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JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

The Necessity of Small-Group Ministries

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Doctor of Ministry

by
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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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There is a consistent debate regarding the best structure for ministry within the context of the church. Churches established with a traditional mentality utilize the lecture method in small groups, while contemporary-driven churches utilize an open-ended discussion method in small groups. The following research seeks to determine which small-group model most effectively grows the believer spiritually and relationally. The participants have lived in a traditional small-group model all their lives. The belief is that introducing a small-group model that goes beyond the traditional lecture approach will deepen relationships and lead to maturity. The research methods include open-ended discussion questions, an anonymous questionnaire, and the observational notes gathered during the instructional and fellowship meetings. Allowing the participants an opportunity to ask and respond to questions deepens the conversation, allowing for succinct growth. The questionnaire has been designed to gain insight into the participant's opinion of the small-group model utilized in this research. The observational notes should reveal a steady change throughout the research. This thesis project will influence others in the field of ministry to pursue a different small-group model based on the success seen with the change. Pastors, lay leaders, and leaders of the church should strive for the best atmosphere in which believers will grow. This thesis project reveals that change is necessary at times.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Is there a better way to disciple believers to make disciples? The context of the following thesis is to determine if a transition from a traditional small group setting to a life-to-life small group ministry will enhance spiritual and relational growth. The following chapter will focus intently on the ministry context of Star Baptist Church along with the current ministry problem within the church body. Basic assumptions, definitions important to the study, limitations and delimitations will also be examined that will have an effect on the study overall. Finally, the thesis statement will be presented detailing the overarching goal of the study.

Small-group implementation has shown positive results in the history of the church, including evidence from the early church described in the Acts of the Apostles. At some point in history, certain denominations have wandered from the biblical model of small-group ministry, preferring a more traditional setting for the church: lecture-oriented instruction as opposed to life-on-life ministry. Small-group ministries have shown effectiveness in spiritual and numerical growth within the church as opposed to the lecture-style method.

Currently, the ministry context reflects the traditional model of church without small groups, unless Sunday school can be considered a small group. It is the opinion of the author that Sunday school is not a true model of small-group ministries due to the nature in which it is conducted. There are various components of a proper small-group ministry that are not reflected in a simple, traditional Sunday school class. The ability to discuss life in light of Scripture is

absent due to the lecture-style method used during the hour. Little to no contact is made outside of the designated time slot for Sunday school. The contact that is made is more of an investigation into why a member was absent from the Sunday school meeting. (It should be noted the idea of Sunday school is not counter scriptural when used in conjunction with a successful small-group ministry.)

There are several advantages to implementing a small-group ministry. Small-group ministries, when done correctly, challenge the participants to seek after God in all aspects of their lives while leaving them with the understanding that they are not walking this journey on their own. Instead, individuals who are part of a thriving small group understand God's purpose of fellowship with other believers in their faith walk. Small groups also utilize more individuals than a church without small groups. This allows the leadership of the church to ensure that all believers are not only growing spiritually but also serving one another and their communities. These are but a few advantages that a succinct small-group ministry offers the church as a whole.

Ministry Context

The ministry context for this prospectus is Star Baptist Church, specifically its adult ministry. As mentioned earlier, Star Baptist is a body of believers that operates in the traditional sense. There are five separate services offered throughout the week: Sunday school, discipleship training, two worship services on Sunday (morning and evening), and a Wednesday night prayer service. Outside these instructional periods, there is little to no communication in regards to life-to-life ministry. All services offered utilize the lecture method with little discussion. Outreach outside these services is limited.

Star Baptist Church is located in Star, Mississippi, just south of the capital, Jackson, and west of Highway 49. The community of Star is not incorporated and supports the Rankin County

School District, specifically focusing on the McLaurin schools. The area is predominantly Caucasian with a minority of African Americans. There are five churches in a two-mile radius that make up the community, including Star Baptist Church. Two of these churches are African American Baptist, one is Caucasian Methodist, and the other is Caucasian Baptist. The average household is three people, with the average age set at approximately forty-five years.

Star Baptist Church is the largest of the five churches in the community of Star, Mississippi. The town thrived as one of the largest railroad stops in Mississippi until a four-lane highway was built just to the east of the town, taking the majority of traffic through a different route. Star eventually fell behind in developing businesses that would allow the community to grow. There is currently a fire station, hairworks business, satellite post office, woodworking business, and a water company. The distance from small-community living to big-city hustle is approximately fifteen minutes north. History has revealed that a school used to be part of the community where certain buildings that are part of Star Baptist Church's facilities were used.

Star Baptist currently has an operating staff of ten individuals: four ministerial and six non-ministerial staff. The office of pastor is occupied by an interim pastor as this thesis is being composed. The other ministerial staff members are the worship/associate pastor and the youth pastor. The fourth ministerial position is held by a woman who is serving an interim volunteer role over the children's ministry. This is the only staff position at Star Baptist that is not compensated. There is also a full-time ministry assistant who handles administrative responsibilities and a part-time individual who is filling a separate interim position dealing with the finances of the church. Two custodians handle the upkeep of the church facilities: one who is tasked with the CLC and other grounds projects and another who takes care of the cleaning of

the main church building. Finally, two accompanists, who are paid part time, contribute their talents through piano and organ during the Sunday services.

Sunday school is a driving force within Star Baptist and takes place at 9:00 a.m., before the worship service begins. There are eleven separate classes that are offered for adults who are college age and older during this instructional period. The Sunday school format for the church can be broken down into three separate categories: child (including babies and preschool), youth, and adult classes. One adult class is geared toward visitors or individuals who have not yet joined the church and is open for any age group. One class is devoted to college-age and young adults combined, up to the age of twenty-five. This class is limited through the school year (August–May) due to most students leaving the community to attend college. There is one class geared to adults (mainly couples) from the age of twenty-five to fifty. The remaining classes are built to minister to adults above the age of fifty. Two of these classes are mixed gender (male and female), while the remaining six classes are gender specific and essentially closed groups, meaning the roster is established with no openings. Child or youth Sunday school groups will not be discussed as they are not essential to the practicum.

It has been stated the adult Sunday school groups are essentially closed, suggesting that no one is allowed to join these Sunday school groups. A better way of understanding this is that the Sunday school groups of Star Baptist are not advertised to new members or visitors. Outreach is nonexistent. New membership is not frowned upon but not sought after. The members of Star Baptist would not claim exclusivity, but advertisement for the various classes is null and void. This is the traditionalist nature. The individuals who compose the various adult Sunday school classes have been attending for many years and do not change with the exception of one class.

The class that caters to visitors was created due to an individual noticing there was not a class for “new” people.

The curriculum that is utilized in all adult Sunday school classes is the Gospel Project presented by Lifeway. Every class does the same lesson with the exception of the Sunday school class created for visitors. Very little is done about broadcasting the different classes to the church as a whole. Announcements to increase Sunday school is relegated to the one service a year in which high attendance is stressed. This has been stretched to include a month as opposed to simply one Sunday out of the year. The average attendance for Sunday school is 170 (this number includes child and youth classes). This has been the average for a few months. There are almost 600 active members of Star Baptist. This reveals that approximately 28 percent of the body of believers in Star Baptist are actively involved in Sunday school. The numbers for discipleship-training classes, which are offered at a separate time on Sunday, do not provide better data.

There are three adult classes that meet during the discipleship-training hour, which is at 5:00 p.m. every Sunday. One of these classes is deemed the Sunday school prep class, in which the teachers of the various Sunday school classes come and receive instruction for the following week’s Sunday school lesson. This is not a required class but a class for those who feel they need extra help in preparing for the lesson. The other two discipleship classes are gender specific and target adults who are over the age of fifty. These two classes follow different Bible studies and have little conversation about them in the class meetings due to time constraints. The average attendance for discipleship training is sixty church members, including child and youth ministries. Ten percent of the members at Star Baptist take part in a discipleship class.

Wednesday night prayer meeting starts at 6:30 p.m., with approximately twenty-five adults meeting in one of the classrooms to discuss the church prayer list and listen to a small devotion given by one of the deacons. Child and youth activities take precedence on Wednesday night meetings. There is a meal offered, with the specific purpose of bonding the adults with children. A bus ministry began picking up children and youth in a low-income neighborhood in close proximity to the church. These children have little to no accountability in their lives. The meal ministry is to prayerfully provide an accountability connection between adults and children. One issue is that parents who are members of Star Baptist avoid bringing their children for two reasons: no available class for parents other than the prayer meeting and the parents' fear that the children who are picked up by the church bus will be a bad influence on their own children.

Sunday morning and Sunday evening worship services are typical traditional church gatherings. The morning worship service, which begins at 10:15 a.m., includes a time of fellowship, announcements, praise (including a choir special twice a month), taking up the offering, and preaching, followed by a time of invitation. The Sunday evening worship service, which begins at 6:00 p.m., is scaled back. There are usually two songs and possibly a special solo followed by a lesson from the interim pastor and concluded with a prayer. This is also the time the choir meets to practice choir music. On average, 250 members gather during the morning worship service, accounting for 42 percent of active members, while 100 gather for evening worship, accounting for 17 percent of active members.

There are two separate ministries that should be mentioned: the mission team and the JOY (Just Older Youth) group. These two ministries are the only entities that have not yet been described. Both ministries include the adults of the church. The mission team has been instrumental in sending individuals across the world spreading the gospel of Jesus. The group is

often closed when it comes to trips, with the same individuals going each trip. Opportunities are extended to the church as a whole but not highly publicized. Every mission trip includes a core group of ten adults, with very few newcomers attending. The JOY group is the senior citizen group, which gathers monthly to eat and play board games. This group is comprised of various older members who do not discuss anything scriptural at the meetings. This time is used more as a social gathering or fellowship as opposed to mentoring and growing in Christ.

There are several resources from Star Baptist Church that could be utilized for this prospectus. The main resource is the study material *Return on Investment*, by Dr. Tony Evans. This material is geared toward the biblical command of giving back to the church, a focus on servanthood, and being devoted to the fellowship of the church. Finances and church facilities will also be available for use if necessary. Considering this is a different type of small group from the Sunday school and discipleship-training model, participants should not be hard to identify. The instructional meetings will take place during the Sunday school hour. Time for the fellowships is also flexible, depending on when participants agree to meet together due to the structured times not being infringed upon.

As stated above, the church does have child and student ministries. The student ministry has started to transition the Sunday school hour to more of a conversation time in the church, discussing the lesson that was taught the previous Wednesday night. Results have been positive, with students agreeing that their relationship with God and others has benefited since implementing the change. This prospectus revolves around the adults of Star Baptist and is based on the positive results seen in the student ministries.

The flow of ministry at Star Baptist Church highly fits the mold of the traditional church model. The idea is prevalent that God simply expects His children to attend church no more than

three times weekly. Ministers are expected to accomplish the discipleship and service of the church. With this mind-set, there is a void in true discipleship as defined by Scripture. This is the problem that is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Problem Presented

The problem is that many members of Star Baptist Church may not see the benefit of small-group ministry in their lives. The attitude currently experienced within the body of believers that compose Star Baptist Church is apathetic concerning discipleship. The church is traditional in nature pertaining to the idea of small groups. There is Sunday school on Sunday morning, and a discipleship-training course on Sunday evening. Both classes are lecture style, with no opportunity for the students to grow by asking questions or entering conversation. There are rarely fellowship activities that foster a community atmosphere. This is a problem and in direct contradiction to what Jesus has called the church. The unity of the members of Star Baptist Church suffers due to the lack of community-building opportunities.

This is a problem within the body of believers for multiple reasons. First, the lack of life-to-life interaction found in a church of small groups could leave the congregation with an apathetic attitude toward church in general. This is when the church conforms to the idea that attending the regular services somehow accomplishes the spiritual requirements of being a Christian. The traditional idea of being faithful to the church, which is a thought experienced in many churches in the Bible Belt area of the South, is contrary to what Jesus has called for His church to be. Star Baptist is currently suffering from apathetic attitudes that cement itself in the traditional mind-set of church. The belief is that ministry is done in a specific way, regardless of whether or not the way church is accomplished is biblical. This is detrimental to the pursuit of spiritual fortitude.

The second reason that a lack of small groups is a problem in Star Baptist revolves around the issue of a lack of accountability within the church. Church discipline is nonexistent. Implementing small groups is not to discipline believers when the leaders of Star Baptist have the opportunity. On the contrary, small groups provide a life-to-life interaction in which believers can hold one another accountable in their lives as they see, feel, and hear how one another lives, the holy and unholy in one another's lives. This is for the purpose of holding one another accountable for the glory of God.

The final reason the lack of small groups hurts the ministry of Star Baptist is the inability to grow deeper in a relationship with God. Certain members enjoy the lecture method and obtain great information that assists in their walk with Christ. Lecturing cannot be the only effective learning method offered to believers at Star Baptist. Discussion of the topic allows for different perspectives and addresses the various types of learners that could be included in the small group.

Purpose Statement

The purpose for this DMIN action research thesis is to discover whether the implementation of a succinct, developed small-group ministry will enhance and fulfill the responsibility of discipleship effectively within Star Baptist Church. The current discipleship model used is ineffective for the church as a whole. Over the past two years, a hybrid model for small-group ministry has been implemented within the youth group of Star Baptist Church and has seen positive results numerically, both spiritually and physically.

The attendance of the small-group model three years ago was approximately twenty students from grades seven to twelve. The attendance grew from approximately twenty to approximately fifty within a year after the implementation of the hybrid model from the

traditional model. Spiritually, the students have grown based on observation. There are more student leaders emerging on school campuses as well as within the church, when in the past the students of Star Baptist Church have been silent on their campuses. Small groups began to reveal themselves on school campuses, while students of the hybrid model at Star Baptist Church were stepping into leadership roles in Christian clubs at their schools. Personally, students have taken on highly debated topics from a Christian perspective, such as abortion and racism within their schools. These actions were nonexistent before the hybrid small-group model was introduced. The application of a small-group model for the church as a whole may have the same results.

The purpose of the Christian is to bring glory to God. This is accomplished by loving Him, loving people, and making disciples. It is difficult to fulfill the purpose of a Christian by living a life of solitude or resolving to function as the church in a specific way. The traditional manner in which Star Baptist operates excludes avenues that would assist in fulfilling the purpose of the Christian. Implementing small groups as defined by Scripture would enhance the Christians' responsibility of fulfilling their purpose by replacing the life of solitude with a life committed to community.

The purpose of implementing small groups will hopefully lead the congregants of Star Baptist to a lifestyle of community. The traditional style allows for community during the fellowship time before and after service and the occasional dinner on the grounds after certain worship services. There are few times offered outside of the five worship services for community to take place in Star Baptist. Discipleship involves different facets that cannot be met within the traditional style of worship. Implementing a small-group ministry will prayerfully bridge relationship gaps between generations that the traditional style cannot bridge.

This will lead to an opportunity to practice accountability between believers. The congregants of Star Baptist do not have any ground to stand on for accountability purposes due to fellowship being relegated to social media or the time before and after a service. Accountability, as outlined by Scripture, comes from a knowledge that can only be gained from life-on-life ministry.

Implementing small groups will provide an atmosphere for believers to open up about what is being presented through Scripture. The time allotted for current ministries within Star Baptist does not provide ample time or opportunity to discuss what is being taught. Offering a time of fellowship outside of the regular scheduled time will benefit the congregants in being able to express thoughts and opinions pertaining to Scripture and how it applies to life.

Basic Assumptions

Assumptions have been presented in the previous sections but will be further extrapolated in this section. One major assumption is that a majority of the believers at Star Baptist do not desire to participate in a small-group ministry. The reason is grounded in the traditional mind-set of the congregants as a whole. In the traditional model, change is looked down upon for multiple reasons. One reason that change is hard is based on the mind-set that church has always been done a certain way. The assumption is that believers do not want to change due to not seeing the need to change. This was discovered through conversation with and observation of various members of Star Baptist Church. These conversations and observations were part of the reason for pursuing the topic of this thesis.

A separate assumption lies in the community aspect found within the thriving small group. Believers at Star Baptist are private by nature. Committing to participate in a small-group ministry that would lead them out of their comfort zone would test their comfortability.

Discipleship in its purest form requires the disciple and the one being disciplined to develop a relationship that supersedes most other relationships in terms of being open and honest in communication. Discipleship is most effective in a small-group setting, as exemplified in Scripture through Christ. The assumption is that believers of Star Baptist will not allow themselves to be open and honest in communication.

Implementing a small-group ministry that is effective and efficient in Star Baptist, where believers are encouraged and excited about being a part of it, is another assumption. The assumption is that members will not be excited about the change that a small-group ministry represents. Excitement fuels participation. It is assumed that a few of the church members will be excited, while the remaining church members will not be, thus resulting in a lack of participation.

Definitions

There are several terms that are used when discussing small-group ministry and its effect on the biblical mandate of discipleship. The terms defined here will be used throughout the study.

Christian community. Christian community refers to a group of believers who gather together for the glory of God. Francis Chan and Mark Beuving provide the most succinct definition in regards to how the term *Christian community* will be utilized in this thesis: “The church is a group of redeemed people that live and serve together in such a way that their lives and communities are transformed.”¹

Christian leader. When referring to a Christian leader, the focal point is not on the pastor or pastors of Star Baptist Church. On the contrary, a Christian leader is an individual who appears to have the gift of leadership from the Holy Spirit. Dave Earley and Rod

¹ Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2012), 52.

Dempsey explain: “A Christian leader is a person of influence. He or she follows God’s will for their lives and influences others to follow God’s plan for their lives.”²

disciple. For this prospectus, Andrew Burggraaf’s definition of *disciple* will be used: “The simple definition of the Greek word (disciple) is one who learns or is a pupil of another.”³

discipleship. Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey explain: “Disciple making in its purest form is helping people find Jesus and then helping them to grow and become all they can be for Christ.”⁴ This statement encompasses the end goal for implementing a small-group ministry at Star Baptist Church.

small group. Small groups come in various sizes, but this study will focus on groups containing no more than twelve members. Brad House defines a community or small group as “a people who understand their identity in Christ and have a corporate or communal understanding of that identity.”⁵

Star Baptist Church. At various times, Star Baptist Church will be referred to as Star Baptist or simply SBC. This is the established body of believers represented in this study. When referring to Star Baptist Church, Star Baptist, or SBC, the members of the church are the focal point, as opposed to the building in particular.

Limitations

One limitation that is obvious is discovering who will be the leaders utilized in the small-group ministry. Determining these leaders should not be left to one individual. Understanding

² Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . . : How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), chap. 20, Kindle.

³ Andrew Burggraaf, “Developing Discipleship Curriculum: Applying the Systems Approach Model for Designing Instruction by Dick, Carey, and Carey to the Construction of Church Discipleship Courses,” *Christian Education Journal* 12, no. 2 (2015): 398, <https://doi.org/10.1177/073989131501200211>.

⁴ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .*, chap. 1.

⁵ Brad House, *Community: Taking Your Small Group Off Life Support* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 95.

that multiple opinions matter as far as who would be competent to lead a small group limits who will be selected to lead the small group.

A separate limitation is found in the location of where the small group will gather. The idea is for homes to be opened to a particular group of adults in Star Baptist. The limitation is found in the home in which the small group will gather. Is it necessary to utilize homes of members of the small groups, or would it benefit the group to meet in a location separate from the home?

The material used in the study is the next limitation. Star Baptist leans heavily on the Gospel Project, already utilizing it within Sunday school ministry. There have been issues with teachers wanting to branch out and use other material. The idea is that all of the congregants should use the same material weekly. The study material used for this prospectus will be from Dr. Tony Evans's library, *Return on Investment*.

A separate limitation involves the fellowship activities. Participants are not required to pay for any activities, resulting in limitations in what can be done during the fellowship times. Gathering in public places that cost money will be off-limits due to the requirement of funds.

The final limitation includes the meeting time for the research to be conducted. Establishing a set day and time could be beneficial for several reasons. Participants will know from the onset when and where to include the expectation of involvement. Allowing the participants to determine the best day and time would limit participants but also involve the possibility of utilizing members that otherwise would not be thought of.

Delimitations

The desire is to use the entire congregation of Star Baptist in this thesis project. However, that would be a broad test audience and could result in skewed results. For this reason, the first

delimitation set for this thesis is to focus on adults aged twenty-five to thirty-five with young children. This limits the congregation to a reasonable number of individuals to work with when developing a small group that is effective and efficient. It is assumed that not all couples between the desired ages will participate. The goal is to begin with six couples (twelve individuals) specifically chosen to participate in the small-group environment.

There is a valid reason for including this specific parameter concerning the participants. This age group is the least disciplined age group currently in Star Baptist Church. The idea is to utilize a small group model that would encourage this age group to be more active within the church. The researcher's family would fall within these parameters, so first-hand knowledge of the deficiency of discipleship with this age group fed the desire to utilize these strict limitations.

The final delimitation involves fellowship times. The participants will have the opportunity to decide what fellowship activities they will take part in. This will alleviate a boredom issue as participants will provide input into what interests them. The prospect of imagination is intensified due to the limitation of where fellowship activities can take place. Utilizing the participants in making the decision of what to do increases excitement and interest surrounding the fellowship times.

Thesis Statement

It is believed that if a defined small-group ministry is implemented at Star Baptist Church, the result will be more effective discipleship with a greater awareness of spiritual ineptitude and pursuit of spiritual competence. As mentioned in the purpose statement, designing a small-group model that goes beyond the traditional lecture method may lead congregational members of Star Baptist Church to a deeper level in the Christian walk with Christ. Discipleship will begin to take root as designed biblically, with positive results as evidence. This evidence

will be an increase in spiritual fervor as well as numerical growth, considering that the Great Commission will come into focus more through this process.

As mentioned previously, a small-group ministry has been implemented in the student ministry at Star Baptist. The atmosphere before this small-group ministry was installed was steeped in a traditional setting. Sunday morning and evening services involved a lecture during the Sunday school and discipleship-training hour. Wednesday night worship services (geared specifically to students) included songs and a message from the youth pastor or speaker. There was no connection between the lessons, resulting in the students hearing five separate messages throughout the week.

Small groups were implemented, and the Sunday school hour changed to allow time for the students to engage in what they were being taught. Small-group leaders guided a discussion of what was discussed during the lesson from the previous Wednesday worship service. These changes have proven successful through the fruit that is being born. There has been an increase in student attendance during the Sunday school hour, with a fuller understanding of what is being taught.

The student ministry of Star Baptist has proven that a successful implementation of a small-group ministry will result in greater competence of spiritual matters, which is lacking with the traditional style. The adult ministries at Star Baptist will prosper with the development of a small-group ministry. Accountability will increase as members of Star Baptist lock in to the importance of living life in community through a small-group ministry that is effective and efficient. This will lead to a greater understanding of Scripture, resulting in stronger faith in God as well as deeper relationships with fellow believers.

The ministry context has been delivered detailing how Star Baptist Church currently operates in using the traditional small group model. The problem involved in a traditional small group model has been presented leading to the purpose statement of this thesis. The researcher has offered basic assumptions regarding the researcher's basic commitments and presuppositions along with key terms that need to be defined. The limitations and delimitations defined the boundaries of the project. Finally, based on the information regarding the ministry context and other factors discussed in this chapter, a clear and concise thesis statement was produced detailing the overarching goal of this research project. The researcher will focus on why this problem should be addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Small-group ministry has one purpose: to develop disciples, or make disciples who make disciples. With this goal in mind, it is important to define what a disciple is, indicate the effects of discipleship, the problems or issues found in discipleship, and the importance of Christian community. Understanding these four key areas of disciple making will provide a solid basis or foundation for the importance of implementing a succinct model of discipleship. History has proven the necessity of a succinct discipleship ministry within the local congregation.

In the following chapter, several definitions and competing views will be provided from scholars of various backgrounds, emphasizing the call to make disciples and what that looks like in a ministry context. The theological foundation section of this chapter will key in on the biblical principles that support the necessity of the research. What does scripture teach regarding this issue? Finally, the theoretical foundation section will conclude this chapter. Has any research been conducted regarding the issue being address within this thesis? An examination of various models of ministry will be detailed in this section.

Literature Review

What Is a Disciple and Discipleship?

Most scholars agree that a disciple is an individual who is a student of another with the intent of becoming like that individual. Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation describe a disciple as an individual who is a learner or a student and even claim that everyone, regardless

of spiritual orientation, is a disciple of someone.⁶ Brad House confirms this definition but insists that the idea of reducing a disciple as someone who is a learner is a broad stretch.⁷ House does not provide a deeper or more in-depth definition in claiming that a disciple is broadly a learner.

There are scholars, such as Chan and Beuving, who believe that one cannot carry the title of disciple if that individual is not actively making more disciples. Francis Chan and Mark Beuving agree that a disciple is someone who is a student or apprentice but push beyond this basic definition to state that if one is truly a disciple, then that individual is constantly making other disciples.⁸ A separate author, David Platt, says that a disciple is simply someone who follows after the teaching of Jesus, with no clear focus on developing disciples in the process, implying that one can be a disciple without actively making disciples of others. David Platt's idea pushes back against Chan and Beuving. Platt defines what would be considered a Christian as someone who is loved, pursued, and found by God.⁹ Platt does not provide a definition for the term *disciple* but indicates in his work that a Christian is an individual who follows Christ. According to the previous definitions, this individual would also be considered a disciple.

Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey take a more direct approach in defining what a disciple is. It is more than simply being a student, as proposed by the previous authors. Earley and Dempsey claim that a disciple is one who completely abandons everything the world offers and instead chooses to follow Jesus.¹⁰ Earley and Dempsey confirm the idea of abandoning the things of this

⁶ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2012).

⁷ House, *Community*, 52.

⁸ Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012), 31.

⁹ David Platt, *Follow Me: A Call to Die, a Call to Live* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013).

¹⁰ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .*, Kindle.

world by stating in separate literature that a disciple is one with purpose and intent.¹¹ Stephen Cherry takes a completely different approach from Earley and Dempsey in defining what it means to be a disciple.

Cherry notes that being a disciple is not about following Jesus at all but instead imitating the manner in which the first-century disciples learned and grew.¹² Cherry supported the idea that being a disciple could not be relegated to a classroom but must be accomplished walking through life together with a mentor.¹³ Kathleen Beagles also supports the idea that a disciple is only made while traveling along the journey.¹⁴ Neither author discourages the necessity for the disciple to learn in a classroom setting. Both authors agree that disciples are made when living life together with one another.

Andrew Burggraff agrees with authors such as Geiger, Kelley, and Chan, defining a disciple as a pupil or a student of another.¹⁵ Burggraff does argue in his work that discipleship is a broad term that is used in large- and small-group settings, including one-on-one conversations between two Christians, with an individual becoming a disciple at baptism and continuing with some form of education.¹⁶ Jim Putnam agrees somewhat with Burggraff in claiming that a disciple of Jesus carries specific traits: a disciple must be saved, invested in other disciples, imitating Christ, and diligent in accomplishing the mission of Jesus.¹⁷ It should be noted that

¹¹ Rod Dempsey and Dave Earley, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University Press, 2016), Kindle.

¹² Stephen Cherry, "Discipleship and Christian Character," *Theology* 119, no. 3 (2016): 193–99, doi: 10.1177/0040571X15623705.

¹³ Cherry, "Discipleship and Christian Character," 196.

¹⁴ Kathleen Beagles, "Growing Disciples in Community," *Christian Education Journal* 9, no. 1 (2012): 148–64, <https://doi.org/10.1177/073989131200900111>.

¹⁵ Burggraff, "Developing Discipleship Curriculum," 397.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 398–99.

¹⁷ Jim Putnam, *Church Is a Team Sport: A Championship Strategy for Doing Ministry Together* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), Kindle.

Putnam is applying these traits to individuals who consider themselves disciples after Jesus was crucified and rose from the grave. This does not apply specifically to the disciples who lived with Jesus during his earthly ministry. The agreeance between Putnam and Burggraff comes at the point of where a disciple begins to be a disciple—salvation from Jesus. Putnam further explains that the only way for discipleship to be effective is through relationship, meaning that one cannot be a disciple apart from relationship.¹⁸

Thom S. Rainer does not provide a definition for what a disciple is but instead gives information pertaining to what a disciple is not. Rainer’s explanation centers around the idea that disciples are believers, but not believers who just fill a church pew on Sundays. On the contrary, disciples are believers who take care of other believers.¹⁹ This indicates the necessity of relationship, which is what Putnam supports. This idea of gathering and being a part of a church is an idea that Jonathan Leeman also agrees with, but the reason for gathering differs. Putnam and Rainer believe that disciples gather for encouragement and instruction, with the focus being on growing toward Christ through the avenue of small groups. Leeman approaches defining a disciple as not someone who grows but instead of what the disciple can do for the church.²⁰

The Effects of Discipleship

What occurs when discipleship is successful? What happens when discipleship as defined by Jesus is taking place throughout God’s church? The first effect that is seen through discipleship is transformation. All scholars mentioned in this section hold to the belief or thought that transformation is an effect brought on by the cause that is discipleship. They differ in how

¹⁸ Putnam, *Church Is a Team Sport*, Kindle.

¹⁹ Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014).

²⁰ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

the transformation takes place but hold to the fact that transformation will take place regardless. House believes transformation is the overall goal of discipleship because the focus is centered on the gospel, which brings transformation.²¹ Platt contends that transformation takes place as one pursues Christ through discipleship in the heart, desires, wills, and relationships, becoming the purpose for one's living.²² Geiger, Kelley, and Nation solidify the thought that transformation is an effect of discipleship. These authors differ in believing that all discipleship does not result in transformation, but evidence of transformation is seen through ones' actions.²³

A separate effect of discipleship is to produce more disciples who make disciples, thus succeeding in participating in the Great Commission. Earley and Dempsey claim that the objective of discipleship is to produce more disciple-making disciples.²⁴ Chan supports this effect, stating that it is not enough for Christians to lead people to the saving knowledge of Jesus; one must also teach them how to be successful disciple makers.²⁵ This idea of making disciples who make disciples as an effect is shared by Jim Egli and Wei Wang. Egli and Wang take it a step further in believing that disciple makers will eventually result in leaders for small groups if individuals are engaged in the disciple-making process.²⁶ Rod Dempsey and Dave Earley differ slightly in their opinion that an effect of discipleship is to make disciples who make disciples. Dempsey and Earley believe the ultimate goal is to bring God glory through discipleship, which leads to a life of service.²⁷

²¹ House, *Community*, 54.

²² Platt, *Follow Me*, 208.

²³ Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 10.

²⁴ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .*, Kindle.

²⁵ Francis Chan, *Letters to the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2018), 179.

²⁶ Jim Egli and Wei Wang, "Factors that Fuel Small Group Growth," *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (2014): 134–51, <https://doi.org/10.1177/073989131401100111>.

²⁷ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*, Kindle.

The final effect that is evident throughout the literature is this idea that relationships flourish when there is a small-group setting available. Bill Donahue and Charles Gowler maintain that the feeling of belonging increases within a small-group ministry in a way that is not felt in a corporate setting.²⁸ Roger Walton argues that the relationship building found in small-group ministries increases faithfulness to the overall church goals, while those who are not plugged into a small group tend to fall away.²⁹ Beagles agrees that relationships are an effect of successful small-group ministries. She takes it a step further by indicating that when there are purposeful generational relationships built throughout the church, the result is the retention of younger Christians. She asserts that “both research and theory indicate that intentionally supporting healthy, intergenerational relationships for spiritual growth and modeling within the family of God can improve the state of discipleship and youth retention.”³⁰

Problems Found in Discipleship

Multiple problems arise when considering beginning a small-group ministry for the sake of discipleship. Selfishness is a sin that can distort or destroy steps taken toward implementing a successful discipleship lifestyle through small groups. Chan asserts that when individuals have too much of a say pertaining to persona opinions, complaining increases throughout the ministry.³¹ The opposite position is held by Joshua Rose. Rose believes that the small group suffers when an individual withholds information from the group as a whole.³² The authors differ

²⁸ Bill Donahue and Charles Gowler, “Small Groups: The Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever?,” *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (2014): p. 118–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/073989131401100110>.

²⁹ Roger Walton, “Disciples Together: The Small Group as a Vehicle for Discipleship Formation,” *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 8, no. 2 (2015): 99–114, <https://doi.org/10.1558/JATE.v8i2.99>.

³⁰ Beagles, *Growing Disciples*, 157.

³¹ Chan, *Letters to the Church*, 51.

³² Joshua Rose, “Equipping Members for Ministry through Small Groups,” *Christian Education Journal* 14, no. 2 (2017): 361–75, <https://doi.org/10.1177/073989131701400209>.

in their opinions of which issue is harder on the small group. Rose believes that those who are not involved enough are a problem, while Chan insists that those who are selfish in nature are the problem.

Harley T. Atkinson and Joel Comiskey present a separate problem. The lack of hospitality from church members presents a problem as small groups work best out of the home.³³ Atkinson and Comiskey appear to believe that lack of hospitality fuels the closed mind-set that Rose presents as the problem in small-group ministry. Rainer's thoughts are similar to Chan's. Rainer claims that "a church cannot thrive long-term where members are focused on their own preferences."³⁴ This is also a belief held by Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, that a lot of members retreat to resist change.

A separate problem that exists within small-group ministries revolves around the curriculum, or whether or not a curriculum should be taught at all. Stetzer and Rainer claim that one of the obstacles that small groups face is in placing more emphasis on what is taught as opposed to transforming lives for the gospel.³⁵ This thought directly contradicts the thoughts of Burggraff and Walton, who argue that small-group discipleship structures tend to miss the important task of teaching Scripture. Beagles agrees with Burggraff and Walton but believes there should be a way to disciple and equip younger believers without utilizing a programmatic structure.³⁶

House, Chan, and Beuving meet in the middle of where Stetzer, Rainer, Burggraff, Beagles, and Walton stand. House views discipleship classes as more of a booster shot than an

³³ Harley T. Atkinson and Joel Comiskey, "Lessons from the Early House Church for Today's Cell Groups," *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (2014): 75–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/073989131401100107>.

³⁴ Rainer, *Autopsy*, 49.

³⁵ Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 190–91.

³⁶ Beagles, *Growing Disciples*, 156.

end goal.³⁷ Chan and Beuving argue that church leaders should not be left to develop a campaign to create disciples that only lasts a few months, which is what a programmatic model does.³⁸ Should churches pursue programmatic discipleship classes that focus on curriculum as opposed to relational classes that focus on fostering relationships that extend beyond social pleasantries? These authors disagree.

The Importance of Christian Community

Discipleship finds success when bred among a community of believers who have developed relationships. Relationships are a product of the unity experienced within small groups. Chan and Beuving argue for the idea that God intends for His church to be a body of believers who are not composed of isolated individuals but instead united for the purpose of the Gospel.³⁹ Platt echoes this idea of unity in claiming that the picture that is painted from the Bible portrays the church as united in all causes, including but not limited to encouragement, edification, forgiveness, rejoicing, and praying for one another.⁴⁰ This exhaustive list can only be accomplished through unity based on a devout and intentional relationship structure.

Egli and Wang indicate that this unity in relationship is what draws new people to the group, as opposed to a good curriculum.⁴¹ Dempsey and Earley believe healthy small groups are defined by believers who carry out the great commandment, which would reveal a small group composed of individuals who love deeply.⁴² The idea of loving one another based on a real relationship is a common thread in the literature reviewed thus far. Leeman continues the support

³⁷ House, *Community*, 49.

³⁸ Chan and Beuving, *Multiply*, 31.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁰ Platt, *Follow Me*, 154–55.

⁴¹ Egli and Wang, *Factors that Fuel*, 144–45.

⁴² Dempsey and Earley, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*, Kindle.

of the importance of community in the small group by claiming that “the local church community should be a place where Christians form and shape one another for good, through all the dynamics of friendship.”⁴³

Friendship is an impossible goal if relationship is not a constant within the community. There can be a community of individuals who are not united, resulting in a lack of relationship and causing discipleship to suffer for the members. This is what Chan and Beuving hint at in their work. Joseph Hellerman insists in his work that disciples should have an impact on one another daily when living together in the communal family environment.⁴⁴

Relationships are important in Christian community. These relationships are a drawing point for outsiders, whether the outsiders are believers or not. Geiger, Kelley, and Nation explain the necessity of the community being appealing to others: “Community is always attractive; it always grabs the hearts of those who observe.”⁴⁵ Chan supports this belief by turning to Scripture. He uses the early church as an example of a community that any reader would want to be a part of.⁴⁶ Rainer argues that the reason for the church’s appeal to the community in which it serves is due to the fact that the community in the church should be a direct reflection of the community in which the church is located.⁴⁷ Rainer’s argument is that a church that is dying or sick is a result of being a separate community that does not reflect the community in which it is found. This seems to be contrary to the thoughts set forth by Geiger, Kelley, and Nation. The latter authors seem to support the idea that the church should be attractive at all times. Rainer

⁴³ Leeman, *Church Membership*, 98.

⁴⁴ Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 162.

⁴⁵ Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 168.

⁴⁶ Chan, *Letters to the Church*, 54.

⁴⁷ Rainer, *Autopsy*, 25.

comes from a position that if the church community does not reflect the community in which it is located, then the result will be a lack of attractiveness.

Christian community breeds unity and attractiveness for outsiders to have a desire and want to belong based on real, relevant relationships. Christian communities also serve a role in presenting the Gospel that changes lives. Earley and Dempsey contend that disciples are better suited to “developing to their full potential for Christ and His mission” when living in Christian community.⁴⁸ This is supported by Rose, who claims that disciples have the opportunity to grow in every aspect of Christlikeness within a biblical community.⁴⁹

Rose seems to expound upon what Earley and Dempsey claim. Earley and Dempsey focus on the disciple and spiritual disciplines. Rose, by stating all aspects, includes spiritual disciplines but also every other facet of the Christian life. Donahue and Gowler support this idea by providing evidence from Stetzer and Rainer claiming that there is a positive trend to spiritual growth when disciples are living in Christian community.”⁵⁰

Conclusion

When discussing and determining the importance of implementing a type of small-group ministry, taking note of what various scholars agree and disagree on is paramount to making the decision to act. This literature review has presented numerous scholarly opinions concerning four main areas or themes of discipleship. Most scholars agree that the term *disciple* is best defined as an individual who learns from a mentor and strives to pattern their lives after the mentor. Scholars vary on the opinion of whether disciples take other disciples under their leadership.

⁴⁸ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .*, Kindle.

⁴⁹ Rose, *Equipping Members for Ministry*, Kindle.

⁵⁰ Donahue and Gowler, “Small Groups,” 126.

Three separate effects of discipleship have been discussed as presented by differing scholars. The first effect of discipleship is a type of transformation. There are differing opinions on whether or not transformation is accomplished at the physical or mental level. The second effect is focused on making disciples who make disciples, with scholars differing in their beliefs of whether disciples are made into leaders or just other disciples. The final effect is positive in nature toward relationships. Individuals who commit to discipleship grow in their relationships with others.

There are problems with discipleship that must be discussed to help prevent. The first problem focuses on selfishness and a lack of involvement. Too much of one person's opinion will ruin discipleship efforts. On the contrary, when disciples do not offer information to the group, the discipleship effort will suffer. A lack of hospitality within the church body is the second problem in discipleship. This lack of hospitality will derail any efforts made toward establishing a discipleship model. Finally, the last problem that can surface in discipleship is the focus of the small group's purpose. Should the small group be curriculum driven or relationally driven? The opinion of the scholars collectively is to utilize both curriculum and relationship-building exercises that will lead to a healthier, stronger discipleship ministry.

The final information gleaned from scholars revolves around the importance of Christian community for discipleship ministry. The authors focused on various reasons for the importance of Christian community, ranging from unity, relationships, and growth. The overwhelming idea or thought process is that Christian community breeds unity and healthy relationships, which in turn allows the disciple to grow spiritually.

Theological Foundations

Developing a theologically sound foundation for small groups is essential in understanding the importance of the need to establish a small-group ministry at Star Baptist. God reveals the necessity and significance of small groups throughout Scripture. Small groups were God’s design from before time began. From the onset in Genesis, God reveals He was not alone during Creation but was accompanied by the Son and the Holy Spirit: the Trinity. God Himself lives in community with the Son and the Spirit. Adam Clark explains that the belief in the Trinity is a long-held belief by many scholars and is seen in the original name used in the first verse of Scripture, Elohim: “As this plurality appears in so many parts of the sacred writings to be confined to three Persons, hence the doctrine of the TRINITY, which has formed a part of the creed of all those who have been deemed sound in the faith, from the earliest ages of Christianity.”⁵¹ God’s Word from beginning to end places a priority on this community or small-group influence, understanding that God did not design man to be alone.

In the beginning, God took His time creating all living things to include man. In Genesis 2:18, God makes the declaration that Adam should not be alone. There was a problem in that all created beings had a partner except for man. Multiple faculty contributors from the Moody Bible Institute support the idea that God knew in advance that Adam would need a helpmate. The authors contend that “God waited to meet that need—and in so doing to bring His creative work to completion—by showing Adam the animal kingdom so that he would realize he had a need that only God, in His love and wisdom, could meet.”⁵² God rectified this situation by creating a

⁵¹ Adam Clarke, ed., *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testament*, 6 vols. (London: Printed for Thomas Tegg & Son, 1836), 30, https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_holy_Bible_with_a_comm_and_critical/tKcGAAAAQAAJ.

⁵² “Genesis,” in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, eds. Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 42.

helpmate for Adam (the first man) out of his side. This woman's name was Eve, and her creation began the first small group: the family. This family dynamic is evident through various examples of God's chosen people. There are very few people in Scripture who do not have at least one other person in their life to help them grow into the individual God designed them to be.

Noah lived in a select small group that was used by God to replenish the earth after the flood. In Genesis 6:18, the specific calling of Noah, along with his wife, three sons, and their wives, is revealed, keeping the family in the tight group that God chose. The example of the small group recognized as Noah and his family reveals the necessity of reliance on God. Including the sons and their wives strengthens the idea that "Noah's household share in the covenant."⁵³ This provides theological support that small groups recognized today should understand the purpose of reliance on God.

Abraham held company with his wife Sarah and nephew Lot. The relationship with Lot was an interesting one. As Arthur Walkington Pink explains, "Throughout the biographical portions of Scripture, we find the Holy Spirit frequently brings together two men of widely different character and placing them in juxtaposition so that we might the better learn the salutary lessons He would teach us."⁵⁴ It is no accident that Abraham and Lot traveled together as a family, eventually separating into their own separate groups. What can be gleaned from this relationship is the necessity for the family to stay in the will of God, exemplified by Abraham and his family and what happens when the family walks against the will of God, as seen through what happened to Lot and his family in Sodom and Gomorrah.

⁵³ Albert Barnes, "Genesis 6," *Notes on the Whole Bible*, StudyLight.org, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/bnb/genesis-6.html>.

⁵⁴ Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1922), 148, https://www.google.com/books/edition/GLEANINGS_IN_GENESIS/He89UcODFyIC.

The idea of physical multiplication, as instructed by God to Adam in Genesis 1:28, is seen in action in Exodus 1:7. The children of Jacob were obedient to the command to multiply their family, which resulted in power throughout where they lived. This lends to the argument that there is power in numbers, supporting the idea that God desires for His disciples to live in community due to increased power to overcome the evil one.

Moses found sound wisdom through community in his familial small group. Specifically, Jethro was instrumental in teaching Moses, in Exodus 18:21–26, of the need to find suitable and equipped men to oversee issues found among the Israelites. Moses had stretched himself thin, and those closest to him recognized the need for structure and organization. Moses would have been lost if it were not for the sound council from Jethro, a man Moses allowed close to him. Jethro, based on the close relationship with Moses, took it upon himself to offer advice that proved beneficial to Moses. “Not only did this advice provide Moses with some excellent management principles, but as the spiritual leader, Moses was freed up for spiritual service.”⁵⁵ The story of Moses and Jethro reveals the necessity of having individuals through community who will be a voice of wisdom in specific periods of one’s life.

There is one example found in the Old Testament in which the small group is not relegated to family. The story of Daniel reveals a small group that was instrumental in encouragement to one another in a time of crisis. In Daniel 2:17–18, specifically, Daniel talks to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, whom the author reveals as “companions” of Daniel, about the dream that Nebuchadnezzar revealed to Daniel. Michael Rydelnik explains, “Daniel informed his Jewish companions of his need, and then together they sought help from the true God of

⁵⁵ Kevin D. Zuber, “Exodus,” in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 139.

heaven.”⁵⁶ The relationship was established, which exhibited community that instilled in Daniel a trust of his fellow companions that there was power in their prayers together for God to answer. God answered. This reveals that within the small group, there is power in petitioning God together and expecting Him to answer the prayer.

The emphasis of small groups is seen throughout the Old Testament, with these being but a few examples. The key is understanding the purpose of small groups. In order to understand the biblical mandate or foundation for small groups, the purpose of small groups must be defined biblically. As seen in the dynamic of the Trinity and the various examples of different small groups mentioned above, it is clear that the biblical purpose of small groups is the idea of community. The Old Testament focus on small groups is limited primarily to the family model as it is the first small group implemented by God, with the exception of a small group like Daniel’s.

The New Testament does not lose focus on the idea of the importance of implementing small groups. It can be argued that the idea is not explicitly stated, but there is an understanding of the implementation of small groups from the beginning of a Christian’s journey in the faith. This is evident in the life of Jesus and His disciples and flows into the establishment of the first church seen in Acts. The perception throughout the remainder of the New Testament is that small groups were not an added addition to the church at a later time but were the foundation of the church from the beginning.

Small groups in the Old Testament are relegated to familial ties. Jesus broke this trend by calling and surrounding himself with twelve men who were not related as a whole with the exception of three sets of brothers: Peter and Andrews, James and John, and James and Thaddaeus. (It has been debated whether or not James and Thaddaeus were brothers). There was

⁵⁶ Michael Rydelnik, “Daniel,” in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 1287.

no relationship between the twelve disciples apart from these three sets of brothers. Jesus broke the mold of the small group being defined by the family. A closer look into the relationship between Jesus and His disciples lays the groundwork for small-group ministries moving forward, into the new church, which began in Acts, through the churches of the New Testament, up until today's church.

Jesus's ministry began by establishing the first small group for the purpose of spiritual growth. Mark 3:14 states that Jesus's purpose of calling the twelve disciples was for them to be with Him. Lou Barbieri explains, "Jesus went up one of the Galilean mountains and summoned those whom He Himself wanted to follow Him."⁵⁷ This is a part of Scripture that gives insight into what a disciple is. By following Jesus in a small-group format, accountability was possible between the disciples. This can be seen in Jesus's instructions concerning accountability in Luke 17:3.

Jesus began His ministry after the temptation in the wilderness. Calling the first disciples set the precedence for the beginning of the example of the small group, which all followers of Christ are designed to follow. It should be noted the first disciples Jesus called did not begin as disciples. Biblically, Jesus put forth the precedence of what a disciple is. According to Luke, Jesus broke down specifically what was necessary for one to be a disciple of Christ (Luke 9:23). First, one must deny themselves. In order to be a disciple, one must be willing to set aside their selfishness for servanthood with Jesus as Lord. Paul teaches this concept to the church in Corinth stating this was the very reason Jesus died, that believers might deny themselves (2 Corinthians 5:15). This is also a concept that Jesus stressed when he taught that one should not have more than one master (Matthew 6:24). Second, one must die to themselves and live to Christ by taking

⁵⁷ Lou Barbieri, "Mark," in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 1524.

up their cross. The idea of dying to one's self is later taught by the Apostle Paul indicating this was a doctrinal truth for those believers who pursued Jesus (Galatians 2:20).

Third, one must follow Jesus. This particular characteristic of a biblical disciple could be fleshed out for a while. Jesus simply means the disciple's life should emulate Jesus' life. Again, the Apostle Paul and Peter taught this after Jesus' ascension (Ephesians 5:1; 1 Peter 2:21). Following Christ means living according to the way Jesus lived his life. The final characteristic of a disciple is one who loves as Jesus loves (John 13:34-35). Scripture is explicit in its direction to love without abandon. This love is seen sacrificially in the example of Jesus. Biblically, a disciple is one who denies themselves, takes up their cross daily, follows Jesus, and loves expecting nothing in return. There are several reasons that small-group ministry is important as defined by the way that Jesus lived His life.

First, in keeping with the Old Testament purpose for small groups, Jesus understood the importance of teaching His disciples community. It is through community that Jesus was able to teach the disciples the truths of Scripture, to include clarification for what was most important. Second, community is not only the environment in which followers learn but also care for one another's needs. Jesus exemplified what it meant to take care of those closest to Him. The important facet from Jesus in teaching the necessity of a small-group ministry for community is how to develop small groups further.

Before multiplication was understood, Jesus knew the importance that it would have on the family of God as a whole. In some of His last words to the disciples, in Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus commands the disciples to make disciples who will know how to follow what Jesus commanded. This was a multiplicative principle that Jesus understood from the beginning of time, when God commanded man to multiply: "Jesus is so intent on the members of His

redeemed community fulfilling the Great Commission that He promised to be with them, in all His authority, as they go and make disciples.”⁵⁸ The multiplication that Jesus was teaching and expecting is not accomplished through the same vehicle as when God commanded it in the beginning of time.

The concept is the same. Jesus expects His followers to not live in isolation but community. He also expects for the community to be one of growth. This is demonstrated in the Great Commission and is seen as fruit in the beginning of the church (Acts 2). The expectation is that the disciples will make disciples who in turn will make disciples. This is not accomplished through lecture methods solely but through applied instruction that yields fruit in new believers to mature believers. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus teaches various truths, expecting the disciples to follow suit in their actions.

The evidence is overwhelming in the letter of the Acts of the Apostles, written by Luke. The disciples are in a small group awaiting the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Once the gift of the Spirit is given, the disciples start preaching, with souls being saved (Acts 2:41). This marks the birth of the church, beginning to fulfill Jesus’ command to make disciples. The disciples could have continued with preaching the Gospel of Jesus, seeing lives changed and individuals added to the family of God. This would have been partial obedience to the Great Commission. The disciples understood, however, by the example of Jesus in their own lives, the necessity to teach the concept of small groups to the new converts.

Luke explains the development of the small group toward the end of chapter 2. This passage has been used consistently throughout the history of the church to direct the Christian to the proper way that fellowship should be conducted. William H. Marty further explains this type

⁵⁸ Michael G. Vanlaningham, “Matthew,” in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 1514.

of fellowship by stating, “Christian fellowship includes a relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and a horizontal relationship with other believers.”⁵⁹ Specifically, small groups are introduced as the means by which church should operate as a whole in verse 46. Marty says that the early church “also met in individual homes in a more informal setting” as well as the temple.⁶⁰

The newly converted Christians were meeting daily together in homes and the temple and had all things in common. The affection for one another that the early believers shared was due to living in community as exemplified by Jesus and his disciples: “Their spiritual unity was manifested in voluntary, compassionate sharing.”⁶¹ This is the mind-set that the disciples taught the early believers. Fellowship was one of the four disciplines that the new believers were taught from the beginning, along with devotion to the apostles’ teaching, the Lord’s Supper, and prayer. Fellowship in the early church was experienced in the temple but found a more intimate, informal setting in a small-group atmosphere where believers met in one another’s homes.

Community in small groups in which believers gathered in houses was not restricted to the church immediately following Pentecost. This is evident later in Luke’s historical account of the Acts of the Apostles, when Paul and a company of men who follow him are meeting in a house in Troas, where a young man falls three stories after falling asleep during Paul’s message (Acts 20:9). This is a change from the original church in Acts 2, which was primarily made of Jews. In this example, the believers are Gentiles, which is important to understanding why they meet. Marty provides clarity, stating, “They met in the evening because believers who were common laborers or slaves would not have had a day off and would have been required to work

⁵⁹ William H. Marty, “Acts,” in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 1678.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

during the day.”⁶² In this home, the small group, which includes Paul and his traveling group, gathers to break bread in community with one another (Acts 2:46). This biblically supports the idea that small groups maintain flexibility for those who cannot attend scheduled meeting times.

A separate example of the small group meeting in homes is found in the twelfth chapter of Acts (Acts 12:12). John Mark’s mother has a small group gathered in her house praying, which is one of the four disciplines the early believers were devoted to (Acts 2:42). The fact that the believers are praying together is not the essential point to be made in this context. The point is that John Mark’s mother opened her home to a small group of individuals for them to experience community together.

The apostle Paul’s focus was on spreading the truths of God in the churches that he was blessed to plant. He admitted to preaching publicly and privately to the elders in the Ephesians church. Paul’s message was powerful: repentance and faith in Jesus. The arena in which Paul spoke was not relegated to theaters solely but also to small-group gatherings that met in homes. Examples are found in Colossians 4:15 and Philemon 2. Gerald Peterman describes the church in Colossae: “House churches were common, however, and are mentioned a few times in Scripture.”⁶³

The power of the small group in homes as the church is seen in Paul’s letters to the various churches. Paul understood the power of meeting in small groups in homes. Finally, Paul and Timothy wrote to Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus on behalf of Onesimus (Phlm 2). The primary point, however, is that Paul also included this letter to the church that met in the house of Philemon. In his letter to Philemon, he specifically addresses “the church that met in

⁶² Marty, “Acts,” 1721.

⁶³ Gerald Peterman, “Colossians,” in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 1874.

Philemon's house."⁶⁴ Toward the close of his letter to the church in Rome, Paul encourages the believers to greet one another in the house of Prisca and Aquila (Rom 16:5). The church gathered in various houses as small groups to encourage and exhort one another.

Theoretical Foundations

Small-group ministry is not a new phenomenon that is recently being discussed. As presented in the previous section, small groups have existed since the beginning of time for the purpose of community. In the twenty-first century, several churches utilize small groups in various ways. Research has been done related to small groups and the missional movement, the effectiveness of small groups in relation to Acts 6:1–7, and the use of a small-group approach to increase church growth. This research will be discussed in depth pertaining to how it affects the current research position of this thesis. The theories revealed in the various research will be compared and contrasted with the researcher's topic while concepts from the research that will undergird this specific topic will be provided.

Small groups should play a role in the missional effectiveness of the overall church. Arthur R. Tucker conducted research that revealed that missional effectiveness from the dual-group structure was obsolete. Dual-group structure refers to a church structure that utilizes a main worship gathering as well as a small-group model outside the main worship gathering. Tucker's research indicates a lack of missional focus within the small-group model needed to advance the church as commanded in the Great Commission. Tucker claims, "If a group does not have a mission as a goal it can easily become self-centered and cliquish."⁶⁵ The underlying

⁶⁴ Gerald Peterman, "Philemon," in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 1918.

⁶⁵ Arthur R. Tucker, "Improving the Lack of Missional Effectiveness of Congregations with Small Satellite Meetings from an Interdisciplinary Practical Theological Perspective," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37, no. 1 (2016): 2, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v37i1.1530>.

theory in this research is that a small group is ineffective if missions are not a central focus of the small group.

Tucker provides evidence, using the early church as an example as to how they were effective in missions: “Research indicates a large majority of small group members perceived that their spiritual growth in understanding and discipleship has increased since they joined their small group because of the opportunity to ask questions, receive personal help, and model themselves on the more experienced in the group.”⁶⁶ In arguing for the necessity of a small-group model, Tucker explains that the small-group model is beneficial in that it provides an atmosphere for growth and development that a large church gathering does not afford.

There are two theories mentioned by Tucker that need to be addressed as the theories will undergird the theories of this thesis. First, the theory that missions must be a central focus tends to be offsetting and contrary to the theory believed to be true regarding small group models for Star Baptist Church. The theory for Star Baptist Church’s small-group model reveals that missions will be understood within the curriculum utilized in the study. Missions are a by-product of correct discipleship. Tucker’s research reveals the need for missions to be a focal point of the small group in a direct way. The theory for this research paper is that if the correct small-group model is utilized, the concept of missions will be interwoven throughout the implementation process, as opposed to being a direct focus. Missions will be an indirect focus while maintaining its importance.

The second theory mentioned by Tucker is one that undergirds the work of this thesis. Growth and development are the desired end result of the research. The theory is that believers of Star Baptist will grow spiritually and numerically if involved in the proper small-group model.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 5.

Theoretically, churches that are operating in the traditional model (without small groups) fail to care for the individual needs of their members. Tucker theorizes that small groups are intentional in caring for their members on a level that the large church gathering cannot. This research is directly relevant to the thesis of this paper as it correlates to the fact that a small-group ministry would only benefit the members of Star Baptist.

A separate study was performed by William Sawyer. Sawyer's focuses on whether or not there is "exegetical support for the proposition that Christian spirituality relates to diverse work team's effectiveness in achieving the organization's desired outcome."⁶⁷ There are theories that can be extrapolated upon even though this particular research is not identical to the research being conducted in this thesis. One theory involved in the research is that certain criteria must be met in order for the effectiveness of the small group to be at maximum potential. Sawyer indicates the necessity of the Holy Spirit's presence in order for the small group to be effective.

Another theory employed by Sawyer is the idea that a small group consists of at least "two or more individuals who work together toward a common goal or goals in order to be effective in achieving an organizational desired outcome."⁶⁸ In short, a small group requires more than one individual working to complete a mission. This concept should be further explored. There are biblical concepts that support this theory; however, studies lack in proving that more than one person is necessary in accomplishing the command established by God. Can an individual make one disciple at a time outside the small-group model, moving from one person to the next? More research is necessary to answer this question.

⁶⁷ William Sawyer, "Christian Spirituality and Small Group Effectiveness: A Socio-rhetorical Analysis of Acts 6:1-7," *Emerging Leadership Journeys* 8, no. 1 (2015): 2, <https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/elj/vol8iss1/1ELJ-Sawyer.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Sawyer, "Christian Spirituality," 6.

Both theories undergird the premise for this research paper. The end result for this thesis is to develop a thriving group of individuals who have grown spiritually and by necessity through the means of a succinct small-group model. This can only be accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit as He is the one who provides insight: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”⁶⁹ The concept of the necessity of the Holy Spirit is paramount to this research paper. Without the Holy Spirit, this is nothing more than a community group that will not achieve the desired goal that is expected in this research.

The second theory revolves around the idea of an end goal. In Sawyer’s research, there is evidence that a desired goal is the common objective with any small group, whether secular or spiritual. As mentioned before, there is a desired goal within this research project: the growth of the group both numerically and spiritually.

The final research that will be analyzed is from Schadrack Nsengimana, who researched whether the implementation of a small-group model would increase church growth in the Gikondo Seventh-day Adventist Church. It should be noted that the theological differences found in this denomination and that of Star Baptist Church are irrelevant to an extent. Nsengimana’s research carries within it theories that are relevant for this research project. Similar to Star Baptist Church, the Gikondo Seventh-day Adventist Church was experiencing close to a 75 percent decrease from members after baptism. Discipleship was nonexistent. Commitment to spiritual growth was not important to those who were baptized in the Adventist faith. The results found in implementing a small group in the Adventist church found over a 100 percent increase in participation from those who were being baptized.

⁶⁹ John 14:26, ESV.

One theory that needs to be explored more is the use of specific study materials. Nsengimana lists several authors and materials that will be utilized to train leaders and members. Further research is necessary to determine what is the best material to use. For this research, Dr. Tony Evan's study, *Return on Investment*, was used to walk through scripture with the participants. This material was chosen due to the topic; however, a deeper study into what material is best to train leaders and participants in living a missional life for Christ is necessary.

It seems that the model utilized by Nsengimana was built around specific spiritual gifts of the participants. This type of small-group assembly would be detrimental to the purpose of the gifts in general. It is unclear whether or not Nsengimana placed participants who shared the same gift in the same small group. If this is the case, it is in direct contradiction to passages such as Romans 12:3–8, which lists a non-exhaustive list of spiritual gifts that are paramount to the growth of the church. Small groups, in the least, should employ participants of differing spiritual gifts in order to achieve full potential from the study.

The conceptual framework has been laid. The answer to the question of whether or not this problem should be addressed has been answered by interacting with a numerous amount of literature. This was accomplished by defining what a disciple and discipleship is, the effects of discipleship, the problems found in discipleship, and the important of Christian community.

Biblical principles were fleshed out in the theological foundation section proving the necessity of a succinct small group model that is supported by scripture. Finally, the researcher provided insight into research that has already been conducted regarding the implementation of a small group ministry. The information gleaned from this chapter overwhelmingly supports the necessity of moving forward with this research thesis. In the following chapter, the methodology

of the research will be provided. The system of how the research will be conducted will be delivered.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

There are many avenues that one could take to implement a succinct, developed small-group ministry that will enhance and fulfill the responsibility of discipleship effectively in Star Baptist. The intervention plan detailed below is considered to be the best avenue to determine if the participants will see the benefit of a small-group ministry in their lives. The goal of this research project is to determine whether executing a small-group format for young adults will increase their desire to grow in Christ through discipleship. The following chapter will provide information into the research aspect of determining whether or not the problem within Star Baptist regarding young adults with small children can be rectified.

The intervention design of this research project will explain in greater detail the ministry problem within Star Baptist Church. This section will provide details into how the project will be carried out by breaking down the project to a step-by-step guide. The implementation section of this chapter will bring the focus to how the steps from the intervention design are applied. Specifics will include how information is recorded and analyzed to ensure that anyone else could replicate the project in their respective ministry context.

Intervention Design

The intervention plan will begin with a face-to-face conversation with selected couples between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five who have young children. The couples have been predetermined based on conversations that have taken place in the past in regards to a lack of instruction time for them within the ministry context of Star Baptist. In short, the target audience

for this research project are couples who are currently only faithful to the Sunday morning worship hour starting at 10:15 a.m. These specific couples have expressed interest in taking part in a small-group ministry due to feeling slighted in terms of developing their spiritual growth. A meeting will not be established to interact with the couples at one time. Each couple will be approached separately by the researcher to ensure that they understand the requirements expected of them through the intervention plan. This initial contact should begin up to a month prior to the first initial meeting.

A joint meeting will be called with all involved, explaining in detail how the format will continue and ending with couples signing the consent form. During this meeting, an introduction into the curriculum will be provided. The curriculum that will be utilized over the course of the study is *Return on Investment*, an audio study from Dr. Tony Evans. The emphasis of this study is on investing into eternity as opposed to just merely investing in retirement on earth by understanding that stewardship concerns itself with more than just money. The idea is to develop a mind-set through specific ideas concerning giving to God, one's self, others, and so on. This study uses Romans 12 as the primary passage.

The specific meeting place for the initial meeting will be in the Christian Life Center at Star Baptist Church, in a room that is separated from the gymnasium. This provides privacy and is actually separated from the rest of the church meeting areas to ensure that focus is not disrupted by distractions. Considering that there is currently no Sunday school class offered for this age group, the church is the ideal location to meet to prayerfully develop a habit within the participants of coming to church. This is a mind-set that they will have to develop, considering that they were not a part of this hour of church prior to this research project. Time will tell if the

mentality has changed within the participants concerning faithfulness to this class. This will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

During the initial meeting, the process of the research study will be divulged to ensure that there is no confusion over the expectations of the participants moving forward. The research project will be split into two separate areas: instructional hour and fellowship hour. The instructional hour will take place in the same room of the church in the Christian Life Center as the initial meeting took place. These meetings will be every Sunday morning beginning at 9:00 a.m. which is the same time all other Sunday school classes meet. Meeting at the church directly affects the goal of the research project: to instill an enduring mindset of discipleship in the participants.

The first part of the instructional meeting will include a five-to-ten-minute recap of the prior week, to include the phone calls and text messages passed back and forth between the researcher and the participants. Once the recap is finished, the meeting will move into the next lesson, presented through a Bluetooth speaker from Dr. Tony Evans's study. These lessons are approximately twenty-five minutes in length, which will leave ample time for discussion.

One of the issues in the current format of instructional periods at Star Baptist is the overwhelming usage of the lecture. Lectures last at least forty-five minutes of the instructional period, with little to no opportunity for discussion. Allotting at least thirty minutes during the instructional period allows for participants to not only absorb the material but offer insight into how they receive and analyze the material in their minds. Discussion allows the participants to flesh out how the material can and will be applied in their lives. This instructional class will take one hour and ten minutes to complete, which leaves ample time for the participants to make it to the church worship hour that begins at 10:15 a.m.

The research project will run for six weeks. During this period, daily contact will continue between the researcher and the participants. This part of interaction will be different from week to week. Every week will begin on Monday, with a message to the group as a whole highlighting the main theme from the lesson the previous Sunday. This will be a generic message in which no reply from the group will be necessary. It is simply to keep the information at the forefront of the participants' thoughts. Considering the current discipleship model used at Star Baptist (traditional model), there is no interaction between teacher and student between meeting times. Part of this research is to determine whether interacting with the participants will be effective in taking them deeper into discipleship.

There will be messages sent to individual couples sparking conversation through text throughout the week. These messages will be called relational texts to understand when and how they are used. Due to everybody's hectic schedules, these relational texts will supplement the lack of discussion time during the instructional hour. The first week, relational texts will be sent once. With the generic message being sent on Monday, the first relational text will be sent on Wednesday. Sending on Wednesday will serve as a reminder during the middle of the week. The idea is to spread out the interaction. One relational text will be added each week. By the sixth week of study, each couple will receive one relational text per day.

The goal of sending these relational texts is to allow participants to not just be reminded of the material but also to discuss how the material affects their everyday lives. The reason for using a texting system is due to the demands and busyness of life. The texts will be sent in the mornings to allow the participants to ponder their responses before they reply. In this format, questions will be answered that will provide feedback into the success of this method. What is

the right number of texts that should be sent each week? Are the texts effective? Do the participants feel overwhelmed by the amount of communication?

A separate goal of the relational texts is to build relationships between the researcher and the participants. Based on the research presented in chapter 2 of this research project, developing relationships will enhance the participation of the participants in the study. Daily, the topic of study for that week will be reinforced, keeping Scripture and the theme from the lesson at the forefront of the minds of the participants. Dr. Tony Evans provides talk-back points for the lessons he presents weekly. The talk-back points come in the form of one-liners that will serve as conversation starters between the researcher and the participants. Maintaining focus on the subject material will build the participants' spiritual relationship with God. In conjunction with the instructional hour, every two weeks there will be a time of fellowship apart from the scheduled meeting time. The focus of this meeting will be to reinforce relationships in person.

The fellowship hour will be every other week during the study totaling three specific, intentional times of fellowship. These will take place on the second, fourth, and sixth week of the research project. The fellowship activities will take place at a separate location from the designated home where the study will be held. The first location is at a church friend's barn, which provides ample room for the children to play as well as for the participants to develop relationships with one another. There are multiple goals for implementing a fellowship hour in the study. The researcher's home will be the location for the second and third fellowship meetings. Children are invited to the first two, while the final meeting will be child-free. This will allow the researcher and participants to talk candidly without the concern of being interrupted or distracted by children.

The first goal is in regards to how the participants interact with one another. Can relationships form between couples where there was no relationship to begin with? The idea is to observe the couples interacting over the course of the three fellowship periods to determine if a relationship has developed that carries outside the reserved fellowship time. As stated previously, relationships are paramount when developing a mind-set of discipleship. Couples are free to open up regarding certain situations when trust is developed through nurtured fellowship. (It should be noted that the relational texts are to develop relationships between the researcher and participants, while the fellowship hours are to develop relationships between participants.)

The second goal of the fellowship hour is to observe how the participants grow in their interactions with one another. The first fellowship hour will have awkwardness due to merging couples who typically do not mingle due to the lack of fellowship time offered through the traditional method utilized by Star Baptist. Providing a more intimate setting, in terms of less distractions and programming, should enable the participants to devote themselves to familiarizing themselves with one another. Will the participants' relationship develop over the course of the research project to the point of open dialogue within the instructional hour?

Food will be present at all fellowship meetings as they will take place on Saturday evenings. The researcher will provide this food with the assistance of church members outside the participating group. This ensures that the participants will not feel obligated to supply anything other than themselves during the study. There will be responsibilities given out, which will be discussed later. The idea is for the participants to not feel an obligation that will preclude them from taking part in the study.

This is the format for the six-week period, from the initial interaction with the couples almost to completion. Once the six-week period has concluded, there will be a final meeting that

will enable the participants to complete a questionnaire stating likes and dislikes from the intervention plan. This will be an opportunity to see whether there has been any tangible change for the couples through the process. Gathering data during this meeting will be vital in determining the results of carrying out this specific study to determine whether or not the participants have grown closer in their walk with God and one another.

There will be various roles assigned to the participants that will ensure this is not another program in which they come, listen, and leave. Each role will change weekly to allow the participants to have a hand in every aspect except teaching. The whole purpose is for the participants to be an active part of the meetings as opposed to mere listeners. The fellowship meetings will take place at 6:00 p.m. to ensure all participants are home from work. The meeting will last approximately two hours. The roles may seem paltry but serve the purpose of teaching the participants that being part of the church demands participation beyond mere listening.

The instructional hour is straightforward. There are just two roles that will need to be filled during this time. The first is to ensure the room is opened and set up for a meeting each week. The specific room that is being used in the Christian Life Center is locked a majority of the time. The person who is tasked with setting up the room must ensure that the door is unlocked and the lights are on, with tables and chairs in place. The second responsibility lies with the coffee provided by the church. This is no cost to the participants as every Sunday school class has the opportunity to have coffee during the Sunday school time period. There are no other responsibilities for the instructional hour other than being present.

The fellowship hour does not involve many responsibilities either. There must be an organizer to arrange activities for the hour. If supplies are needed for the activities (e.g., materials for games), the organizer will connect with the researcher a week prior to the scheduled

meeting time. The researcher is responsible for collecting items necessary for any activities. This will alleviate the burden of having the participants spend any money during the research project. The greeter role is essential in welcoming each participant to the meeting. The greeter must arrive before the other participants to ensure that each participant arriving feels welcomed. The goal is for the greeter mentality to be prevalent in all future meetings. The researcher will serve as the greeter during the instructional hour. There will also be a role for cleanup responsibilities. Finally, the role of instructor will be relegated to the one who is implementing the intervention plan, the researcher. This is the only role that will not change.

During the initial meeting, details of how the fellowship meetings flow will be discussed. It is the responsibility of all participants to ensure that they are present during these meetings for relationships to be established. Due to the lower number of assemblies, it is mandatory to be at each one. Conversation will not be geared toward the lesson from that week unless it naturally flows in that direction. The first two meetings should be used to monitor the beginning, development, and growth of relationships. The last fellowship meeting could lean toward deeper conversations as children will not be present at this particular meeting.

Once the six-week intervention plan has concluded, there will be one more meeting to gauge the participants' ideas of how they viewed the intervention plan. A general discussion will take place to discover whether there was a change in perspective of how the church operates. The goal is to determine whether or not the participants see the value of transitioning from a traditional small-group model to a hybrid small-group model that takes the church member from being a spectator to an active participant in the church. This will be accomplished through multiple avenues: open-ended discussion questions, a questionnaire that is anonymous, and the observational notes gathered during the instructional and fellowship meetings. This will take

place on the Sunday morning following the five-week intervention plan. The questions that will be asked include but are not limited to the following:

1. What changes should be made to the meetings?
2. How was the curriculum sufficient in taking you to a deeper relationship with God?
3. In what ways did you feel you were connected to the other participants in ways you haven't felt before at church?
4. How were the fellowship times conducive to deepening relationships with one another?
5. In detail, explain how you believe a small group model such as this is essential to church.

The questions will be asked during a meeting with the whole group upon completion of the questionnaire. The idea is not to single anyone out but instead to have an open discussion regarding the effectiveness of the intervention plan. The setup for this meeting will be similar to the instructional meetings mentioned above. Starting at 9:00 a.m., the participants will come into the designated room in the Christian Life Center and be seated at a table with their respective spouses. The questionnaire will be based on individual opinion. The construct of the intervention plan includes six separate couples. In order to determine the effectiveness of the plan, the questionnaire will not be completed by couples but by the individual participant. This will provide a more well-rounded response for the researcher to analyze.

At this point in the study, it should be noted the possibility of observer bias within this research project. The researcher is the only individual who will analyze the data gathered from the observational notes, questionnaire, and open-ended discussion during the final meeting which could lead to observer bias. One way to combat the bias is to utilize an individual who is not connected to anyone in the ministry in which the research was being conducted. This individual

would need to be someone who could be trusted to hold the researcher accountable during the analysis process for future studies.

There are several ways in which the intervention would be a solution to any problems presented. The main change is hopefully found in the transition from a traditional church model to a church model that includes small groups or a hybrid church model. The belief, as supported by Scripture and research mentioned in the previous chapter, is that a well-integrated and thought-out small-group ministry would enhance one's spiritual and social relationships.

A separate change found through this specific intervention is the discovery of the need of small-group fellowship for those who participate in the intervention. Community is important and necessary to being found faithful as a disciple of Christ. This is exemplified in the life of Jesus. The change that would be made would occur in the mind-set of the participants in understanding that church is more than the meeting designated on Sunday morning and evening and Wednesday evening. Prayerfully, the intervention will reveal to the participants their need for fellowship and instruction daily.

Considering the current culture, the plan to inform and involve those who are participating in the project is multifaceted. The first means of communication is to reach out through technology. Phone calls and group texts will be the main form of communication apart from the physical gatherings in the instructional and fellowship hour. This culture dictates more concerted efforts in communicating effectively via means not normally recognized in the traditional church culture. Bearing in mind the target age for the intervention plan, families are busy and cannot meet in person as often as the communication requires. This does not negate the importance of meeting in person when possible.

The second means of communication is in the form of physical contact. This is actually the first form of communication that will be used to explain what is going on with the study and how the participants can help. The meeting will be set by approaching the individual families and personally asking them to take part in the small-group intervention plan. Follow-ups with the prospective participants would come in the form of physical contact as well.

There are three approvals that are necessary for this intervention plan. First, the approval of the participants themselves. The participants must agree that they will meet the prerequisites of being a part of the intervention plan. This approval indicates that the participants are willing to commit the time necessary to be available and present at all instructional and fellowship hours. The approval must be given in writing, with a signature and a commitment to seeing the project through to the end.

The second approval will be from the church's associate pastor. This approval provides permission for the researcher to utilize church facilities when necessary and as needed, specifically the room in the Christian Life Center as well as the coffee for the instructional hour. This is the only time that the researcher will use the facilities at the church for the research project.

The final approval will come from the education committee which will be a verbal approval. This committee approves all curricula used by congregants who have come together for the purpose of study under the name and authority of Star Baptist. While using church facilities, it is important to stay within the doctrinal position of the church body. The study being used for this research project, by Dr. Tony Evans, is in line with the beliefs of Star Baptist Church.

Obtaining the participants' consent will be accomplished at the end of the initial meeting. The recruitment letter will be given before the initial meeting to provide prospective participants the opportunity to discuss and decide whether they would like to be a part of the study, understanding the conditions that must be adhered to during the study. This will eliminate the pressure of deciding during the initial interaction. Allowing a week prior to final commitment ensures that the participants will have contemplated whether or not they can make the pledge to take part in the study after mulling over the obligations required.

There are several resources and personal preparation time needed for the intervention plan. The first resource necessary is the *Return on Investment* podcast, from Dr. Tony Evans. This material will be used via Bluetooth through an external speaker. It is free of charge to use, with no handouts necessary. The intervention plan will last six weeks, in which the researcher will lead the small group as opposed to having someone from outside the study lead it. Weekly preparation is necessary for instruction time as well as establishing specific fellowship opportunities for the group as a whole. The necessary preparation includes listening to each lesson prior to the instructional period, taking notes, and crafting the open-ended questions necessary to involve the participants in discussion.

The truth regarding the necessity of a small-group ministry at Star Baptist is that there are many families who believe there is more to being a Christian than what the traditional model offers: the idea that church is relegated to corporate meetings on Sunday and Wednesday. This was discovered through conversations with various families about the lack of their commitment even to these specific services. There is an idea permeating within the Star Baptist congregation that church is and should be more than the traditional gathering times on Sunday and

Wednesday. The busyness of the families detracts from the required commitment of a succinct small-group ministry. This leads to the next truth.

A separate truth is the level of difficulty found in assembling families together for an effective small-group ministry. The culture is that church is only done on the weekend and Wednesday evening, with no thought given to it for the rest of the week. This culture will be hard to crack as people have developed lifestyle routines that will have to be reevaluated. For example, there are families who are strict regarding bedtime for their children. Balancing the times and responsibilities of multiple families will be a challenge in and of itself. Other families consider their spare time important to take care of things not accomplished through the rest of the week. This is one of the main reasons that the instructional time will be during the Sunday school hour, at 9:00 a.m. Sunday mornings, as opposed to a separate time during the week. The target participants are not engaged in a Sunday school class as of now.

A month will be needed before the instructional meetings of the small group can begin. Within the first month, determining the participants will be vital to a successful project. This will occur by seeking out the individuals who will be the target participants for the project. Contact will be made with each participant in person. The platforms of text messaging and social media are too informal for the invitation to be a part of this project. The idea is to use personal interaction to reveal the necessity of cooperation within the project. Following this will be a weekly breakdown of this first month to ensure success of the project.

It should be noted that the beginning of one week is Sunday and the end of the same week is Saturday. By the end of the first week of September, contact will have been made with all participants. The third week of September will be devoted to the participants' deciding

whether or not they would like to participate in the project. By the end of the third week, it will be determined whether there are enough participants to take part in the study.

The number of participants that will be necessary is approximately twelve, or six couples. These individuals should be between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five and must have younger children below the age of twelve. By the end of the third week, all participants should have agreed to and signed off on the necessary documentation, stating they will be committed to the end. The final week will be dedicated to preparing lessons and developing a plan of fellowship to present to the participants during the initial meeting. The initial meeting with all participants will be held on the first day of the final week prior to the beginning of the research project, with the first meeting taking place the following week.

In summary of what has been stated to this point, a month prior to beginning the research project, initial interaction with targeted participants should be made and secured. These should be done on an individual basis via personal connection. An initial meeting should take place the last Sunday of the month with all included. During this meeting a detailed summary of what will occur during the research period will be presented, including an organizational structure of the instructional and fellowship period.

A fair trial period to evaluate the intervention will be six weeks. Six weeks will provide ample time to present material each week that can be pored over with intense focus. Every week on Sunday morning, the participants will gather for a time of instruction via lecture method followed by a time of discussion. Each week the researcher will purposely reach out to participants to remind them of what was discussed during the prior Sunday's lesson. The first week, the researcher will reach out via text or phone call on Wednesday, with every week adding

a day for communication. The weekly communication will come via text messages or phone calls.

Every week on Monday, the researcher will send out a generic message to the group. Every other week will involve a fellowship activity, which will take place on that Saturday at 6:00 p.m. This time is designated for relational building between the participants. These activities will require no monetary obligation for the participants. If money is needed, it will come at the expense of the researcher. Communication between meeting times is crucial to the effectiveness of the intervention.

This is unlike any program that the participants from Star Baptist will have taken part in. The trial period of six weeks was decided on based on data from implementing a similar program in the youth group at Star Baptist. During that implementation, it was recognized that it took approximately six weeks for the majority of the students to begin to invest in one another and open up to their small-group leaders. Based on the effectiveness of that specific program, six weeks is the best time period for this intervention plan.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Understanding any intervention design is paramount to the success of the implementation process. The intervention design for this specific research project is simple and straightforward. A simple, straightforward intervention design tends to lead to a direct implementation process. Media was not used during any of the meetings, instructional or fellowship. Three ways of gathering data were employed to ensure that triangulation was met in the process. This enhanced the observation of the researcher. The three methods will be discussed first.

First, observational notes are the primary means of gathering information during the various meetings. Taking the time to articulate what is taking place in each meeting and between

meetings will guide the researcher to the effects that the research project is having in answering the problem presented for this thesis. Ensuring that the participants recognize that notes will be taken during the meetings for the purpose of gathering data allows the researcher to not have to wait until the meeting has suspended and remember all that has happened. Data will be collected in an ongoing manner.

The second method of data collection is through the questionnaire handed out at the last meeting. This questionnaire is based on individual opinions and is anonymous. Anonymity allows each participant not to be swayed based on what their spouse believes or inputs. The pressure to agree with a significant other is reduced significantly when anonymity is available.

The final method is the open-ended discussion time during the final meeting. There will be moments of open-ended discussion throughout the intervention plan, with the focus being on the material that is presented during the instructional hour. The weekly interaction between the researcher and the participants (communication relegated to couples) will also provide them the opportunity to ask open-ended questions about the process. It should be noted that an outside expert will not be used in this study.

The observation process begins from the onset of initial interaction with each couple. The attitude with which the couple responds provides an indication into how they feel regarding the thought of being part of a group that will ask more of them over the next six-week period. The response from the couple generates a solid foundation from which to work. Will the couple be excited about the opportunity? Is there hesitation in their tone? What is the reaction given to being asked to be a part? Data from this interaction provides a starting point for the researcher to discover whether the attitude regarding the idea of being part of a succinct small-group ministry changes over the course of six-weeks, either for the better or for the worse.

The first initial meeting in which all committed couples will be together for the first time provides a new opportunity to gather data. The detailed research plan will be discussed during this meeting in intricate detail. The reaction to the specifics of the research project needs to be carefully documented to discern whether or not there is apprehension in what is being asked of each participant. This builds on the first personal interaction between the researcher and couples. Are there apprehensions that will push the participants to not be fully devoted to the project? Do the details deter the participants from being fully committed to what is expected of them over the next six-week period?

A separate point of observation will be between participants themselves. The researcher will take the time to collect data on how the different couples interact with one another. This plays a role in how comfortable the participants are willing to be to open a dialogue with individuals whom they normally do not intermingle with. Is there a discernable tension between certain individuals in the room? If there is, this is unintentional and should be noted to see what the ongoing data reveals. The researcher builds on the initial interaction between participants as they come together from different walks of life to take part in the study. Differing backgrounds should provide for interesting conversations. Will these conversations generate deeper relationships? It is imperative for the researcher to observe, record, and analyze the data from this initial meeting to use as a starting point for the research project. By the end of the research, this is the point that will be compared to the end result to see whether change took place and the problem was solved.

Every instructional meeting will require the researcher to take observational notes. This data is really concerned with the idea of whether or not participants feel a freedom to interact with the material being presented for discussion, Dr. Tony Evans's *Return on Investment*. There

is limited time for discussion as almost half of the meeting time will be dedicated to listening to the podcast presented by Dr. Tony Evans.

Observational notes will be taken during the presentation of the material to gauge the attention of the participants. Are they taking notes of what is being taught? Are there side conversations? Do the participants appear interested in what is being taught? Do the mannerisms of the participants indicate boredom with what is being taught? This type of observation will be subjective. The participation in the discussion questions will give credence to the observations during the presentation of instructional material.

Interaction between the researcher and specific couples will take place weekly. The first week will involve one day of interaction, the second week will involve two days, and each week after will continue adding a day of interaction. These interactions will either be via phone call or text messaging. These conversations will be utilized for a couple of reasons: to continue the open-ended discussion from the previous Sunday's lesson and to keep the material at the forefront of the participants' thoughts throughout the six-week trial. The observational notes taken will center on active participation in these extra conversations. Are the participants ready and willing to dive deeper in the discussion, albeit in the avenue of a text message or phone call? What is the response time of the participants from the moment contact is attempted? Is there a dedication to growth over the six-week period? Does the level of commitment reveal itself in other forms, such as attending various church-related activities?

Observation is an ongoing process but culminates in the final meeting of the six-week period. During this meeting, the focus of the observation will be to determine whether participants in the process see change in their lives. This will be based on data collected from the questionnaire that will be given. Based on a list of ten statements, the questionnaire will reveal

the growth track of the participants. Comparing data that was taken from the initial interaction between the researcher and participants, as well as the first initial meeting with all participants present, to the final meeting, the researcher should be able to recognize those who were positively affected, negatively affected, or experienced no effect from the research project.

The list of ten statements from the questionnaire allows for anonymity from each participant. The researcher, based on observational notes taken throughout the six-week process, seeks to discover whether the responses of the questionnaire directly correlate to the notes taken throughout the process. A comparison between the verbal responses from the open-ended discussion questions and the questionnaire should reveal any disparity found in responses from the participants.

The open-ended discussion based on the five discussion questions mentioned in the intervention design are the final means of observation that the researcher will conduct. This conversation supplements data gathered throughout the six-week process. The researcher is looking for personal testimony of how the research project has shaped the personal views of the participants pertaining to the idea of implementing a lasting, succinct small group at Star Baptist Church.

This will be a discussion in retrospect of what has taken place throughout the process from beginning to end. The participants will be asked about their initial reaction to being asked and to the couples that were included in the research project. Was there any reservation at any point about what was expected from the participants during the process? The researcher will seek to discover if there was any tangible change from the participants in other areas of church ministry. Did the participants find themselves better engaged in church activities than prior to beginning the research?

How will the data from the research be analyzed? The researcher should take note of the common themes throughout the data that is gathered from the different types of observational notes mentioned previously. What answers are replicated from participant to participant? Identifying the various themes will assist in determining the results of the research project. The identifiers present in themes reveal a type of agreement regarding a certain aspect of the research. For example, if a majority of participants agree that daily interaction gives positive results in how the small-group model is viewed, then the research project has addressed the problem presented.

Anomalies can occur in the themes if participants are in opposition to a part of the research process. The majority might be in support of daily interaction regarding the biblical material, while a select few may dislike being bombarded daily. This would be considered an anomaly if the individual who disagrees with daily interaction did not, in fact, interact daily with the researcher.

Identifying slippages throughout the research process will also be a part of data analysis. An example of a slippage would be if the group disagrees on the type of fellowship that is decided on. Half the participants might agree on a game night for fellowship, while the other half might detest games. This would lean toward faulty data, with full commitment and total devotion to the times of fellowship hour being an issue.

Utilizing the open-ended questions throughout the study, the questionnaire, and the time of post-assessment during the last meeting will be the primary means of data analysis. The ultimate goal is to determine whether or not a select group of members who are part of the ministry of Star Baptist Church sees the advantages of being part of a hybrid small-group model. There is a beginning stage in which the participants will not be privy to being a part of such a

small-group model. The end stage determines the effectiveness of the study. The analysis of the data will determine if the steps taken during the six weeks were successful in introducing a new way to be part of the church.

In this chapter, the researcher has focused on the intervention design and how the intervention design would be implemented. The intervention addressed the ministry context problem and research question explained in chapter one. The implementation has been explained detailing data would be gleaned utilizing observational notes, a questionnaire, and an open-ended discussion that will conclude the research. In the next chapter, the researcher will deliver the results from the research.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

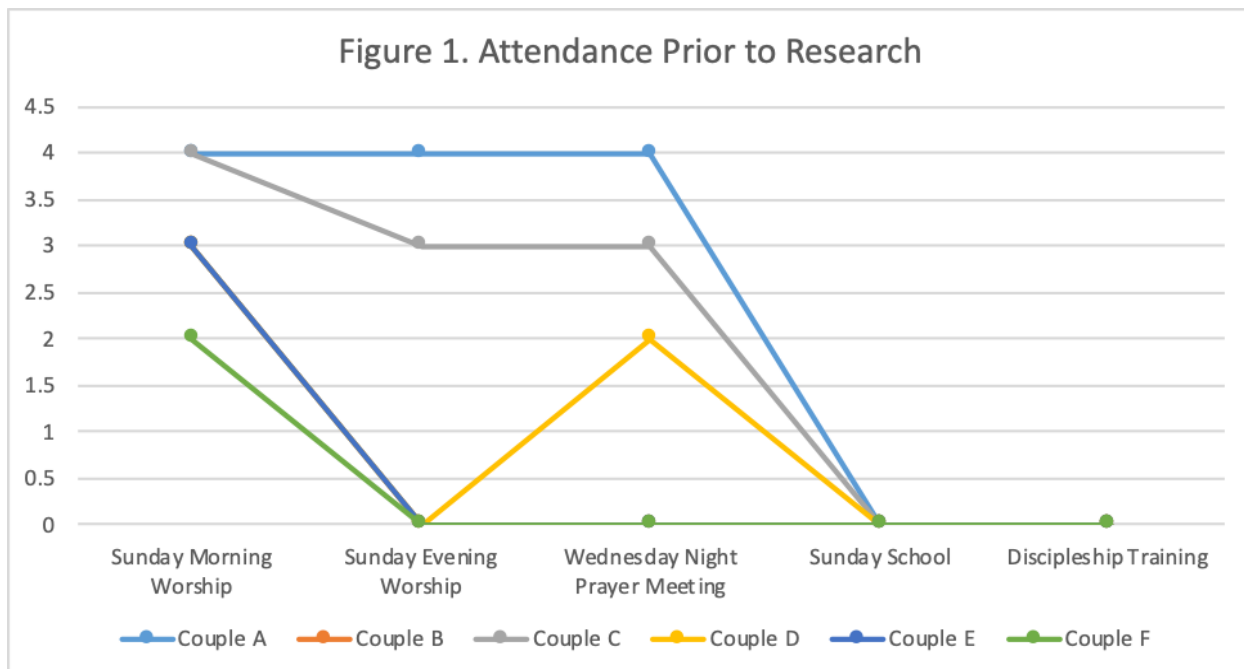
What are the results of addressing the problem when members of Star Baptist Church may not see the benefit for small-group ministry in their lives? Do the participants recognize the necessity for a succinct small-group ministry in their lives, in which they experience relational and spiritual growth? Have relationships formed over the last six weeks that were nonexistent before the intervention plan commenced? Were the expected results met during the implementation of the intervention plan? These questions are but a few that will be answered in this chapter. The results of the intervention plan will be presented in a manner that follows the progression of the intervention plan.

The six participating couples will be referred to as couple A, couple B, couple C, couple D, couple E, and couple F, respectively. There were moments throughout the study in which the husband or wife was independently recognized. The couples will also be known as spouse A1 or spouse A2, indicating which spouse is being referenced. The letter indicates the specific couple. The *1* in the title refers to the husband, while the *2* refers to the wife. For example, if spouse A1 interacts with spouse C1, this means that the two husbands are interacting with each other. This ensures anonymity is maintained for each individual and couple involved.

Keeping in mind the purpose of the research, which is to discover if the implementation of a succinct, developed small-group ministry will enhance and fulfill the responsibility of discipleship effectively within Star Baptist Church, figure 1 provides insight into the active involvement prior to the beginning of the research for each couple. This specific chart reveals the

active involvement over the course of a month prior to the beginning of the research and provides a glance of each couple's faithfulness in organized church services. There is a maximum of five worship services each couple could take part in weekly (Sunday school, discipleship training, Sunday morning and evening worship, and Wednesday prayer meeting).

Figure 1 is based on a four-week cycle.



It is evident from figure 1 that only a few of the participating couples were faithful to the corporate worship gatherings, while none was faithful to the gatherings dedicated to small groups (Sunday school and discipleship training). It should be noted that couples B, D, and E attended three Sunday morning worship services over the course of the four weeks. Couples B and E were not involved in the remaining four services offered to the members of Star Baptist Church.

Preparation

The first step of the plan was to approach several couples at least one month prior to the start. This was accomplished at the beginning of September, with the intervention plan officially

set to begin the first week of October. There were eight couples approached, with six confirming their interest and willingness to be a part of the study. All the couples had previously shown interest in being part of a small-group ministry that was not simply another Sunday school class. Two of the couples that were approached turned down the invitation, not believing they would have the time to adequately commit to the study. Four of the six, couples A, B, C, and D, were excited about what was to come. The remaining two couples, couples E and F, revealed trepidation during this first interaction but chose to be a part of the study regardless.

The response from couples A–D regarding the possibility of being a part of a different type of small-group ministry was astonishing. All four couples were overtly engaged from the moment that the initial confrontation took place when they realized what was being asked of them. All four couples stated that they were “starved” for something more than what they had encountered in their history with the church in general. The fellowship time garnered the most excitement from each these couples. Couples E and F seemed to agree to being part of the study out of obligation. The trepidation was evident in their initial responses.

The Initial Meeting

One week prior to the beginning of the study, the initial meeting took place at Star Baptist Church in the CLC during the Sunday school hour, at 9:00 a.m. To put it into perspective, this was the first class that four of the six couples had attended during the Sunday school hour in a while. For couples B, C, E, and F, this was the first class they had attended as a couple during this time period. Couples A and D had not attended a class during this time period in over a year. The four couples who showed interest were also the four couples who were excited about the opportunity to attend a class designed for their age group. One of the remaining couples, Couple D, felt burned by the last small-group Sunday school class that they had been a

part of but wanted to try this class due to the meetings that would take place away from the normal hour spent together on Sunday mornings.

The initial meeting began with a general introduction explaining what the intervention plan would entail. All six couples were present and revealed excitement for what was to come, including couples E and F, who had been apprehensive when initially approached. The general introduction given by the researcher detailed how the classes would flow each Sunday morning. It was communicated that there would be six weeks of listening to Dr. Tony Evans's study *Return on Investment*. The researcher asked if everyone was familiar with Dr. Tony Evans, with all but couple F having heard of Dr. Evans's ministry.

The flow of each Sunday morning meeting was provided in detail to the participating couples. The meetings would begin with a five-minute recap of the previous week and meeting notes. This would allow for any necessary clarification concerning the material to be provided. The instructional meeting would continue by listening to Dr. Tony Evans's podcast. It should be noted that the participating couples were urged not to take notes during the discussion. The reason was to discover whether the couples found taking notes necessary for a deeper discussion.

Once the podcast concluded, the researcher would open with a word of prayer asking God to guide the conversation and follow the prayer with an open discussion of the material Dr. Tony Evans had introduced. This discussion would revolve around what stood out to the participants about what Dr. Evans had stated during the podcast. The length of each phase of the meeting was explained to the participating couples. The introduction/recap would last five minutes, the podcast would last twenty-five minutes, and the open discussion would last thirty minutes. It was explained that these times were approximations of what would take place.

Contact between meeting times was next on the agenda during the initial meeting with all participating couples. It was explained to the couples the importance of connecting between meetings. These interactions were specific to the instructional meetings. The goal was to increase interaction weekly until week six to determine whether or not more communication was necessary for the practical implementation of the material.

During the first week after the first instructional meeting, one message would be sent to each couple recapping one of the key points Dr. Evans had made in the podcast. This would increase to two days' communication in week two, progressing to six days' communication during the final week of the study. The communication would take place through phone calls and text messages between the researcher and each couple. Separate from the individual messages, one general message would be sent to the group as a whole each week reminding them of what to expect during that week concerning communication from the researcher.

The researcher continued the initial meeting with all couples present by explaining the three fellowship times that would take place during weeks two, four, and six of the study. It was communicated that the purpose of these fellowship meetings was to discover if new relationships would form away from a church setting. The purpose of the fellowship meetings would not be centered on biblical discussion or spiritual formation unless the conversation migrated in that direction.

One area of expectation concerning the fellowship hours was upended when it was discovered by the participants that there would be no expected cost for them regarding these meetings. This was met with minor backlash from the participants. The researcher assumed that each participating couple would be content with attending a fellowship meeting without having to pay for anything. On the contrary, the participating couples were borderline offended with the

idea of not being able to help with costs. It should be noted that the only cost for these fellowship meetings was the food served during the meetings.

Once the fellowship times were explained, the idea of implementing roles was presented to the participating couples. There were three main roles that each participating couple would be responsible for, and they would rotate weekly. Initially, the idea was to have individuals carry out the responsibilities of each role; however, due to the small number of roles, it was decided that couples would carry out the roles together. The three roles included room setup for the instructional time on Sunday morning, coffee preparers during the instructional time on Sunday mornings, serving as the greeter during the fellowship times, and cleaning up once the fellowship time was complete.

Each couple would have a turn with each responsibility. During the instructional meeting, couple A would be responsible for room setup, while couple B would be responsible for coffee. In week two, couple B would be responsible for room setup, while couple C would be responsible for coffee. This would flow sequentially until the final week, in which couple F would be responsible for room setup, while couple A would be responsible for coffee.

Couples would be paired during the three fellowship times and would not serve during a week in which they had obligations during the classroom instructional time. Couples A and D would be responsible for greeting and cleanup, respectively, during the first fellowship meeting. Couples C and F would be responsible for the second fellowship meeting. Couples B and E would be responsible for the final fellowship meeting. This would ensure that no one couple had duties to carry out during the fellowship meeting and classroom instructional time during the same week.

The decision of what would take place during the fellowship times was discussed next in the initial meeting. As a requirement for being a part of the study, each of the six couples had young children. There was the concern of childcare during the fellowship times. The participating couples admitted to not being sure that they could be devoted during the fellowship times due to watching little ones. The researcher took the time to explain to the couples that this was part of the study. The idea of forming a succinct, small group included recognizing that children would be a part of the process. It was important to discover whether the parents would combine efforts to watch the children. Would parents feel ostracized if their children were more rambunctious than others'? This led to the decision to have the final fellowship time without kids. The participating couples would be responsible for their own childcare.

It was communicated between the researcher and the participating couples how communication would take place throughout the study. While in person, whether during the instructional time or fellowship times, data would be retained through observational notes. The remaining communication would be accomplished through texting or phone calls. There was little communication during the week between the initial meeting and the first meeting. A reminder was sent to each participating couple two days prior to the first instructional meeting. This was sent to ensure that the couples knew where and when to be for the first meeting.

Finally, the researcher revealed that the final week would be a busy week for all involved. The final instructional meeting, fellowship time, and closing meeting would take place during this week. The instructional and fellowship times would flow as they had during the previous five weeks. The final meeting would last approximately two to three hours, with the purpose being to determine if any change had taken place within the mind-set of each couple regarding the importance of this type of small group.

Each individual participant received an anonymous questionnaire to gauge this change (please see appendix I). This was done during the first thirty minutes of the meeting. The rest of the meeting was dedicated to an open discussion in which the researcher asked guided questions and observed as participants discussed the progression of the study and their likes and dislikes. There were seven questions to help the conversation progress (please see appendix J). Snacks were served during this final meeting at the expense of the researcher. The meeting took place on the Sunday following the final fellowship meeting.

Once all the facets of the study were explained in greater detail, the researcher asked if the couples would sign the consent form stating their commitment to being an active participant of the study. All six couples agreed and signed the consent. This initial meeting took approximately one hour to complete, with no questions being asked by the participants. The first instructional meeting time was the following Sunday at 9:00 a.m., in a specified room in the CLC of Star Baptist Church.

Week One

A week passed, and the time came for the first instructional meeting. All six couples were present and on time for this first meeting, having taken children to childcare and made the trek from the main worship building to the CLC for this first meeting. The recap time was not used to discuss the previous week's lesson due to this being the first lesson. Instead, the time was used to gauge the excitement in the room. The interest in the couples had not changed from the initial interaction. Couples A–D were excited, while trepidation was still obvious with couples E and F. The first class began with couple A preparing the room by placing chairs in a semicircle. Couple B had prepared coffee for the entire class. The atmosphere was different than a normal Sunday

school class at Star Baptist due to the flow of the meeting. Sunday school classes tended to jump into the lesson without much conversation between the teacher and the students.

This small-group instructional meeting began with more of an open discussion as opposed to beginning a lecture. Couples A and C were most excited, stating that they had been longing for a class like this for quite a while. Couples B and D agreed with couples A and C but were not as vocal. Couples E and F sat in silence, seemingly processing what was taking place. Once the five minutes had passed, the researcher began the podcast of the first lesson from Dr. Tony Evans's study *Return on Investment*.

Dr. Evans focused on giving back to God during the first lesson. The researcher had previously listened to each lesson. This enabled him to observe the participants as they listened. Dr. Evans captivated the participants as he discussed the importance of giving to God was not simply found in the offering plate. On the contrary, according to Dr. Evans, the responsibility of the believer is not to give God a tenth but instead the whole life. The main Scripture used was Romans 12:1, in which Dr. Evans focused on living as a sacrifice before God.

The participants were enthralled with what was being taught, as if they had never heard this Scripture taught in this way. During the first meeting, there were only two individuals taking notes: participants A2 and C2. The two women profusely took notes, trying to keep up with the information being given. The other participants did not take notes with pen or paper but were intently focused on what was being taught. Once the podcast ended, a prayer of guidance was made by the researcher and an open discussion began, highlighting what had stood out to the participants as they listened.

During the first podcast, Dr. Evans used an analogy of a pig and a chicken that had come across a sign that stated a need for bacon and eggs. The chicken, according to Dr. Evans, was

ready and willing to give the eggs. The pig, on the other hand, was not willing to provide the bacon. The point being made was that many believers are living as chickens, giving to God parts of their being. The pig must sacrifice itself in order to contribute what is needed. Dr. Evans taught in the podcast that God expected believers to live as pigs as opposed to chickens. This was the main talking point during the conversation between the participants.

Participants A2 and C2 were the first to speak, using the notes they had taken. This would be a common theme throughout the study. The participants who took notes were the individuals who contributed the most to the conversation. Participant A2 confessed that they lived as chickens most of the time and had never given thought throughout each day that living as a pig was necessary. The other participants agreed with this notion. The general consensus was that each participant had never viewed living as a sacrifice before God required sacrifice of the whole person (in a figurative sense). The analogy opened the eyes of most present.

Participant C2 contributed heavily to this first conversation in noting the world was the driving force that precluded her from living as a sacrifice. Too much busy time kept her from living for Christ and instead drove her to live for herself. With the exception of couples E and F, all participants were straightforward in revealing that they lived as chickens except on Sunday mornings. The consensus was that being a pig was easy when it was relegated to just Sunday mornings. The conversation concluded with reminding the participants of the interaction that would take place throughout the following week until the next instructional meeting.

During the first week, two texts were sent from the researcher to the participants. The first text was a mass text sent to everyone in one message, reminding the participants of the main points from the lesson sent on Monday. The researcher requested that the participants not

respond to these mass texts as they were utilized for general information. The second text sent the first week was to discuss and answer questions that the participants had regarding the lesson.

The individual text was sent on Wednesday with the purpose of continuing the conversation that had begun during the first instructional meeting. The response garnered from each participating couple was overwhelming. Each individual participant reported that they were actively thinking on what they had learned. The main point that captured their focus and attention was living as a pig or a chicken. Participant D1 expressed that he had never thought about spiritual matters except on Sundays. Throughout this first week, he claimed that he could not get the idea of living as a pig off his mind. He confessed that in most interactions, he was living as a chicken. This indicated that the thought process had not yet materialized into outward living. The conversation with the majority of participants tended in the same direction, with many feeling the need to confess and repent for being selfish in how they lived.

Participant E1 was the most surprising interaction during the first week. He had initially tried to call during the first week but could never connect with the researcher. Keep in mind that couples E and F were silent during the first instructional meeting. The call from participant E1 was unexpected, to say the least. Once he connected with the researcher, he spoke as if they had been friends for a while, providing insight into what he had learned and asking questions about specifics from the podcast that he did not understand. He revealed an eagerness about the material being taught.

Week Two

The second week of the study would bring the second instructional period as well as the first fellowship time in which the couples would have an opportunity to spend time together outside of the normal church setting. Couple B had the room set up for the meeting time, while

couple C had the coffee prepared. The second instructional period began with a quick recapitulation from the week-one podcast. All participants relayed that they had been thinking about what it meant to be a pig throughout the week, with the majority of the group confessing the difficulty of living a surrendered life. This mini conversation lasted approximately ten minutes and flowed into the second podcast.

Dr. Evans taught on the importance of giving to one's self in the second podcast. Staying in Romans 12, Dr. Evans revealed the importance of recognizing who believers are in Christ. A survey of the room showed that the number of participants taking notes did not change. Participants A2 and C2 were the only ones with pen and paper steadily focused on taking notes on what Dr. Evans had to say. Couple B seemed disconnected during this meeting, not appearing engaged in what was being taught. This reflected in the discussion time.

Once Dr. Evans completed the second lesson, a prayer for guidance was offered to God, followed by opening the floor to the group for conversation. This week was unlike the first one and appeared to take a step back in engagement with the exception of participant E1. This is the same participant who had held a thorough conversation during the week-one interaction with the researcher once the two could connect. Participant E1 focused on what Dr. Evans had spoken to about the individual believer, stating that he rarely thought about what God thought of him.

Romans 12:2 speaks to being transformed by changing the way one thinks. Participant E1 stated that he believed that this began with changing the way one thinks of themselves. The other participants agreed with this point, with participants A2 and C2 indicating that it is hard to think highly of one's self due to what the world says one should be. Participant D1 connected the dots of what was being said by participant E1 and participants A2 and C2. Participant D1 reiterated

that part of not being conformed to the world is prohibiting one's self from living to the standards set by the world. On the contrary, the believer should live to the standard set by God.

This interaction concluded the second instructional period. Before class was dismissed, the group was reminded of the upcoming fellowship time that would be spent Saturday evening. The next day, Monday, the researcher sent a mass group text reminding the participants of who God said they were by utilizing Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. The idea to think on these truths was encouraged. Two interacting texts to each couple were sent Tuesday and Thursday of this second week.

During the Tuesday conversations, couple F began to open up about their opinion concerning their relationship with God. This was the first time that this couple had offered any input since the beginning of the study regarding the material being presented. Dr. Evans had touched a nerve that participant F2 had never dealt with. She claimed that she had never given much thought to what God would say about her. Instead, she would try to live to the world's standards, which left her empty inside. Participant F1 was completely transparent with this, stating he had a hard time communicating with his spouse because of this struggle that she had. This was the first time that they had opened up about this specific issue.

Couple B offered very little input concerning the material presented in the week-two podcast. This was not surprising due to the disengagement that they had shown during the instructional time. Participants A1 and C1 had interesting insights. Their spouses were the ones who to this point had offered input into the conversation. This week, the two husbands began to open up slightly more. Both came to the same conclusion: the world places this expectation for men to suppress their feelings and emotions. This includes quelling the conversation that revolves around what God says.

Thursday's communication seemed to resort back to the idea of living as a chicken or pig, revealing that the information being presented during the instructional periods was being learned and thought about as opposed to information simply being presented during a time of lecture. Couple D replied with more frequency on Thursday than Tuesday, stating that it was easier to live as a pig when they remembered what God says about them as His children. The researcher used this point to engage the other couples and challenged them to think of what God would have to say about them, leading them to surrender more than just parts of themselves. This was revisited in the recap during the next instructional time.

The first fellowship time took place during this week on Saturday. All the couples were invited to come together and reassured that the conversation would not be biblical or instructional in any way unless it led in that direction. Couple A arrived Saturday evening at 5:30 p.m. to help with setup, while all other couples arrived at 6:00 p.m. There were fifteen total children at this meeting, including the researcher's children. This evening started with a touch football game with the men. All but participant A1 partook in the game, while most of the spouses watched in amusement. Participants B2 and C2 were busy walking one of their children around, which was a theme of the night. Their interaction with others was minimal.

The other four spouses were found interacting with one another. This was important as a majority of the couples did not have relationships with one another before this meeting. Was this the beginning of the relationship aspect for these participants? The football game only lasted until the first touchdown was scored. At the conclusion of the game, it was interesting to see the husbands in the relationship take charge of gathering the children to say the blessing before eating.

The time had come to say the blessing and eat together. There was a designated area for children to sit while the adults ate in a separate location. This allowed the researcher the opportunity to see if conversations would naturally take place or if there would be awkwardness due to not having established relationships. The atmosphere was uneasy at the onset of the meal. Participant C1 was the one to break the ice while the researcher sat back to observe. The talk was small in nature, consisting of what people did for a living. This conversation moved to a firepit outside once dinner was completed.

Once outside and around the fire, the atmosphere loosened. Participants B2 and C2 were still tending to their children and not as involved in the conversation as the others. The conversation morphed from talking about work careers to communication about hobbies and habits. Couple A stated that they needed a night like this first fellowship time. The interaction with others their age was something that was missing from their lives. They were the only couple who spoke of the impact that the fellowship time had had on them. The fellowship time concluded after approximately two hours. Couple D had already begun the cleanup process. By the time they were finished, all couples had left; they soon followed suit.

Week Three

The next day was the third instructional meeting time. Couple C was in charge of setting the room up, while Couple D was charged with having the coffee ready. Couple B was the only couple not present during this meeting and the first couple to miss one of the gathering times. Concern crept into the researcher's mind due to couple B's not being engaged during the previous instructional meeting. Contact was made after the morning worship service at Star Baptist to ensure that all was well with couple D. They had stated that they would need to meet with the researcher at a separate time that week.

The instructional meeting began with a recap of the previous week, in which all couples reported that living as a pig came more naturally when they thought of what God thought of them. The next lesson from Dr. Evans was focused on giving to other believers. Continuing in Romans 12, Dr. Evans turned the participants' attention to recognizing the need for community with believers. The horizontal relationship one has with others directly affects their relationship with God. As revealed in the previous weeks, participants A2 and C2 were the only ones taking notes with pen and paper. A prayer of guidance was offered to God as the discussion would soon follow.

This week's discussion was led more by the participants than the researcher. Participant C1 started off by claiming that it was an eye-opener that church was more than simply being present during worship times. He grew up believing that in order to be a good Christian, one must simply be present. Participant F1 agreed and added that he and his wife had been absent from the designated worship services up until this study began and knew something was missing. Participant F2 agreed and stated that they had withdrawn from the worship times due to feeling that something was still missing. Recognizing that church is more than being present at the worship services seemed to be what was missing in their lives, according to their feedback.

All other couples agreed with the idea that something was missing from their Christian lives. Couple A took the opportunity to recognize that the fellowship time from the evening prior was perhaps what had been missing. It was at this point in the study that a light bulb seemed to have been turned on in each participant's mind. At this point, all couples started to chime in on how much they had enjoyed the first fellowship time, with participant E2 not realizing the importance of what had taken place in the moment the Saturday prior. For the first time in the

group setting, participant E2 spoke excitedly about what was taking place within the group and the excitement that was building to the next time of fellowship.

The following week's communication included the mass group text sent on Monday reminding the participants of key points from Dr. Tony Evans's podcast and three days' worth of communication with each participating couple: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. All three days were met with more communication than the two weeks prior. The focus for every conversation was how to make more time for each other throughout the week. It appeared as if the principal obstacle for each couple was busyness. Each couple's time was occupied by responsibilities that the world had placed on them.

The researcher took this as an opportunity to remind the couples of the importance of Romans 12:2 and being transformed by changing the way that they thought. This led to interesting conversations and new concepts that the participants had not thought of previously. Participant A1 summed up what everyone else thought: the importance of changing the way one thinks of their time being spent. Is the time being spent on tasks that bring God glory? Couple E reiterated this with the idea that believers become too busy to invest in one another's lives. All couples had the same question at the end of the conversation. How does a believer reprioritize the important tasks, such as scheduling times of fellowship with one another? This part of the conversation never materialized past the point of asking this question. This was an issue with the study.

Week Four

Couple D held the responsibility of setting the room up for the fourth instructional time. Couple E provided the coffee. Couple B returned to the meeting after having a brief conversation the week prior with the researcher and was caught up with the lessons after being forwarded the

last lesson by the researcher. They were faithful in listening to the podcast together the week prior. Dr. Tony Evans shifted focus from giving to other believers to giving to a believer's enemies. This lesson struck a chord with all participants.

The recap was relatively short this particular morning due to the amount of information discussed the week prior. This would allow for more discussion time once the podcast concluded. The overarching idea from Dr. Evans during the podcast was what God expects of believers once they've been wronged. Dr. Evans indicated that Romans 12 pointed to a believer giving their whole self when the offering plate was passed as opposed to offering bits and pieces of one's self. Participants A2 and C2 were still the only ones taking notes via pen and paper. A prayer of guidance was offered to God once the podcast concluded.

To this point in the study, even though the men had offered input into most of the discussions, the women were the driving force in the conversations. The discussion quickly turned to the necessity of forgiveness and love and was led primarily by participant C2. Participant B2 asked two intriguing questions that dominated the remaining time: Are reconciliation and forgiveness the same thing, and can a believer forgive an offender and not reconcile with the offender? This drove the communication throughout the week.

Communication for week four included the mass communication text sent on Monday and the conversational texts sent to each couple on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. The couples were eager to communicate three out of the four days, which proved interesting. It became quite apparent that all couples had faced hurt recently in their lives. How they handled this hurt or wrongdoing had affected their relationship with God.

Couple E indicated they were all right with people hurting them. They did not tend to hold a grudge. They simply cut ties and moved on with life. The researcher asked their opinion

about reconciliation; they replied that they did not see the importance of reconciling with someone who had offended them. This allowed the researcher to guide them to 2 Corinthians, where Paul teaches that believers are ambassadors of God. Couple E revealed that they need to study more concerning the ministry of reconciliation.

Studying the ministry of reconciliation was a general consensus among the participants. Recognizing the need for not only forgiveness but also reconciliation, the researcher had the opportunity of explaining that reconciliation with an offender is an act of love on behalf of the believer. Paul recognized this in his letter to the church in Corinth when he wrote that love keeps a record of no wrongs (1 Cor 13:5). The participants attributed 1 Corinthians 13 to marriage as opposed to everyday life with everyday people. The belief held by all was that Paul was speaking directly to the marriage relationship when he wrote 1 Corinthians 13, as opposed to all relationships. The researcher took this as an opportunity to remind the participants of what was learned in week two from Dr. Evans: God views the participants in the same way that He views the enemies of the participants.

Week four also included the second time of fellowship. Couple C assisted with the setup, arriving at 5:30 p.m., while the remaining couples arrived at 6:00 p.m. During this fellowship time, participants B2 and C2 spent less time following their children and more time devoted to connecting with the other participants. The atmosphere was less tense than the first, with a sense of comfort between the participants. All were eager to spend more time communicating what had taken place in their lives the week prior. Eventually, the conversation turned toward discussing the lessons from the previous four weeks, which included living a sacrificed life, recognizing what God says about the believer, the importance of community, and forgiveness and reconciliation.

The researcher observed as couples began to open up regarding their relationships and how they interacted with people during day-to-day activities. The conversation was led and guided by the participants, with the researcher providing little input. There was a vast difference between the interactions in the second week compared to the first week's meeting. Couples E and F were offering as much input into the conversation as the rest. There was an excitement leading into the next day's study. Couple F was the only couple remaining at the end of the gathering to help clean up from the evening's festivities.

Week Five

Dr. Tony Evans began to change course in the week-five podcast, focusing on the law of the harvest. Couple E was responsible for setting the room up for class, while Couple F prepared the coffee. The summary from the previous week was short, as it was in week four. This particular podcast lasted approximately twenty-five minutes. Dr. Evans focused on the gift of grace that is given by God and should be given by believers to others. Upon completion of the podcast, a prayer for guidance during the discussion time was offered.

Participant A1 began the discussion with the concept of reaping and sowing. Dr. Evans spent the majority of the time focused on this particular concept. Participant A1 confessed that while he sowed repeatedly, he hardly saw the reaping. This was discouraging to him. The other participants took this as an opportunity to pour into participant A1, reminding him of what Paul said in his first letter to the church in Corinth: some believers are given the responsibility of planting, while others are given the responsibility of watering.

The researcher asked the participants if they understood why it seemed that Dr. Evans had changed his focus with this podcast. The majority appeared confused, which was justified by the lack of communication during the discussion time. Participant C1 revealed that he did not see

this as a disconnect from the other lessons but instead a charge moving forward. The believer's responsibility does not end with getting along with people. On the contrary, the believer's life must continue by sowing seeds of grace and love in the lives of those whom they come into contact with. Participant B1 added that he believed God saved people for a greater work than simply getting along with one another. This mission would be the focus of the week's interactions.

Week-five interactions included the mass text to all, reminding the participants of the key points from the lessons, and individual communication with each couple five days of the week: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. In similar fashion to week four, the participants only communicated three of the five days with the researcher. The opportunity to guide them into more Scripture was apparent when discussing the mission of the believer as found in the Great Commission (Matt 28).

The mission of the believer is to make disciples. Participant F2 understood this to mean to make converts. After further direction from the researcher, she understood that this is more than leading people to Christ. It involves teaching them to grow in Christ by walking in the Spirit. Couple A was still struggling with sowing but recognizing no reaping. The researcher took the opportunity to explain the parable of the sower in the Gospel of Matthew. Participant A1 recognized that where he sows is as important as what he sows, which was part of the lesson from Dr. Evans. The whole lesson seemed to be new information that the participants were not used to living. The communication was not as in depth as in previous weeks because of the lack of knowledge pertaining to the subject content.

Week Six

The final week of the research was dedicated to a time of fellowship and discussion of the podcast. Due to limitations and restrictions in effect from COVID-19, there were a few of weeks in between weeks five and six. The small-group time during Sunday morning was relegated to a discussion of the prior lessons learned from previous weeks. Couples F and A were responsible for classroom setup and coffee preparations.

The discussion was opened to the participating couples to ask questions regarding previous lessons. Couple E stated that the one principle that had carried over from the previous meetings was the idea of the pig and a chicken. Participant E1 specifically stated that he had had an easier time surrendering throughout the day and paying attention to his spiritual walk when he recalled the illustration of the pig and a chicken. Participant D1 stated that he rarely focused on the lessons from the previous weeks. All participants agreed that the focus was helped when the researcher sent messages to each couple. The discussion during this meeting concluded with all participants indicating the desire to continue with the Sunday school class.

The communication during this final week included a text message each day from the researcher to various couples. Each couple did not receive a daily message. The communication at this point was not as detailed as in previous weeks. This could be a result of the break between weeks five and six. More research is needed to determine whether or not this is the case.

The Final Meeting

The final meeting took place during week six. This time of fellowship excluded children due to the gathering of intel that took place. Each couple was responsible for finding their own childcare. The location of the final fellowship meeting was the same Sunday school room where the lessons had been held. The order of business in the final meeting was for each participant to

complete the anonymous questionnaire (appendix I). This took approximately fifteen minutes.

Figure 2 provides a synopsis of the data gathered from the questionnaire.

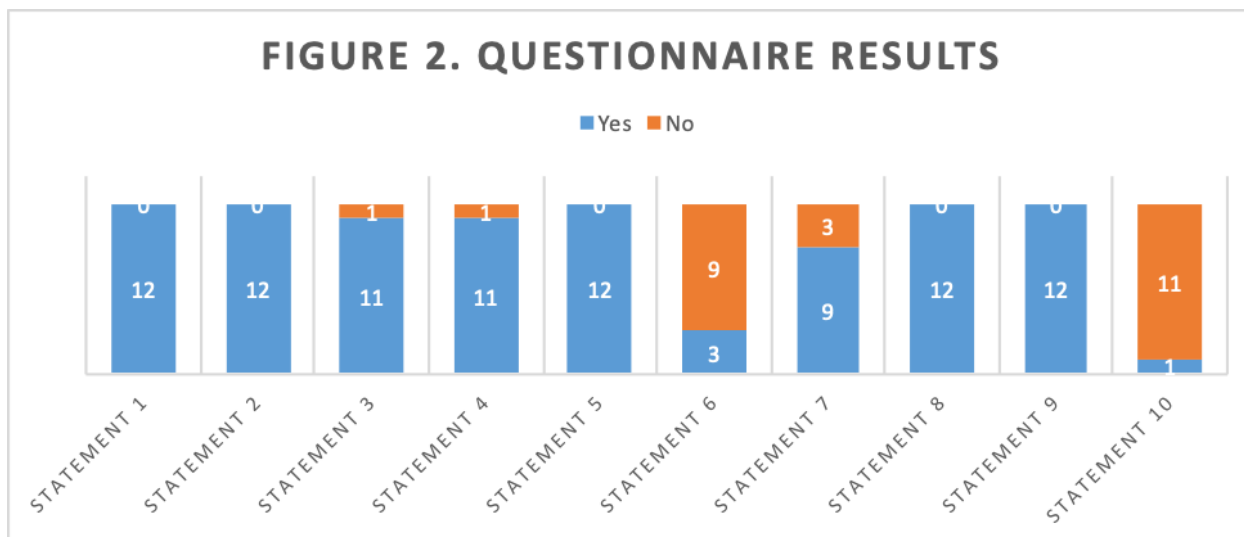


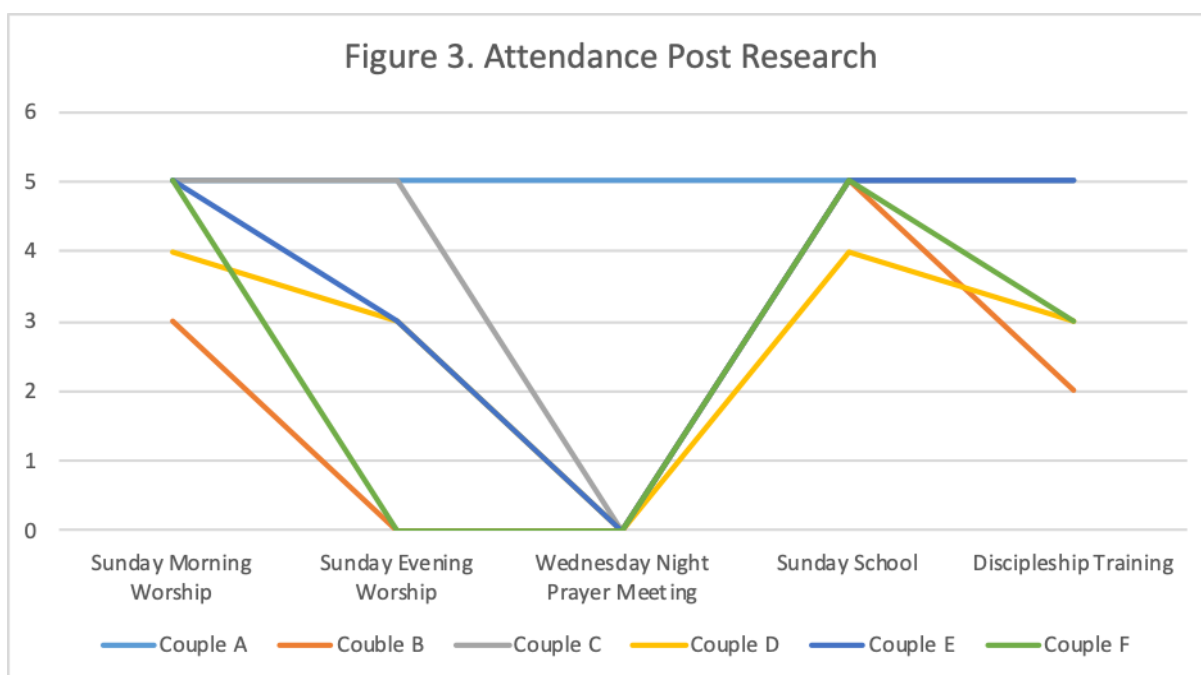
Figure 2 reveals that there was unanimous agreement concerning statements 1, 2, 5, 8, and 9. Statements 3, 4, 6, 7, and 10 found differing opinions with statement 6 and 7 revealing the greatest disparity between the participants. All participants agreed the research project helped grow their relationship with Christ and others and challenged their growth and understanding. This led to all participants agreeing this is the recommended small group format for Star Baptist due to a necessity of “living life together” over simply being lectured to in a classroom setting.

Figure 2 provided insight into differing opinions concerning statements 3, 4, 6, 7, and 10. Statements 3, 4, and 10 resulted in one participant disagreeing with the other participants, while statement 6 indicated that three participants agreed and nine participants disagreed. There were three disagreeing participants in statement 7, indicating that the differing roles within the group did not help them feel like they had a bigger role than just attending. Statements 3 and 4 revealed that one participant for each statement disagreed with the statements that the fellowship activities

had motivated them to attend all meetings and helped them to get to know others. Statement 10 revealed one participant who agreed that this type of small group should not be pursued at Star Baptist Church.

All participants admitted during the discussion that statement 6 was confusing in its wording. This is a flaw in the research process. Most participants agreed that this statement could have been worded better. The majority indicated verbally that the environment did help their walk with Christ. Reassessment of how the statement was worded needs to be done if the questionnaire will be replicated in future studies.

The attendance for small-group times at Star Baptist increased with the faithfulness of the participating couples over the course of the research project. Figure 3 reveals this upsurge over the five designated worship times. The most significant increase is seen in the small-group hours, which are Sunday school and discipleship Training. Faithfulness to Sunday morning and evening worship increased slightly, with the Wednesday prayer meeting seeing very little to no change.



The discussion guided by open-ended questions (appendix J) was the final stage in this meeting. The seven questions listed in appendix J guided this discussion as the researcher took observational notes. This part of the final meeting took approximately one hour and thirty minutes to complete, resulting in a roughly two-four final meeting. The participants were vocal and forthcoming in their opinions regarding the open-ended questions with the exception of participant A1.

The first question keyed in on changes to the research project. Participant B2 indicated that the roles for each meeting and fellowship time could have been expanded. This would allow for more participants to be involved in the project as a whole. Three of the participants indicated from the questionnaire that they did not believe that the roles had helped them feel like they had a bigger role in the group. Participant B2 agreed, indicating that she felt like another spectator most weeks. Participants C1 and D2 stated that they would continue assisting even if they were not assigned a responsibility. Breakfast was also advocated by participant C2 for every instructional meeting.

All participants desired more time allotted for the biblical discussion hour, which was the Sunday school hour. The one hour was not enough time to dive into Scripture, regardless of how it was presented, and discuss what was being taught. They agreed that the communication throughout the week helped but would have liked more time during the instructional time. Participant D1 admitted that he had not had anyone reach out to discuss Scripture between church services. This part of the research was highly favored by all.

The fellowship meetings every other week were met with disagreement. Participant A2 desired a fellowship meeting every week, while participant F2 stated that it would be hard to meet every week. Participants E1 and F1 believed that a fellowship meeting outside the church

once a month would be enough to suffice. All remaining participants agreed that every other week would be the best option for a time of fellowship. This structure would allow for the deepening of relationships.

The focus of question 2 was on the curriculum used for the study. Most participants had not heard of Dr. Tony Evans, let alone been through his curriculum. All participants agreed that the information presented had strengthened their walk with Christ and had them questioning their full commitment to Jesus and to the Gospel. The illustrations used assisted in challenging each participant in their own lives. The curriculum had not been hard to follow or burdensome.

The third question resulted in surprising responses. Participant B2 stated she did not feel more or less connected with other participants. Couple F and Participant E2 confirmed that the various instructional and fellowship meetings helped grow their relationships with all involved. Their response indicated that Star Baptist Church had not afforded them an avenue to get to know others with the exception of the welcome time during the Sunday morning worship hour. The consensus was that friendships had been made, but they stressed that they did not want to stop gathering. This led to the discussion of the fellowship time.

All agreed that the fellowship time was something that had been missing from their prior church experience. Participant E1 explained a difference between a church fellowship that included all members to a small-group fellowship time. The small-group fellowship time was more intimate, allowing for greater opportunity to let barriers come down while getting to know others on a deeper level. Participant A1 agreed with this statement. There were moments, according to participant C2, that fellowship was harder with little ones during the first fellowship meeting. The second meeting seemed to be better. She wondered whether more fellowship opportunities would relax the need to focus on her children.

Questions 5 and 6 began the discussion of the effectiveness of the small group.

Participant D1 stated that the only time he had attended church before the research project was for Sunday morning worship. During the research project, he admitted that being held accountable to attend moved him to a mind-set of being faithful to more opportunities that the church offered for worship and small group. Couple F felt the same as their attendance grew in other worship times that the church offered.

None of the participants had ever been part of a small group designed like the one utilized in this research. The overwhelming response was that the church as a whole should move toward a model like this, with a few tweaks. This was due to the presence of Scripture in their lives throughout the week and the extra time devoted to building relationships that had not previously existed. The communication during the week between researcher and participants had been a missing element in their lives prior to the research. This communication forced them to ponder Scripture. This idea had not been enforced by an outside force previously in their lives.

The final question keyed in on the details of the fellowship times and what the participants would do differently. Participant C1 suggested rotating homes. His opinion was based on the idea that couples would be forced to remove another barrier in their lives by opening their homes to one another, possibly something they would not have done in the past. All six women participants were frustrated at not being allowed to help with food during the fellowship times. They were appreciative for the food but felt that they could have helped more by bringing food.

All the men except for participant A1 believed that there was a need for different activities. Sitting and talking would not be enough for them to continue participating if the model were to be implemented. Participant B2 suggested having separate fellowship meetings for the

men and women. The idea would be for the occasional meeting to be gender oriented as opposed to everyone's meeting together every meeting.

The results have been delivered regarding the research project. Utilizing the observational notes from the weekly meetings, the questionnaire, and the open-ended discussion from the last meeting of the research project, the researcher discovered the intervention plan did yield the expected results. There are other areas that need to be addressed if someone were to attempt to recreate this study. These areas will be discussed in the final chapter. The statement, "one size fits all" does not fit when implementing a succinct small group model. The results from this study proved the small group model depends on those involved in the small group.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The purpose for this DMIN action research thesis was to discover whether the implementation of a succinct, developed small-group ministry would enhance and fulfill the responsibility of discipleship effectively within Star Baptist Church. The problem that was addressed focused on whether there was a changed attitude concerning a specific style of small group within the context of Star Baptist Church. The participants of this research were twenty-five-to-thirty-five-year-old couples with small children. The research lasted six weeks in total. Where does the research go from here? How do the results of this research project compare to the information gleaned from previous studies or the published work analyzed in the literature review? These questions will be answered along with others in this conclusion.

The information gathered from the Literature Review Section in Chapter 2 provides support to this thesis as well as differs in various aspects from this thesis. The definition of a disciple generally agreed upon by the majority of scholars' reviews support this thesis in that a disciple of Jesus seeks to imitate the life of Jesus. The effects of discipleship discussed in this section differ from this thesis. The effect of transformation was seen in the small group model implemented within this thesis, however, the effect of disciples who make disciples was not addressed in the small group model of this thesis. More time should be devoted in researching the effect of making disciples who make disciples. Finally, the effect of developing relationships within a small group model focused on relationships proved true in this thesis as participants found themselves growing deeper in a relationship with each other whom they had not previously held a relationship.

The problems found within small groups discussed by the scholars differ from the thesis with the exception of selfishness. The small group model utilized in the thesis found selfishness to be an issue particularly in the times devoted to discussion. Certain participants would dominate the time while other participants would hold back from contributing. The small group model did not experience the other problems mentioned in the Literature Review Section. The other literature supported the importance of Christian community which was experienced in the small group model employed with this thesis. The break between weeks five and six indicated the necessity of Christian community and the detriment to the group when there was a break in this community.

A Comparison of Research regarding Discipleship

In chapter 2, "Conceptual Framework," research regarding what a disciple and discipleship is, the effects of discipleship, problems found in discipleship, and the importance of Christian community was performed. This information will be compared to the information gleaned from the research conducted at Star Baptist Church. The goal is to provide what the researcher learned implementing this project and what research needs to be pursued beyond the information gleaned from this research.

The assumption before the research process began is the ineffectiveness of making disciples in Star Baptist Church. The church has been using the traditional small-group model in the form of Sunday school and discipleship-training classes, in which participants would endure a lecture. Little to no opportunity was provided for students in various classes to ask questions and engage in discussions regarding the material being presented.

A Comparison of Definitions

The participants in this research project defined a disciple as Jonathan Leeman did in the research from chapter 2. The participants indicated early in the research process that there was a lack of relational development within the church, specifically for their age group. This is what led a few of them to take part in the study. Leeman stated, “A local church, I said, is a group of Christians who regularly gather in Christ’s name to officially affirm and oversee one another’s membership in Jesus Christ and his kingdom through gospel preaching and gospel ordinances.”⁷⁰ The participants in this study explained that their church experience was relegated to coming and listening to the preacher, taking part in the Lord’s Supper and baptism, and occasionally attending a church fellowship. This idea of a disciple is contrary to what other authors stated, which was detailed in chapter 2.

The research did indicate the necessity of implementing small groups that foster an environment of community and communication. The participants agreed by the end of the research that their understanding of what is required of a disciple of Jesus Christ aligns with the majority of the research covered in chapter 2. Being a disciple is more than being present at church. The participants agreed in theory with Jim Putnam, that “a disciple is a child of God, an individual who is invested in other disciples, someone who is becoming more like Christ, and committed to the mission of Christ.”⁷¹ Emphasis is placed on investment concerning Putnam’s definition.

The strategy for this research project was not to define and discuss these specific topics directly but instead to indirectly cover the purpose and vision of the succinct small-group model. The participants of this study realized a lack of investment in previous church experiences.

⁷⁰ Leeman, *Church Membership*, 62–63.

⁷¹ Putnam, *Church Is a Team Sport*, chap. 10.

Based on the definitions provided in chapter 2, the participants evolved in their idea of disciples and discipleship, from the position of a church attendee to an invested individual of relationships. Their idea of what it means to make a disciple progressed to match that of Jim Putnam: “Discipleship is a process that can only be accomplished through relationship.”⁷² As this research project developed weekly, the participants vocally agreed that relational building is necessary for proper discipleship.

A Comparison of the Effects of Discipleship

The research conducted for this thesis concluded that all scholars believe that when discipleship is carried out according to the biblical mandate, transformation will be the result. A separate goal of the research project was to determine if there would be a transformation after six weeks of intense discipleship through the specific small-group model implemented. Transformation was apparent in the mental capacity of the participants, meaning that the participants understood the need for a small-group model that placed priority on relationships. More study must be pursued to determine whether there is a positive long-term effect motivating the disciples to make disciples of their own.

Six weeks is not ample enough time to teach disciples how to make disciples and expect results from them. A follow-up study dedicated to the training of small-group leaders would provide solutions to this problem. This study brought to light the necessity of incorporating a small-group model that would foster relationships and guide participants to living life together. The follow-up study to teach participants how to make disciples should last no less than six months to ensure that a proper understanding of what it means to be a disciple and to make a

⁷² Ibid., chap. 9.

disciple is gained. This study devoted more attention to what it means to be a disciple as opposed to how to make a disciple.

Relationships were an effect discussed in the research material that translated into the research model with the participants. One overwhelming result from the research project of this thesis is the understanding and agreement that within a proper small-group model, relationships flourish and aid in growing as disciples. According to the research in chapter 2, the consensus is that relationships develop whether it is a new relationship or one that has previously been established.

The relationships that grew out of the research project of this thesis proved the theory. The participating couples have been found fellowshipping beyond the end of the research project. The couples are interacting through a separate small group within Star Baptist Church since the conclusion of the research project. This small group is geared more toward familial discussion, providing opportunity for the younger couples to talk about issues within the family and what Scripture teaches about specific scenarios.

It is the belief of the researcher that participating couples from the research project felt the need to continue with a small group like the one used in the project. The relationships created from the research project have carried over into this new small-group environment. Fellowship is an offshoot of this mentality, with differing couples interacting with other couples from the research group who normally would not spend time together outside of church. Further research could be conducted concerning the type of interactions outside the church with members of the small group. This research would lead to understanding how believers behave and respond to situations when not in the safe confines of the church.

A Comparison of the Problems Found in Discipleship

The research conducted in chapter 2 also covered problems found within discipleship. The problems mentioned included selfishness in regard to how much input an individual is allowed or not allowed, the lack of hospitality among individuals, and which curriculum should be chosen. More research should be done to delve deeper into each problem and how it affects the success of the small group. This will be discussed momentarily.

Selfishness within a small group can generate multiple issues. The research from chapter 2 met two opposing views regarding selfishness. First, when an individual is afforded the majority of the say, disunity could disrupt the flow and development of the small group. This individual would be viewed as selfish with the time allotted or in the decision-making process. Second, an individual could be deemed selfish when they choose to withhold information or opinions regarding the small group. These individuals would be labeled as “outsiders,” indicating a disconnection from the group.

The participants of the research project for this thesis found both types of individuals within the group. The small group was structured in such a manner that the researcher could be labeled as selfish in the decision-making process. This did not, however, seem to disturb the flow of the small-group model. The second form of selfishness listed above was more evident among the participants. There were multiple times throughout the study in which participant A1 chose not to take part in the discussion. He was also withdrawn during the fellowship activities. The goal is for all participants to become disciples and to make disciples. If one suppresses their opinions, it could be detrimental to the process as a whole.

This leads to a need for further study. Was six weeks not enough time for certain participants to feel comfortable enough to speak out? Should there be an expectation of certain

participants to withhold discussion from the group based on their personality type? The idea is not to start something new for the sake of starting something new. The goal is to accomplish the biblical mandate of making disciples. Would a different demographic serve believers such as participant A1 better than the one utilized in this research?

The second problem discussed in the research from chapter 2 focused on the hospitality of believers. The research project for this thesis did not allow for further information concerning the hospitality of each participant. The researcher established the location used for fellowship outside the church and a church classroom for the instructional period during the research project.

There was an indication during the research project that the participants were frustrated due to not being allowed to assist in the preparation of the times of fellowship. The consensus was that the participants would have preferred to take more of a role in opening their homes or assisting with meals. Research should be done to discover if hospitality is an issue when creating a small-group model focused on relational and spiritual development. If participants are required to open their homes for a small-group setting, would they be willing to oblige? Would participants be willing to assume more responsibility if given the chance?

The curriculum chosen for any small group can be a problem for multiple reasons. Does the curriculum speak to the lives of those who are participating in the small group? For example, it would be ludicrous to begin a small group of elderly couples and use curriculum geared toward new parents. This is an overly dramatic example, but the point is that the curriculum can cause problems if it is not relevant to the small group in which it is being used.

This was a nonissue within the research project for this thesis as the researcher was responsible for selecting the curriculum. The researcher understood where the members were

spiritually and what would benefit them for spiritual growth. More research is necessary to determine if there should be a set curriculum included at all within a small-group model. The research from chapter 2 was split concerning where emphasis should be placed, either on the curriculum or on building relationships.

The argument for building relationships was supported by the importance of transforming lives. Is building relationships more important than putting more emphasis on what is taught? It would seem, from the traditional small-group perspective of Sunday school, that the emphasis is placed on what is taught. It is proven that this model is lacking in making disciples. Would a small-group model specifically devoted to developing relationships translate into transformed lives with less attention given to curriculum?

This research project was modeled in a way to give deference to both perspectives. The instructional period focused on curriculum, while the times of fellowship focused on relationships. The goal was to see transformation utilizing both perspectives. The conclusion is that in order to transform lives, careful attention must be given to curriculum while seeking to provide an atmosphere in which relationships can flourish.

A Comparison of the Importance of Christian Community

Christian community is a foundation to a successful small group model. Relationships are bred from Christian community. If Christian community is not prevalent, relationships will not flourish, and small-group models will decline and deteriorate to the point of nonexistence. The commitment to Christian community is paramount for the success of the small-group model. Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey explain, “He or she [the disciple] is committed to practicing the

spiritual disciplines in community and developing to their full potential for Christ and His mission.”⁷³ Christian community is foundational to making and developing disciples.

Christian community is more than simply gathering for church. David Platt provides the best explanation for Christian community:

The Bible portrays the church as a community of Christians who care for one another, honor one another, serve one another, instruct one another, forgive one another, motivate one another, build up one another, encourage one another, comfort one another, pray for one another, confess sin to one another, esteem one another, edify one another, teach one another, show kindness to one another, give to one another, rejoice with one another, weep with one another, hurt with one another, and restore one another.⁷⁴

This biblical definition of what Christian community is provides a separate opportunity for research.

This definition of Christian community is for the church as a whole. Should all small groups follow the same pattern and use this definition as a foundational starting point for the group? Is it possible to achieve this mentality within a small-group model? Certainly, a small group that is designed to adhere to these tenets should last longer than six weeks to determine if this type of lifestyle is possible. The focus would need to be geared toward each respective element to determine if this is a feasible environment to develop. For example, time must be devoted to teaching a believer how to hurt with another believer, how to restore another believer, and how to forgive another believer.

In the research project, it was impossible to attack each element of this idea of what Christian community is based on Platt’s study of the Scriptures. There was not enough time allotted in the six weeks to concisely deal with each element. At the most, the environment of the research project was conducive to honoring one another, serving one another, motivating one

⁷³ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .*, chap. 2.

⁷⁴ Platt, *Follow Me*, 154–55.

another, praying for one another, and showing kindness to one another. Out of the twenty separate descriptors used to define Christian community, the research project was equipped to key in on five. The environment was not beneficial to focusing on all twenty. A longer time period for research is necessary to determine the effectiveness of focusing on each element.

Finally, the idea of community being attractive rang true in the research found in chapter 2 and the research project for this thesis. The idea is that if the small-group model conveys true, authentic Christian community, outsiders will be attracted to what is happening within the group. Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation expound on this idea: “Community is always attractive; it grabs the hearts of those who observe.”⁷⁵ Lasting attractiveness is only possible when the Gospel is present and center in the small group setting. Geiger, Kelley, and Nation agree: “Christian community is a beautiful reflection of the gospel.”⁷⁶

The participants in this research project exemplified the gospel throughout the weeks. There was chatter between participants that led to outsiders questioning what was taking place with the small group, with some asking how to be a part of the fellowship. The attractiveness was not a goal of the researcher but found success through the communication with other believers of Star Baptist Church. The research, without pursuing this, created an environment that was eye-catching to those who were not a part of the study. The comments included the idea of something different than the typical Sunday school class offered by the church.

What Was Learned?

It is important to understand what was gleaned from this research project in order to establish a long-term solution to the small-group dilemma. The dilemma pits traditional small

⁷⁵ Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 168.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

groups such as Sunday school and discipleship-training classes, where the lecture method dominates, against relational small-group models that place a higher priority on the relationships between the participants of the small group. The conclusion, based on the research, is that neither model should be considered the only route to take when pursuing successful discipleship within the church. On the contrary, the research revealed that both models are necessary to foster Christian community as defined in Scripture.

There are five specific areas that need further attention. The research is not complete and could stretch into a few different directions. In the following section, these aspects will be examined and thought through for further study opportunity. This is not an exhaustive list as there are many elements that should be considered regarding this specific track of research. These include time restraints, location, demographic, what it means to be a disciple, and how to expand the small groups.

Time Restraints

The time restraint for the research project was put into place due to the location of the instructional meeting time. The small group met in a classroom at Star Baptist Church during the instructional time and was limited to approximately one hour. More time was devoted to the fellowships than to the instructional time. Research over a longer period of time would indicate whether more time during the instructional period would lead to an increase in spiritual growth. Does one hour suffice for the believer to grow in their relationship with Christ as Scripture is taught and discussed?

There were certain weeks, specifically weeks two and four, where the participants of the research project would have benefited from more time to discuss the topics. The lessons from Dr. Tony Evans were valuable to the participants. However, during these weeks, the conversation

could have lasted longer than one hour, but due to the time restraint, the conversation had to be cut short. There were opportunities to discuss the lesson throughout the week via text messaging. The researcher found these moments of communication to be less engaging and fulfilling for all involved. The interaction kept the material in focus for the participants but cannot be a replacement for real conversation within the group.

Further research should ask the question “Would offering two separate meetings during the week for instructional purposes promote better spiritual growth for the participants?” Keeping the communication open regarding information flow is vital. This was seen in the example of the chicken and the pig. The researcher reached out through text messaging to each couple to remind them of the illustration and was met with agreement. This helped in processing through different encounters for the participants. The following instructional meeting proved that more time needs to be spent on discussion of the material as a group as opposed to simply reminding each couple throughout the week.

It should be noted there were no time-restraint issues regarding the fellowship times. The participants enjoyed meeting every other week. They did agree that some meetings would be more beneficial without children but not every meeting. Further research is needed to determine the effect of holding one fellowship meeting during the month as opposed to biweekly meetings. Do relationships increase in intimacy when there are fewer or more opportunities for the participants to meet? The two-hour time limit was the best choice for this specific group of participants. Is this enough time for a separate demographic to fellowship together?

Location

The location of the instructional and fellowship times could offer differing results for research. The location of the instructional period was in a classroom at Star Baptist Church in the

Christian Life Center. This location was chosen due to the time restraint placed on the research project. The only classroom available at the time of the research was this one, which is located away from the main church campus, resulting in a few issues.

First, all the participating couples had younger children. They would have to arrive at the main campus to register children in the children's wing and then proceed across campus (approximately a five-minute walk) to make it to the class by the starting time. A few of the participating couples had trouble arriving to class on time, resulting in less time spent in discussion. There were weeks that the participating couples would drop their children off at the time they were supposed to be in class for the instructional period to begin. Would changing the location of the instructional period benefit the participants in their spiritual and relational growth?

Second, due to the trek across campus, the researcher would have to ensure that the class was stopped in enough time to allow participants to retrieve their children and make it to Sunday morning worship before it began. This deprives the participants of valuable communication time. Would a location in closer proximity to the children's ministry alleviate this stress? If the research remains under the same time restraints, this is research worth pursuing.

Finally, changing locations altogether to a destination off the church campus could lend to better discussion and relational building. This would allow the researcher to accomplish instructional and fellowship sessions simultaneously. Would changing the location of the small-group meeting benefit the participants? More research is needed in this area as different elements come into consideration. Moving the class off campus would affect a variety of amenities the campus has to offer. For example, childcare would have to be determined before the meetings began. Would the children come to the meeting or stay with childcare away from the meeting?

Would moving the meeting off campus deliver the same or better results? These are but a few of the decisions that need to be made and researched further.

Demographic

One question that must be asked and further pursued is whether or not this research would fit various demographics. This specific study focused on twenty-five-to-thirty-five-year-old parents of young children. Would this same study work for widowed individuals, middle-aged parents of teenagers, teenagers, married older adults, or single adults? Concerning the fast-paced lifestyle of the younger couples, the idea is that all members would benefit from a small-group model like the one used in this research project.

Details would need to be adjusted for each demographic. For example, if this research project were implemented for teenagers, concessions would need to be made regarding transportation, location, time restraints, and fellowship activities. Every demographic could utilize the shell of the research but would need to adapt to specific needs found within the group. Implementation during a pandemic should be addressed regarding this research project as well.

Small-group models undoubtedly look different during the pandemic. This research project was no different. There was a period between weeks five and six where a short break was necessary due to the pandemic. The quarantine that was a result of the pandemic affected the participants negatively. It is the researcher's opinion that more research should be done to find the best-possible small-group model for demographics that do not feel comfortable meeting in person regardless of the environment. What does this meeting look like? How would a researcher determine success within an environment that does not allow for personal contact?

Defining Disciple and Discipleship

These terms were defined in chapter 2 of this thesis and were compared again at the beginning of this chapter with what the participants understood regarding the terms. The problem with the research project was the lack of instruction pertaining to what a disciple and discipleship is. Research could move forward in creating a small group utilizing this small-group model but focusing on teaching what a disciple is and what it means to be a disciple.

Would beginning with this specific material generate more mature disciples than utilizing a separate curriculum within the same small-group model? Would introducing what a disciple is and how to make disciples increase the likelihood of spiritual and relational growth? The researcher did not teach these terms specifically but believes that they were addressed throughout the six-week period, albeit not in depth. Should instructing participants on what it means to be a disciple and how to make disciples be a precursor before beginning any other type of curriculum?

Recognizing the necessity of teaching these specific terms would enhance the effectiveness of the small group. This should be done at the beginning of the class and possibly before the research even begins. There was an initial meeting set up before the research began in this project. Could an explanation into what a disciple is and how to make disciples be explained in this initial meeting, or should the instructional period last longer than the time allotted within this first meeting?

This research is important to accomplish in that it directly affects the overall goal of the research project. The purpose of the research was to discover if the implementation of a succinct, developed small-group ministry would enhance and fulfill the responsibility of discipleship effectively within Star Baptist Church. Research into introducing what a disciple is and how to

make disciples would enhance the instructional period. The participants would understand what was better expected of them throughout the process. This leads to the final section of the discussion.

How to Expand Small Groups

This area of attention is a goal to strive for in order to understand what is necessary to build multiplying small groups. The goal of a disciple is to make disciples. This mission is explained in the Great Commission from Jesus (Matt 28:19–20). If disciples are being made, small-group growth will be the result. It is at this time that these questions must be researched: What the most effective size of a small group? At what point does the small group need to expand?

Once this information is gleaned from further research, the researcher must then pursue the steps to expand the small group. The researcher uses the word *expand* to signify the moment a small group must break off from the original small group to form a new small group. Does this new small group begin with one person from the original small group? Are a group of individuals necessary to begin a new small group? Does the original leader of the small group train a participant to take over and then begin a new small group? These are but a few of the questions that should be answered when pursuing this direction in research.

Final Statement

Growth should always be the goal of the research or small-group leader. This growth comes in a variety of methods and refers specifically to relational and spiritual growth. How does growth take place? It was determined in this research project that in order for growth to take place, two elements must be present: an instructional period and a fellowship period. It is the conclusion of the researcher that the implementation of a succinct, developed small-group

ministry will enhance and fulfill the responsibility of discipleship effectively within Star Baptist Church. Implementing the research project successfully addressed the problem mentioned in chapter 1: that many members of Star Baptist Church may not see the benefit for small-group ministry in their lives. The participating couples desired to continue the small group beyond the conclusion of the research project.

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APPENDIX A

PERMISSION REQUEST

May 24, 2020

William Dewease
Pastor
Star Baptist Church
301 Mangum Dr.
Star, MS 39167

Dear Todd Ward:

As a graduate student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University. I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate of Ministry degree. The title of my research project is The Necessity of Small Group Ministries and the purpose of my research is to discover if the implementation of a succinct, developed small group ministry will enhance and fulfill the responsibility of discipleship effectively within Star Baptist Church.

I am writing to request your permission to contact members of your church to invite them to participate in my research study.

The data will be used to determine the effect of the small group program the participants will be a part of. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, respond by email to wdewease@liberty.edu. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

William Dewease
Pastor

APPENDIX B

PERMISSION LETTER

May 24, 2020

Todd Ward
Associate/Worship Pastor
Star Baptist Church
301 Mangum Dr
Star, MS 39167

Dear William Dewease:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled *The Necessity of Small Group Ministries*, I have decided to grant you permission to access our membership list and invite them to participate in your study.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

- The requested data WILL BE STRIPPED of all identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.
- The requested data WILL NOT BE STRIPPED of identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.

Sincerely,

Todd Ward
Associate/Worship Pastor
Star Baptist Church

APPENDIX C
RECRUITMENT LETTER

May 24, 2020

William Dewease
Pastor
Star Baptist Church
301 Mangum Dr.
Star, MS 39167

Dear Member:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to discover if the implementation of a succinct, developed small group ministry will enhance and fulfill the responsibility of discipleship effectively within Star Baptist Church, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 25-35 years of age, married with both spouses willing to participate in the study, active members of the church with over 90% attendance, with children under the age of 10.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to take part in several activities throughout the study:

- Attend weekly Bible study meetings for six weeks focusing on Dr. Tony Evans' study, *Return on Investment*. The sessions will include question, answers, and life application principles and will last approximately 1 hour each meeting.
- Attend a total of 3 extracurricular fellowship activities every other week including dinner, games, etc. These activities will last approximately 2 hours each time.
- During the final Bible study meeting, participate in a focus group discussion to determine if any growth has occurred. The final meeting will last approximately 2-3 hours.
- Complete an anonymous questionnaire during the final meeting. The questionnaire should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Observational notes will be taken during all Bible study and fellowship activity meetings. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please respond to this letter verbally that you will commit to the initial meeting on [Date/Time] at [Location].

A consent document is attached to 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 initial meeting.

Sincerely,

William Dewease

Pastor

(601)408-9525/wdewease@liberty.edu

APPENDIX D
RECRUITMENT FOLLOW-UP LETTER

May 24, 2020

William Dewease
Pastor
Star Baptist Church
301 Mangum Dr.
Star, MS 39167

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. Last week a letter was given to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up letter is being sent to remind you to respond if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for responding to whether or not you will participate in the study is [Date].

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to take part in several activities throughout the study:

- Attend weekly Bible study meetings for six weeks focusing on Dr. Tony Evans' study, *Return on Investment*. The sessions will include question, answers, and life application principles and will last approximately 1 hour each meeting.
- Attend a total of 3 extracurricular fellowship activities every other week including dinner, games, etc. These activities will last approximately 2 hours each time.
- During the final Bible study meeting, participate in a focus group discussion to determine if any growth has occurred. The final meeting will last approximately 2-3 hours.
- Complete an anonymous questionnaire during the final meeting. The questionnaire should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Observational notes will be taken during all Bible study and fellowship activity meetings. Your name and other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please respond to this letter verbally that you will commit to the initial meeting on [Date/Time] at [Location].

A consent document was attached to your initial recruitment letter. The informed consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the informed consent document and return it to me at the time of the initial meeting.

Sincerely,

William Dewease
Pastor

APPENDIX E
CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: The Necessity of Small Group Ministries

Principal Investigator: William Dewease, MDiv in Discipleship, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be between the ages of 25-35 and married with children under the age of 10 and actively involved in the church with over 90% attendance. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to discover if the implementation of a succinct, developed small group ministry will enhance and fulfill the responsibility of discipleship effectively within Star Baptist Church.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Take part in an initial meeting before the six-week period begins to establish meeting location and time that is beneficial for all involved. This meeting will last approximately 1 hour.
2. Take part in the weekly Bible study group to discuss Scripture, praise, and fellowship with other participants. There will be one meeting each week for six weeks. The meetings will last approximately 1 hour each. During the meeting times, observational notes will be taken. The observational notes will be utilized to assess the situation in the room from individual's interactions with each other as well as the material being taught.
3. Take part in fellowship activities every other week (total of 3 activities). Each fellowship activity will last approximately 2 hours and consists of spending time with each other outside of the structured small group meeting time.
4. Take part in the focus group discussion during the last Bible study meeting. This meeting is designed to allow the participants the opportunity for feedback regarding the different elements of the twelve-week study. The focus group will last approximately 2-3 hours.
5. Complete a questionnaire that is anonymous at the end of the study. It should take you approximately 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits to participants that could be gained from this study is a changed perception of small groups. Small group ministries allow Christians to fellowship as expected biblically. The atmosphere allows for accountability to include constructive criticism in one's pursuit of following Christ. There are benefits to society as well that include, but are not limited to, neighborhood support groups and opportunities to serve society through love as a group.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participants responses to the questionnaire will be anonymous. Participant responses to the focus group and small group meetings will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms/codes.
- 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.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide 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, except for focus group data, 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.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is William Dewease. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at (601)408-9525 and/or wdewease@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Daryl F. Rodriguez, at dfrodriguez@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX F

INITIAL MEETING OUTLINE

- Gather in a specified Sunday school room of the church with enough room for all participants to sit comfortably.
- Open with prayer and Scripture reading (Eph 4).
- Thank all participants for being a part of the study.
- Explain the six-week Bible studies to include the material of choice (Dr. Tony Evans's *Return on Investment*).
- Explain the three-week fellowship meetings and what they will entail.
- Explain how observational notes will be taken during each meeting.
- Explain how the final meeting will flow, including the questionnaire that is to be taken.
- Retrieve Consent Forms

APPENDIX G**FELLOWSHIP MEETING OUTLINE**

- Gather at a predetermined location.
- Open with prayer.
- Eat (meal provided by the researcher).
- Pursue activity (board game, movie, etc.).
- All costs are covered by the researcher.

APPENDIX H

FINAL MEETING OUTLINE

- Gather in a Sunday School room at Star Baptist Church.
- Hand out questionnaires for participants to complete.
- Open the floor with open-ended questions for participants to speak of their experience over the last twelve weeks.
- Take observational notes during the meeting.
- Snacks will be provided at the expense of the researcher.

APPENDIX I
QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following statements with Yes or No.
“Yes” indicates an agreement with the statement. “No” indicates a disagreement with the statement.

	Please Circle	
	Yes	No
1. The Small Group Ministry helped grow my relationship with Christ.	Yes	No
2. The Small Group Ministry helped grow my relationship with others.	Yes	No
3. The fellowship activities motivated me to attend all meetings.	Yes	No
4. The fellowship activities helped me get to know others at Star Baptist Church.	Yes	No
5. The material presented during the devotional time challenged my growth and understanding.	Yes	No
6. This type of environment did not help me in my walk with Christ.	Yes	No
7. Utilizing different roles within the group helped me feel like I had a bigger role than just attending.	Yes	No
8. I would recommend this format of Small Group Ministry at Star Baptist Church.	Yes	No
9. I see the necessity of “living life together” in this way over the traditional model.	Yes	No
10. This type of Small Group should not be pursued at Star Baptist Church.	Yes	No

APPENDIX J

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What changes should be made to the meetings?

2. How was the curriculum sufficient in taking you to a deeper relationship with God?

3. In what ways did you feel you were connected to the other participants in ways you haven't felt before at church?

4. How were the fellowship times conducive to deepening relationships with each other?

5. In detail, explain how you believe a small group model such as this is essential to church?

6. Will you elaborate as to how this type of small group ministry would benefit/be detrimental to Star Baptist Church as a whole?

7. In what ways would you change the fellowship times, i.e. include more, reduce, types of activities, etc.?

IRB Approval Letter

July 21, 2020
William Dewease
Daryl Rodriguez

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY19-20-417 The Necessity of Small Group Ministries

Dear William Dewease, Daryl Rodriguez:

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

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 101(b):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. 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.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

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

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office