not?

-Too busy

-Not interested

-Not aware of the current listing of church sponsored small groups

10. I currently serve in a ministry team at the church...

-YES

-NO

-UNABLE (because of health/time/season of life, etc....)

The types of data that will be collected for the anonymous pre-test will be the answers to the questions from the anonymous pre-test. The tools for gathering information will be the four-page

handout. The data will be analyzed to see comprehension of the implementation of Simple Church at Greenhouse Community Church.

#### Intervention with Sermons, Signups, and Sermon Based Small Groups

**Task 3** is the Week #1 Intervention with sermon, signups, and small group. This phase is organized into eleven ingredients: (1) the purpose and objectives of the project's intervention, (2) the steps to be taken for each task, (3) the people involved, (4) the places where the activities will occur, (5) the timeline and duration of activities, (6) the ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality, (7) the resources required, (8) the types of data that will be collected, (9) the tools for gathering information needed, (10) protocols for using tools, and (11) the analysis/evaluation procedures and methods required.

The purpose of the Week #1 sermon is to give the congregation at Greenhouse Community Church an overview of the simple, clear discipleship plan at Greenhouse Community Church. The title of the message is "Our Discipleship Plan at GCC." I shared three Action Steps:

Action Step #1: Love God through Worship Services.

Action Step #2: Love People through Small Groups.

Action Step #3: Serve the World through Ministry Teams.

I closed the message by reviewing our Discipleship Plan at Greenhouse Community Church. I also encouraged the congregation to sign up for a small group, and a ministry team in the church lobby. This allowed congregants to be aware of small groups and ministry teams being offered at Greenhouse Community Church. A sermon-based small group took place after the 11:00 a.m. Worship Service.

The steps for this sermon-based small group are as follows: first, send out recruitment letter and consent form to those that have participated in sermon based small groups. Second, set up the tables, pizza, salad, and dessert in the community hall. Third, set up the consent form table, where those who forget to bring their consent form can sign a copy for my records. Fourth, print out copies of the small group questions. Fifth, set up the video camera. Sixth, welcome the participants and open the small group in prayer for the meal. Seventh, pass out the sermon-based small group questions and open in prayer for the start of the sermon-based small group. Eighth, start video recording the sermon-based small group. Ninth, when the sermon-based small group questions have been answered, close the meeting in prayer and stop the video recording. Finally, transcribe the answers to the questions from the Week #1 sermon-based small group.

The people involved in the sermon-based small group were those that participated in sermon-based small groups in the past and decided to be a part of the four-week small group. The Week #1 sermon-based small group took place on Sunday January 6, 2019 in the Community Hall of Greenhouse Community Church. The approximate timeline of the small group can be seen below:

Meal provided for those in the Small Group	12:30 p.m.
Start Time of the Video-recorded Small Group	12:55 p.m.
End Time of the Video-recorded Small Group	1:40 p.m.

The ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality were shared in the consent form. Please note that a copy of the informed consent and confidentiality statement is included in the thesis project appendices. The resources required were a video camera and a handout with sermon-based small group questions. The Week #1 sermon-based small group questions can be seen below:

1. Why does Jesus take the 613 commandments from the law and simplify them into just two?
2. If you have ever attended another church prior to Greenhouse Community Church, can you name the discipleship plan?
3. Did Greenhouse Community Church have a plan in the past?
4. Is there a connection between having a discipleship plan and church growth?
5. What are the 3 steps of our Discipleship Plan at Greenhouse Community Church?
6. According to our Discipleship Plan, what is a way we Love God?
7. According to our Discipleship Plan, what is a way we Love People?
8. According to our Discipleship Plan, what is a way we Serve the World?
9. Does our Discipleship Plan have clarity?
10. Does our Discipleship Plan have movement? (In other words, are there next steps?)
11. Does our Discipleship Plan have alignment? (In other words, are all age groups in the church-based on the same discipleship plan?)
12. Does our Discipleship Plan have focus? (Do we eliminate events that don't fit with our Discipleship plan?)
13. How can we pray for you? Share requests.
14. Prayer Time.

The types of data that will be collected for the sermon based small group will be the answers to questions from the sermon based small group. The tool used for gathering information will be a video camera. The recording device will be turned on for the opening prayer to start the sermon-based small group. The individual operating the video camera will be instructed to turn the video camera off at the end of the sermon-based small group questions and the closing prayer. The data

will be analyzed to see similarities and dissimilarities, clarity, and confusion, and the participants will be given pseudonyms.

**Task 4** is the Week #2 Intervention with sermon, signups, and small group. This phase is organized into eleven ingredients: (1) the purpose and objectives of the project's intervention, (2) the steps to be taken for each task, (3) the people involved, (4) the places where the activities will occur, (5) the timelines and duration of activities, (6) the ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality, (7) the resources required, (8) the types of data that will be collected, (9) the tools for gathering information needed, (10) protocols for using tools, and (11) the analysis/evaluation procedures and methods required.

The purpose of the Week #2 sermon is to give the congregation at Greenhouse Community Church a biblical rationale as to why they should attend church worship services. The title of the message is "3 Reasons why Christians need to attend church worship services." The 3 reasons I were that Christians need to attend worship services

1. Because of the Scripture's Exhortation.
2. Because of the Saint's Encouragement.
3. Because of the Savior's Example.

I closed the message by reviewing our Discipleship Plan at Greenhouse Community Church. I also encouraged the congregation to sign up for a small group and a ministry team in the church lobby. A sermon-based small group took place after the 11:00 a.m. worship service.

The steps to be taken for this sermon-based small group are as follows. First, set up the tables, pizza, salad, and dessert in the community hall. Second, set up the consent form table, where those who forget to bring their consent form can sign a copy for my records. Third, print out copies of the small group questions. Fourth, set up the video camera. Fifth, welcome the

participants and open the small group in prayer for the meal. Sixth, pass out the sermon-based small group questions and open in prayer for the start of the sermon-based small group. Seventh, start video recording the sermon based small group. Eighth, when the sermon-based small group questions have been answered, close the meeting in prayer and stop the video recording. Finally, transcribe the responses to the Week 2 sermon-based small group questions.

The week #2 sermon-based small group took place on Sunday January 13, 2019 in the Community Hall of Greenhouse Community Church. The approximate timeline of the small group can be seen below:

Meal provided for those in the Small Group	12:30 PM
Start Time of the Video-recorded Small Group	12:55 PM
End Time of the Video-recorded Small Group	1:40 PM

The ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality were shared in the consent form. Please note that a copy of the informed consent and confidentiality statement is included in the thesis project appendices. The resources required were a video camera and a handout with sermon-based small group questions. The Week #2 sermon-based small group questions are below:

#### Sermon Based Small Group Session #2: Love God through Worship Services

1. The first step in our Discipleship Plan is to Love God through Worship Services.  
What are the 2 Worship Services we offer each week?
2. According to the message, what are three reasons why Christians need to attend church?
3. Why do you think the Scripture exhorts us to meet as Christians?
4. Have you ever had a time when you were discouraged but attended a worship service left feeling encouraged? Please share.

5. Jesus sets an example in Luke 2, by going to the Father's house. Why did Jesus do this?
6. What are some other benefits in attending a Worship Service?
7. How can we pray for you? Share prayer requests.
8. Prayer Time.

The types of data that will be collected for the sermon-based small group will be the answers to questions from the sermon-based small group. The tool for gathering information will be a video camera. The recording device will be turned on for the opening prayer to start the sermon based small group. The individual operating the video camera will be instructed to turn the video camera off at the end of the sermon-based small group questions and the closing prayer. The data will be analyzed to see similarities and dissimilarities, clarity, and confusion, and the participants will be given pseudonyms.

**Task 5** is the Week #3 Intervention with sermon, signups, and small group. This phase is organized into eleven ingredients: (1) the purpose and objectives of the project's intervention, (2) the steps to be taken for each task, (3) the people involved, (4) the places where the activities will occur, (5) the timeline and duration of activities, (6) the ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality, (7) the resources required, (8) the types of data that will be collected, (9) the tools for gathering information needed, (10) protocols for using tools, and (11) the analysis/evaluation procedures and methods required.

The purpose of the Week #3 sermon is to give the congregation at Greenhouse Community Church a biblical rationale as to why they should join a small group. The title of the message is "Why should I join a small group?" I shared 3 reasons:

1. I should join a small group because of Christ.
2. I should join a small group because of Community.

3. I should join a small group because of Care.

I closed the message by reviewing our Discipleship Plan at Greenhouse Community Church. I also encouraged the congregation to sign up for a small group and a ministry team. A sermon-based small group took place after the 11:00 a.m. worship service.

The steps for this sermon-based small group are as follows: first, set up the tables, pizza, salad, and dessert in the community hall. Second, set up the consent form table, where those who forget to bring their consent form can sign a copy for my records. Third, print out copies of the small group questions. Fourth, set up the video camera. Fifth, welcome the participants and open the small group in prayer for the meal. Sixth, pass out the sermon-based small group questions and open in prayer to start the sermon-based small group. Seventh, start video recording the sermon-based small group. Eighth, when the sermon-based small group questions have been answered, close the meeting in prayer and stop the video recording. Finally, transcribe the responses to the sermon-based small group questions.

The week #3 sermon-based small group took place on Sunday January 20, 2019 in the Community Hall of Greenhouse Community Church. The approximate timeline of the small group can be seen below:

Meal provided for those in the Small Group	12:30 p.m.
Start Time of the Video-recorded Small Group	12:55 p.m.
End Time of the Video-recorded Small Group	1:40 p.m.

The ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality were shared in the consent form. Please note that a copy of the informed consent and confidentiality statement is included in the thesis project appendices. The resources required for these steps were a video camera and a handout with sermon-based small group questions.

The Week #3 sermon-based small group questions can be seen below:

Sermon Based Small Group Session #3: Love People through Small Groups.

1. Jesus could have used any method to change the world. How did Jesus model “Small Groups” in his ministry?
2. In Acts 2, the early believers met in the temple and in homes. Why did the believers meet in small groups?
3. In Exodus 18, Moses is leading the children of Israel. His father-in-law Jethro tells him to divide the people up into tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands. Why was this advice given?
4. When were you first introduced to small groups?
5. How can a small group provide care?
6. Have you ever experienced care in the context of a small group?
7. How can we pray for you? Share requests.
8. Prayer Time.

The types of data that will be collected for the sermon-based small group will be the answers to questions from the sermon-based small group. The tool for gathering information will be a video camera. The recording device will be turned on for the opening prayer to start the sermon-based small group. The individual operating the video camera will be instructed to turn the video camera off at the end of the sermon-based small group questions and the closing prayer. The data will be analyzed to see similarities and dissimilarities, clarity, and confusion, and the participants will be given pseudonyms.

**Task 6** is the Week #4 Intervention with sermon, signups, and small group. This phase is organized into eleven ingredients: (1) the purpose and objectives of the project’s intervention, (2)

the steps to be taken for each task, (3) the People involved, (4) the places where the activities will occur, (5) the timelines and duration of activities, (6) the ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality, (7) the resources required, (8) The types of data that will be collected, (9) the tools for gathering information needed, (10) protocols for using tools, and (11) the analysis/evaluation procedures and methods required.

The purpose of the Week #4 sermon is to give the congregation at Greenhouse Community Church a biblical rationale as to why they should serve. The title of the message is “Ministry Teams: How can I be great in God’s Kingdom?” This message is based on the request of James and John in Mark 10. I shared 3 points:

- First, the Problem: Self-Centeredness.
- Second, the Solution: Servanthood.
- Third, the Application: Serve.

I closed the message reviewing our Discipleship Plan at Greenhouse Community Church. I also encouraged the congregation to sign up for a small group and a ministry team. A sermon based small group took place after the 11:00 a.m. worship service.

The steps for this sermon-based small group are as follows: First, set up the tables, pizza, salad, and dessert in the community hall. Second, set up the consent form table, where those who forget to bring their consent form can sign a copy for my records. Third, print out copies of the small group questions. Fourth, set up the video camera. Fifth, welcome the participants and open the small group in prayer for the meal. Sixth, pass out the sermon based-small group questions and open in prayer to start the sermon-based small group. Seventh, start video recording the sermon-based small group. Eighth, when the sermon-based small group questions have been

answered, close the meeting in prayer and stop the video recording. Finally, transcribe the responses to the Week #4 sermon-based small group questions.

The Week #4 sermon-based small group took place on Sunday January 27, 2019 in the Community Hall of Greenhouse Community Church. The approximate timeline of the small group can be seen below:

Meal provided for those in the Small Group	12:30 PM
Start Time of the Video-recorded Small Group	12:55 PM
End Time of the Video-recorded Small Group	1:40 PM

The ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality were shared in the consent form. Please note that a copy of the informed consent and confidentiality statement is included in the thesis project appendices. The resources required for these steps were a video camera and a handout with sermon-based small group questions. The week #4 sermon based small group questions can be seen below:

#### Sermon Based Small Group Session #4: Serve the World through Ministry Teams

1. In Mark 10, James and John are self-centered. What are some ways that we can be self-centered?
2. Jesus came to serve. Is there a connection between Christ-likeness and serving? If so, share.
3. What are some ways that we can serve the Lord Jesus Christ?
4. What are some reasons why Christians don't serve?
5. What benefits are there in serving on a ministry team?
6. Are you currently serving on a ministry team? What have you learned in the process?
7. How can we pray for you? Share requests.

## 8. Prayer Time.

The types of data that will be collected for the sermon-based small group will be the answers to questions from the sermon-based small group. The tool for gathering information will be a video camera. The recording device will be turned on for the opening prayer to start the sermon-based small group. The individual operating the video camera will be instructed to turn the video camera off at the end of the sermon-based small group questions and the closing prayer. The data will be analyzed to see similarities and dissimilarities, clarity, and confusion, and the participants will be given pseudonyms.

### Anonymous Post-Test Questionnaire

**Task 7** is the Anonymous Post-Test. This phase is organized into eleven ingredients: (1) the purpose and objectives of the project's intervention, (2) the steps to be taken for each task, (3) the people involved, (4) the places where the activities will occur, (5) the timeline and duration of activities, (6) the ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality, (7) the resources required, (8) the types of data that will be collected, (9) the tools for gathering information needed, (10) protocols for using tools, and (11) the analysis/evaluation procedures and methods required.

The purpose of the Anonymous Post-Test is to understand from the congregation if there is a connection between having a simple, clear discipleship plan as shared in *Simple Church* and seeing (1) increased worship attendance, (2) increased small group involvement, and (3) increased ministry team involvement.

The steps to be taken for this Anonymous Post-Test are as follows. First, send out a recruitment letter and consent form to the congregation of the church. Second, put the anonymous pre-test under the chairs in the Worship Center. Third, place pens in chair pockets so

that the congregation can fill out the anonymous pre-test. Fourth, read consent document and instruct the congregation that if they choose to participate, they will be given five minutes to take the anonymous pre-test. Finally, instruct the congregation at the end of the worship service that they can put the anonymous pre-tests on a back pew near the exit of the Worship Center.

The people involved in the anonymous post-test were people in the congregation of Greenhouse Community Church. The anonymous post-test took place on Sunday January 27, 2019 at the 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. worship service in the Worship Center at Greenhouse Community Church. The approximate time of the anonymous post-test can be seen below:

9:30 a.m. Worship Service

Consent form read and instructions given 10:25 a.m.

Conclusion of anonymous pre-test 10:30 a.m.

Anonymous pre-test collection 10:30 a.m.

11:00 AM Worship Service

Consent form read and instructions given 11:55 a.m.

Conclusion of anonymous pre-test 12:00 p.m.

Anonymous pre-test collection 12:00 p.m.

The ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality were shared in the consent form. Please note that a copy of the informed consent and confidentiality statement is included in the thesis project appendices. The resources required for this step were a photocopy machine, and four-page handout including the consent form and anonymous post-test. The anonymous post-test can be seen below:

Post-test Anonymous Questionnaire

1. Why do churches grow?

2. Do you believe there is a connection between church growth and having a discipleship plan? Explain.
3. How should a believer be disciplined?
4. What is Simple Church?
5. How many times have you heard the pastor talk about Simple Church?
6. The Discipleship Plan at Greenhouse Community Church is to...
  1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
7. I attend a Worship Service...
  - Once a month
  - Twice a month
  - Three times a month
  - Every week
8. I currently am involved in a church sponsored small group
  - YES
  - NO
  - UNABLE
9. If not, why not?
  - Too busy
  - Not interested
  - Not aware of the current listing of church sponsored small groups
10. I currently serve in a ministry team at the church...

-YES

-NO

-UNABLE (because of health/time/season of life, etc....)

The types of data that will be collected from the anonymous post-test will be the answers to the questions from the anonymous post-test. The tool for gathering information will be the four-page handout. The data will be analyzed to see the growth of comprehension of the implementation of Simple Church at Greenhouse Community Church as compared to the pre-test.

### Interviews

**Task 8** is the interviews. This phase is organized into eleven ingredients: (1) the purpose and objectives of the project's intervention, (2) the steps to be taken for each task, (3) the people involved, (4) the places where the activities will occur, (5) the timeline and duration of activities, (6) the ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality, (7) the resources required, (8) the types of data that will be collected, (9) the tools for gathering information needed, (10) protocols for using tools, and (11) the analysis/evaluation procedures and methods required.

The purpose of the interviews is to understand from church leaders if there is a connection between having a simple, clear discipleship plan as shared in *Simple Church* and seeing (1) increased worship service attendance, (2) increased involvement in small groups, and (3) increased involvement in ministry teams.

The steps for this focus group are as follows: First, send out recruitment letters and consent forms to the church leaders. Second, set up the tables in the community hall. Third, set up the consent form table, where those who forget to bring their consent form can sign a copy for my records. Fourth, print out copies of the interview questions. Fifth, set up the video camera. Sixth, welcome the elder and spouse, one couple at a time. Seventh, pass out the interview

questions and open in prayer for the start of the interview. Eighth, start video recording the interview. Ninth, when the interview questions have been answered, close the meeting in prayer and stop the video recording. Finally, transcribe the responses given to the interview questions.

The people involved in the interviews were leaders in the church and included elders and their wives. The interview took place on Wednesday February 27, 2019 in the Community Hall of Greenhouse Community Church. The approximate timeline of the interviews can be seen below:

Interview #1	6:00 p.m.
Interview #2	6:30 p.m.
Interview #3	8:00 p.m.
Interview #4	8:30 p.m.

The ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality were shared in the consent form. Please note that a copy of the informed consent and confidentiality statement is included in the thesis project appendices. The resources required for this step were a video camera and a handout with interview questions. The interview questions can be seen below:

1. How long have you attended Greenhouse Community Church?
2. Did the church have a clear discipleship plan?
3. Do you believe there is a connection between having a discipleship plan and church growth? If so, why?

Our Discipleship Plan from Simple Church is to...

- 1) Love God through Worship Services
- 2) Love People through Small Groups
- 3) Serve the World through Ministry Teams

4. Why is it important for Christians to attend a Worship Service?
5. Why is it important for Christians to be involved in a Small Group?
6. Why is it important for Christians to serve in a Ministry Team?
7. What are the benefits of having a simple and clear discipleship plan for Greenhouse Community Church?

The types of data that will be collected from the interviews will be the answers to questions asked in the interview. The tool for gathering information will be a video camera. The recording device will be turned on for the opening prayer to start the interview. The individual operating the video camera will be instructed to turn it off at the end of the interview questions and the closing prayer. The data will be analyzed to see similarities and dissimilarities, clarity, and confusion, and the participants will be given pseudonyms.

This section was organized into eight tasks, (1) Focus Group, (2) Anonymous Pre-Test Questionnaire (3) Week #1 Intervention with sermon, signups, and small group, (4) Week #2 Intervention with sermon, signups and small group, (5) Week #3 Intervention with sermon, signups and small group, (6) Week #4 Intervention with sermon, signups, and small group, (7) Anonymous Post-Test Questionnaire, and (8) Interviews. While this section may seem a little choppy, the goal was a step-by-step resource, and this goal shaped the format. These eight tasks consist of my implementation of the intervention design.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results and Reflection of the Research**

Chapter 3 explained the research intervention. The problem was that Greenhouse Community Church lacked a simple, clear discipleship plan. *Simple Church* by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger was helpful, but it did not provide a step-by-step implementation guide for a congregation. Furthermore, there was no available literature specifically focused on meeting the need of a step-by-step example of a simple church discipleship plan implemented in a church. So, a mixed methodology of research was created and implemented. This chapter will share the results of that intervention and reflect on the research. The first section of the chapter is hard data. I simply report on the results of the research intervention. I do not want to contaminate the results of the intervention, so I do not share my reflections in this section. However, I share my reflections in the second section. In the reflection section, I share why I believe the results were what they were. The first part of this chapter is more analytical, and the second part is more interpretative.

### **Results of Intervention**

This section is organized into five subsections: (1) Church Growth and Discipleship Plan, (2) Overview of Simple Church, (3) Love God through Worship Services, (4) Love People through Small Groups, and (5) Serve the World through Ministry Teams. The first subsection is an overview of church growth and a discipleship plan. The second subsection is an overview of Simple Church, and the remaining subsections focus on the three action steps within Simple Church.

#### **Church Growth and Discipleship Plan**

The first subsection is an Overview of Church Growth and having a Discipleship Plan. This section is organized into five parts: (1) reasons why churches grow, (2) the connection

between church growth and having a discipleship plan, (3) how a believer should be disciplined, (4) whether Greenhouse Community Church had a Discipleship Plan in the past and (5) benefits in having a simple, clear discipleship plan at Greenhouse Community Church. I chose to focus on these five results because I believe they best highlight the findings of this subsection on church growth and discipleship.

### **Reasons Why Churches Grow**

The first part is reasons why churches grow. The following answers were taken from the pretest:

“Church leadership.”

“It seems like in our current culture it is because of ‘feel good’ prosperity doctrine.”

“Churches grow because people feel welcome and members invite them and then discipleship takes place.”

“People get saved or they join a church because they like going there.”

“Because people are encouraged, they feel welcome, the worship is uplifting, the programs meet needs.”

“People are either invited to come or people leave their old church.”

“Most grow by entertaining and not requiring commitment. They should grow by making disciples of unbelievers.”

One can see that the answers were all over the place.

After the four-week intervention of sermons, sermon-based small groups and signups for small groups and ministry teams, the post-test was administered. The following answers were given as to why churches grow:

“Because they have a clear discipleship plan.”

“According to Simple Church churches grow who have a simple clear discipleship plan”

“They have a plan.”

“The church has a clear, simple discipleship plan.”

“They have a clear, concise strategy that is not complicated for sharing the gospel, leading people to Christ, and discipling people in Christ.”

“Discipleship plan.”

“Because they have a discipleship plan.”

Before the intervention, the answers were all over the place. However, after the intervention, the answers had a similar theme. Church attenders mentioned the connection between church growth and having a discipleship plan.

### **Connection Between Church Growth and Discipleship Plan**

The second part is the question taken from the pre-test and post-test, “Do you believe there is a connection between church growth and having a discipleship plan? Explain.”

“Possibly. If you are attracting church members who truly care about spiritual growth.”

“Yes, because members are spiritually encouraged and want to bring in new members.”

“Yes – New Testament plan showed this. It is a direct correlation.”

“Yes, no plan means little discipleship. When Christians are discipled and then make disciples, God gives growth.”

“Yes, without a vision – the people perish!”

“Yes. Churches that have a strong discipleship plan will see the disciples sharing their faith with others.”

“Yes. As people grow in their individual faith they become interested in what takes place in their home church and therefore become active members.”

During the pre-test there were a variety of answers about the connection between church growth and having a discipleship plan.

After the four-week intervention of sermons, sermon-based small groups, and signups for small groups and ministry teams, the post-test was administered. The following answers were given regarding the connection between church growth and having a discipleship plan:

“Yes, if people aren’t discipled they don’t grow, don’t have desire to return to church.”

“Yes, if you have a goal – church growth – you need to know how to get there! Without a vision, the people perish.”

“Yes. A church that has a clear discipleship plan is going to have people that are not confused about where they are going,”

“Yes. A Discipleship plan that is followed should produce new Christians and obedient Christians who meet regularly.”

“Yes. We are a body and a discipleship plan show people how to participate in that body.”

“Yes. Any plan set up with a goal in mind has a better chance of success.”

“Yes, people need guidance to stay connected.”

During the pre-test there were a variety of answers as to the connection between church growth and having a discipleship plan. But the post-test answers, after the intervention, reveal a recurring theme as to the connection between church growth and having a discipleship plan. As stated earlier, church attenders believe that there is a connection between church growth and having a discipleship plan.

## **How a Believer Should be Discipled**

The third part is the response question #3 from the pretest and the post-test, “How should a believer be discipled?” The following answers were given from the pre-test:

“One on one or in small groups lead by mature believers.”

“Both in large and small groups settings as well as one on one.”

“Without judgment but with encouragement and prayer.”

“An ideal discipleship scenario would involve a more seasoned member teaching a less seasoned member/visitor to grow.”

“Bible understanding, obedience & application.”

“According to the Bible – focused on New Testament but not to exclude OT.”

“small groups, accountability partnerships.”

Thus, there were a variety of responses as to how a believer should be discipled.

After the four-week intervention of sermons, sermon-based small groups, and signups for small groups and ministry teams, the post-test was administered. The following answers were given to the question, “How should a believer be discipled?”:

“Through a systematic simple plan, resulting in the strengthening of all parties.”

“Bible study – personal & in groups”

“Thru prayer.”

“In small groups, through corporate worship, and being involved in service teams.”

“Thru small groups.”

“Application of scripture in a small group setting.”

“By being part of worship, small groups, and ministry teams.”

On the post-test, one can see the common theme of “small groups” as to how a believer should be disciplined.

### **Lack of a Discipleship Plan**

The fourth part is the answer to the question, “Did Greenhouse Community Church have a discipleship plan in the past?” For this question, I report on the results from the interviews.

Ted: “As a church I will say no.”

Jeff: “What are your thoughts Madison, do you think the church had a clear discipleship plan?”

Madison: “I would not say as far as a clear plan, and here is what we are doing and here is how we are going to do it, I don’t think I ever saw one of those.”

Jeff: “Did the church have a clear discipleship plan?”

Dan: “No.”

Jeff: “Did the church had a clear discipleship plan?”

Ray: “No, at that time.” (Ray was referring to 19 years ago when they arrived at the church.)

Bottom Line: Greenhouse Community Church did not have a simple, clear discipleship plan.

### **Benefits of Having a Simple, Clear Discipleship Plan**

The fifth part of this subsection focuses on the benefits of having a simple clear discipleship plan at Greenhouse Community Church. Here, I directly report on the results from the interviews.

Jeff: “Final question: What are the benefits of having a simple, clear discipleship plan for Greenhouse Community Church?”

Ted: “The people know expectations, where they stand, the things they have to work on, whatever, just...it is out there.”

Madison: “Like you said on Sunday, if you don’t know how to read the Bible, come to our small group next week. I mean if there is a simple and clear discipleship plan, then somebody says I don’t know how to pray, this is how you do it; so that is definitely a benefit because people are going to ask.”

Dan: “That really shows that everybody is on the same page.”

Jeff: “Right.”

Ray: “...so by having a clear plan I think it helps people who came in understand what the church is about, align direction for the leadership and we should test everything that we do with the discipleship plan. I think a clear, well-articulated plan is critical to serve in the mission of the local church.” Result: Church leaders see benefits to having a simple, clear discipleship plan.

### Overview of Simple Church

The second subsection is an Overview of Simple Church. This section is organized into three parts: (1) what Simple Church is, (2) the number of times congregants have heard the pastor talk about Simple Church, and (3) the three action steps in the Discipleship Plan at GCC.

### **Simple Church Defined**

The first part is “what Simple Church is.” This part comes from the pre-test question, “What is Simple Church?” In the pre-test, the following answers were given:

“I guess a church without frills and noise.”

“Not familiar with this term.”

“Making things in the Bible understandable.”

“No idea.”

“I don’t know.”

“Not sure.”

“?”

On the pre-test, there were a variety of answers from the congregation as to the definition of Simple Church.

After the four-week intervention of sermons, sermon-based small groups, and signups for small groups and ministry teams, the post-test was administered. The following answers were given to the question, “What is Simple Church?”

“Clear concise understandable method for churches to strategize and grow.”

“Love God, love others, serve the world.”

“The theory that churches grow by doing a few things, like discipleship, well.”

“A book written by Tom Rainer about how to make disciples with a clear method.”

“A church that has a clear discipleship plan.”

“Having simple plan of discipleship.”

“Having a simple clear discipleship plan.”

One can see the congregation defined simple church around the theme of a discipleship plan.

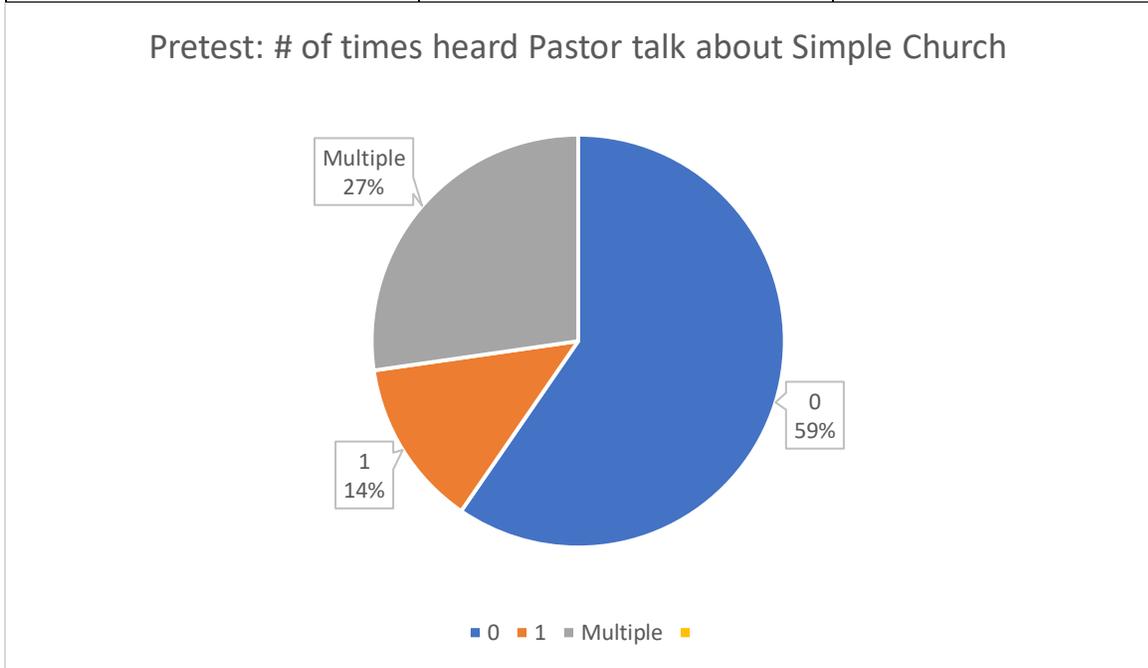
### **Frequency of Hearing “Simple Church”**

The second part of this subsection is on the number of times the congregation attenders have heard the pastor talk about Simple Church. The total number of pre-tests completed were 44, as compared to 40 post-tests. The results from the pre-test can be seen below:

Pre-test

Number of times	Number of responses	%
0 or don't know or don't remember	26	59%
1	6	14%

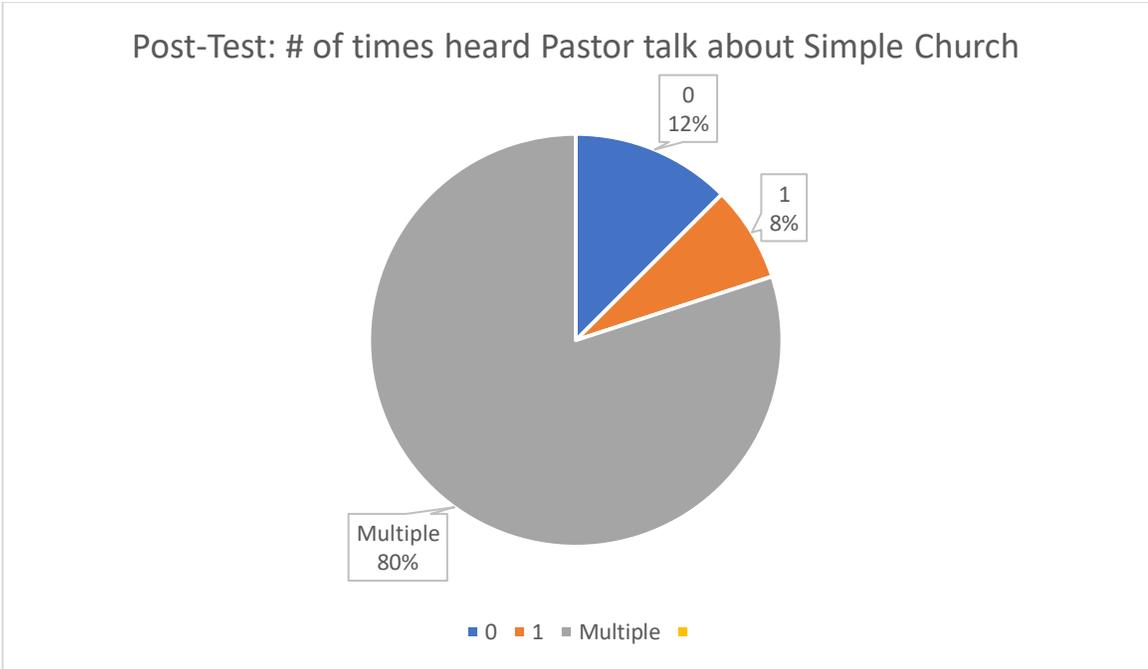
Multiple times	12	27%
----------------	----	-----



After the four-week intervention of sermons, sermon-based small groups, and signups for small groups and ministry teams, the post-test was administered. The results from the post-test can be seen below:

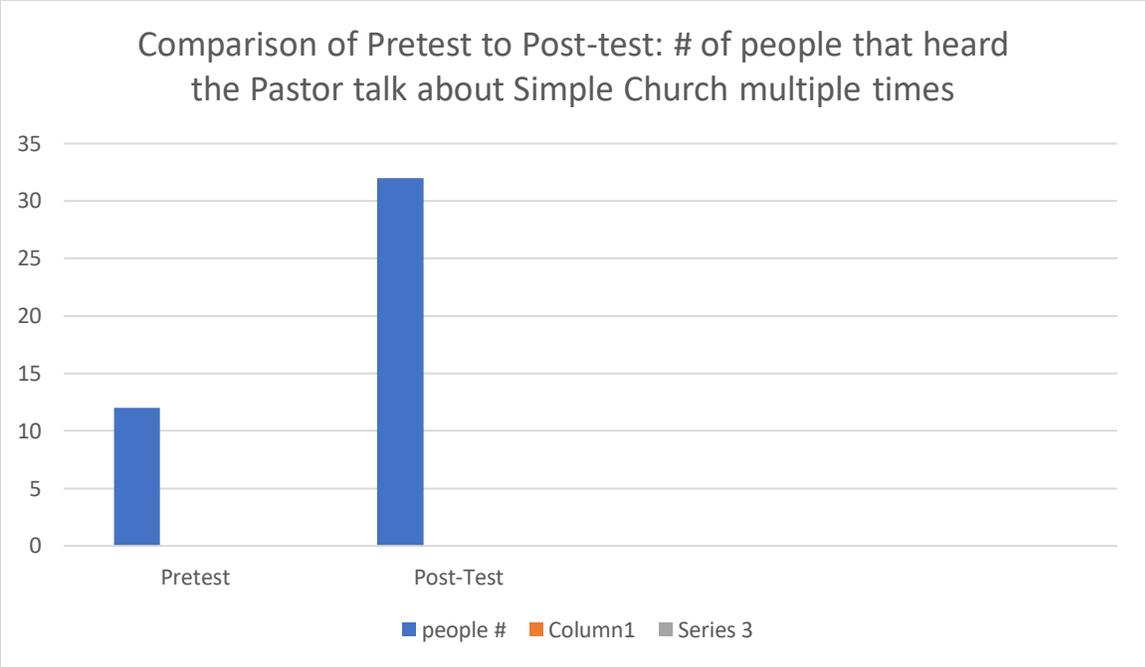
Post-test

Number of times	Number of responses	%
0 or don't know or don't remember	5	13%
1	3	8%
Multiple times	32	80%



There was dramatic improvement from the pre-test to the post-test as to the number of times church attendees heard the pastor talk about Simple Church. In the pre-test, only 12 people had heard the pastor talk about Simple Church multiple times, whereas on the post-test, 32 people had heard the pastor talk about Simple Church multiple times.

Test	Number of responses	%
Pretest – multiple times	12	
Post-test – multiple times	32	
		267% improvement

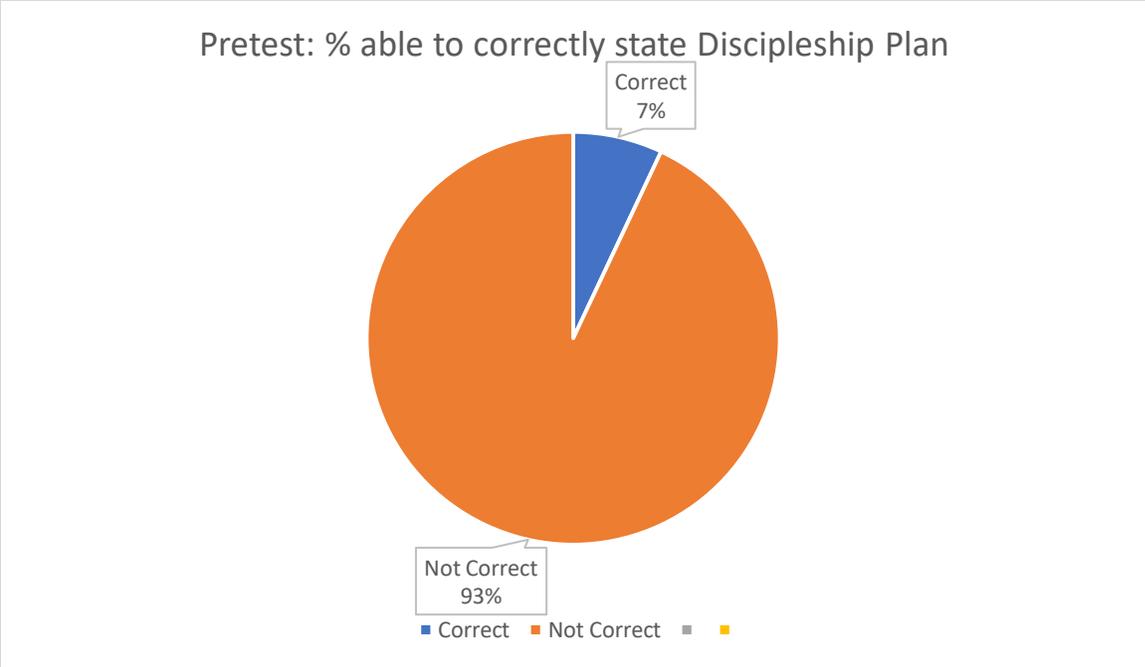


**Actions Steps in GCC Discipleship Plan**

The third part is on the three action steps in the Discipleship Plan at Greenhouse Community Church. During the pre-test, the church attendees were asked to name the three action steps of our Discipleship Plan. The results of those that correctly named part of the “what” and “how” of the three action steps in proper sequence are seen below:

**Pretest**

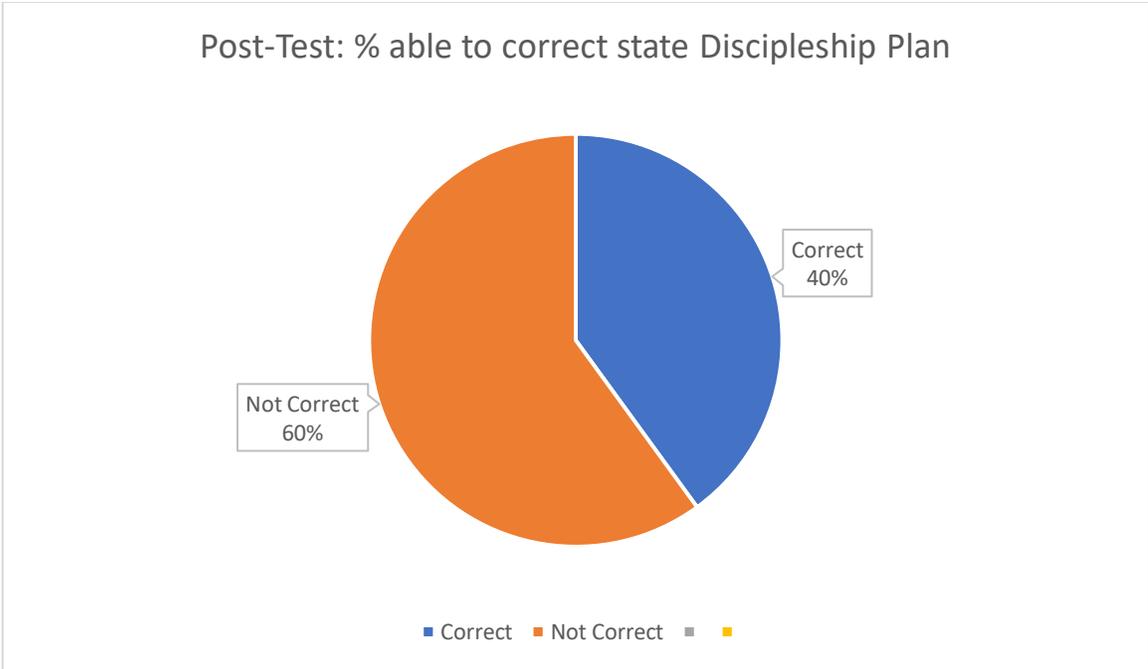
Correct Responses	Number of responses	%
Yes – Correct	3	7%
No – Not correct	41	93%



After the four-week intervention of sermons, sermon-based small groups, and signups for small groups and ministry teams, the post-test was administered. The results of those that correctly named part of the “what” and “how” of the three actions steps in proper sequence are seen below:

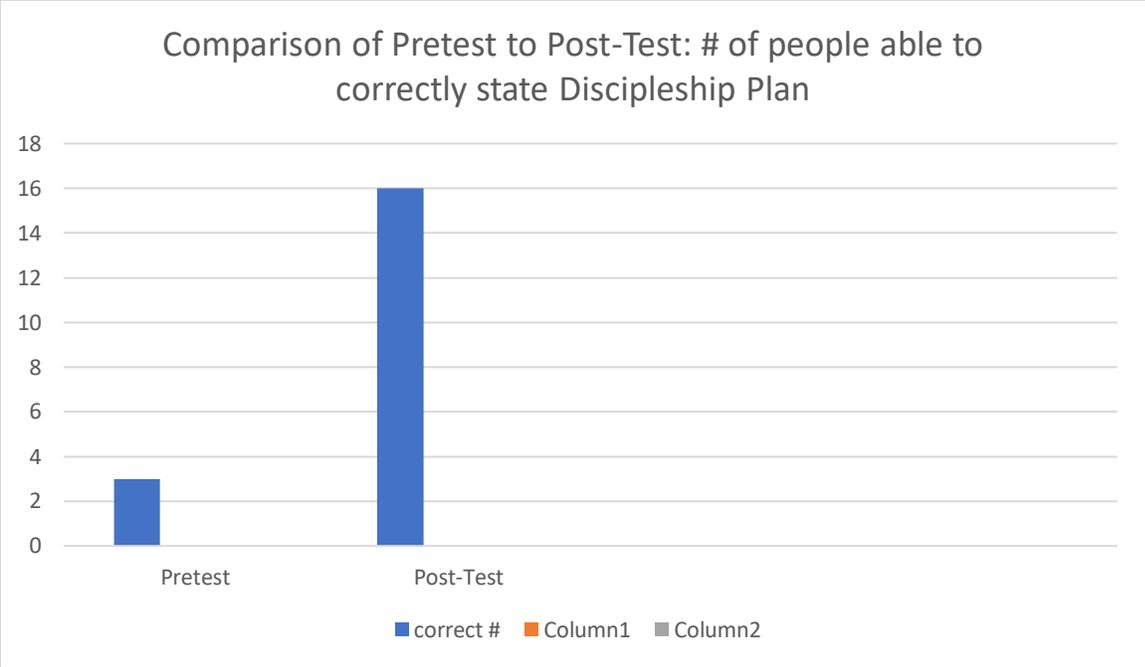
Post-test

Correct Responses	Number of responses	%
Yes – Correct	16	40%
No – Not correct	24	60%



Please note the dramatic improvement in results. Only three people correctly named part of the “what” and “how” of the three action steps in proper sequence of the discipleship plan at the pre-test. However, 16 people correctly named part of the “what” and “how” of the three action steps in proper sequence of the discipleship plan at the post-test.

Test	# of Correct Responses	% of improvement
Pretest Correct Responses	3	
Post-Test Correct Responses	16	
		533% improvement



**Love God through Worship Services**

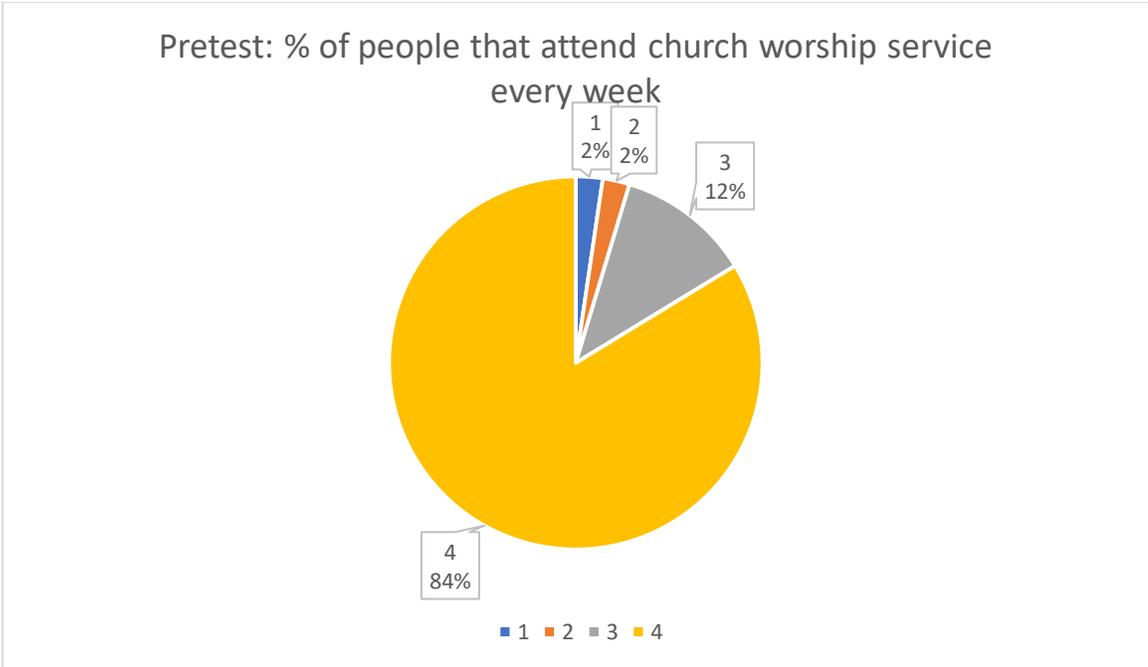
The third subsection is titled, “Love God through Worship Services.” This section is organized into two parts: (1) involvement in attending a worship service, and (2) benefits in attending a worship service.

**Involvement in Attendance at a Worship Service**

The first part is involvement in attending a worship service. During the pre-test, church attendees were asked to report their church attendance. The results can be seen below:

Pretest

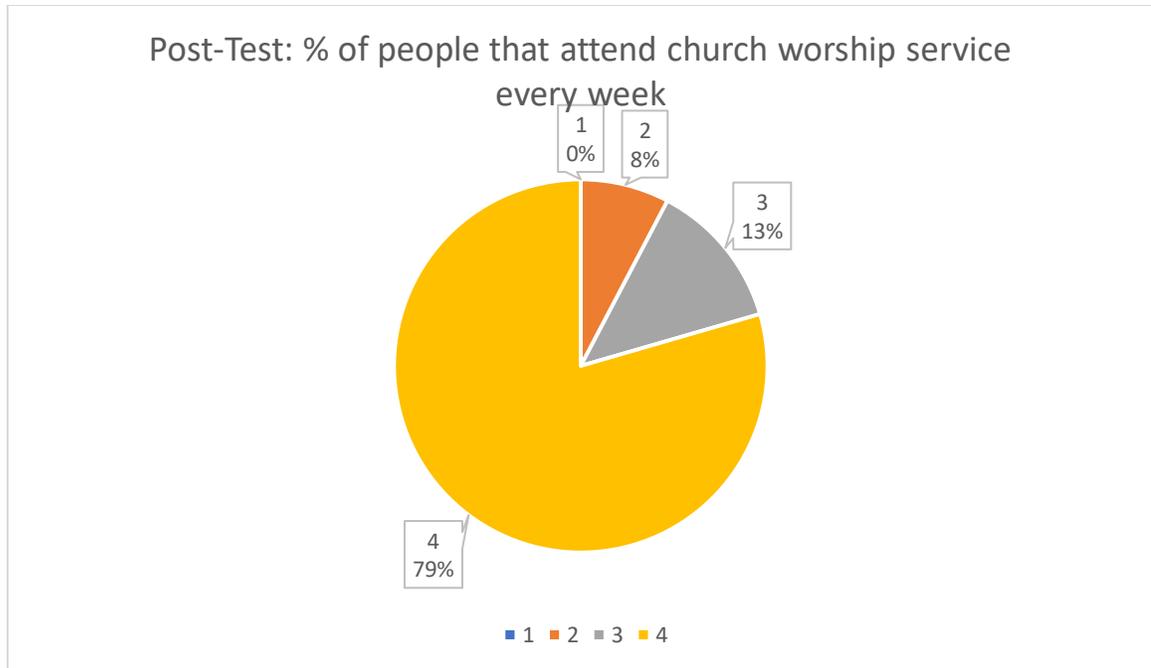
Attend # of Sundays a month	Number of responses	%
1	1	2%
2	1	2%
3	5	12%
4	36	84%



After the four-week intervention of sermons, sermon-based small groups and signups for small groups and ministry teams the post-test was administered. The results can be seen below:

Post-test

Attend # of Sundays a month	Number of responses	%
1		
2	3	8%
3	5	13%
4	31	79%



Note that we had four regularly-attending leaders away on the date of the post-test. Also note that no one put down that they attended only one week a month.

### Benefits in Attending a Worship Service

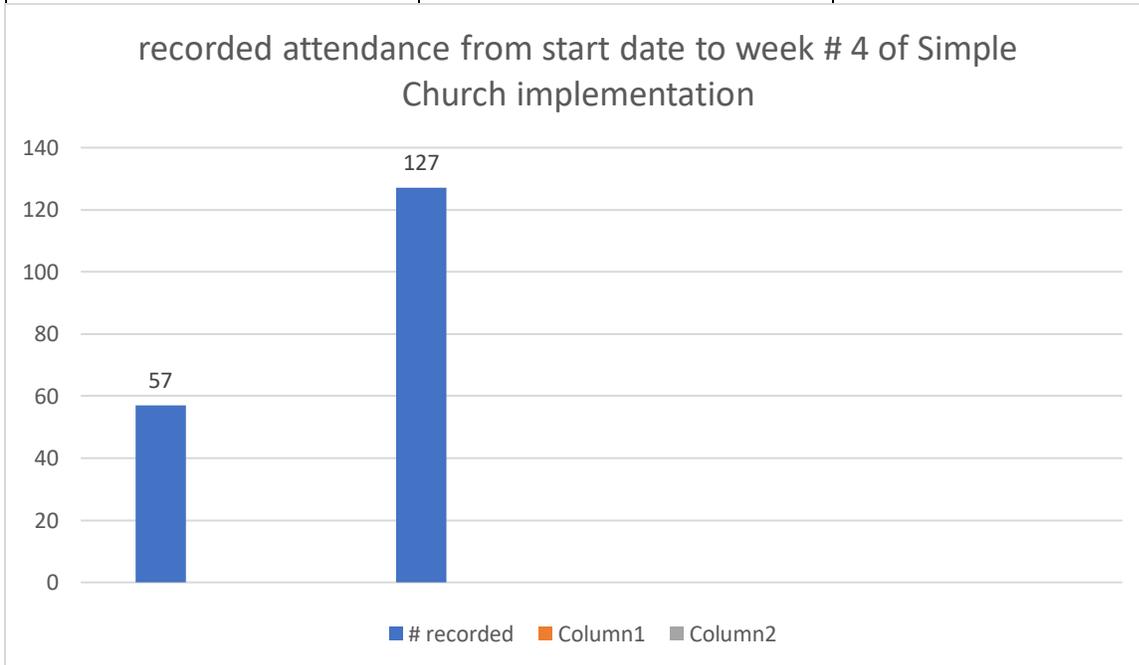
The second part focused on the benefits in attending a worship service. Encouragement was a common theme that came up during the sermon-based small group that was video recorded. The participants in the sermon-based small group found encouragement through other members, music, and the message. Laura said, “I just was going to say, my world has shrunk so much. If I don’t go to church, I would not have any friends.” Kate said, “...it has to do yes with the sermon, and yes with the worship, and yes with seeing people, I think it is all of that together present every Sunday morning, when I leave here, I am always walking out the door encouraged, always.” Laura: “I always love the singing time in addition to the sermon too, that is the real reason I am coming.” Participants in the sermon-based small group experience the benefit of

encouragement by attending a worship service. They are encouraged through the members, the music, and the message.

#### Attendance in the worship service

The third part is on actual attendance in the worship service. The Sunday I was a candidate at Greenhouse Community Church in November 2017, the worship attendance was recorded as 57. The discipleship plan had not been implemented. A little over a year later, on the last Sunday in January 2019, the worship attendance was recorded at 127; this was also the last Sunday of the intervention for the discipleship plan. Thus, there was significant attendance growth before Simple Church was implemented and the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Simple Church implementation.

	Recorded Attendance	% growth
Nov. 2017 – Pastor’s 1 <sup>st</sup> Sun	57	
Jan. 2019 – project Week #4	127	
		223% growth



Please note the significant increase in attendance during the four-week intervention as compared to the four weeks prior to the intervention.<sup>75</sup>

Date	Attendance Count
December 9, 2018	120
December 16, 2018	122
December 23, 2018	97
December 30, 2018	116

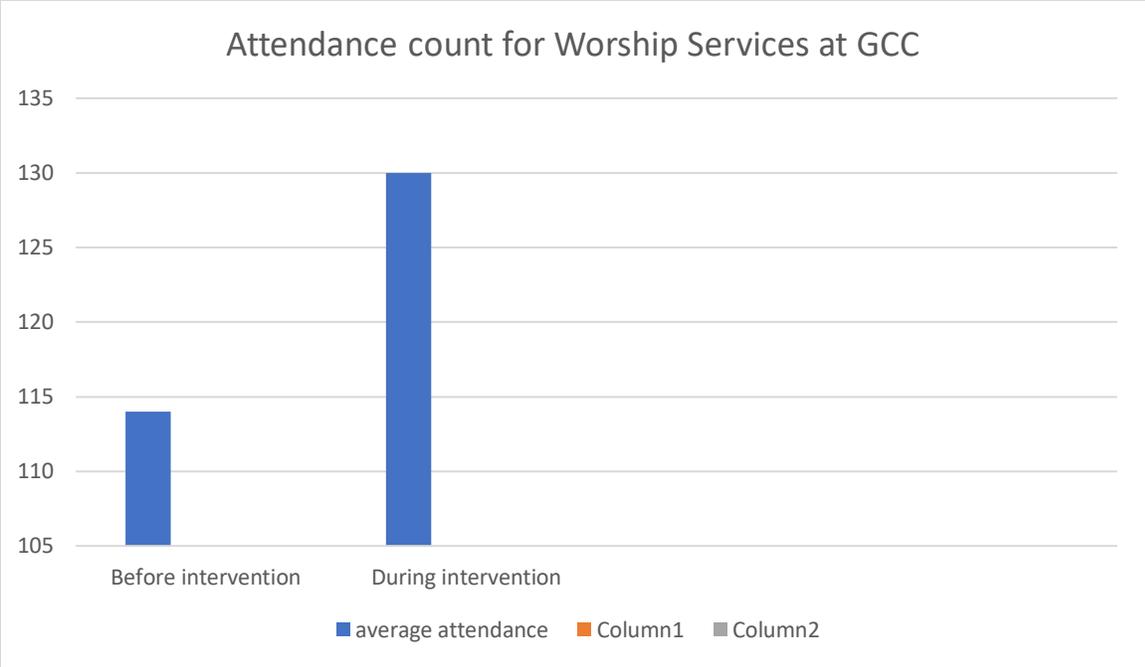
So, the average attendance was 114 for the four weeks prior to the intervention. In January of 2018, the church attendance was low and averaged 79 people. However, during the four-week intervention in January of 2019, the attendance count results can be seen below:

Date	Attendance Count
January 6, 2019	128
January 13, 2019	149
January 20, 2019	117
January 27, 2019	127

During the four-week intervention, the church averaged 130 people. The result was a 14% increase during the four-week intervention as compared to the four weeks prior to the intervention.

---

<sup>75</sup> It should be noted that the quantitative results only show the change in numbers. There is no attempt to show a correlation. For example, perhaps people started coming because of the uniqueness of participating in a survey. Or maybe there was a natural attendance boost because of the time of year.



One can see the improvement in attendance at the worship services during the intervention as compared to before the intervention.

### Love People Through Small Groups

The fourth subsection is titled, “Love People through Small Groups.” This section is organized into two parts: (1) involvement in attending a Small Group, and (2) the reasons why people are not of being involved in small groups.

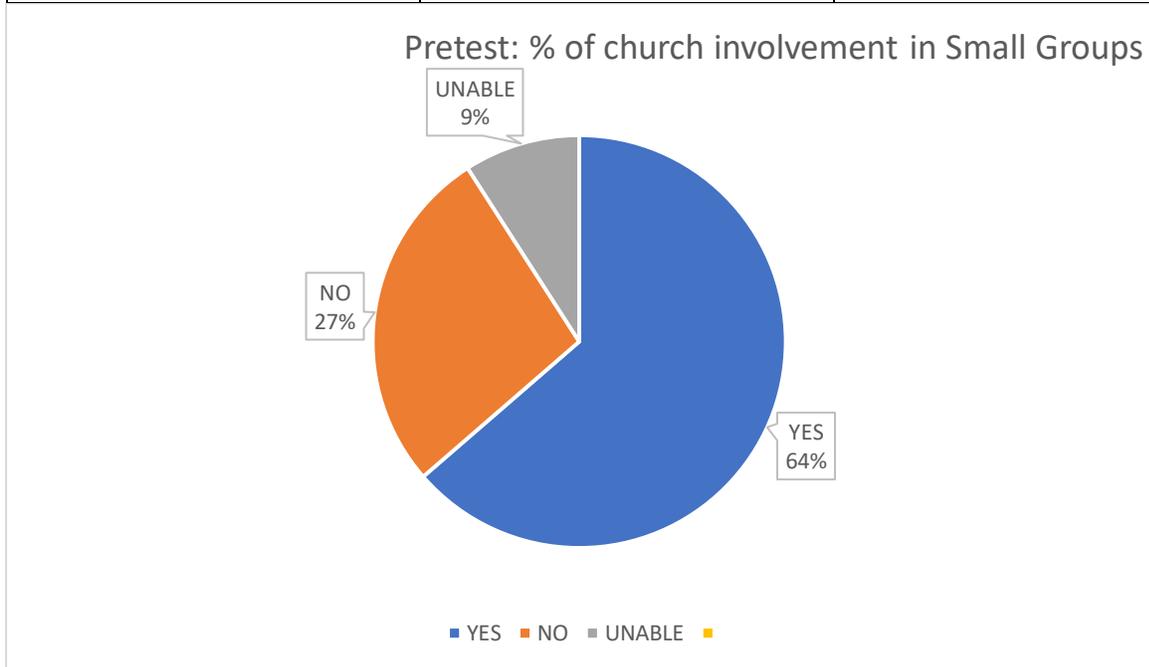
#### **Involvement in Attending a Small Group**

The first part focuses on involvement in attending a Small Group. During the pre-test, church attendees were asked to report their involvement in Small Groups. The results can be seen below:

Pre-test

Involvement in small group	Number of responses	%
-YES	28	64%

-NO	12	27%
-UNABLE	4	9%

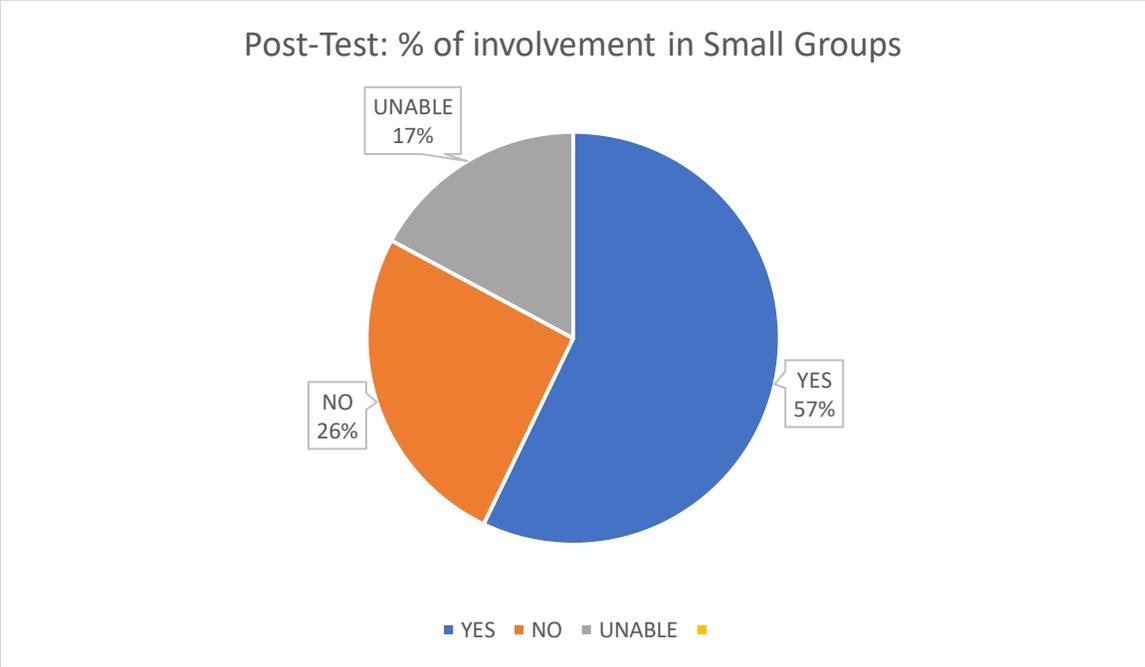


After the four-week intervention of sermons, sermon-based small groups and signups for small groups and ministry teams the post-test was administered. The results can be seen below:

Post-test

Involvement in small group	Number of responses	%
-YES	20	57%
-NO	9	26%
-UNABLE	6	17%

Note that four of our leaders that are all involved in small groups were away. Also note that the number of NO's went down.



Please note the results below if the four leaders of the church had been at Greenhouse Community Church on the Sunday the post-test was administered.

Involvement in small group	Number of responses	%
-YES	24	62%
-NO	9	23%
-UNABLE	6	15%

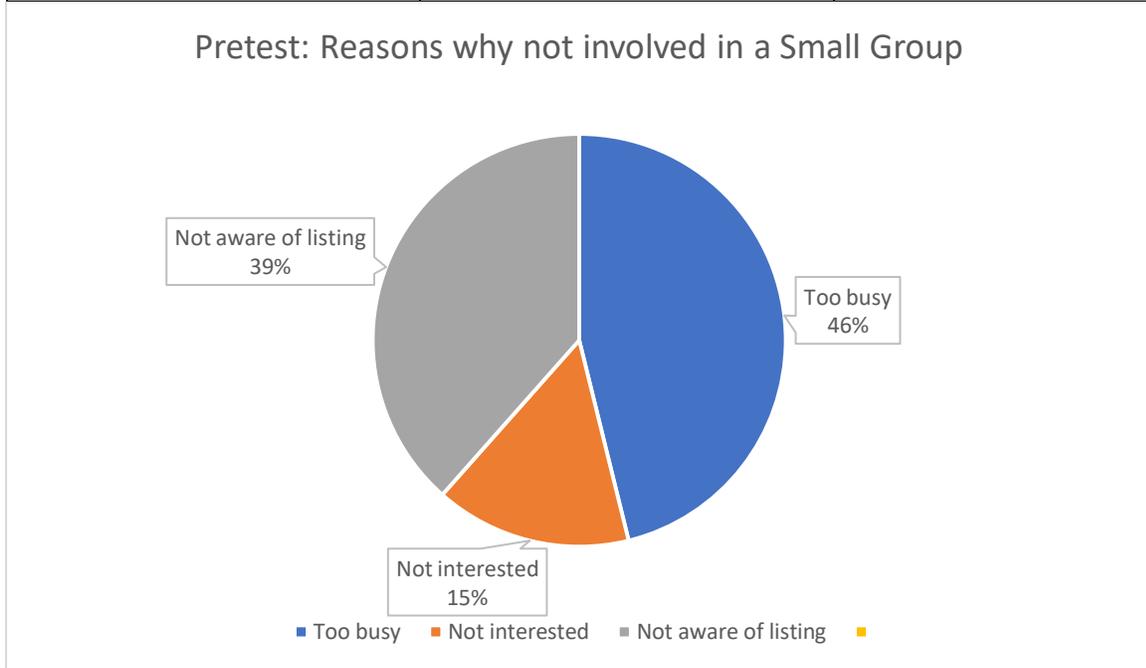
Percentage-wise, the number of “NO” responses went down from the post-test to the pre-test.

Reasons why people do not join a small group

During the pre-test, church attendees were asked to report reasons why they do not join a small group if they responded to the previous question that they were not involved in a small group. The results can be seen below:

Pre-test

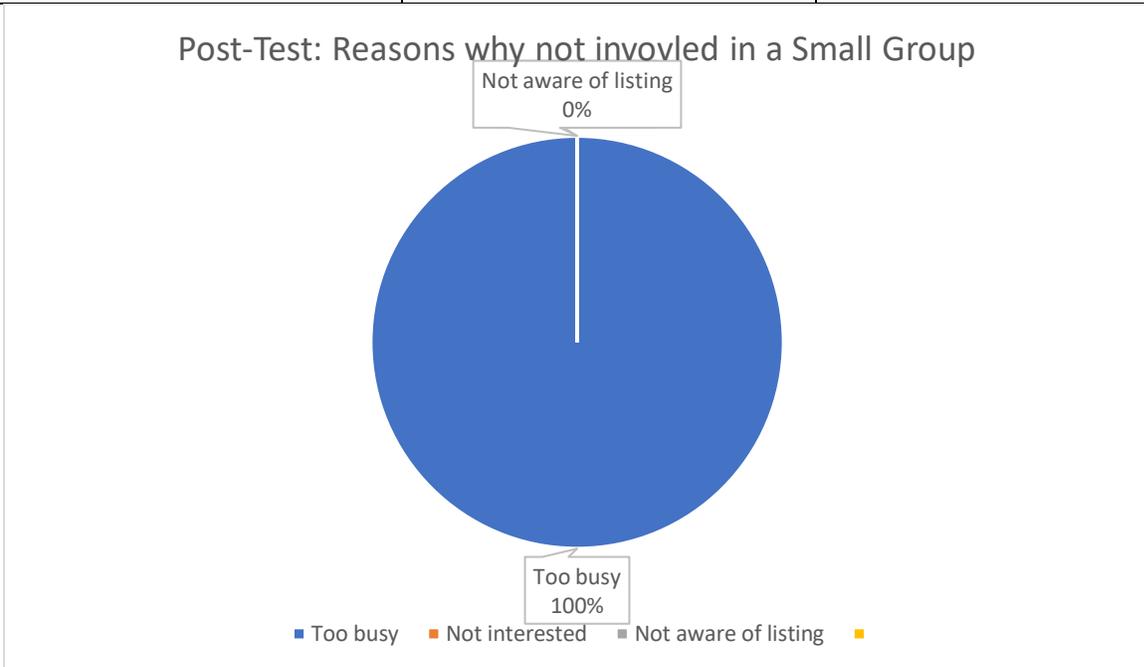
Reasons why not involved in a small group	Number of responses	%
-Too busy	6	46%
-Not interested	2	15%
-Not aware of the current listing of church sponsored small groups	5	38%



After the four-week intervention of sermons, sermon-based small groups, and signups for small groups and ministry teams, the post-test was administered. The results can be seen below:

Post-test

Reasons why not involved in a small group	Number of responses	%
-Too busy	5	100%
-Not interested		
-Not aware of the current listing of church sponsored small groups		



Each week, I shared that there were sign-up sheets for our small groups out in the lobby. After the intervention, no one said that they were not interested in joining a small group. Also, after the intervention, no one stated that they were unaware of the small groups listed.

**Benefits of Being Involved in a Small Group**

The third part of this subsection is on the benefits of being involved in a small group. Note the testimony of participants:

Donna: “You need your family, you need people that you love and relationships that we have in the body of Christ through these small groups often replace the family in some degree.”

Adam: “You feel more important, less insignificant.”

Esther: “I think is so important for people to know that they are loved, that they matter and that we care about them and you as a church nailed that, you are so amazingly good at that, and people need that; they need to know that it is possible.”

Jasmine: “You have a more personal relationship in a small group; you share your ideas with them, and they inspire you.”

A benefit of being involved in a small group, as discussed in the sermon-based small group, was loving relationships.

### Serve the World Through Ministry Teams

The fifth subsection is titled, “Serve the World through Ministry Teams.” This section is organized into two parts: (1) involvement in serving on a ministry team and (2) reasons why people do not serve on a ministry team.

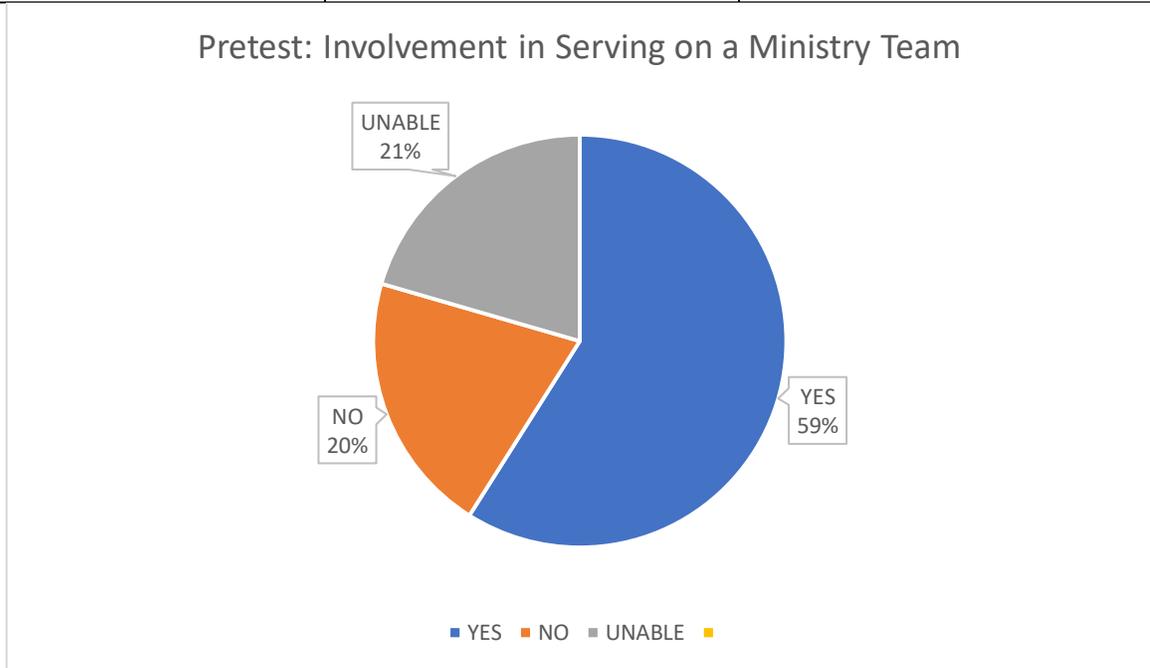
#### **Involvement in Serving on a Ministry Team**

The first part is on involvement in serving on a ministry team. During the pre-test, church attenders were asked to report their involvement in serving on a ministry team. The results can be seen below:

Pre-test

Involvement in serving on a Ministry Team	Number of responses	%
-YES	23	61%
-NO	8	21%

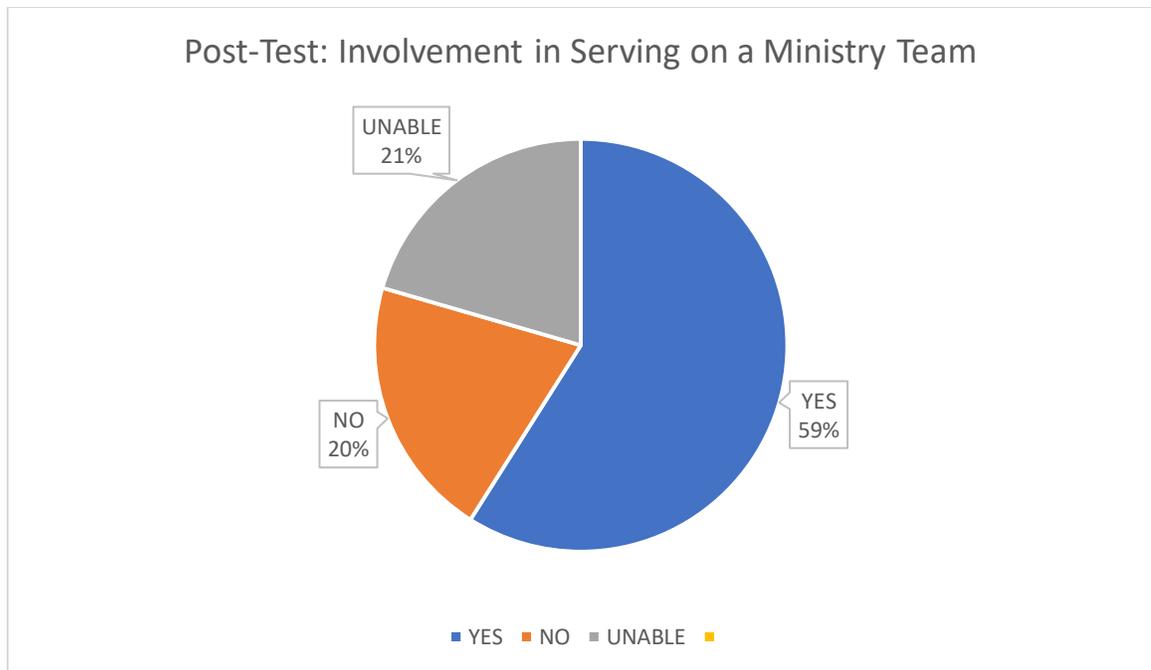
-UNABLE	7	18%
---------	---	-----



After the four-week intervention of sermons, sermon-based small groups and signups for small groups and ministry teams, the post-test was administered. The results can be seen below:

Post-test

Involvement in serving on a Ministry Team	Number of responses	%
-YES	23	59%
-NO	8	21%
-UNABLE	8	21%



The data was very similar in pre-test and post-test. Yet, it must be noted that four of our leaders that are involved in ministry teams were away. Their presence would have put the number as involved in ministry teams at 27 as opposed to 23. This would have increased the percentage serving on a ministry team.

### **Reasons Why People do not Serve on a Ministry Team**

After preaching the message and facilitating the sermon-based small group, it was obvious that self-centeredness hinders Christians from serving. This self-centeredness can take many different forms.

Bert: Finances, with our finances.

Jonathan: Pride

Donna: Selfish desires

Self-centeredness gets in the way of Christians serving on a ministry team in the local church.

The third part is on the benefits of serving on a ministry team. The following testimonies were shared during the video-taped sermon-based small group.

Bert: It really brings a sense of belonging.

Lydia: For me it builds a purpose in life.

Thus, serving on a ministry team provides a sense of belonging and a purpose for the team members.

This first section was organized into five subsections, (1) Church Growth and Discipleship Plan, (2) Overview of Simple Church, (3) Love God through Worship Services, (4) Love People through Small Groups, and (5) Serve the World through Ministry Teams. The aim was to present an analysis of the data and the results of the intervention both in quantitative numbers and qualitative descriptions. The goal here was to document the findings.

### **Reflection on the Research Results**

The second section is called, “The Reflection on the Research Results.” This section is organized into the same five subsections as the first part, (1) Church Growth and Discipleship Plan, (2) Overview of Simple Church, (3) Love God through Worship Services, (4) Love People through Small Groups, and (5) Serve the World through Ministry Teams. The goal here, though, is to personalize the data.

#### **Church Growth and Discipleship Plan**

The first subsection is called, “church growth and discipleship plan.” As I reflected on this subsection, I was surprised that no one mentioned prayer as a reason why churches grow. This was surprising to me since the early church in the book of Acts spent time praying together before 3,000 people were converted at Pentecost in Acts 2. Also, our denomination, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, essentially was founded as a prayer meeting with seven people, including our founder, Dr. A.B. Simpson. Furthermore, Christians are aware of the Brooklyn Tabernacle story of a small church experiencing tremendous church growth and vitality after

they focused on prayer. Throughout church history, whenever there has been a great movement of God, it has been preceded by a time of prayer. I was surprised at the absence of prayer as a reason for church growth. While I did not share prayer as a reason for church growth during the intervention, I have frequently mentioned the importance of prayer with congregants.

I noticed a significant change in responses from the pre-test and the post-test when the question was asked as to why churches grow. In the pre-test there were different answers and yet in the post-test there was a theme of having a discipleship plan. I believe the results were thus because I talked about this repeatedly.

I reflected on the fact that church leaders admitted that the church did not have a discipleship plan in the past. I believe that this is one of the reasons why the church did not see evangelistic or numerical growth. Awareness of a problem can lead to a diagnosis and then to a remedy.

### Overview of Simple Church

The second subsection is called, “Overview of Simple Church.” As I reflect on this subsection, one can see confusion when it comes to “Simple Church.” Congregants were unclear what Simple Church is and they reported this on the pre-test. However, during the post-test it was mentioned that *Simple Church* was a book written by Thom Rainer to help make disciples with a clear method. Words like “simple” and “clear” were used in writing about a discipleship plan.

The frequency of congregants hearing the pastor talk about Simple Church dramatically increased after the intervention compared to before the intervention. Only 27% of people stated that they heard the pastor talk about Simple Church multiple times on the pre-test, whereas 80% of people stated that they had heard the pastor talk about Simple Church multiple times on the

post-test. I believe this significantly higher percentage was because of constant speaking about Simple Church during the intervention

The number of people able to correctly state the “what” and the “how” of the discipleship plan drastically increased. There was an improvement of 533% from the pre-test to the post-test. I was very encouraged at the congregational ability to articulate the discipleship plan. I stated the discipleship plan every week and the repetition obviously helped. I was pleased with the drastic improvement; however, I would have liked to see 50% able to correctly state the “what” and the “how” of the 3 action steps in proper sequence; only 40% were able to correctly state the “what” and the “how” of the 3 action steps in proper sequence.

#### Love God Through Worship Services

The third subsection is called, “Love God through Worship Services.” As I reflected on this subsection, I was encouraged by the attendance growth in the worship services after Simple Church was implemented. The average worship service attendance was 114 for the four weeks prior to the intervention and 130 for the four weeks during the intervention. This was an increase of 12%.

I had a congregant tell me that they knew they needed to attend the worship service after they heard that message. However, I would have liked to see more responses stating that they attend a church worship service every week.

#### Love People Through Small Groups

The fourth subsection is called, “Love People through Small Groups.” As I reflected on this subsection, my goal was to see 60% of the congregation involved in a small group. After the post-test was completed, 57% responded that they were involved in a small group. I was close, but I would have liked to see greater involvement in small groups. As I reflected on this, I

learned that it is not enough to exhort people to be involved in a small group from behind the pulpit, a personal invitation is critical to seeing more people involved in small groups.

I was very encouraged on the second part of this subsection, namely, “reasons why people don’t join a small group.” In the pre-test, 15% of congregants filled out the portion that they were not interested. After the intervention, and the post-test was given this went down to 0%. Also, in the pre-test, 5 congregants responded that they were “not aware of the current listing of church sponsored small groups.” From the pulpit, I mentioned that there were small group signup sheets out in the lobby, thus making congregants aware of the current listing of church sponsored small groups. In the post-test, no one mentioned that they were unaware of the current listing of church sponsored small groups. So, the intervention helped in making congregants aware of the current listing of church sponsored small groups. My intervention helped fix the issue of people being unaware of the small groups being offered. To fix the “too busy” issue I could do a further sermon on time management. The “too busy” issue illustrates why churches should not impose more on the congregants than worship services, small groups and ministry teams. People are overwhelmed as it is. This is a further reason for a simple, clear discipleship plan.

#### Serve the World Through Ministry Teams

The fourth subsection is called, “Serve the World through Ministry teams.” As I reflected on this subsection I was encouraged by the percentage of congregants serving on a ministry team. My goal was to have 30% of the congregants serving on a ministry team. The post-test revealed that 59% were serving in a ministry team. So, on the action step of serving the world through ministry teams, I almost doubled what my pre-intervention goal had been. As I reflect on what could have been improved, I cannot help but wonder if the percentage of congregants

involved in serving on a ministry team would be even higher with a personal invitation, just like Jesus did with Peter and Andrew.

This chapter was organized into two sections, (1) the results of the intervention, and (2) the reflection on the research results. This chapter shared the hard data results of the following subsections, (1) Church Growth and Discipleship Plan, (2) Overview of Simple Church, (3) Love God through Worship Services, (4) Love People through Small Groups, and (5) Serve the World through Ministry Teams. I also reflected on the data of these five subsections, trying to understand why the data came back this way and the significance behind it. In short, Chapter 4 verifies the thesis from the introduction. The next chapter will be the conclusion of this thesis project.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

When a U.S. Army cadet has completed Advanced Camp and graduates from college, he is commissioned as a U.S. Army Officer. While this event marks the end of serving as a cadet, it is really a step forward into new work as an officer. In the same way, as a thesis project comes to completion, it is fitting to look forward to the places that are open to explore. Chapter 5 is the conclusion of this thesis project and has six sections: (1) a review of the chapters, (2) future research, (3) results of this research project compared to published work in the literature review, (4) lessons learned in implementing *Simple Church*, (5) results in other settings, and (6) recommendations.

### **Review of the Chapters**

The first section, “A review of the chapters,” has five subsections, one part for each chapter of the thesis project, and is used to summarize the completed work. This section asks and answers the question, “How did we get here?” Chapter 1 is an overview of the history of the thesis project designer and the history of Greenhouse Community Church. The problem is stated in this chapter. Chapter 2 is a review of literature that is pertinent to implementing *Simple Church* at Greenhouse Community Church. Chapter 3 is the research project design for implementing Simple Church at Greenhouse Community Church. Chapter 4 shares the results from the intervention of the research project design. Finally, Chapter 5 is the conclusion of the thesis project.

Chapter 1 shares the background of the research project director, Jeff Wheeland. I became a Christian at a young age but was never introduced to a simple, clear discipleship plan in the context of the local church. In December of 2017, I became the Pastor of Greenhouse

Community Church. This church had been in overall decline for almost a decade. The problem was that Greenhouse Community Church lacked a simple, clear discipleship plan.

Chapter 2 was a literature review that shared an in-depth review of *Simple Church*, written by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger. This literature review focused on the writings of both Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger. Other pertinent literature to discipleship and church growth was also discussed and compared to *Simple Church*.

Chapter 3 featured a research project design for implementing *Simple Church* at Greenhouse Community Church. A mixed methodology of both qualitative and quantitative research was used for the research phase of this project. The research phase included a focus group, an anonymous pretest given to the congregation, four sermons and four sermon-based small groups after the 11:00 a.m. worship service, an anonymous post-test given to the congregation to see congregational understanding and progress of *Simple Church* implemented at Greenhouse Community Church, and an interview of the elders and their spouses.

Chapter 4 was the intervention and the data collection. Dramatic results were seen in the congregational understanding of the simple, clear discipleship plan implemented at the church. Furthermore, the congregation was now aware of the church's offering of different small groups after the intervention as compared to before the intervention. A couple of people left the church after the simple, clear discipleship plan was implemented into the membership requirements of the church. The requirements of being involved in a small group and serving on a ministry team were added to the church's bylaws as requirements of membership. I also reflected on the data collection results. I gave interpretation as to why the data collection was what it was.

Chapter 5 is the summary chapter of this thesis project. The conclusion provides the reader with six sections. The first concluding section is a review of the chapters. The second

concluding section shares future research possibilities. The third concluding section is the result of this research project compared to published work in the literature review. The fourth concluding section is the reflection on what the researcher learned in implementing *Simple Church*. The fifth concluding section discusses possible results in other settings. The final concluding section shares recommendations on what to do with the Simple Church paradigm.

### **Future Research**

The second section is future research. This section answers the question from the thesis manual (p. 44), “Where should research regarding this problem go from here?” This section has two subsections: (1) future research in the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the denomination that Greenhouse Community Church belongs to, and (2) future research for the broader evangelical church.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance has close to 2000 U.S. Churches. Approximately only 100 of these churches had a net gain in worship attendance of 24 people from the year 2016 to the year 2017. I believe that future research needs to focus on all 2000 U.S. churches and ask each church to submit in one paragraph their discipleship plan. The results of this should be compared. The Vice President of Church Ministries for the Christian and Missionary Alliance could then compare the discipleship plan of the top 100 fastest growing churches with the remaining churches. I believe that the research would show that, overall, the top 100 fastest growing churches in the C&MA have a simple, clear discipleship plan whereas the remaining C&MA churches, which are the plateaued or declining churches, have either no plan or a very complex plan. This research has not been done but needs to be done for the sake of seeing C&MA churches reverse the state of plateau and decline that has clearly marked the

denomination recently. This needed research could help reverse the denominational decline that many C&MA churches are now experiencing.

The broader evangelical church would benefit from *Simple Church 2020*. This would be a workbook intended to be a companion guide to *Simple Church*. This workbook would give opportunity for church leaders to develop a “what” and a “how” for a simple, clear discipleship plan. For example:

What	Through	How
1. Love God...	through...	Worship Services.

Blanks would be provided in the workbook to help church leaders develop a simple, clear discipleship plan step-by-step. This workbook would also show a specific step-by-step implementation guide to help a congregation adapt to a simple, clear discipleship plan. Each year the Senior Pastor could lead the congregation through the simple, clear discipleship plan while tracking improvements.

Whether a church belongs to the C&MA or the broader evangelical community, after going through the initial process to simplify, the congregation will need to review the Simple Church paradigm from time to time. The steps used for implementation may not be the same needed for evaluation. Assessing how a church is doing after the change could be its own research project. Just as software companies release updates to fix unforeseen issues, there could be an update to *Simple Church* called *Simple Church 2.0*.

### **Results Compared to Published Work**

The third section is called, “Results of this research project compared to published work in the literature review.” This section has three subsections, (1) Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger’s book *Simple Church*, (2) “Equipping Lifeway Ministry Multipliers to Train Women’s Ministry

Leaders in Transitioning to and Leading in the Simple Church Model” a doctoral dissertation by Debra M. Douglass in December 2008, and (3) “Equipping Active Deacons to Implement the Simple Church Process at Gladeville Baptist Church, Gladeville, Tennessee” by Craig A. Webb in 2010.

Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger wrote *Simple Church* in 2006. This book focuses on churches that experienced a 5 percent or greater growth rate for three consecutive years. The common factor in these churches, which Rainer and Geiger, would classify as being vibrant and growing, was that they had a simple, clear discipleship process. This book was written about common characteristics of vibrant, growing churches. The book was not written as an implementation guide to implement a simple, clear discipleship process. Furthermore, after the book was written, no research was conducted on the results of churches that had implemented a simple, clear discipleship plan. My thesis project was an implementation of *Simple Church* that a local church could use to implement a simple, clear discipleship plan within their congregation.

“Equipping Lifeway Ministry Multipliers to Train Women’s Ministry Leaders in Transitioning to and Leading in the Simple Church Model” by Debra M. Douglass was written in December 2008. This doctoral dissertation was focused on women’s ministry, whereas my thesis project is focused on the church congregation. Furthermore, Douglass writes of events in women’s ministry. This mention of “events” is clearly an anti-thesis of *Simple Church*. In addition, Douglass does not share specific, concrete results in this dissertation. My work shares specific, concrete results from the intervention.

“Equipping Active Deacons to Implement the Simple Church Process at Gladeville Baptist Church, Gladeville, Tennessee” by Craig A. Webb was written in 2010. Webb focuses this research on active deacons, whereas my thesis project focuses on the church congregation.

Furthermore, Webb has a special “event” training session for the deacons. This also is the anti-thesis of *Simple Church*, which intends to minimize or eliminate events altogether for a healthier, more robust church congregation. Webb taught only eight deacons for the research project’s intervention. He writes that one deacon dropped out. He also fails to share graphs or charts between the pretest and post-test results. In addition, I am concerned about the small number of people taken through the training session of *Simple Church* at Gladeville Baptist Church.

My thesis project is unique compared to the review of the literature in that it implements *Simple Church* in a church congregation, not simply among women or deacons. Secondly, it shares specific, concrete before and after results in the form of charts and graphs in areas of improvement once *Simple Church* was fully implemented. Thirdly, it implements *Simple Church* in the steps of *Simple Church*, namely worship services and small groups.

### **Lessons Learned**

The fourth section shares lessons learned on what I, as the researcher, learned in implementing *Simple Church*. I reflect on ten lessons learned in the implementation of *Simple Church*. This section could even be called, “greatest insights I gleaned.” They are as follows: (1) direction, (2) continuation, (3) subtraction, (4) invitation, (5) concentration, (6) assimilation, (7) repetition, (8) reduction, (9) clarification and (10) simplification.

#### **Direction**

One lesson learned as I reflected on the implementation of *Simple Church* is that it provides direction to a church congregation. The Bible says in Proverbs 29:18a, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (KJV). Once the four-week sermon series was completed, the church congregation knew where the church was going from a directional standpoint. Growing up in evangelical churches, no local church I attended communicated information about church

direction. An individual from the church told me that people were leaving his company because the company lacked direction. He was comparing this experience to Greenhouse Community Church and how I share the direction we are going each week.

#### Continuation

A second lesson learned as I reflected on the implementation of *Simple Church* is that delegating the work can lead to continuation of the ministry leader. In Exodus 18, Moses is on the verge of burn out. His father-in-law Jethro tells him to divide the people up into groups of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands. A godly leader is appointed over these groups, thus spreading out the workload. In other words, delegation occurs. Moses is not doing all the work himself anymore. The work has now been delegated. When *Simple Church* is implemented, it has the potential for delegation. People join small groups, and the small group leaders can be given the task of providing shepherding care to those within their small group. Furthermore, the congregation is encouraged to also serve on a ministry team, where the work is also delegated.

#### Subtraction

A third lesson learned as I reflected on the implementation of *Simple Church* is that of subtraction. In John 6, Jesus gives a hard teaching. John 6:66 says, “From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.” Jesus experienced subtraction. Not everyone stayed. As I implemented *Simple Church* both at Fallen Timbers Community Church and at Greenhouse Community Church, some people left. Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger do not really address this in *Simple Church*, but when *Simple Church* is fully implemented and followed, some people will leave.

When we implemented *Simple Church* at Fallen Timbers Community Church, some people left because the church was laser-focused on the simple, clear discipleship plan. Events

that they had experienced at other churches were not offered at Fallen Timbers Community Church, and people left for that reason. I call this short-term loss, but long-term gain. The church grew by the hundreds as *Simple Church* was implemented.

This past February, Greenhouse Community Church held its Annual Membership Meeting. The elders embraced *Simple Church* to such an extent that in the bylaws, it was added that to be a member, in addition to professing faith in Christ and showing evidence of regeneration, a member also needed to be baptized as a believer, be involved in a small group, and serve on a ministry team. Note that action steps 2 and 3 of *Simple Church* were added to the membership requirements. While the amendment received the necessary votes, there was some opposition, and a couple of people did not return to the church after this change. When *Simple Church* is implemented and followed, a church can expect to experience subtraction. I call this short-term loss, but long-term gain. Since this meeting, the church has recently experienced its highest attendance at an Easter service in perhaps more than a decade.

#### Invitation

A fourth lesson learned as I reflected on the implementation of *Simple Church* is that personal invitation is still needed. Matthew 4:18-20 states, “As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fisherman. ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will make you fishers of men.’ At once they left their nets and followed him.” Jesus used personal invitation. I learned that preaching about joining a small group and serving on a ministry team is not enough. One also needs to use personal invitation. One woman in the church mentioned that her son had never been asked to serve. I found that strange because every week we encourage people to serve on a ministry team. What she meant was that he had not been personally invited to serve on a

ministry team. In other words, preaching and exhorting people from the pulpit is not enough, some people need a personal invitation before they will be involved.

#### Concentration

A fifth lesson learned as I reflected on the implementation of *Simple Church* is it allows for a church and church pastor to concentrate on doing a few things well. In Acts 6, there were widows before overlooked in the daily distribution of food. Rather than every church disciple taking on this ministry, it was stated in Acts 6:3-4, “Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” Since these disciples were not having to wait on tables, they could concentrate on prayer and the ministry of the word. When *Simple Church* is implemented, it allows for the church and the church leadership to concentrate on doing a few things well.

#### Assimilation

A sixth lesson learned as I reflected on the implementation of *Simple Church* is that it is an effective assimilation tool. In my experience of implementing *Simple Church* now at two churches, very rarely will people leave the church when they are members who are: (1) regularly attending a worship service, (2) regularly participating in a small group, and (3) regularly serving on a ministry team. In fact, I would argue that if people are not involved in a small group and not involved in serving on a ministry team, it is only a matter of time before they leave the church. When church people understand and follow the three action steps of *Simple Church*, it helps to close the back door of the church.

### Repetition

A seventh lesson learned as I reflected on the implementation of *Simple Church* is that repetition increases comprehension. Most people will not remember what is said if they only hear it once. I noticed that as I continued to repeat the simple, clear discipleship plan at Greenhouse Community Church, the comprehension also increased dramatically as is shown in Chapter 4. So, when *Simple Church* is implemented in a church, there must be repetition of the discipleship plan, which will aid the congregation in comprehension of the discipleship plan.

### Reduction

An eighth lesson learned as I reflected on the implementation of *Simple Church* is that it has the potential of reduction. When a church leadership board decides not to do the special events that they used to do, it can provide a reduction in labor, money, and time, which can be allocated to the programs that are a part of the discipleship plan. This is different from subtraction in that subtraction was a short-term loss of people that were not in agreement with the Simple Church paradigm. Whereas, reduction is the downsizing of labor, time and money needed to carry out a streamlined discipleship plan in a church.

### Clarification

A final lesson learned as I reflected on the implementation of *Simple Church* is that of clarification. Many churches have a mission statement. Relatively few can accurately name their church's mission statement. Furthermore, even if a church has a mission statement that people can name, it fails to mention the "how." When *Simple Church* is implemented, it provides the "what" and the "how." Otherwise, when a church simply has the "what" and lacks the "how," just about any ministry "event" can be justified. But when they have a "how," it forces elimination of those "programs" that are outside the simple, clear discipleship plan. In addition,

clarification is provided as to “how” the church is to carry out her mission by stating the program being used.

### Simplification

A final lesson learned is the importance of simplification. Even though this thesis project is on the implementation of *Simple Church*, the work could have been simplified. If I had to do the research over again, it would have been much simpler by focusing on the sermons during the worship services, sermon based small groups and a pre-test and post-test before and after the intervention. This would have been a much simpler methodology. The insight I gained is that even the implementation of a simple church discipleship plan can be very complex.

### Results in Other Settings

The fifth section is titled, “results in other settings.” My step-by-step example of a simple, clear discipleship plan implemented in a church would have some of the same results and some different results, if it was implemented in other settings. I will explore four specific settings. They are (1) denomination, (2) location, (3) size, and (4) age of the church.

The first specific setting is the denomination. The church that I pastor is in the Christian and Missionary Alliance. In 2007, the District Superintendent of the Great Lakes District encouraged us to read *Simple Church*. The denomination is also trying to simplify its financial giving categories and its missionary structure. So, the concepts of *Simple Church* are understood in the denomination. For those in different denominations, the implementation of *Simple Church* would depend on whether the denominational leaders and local church leaders were familiar with the elements of *Simple Church*. For those in denominations that are program-heavy, the implementation of my step-by-step example could be very difficult, especially when programs that do not fit into the simple, clear discipleship plan need to be eliminated. This can cause

conflict, decline and even death to a local church. Before my step-by-step example is implemented in a denominational church setting, one needs to understand if the denominational leaders and church leaders are familiar with the concepts of *Simple Church*. Furthermore, one needs to do an honest evaluation of whether the church's denomination is program heavy. If the church's denomination is program-heavy, one needs to proceed with extreme caution and patience when implementing my step-by-step example.

The second specific setting is the location. I pastor Greenhouse Community Church in Houston, Texas. I believe that the implementation of my step-by-step example will garner positive results in comprehension of the direction of the church and numerical growth in worship services, small groups, and ministry teams, regardless of the location of the church. Why? Because whether the people are in an urban, suburban, or rural setting, they are busy and long for a simple, clear directional strategy for the church they attend.

The third specific setting is the size of the church. The church I pastor is slightly larger than the average size church in America. I believe that the implementation of a step-by-step example works best in a smaller situation that has lacked a discipleship plan in the past. Implementing my example in a very large church that has been program-heavy has the potential of causing conflict when some dearly beloved programs are eliminated because they do not fit the new simple, clear discipleship plan.

The fourth specific setting is the age of the church. I believe that best results for the implementation of Simple Church would be in a church plant. The reason is that the church plant is new and has not had pre-existing programs for years that need to be eliminated. Ideally, my step-by-step example should be implemented in all new church plants, which would provide the church plant with a clear direction. The implementation of my example would be difficult in a

traditional church that has been overly programmatic for decades and where the congregation's leadership does not see the need for change, even if they have been in decline for years.

### **Recommendations**

The final section is titled, "recommendations." I have four recommendations. These recommendations have to do with the following areas: (1) Process Design Survey, (2) District Superintendents, (3) evangelical pastors' discipleship plan development, and (4) timing for the implementation of *Simple Church*.

First, I recommend that each year I have the church elders take the Process Design Survey, written by Eric Geiger. This will show the progress that has been made since the previous year, it will also show areas that need to be addressed. This will provide a concrete number out of 120 possible points as to how simple our church is. The higher the score, the better.

Second, I recommend that every District Superintendent in the Christian and Missionary Alliance sit down with each Senior Pastor and ask them to write out the "what" and the "how" of their discipleship plan. In most cases, the church will not have both a "what" and a "how." This will provide an opportunity for the District Superintendent to encourage the pastor to take his church boards through the book *Simple Church*.

Two months ago, I had my District Superintendent ask me to teach this information to the pastors of our district, which would include pastors from Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana. I also had the District Superintendent from the Northeastern District talk to me about teaching *Simple Church* to the pastors in his district. This district is in New York state and represents about 70 churches. He likes this approach because not only can *Simple Church* be

implemented in churches of 70, but also in churches of 700. As one of my elders likes to say, the plan is scalable. It can work in small churches but also in very large churches.

Third, I recommend that every evangelical pastor write out the “what” and the “how” of their discipleship plan. Again, I believe that most churches do not have a “what” and a “how” in their discipleship plan, if they even have one at all. This will provide the Senior Pastor an opportunity to take this church board through *Simple Church: Updated Edition*. Upon completion of the book, the church leadership should develop a simple, clear discipleship plan that articulates the “what” and the “how” of their plan. This is critical for churches to be vibrant and growing as shown by the research done by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger.

Fourth, I recommend the timing of the implementation of *Simple Church* to be either after Labor Day or after the New Year. Labor Day across America signals the end of summer and the start of the school year. People are ready for a new beginning. The New Year would also be a good time to implement *Simple Church* because people are ready for a new year and a new beginning. *Simple Church* is new for many congregations, and the timing of the implementation of *Simple Church* could be coordinated with these dates in mind.

Even though the thesis project has ended, there is still more work that needs to be done. Just as this paper took Rainer and Geiger’s work a little further, other researchers will come along and take it to new places.

## Bibliography

- Kaye, Allison, Michael Kaye, and Jude Kaye. *Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2005.
- Barna, George. *Grow Your Church from the Outside*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2002.
- Berg, Jeff, and Jim Burgess. *The Debt-Free Church*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1996.
- Blum, Edwin A. *2 Peter. The Bible Expositor's Commentary*. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelein. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981.
- “Books for ministry.” *The Christian Century*, 15 October 2014.
- Browning, Dave. *Deliberate Simplicity: How the Church does more by doing less*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.
- Burns, Bob, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie. *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told us about Surviving and Thriving*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013.
- Chandler, Matt, Josh Patterson, and Eric Geiger. *Creature of the Word*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2012.
- Cloud, Henry, and John Townsend. *Boundaries*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.
- Collins, Jim. *Good to Great*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001.
- Collins, Jim, and Jerry I. Porras. *Built to Last*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994.
- Coleman, Robert E. *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book Publishing, 1963.
- Cooper, Tim, and Kelvin Gardiner. *Pastoring the Pastor: Emails of a Journey Through Ministry*. Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2012.
- Creswell, John W., and J. David Creswell. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018.
- Croft, Brian. *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches*. Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2016.
- Cymbala, Jim. *Fresh Win, Fresh Fire*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.

- Delavan, Norma. *Parkway Fellowship Celebrating 75 Years*. Houston, Texas, 2012.
- Donahue, Bill. *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996.
- Donahue, Bill, and Russ Robinson. *The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.
- Douglas, Debra M. "Equipping Lifeway Ministry Multipliers to Train Women's Ministry Leaders in Transitioning to and Leading in the Simple Church Model." EdD dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008.
- Earley, Dave. *Turning Members Into Leaders: How to raise up your group members to lead new groups*. Houston: Cell Group Resources, 2003.
- Earley, Dave, and Rod Dempsey. *Disciple Making Is....* Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2013.
- Farrar, Steve. *Overcoming Overload*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2003.
- Fee, Gordon D. *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.
- Finzel, Hans. *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2007.
- Fletcher, Michael. *Overcoming Barriers to Church Growth*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003.
- Floyd, Ronnie. *10 Things Every Minister Needs to Know*. Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 2006.
- Garlow, James L. *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership Tested by Time*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002.
- Geiger, Eric, and Jeff Borton. *Simple Student Ministry*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2009.
- Geiger, Eric, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation. *Transformational Discipleship: How people really grow*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2012.

- Geiger, Eric, and Kevin Peck. *Designed to Lead*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2016.
- George, Carl F. *How to Break Growth Barriers*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993.
- Gibson, Scott M. *Preaching with a Plan*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012.
- Graham, Billy. *Just as I Am*. New York, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997.
- Greenhouse Community Church Profile, 2017.
- Greenhouse Community Church Annual Report of the Pastor, 2017.
- Greidanus, Sidney. *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.
- Groeschel, Craig. *How Churches and Leaders can get it and Keep it*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.
- Hemphill, Ken. *You are Gifted*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2009.
- Hirsch, Alan, and Dave Ferguson. *On the verge: a journey into the apostolic future of the church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- Hughes, R. Kent. *Disciplines of a Godly Man*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991.
- Hybels, Bill. *Courageous Leadership*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.
- Larson, Knute. *The Adult Bible Fellowships Book*. Akron, OH: Chapel Press, 1997.
- Macchia, Stephen A. *Becoming a Healthy Church: 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1999.
- Mangham, Bill. *Statistics from Christian and Missionary Alliance*, 2017.
- Malphurs, Aubrey. *Planting Growing Churches for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992.
- . *Advanced Strategic Planning*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002.
- Marraccino, Dawn. She responded in an email to me in 2018.

- Maxwell, John C. *Leadership Gold: Lessons I've Learned from a Lifetime of Leading*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2008.
- . *Developing the Leaders Around You*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995.
- . *3 Things Successful People Do*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2016.
- . *Developing the Leader within You*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1993.
- . *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1998.
- McIntosh, Gary L. *Biblical Church Growth: How you can work with God to Build a Faithful Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003.
- Mittelberg, Mark. *Building a Contagious Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.
- Morris, Henry. *The Genesis Record*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976.
- Morris, Robert. *The Blessed Church*. Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2012.
- Myers, Kevin, and John C. Maxwell. *Home Run: Learn God's Game Plan for Life and Leadership*. New York: Faith Words, 2014.
- Olson, David T. *The American Church in Crisis*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.
- O'Malley, J.S. "Discipleship Movement." *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Edited by Walter A. Elwell. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984.
- Pritchard, G.A.. *Willow Creek Seeker Service*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996.
- Rainer, Thom S. "An assessment of C. Peter Wagner's contributions to the theology of church growth." PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988.
- . *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing, 1993.
- . *Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Reveal what works and what doesn't*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing, 1996.
- . *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing, 1999.

- . *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001.
- . *Breakout Churches*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005.
- . *Essential Church*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2008.
- . *I am a Church Member: Discovering the Attitude that Makes the Difference*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2013.
- . *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2014.
- . *I Will!: Nine Traits of the Outwardly Focused Christian*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2015.
- . *Who Moved my Pulpit?: Leading Change in the Church*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2016.
- . *Becoming a Welcoming Church*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2018.
- . *We want you here*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2018.
- . *Scrappy Church: God's Not Done Yet*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2018.
- Rainer, Thom S., and Art Rainer. *Simple Life*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2009.
- Rainer, Thom S., and Jess W. Rainer. *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2011.
- Rainer, Thom S., and Sam Rainer. *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of dropouts*. Nashville, Tennessee: B& H Publishing Group, 2008.
- Rainer, Thom S., and Eric Geiger. *Simple Church: Updated Edition*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2011.
- Rainer, Thom S., and Eric Geiger. *Simple Church*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2006.
- Russell, Bob. *When God Builds a Church*. New York: Howard Books, 2000.

- Scazzero, Peter L. *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- . *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015.
- Schaller, Lyle E. *The Multiple Staff and the Larger Church*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1980.
- . *The Very Large Church: New Rules for Leaders*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2000.
- . *44 Ways to Increase Church Attendance*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1988.
- Schwarz, Christian A. *Natural Church Development*. Saint Charles, Illinois: Church Smart Resources, 1996.
- Searcy, Nelson. *Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests into Fully-Engaged Members of your Church*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2007.
- Sensing, Tim. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011.
- Simple Church Global Network Website, “About Us.” Accessed on October 21, 2019.
- Sjogren, Steve. *Conspiracy of Kindness: A Refreshing New Approach to Sharing the Love of Jesus with Others*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1993.
- Smith, Terry D. *Changing Course: Leading Older Churches in a New Direction*. Church Smart Resources, 2014.
- Stanley, Andy. *Deep & Wide*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.
- . *Making Vision Stick*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.
- . *Visioneering: God’s Blueprint for Developing and Maintaining Vision*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1999.
- Stanley, Andy, Reggie Joiner, and Lane Jones. *7 Practices of Effective Ministry*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004.
- Stebbins, Tom. *Evangelism by the Book*. Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1991.

- Stetzer, Ed. *Planting Missional Churches*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2006.
- Stetzer, Ed, and Mike Dodson. *Comeback Churches*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2007.
- Stetzer, Ed, and Eric Geiger. *Transformational Groups*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2014.
- Sugden, Howard F., and Warren Wiersbe. *Answers to Pastors' FAQ's*. Colorado Springs: Cook Communications, 2005.
- Surratt, Geoff, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird. *A Multi-Site Church Road Trip*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.
- Towns, Elmer. *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools and What makes them grow*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969.
- . *The Ten Most Influential Churches of the Past Century*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2014.
- Towns, Elmer, and Daniel Henderson. *The Church That Prays Together*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008.
- Viola, Frank. *Reimagining Church*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008.
- Ward, Angie. "Church is Simple. No, really," *Leadership Journal* 28, no. 1 (January 2007).
- Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.
- . *The Purpose Driven Life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.
- Webb, Craig A. "Equipping Active Deacons to Implement the Simple Church Process at Gladeville Baptist Church, Gladeville, Tennessee." DMIN diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010.
- Wiersbe, Warren W. *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament Volume 1*. Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries, 2001.
- Yount, Michael. *A.B. Simpson: His Message and Impact on the Third Great Awakening*. Eugene, Oregon: WIPF & STOCK, 2016.

## Appendix A: Sample Letter to Focus Group

December 1, 2018

Dear Greenhouse Community Church Leader:

I hope you are doing well.

I am a graduate student in the Doctor of Ministry Program at Liberty University School of Divinity. I am conducting research to better understand discipleship in the local church. The purpose of my research is to implement *Simple Church* at Greenhouse Community Church to see more involvement in small groups and ministry teams. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study because you are a leader at Greenhouse Community Church.

If you are 18 years of age or older, and are willing to participate, you will be asked to be involved in a focus group. I will ask you questions and you will give answers in a small group setting. It should take 20 minutes to complete the focus group. Your name and insight will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, go to the Community Hall at Greenhouse Community Church, on Sunday, December 16, 2018 at 12:15 pm for a free pizza lunch. This Focus Group meeting will last 20 minutes.

A consent document immediately follows this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the focus group.

Sincerely,

Rev. Jeff Wheeland  
Pastor at Greenhouse Community Church  
Houston, Texas 77084

## Appendix B: Sample Consent Form for Focus Group

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 12/14/2018 to 12/13/2019 Protocol # 3564.121418

FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM Simple Church Implemented at Greenhouse Community Church Jeff Wheeland Liberty University Doctor of Ministry Department/School of Divinity

You are invited to be in a research study on implementing *Simple Church* at Greenhouse Community Church. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a leader at Greenhouse Community Church. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Jeff Wheeland, a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Ministry department at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to see the connection between the implementation of *Simple Church* and increased involvement in small groups and ministry teams.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following:  Answer the questions in a group setting. This will take approximately 20 minutes. Those involved in this focus group will be video recorded.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Compensation: Pizza, salad, and cookies will be served at the focus group.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

Participants will be assigned a pseudonym (made up name).  Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.  This focus group will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only

the researcher will have access to these recordings.  I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 12/14/2018 to 12/13/2019 Protocol # 3564.121418.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Greenhouse Community Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Jeff Wheeland. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at 419-266-2029 or [jeff@greenhousecma.org](mailto:jeff@greenhousecma.org). You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Dan Russell, at 717-404-2790. His email is [drussell3@liberty.edu](mailto:drussell3@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to video record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Signature of Participant      Date

---

Signature of Investigator      Date

## Appendix C: Sample Letter for Congregation for Pre-Test and Post-Test

January 1, 2019

Mr. Bob Hill  
19706 Emerald Leaf Dr.  
Houston, Texas 77094

Dear Greenhouse Community Church Attendee:

I hope you are doing well.

I am a graduate student in the Doctor of Ministry Program at Liberty University School of Divinity. I am conducting research to better understand discipleship in the local church. The purpose of my research is to implement *Simple Church* at Greenhouse Community Church to see more involvement in small groups and ministry teams. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study because you attend Greenhouse Community Church.

If you are 18 years of age or older, and are willing to participate, you will be asked to take an anonymous pre-test and post-test. Since this is anonymous, you will not write your name. It should take 5 minutes to complete the test.

To participate, come to Greenhouse Community Church on Sunday, January 6, 2019. The pre-test will be given on Sunday, January 6, 2019 and the post-test will be given on Sunday, January 27, 2019.

A consent document will be given to you at the time of the anonymous pre-test.

Sincerely,

Rev. Jeff Wheeland  
Pastor at Greenhouse Community Church  
Houston, Texas 77084

## Appendix D: Sample Consent Form for Pre-Test and Post-Test

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 12/14/2018 to 12/13/2019 Protocol # 3564.121418

ANONYMOUS PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST CONSENT FORM Simple Church Implemented at Greenhouse Community Church Jeff Wheeland Liberty University Doctor of Ministry Department/School of Divinity

You are invited to be in a research study on implementing *Simple Church* at Greenhouse Community Church. You were selected as a possible participant because you attend Greenhouse Community Church. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Jeff Wheeland, a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Ministry department at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to see the connection between the implementation of *Simple Church* and increased involvement in small groups and ministry teams.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following:  Answer the anonymous pre-test and post-test questions during one of the worship services. This will take approximately 5 minutes. Since this is anonymous, please don't write your name.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants will be taught a discipleship method.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

Participants will be assigned a pseudonym (made up name).  Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 12/14/2018 to 12/13/2019 Protocol # 3564.121418.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, do not return your pre- or post-test.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Jeff Wheeland. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at 419-266-2029 or [jeff@greenhousecma.org](mailto:jeff@greenhousecma.org). You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Dan Russell, at 717-404-2790. His email is [drussell3@liberty.edu](mailto:drussell3@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

## Appendix E: Sample Letter to Sermon Based Small Group

January 1, 2019

Dear Greenhouse Community Church sermon-based small group attendee:

I hope you are doing well.

I am a graduate student in the Doctor of Ministry Program at Liberty University School of Divinity. I am conducting research to better understand discipleship in the local church. The purpose of my research is to implement *Simple Church* at Greenhouse Community Church to see more involvement in small groups and ministry teams. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older, and are willing to participate, you will be asked to be involved in a small group. You will interact with the points made during the sermon. It should take 30 minutes to complete the small group. Your name and insight will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, go to the Community Hall at Greenhouse Community Church, on Sunday, January 6, 2019 at 12:15 pm for a free pizza lunch. This Small Group meeting will last 30 minutes. There will be four consecutive Small Group meetings at 12:15 pm each Sunday in January 2019.

A consent document immediately follows this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the small group.

Sincerely,

Rev. Jeff Wheeland  
Pastor at Greenhouse Community Church  
Houston, Texas 77084

## Appendix F: Sample Consent Form for Sermon Based Small Group

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 12/14/2018 to 12/13/2019 Protocol # 3564.121418.

SMALL GROUP CONSENT FORM Simple Church Implemented at Greenhouse Community Church Jeff Wheeland Liberty University Doctor of Ministry Department/School of Divinity

You are invited to be in a research study on implementing *Simple Church* at Greenhouse Community Church. You were selected as a possible participant because you have attended a sermon based small group at Greenhouse Community Church. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Jeff Wheeland, a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Ministry department at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to see the connection between the implementation of Simple Church and increased involvement in small groups and ministry teams.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following:  Answer the sermon-based questions in a small group setting. Participation involves attendance at four different 30-minute Sunday small group sessions. Those involved in this small group will be video recorded.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Compensation: Pizza, salad, and cookies will be served at the small group.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

Participants will be assigned a pseudonym (made up name).  Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.  This small group will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only

the researcher will have access to these recordings.  I cannot assure participants that other members of the small group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the small group.

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 12/14/2018 to 12/13/2019 Protocol # 3564.121418

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Greenhouse Community Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Small group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the small group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Jeff Wheeland. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at 419-266-2029 or jeff@greenhousecma.org. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Dan Russell, at 717-404-2790. His email is drussell3@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to video record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Signature of Participant      Date

---

Signature of Investigator

## Appendix G: Sample Letter to Interview Participants

January 1, 2019

Mr. Bob Hill  
19706 Emerald Leaf Dr.  
Houston, Texas 77094

Dear Greenhouse Community Church Leader:

I hope you are doing well.

I am a graduate student in the Doctor of Ministry Program at Liberty University School of Divinity. I am conducting research to better understand discipleship in the local church. The purpose of my research is to implement *Simple Church* at Greenhouse Community Church to see more involvement in small groups and ministry teams. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study because you are a leader at Greenhouse Community Church.

If you and your spouse are 18 years of age or older, and you are both willing to participate, you will be asked to be involved in an interview. It should take 10-15 minutes to complete the interview. I will interview you and your spouse together. Your names and insights will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, go to the table in the lobby at Greenhouse Community Church on Sunday, January 27, 2019 and sign up for a 15-minute time slot.

A consent document immediately follows this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Sincerely,

Rev. Jeff Wheeland  
Pastor at Greenhouse Community Church  
Houston, Texas 77084

## Appendix H: Sample Consent Form for Interview Participants

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 12/14/2018 to 12/13/2019 Protocol # 3564.121418.

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM Simple Church Implemented at Greenhouse Community Church Jeff Wheeland Liberty University Doctor of Ministry Department/School of Divinity

You are invited to be in a research study on implementing *Simple Church* at Greenhouse Community Church. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a leader at Greenhouse Community Church. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Jeff Wheeland, a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Ministry department at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to see the connection between the implementation of *Simple Church* and increased involvement in small groups and ministry teams.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following:  Answer the interview questions. This will take approximately 10-15 minutes. I will interview you and your spouse together. Those involved in this interview will be video recorded.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

Participants will be assigned a pseudonym (made up name).  Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.  This interview will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.  I cannot assure participants that other

members that were interviewed will not share what was discussed with persons outside of those being interviewed.

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 12/14/2018 to 12/13/2019 Protocol # 3564.121418

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Greenhouse Community Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Jeff Wheeland. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at 419-266-2029 or [jeff@greenhousecma.org](mailto:jeff@greenhousecma.org). You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Dan Russell, at 717-404-2790. His email is [drussell3@liberty.edu](mailto:drussell3@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to video record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Signature of Participant      Date

---

Signature of Investigator      Date

## Appendix I: IRB Approval

December 14, 2018

Jeff Wheeland

IRB Approval 3564.121418: Simple Church implemented at Greenhouse Community Church

Dear Jeff Wheeland,

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

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Your IRB-approved, stamped consent form is also attached. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

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

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*

**The Graduate School**

**LIBERTY**  
UNIVERSITY

*Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971*

## Appendix J: Four Sermon Outlines used for intervention

Note: I learned this preaching method from preaching classes at Dallas Theological Seminary and from *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* by Sidney Greidanus.

Sermon #1: Our Discipleship Plan at Greenhouse Community Church

### INTRODUCTION

Opening Image: Story about a surprise.  
Need: I don't want you to be surprised about the direction of Greenhouse Community Church.  
Text: You need to know exactly what our discipleship plan is.  
Preview: If you have your Bibles turn with me to Mark 12.  
I have titled the message, "Our Discipleship Plan at Greenhouse Community Church."  
I want to share three action steps in our discipleship plan.

- I. Love God through Worship Services.
  - A. Text: Mark 12:28-30.
  - B. Illustration: My dad didn't want my heart to grow cold towards God in seminary. He wanted me to grow in my love for God.
  - C. Application: Action Step #1: Love God through Worship Services.
  
- II. Love People through Small Groups.
  - A. Text: Mark 12:31.
  - B. Illustration: Vince Lombardi the former coach of the Green Bay Packers once said, "If you are going to play together as a team you have to love each other."
  - C. Application: Action Step #2: Love People through Small Groups.  
Out in the lobby you will see a listing of different small groups.
  
- III. Serve the World through Ministry Teams.
  - A. Text: Mark 10:45.
  - B. Illustration: Rick Warren once said, "The mark of spiritual maturity is when someone takes off their bib and puts on an apron."
  - C. Application: Action Step #3: Serve the World through Ministry Teams.

### CONCLUSION

Review: I titled the message, "Our Discipleship Plan at Greenhouse Community Church."  
I shared three action steps.

- I. Love God through Worship Services.
- II. Love People through Small Groups.

Closing Image: III. Serve the World through Ministry Teams.  
 Noah had a plan to build the ark.  
 Moses had a plan to build the tabernacle.  
 Nehemiah had a plan for building the walls of Jerusalem.  
 At Greenhouse Community Church, we have a plan to make disciples that:

1. Love God through Worship Services.
2. Love People through Small Groups.
3. Serve the World through Ministry Teams.

Sermon #2: Three Reasons why Christians need to attend Worship Services

INTRODUCTION

Opening Image: Funny similarities of football and church.  
 YOU: As you know there are all sorts of reasons why some Christians don't attend Church.  
 Need: Why do Christians need to attend church worship services.  
 Text: The Bible talks about this in Hebrews 10.  
 Preview: I have titled the message, "Three Reasons why Christians need to attend church worship services."  
 I want to share three reasons why Christians need to attend church worship services.

- I. Christians need to attend church worship services because of the Scriptures exhortation.
  - A. Text: Hebrews 10:25.
  - B. Illustration: The average American Christian considers themselves a regular attender if they come twice a month.
  - C. Application: Christians need to attend church worship services because of the Scriptures exhortation.
  
- II. Christians need to attend church worship services because of the Saint's encouragement.
  - A. Text: Hebrews 10:25.
  - B. Illustration: Personal story of a church member encouraging me when I was discouraged as a pastor.
  - C. Application: Christians need to attend church worship services because of the Saint's encouragement.
  
- III. Christians need to attend church worship services because of the Savior's example.
  - A. Text: Luke 2:41-52.

- B. Illustration: Dr. James Dobson tells the story of wanting to skip church to go skiing on Sunday. His young son said that it wasn't right to skip church. They went to church on Sunday and went skiing on Monday.
- C. Application: Christians need to attend church worship services because of the Savior's example.

## CONCLUSION

Review: I titled the message, "Three Reasons why Christians need to attend church worship services."

I shared three reasons why Christians need to attend church worship services.

- I. Christians need to attend church worship services because of the Scriptures exhortation.
- II. Christians need to attend church worship services because of the Saint's encouragement.
- III. Christians need to attend church worship services because of the Savior's example.

Closing Image: A man shared how pastor's sermons helped feed him spiritually.

Sermon #3: Why should I join a small group?

## INTRODUCTION

Opening Image: Funny children's story about squirrels and Jesus.

You: In every message you will hear me talk about Jesus and small groups.

Need: We all need small groups.

Text: The Bible talks about Small Groups so if you have your Bibles please turn with me to Matthew 10.

Preview: I have titled the message, "Why should I join a small group?"  
I want to share three reasons as to why you should join a small group.

- I. I should join a small group because of Christ.
  - A. Text: Matthew 10:1-4.
  - B. Illustration: Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple Computers once asked a man if he wanted to spend the rest of his life selling sugared water or if he wanted to change the world.
  - C. Application: I should join a small group because of Christ.
- II. I should join a small group because of Community.
  - A. Text: Acts 2:42-47.
  - B. Illustration: Harvard did a study on happiness and discovered the key was relationships.
  - C. Application: I should join a small group because of Community.

- III I should join a small group because of Care.
- A. Text: Exodus 18:13-27.
  - B. Illustration: When Jackie Robinson was being mocked because of his skin color during a baseball game, a teammate came and put his arm around him.
  - C. Application: I should join a small group because of Care.

## CONCLUSION

Review: I titled the message, "Why should I join a small group?"  
I shared three reasons.

1. I should join a small group because of Christ.
2. I should join a small group because of Community.
3. I should join a small group because of Care.

Closing Image: Inspirational story of small groups.

## Sermon #4: Ministry Teams: How can I be great in God's Kingdom?

### INTRODUCTION

Opening Image: Sitting the bench playing college soccer.

You: Are you involved in the action or are you sitting the bench on God's team?

Need: We need to be reminded that all of us can serve.

Text: If you have your Bibles turn with me to Mark 10.

Preview: I have titled the message, "How can I be great in God's Kingdom?"

I want to share the problem, solution and application.

- I. The Problem: Self-Centeredness.
  - A. Text: Mark 10:35-40.
  - B. Illustration: Randy Moss said one time when he was playing wide receiver in the NFL, "I play when I want to play."
  - C. Application: The problem is self-centered.
  
- II. The Solution: Servanthood.
  - A. Text: Mark 10:41-44.
  - B. Illustration: Dr. Victor Frankl shared that the key to survival in a Nazi concentration camp was having an attitude of servanthood.
  - C. Application: The Solution is servanthood.
  
- III The Application: Serve.
  - A. Text: Mark 10:45.
  - B. Illustration: Story of stepping outside of your comfort zone to serve.

C. Application: The application is to serve.

## CONCLUSION

- Review: I titled the message, "How can I be great in God's Kingdom?"  
I shared the problem, the solution and the application.
- I. The Problem: Self-Centeredness.
- II. The Solution: Servanthood.
- III. The Application: Serve.
- Closing Image: Story of how one person can make a difference.