Liberty University School of Divinity

Proven Biblical Discipleship: Make it According to the Pattern

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By

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ABSTRACT

PROVEN BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP: MAKE IT ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN
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The first-century church's spiritual growth methodology functioned to achieve the goal of Christlikeness through discipleship. God crafted a design for his church to advance followers of Jesus toward Christian maturity. God's instruction for Israel to "see that you make it according to the pattern" came from God's perfect mind and is practical guidance for today's spiritual growth practices.[1] According to the countless number of discipleship methods available, some churches communicate that Christian maturation can be achieved through any discipleship perspective. This project aims to study local churches that offer a discipleship program, process, or pedagogy and compare them with twelve "best practices" found in the models exemplified by Jesus and the apostle Paul. Surveys will be presented to church leadership or their representatives to establish data concerning approaches used for their members' spiritual growth. This examination's desired outcome is to measure the local churches' alignment with twelve "best practices" existing in the original pattern and present a reasonable solution of implementing a more robust process. One possibility to explore is the need to disengage from the modern mindset of creating a new contemporary culture strategy. Instead, return to a process comprising of a significant number of these "best practices" proven effective in the early church.

Abstract Length: 234 words.

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[1] David L. Allen, *Hebrews* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 443; Exodus 25:40; Hebrews 8:5. Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical passages referenced are from the New King James Version.

Dedication

      I primarily dedicate this work to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose transformation of my life has led to an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and a relationship with the divine Creator. May this project, and my life, continue to glorify him and his kingdom unceasingly. Also, I dedicate this final project to my wife Tracy, daughters Dr. Ravyn Canale and Kara McKee, and son Vaughn Patrick McKee. Your encouragement in my academic journey has piloted me in accomplishing my educational goals. God has truly blessed me with each one of you, and my love for you is unmeasurable.

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Abbreviations

DMIN   *Doctor of Ministry*

IRB   *Institutional Review Board*

SBC   *Southern Baptist Convention*

PPBA   *Pikes Peak Baptist Association*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

God chose the church as the vehicle to labor in the "Great Commission" to make disciples. The church is a living organism working together toward the primary goal of progressing Christians toward maturity and fruit-bearing. The growth of committed disciples of Jesus Christ should be the objective of every Christian church in the world, in obedience to the Master's final commission. Obedience requires every disciple must be fully surrendered to Jesus Christ as Lord in heart, mind, and actions.[1] Only then will one be in the absolute will of God to make disciples for the furtherance of his kingdom.

Furthermore, not every church has made discipleship its primary mission, and consistency concerning methodology between denominational churches is often nonexistent. Current research indicates that 80% of the churches in America have reached a plateau or are declining. One potential cause for this is the lack of attention to biblical discipleship.[2] These findings warrant an investigation into current church practices to ascertain verifiable evidence to substantiate this hypothesis.

The American church's scope makes it impractical to examine it as a whole; therefore, this study will concentrate on a local subset of Southern Baptist churches affiliated with the Pikes Peak Baptist Association in southern Colorado. This study investigates the strength of the discipleship programs using the example of God's-patterned New Testament model for comparison. Comparing local church methodologies with twelve identified characteristics, or

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[1] Roger Helland, *Magnificent Surrender: Releasing the Riches of Living in the Lord* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 49.

[2] Dr Bobby M. Wagner, *Identity Crisis: From Crisis to Christ, a Case of Mistaken Identity* (San Jose, CA: I & D Press, 2016), 126; Ermias G. Mamo, *The Maturing Church: An Integrated Approach to Contextualization, Discipleship and Mission* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Publishing, 2017), 6.

"best practices" observed in the original model can help assess whether these churches have strong programs that are aligned with the methods exemplified by Jesus and Paul.

Ministry Context

A church's success in today's climate is predicated upon a steady increase of its members, often in a quantitative approach rather than a qualitative one.[3] Some suggest that the American church is not being effectively intentional about making disciples.[4] The lack of unity in church disciple-making often parallels the culture's individualist mentality finding it challenging to work well in the community the way God intended. Moreover, American consumer culture has exploited its churches to bring consumption rather than participation and service.[5] Nevertheless, it is God's plan for church members to participate as his instruments in the process of making and multiplying disciples.[6] To accurately evaluate a comparison between models requires a more detailed review of the associations being studied for this project.

The Southern Baptist Convention

The Southern Baptist Convention is the largest Protestant denomination in America.[7]

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[3] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 307; Fred W. McRae, *A Case Study in Contextualization: The History of the German Church Growth Association 1985-2003* (Eugene, OR: WIPF & Stock, 2014), 60; Leonard Sweet, *Soultsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 68.

[4] Aubrey Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making: A Practical Tool for Successful Ministry* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 76.

[5] Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 159.

[6] Paul Versluis, *Making Disciples in the Congregation: A Guide to Christian Formation through the Process of Mentoring and the Experience of Congregational Worship* (Eugene, Or: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018), 12.

[7] "Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics | Pew Research Center," accessed May 28, 2019, https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/.

Predominantly, churches associated with the Southern Baptist Convention remain guided by

biblical doctrine and theology. However, even these churches have experienced slower growth in

the past few years. Mark Clifton, Senior Director of Church Replanting, North American

Mission Board SBC, writes in his forward to the book *Reclaimed Church: How Churches Grow,*

Decline, and Experience Revitalization, "Churches that once thrived within their communities

and experienced growth are now working hard just to stop the bleeding. In my own

denomination, we realize the loss of more than nine-hundred congregations each and every

year."[8]

The problem of the declining numbers of Southern Baptist Convention churches leads to

a multitude of possibilities. However, if Christians are not being developed by their churches

toward maturity, how are they to walk in a manner pleasing to the Lord in works and increased

knowledge?[9] It is the committed disciple of Jesus who will obey Jesus' command to make

disciples, thereby increasing the church's spiritual and numerical growth. The Southern Baptist

Convention, like many denominations, determines healthy church growth by the numerical

increase of its members.[10] Churches without an exhaustive discipleship process become deficient

in developing the Christian maturity needed to fulfill the "Great Commission." Additionally,

churches that concentrate mainly on evangelistic perspectives often deem spiritual development

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[8] Bill Henard, *ReClaimed Church: How Churches Grow, Decline, and Experience Revitalization* (Nashvillle, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), foreward.

[9] James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 72; Colossians 1:10.

[10] "Study Updates Stats on Health of Southern Baptist Churches - Baptist Press," accessed November 28, 2020, https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/study-updates-stats-on-health-of-southern-baptist-churches/.

merely a by-product of their program.[11] This process stagnates spiritual growth since most instruction is elementary when geared more towards the spiritually immature.[12]

A Brief History of the Southern Baptist Convention

The historical background of the Southern Baptist Convention is essential in gaining an understanding of their progression after coming to America. The Baptists fled England in the seventeenth century to escape religious persecution. Churches planted in the South during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were located in the Carolinas, Virginia, and Georgia.[13] The Baptists created associations early after establishing these churches to develop a more significant influence to engage in Christian ministry and still keep each church's autonomy. Soon the churches in the North, South, and West experienced tensions because of the considerable differences concerning culture, economic, and political thinking.

The strain from these differences culminated with the dispute over slavery and led to the creation of two lines of service. Consequently, the Southern Baptist Convention was established on May 10, 1845.[14] Shortly after the SBC was established, the Foreign Missions Board, Home Missions Board, and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary were formed and contributed to

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[11] Gary L. McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth: How You Can Work with God to Build a Faithful Church* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 75.

[12] Christopher Sanchez, "The Local Church in Mission: Becoming a Missional Congregation in the Twenty-First Century Global Context and the Opportunities Offered through Tentmaking Ministry, Lausanne.org" September 12, 2020, https://drchrissanchez.com/review-https://drchrissanchez.com/review-lausanne-occasional-paper-no-39/.

[13] Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 78.

[14] Steve W. Lemke, "The Uneasy Conscience of Southern Baptists: Support for Slavery Among the Founders of the Southern Baptist Convention." *American Baptist Quarterly* 34 (3–4), (2015): 254, https://web-a-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&sid=b1650b52-83cd-48a5-b236-aa236443e3e1%40sessionmgr4008.

the steady growth of SBC churches up to the American Civil war. The Civil War nearly

destroyed the SBC, but soon after the war ended, reconstruction began, and churches were

planted all over the South. This expansion continued, and by the mid-twentieth century, there

were SBC churches in all fifty states.[15]

The SBC became the largest protestant denomination in America in 1967 with the

reputation for being more conservative regarding biblical theology, doctrine, and religious

commitment.[16] Sadly, there has been a recent pattern of religious decline in America, and the

SBC has not been immune, experiencing an 8% reduction in members from 16.4 million to 15

million. The steady decrease should raise questions regarding the cause of membership and

church decline, encouraging some honest conversations on how the SBC should respond to the

drop in numbers.[17]

The conversation regarding the decline of SBC churches is extensive and challenging to

determine the exact root causes. The current president of the SBC, J.D. Greear, recognizes there

is a concern by affirming, "the upcoming generation, our prayer should be to see an increase in

evangelism, church planting, and revitalization, and ultimately an end to decades of decline."[18] It

is apparent that SBC leadership is concerned; therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that SBC

church congregations should also be alarmed with decreasing church membership and work

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[15] "Southern Baptist Beginnings – Baptist History and Heritage Society," accessed June 16, 2020 http://www.baptisthistory.org/baptistorigins/southernbaptistbeginnings.html.

16 "7 Facts about Southern Baptists," Pew Research Center, n.d., accessed June 16, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/07/7-facts-about-southern-baptists/.

[17] Albert Mohler, "The Future of the Southern Baptist Convention: The Numbers Don't Add Up," accessed June 16, 2020. https://albertmohler.com/2019/05/31/the-future-of-the-southern-baptist-convention-the-numbers-dont-add-up.

[18] Kate Shellnutt, "Southern Baptists Down to Lowest in 30 Years," *News & Reporting*, accessed November 28, 2020, https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/may/southern-baptists-acp-membership-baptism-decline-2018.html.

together to explore viable solutions like examining their current discipleship methods as a solution to stop, or at least slow, the regression.

<div align="center">Major Beliefs and Practices</div>

The Southern Baptist Convention Faith and Message 2000 contains a summary of beliefs. SBC churches are autonomous, and for the most part, subscribe to the articles found in their statement of faith. The majority of Baptists believe that the Bible is the divinely inspired revelation of God to man and is the ultimate instruction authority. However, the primary distinction associated with the Baptists is the believer's baptism by immersion in water, which they argue is more closely aligned with scripture than infant baptism.

The demonstration of baptism is one's profession of faith in the salvation of Jesus Christ after conversion. Baptism is not a condition of salvation but is a public identification of one's faith in Jesus Christ. The act of baptizing is an element of the "Great Commission," and, consequently, an ordinance based on this command.[19] Also acknowledged in the SBC Faith and Message 2000 is the duty of every follower and church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[20]

The traditional spiritual growth platform used by members of the SBC is the Sunday School program that began with establishing the Sunday School Board in 1891. Since its founding, Sunday School has been a primary teaching component of SBC churches for

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[19] Anthony R. Cross, *Baptism and the Baptists: Theology and Practice in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), 30.

[20] "Southern Baptist Convention. The Baptist Faith and Message," accessed May 23, 2019, http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp.

evangelism, outreach, and the development of leaders.[21] There are still many SBC churches that rely on the Sunday School platform as their primary teaching method. These programs and others used by SBC churches in this study will be analyzed for their comprehensiveness and alignment with the New Testament Model.

Organization

The SBC is a network of autonomous churches cooperating in various ministries. There are 47,000 churches and 4,500 missional churches in the SBC network. SBC church representatives meet yearly to organize ministries, elect trustees, and adopt a budget. The SBC conducts its work through an Executive Committee, Women's Mission Union, two mission boards, six theological seminaries, Guidestone Financial Resources, Lifeway Christian Resources, and an Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. The mission of SBC cooperating churches is to present the Gospel to the world and make disciples.[22]

This number of SBC churches is an unrealistic challenge to research for this project. A condensed number of SBC churches was discovered associated with Colorado Baptists; however, the number of churches affiliated with Colorado Baptists was still impractical. Therefore, the Pikes Peak Baptist Association was selected because it was a local representative of SBC

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[21] Lynn E May, "The Sunday School: A Two-Hundred-Year Heritage," *Baptist History and Heritage* 15, no. 4 (October 1980): 11, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0000782394&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[22] "Southern Baptist Convention. Fast Facts About the SBC," accessed May 28, 2019, http://www.sbc.net/becomingsouthernbaptist/fastfacts.asp.

autonomous churches, practical in number, and all its member churches were located within a short radius of this researcher.

Pikes Peak Baptist Association

The Pikes Peak Baptist Association is comprised of over fifty-five churches along the front range of the Rocky Mountains in Southern Colorado. The churches that make up the PPBA are located in El Paso and Teller Counties. The central city within these two counties is Colorado Springs, which has over 470,000 people. Furthermore, El Paso and Teller counties have a combined population of over 745,000 people, with 80% of them unchurched.[23] Each of the affiliated churches is autonomous in structure and nature. As a result, there can be minor differences in their theological beliefs; however, most churches subscribe to the Southern Baptist Faith and Message 2000. The vision of PPBA is the fulfillment of the "Great Commission," and their motto is, "Every church is missional. Every person is a missionary."[24]

Organization

The PPBA is an association for assisting local churches partnering together to accomplish their mission. The association incorporates seven core values to support PPBA churches in worldwide missions, local missions, intentional prayer, church start-up, church cooperation, congregational health, and leadership development. The association is guided by a church planting catalyst, collegiate minister, and administrative executives team.[25]

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[23] "Pikes Peak Baptist Association of Southern Colorado," *Pikes Peak Baptist Association*, accessed May 23, 2019, http://ppba.org/.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

Summary of Churches

The majority of churches affiliated with PPBA are smaller congregations of less than two hundred members. One of the churches affiliated with the PPBA has over one thousand members and a distributed leadership structure. However, most churches have one pastor responsible for carrying out the church's vision and mission. Many of the PPBA affiliated churches use websites or social media to publicize church services. All fifty-five churches in the PPBA are located within fifty miles of each other.

The demographics for this churched area within El Paso and Teller counties are predominately Caucasian. The African American population in both counties is less than 7%, and the Native American population is registered at 3% for the region. Teller county contends that over 95% of the population are high school graduates or higher with a median income of $65,000. El Paso County has a larger population and 93% with a high school education or higher, and the median income is also $65,000.[26] An additional underlying impact on the church population is the presence of four active military installations causing a fluctuating number of churchgoers due to deployments and the perpetual change of duty stations.

Problem Presented

SBC churches in North America have experienced a decline in membership.[27] Because a loss of membership could be directly tied to the spiritual health of the church, it is thought that a decline in membership may have a corresponding association with a lack of robust discipleship

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[26] "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: El Paso County, Colorado," accessed June 19, 2020, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/elpasocountycolorado; "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Teller County, Colorado," accessed June 19, 2020, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/tellercountycolorado.

[27] "Southern Baptist Convention Continues Statistical Decline, Floyd Calls for Rethinking ACP Process - Baptist Press," accessed November 28, 2020, https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/southern-baptist-convention-continues-statistical-decline-floyd-calls-for-rethinking-acp-process/.

within the local church. Therefore, this project will explore the current practices of discipleship to determine if they are adequate for developing spiritual maturity.

Purpose Statement

This quantitative research comparison study aims to analyze current disciple methods used by PPBA churches along the Rocky Mountains' western slope in Colorado. This research seeks to uncover differences and commonalities in discipleship methods, programs, or processes between the churches studied and compare them to twelve "best practices" found in the early church discipleship model. This project's results should help establish whether current practices are robust, how well they parallel the original model, and if local churches are doing enough to support the growth of spiritual maturity through discipleship.

Basic Assumptions

Numerous discipleship models are being used to develop Christians' spiritual maturity; however, it is assumed in this project that the methodology exemplified in scripture is timeless and the model to be followed. Secondly, it is assumed that the primary mission of the church is to make disciples.[28] A third assumption is that most churches in PPBA will have some form of discipleship present, but their comprehensiveness and depth are the focal points of this study. Finally, participation from members in leadership roles as disciplers will vary depending on what the church allows concerning ministry leadership.

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[28] Paul W. Chilcote, *Making Disciples in a World Parish: Global Perspectives on Mission & Evangelism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 1.

Terminology

Spiritual Formation is a broader concept of discipleship. It includes everything God does to bring His followers to maturity, such as form the committed believer toward his likeness and what each person does to accomplish this goal of living accordingly as a new creation.[29]

Stages of Spiritual Growth is the spiritual parallel to the physical maturation that every human goes through from little children (Infants in Christ), young men (Developing Christian through the word of God), and eventually fathers (Mature Christians in the faith).[30]

Christian Maturity is the goal of discipleship and spiritual formation. Christian maturity gives individuals the ability to apply their faith to daily living and demonstrates a life that is continuously growing towards the representation of Jesus in their knowledge, attitudes, and display of love for others.[31]

Primary Church Mission must be defined to gain a clear understanding of the meaning of the mission of the church in this project. A mission is a specific task assigned to a person or group to be carried out. Primary Church Mission expands on this definition by expressing its primacy, specifying the charged as Christians, and the specific task is to make disciples.[32]

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[29] Paul Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, n.d.), 105.

[30] Dr. Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in 1,2,3 John* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 39-40; 1 John 2:12-14.

[31] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 172; Hebrews 5:14.

[32] Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 19.

First-Century Discipleship Model is the model Jesus employed for his disciples during his earthly ministry. It is believed that the apostle Paul followed this pattern of discipleship after his conversion on the road to Damascus. The twelve disciples and many others whose names are not recorded in Scripture were the results of Jesus' discipleship training. Although Paul generally planted churches on his missionary journeys, he also discipled Priscilla, Aquilla, Dr. Luke, Titus, and Timothy. These people were only a few whom Paul instructed.[33]

Every man and woman is created as image-bearers of God, and the goal of discipleship is concentrated on the imitation of Jesus' life and character.[34] Jesus' design for discipleship was given to every believer to follow for all generations. Twelve "best practices" incorporated in the first-century model were selected for this project and identified and discussed in a subsequent segment of this project.

Spiritual Disciplines are the practices required in any discipleship process. Christian obedience is essential for godliness. The repetition of spiritual disciplines is not about "doing" as much as it is about "being" more like Jesus Christ.[35] The practice of these disciplines is an essential element of the discipleship process and certainly incorporated in many discipleship approaches; nonetheless, the primary focus of this project will be limited to the twelve "best practices" selected from the first-century model for this study.

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[33] Rod Culbertson, *The Disciple Investing Apostle: Paul's Ministry of Relationships* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018), 62.

[34] Jason B. Hood, *Imitating God in Christ: Recapturing a Biblical Pattern* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 194.

[35] Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2014), 6.

Limitations

This thesis project examines the discipleship methods of churches affiliated with the PPBA in Southern Colorado; therefore, this project is regionally limited. There are fifty-five churches in this association, although it is anticipated that not every church will participate. A minimal response rate will trigger a rescoping of the project and further investigation into the barriers, methodology, or viability. Moreover, there is a likelihood that some churches will not be honest with their answers, and others will not respond to communications. Some churches in the community serve non-English speaking congregations and may not participate because of the language barrier.

Delimitations

The project's delimitation focuses on examining only one denomination in a region of Colorado to provide focus, produce realistic timelines, and generate realistic outcomes; therefore, this study's results do not represent the entire American church. The participant selection of this project will be restricted to pastors, elders, ministry leaders, or others appointed by church leaders who have operational knowledge of each surveyed church's current discipleship process. The primary survey and data collection will be conducted online through a free survey software program (Google Forms) for willing participants.

This project aims not to discredit churches' current discipleship philosophy but to compare methodologies with twelve "best practices" exemplified by Jesus and the apostle Paul that were proven effective in developing committed disciples in the first century. Additionally, this project examines whether local church discipleship processes are doing enough for their congregants to aid their development toward spiritual maturity. A flawed process will stagnate individual growth, adversely affect any discipleship methodology, and diminish the church's

growth.[36] Finally, the American individualistic culture is a challenging obstacle to overcome, and the implementation of a first-century discipleship model contests this ideology.

Thesis Statement

This project will evaluate the current practices of discipleship in PPBA churches and determine whether they align with discipleship "best practices" seen in biblical teachings. There is a real risk of nominal and stagnant Christianity for every church in disobedience to the "Great Commission." This paper will address whether churches affiliated with the PPBA in Southern Colorado are doing enough to develop the spiritual growth of congregants through discipleship. Terry Bowland writes that "One of the largest plagues in the American church is the problem of nominal Christianity. The definition of a nominal Christian is one who calls himself a Christian with no authentic commitment to Christ based on personal faith."[37]

The methodology for this study will be conducted by comparing current church discipleship methods with twelve "best practices" of the first-century model to expose any deficient areas not being addressed by the discipleship process. The outcomes will help illuminate whether local church discipleship programs are comprehensive and whether churches are doing enough to promote Christian maturity. The expected results from studying discipleship processes in today's local churches will reveal the extent they have implemented the identified biblical pattern.

The steady decline in church growth is evident in some American churches that have forgotten discipleship's essential doctrine. "Sociologists and historians observing the American

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[36] John Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003), 41.

[37] Terry A. Bowland, *Make Disciples!: Reaching the Postmodern World for Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1999), 243.

church scene indicate that one of the first signs of denominational decline is a lessening of doctrinal attention."[38] Deteriorating churches have drifted from developing Christian maturity through discipleship within their congregations to promote other philosophies such as social justice issues, idolatrous activism, and other movements instead of increasing church growth through the reciprocal process of making disciples.[39] Sadly, it appears that the American church has been made motionless by a satanic lullaby that has put them to sleep concerning their role in making disciples of all nations.

Furthermore, the principal influence determining one's spiritual growth is based on how well they are discipled. According to a Pew report, over 65% of Americans identify themselves as Christians—down 12% from a decade ago.[40] Lifeway Research recently surveyed three thousand professing American Christians and discovered that "disconcerting proportions embrace ancient errors condemned by all major Christian traditions. These were not minor points of doctrine, but core ideas that define Christianity itself."[41] Few would question that when something is not done right, problems arise; therefore, one could suppose that an inadequate discipleship process creates inadequate disciples.

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[38]Albert Mohler, "Why Doctrine Matters," accessed May 23, 2019, https://albertmohler.com/2004/07/27/why-doctrine-matters.

[39] Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2010), 213; Alfonso Wieland, "Social Justice and the Mission of the Church." *Journal of Latin American Theology* 11, no. 1 (2016): 99–102, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAn3961199&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[40] "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, last modified October 17, 2019, https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/.

[41] "Survey Finds Most American Christians Are Actually Heretics," *The Federalist*, last modified October 10, 2016, https://thefederalist.com/2016/10/10/survey-finds-american-christians-actually-heretics/.

This researcher elected to look into the lack of adequate discipleship as a possible reason for the church's decline since it is every Christian's responsibility to expand God's kingdom by making disciples. Christians who are not sufficiently spiritually developed will become stagnate in commitment and fruit-bearing. More than ever, the church needs congregations made up of spiritually mature believers devoted to the obedience to Jesus' commands. The churches in this study could benefit from this research comparing their discipleship processes with the effective first-century method. This project's results can help each church ascertain whether its discipleship method is comprehensive concerning congregants' development towards Christian maturity. The American church is in steady decline, and rather than look to an unproven, innovative methodology. A reasonable solution could be returning to the proven model patterned by Jesus and designed to be followed and repeated henceforth.[42]

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[42] George Gray, *Discipleship from Jesus's Perspective: Rediscovering and Reinstituting the Master Plan* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2012). 80.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Overview

This chapter builds the foundation from which this project will be constructed, and it will set the motivation and direction for it. This will be accomplished by first reviewing the prevailing literature related to discipleship. Particular attention will be given to resources geared toward discipleship theory instead of the existing discipleship curriculum. This literature review will demonstrate validity in returning to various effective "best practices" from the first-century discipleship model, which could prove beneficial in today's discipleship methodology.

The following section will then present a theology of discipleship. This discussion will focus upon the discipleship practices exhibited by Jesus' use of the Jewish Rabbinic-Talmudic style of growing disciples and the apostle Paul applying similar discipleship "best practices" to establish early church methodology.[1] This will entail an exegetical study of relevant passages that convey both of their discipleship practices. The last section will build a theoretical foundation for the project. This section will draw from the theological material and construct a framework for understanding discipleship in the first century. It will include the identification and discussion of twelve discipleship practices found in the early Christian discipleship process.

Review of Literature

The relevant literature for this project focuses on discipleship theory concerning spiritual growth toward Christian maturity. This project's scholarly resources will be used to define what discipleship is, how it is most effectively accomplished, and what principles should be present in a discipleship process comparable to the early church model.

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[1] Stuart H. Merriam, *Paul the Apostle: At the Edge of Faith* (Tucson, AZ: Wheatmark, 2003), 106-7.

Defining Discipleship

Christian discipleship is the process of learning and applying information, specifically the Word of God. This process leads to the spiritual formation and subsequent transformation of the individual to imitate the life and characteristics of Jesus. The methodology, exemplified by Jesus and subsequently the apostle Paul, was a wide-ranging process committed to achieving the goal of Christian maturity.

Biblical Literacy

The source of information necessary for Christian maturation comes from God, the designer in the Bible's divinely inspired writings. There is a definite connection between growing in biblical knowledge and a Christian's transformation. The need for biblical literacy is a necessary element concerning spiritual growth and a closer relationship with God.[2] Scripture indicates that God's word is truth, eternal, in that it will not pass away, and is a demonstration of one's love for God through obedience to His commands.[3]

There is a great deal of discussion concerning the proper approach to Bible literacy. However, many would agree that it is developed through some form of reading, study, memorization, and meditation on God's Word. A recent study by Brad J. Wagoneer surveyed churchgoers measuring over sixty distinguishing factors of spiritual development. The data

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[2] Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 172.

[3] Mark 13:31; John 6:68; John 17:17; John 14:23-24.

established through the surveys concluded that the number one characteristic correlating to the highest maturity scores was determined to be the practice of reading the Bible.[4]

Another recent analysis researching biblical literacy surveyed 334 self-identified Christians and discovered that although 95% of those surveyed believe that the Bible is divinely inspired and is God's revelation to humankind, less than 40% acknowledged a daily Bible reading routine. Additional conclusions identified that 32% agreed that discipleship was necessary for biblical literacy; however, only 25% of those surveyed considered discipleship necessary for spiritual growth.[5] This conclusion suggests that fewer Christians read the Bible to develop spiritual growth generating higher levels of biblical illiteracy; therefore, increasing the potential for nominal Christians.[6]

Subsequently, to what degree should Christians strive for extraordinary biblical knowledge? One does not study for the mere knowledge only, but to know Christ. Therefore, the Christian objective of constant development towards Christlikeness depends on continued growth in this area. One would not parallel the pursuit of biblical knowledge as a quest for expertise; however, the activity of obtaining a higher-level of biblical literacy should have similar qualities. The expert possesses a higher quantity of relevant knowledge than the novice, comparable to the mature Christian equated to the immature. This comparison is relevant to how an expert structures knowledge in decision-making by examining a deeper level of

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[4] Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 68.

[5] Joseph G. Austin, "The Role of Biblical Literacy in Discipling Believers in the Local Church" *Doctoral Dissertations and Projects* (2019): 2242. https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/2242.

[6] Kerry Walters, *Faith Matters: Reflections on the Christian Life* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019), 12.

interpretation.[7] With this deeper level of knowledge, one can better know and imitate Christ's characteristics.

Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation can be described as the continuing process of transformation that God works in the believer to conform to the image of Christ in life and character. Spiritual formation begins when one seeks to worship God, and then encompasses how one thinks, talks, and relates with God and others. The primary resource for spiritual formation is the scriptures, and accompanied by the Holy Spirit, contains the power to transform.[8] The scriptures represent the truth about Christ and what it means to be like him.[9] Continuous exposure to the Word of God encourages the spiritual development of an individual towards maturity.

The Holy Spirit is essential to the spiritual formation of the Christian disciple. God's Spirit lives in believers and makes them his home and his throne as he transforms his disciples into the image of Christ.[10] The Holy Spirit can transform lives through spiritual gifts and fruits; however, spiritual formation does not occur if the Holy Spirit is not active or rightfully placed in the disciple.[11] Spiritual formation imparts a framing of the development of life in which people come to do all things that Jesus taught. "Willard describes this as the process in which the embodied and reflective will takes on the characteristics of Christ's will. Spiritual formation is a

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[7] Jean Bédard, and Michelene T. H. Chi, "Expertise," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 1, no. 4 (1992): 137, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20182156.

[8] Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 58.

[9] Hebrews 4:12; Psalm 19: 7, 9-10; Psalm 119: 105.

[10] John 14:17.

[11] Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 260; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; Ephesians 4:30; 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4; Galatians 5:16-18.

transformation of the human spirit and heart, which Willard understands to be the same as the human will."[12] Therefore, the outcome of spiritual formation parallels the goal of discipleship in becoming more like Christ.

The third resource necessary for spiritual formation is the body of Christ, which is the church. It is the vine that Jesus referred to as the source for the branches to grow and be nurtured to produce fruit.[13] Spiritual formation is a social process in that the branch must stay attached to the vine because the believer can do nothing without Christ.[14] All three resources actively work together to form, conform, and transform the lives of the believer into the image of Christ. Spiritual formation includes spiritual disciplines that involve subjecting the flesh in obedience to the Spirit of God, thus, yielding to the control of the Spirit and trusting him through the process.[15]

A potential cause for the fluctuating levels of Christian development within the church could be that leaders and churchgoers are not in agreement with what it means to be spiritually mature. One definition for the spiritually mature Christian is one who, through the process of formation, emulation, and examination, is led by the Holy Spirit.[16] A current study of faith leaders and churchgoers by Barna research concluded that 81% of those believers surveyed supposed that being spiritually healthy is trying hard to follow the rules in the Bible. However,

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[12] Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Formation: What It Is, and How It Is Done | Dallas Willard.org," accessed June 24, 2020, http://www.dwillard.org/articles/individual/spiritual-formation-what-it-is-and-how-it-is-done.

[13] John 15:1-5.

[14] John 15:5.

[15] Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1-15* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 241-3; Proverbs 3:5-6.

[16] Cynthia V. White, *Understanding Spiritual Maturity* (London, UK: Fruit That Remain Publishing, LLC, 2015), 11.

half of them were unsure of what it means to be a spiritually mature believer of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, 9 out of 10 pastors said one of the most significant problems facing the nation is a

lack of spiritual maturity. Ultimately, only 9% of the clergy surveyed were satisfied with the

church's ability to assess their congregations' spiritual maturity.[17]

Life Transformation

The spiritual transformation of individuals is typically attributed to some form of

religious association. This premise is supported by a national study conducted regarding spiritual

transformation. This analysis concluded that over fifty percent of Americans had undergone one

or more spiritual change experiences.[18] Of those surveyed, the majority attributed the changes to

either a spiritual or religious belief. Sixty-five percent of those surveyed experienced a spiritual

transformation and acknowledged being "born again." The remaining thirty-five percent did not

associate their transformation based on any religious philosophies.[19] The majority credited the

originating influence for the change with some form of religious participation, the experience of

a recent illness, or the death of a loved one. The strengthening of spirituality or increased

religiousness was the standard response given by participants who experienced a

transformation.[20]

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[17] "Many Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity," *Barna Group*, accessed June 24, 2020, https://www.barna.com/research/many-churchgoers-and-faith-leaders-struggle-to-define-spiritual-maturity/.

[18] Tom W. Smith, "The National Spiritual Transformation Study." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45, no. 2 (2006): 293, https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2006.00306.x.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Smith, "Spiritual Transformation Study," 288-9,

The Bible asserts that those in Christ will experience a change in all aspects of their lives. Old things that may have seemed essential but not crucial to the kingdom of God will no longer allure the disciple away from his or her service to the Creator. Disciples that have reached a level of maturity will allow the Holy Spirit to control their moral guide. Warren Wiersbe says, "A mature Christian uses his gifts as tools to build with while an immature believer uses his gifts to play with or trophies to boast about."[21] The mature believer will never let someone be hungry without feeding them, thirsty without giving them something to drink, or naked without clothing.[22] A transformed disciple will go, therefore, proclaim the gospel and multiply other disciples because of their love of God, others, and one another.

The committed disciple's goal is Christlikeness, and anyone coming in contact with this individual will realize a difference, having been set apart in godliness. Koessler writes, "God's standard for the disciple's life, then, is no less than Christ. He is the mark by which our spiritual maturity is measured and the aim of our training. The reason that God has given believers spiritual gifts is to build the church up until they reach the unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."[23] A genuine transformation of a person achieves this through a continuous discipleship process. Gordon MacDonald associates this visible spiritual transformation of a Christian with the visible change witnessed when young people transform into United States Marines. The apparent changes noted in the physical conversion are self-discipline, determination, toughness, and

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[21] Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament Volume 1* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications, 2001), 578.

[22] Matthew 25:35-36.

[23] John Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003), 41.

readiness to follow orders, as some of the characteristics witnessed.[24] Similar to a Marines' conversion, the transformation of the individual Christian is also easily observed by others who recognize Christ's characteristics being lived out through them.

<div align="center">Discipleship Methodology</div>

God designed the model for discipleship, just like he designed the temple's intricate pattern, the human body, and the universe.[25] The Talmudic method of discipleship was the method Jesus used to train his disciples, and the apostle Paul was familiar with this method, having been discipled this way himself. In this process, one submitted to one teacher, memorized the teacher's words, learned the teacher's ministry method, imitated the teacher's way of life, and then searched to find disciples of their own.[26]

The methodologies used by Jesus and Paul contained various "best practices" proven to work towards a believers' spiritual growth. Jesus and Paul did not have the exact models; however, many elements corresponded while others were divergent. This project draws on 12 of these practices that seem more central to their methods of developing mature believers. The more of these "best practices" used in a discipleship methodology creates a better chance for success. Christian discipleship has had over two-thousand years to develop, yet the present-day church in America is in decline. Therefore, a reasonable solution may be to incorporate these effective "best practices" of early discipleship in the current church methodology.

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[24] Gordon MacDonald, "How to Spot a Transformed Christian," *CT Pastors*, 1, accessed June 25, 2020, https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2012/summer/transformedchristian.html.

[25] Exodus 25:40; Hebrews 8:5.

[26] Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker*, Anniversary edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 13.

The Small Group Setting

Historically, the small group has been used in various practices to develop believers'

spiritual growth and is currently being used in many churches. Bill Hull deems that "the small

group is the most strategic training environment used by Christ."[27] Robert Wuthnow's research

on small groups found that 4 out of 10 Americans belong to a small group though not all for

religious purposes. According to his findings, the small group has played a significant role in

adapting religion to secular culture's main currents.[28] The primary focus through a small group

must remain on the development towards God's purpose for the people of God, that is to become

more like Christ if the goal is to be obtained.[29] The small group's relational aspect necessitates

following the objective of knowing, obeying, and applying Christ in community. Essential are

those willing to fully obligate themselves to a curriculum imposed to progress towards that goal.

Small group settings provide an environment that differs from the large group meeting

where mutual edification, worship, and relationships begin. Here relationships can develop

through intimate fellowship. In the article on the small group titled "Design for Growth,"

Thompson writes that the small group of 8 to 10 people provides an atmosphere where believers

can interact in a meaningful and transparent way. A small group is a place of belonging where

one can be equipped for the ministry and an environment that provides the setting for awakening

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[27] Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker*, 249.

[28] "Small Groups Forge New Notions of Community and the Sacred." *The Christian Century* (Dec 08, 1993): 1236, accessed August 26, 2020, http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2F www.proquest.com%2Fmagazines%2Fsmall-groups-forgenew-notions-community-sacred%2Fdocview%2F217191052%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085.

[29] John Stott, "Becoming Like Christ," *Decision Magazine* (last modified July 28, 2010):1, https://decisionmagazine.com/becoming-like-christ/; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18;1 John 3:2.

the spiritual gifts and their use.[30] Additionally, Mariet Mikaelian's research suggests the importance of relationships in transformative learning and indicates two types of influential relationships: small groups and one-on-one relationships.[31] This is consistent with the recent research that shows the small group atmosphere is beneficial in nurturing spiritual growth.[32]

Current research in small group participation is optimistic concerning the utilization of a small group model. There is a constructive increase in the individual experience resulting from group involvement. In his study, Walton attributes that 87% felt closer to God, and 76% affirmed a connection between small group involvement, faith, and everyday life. Moreover, small group involvement helped participants accept and forgive others (72%), strengthened their prayer life (79%), and encouraged speaking to others concerning their faith (68%).[33] Critics of the success of small groups note the lack of engagement in outreach and social justice. Donahue and Gowler suggest that the absence of overwhelming statical data correlating small groups with civic

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[30] Alvin L. Thompson, "Design for Growth," *Journal of Christian Education (US)* 2, no. 2 (1982): 60, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=33h&AN=335027&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[31] Mariet Mikaelian, "The Transformative Learning Experiences of Southern California Church-Based Small Group Members," *Christian Education Journal* 15, no. 2 (August 2018): 182. https://doi:10.1177/0739891318784307.

[32] Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and the Quest for a New Community* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996); Victor Brady Willis. 2001, "Spiritual Growth of Small Group Participants using a Wesley-Development Model," D.M. diss Asbury Theological Seminary, in PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fspiritual-growth-small-group-participants-using%2Fdocview%2F250224595%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085; Roger Walton,"Disciples Together: The Small Group as a Vehicle for Discipleship Formation," *Journal of Adult Theological Education*, 8:2 (2011): 114, https://doi:10.1558/JATE.v8i2.99.

[33] Roger Walton, "Disciples Together: The Small Group as a Vehicle for Discipleship Formation," *Journal of Adult Theological Education*, 8:2 (2011): 112, https://doi:10.1558/JATE.v8i2.99.

engagement is because most groups are not formed for this purpose.[34] However, there is a need for more research in small group successes concerning various components of discipleship.

An Opportunity to Mentor

The small group's size should be considered since discipleship is personal; therefore, it is vital to incorporate opportunities for one-on-one guidance. Mentoring has been found to be a legitimate form of pedagogy for students and has been effective in spiritual growth.[35] A current study assessing Denver Seminary training and mentoring program's effectiveness was completed surveying 146 graduates who participated in the program. The results received for the mentoring portion specified that 81% of the participants agreed that the program was helpful. The participants' primary reasons were an appreciation of a learned role model, receiving support, encouragement, feedback, experiencing trust, and accountability. Others thought the process demonstrated the value of mentoring and personal growth due to the mentoring relationship.[36] Therefore, the benefits of mentoring in the discipleship process are conclusive and align with the models Jesus and Paul used as an essential component of their discipleship process.

The effectiveness of mentoring has been established within many disciplines and professions. There are hundreds of books and articles on the success of mentoring and manuals

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[34] Bill Donahue and Charles Gowler, "Small Groups: The Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever?" *Christian Education Journal* 11 (April 2014): 126, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx ?direct=true&db=33h&AN=405599&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[35] Elisabeth H. Selzer, "Effectiveness of a Seminary's Training and Mentoring Program and Subsequent Job Satisfaction of Its Graduates." *JRCE* 17, no. 1 (2008): 37, https://doi:10.1080/10656210801967309.

[36] Ibid.

on how to mentor successfully.[37] "A common thread among great people is that they seem to have been mentored by others. Socrates mentored Plato, and Plato mentored Aristotle."[38] Mentoring has helped countless men and women reach extraordinary heights in their lives and professions, demonstrating why mentoring is also an indispensable component of discipleship.

Mentoring as a recognized concept has been around since 800 B.C.[39] Mentoring occurs when a less experienced person desires a relationship with an experienced person. Ron Belsterling writes that "mentoring another to help them grow includes (1) casting and communicating a life vision. (2) Teaching through verbal instruction, (3) experiential learning in a mutually committed relationship, (4) intimate relationships with mentees, and enduring lifelong relationships. According to these criteria, Jesus was the ideal mentor."[40] The capability to mentor disciples that was established by Jesus and Paul, is a needed element of discipleship for modern-day programs.

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[37] Michael D. Crow, "Multiplying Jesus Mentors: Designing a Reproducible Mentoring System: A Case Study." *Missiology* 36, no. 1 (January 2008): 87–109, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=33h&AN=314142&site=ehost-live&scope=site; Edward R. Marton, *Mentoring by Design: Mentoring and Discipling Through Missional Small Groups* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016); Phil A. Newton, *The Mentoring Church: How Pastors and Congregations Cultivate Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2017); Robert H. Mounce, *Jesus as Mentor* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017); Wayne Hart, *Seven Keys to Successful Mentoring* (Hobokan, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2011); John D. Lottes, 2005. "Jesus as Mentor: Biblical Reflections for Ministry with Young Adults." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 32 (2): 128–38, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rvh&AN=NTA0000050750&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[38] Anthony Troy Adams, "The Great Ones All Had Them: The Value of Mentoring for Applied Sociology." *Journal of Applied Social Science* 10, no. 2 (2016): 91, https://doi:10.1177/1936724416664383.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ron Blistering, "The Mentoring Approach of Jesus as Demonstrated in John 13," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 5 (1) 2006: 78, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=23010807&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Experiential Learning

A practical, contemporary theory of learning with historical origins dating back to Aristotle is learning through experience.[41] Experiential learning is essentially learning by doing and tends to be hands-on.[42] There is a considerable amount of discussion on knowledge obtained through experience and what contributes to the transformation. However, experiential learning is arguably the best way of learning where data has shown that people remember 80 percent of what they personally experience.[43] A clear definition of experiential learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.[44]

There are significant concepts concerning experiential learning that was introduced by John Dewey and Jean Piaget. In 1984 David Kolb developed an experiential learning theory based on Dewey and Piaget's earlier work that described how experience is transformed into knowledge through a four-stage cycle. (1) Concrete experience, (2) reflective observation of the new experience, (3) abstract conceptualization, and (4) active experimentation. Effective learning is understood when one progresses through these four cycles.[45]

There are multiple examples of experiential learning in the Bible, where practical experiences were used to facilitate learning. One such circumstance was the sending ministry of the seventy-two disciples. Kenneth Nehbrass and Jane Rhodes present evidence in their article,

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[41] Rosemary Sage, *Paradoxes in Education: Learning in a Plural Society* (New York, NY: Springer, 2017) 59.

[42] W. Shipton Takeuchi E. Coetzee & R., *Worldviews and Christian Education* (PartridgeIndia, 2013), 503.

[43] James Lemler, *Transforming Disciples* (New York, NY: Church Publishing, Inc., 2008), 61.

[44] David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (London, UK: Pearson Education, 2015), 39.

[45] Ibid, 51.

"Jesus' Use of Experiential Learning in the Sending of the Seventy: Implications for Ministry Practicums," on experiential learning. "These two authors recognize the model of ministry internships used in sending out the seventy-two in Samaria closely resembled Terence D. Linhart's (2010) modification of Laura Joplin's (1995) model that, like Kolb's, was built on the foundation of John Dewey's work on experiential learning."[46] John Dewey's theory identified that learning was more effective when connected to previous experiences and knowledge. Additionally, he felt that learners needed to participate directly with their environment, which was the premise for experiential learning.[47]

"A relatively new concept of experiential learning in education is service-learning that combines academic study with work in the community in ways that enhance both."[48] This concept is practiced through community service in various locations to achieve the goal of promoting change in the society resulting from the works of the students through reflective action.[49] Community-based service-learning is being utilized more frequently in both secular training and the religious ministry preparation of students.

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[46] Kenneth Nehrbass and Jane Rhoades, "Jesus' Use of Experiential Learning in the Sending of the Seventy: Implications for Ministry Practicums," *Christian Education Journal (*June 15, 2020):13, https://doi.org/10.1177/0739891320908279.

[47] "The Pedagogy of John Dewey: A Summary," *TeachThought* (February 16, 2015): 1, https://teachthought.com/learning/pedagogy-john-dewey-summary/.

[48] W. Shipton Takeuchi E. Coetzee & R., *Worldviews and Christian Education* (PartridgeIndia, 2013), 503.

[49] Ravyn L. McKee, "Arriving at this Place: A Teacher's Journey to Fostering Sustainable International Service-Learning in the Writing Classroom," Order No. 10239695, Phd Diss, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2016, 99.

Making Disciples

The ascension of Jesus Christ began a series of changes in discipleship. Collinson found that although the life of discipleship is readily discussed in Christian education, few have defined what is meant by discipling. [50] Collinson's article on making disciples explores the change in focus concerning disciple and discipling after Christ's ascension in an effective contemporary process. The disciple after the ascension exceeds beyond the twelve chosen by Christ to include every believer in Jesus Christ. "Discipling includes formal teaching but, with a greater emphasis on informal methods to develop Christian attitudes, values, behaviors, and skills."[51] The post-ascension model in the book of Acts focuses on a relationship with Christ and comprises small groups of committed believers in a collaborative learning environment that exemplifies Christ and his mission.[52]

<div align="center">

Theological Foundations

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The foundation for discipleship is Jesus's command to his followers to make disciples. The methods used for discipleship have changed over the centuries, but the required results are still the same. Therefore, an analysis of current processes concerning the development of Christian maturity should be examined. The theological basis for this project is to examine the

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[50] Sylvia Collinson, "Making Disciples: An Educational Strategy for Use Beyond the Time of Jesus? *Journal of Christian Education* Vol. 43 No. 3 (December 2000); 7, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy. liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000008572&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[51] Ibid, 14.

[52] Ibid.

current discipleship methods used by churches affiliated with the Pikes Peak Baptist Association to determine how well they align with several prominent "best practices" used in Jesus and Paul's methods responsible for spiritual growth.

Great Commission Background Information

To make disciples came from Jesus in the "Great Commission," recorded in the gospels and the book of Acts.[53] Today's Christians find themselves in the "church age," defined as the period after Pentecost and before the rapture. Arguably, discipleship is the primary mission of the church until Jesus Christ's return. The disciples had some understanding concerning the process of making disciples, having just completed three years of discipleship under the tutelage of Jesus. "The command given to them, and every follower of Christ henceforth is the vision of God, and everything Christians do towards kingdom building should not be the creation of man, but it should flow from the character and purpose of God."[54]

Matthew 28:18-20

Each of the gospels contains the "Great Commission," but the most notable is in Matthew chapter 28. Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples of all nations before He ascended into heaven. The command known as the "Great Commission" is comprised of three principles: (1) to go therefore and make disciples of all nations, (2) baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and to (3) teach obedience to all that Jesus commanded.

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[53] Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:45-49; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8.

[54] Raymond F. Culpepper, *The Great Commission The Solution . . . (Study Guide)* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2009), 32.

(1) Therefore, go and make disciples

There is some debate concerning whether the correct interpretation is to "go" or "as you are going." The argument is focused on the translation of the Greek word "go" *poreuthentes* as a participle or imperative. When translated as a participle, the word means "going" or "as you are going." Bill Mounce's examination of the word used in Matthew 28:19a found it consistent with the "structural pattern for the attendant circumstance participle with the participle picking up the main verb's mood. Additionally, he discovered twenty-seven occasions in the New Testament, where the main verb follows *poreuthentes*, and in each case, the imperative was the correct use."[55] This has been the accepted understanding of the translation for many centuries.

A recent opposing argument is that the word is used as a participle better translated "as you go" because the main focus is not on a global mission, but that disciple-making should be the priority.[56] Appropriately, Christians are to make disciples "as they go" about their daily lives regardless if they are global missionaries or limited to making disciples locally. The opinion that disciple-making should be a necessary part of a believer's life is typically not disputed. However, if the focus is on making disciples of all nations, the implication of having to go somewhere to encounter them is assumed. "Earley and Dempsey support this premise affirming that the 'Great Commission' cannot be fulfilled without deliberately pursuing the lost."'[57]

Making disciples is the main verb and primary focal point of Jesus' command in this first principle. It was clear from the commission's final words that disciple-making was to continue

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[55] "The Participle as Imperative (Monday with Mounce 12) by Bob Mounce," Monday with Mounce Blog, October 27, 2008, https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/the-participle-as-imperative.

[56] Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Sydney, AUS: Matthias Media, 2009), 13.

[57] Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 4.

until the end of the age. The activity of making disciples was to reproduce the characteristics

Jesus produces in every true Christian. The Holman New Testament Commentary on Matthew

depicts those characteristics as "faith, obedience, growth, authority, compassion, love, and bold

witnesses to his message. Disciples are learners commanded to produce more learners."[58]

Making disciples of all nations, *panta ta ethne,* was specified to present the mission's

intended target. The term *ethne* is another subject of debate concerning whom the nations refer to

in the verse. Some scholars believe *ethne* was directed towards the Gentles, excluding Israel.

Others suggest this is the fulfillment of Abraham's promise that all the peoples would be blessed

through him, meaning all peoples on earth.[59] Another belief is that *ethne* refers to every

ethnolinguistic people group present globally, particularly the unreached people groups. Those

advocating an emphasis on reaching these people groups have seemingly altered the mission's

focus in recent years, according to some scholars. While it is essential to reach all unreached

people groups with the gospel of Jesus Christ, the emphasis should remain on making disciples,

baptizing, and teaching all that Jesus commanded.[60]

(2) Baptize in the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit

The second principle is to baptize in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy

Spirit. The act of baptizing has no salvific power but is the initial act of obedience in one's union

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[58] Stu Weber, *Holman New Testament Commentary - Matthew* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2000), 483.

[59] Paul Hertig, "The Great Commission Revisited: The Role of God's Reign in Disciple Making," *Missiology* 29, no. 3 (July 2001): 347, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login .aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000272696&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[60] Darren Carlson, Elliot Clark, "The 3 Words That Changed Missions Strategy—and Why We Might Be Wrong," *The Gospel Coalition*, accessed October 28, 2020, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/misleading-words-missions-strategy-unreached-people-groups/.

with Christ. Baptism is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection, representing a transformation of one's old nature.[61] Furthermore, baptism symbolizes each person's admission into the holy spirit's influence and incorporation into the church.[62] This unification of believers through baptism makes up the church's local body devoted to working together in unity in the common goal of discipleship.[63]

Baptism is not without its disagreements. Churches have differing opinions as to whether baptism includes infants or credobaptism only. There is debate about whether a person being baptized is sprinkled with water or fully immersed. This debate has been the subject of scholarship for centuries and does not necessitate an in-depth discussion on baptismal doctrine for this study. One common thread in the different opinions of water baptism is that it links the believer with Jesus Christ and incorporates them into the church.

(3) Teaching them to observe all that Jesus Commanded

Teaching is the last principle in the "Great Commission" and requires believers to teach so that others can observe Jesus' commands. The discipleship process works to understand what is commanded by Jesus, and the continued spiritual growth leads to obedience. The last part of the verse is often overlooked in the explicit instruction to teach disciples to know and obey Jesus' commands. The study, understanding, and application of these commands is a lifetime

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[61] John MacArthur, *Matthew 24-28 MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1989), 343.

[62] John Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003),14; David J. Bosch "The Scope of Mission." *International Review of Mission* 73, no. 289 (January 1984): 25, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000936676 &site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[63] Alister E. McGrath, *Theology: The Basic Readings* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 195.

task for the Christian disciple. The act of obedience by the disciple is a verifier of salvation and faith in the Lord Jesus.[64]

These verses in Matthew's gospel are a command given by Jesus to his disciples that they continually reproduce themselves until his return. Kgatle explains, "Matthew uses five lines to present the scenario. He first covers the characters and setting, then moves on to the circumstances. He gives motivation for their action, commands what to do and how to do it, and finally closes with a promise that only God can make."[65] This passage of scripture contains all the necessary elements of the church's mission needed to replicate discipleship.

The apostle Paul carried on the mission of making disciples after Jesus. Fanning writes, "Paul followed Jesus' ministry philosophy and basic strategy proclaiming the good news and making many disciples (Acts 14:21). Paul established a group of disciples in locations throughout the Roman Empire in the East (Rom 15:19) and ensured they were well established (Rom 1:11; 16:25; Col 2:7; 1 Thess 3:2; 13:2; 2 Thess 2:7). Paul then taught them so they could teach and train other disciples (2 Tim 2:2).[66]

Exodus 25:40

God commanded that the tabernacle and its furnishings were to be fashioned precisely according to the pattern. The sanctuary was a shadow of what was in heaven and an illustration

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[64] Hebrews 5:9; John MacArthur, *Matthew 24-28 MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1989), 125.

[65] Mookgo Solomon Kgatle, Globalization of Missions: An Exegesis on the Great Commission (Mt 28:18–20), *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 52, (2018): 2, https://doi:10.4102/ids.v52i1.2346.

[66] Don Fanning, "The Great Commission," *Eruditio Ardescens*: Vol. 1: Iss. 2, Article 2 (2014): 11, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/jlbts/vol1/iss2/2.

of what was to come in the spiritual reality of Jesus Christ's sacrifice.[67] There are several instances in the book of Exodus where the reader is told that Moses built the tabernacle as the Lord commanded him. Additionally, at least seven other times, Moses is told to make it according to God's pattern. The building of the tabernacle and all of its furnishings were to be according to God's pattern giving no credit to man's mind or imagination.[68] The verse is repeated in the book of Hebrews; however, this time, it signifies that the earthly shadow of the sanctuary built by hands has been replaced by the heavenly tabernacle of Christ's ministry, a better covenant enacted on better promises.[69]

Throughout the Old Testament, patterning is seen, and conformity to God's blueprint works to achieve his desired results. The God of the Bible is consistently portrayed as a God of order. Diedrich concludes that a definitive sign of order is the presence of a pattern in the physical world.[70] Scientists increasingly understand more of these conceivable patterns through quantifiable measurements advanced through mathematical equations. However, the complete understanding of every chaotic system may never be fully understood from any perspective. Nevertheless, the consistency reflected in knowable systems' laws and patterns reflects God's upholding hand in creation.[71]

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[67] Livingstone, Bruce B. Barton, and David Veerman, *Hebrews* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1997), 114.

[68] Willie J. Murphy Jr, *The Tabernacle in the Wilderness: Its Implications and Applications for Modern Day Believer-Priests* (Conneaut Lake, PA: Page Publishing Inc, 2018), 8.

[69] Hebrews 8:5-6.

[70] Danilo R. Diedrichs. "Mathematics Reveals Patterns That Reflect the Orderly Character of God," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 71, no. 2 (2019): 111, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAiG0V190610000259&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[71] Ibid., 113.

Moreover, God created the universe to operate according to certain principles, often referred to as the laws of nature. Continued research by physicists has led to a general conviction that there is indeed a pattern to nature.[72] These set patterns are obeyed by nature to ensure expected outcomes suggesting an obligation for all of God's creation to follow the patterns he established for each system. God knows the limitations of his created beings; therefore, he established patterns to instruct them concerning salvation, worship, and mission. Furthermore, God gave instructions on the temporal objects like the tabernacle, temple, and furnishings therein to be made according to his pattern to fulfill the promise of dwelling among his creation.[73]

Jesus was the example for his followers, and his life and teachings in the gospels modeled the pattern to imitate. Followers of Christ have the same mind as Jesus, walk as he walked, and following his steps.[74] Moreover, followers are to live a life of humility with a willingness to submit to God in complete surrender.[75] Finally, the followers of Jesus are instructed to love one another in unity and be a servant to all.[76] These were some of the characteristics Jesus demonstrated to his disciples during his earthly ministry. The apostle Paul affirms that Jesus is the pattern to imitate in a number of his scripture writings where he instructs others to imitate him, and he imitates Christ.[77]

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[72] John R. Albright, "God and the Pattern of Nature: A Physicist Considers Cosmology." *The Christian Century* 109, 23 (1992): 714, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx ?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000854118&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[73] Exodus 25:8-9; 25:40; 1 Chronicles 28:11-13.

[74] Philippians 2:5; 1 John 2:6; 1 Peter 2:21.

[75] Mark 8:34-35.

[76] John 13:34; Mark 9:35.

[77] 1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1; Philippians 3:17; Ephesians 5:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6.

1 Corinthians 11:1

Paul's writing to the church in Corinth instructed them to imitate him as he imitates Christ. The emphasis is on his imitation of Christ, thus bringing no attention to himself concerning his capabilities, but the example provided by the incarnate God himself. MacArthur explains that "Paul was the imitator of Christ, the absolute example of the one who set aside all his rights as God for others. A humble servant obedient to the Father to the point of death."[78] Jesus was the pattern set for every disciple to grow more like him in life and character from now until his return.

The difficulty is, how does one imitate a holy God in the person of Jesus Christ? It is the Christian's goal to grow more like Christ in life and character; however, these manners cannot be taught with an assurance of obedience. R.T. Kendall rationalizes that the goal is not to be Jesus but to be more like him in mindset.[79] An understanding of what is proposed comes from Paul's letter to the Philippians where he says, "Let this mind be in you, that was also in Christ Jesus." "That is to experience the mind of Christ on an individual level. Therefore, a measure of becoming imitators of Christ requires that one maintain a self-emptying attitude of Christ, the initiative of letting go of what was rightfully his, and the reverence for the Father as the motivation will aid in becoming more Christlike-minded."[80]

Christ restored the relationship between man (created in his image) and God, and the possibility of imitating Christ comes from the inward processes of salvation that change the

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[78] John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1984), 249.

[79] R. T. Kendall, *Imitating Christ: Becoming More Like Jesus* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma Media, 2015), 1-12; Philippians 2:5.

[80] Ibid.

heart. This occurrence cannot be derived from man's self-disciplined actions but by God, who changes one's attitudes producing good works and Christlike virtues.[81] The truly transformed Christian desires to imitate Christ as the example and, through this imitation, becomes an example of Christlikeness to others.

Theoretical Foundations

The concept of discipleship is that it is a lifelong journey of spiritual growth for the one committed to a deep personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Inquiries about whether today's churches produce mature Christians through discipleship is a common theme; however, the continued discussion suggests the issue has remained unresolved. Many churches will acknowledge they have a process to disciple believers but are they doing enough to address their membership's spiritual growth? If the premise is true that today's church discipleship methods fail to produce Christian maturation after thousands of years of evolving methods, processes, and pedagogies, then is it reasonable to continue to look for new solutions to this problem? A solution in need of further investigation is returning to a method with comparable "best practices" to the models exemplified by Jesus and Paul that was responsible for igniting the growth and spread of Christianity throughout the world.

Summary of Jesus and Paul's Method

During the period of Jesus' earthly ministry, the Greek and Jewish norm of disciple-making involved the student seeking a teacher they wished to study under. The goal was to

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[81] M. Griffiths, *Example of Jesus*; J.M. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life*; E. Malestra, ed., *Imitating Christ,* In Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology, edited by Walter A. Elwell (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 595; Genesis 1:27.

become like the teacher, and after completing the program, the newly commissioned instructor would leave to develop his disciples.[82] Jesus primarily used this methodology with a few differences. First, following Jesus was a lifetime commitment and required a complete transformation from a former lifestyle. Secondly, the disciples would spend the rest of their lives endeavoring to become like their teacher. Finally, unlike the customary model where each disciple eventually became the master, Jesus would always be theirs.[83] The methodology of Jesus' discipleship process conveyed through scripture was both comprehensive and experiential in developing his disciples' spiritual maturity. Jesus' discipleship practice was documented in the gospels, and Paul continued to imitate Jesus and his viewpoints as an example for generations to reproduce.[84]

One could contend that Paul was a church planter, and there is no revelation in scripture to the specifics of his discipleship methodology. However, it is evident from scripture that Paul was a disciple-maker. Some of Paul's fellow workers that he taught and equipped included Titus, Timothy, Luke, Aristarchus, Demas, Erastus, Mark, Silas, Trophimus, Tychicus, and Pricilla, and Aquila. Paul's focus was Jesus Christ, and he instructed others to imitate him as he imitated Christ.[85] Paul taught that Christ was the pattern to follow in teaching others to be more like Jesus in life and character.[86]

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[82] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 62-4.

[83] Timothy A Friedrichsen, "'Disciple(s)' in the New Testament: Background, Usage, Characteristics and Historicity," *Salesianum* 65, no. 4 (October 2003): 735, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu /login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAiG0V170717001629&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[84] 2 Timothy 3:14-18.

[85] Colossians 1:28-29; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Corinthians 4:16; Philippians 3:17.

[86] Aída Besançon Spencer, *2 Timothy and Titus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 89; 2 Timothy 1:13.

There is a considerable amount of literature regarding the similarities and differences between Jesus and Paul concerning their ministries.[87] However, the purpose of Paul's ministry was to preach and advance Christ.[88] A detail to consider regarding Paul's imitation of Christ to include Jesus' disciple-making "best practices" is the similarities between Jesus' method and how Paul was discipled before converting to Christianity. Paul was known as Saul in his youth, growing up in the Hellenistic city of Tarsus, the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia. Saul was born of the tribe of Benjamin and was discipled under the great Jewish Rabbi Gamaliel and later became part of the Jewish sect called the Pharisees.[89]

It is reasonable to suggest that Paul would be comfortable with this methodology as he taught others to pattern their lives after himself as he imitated Jesus. However, the significance of Paul using the exact model demonstrated by Jesus was not essential. Paul's instruction to imitate Christ did not necessitate following Jesus' model precisely, but rather to include as many "best practices" in Jesus' model to increase the chances of a more effective method of developing spiritually mature believers.

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[87] Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Jesus and Paul: Parallel Lives* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017); Alexander J. M. Wedderburn, *Paul and Jesus: Collected Essays* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015); Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don't Know About Them)* (Nashville, TN: Harper Collins, 2009); Wedderburn, A J M., "Paul and Jesus: Similarity and Continuity." *New Testament Studies* 34 (2) 1988: 161–82. https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu /login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000800866&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[88] 2 Corinthians 4:5; Colossians 1:28.

[89] A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve: Timeless Principles for Leadership Development*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 12.

Original Model Argument

Contemporary discipleship methodology has changed from Jesus and Paul's, in what could be referred to as, original Christian discipleship model. Christ-followers have developed different processes, programs, and methods for over two-thousand years. The American church has gone through several different approaches since the birth of this nation 244 years ago. Improving discipleship methods is the subject of much debate. However, no conclusions on this subject suggest returning to the exact methodology Jesus and Paul used as a principal strategy for the present culture.[90]

The presence of nominal Christians in the American church is indicative of insufficiencies in the processes responsible for church members' spiritual development. The original discipleship process exemplified by Jesus and Paul consisted of a comprehensive experiential learning curriculum to grow Christ's disciples toward maturity. Greg Ogden writes, "the primary purpose of having a curriculum is to chart the territory of discipleship needed to cover and build a foundation for Christian living. Programs that do not have a curriculum do not have a plan, and learning will not be intentional like many random church discipleship experiences."[91] Jesus was intentional in the way he taught his followers; therefore, it is rational to suggest that every discipleship process should be intentional.

Andrew Burggraff is another supporter of a discipleship curriculum. He contends that

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[90] Kelly Brady, *Following Jesus: Defining Discipleship for the 21st Century* (Colorado Springs, CO: Equip, 2013); James C. Pauley, *Liturgical Catechesis in the 21st Century: A School of Discipleship* (Chicago, IL: LiturgyTrainingPublications, 2017); Michael L. Baker, *Jesus Walk: Discipleship for the 21st Century; Disciple's Manual* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1999); Norma (COL) Hedin and Royce (COL) Rose, *Christian Education Leadership: Making Disciples in the 21st Century Church* (Coppell, TX: Christian Leadership Publishing, 2012).

[91] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 211.

contemporary research has revealed concerns in the church concerning a decline in biblical literacy, an exodus of evangelicals, inactivity in the church, and a de-emphasis of discipleship training.[92] There are ten steps in the development of Burggraff's curriculum that he believes are essential in his model. Nevertheless, he emphasizes that having a curriculum in the discipleship process is an essential element in the believer's growth.[93] The absence of a curriculum presents difficulties in implementing a wide range of "best practices" essential in a comprehensive program.

Opponents of the curriculum theory propose that discipleship is not a program with a rigid curriculum because those types of disciple-making methods do not produce disciples. This is a contentious position because many curriculum-based methods similar to Jesus and Paul's are historically proven to be effective. Interestingly, this thinking is corroborated in the collective opinion of church discipleship leaders discovered by the Barna Group's research on the state of discipleship. Their 2015 study showed that most church discipleship leaders scored having a comprehensive discipleship curriculum the lowest as an essential component out of thirteen critical elements of discipleship.[94]

Further study is necessary to determine a reason for not returning to a process comparable to the original Christian model. One reason could be based on the cultural reception of such a life-consuming concept rather than examining the potential of it being successful. It is agreed

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[92] Andrew Burggraff, "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): 397–8. https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAn3864182&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[93] Burggraff, "Developing Discipleship Curriculum," 412.

[94]. "New Research on the State of Discipleship," *Barna Group*, accessed June 22, 2019, https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship/.

that implementing such a comprehensive discipleship model in today's church is not without

complications. The formation of a comparable discipleship model necessitates full church

participation; unfortunately, the highest level of involvement in Southern Baptist Convention

churches averaged only 44%.[95] According to Thumma and Bird, the reason for such levels is

mainly due to changes in social and cultural norms that hinder commitment and participation.[96]

Moreover, there are other obstacles to overcome, such as the American individualistic culture,

demanding personal schedules, and inconsistency in church mission priorities.

Best Practices of the Original Model

In such a critical subject as discipleship, there is no justification for not exploring every

option, including earlier processes as a potential remedy for the discipleship inefficiency. As

mentioned previously, over two-thousand years of developing new and innovative ways to

accomplish this essential church mission component, yet the church is in decline. The original

discipleship model was the pattern exemplified by the one every Christian is instructed to

imitate. Therefore, a credible solution is possible by integrating as many of the original

discipleship "best practices" in current church models to encourage a higher probability of

success.

The early discipleship model incorporated several "best practices" designed to address

the spiritual development of those being discipled. A preliminary study of the methods used by

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[95] "Church Involvement Varies Widely among U.S. Christians," *Pew Research Center*, n.d., accessed May 8, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/16/church-involvement-varies-widely-among-u-s-christians/.

[96] Scott Thumma and Warren Bird, *The Other 80 Percent: Turning Your Church's Spectators into Active Participants* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 66.

Jesus and Paul revealed 12 significant "best practices" present in their methodology focused on developing spiritually mature learners. The following is a list of those twelve "best practices" selected for this project and their association with the original model.

1. Commitment to a Teacher

The Greek and Jewish tradition of discipleship before the creation of the church allowed the student in some cases to select his teacher if he was understood to be academically proficient. A commitment was made to follow the teacher from the beginning stages of learning until the student became equal with the teacher and capable of developing his disciples.[97] Although the Lord selected the twelve disciples, they were not forced to follow him; however, each abandoned their former lives and committed themselves to his teaching when asked to follow him.[98]

The disciples committed to the teacher Jesus Christ by abandoning everything to follow him.[99] Paul first committed to the Jewish Rabbi Gamaliel before committing to Christ.[100] Paul was a teacher to those who were committed to him as their discipler as he modeled Christ.[101] According to Ogden, recent studies reveal that modeling is still one of the most significant learning dynamics.[102] Committing to a teacher is a covenant relationship designed for growth and

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[97] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 62.

[98] Matthew 4:19, 8:22, 9:9, 10:38, 16:24, 19:21, 19:28; Mark 1:17, 2:14, 8:34, 10:21; Luke 5:27, 9:23, 9:59, 18:22, John 1:43, 8:12, 10:27, 12:26, 13:36, 21:19, 21:22.

[99] Luke 18:28.

[100] A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve: Timeless Principles for Leadership Development*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 12; Acts 9:18.

[101] 2 Timothy 1:11.

[102] Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 11.

accountability through Jesus' teachings and submission to his demands.[103] The commitment to a teacher typically is the beginning step of an intentional discipleship process.

2. Regular meetings

The process of growing spiritually is continuous; therefore, no restrictions should be set on how many times a discipling group gathers for this purpose. The more often they meet, the more opportunity for growth through the stages of development towards maturity. Jesus met with his disciples frequently during the three years of his earthly ministry. Many of the first-century churches Paul planted met daily in the temple for discipleship and communion, continuing to meet daily up until the end of the second century.[104] Furthermore, Paul met with those he discipled frequently on his missionary journeys.[105] He traveled with some, while others he revisited or wrote epistles to remind them of the teachings of Christ.[106] Meeting regularly is a crucial element in multiplying disciples, resulting in the numerical growth of the church.[107] The frequent meeting around God's word and worship are necessary to encourage one another and hold each other accountable for living the Christian life.[108]

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[103] Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 539.

[104] Valeriy A. Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries* (Leiden, NL: BRILL, 2010), 96; Acts 2:46.

[105] Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2.

[106] Acts 15:40; 18:5; 1 Corinthians; 2 Corinthians.

[107] Acts 9:31.

[108] George H. Guthrie, *NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews [Hardcover] by Guthrie, George H.*, Annotated edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1998), 353.

3. Individual mentoring

Mentoring was a component of Jesus and Paul's discipleship model. A straightforward definition of a mentoring relationship is a person following another person to become more like them.[109] During his three years of ministry, Jesus mentored his disciples, where they observed him in ministry, were taught, encouraged, empowered, and commissioned for the ministry. Examples of mentoring can be found throughout the Bible, where learning was attained from the faithful's observance and replication. Eli mentored Samuel, Elijah mentored Elisha, Moses mentored Joshua, Naomi mentored Ruth, Elizabeth mentored Mary, Jesus mentored the twelve disciples, Barnabas mentored Paul, Paul mentored Timothy and Titus, who learned to imitate their mentor as he imitated Christ.[110]

The relationship between the mentor and mentee is more than an environment of teaching and learning transformation. The mentor also serves as a role model. A productive environment for making disciples is one that allow a hands-on approach to learning. The highly effective disciple-making churches integrate mentoring into their process to study, pray, and encourage each other spiritually regularly.[111]

4. Teaching to observe all that he commanded

The teachings of Jesus were recorded in the gospels, where many commandments were given. Some of the last words spoken by Jesus to his disciples were for them to make disciples

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[109] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 216.

[110] Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 540-2; 1 Samuel 1-3; 1 Kings 19:19-21; Deuteronomy 31; Joshua 1; Ruth 1; Luke 1:39-56; John 13:1-17; Acts 13-15; Acts 16:1-5; 1 Timothy 4, 6:11-12; 1 Corinthians 11:1.

[111] George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 123.

and teach them to observe everything he commanded. Furthermore, Jesus strengthened this statement of obedience, saying, "if you love me, obey my commandments."[112] Jesus taught his disciples all that he commanded during his earthly ministry and Paul instructed his disciple Timothy to be a faithful minister of Christ by entrusting the teachings of Jesus to faithful men.[113] There are numerous similarities between Jesus' teachings and the apostle Paul's concerning the commands Jesus instructed others to be taught. A few of the similarities in teaching include laying up treasure in heaven, Jesus is the way to the Father, forgiving others, loving God, and preaching the gospel.[114]

The teachings of Jesus' commands were passed down to the early churches through the Gospels and Paul's epistles, where the hearers could observe them. The obedience to Jesus' commands displayed by the believer presents the fruit of Jesus' work to the world.[115] The exact number of Jesus commands is a subject of discussion; however, John Piper denotes fifty in his book, *What Jesus Demands from the World*.[116] In order for a believer to be obedient to the commands of Christ, he or she must first have an excellent working knowledge of what those commands are.

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[112] Matthew 28:19-20; John 14:15.

[113] 2 Timothy 2:2.

[114] Matthew 6:19-21; Colossian 3:1-4; John 15:6; Ephesians 2:8; Matthew 22:37-38; Colossians 3:13; Romans 8:28; Mark 16:15; Romans 10:13-15.

[115] John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth Has Been Given to Me* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 19.

[116] Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World,* 19.

5. Doing ministry together

The Lord Jesus taught his disciples his ministry techniques for three years, and they were able to learn from his example as they ministered together with the Master. Timothy learned from watching Paul and doing ministry together.[117] The examples of an apprenticeship-style methodology of the first century are practical instruction tools where ministry can be observed in action. The lessons learned during these experiences are vital in adding various usable approaches to one's ministries.

The scriptures imply a connection between Christian ministry and service.[118] There is more to discipleship than learning what Jesus said during his three years of earthly ministry. There is a requirement for Christian disciples to be sent out to practice what they have learned. Implementing what is being learned is an essential component of the process that also helps to build relationships. Serving together in ministry allows believers to work together as a church body utilizing their spiritual gifts under the common goal of making disciples. A study of church growth has shown that churches grow approximately twenty percent more within five years when church members serve the community outside the church walls.[119]

6. Imitate Jesus's life and character

The goal of every Christian is to be more like Christ throughout his or her life journey. Jesus and Paul's discipleship model had the goal of growing to look like Jesus in life and character. Jesus said that a fully trained disciple would be like his teacher, restating this common

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[117] Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 161; Acts 16:1-5.

[118] John 3:13-19.

[119] Jody Dean and Hal Stewart, *Together We Equip: Integrating Discipleship and Ministry Leadership for Holistic Spiritual Formation* (Nashville, TN: WestBow Press, 2018), 67.

goal.[120] Paul told his disciples, and everyone else, to imitate him as he imitates Christ.[121] The one

discipling must be a disciple himself, having knowledge and discernment against spiritual

blindness and lack of love.[122] Disciples are conformed to God's image and do so in the power of

the Holy Spirit. Koessler writes, "It is not for the disciple to strive to imitate Christ as best as we

can, for that is impossible. However, it is Christ that seeks to be formed in us. It is only because

he became like us so that we can become like him. It is only because we are identified with him

that we can become like him. By being transformed into his image, we are enabled to model our

lives on his."[123]

The characteristics of being a disciple are those essential marks that identify a person as

being a follower of Jesus Christ. These marks cannot be attained in one's strength but are given

supernaturally after commitment affording a believer the ability to imitate Jesus' life and

character. Jesus' characteristics are displayed in the lives of his believers through the product of

the Holy Spirit. Since Christian discipleship's goal is Christlikeness, then like fruit, the believer

is continuously ripened toward that goal. Whenever believers are walking in the Spirit, they will

manifest love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control

in their daily lives.[124]

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[120] Luke 6:40.

[121] 1 Corinthians 11:1.

[122] Leon L. Morris, *Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 153.

[123] John Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003), 304.

[124] Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 366.

7.   Designed expansion

Jesus developed the apostles as the foundation for the expansion of his kingdom through discipleship. The apostles did not make disciples the same way the Lord did, focusing more on spreading the "Good News" to the crowds. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples received the Holy Spirit, and Peter stood up and preached to the crowd, and 3000 believed and were baptized. Those new believers who were baptized were devoted to the apostle's teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer.[125] Deffenbaugh writes that the "Great Commission" was given to the apostles as the church in embryo, making it the corporate responsibility of the church body.[126]

This change suggests that the church's mission was not meant for application independently but as a corporate body of Christ. Paul's design for expansion was a continuum of this philosophy by planting churches responsible for the discipleship of others.[127] This metaphorical language has literal implications regarding Jesus Christ as the headship, and the head controls the church body. The church body has different roles to assume collectively to accomplish the mission. The apostle Paul conveys in the letters to the Corinthians and Ephesians: "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ."[128] Moreover, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and

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[125] Acts 2:40-42.

[126] Bob L. Deffinbaugh, "What Happened to Discipleship in the Epistles? | Bible.Org," accessed November 18, 2020, https://bible.org/seriespage/18-what-happened-discipleship-epistles.

[127] Acts 14:1-28.

[128] 1 Corinthians 12:12.

Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."[129] "The church is an organism in its most fundamental essence is nothing less than an independent, life pulsating people who are indwelled by the presence of a resurrected and reigning Christ."[130]

The church as a living organism is called to complete the goal of developing spiritually mature disciples of Jesus Christ. The body has to be built up, strengthened, and equipped to accomplish this; therefore, the Lord has given his body members various spiritual gifts. The body of Christ is equipped with a collection of spiritual gifting that will address the different "best practices" of discipleship needed to grow mature disciples in Christ's expansion plan.[131]

8. Leadership development

The pattern of leadership is exemplified through Jesus Christ's servant leadership model that places others before oneself.[132] Jesus and Paul developed leaders by equipping, mentoring, and empowering them for success. Jesus advanced the disciple's leadership qualities while Paul developed Timothy and others for their future leadership roles.[133] Christian leaders emphasize godly character and trust that the Holy Spirit will help refine their leadership qualities. Leadership is a part of everything that exists in the human environment. It is directly related to how things function and perform in every aspect of work to how one worships.

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[129] Ephesian 4:4-6.

[130] Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 41.

[131] Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is--: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Avademic, 2013), 170.

[132] John Phillips, John. *Exploring the Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2001), 249; John 13:4-5.

[133] Matthew 20:26; Luke 6:31; 2 Timothy 4:1-8.

There are many characteristics and styles of leadership, all of which help to create maximum performance in a given situation. These styles and characteristics help to influence others to reach their highest potential for success. One's application of Christian principles will carry over to Christian leadership qualities. Jesus was an effective leader, and his qualities of humility, love, service, and others-centered ministry are ones to be imitated. Leaders are developed in the discipleship process so that they will become the leaders of the future.[134]

Leaders are created and not born, developed through the discipleship process to lead and eventually make disciples themselves.[135] Christian leaders must strive to present godly models for their people. Their character, integrity, and commitment to living out scripture's truths should be apparent to the people they serve as they model Christlikeness.[136]A missional leader mobilizes God's people to join his redemptive work in the world through discipleship.[137] A disciple will make disciples of others; therefore, creating leaders by his or her example.

9. Accountability

Scripture demands for individuals in the church to hold others accountable. Jesus instructed his disciples concerning accountability for the mission he set before them.[138] Paul gave instructions to ensure accountability for those preaching the truths of Jesus Christ and dealing

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[134] John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders Around You: How to Help Others Reach Their Full Potential* (Nashville, TN: HarperCollins Leadership, 1995), 11.

[135] Rod Dempsey & Dave Earley, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying, Small Groups* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University Press), 153-4.

[136] Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership (*Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 13; J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), 49.

[137] Mike Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders: From Half-Hearted Volunteers to a Mobilized Kingdom Force* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3dmovements.com, 2012), 9.

[138] Matthew 25:14-26.

with a sexually immoral church member.[139] God has given each disciple talents he expects them

to use for the furtherance of the kingdom.[140] Mutual accountability is a necessary element of the

discipleship process to ensure members adhere to biblical doctrine and are held accountable to

godly living and continued spiritual growth.[141]

There is a cost for committing one's life to Jesus Christ that is seldomly recognized in the

American church concerning persecution. Nevertheless, since commitment is a choice, it must be

self-sacrificing by submitting to God, who will provide the strength to overcome. Disciples are to

be held accountable for the necessary training they have committed to undergo. Bill Hull writes,

"Training involves constant repetition, it requires discipline, but because self-discipline is rare,

one needs others to hold them accountable."[142]

10. Tangible spiritual growth

The goal for discipleship is continued growth towards Christlikeness, and Jesus taught his

disciples intending to develop them spiritually.[143] It is anticipated that not every church has a

robust discipleship process available to grow members spiritually. This statistic is supported by a

recent 2015 Barna Research Group survey that concluded 60% of church leaders looking at their

churches feel that they are not discipling well concerning the development of spiritual growth.[144]

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[139] 2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Corinthians 5:1-11.

[140] Matthew 25:14-30.

[141] David Lowes Watson, *Covenant Discipleship: Christian Formation through Mutual Accountability* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 62.

[142] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 30.

[143] Luke 6:40.

[144] "New Research on the State of Discipleship." *Barna Group*. accessed June 22, 2019, https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship/.

Additional debilitating factors in assessing member maturity are the multiple views on what

determines spiritual maturity and inconsistencies within what categories to track. These

influences have contributed to the absence of obtaining and chronicling the spiritual maturity of

church members.[145]

A way of assessing the spiritual growth of those participating in a church discipleship

process is essential in evaluating individual growth and the effectiveness of the method being

utilized. Growth assessment can be accomplished in several ways, such as through personal

observation and documentation of growth in maturity characteristics. The use of several spiritual

growth assessment tools is available from different academic resources and websites. Notably,

the resources used must accurately measure the maturity level, individual growth and have the

capability to evaluate progression frequently.[146] Although no specific practice was recorded in

scripture, the apostle Paul frequently assessed church maturity levels when commenting on their

lack of spiritual growth in his writings.[147]

Gibson explains that there are four levels of spiritual maturity extending from "(1) self-

centered (2) other-centered (3) principle-centered (4) kingdom-centered. Although one cannot be

reduced to predictable developmental stages because it is difficult to measure maturity levels,

churches need to carefully examine their educational ministries to see if they promote or fail to

promote the four levels of spiritual maturity."[148] The lack of evaluating current processes for

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[145] Carl Shank, *Making Christianity Work: Letters and Lessons on Leadership, Theology and the Church* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu.com, 2012), 34.

[146] Randy Frazee, *The Christian Life Profile Assessment Tool Workbook: Discovering the Quality of Your Relationships with God and Others in 30 Key Areas*, Workbook edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 52.

[147] 1 Corinthians 3:1-4; Ephesians 4:14.

[148] Timothy S. Gibson, "Proposed Levels of Christian Spiritual Maturity," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 32, no. 4 (2004): 303. https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar &AN=ATLA0001582842&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

effectiveness will keep churches from discarding ministries that are not successful in achieving church goals.

11. Small groups

Throughout the New Testament, small group ministry starts with Jesus, who was the leader of a small group of twelve disciples. Jesus facilitated their spiritual growth as they worked to accomplish his mission. The small group was a proven method of developing believers' spiritual growth in the first century and the guideline for creating a healthy small group. Comiskey writes, "today, more than ever, we need to get back to the small group as the primary place to exercise spiritual gifts. It is the most natural context for worship and prayer together. It is the best place to find encouragement and accountability as we grow in our relationship with Christ."[149]

Jesus demonstrated the model for Christians living in community with other believers as he ministered in homes and developed his disciples for service. In the small group, the element of individual mentoring easily fits within this model. Here one can ask a mentee to complete a task within the group to watch their presentation, gently assist or correct, and encourage their performance.[150] The small group that allows Christians to display the life and character of Jesus to others has biblical foundations. "The Creator of the universe and King of kings was a small group leader; therefore, every small group leader today is following in the very footsteps of Jesus Christ."[151] Does this mean that discipleship must incorporate three years of living together with

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[149] Joel Comiskey, *The Spirit-Filled Small group: Leading Your Group to Experience Spiritual Gifts* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2009), 87.

[150] Rod Dempsey and Dave Earley, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying, Small Groups* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University Press, 2016), 165.

[151] Ibid, 27.

the teacher to grow spiritually, especially in the present culture? Reproducing this level of interaction would most assuredly be an unrealistic concept in the modern age of the two-income family. However, many of the fundamentals Jesus taught can be expressed accurately in a small group that meets frequently. The apostle Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome acknowledged a small church group meeting in Pricilla and Aquilla's home.[152]

The small group may be one of the best places to facilitate many of the first-century discipleship model's "best practices" and arguably one of the best comprehensive discipleship tools.[153] A church can use the small group environment to incorporate components that produce spiritual growth in addition to their current processes. Jesus' decision to choose a small group of men to disciple demonstrates his awareness of the proper environment necessary for comprehensive discipleship methodology.

The use of the small group to disciple can equip and empower others to carry out the mission. Peter Bunton's study of 300 years of small groups indicates that implementing a small group platform is not a new concept. Of the many small group movements studied, life was considered a progression through stages, and small groups assisted with spiritual development. Moreover, small groups were formed in these movements to aid Christians with holy living.[154] In today's self-centered atmosphere, the small group is a way to get back to the Christ-centered focus of discipleship where Christians can become fully committed relationally in their goal to become more like Christ.

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[152] Romans 16:3-5.

[153] Dempsey and Earley, *Leading Small Groups*, 150.

[154] Peter Bunton. "300 Years of Small Groups: The European Church from Luther to Wesley." Christian Education Journal 11, no. 1 (Spr 2014): 101. https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001980002&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

12. Sending on mission

A critical element of discipleship is to send recently developed Christians out on Jesus'
instructed mission. A recent study on churchgoers revealed that 51% indicate that they have
never heard of the "Great Commission." Additionally, 25% have heard of the "Great
Commission" but do not know its exact meaning. Furthermore, 6% were unsure, resulting in
17% that have heard of the "Great Commission" and know the meaning and purpose.[155] Only
20% of adult Christians are involved in some form of what they believe is a discipleship activity,
such as attending Sunday school, fellowship group, mentorship, or group bible study.[156] The low
percentage of churchgoers familiar with Jesus' command to make disciples, and those active in a
discipleship activity, implies that the number of those who actively disciple others would also be
inconsequential.

The progression of discipleship begins with one's spiritual growth and leads to that
individual developing others' spiritual growth. The process is not simple addition but the
multiplication of disciples expanding the kingdom exponentially. David Lanier explains the
process this way, "If I won one convert a week and discipled him so that he could lead another to
Christ and disciple him each year, in one year, I would have 52 disciples. In two years, I would
have won 52 others while those 52 would have won another 52, for a total of 156 disciples. In
eight years, I would have 1,872, and in ten, 2860 with the number multiplying each year."[157]

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[155] "51% of Churchgoers do not Know of the Great Commission," *Barna Group*, accessed July 22, 2020, https://www.barna.com/research/half-churchgoers-not-heard-great-commission/.

[156] "New Research on the State of Discipleship." *Barna Group*. accessed June 22, 2019. https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship/.

[157] David E. Lanier, "The Multiplication of Disciples," Faith and Mission 16, no. 2 (Spr 1999): 5–6, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000993749 &site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Genuine discipleship involves the reproduction of the process with others. Dave Earley conveys that the proof of discipleship is continuous fruit-bearing.[158] Jesus sent the disciples out on the mission two by two, and the sending of the seventy-two.[159] The apostle Paul sent Timothy to the Corinthian church to remind them of the ways of Christ.[160] Therefore, one could suggest that sending on mission and reproducing spiritually mature Christians is evidence of discipleship.

Conclusion

Making disciples is not a choice but a command from Jesus to develop Christlike characteristics in others. Scripture provides multiple verses communicating the importance of imitating Jesus and modeling was a principal teaching method.[161] Imitating Jesus implies modeling the pattern of his life, character and advancing his teachings to others. The apostle Paul agrees that the imitation of Christ for the discipler is essential. God's patterns can be observed in Creation and throughout Scripture, where obedience maintains order. Jesus is the model for discipleship, and every process should incorporate this fundamental idea.

Reaching the goal of discipleship requires that the process be robust and comprehensive if the learning elements are to lead to a holistic process that teaches one to obey all of the commands Jesus gave.[162] The application of the exact discipleship method Jesus and Paul used

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[158] Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 108.

[159] Mark 6:7-13; Luke 10:1-23.

[160] 1 Corinthians 4:17.

[161] Jay E. Adams, *Shepherding God's Flock: A Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling, and Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 406.

[162] John R. Martin, *Ventures in Discipleship* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 271; Dana Allin, *Simple Discipleship: Grow Your Faith, Transform Your Community* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2019) , xi; Bob Kellemen, *Biblical Counseling, and the Church: God's Care Through God's People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015) , 75; Rice Broocks and Steve Murrell, *The Purple Book, Updated Edition: Biblical Foundations for Building Strong Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 61.

may be impractical for the 21st century American church. However, a contemporary church process that implements more of the "best practices" Jesus and Paul patterned will almost certainly be a more robust and effective method.

The call to make disciples centuries later is still one of the most critical activities of the church. The goal is to reach the world with the gospel helping them grow to their full potential through discipleship and then sending them out to join the mission of Christ.[163] Every Christian is commanded to engage in the active process of disciple-making in obedience to the Lord Jesus' command. One claim to consider in today's discipleship challenge is the allegation posed by Dr. Stephen Gray. "Maybe the reason discipleship has become such a lost art today is not because of lost principles but rather because so few are willing to live a life of total surrender to Christ."[164] Barna's 2015 study on the state of discipleship confirms this lack of commitment and determination to prioritize spiritual development affirmed by professing Christians themselves.[165]

A church filled with committed disciples of Jesus Christ can bring much-needed revival to the church of America by creating devoted disciples the way God intended. Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey state, "true discipleship always results in spiritual accumulation and reproduction. It must lead to loving community penetration. It ultimately ends up catalyzing spiritual multiplication and church planting."[166] The examination of discipleship processes is needed in

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[163] Dave Earley and Rodney Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 228.

[164] Dr. Stephen L. Gray, *Becoming a True Disciple: The Revolution of Spirit-Led Disciples of Christ* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu.com, 2016), 17.

[165] "New Research on the State of Discipleship," *Barna Group*, accessed June 22, 2019. https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship/.

[166] Dave Earley and Rodney Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 105.

the church's present state that some suggest are the last days. For this reason, creating true

disciples is vital in God's plan of establishing a devoted army of Christian soldiers at war with

the dying world, not to take lives but to save them through the finished work of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This methodology chapter includes how the research was applied to address the problem stated in this project. A survey was selected as the method of intervention to compare and contrast contemporary discipleship approaches in local churches with discipleship "best practices" exemplified by Jesus and Paul in the first-century method. Churches affiliated with the Pikes Peak Baptist Association were selected for this study because of their reputation for sound doctrine, locale, and close affiliation to the present church denomination of this author.

This project's approach combines qualitative and quantitative research to formulate a reasonable hypothesis and concludes with a better understanding of how Christians are being discipled locally. The data observed from the survey provides a quantitative research that could illuminate first-century discipleship "best practices" applied in the local church. It is presumed that when a church subscribes to discipleship as the primary mission, they also present a compliant process to their missional objectives. One technique to understand the depth of a discipleship process is to use a survey to ask questions that illustrate their processes and compare them with a method recognized for comprehensiveness.

Intervention Design

This project aims to examine local churches that offer a program, process, or pedagogy that they allege addresses Christian maturation through discipleship and compare them with twelve identified "best practices" exemplified by Jesus and Paul. The survey questions are designed to understand whether these "best practices" are present in the church models surveyed or if they have an alternate process for achieving each specific characteristic's goal. Comparing

the biblical pattern of discipleship will help determine if a local association of churches provides a complete process that develops Christ-followers' spiritual maturity.

The first-century discipleship model incorporated a holistic process focused on the spiritual development of those being discipled. The process contained several "best practices" that functioned toward this specific goal. Twelve "best practices" were selected for this project because they covered a comprehensive set of principles collectively designed to increase participating learners' spiritual development. It is assumed that many of the current church discipleship processes will contain one or more of these "best practices;" however, the probability of encompassing every one of them is suspect.

A discipleship process that contains one or more of the twelve "best practices" may isolate a restricted number of features for growth; however, spiritual maturity is best developed when being absorbed from every aspect of training from a Christian perspective. These twelve "best practices" exemplified by Jesus and Paul are used as the example for what a robust discipleship process should look like. The twelve first century "best practices" selected for this project were:

1. Commitment to a Teacher.

2. Designed Expansion.

3. Regular Meetings.

4. Leadership Development.

5. Individual Mentoring.

6. Accountability.

7. Teaching to Observe all That He Commanded.

8. Tangible Growth.

9. Doing Ministry Together.

10. Small Groups.

11. Imitate Jesus' Life and Character.

12. Sending on Mission.

Examining the local church methods and comparing them with the first-century model should indicate whether they present an exhaustive process or lack spiritual devolvement practices concerning their congregants. One trend to explore is the need to disengage from the modern mindset of creating new discipleship strategies for the contemporary culture and return to the application of "best practices" comparable in the biblical model as a reasonable course for the restoration of a proven disciple-making method known to increase spiritual and numerical growth of the church.[1]

This study assumes that current discipleship methodologies are deficient, and the results produce nominal Christians. Fink agrees that discipleship is responsible for increasing Christian development in the church and is presently being neglected. "Research indicates that there are damaging consequences for neglecting discipleship. As a result, most Christians are stuck in their growth and failing to reach maturity."[2] The result of this neglect is the presence of inactive Christians.

Moreover, some leaders may not be fully aware of the dangers of not addressing their members' spiritual growth. As members grow towards maturity in Christ, they develop his character, enabling them to solve some of the problems that arise. A continued immaturity in the

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[1] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 27.

[2] Dr Todd M. Fink, *Biblical Discipleship Study Guide: Essential Components for Attaining Spiritual Maturity* (Chicago, IL: Selah Book Press, 2016), 17-20.

church has been responsible for dissension in the church since the beginning. Crabtree writes that "most church fusses are the result of the immaturity of some individual or group within the membership that causes discord."[3] Spiritual maturity empowers church members to work together as instruments of Christ.

Finally, there could be discrepancies between what a church believes its method provides and what accurately parallels a robust methodology. The majority of churches offer discipleship to their members, but church leaders determine strategy and depth. Aubrey Malphurs illustrates in his book, "Strategic Disciple Making: A Practical Tool for Successful Ministry," that Bob Gilliam developed the "Spiritual Journey Evaluation" to determine if today's churches were making disciples. Gilliam's research indicates six reasons church leaders were not effectively intentional about making disciples: (1) Leaders do not know what disciples look like. (2) They do not know how to make a disciple if they could define one. (3) They do not know how church programs work together to make disciples. (4) They do not know how to measure progress. (5) Leaders are not model disciples to reproduce after their kind. (6) They do not know how to become intentional without splitting the church.[4] This research suggests the necessity for an examination of current local church discipleship practices.

However, this study is not being conducted to demonstrate the local churches' inadequacies but instead to determine if current practices in place align with the first-century model. These assumptions were investigated by comparing them with a method similar to the

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[3] T. T. Crabtree, *Zondervan 2010 Pastor's Annual: An Idea and Resource Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 297.

[4] Aubrey Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making: A Practical Tool for Successful Ministry* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 77.

biblical pattern of discipleship that was historically demonstrated as an effective method of creating fully developed followers of Jesus Christ.

The results from the analysis also help to determine if local churches' efforts to comply with Jesus' command of the "Great Commission" is the centerpiece of their mission or if they are providing an insufficient program in observance of this command. The conclusion from the analysis illuminates any inconsistencies and identifies how well the church aligns with the biblical model of God's designed pattern. A church's degree of importance in discipleship is apparent in those churches that fully endeavor to accomplish this command. This survey anticipates the discovery of churches that have adopted other church mission priorities by revealing an anemic process of discipleship.

An encumbering factor is overcoming the American culture's constant state of busyness. Researches have proposed that the busier person with a full calendar is looked upon more favorably today than one living a life of leisure.[5] Furthermore, the cost of living has driven families toward dual incomes out of necessity, which leaves little time for anything else. An addendum for those Christians seeking to be obedient to the commands of the Lord is the recommitment to greater holiness. Christ must remain the predominance in one's life realized by prioritizing according to an eternal perspective.

Theologically, everything that exists was created from God's patterned design to work in the way he knew it would accomplish his goals. The steady decline of the American church in spiritual and numerical growth has prompted debate over its causation, yet the problem persists.

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[5] Silvia Bellezza, Neeru Paharia, and Anat Keinan, "Research: Why Americans Are So Impressed by Busyness," *Harvard Business Review* (December 15, 2016), https://hbr.org/2016/12/research-why-americans-are-so-impressed-by-busyness.

No rational person would purposely change the orbit of the earth if they could make their life more pleasant, knowing the result would be catastrophic to all life.[6] Comparatively, the persistent modification of discipleship from the original pattern could be disastrous to the American church.

All of God's patterns work perfectly as he intended; therefore, it seems practical to return to his original design for the discipleship process. An encouraging potential outcome of this project is the hope of moving closer to a solution rather than farther away. The continued application of untried and untested processes that the American culture willingly accepts because it fits the new and innovative way of thinking has not resolved church decline. The prophetic last days will need spiritually mature Christians committed to stand for Christ to the very end. Only through a comprehensive discipleship model can this kind of Christian be developed. Additionally, this project ascertains how far current discipleship methodologies have progressed from the original church pattern.

A benefit from this study is that a local church can evaluate the depth of their current discipleship process toward Christian maturity and make the necessary changes to mitigate their deficiencies. Those churches that determine the presence of deficiency can now look to a more comprehensive process similar to the original model. The findings should influence church leaders without comprehensive programs to delve deeper into effective models similar to the first-century method historically proven to increase the church's spiritual and numerical growth.

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[6] Joel R. Primack and Nancy Ellen Abrams, *The View From the Center of the Universe: Discovering Our Extraordinary Place in the Cosmos* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2007), 211.

Tasks Done

The researcher's role in the project was to take an unbiased look at the local church discipleship methodology and compare it with the model originated by Jesus and Paul. Although there are some presuppositions about the comprehensiveness of church discipleship in today's culture, there was the potential of finding churches aligned with the biblical pattern. Impartiality was essential in every aspect of this analysis. The collection and categorizing of information was based on detailed criteria so that this research could be replicable.

The motivation for developing a simple replication procedure was to enable church leaders or churchgoers desiring to know the exhaustiveness of their discipleship process through the tools used in this study. This process was done by using the survey to establish the church's current discipleship components and comparing them with twelve identified "best practices" of the first-century model. The person examining the discipleship process could then use the collected data to make any adjustments to their current model.

A survey that supports the research for determining the comprehensiveness of the local church discipleship process was used for this project. The survey consists of straightforward questions so that participants could answer according to the existing elements present in their current discipleship process. All twelve identified first-century "best practices" were represented in the survey. The survey first inquired whether they incorporated this specific component and how their process worked to accomplish this discipline in their methodology. A supplemental open-ended question was used to clarify the church programs that used alternative methods to provide the discipleship component to its members.

Church participation in such projects was a concern based on previous personal experience as a former church staff member; the lack of participation and support between local

churches was personally observed. Furthermore, in the researcher's experience, it was

challenging to influence church leaders to participate in email surveys sent to the church,

especially if they felt their answers to the questions, or the questions themselves, would

disparage the existing church's methodology.

The IRB-approved consent form consisted of the background information for the survey;

however, the purpose and objectives for conducting the survey was not be enough to convince

church leaders to take time out of their busy schedules to participate in the study. Therefore, a

supplemental email followed by a personal phone call to each church representative was

completed to explain the survey and answer any questions they may have. In these personal

conversations, there was more latitude to persuade church representatives to examine their

church discipleship methodology in the prospect of developing a viable solution.

The analysis of the data collected was evaluated according to the "best practices" defined

in the thesis project. Subsequently, every numerical statistic was checked for its accuracy and

presented in a way that illustrates the variables effectively. The final comparisons were explained

thoroughly in a way that was accurate and repeatable. All conclusions were based on evidentiary

facts from the responses received regarding the alignment to twelve identified first-century

discipleship "best practices" and not on the author's preconceptions or opinions.

<div align="center">The Steps Taken for Each Task</div>

The survey was administered to churches associated with the PPBA by email for

potential participation in the survey. There were no incentives other than self-evaluation by

comparing a church's current method with the comprehensive model patterned by Jesus and Paul

in the first century. An assessment of the churches to be surveyed for this project was conducted.

There are fifty-five churches affiliated with the PPBA; however, only forty churches match the

designated project definition of a church described as a specific location used for public worship with a leader and a congregation of any size.

An examination of these churches determined that seven were non-native English speaking. Communication with each church was conducted first by email and then by telephone. Although each representative understood English, all seven informed that they were not comfortable completing a survey written in English and elected not to participate because of the language barrier. This preliminary assessment decreased the potential church participation number based on the criteria mentioned above to thirty-three.

The collection of current email addresses, phone numbers, and web addresses was added to the project logbook for the appropriate recording of all activities and pertinent information connected to the project. A survey software test was completed to confirm that a recipient received the recruitment email with a working survey link. The email survey requests were sent to different accessible email addresses to confirm delivery. Additionally, two trial runs were initiated to ensure that every question could be answered appropriately, and the results were recorded correctly by the software with accurate corresponding graphs.

The completed graphs and charts at the end of the survey were printed and saved electronically. The statistical data were then analyzed and recorded by the number of churches that participated and each church's response to questions concerning the twelve "best practices" of the first-century model. The results give a better understanding of the depth of current local church discipleship and determine whether churches could supplement additional "best practices" to develop spiritual maturity.

Furthermore, most of the churches used in this study currently had websites that provided information about the church concerning the times of service, contact information, past sermons,

ministries, calendars, and church leadership. Additional data collection was completed by checking the websites for supplementary information on church discipleship processes. This extra layer of information helped support or refute the information already collected from the survey in this study. All data received was assimilated and discussed in the last two chapters of this project.

People Involved

The Southern Baptist Convention has over 47,000 churches affiliated in the United States and its territories.[7] The Southern Baptist churches' core values and doctrine are biblically based, with most churches endorsing the Southern Baptist Faith and Message 2000. The motive for selecting this population was because discipleship for Southern Baptist-affiliated churches is a part of their mission statement. It would not be practical to analyze every Southern Baptist church in the United States; therefore, selecting a smaller subset as a reasonable representation of the Southern Baptist Convention was concluded.

The churches selected for this study are affiliated with the Pikes Peak Baptist Association because they also affirm the Southern Baptist Faith and Message 2000. Additionally, all phone calls or potential visits for recruitment could be done locally within a fifty-mile boundary. The motto of the Pikes Peak Baptist Association is that "Every church is missional. Every person is a missionary."[8] This statement suggests that disciple-making is an integral part of churches affiliated with the PPBA.

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[7] "Southern Baptist Convention. Fast Facts About the SBC," accessed May 28, 2019, http://www.sbc.net/becomingsouthernbaptist/fastfacts.asp.

[8] "Pikes Peak Baptist Association of Southern Colorado," *Pikes Peak Baptist Association*, accessed May 23, 2019, http://ppba.org/.

Place Where This Will Occur

The churches addressed in this project are situated along the western slope of Southern Colorado. All of the churches are within fifty miles of the city of Colorado Springs. The surveys were completed in the preferred location of each participant, providing internet or email was accessible. An alternative means of participation was available for those willing to participate without internet access. A printout of the survey would be sent to them via the U.S. Postal Service with free return postage. Those participants without internet access or who would rather contribute by mail could request that the survey be sent to the address of their choice. The final, personal phone call reminded church representatives of this alternative method.

Timeline and Duration of Activities

The response rate for surveys is typically low, mostly depending on the subject being addressed and many other additional parameters. The length of time a survey was administered elevates the potential response rate and data accuracy.[9] Consequently, sixty days were allocated based on this factor to increase the survey's response rate to receive better results. Normally, the average response rate for a survey was about 35.7%, with a standard deviation of 18.8%.[10]

The initial email was sent out on December 18, 2019, without reference to a timeline for completion by potential participants. However, a twenty-day target was allocated because of the Christmas holiday before a second email was sent encouraging participation. The second email was sent out on January 7, 2020, requesting churches to participate in this critical study on

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[9] National Research Council et al., *Nonresponse in Social Science Surveys: A Research Agenda* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2013), 43.

[10] Yehuda Baruch and Brooks Holtom, "Survey Response Rate Levels and Trends in Organizational Research," *Human Relations* 61 (August 1, 2008): 1150, https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu /10.1177%2F0018726708094863.

discipleship. On January 22, 2020, every church yet to respond was telephoned to appeal for participation in the survey notifying the end-date for acceptance no later than February 16, 2020. The collection and recording of data commenced after the deadline for participation ended. Ten days were reserved for the website research; however, this process took only four days to chart all relevant information. A printout of the graphs representing all questions was created for this study's final data analysis segment. The investigative data collection and analysis comparison was completed on March 1, 2020.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

The first email was sent to the thirty-three churches on December 18, 2019. The email identified the author as a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University conducting research as part of a Doctor of Ministry degree. The email included an explanation for this study to examine contemporary discipleship models and compare and contrast them with twelve discipleship "best practices" exemplified by the Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul in the first-century model. The body of the email contained the IRB-approved recruitment letter (Appendix 1), complete with additional background information on the study and the contact information of the IRB, mentoring professor, and this researcher.

The first page of the survey included the consent form requiring a checkbox to affirm approval and willingness to answer all of the survey questions. The form asserts confidentially for those participating in the study. The survey features thirty-two questions examining the inclusion, importance, and depth of twelve identified "best practices" of the first-century model compared to their current discipleship practices. Additional instructions require the participants for this project to be pastors, elders, deacons, church staff, ministry leaders, or any person sanctioned by the church to be a representative with proficient knowledge of the church's

discipleship process. The survey was hyper-linked into the email, allowing participants to click on the link to the first page of the survey (Appendix 2). The participant then follows the instructions answering all thirty-two questions to complete the survey. Although there was no monetary compensation for participation in this study, the self-examination of the participant's current discipleship practices measured by the results helped them determine whether their current discipleship process was adequate regarding the spiritual maturation of their congregations and could become an incentive for change and revival.

The reason for making the survey easily accessible through a weblink was in the hope of encouraging full participation from all churches invited to partake in this project. Moreover, this method was selected to best access the sizable number of churches assuming that most would have access to technology. However, because of the potential of churches without internet access, an alternative plan was created. The alternative plan for churches without internet access would be to send printed copies of the recruitment letter, survey, and a pre-paid self-addressed envelope to churches requesting the material to participate.

There was no timeline given for completion in the first email; however, twenty days were assigned in the activity log due to the Christmas holiday season. There were no responses within the first seven days, and during the celebration of Christmas, no responses were expected. On the tenth day after sending the initial email, the survey software sent an alert notifying the first completed response was received and recorded. At the end of the allotted twenty days, an additional church completed the survey bringing the total number of completed surveys to 2 in 20 days. It was possible to determine which church responded by a corresponding email address; however, it was impossible to know the church's identity that completed the survey, thus

maintaining this project's confidentiality. The two churches that responded were removed from any future contact.

On January 7, 2020, the second email was sent to all of the non-responding churches. It was anticipated that those churches that did not respond to the initial email would take the time to participate in the study after receiving the second email. An additional postscript was added with information concerning this researcher's profound desire to understand the state of local discipleship better. The target date for return was specified for those participants to respond within fifteen days by January 22, 2020. Within this period of fifteen days, an additional six churches completed the survey totaling eight churches in thirty-five days. The participating churches were identified by email and removed from future recruitment activities. According to the second email communication, the time limit for completing the survey passed, advancing to the next step in the process. This step was to personally call churches that had not responded over the telephone to solicit additional church participation.

On January 22, 2020, phone calls were made to the first five out of twenty-five churches on the non-response list. Verbal contact was made with a representative from each of the five churches. The five contacts advised that they were administrative help only but assured that they would pass on this information to their leadership. Moreover, all of them said they would communicate either way, whether someone from the church participated in the survey or not. All representatives were asked to give a response by the deadline of February 16, 2020. Moments after the phone calls were completed on January 22, and an additional church completed the survey. Additionally, a second survey was completed before the following phone calls were conducted on January 27, 2020. These two churches that completed surveys were placed on the inactive participation list with no future correspondence needed.

On January 27, 2020, another five churches were contacted over the telephone regarding survey participation. One church representative, the lead pastor, apologized for not completing the survey promptly after receiving the initial emails and promised to complete it soon after hanging up. Shortly after talking with this pastor, another response was received, notifying of another completed survey. The remaining four church representatives assured they would consider participation and agreed to notify whether they would participate or not.

On January 29, 2020, five more non-responding churches were telephoned, and verbal contact was made with four more church representatives. Each of the four representatives assured that they would pass on the information to church leadership and notify of their decision whether to participate. One of the churches was telephoned three times over three days at varying times to contact a representative. A recorded message was left on the final attempt asking for a representative to return the call.

A representative of the church received the message, and within an hour, called to say he would complete the survey immediately. Soon after the phone call, an additional survey was completed. Over the next few days, two more churches completed the survey, which brought the total church participation to fourteen. After these surveys were completed, emails were received notifying that additional completed surveys were recorded. After notification, these participating churches were placed on the inactive list, and no further communication was necessary.

On February 4, 2020, five more churches were called, and a representative from each church was contacted. Two church representatives expressed an unwillingness to participate, stating that their churches were small in size, and they were only concentrating on worship services right now. Another church staff member indicated that his church was shorthanded and

had no one to complete the survey. The final two churches contacted assured they would pass on the information to the appropriate leader to decide whether to participate.

On February 10, 2020, the final five churches were contacted and asked to participate in this study. All five representatives advised that they would personally contact the appropriate church leadership members and respond by the February 16th deadline. Before the deadline, seven churches emailed advising that their discipleship process did not address most of the survey questions. These representatives were asked to answer the questions to the best of their abilities; however, they still preferred not to participate. Preceding the end of the deadline, one more church completed the survey. Overall, the total number of churches that participated was fifteen out of the thirty-three. A total of eight churches never responded after all of the attempted correspondences, and no more surveys were completed or recorded for this project.

On February 16, 2020, at 5:00 PM Mountain Time, fifteen churches out of thirty-three, or 46%, participated in this project's survey. The survey was created and recorded on Google Forms survey software. The log in information for this software was directed through a personal Gmail account and was password-protected so that no one other than this author has access. This procedure was a requirement to keep the survey's confidentiality as described in the recruitment letter approved by the IRB.
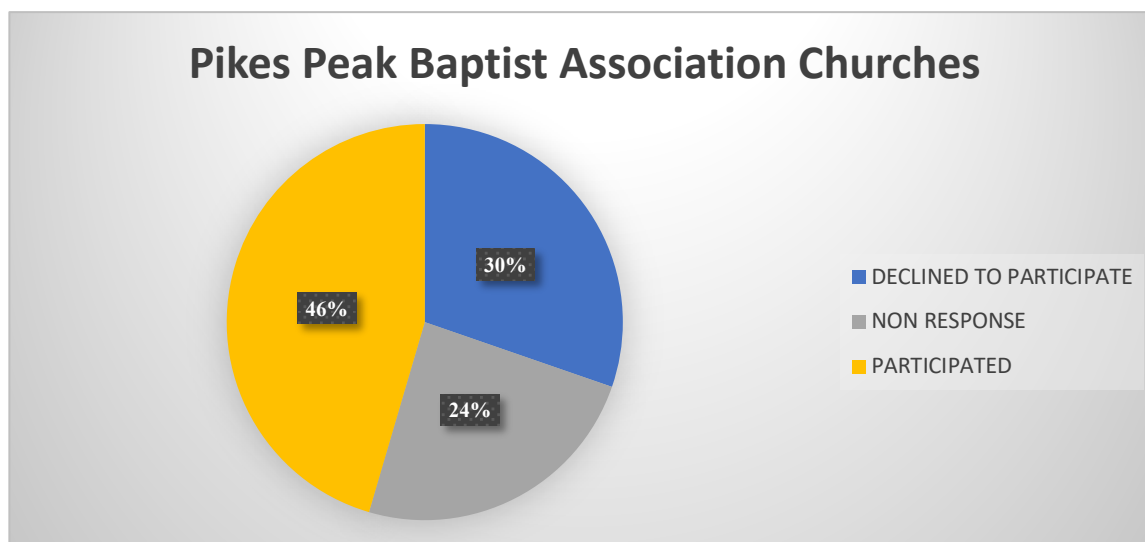
Figure 1. Pikes Peak Baptist Association Churches

The graph in Figure 1 illustrates that 46% of the participants contacted completed the survey before the deadline for this study. 30% of the churches contacted declined to participate in the study for various reasons. The final 24% of the PPBA churches never responded or completed the survey before the deadline. All PPBA churches in this study were emailed twice, and twenty-five churches were personally contacted over the telephone.

The last research activity was to search every church website in the PPBA for evidence that corroborated or contradicted the survey findings. Church websites are generally open to the public, and information about its activities is accessible by anyone with a computer and internet connectivity. Each site was carefully examined except the password-protected pages for members only. This research component considered the various predetermined themes related to the twelve "best practices" of the first-century discipleship model. The website analysis looked for the presence of the 12 "best practices" in the ministries in the, churches but it did not assess the depth at which they are being utilized.

Thirty-three websites were studied over four days, beginning on February 24, 2020, and ending on February 28, 2020. A chart was composed to log specific information found for each

of the twelve "best practices" asked in the survey. The statistical information was evaluated and documented on the chart to be compared with the survey data. The analysis's results were then recorded and discussed in detail in the fourth chapter of this study.

<div align="center">Organization of the Data Collected</div>

The survey software systematically collected the answers to the questions and graphed them according to the number of church responses per specific question. The survey software settings were constructed so that every question had to be answered before the participants could move on to the next question. An email was sent from the software notifying each time a survey had been completed. Frequent checkups were done after survey completion alerts were received to ensure all of the data was being appropriately tabulated and saved. Each time a new response was received, they were manually saved on the computer as a PDF file. The file was updated and saved to a secondary external memory flash drive for duplication in case of a failure in one of the memory sources.

The fifteen church surveys completed for this project were printed out, saved on the computer hard drive and an external memory drive. Google Forms created the graphs from the results of the multiple-choice and the Likert scale questions. The open-ended questions listed fifteen responses after each question. The open-ended questions ranged from a phrase, sentence, or paragraph, and a unit of meaningful analysis was essential; therefore, they were categorized according to similar themes.[11] The number of groups was restricted to five to alleviate excess

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[11] Richard W. Robins, R. Chris Fraley, and Robert F. Krueger, *Handbook of Research Methods in Personality Psychology* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2009), 300.

analyzable themes. The answers categorized by theme were then graphed, representing either percentages or binary numbers.

Qualitative Theory

Likert scale questions were presented to categorize levels of importance of distinctive features of discipleship to support why local churches implemented these "best practices" or not. These types of questions are typically used in a quantitative approach to research; however, they are also used in studies that combine quantitative and qualitative measures.[12] The majority of the questionnaire questions were closed-ended questions where the data collected can be used for a quantitative approach to this study.

Subsequently, some open-ended questions were used to allow participants to explain their thoughts on how their process of accomplishing a specific characteristic of discipleship was currently being conducted. Factually, questionnaires that rely heavily on open-ended questions have a weaker response rate, possibly due to them having to answer questions regarding perceived unacceptable behavior.[13] However, all answers were completely confidential in anticipation of receiving an honest and genuine answer from the participant.

The Hawthorne effect prompts the researcher to consider that many participants will disguise their actions and feelings because they do not want to answer an outsider's questions, knowing they may be deficient in any ministry area by adapting to fit the behavior they believe the researcher wants.[14] The simple clarification to confirm this phenomenon was to use questions

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[12] Allen Rubin and Earl R. Babbie, *Essential Research Methods for Social Work* (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2009), 102.

[13] David Royse, *Research Methods in Social Work* (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2007), 183.

[14] Geoff Payne and Judy Payne, *Key Concepts in Social Research* (New York, NY: SAGE, 2004), 109.

that established the importance of a specific principle, which could then be verified by the number of churches that implement that principle. One example is checking the importance of developing future leaders with a Likert scale question and then following up with a question asking if the church provides training to develop future ministry leaders. The responses charted should line up with similar amounts of churches believing in its importance. This principle is then confirmed by the number of churches that implemented this principle.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

The figures recorded in this study were compared along specified parameters to show varying alignment or deficiencies. The survey was managed using a weblink that was only given to those churches selected to participate in this study. All of the questions required an answer before going on to the next question; therefore, a completed survey was the only one recognized. There were no partial survey completion attempts made by any church during this phase of the project.

The closed-end questions were automatically data coded by the software to show the numerical findings of each question. Additionally, the Likert scale questions had similar descriptive statistics by charting the number or percentages of differing levels of importance to specific questions. The open-ended questions were categorized by theme and then triangulated into graphs for comparison.[15] The results' organization included the multiple-choice questions, which gave participants answers to choose from that best identified their process with a particular discipleship characteristic. These variables were categorized into statistical graphs

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[15] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 73.

necessary for quantitative analysis of the local church discipleship methods incorporating elements aligned with the biblical pattern.[16] The variables were then linked together to form the hypothesis that was the focus of this study.[17]

The twelve identified "best practices" of the first-century model were all implemented as the example set by the Lord Jesus with the disciples and Paul, providing the baseline data point for this project. This arguably was the biblical pattern for the discipleship model, and the analysis comparison between contemporary models should be driven by a parallel to the baseline of each characteristic. The comparison would argue that it would have to align with all twelve "best practices" for a church to align with the biblical model completely. Comparing the data points shows alignment as well as deficiency percentages present in the local church model. This analysis could be reproduced at every church level to ascertain how similar their process is to the biblical model.

The analysis results help illuminate the condition of church-directed discipleship compared to the biblical model and the church's depth as an institution for making disciples in fulfillment of the "Great Commission." This premise is supported by the number of churches that acknowledge intentional discipleship but lack a robust process based on low median data points because of the absence of a multiplicity of "best practices" present to encourage growth. The breakdown of the answers to the open-ended questions were categorized according to the themes they symbolize. The results were compared to the "best practices" of the first-century model. Not every response from the churches that participated fulfilled the "best practices"

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[16] David S. Moore, William I. Notz, and Michael A. Fligner, *The Basic Practice of Statistics* (New York, NY: Macmillan Higher Education, 2015), 35.

[17] Julia Brannen, ed., *Mixing Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Research* (New York, NY: Ashgate Publishers, 1992), 4.

presented in the original pattern. The discrepancies were noted and clarified in the next chapter. An example of this would be a church responding in alignment to the characteristic of one-on-one guidance as prayer. Although one could argue that this is one-to-one with God in prayer, it does not match the original model's definition. In the original model, there was a person-to-person relationship where the student replicated the teachers' actions as their model.

Lastly, Jesus and Paul exemplified models of discipleship that encompassed a deliberate curriculum. Analyzing the data for this project concerning questions that participants attempt to express their interpretation of satisfying the question will be subjected to these criteria. Is the answer more random concerning achievement rather than being organized to accomplish the goal? The example: Asking accurately how one's church accomplishes a particular characteristic, the answer is by leading the Spirit. It is acknowledged that the Spirit should lead everything in a Christians' life, but this does not define a specific prospectus on how it is accomplished; therefore, the answer is equivalent to not being addressed by their process.

Validity and Reliability

The survey instructions provided restrictions allowing only those with a strong familiarity with the church's discipleship process to complete the survey. Those participating in the survey must have direct knowledge concerning their church's discipleship methodology and could answer according to current practices. Recognized is that the survey assessment is self-reflective, so each individual may score himself higher or lower than what is indeed occurring. However, this phenomenon occurs generally in questions inquiring about levels of participation or importance. Since most survey questions focus on the existence of specific "best practices" present in current church discipleship methods, it allowed for a more straightforward answer. The number of churches examined combined with responses for each characteristic's existence

assisted in corroborating the comprehensiveness of the churches surveyed. Finally, having control and consistency over survey completion, environment, and questions enhanced the research method's validity and reliability.[18]

The supplemental investigation of the websites improved the dependability of the research process. The confidentiality of this project made it impossible to know which participants gave which answers. Moreover, the number of participating churches in the survey was less than half of the churches with websites on the internet. However, this supplemental investigative procedure helped expose any significant discrepancies in the statistical data. An example of this was to compare the results of those churches that answered that discipleship is in their church mission statement with the website investigative results of how many churches actually included discipleship in their mission statement. This additional process of identifying discrepancies added to the reliability of this research approach.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the intervention design and its implementation in the pursuit of discovering the extensiveness of local church discipleship practices. A synopsis of the details involving the people, instruments, data collection, analysis, and researcher's role is documented in this section of the study. Also, an itemized depiction of the research's progression is detailed for easy replication of this study. The analysis results and how the local churches' discipleship processes compare to the first century's comprehensive method will be illustrated in the following chapter.

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[18] Isadore Newman, Carolyn R. Benz, and Professor Carolyn S. Ridenour, *Qualitative-Quantitative Research Methodology: Exploring the Interactive Continuum* (Carbondale, IL: SIU Press, 1998), 34.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The fourth chapter of this thesis project includes all of the findings extracted from the surveys from Pike Peak Baptist Association affiliated churches located on Southern Colorado's western slope. The results from examining local contemporary church discipleship and twelve identified "best practices" present in the comprehensive biblical model provide a better understanding of whether local PPBA churches are doing enough concerning the spiritual maturation of their congregations. It is unreasonable to suppose that every church will recognize its potential deficiency based on differing philosophical priorities regarding church mission. However, a reasonable objective is to identify those areas not aligned with the biblical pattern so that a rectifying adjustment can be directed by leadership if needed.

After the findings, this project expects to propose a reasonable solution that could alter the church's steady decline. It is the prevailing attitude for man to believe that all things can be understood and improvements to every process are possible despite having limited minds. Christians have united with the culture in thought, where innovation allures minds away from the pattern designed from the infinite intellect of God.[1] The discipleship model exemplified by Jesus and Paul is an effective pattern to follow, and discipleship processes incorporating several or all of the twelve identified "best practices" have a healthier chance for achievement.

It is assumed that most churches will have some of the twelve "best practices" present; however, the lack of a robust discipleship model suggests that churches are not resolute in generating a comprehensive plan for discipleship. Implementing a model paralleling the original pattern of discipleship is challenging in the contemporary American individualistic culture. The

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[1] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 431; Isaiah 55:8-9.

sacrifice of the time needed to grow more like Christ is difficult with such busy schedules.

Nonetheless, Christ must be the central focus in life if one is to love and obey his

commandments. Hence, no expense is too high for the excellence of knowing Christ Jesus the

Lord.[2]

First Century Discipleship Comparison Survey

Question 1:

Does your church have an intentional discipleship process available to all members of the congregation?

A designed disciple model is deliberate in the development of church members' spiritual

growth. The original model was the one designed and exemplified by Jesus. "Jesus knew the best

way to train his disciples, first to model his life before them and second to send them out to do it

for themselves. Jesus was his own school and curriculum. Furthermore, the apostle Paul followed

comparable "best practices" as he imitated Christ's discipleship method."[3] Every church

fulfilling the "Great Commission" should have an intentional discipleship process, especially

churches that allege to subscribe to discipleship as part of their missional statement. However,

fifty-three percent of the churches who participated in the survey answered that they did not have

an intentional discipleship process.

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[2] John 14:15; Philippians 3:8.

[3] David E. Garland, MarFurthermore, Strauss, and Walter W. Wessel, *The Mark Commentary Collection: An All-In-One Commentary Collection for Studying the Book of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 222.

Does your church have an intentional discipleship process available to all members of the congregation?
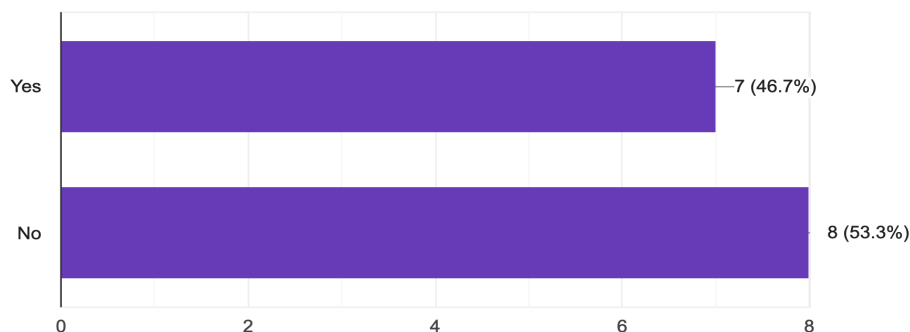
15 responses

Figure 2. Intentional Discipleship Process

Seven churches described their discipleship process as intentional; however, none of these churches implemented all twelve "best practices" of the first-century model. Out of the seven churches, 77% of the "best practices" were in their process, indicating that most "best practices" were present in less than half of the churches examined. This examination does not portray the level of use for each characteristic, only that the surveying source acknowledged each principle was present in their method.

Question 2:

Does your church's discipleship process, program, or methodology have any of the following: Check all that apply?

A manual or written guideline helps keep the consistency to both the teacher and student concerning timelines, curriculum, and lesson plans. It identifies the process's perimeters and can be an essential resource for church plants not familiar with the current discipleship process. Additionally, the guide can be updated regularly to accommodate any changes in implementing new discipleship principles and church size changes. Only 20%, or three out of the fifteen churches surveyed utilized this supportive tool in the discipleship process.

Does your church's discipleship process, program, or methodology have any of the following: Check all that apply?

15 responses

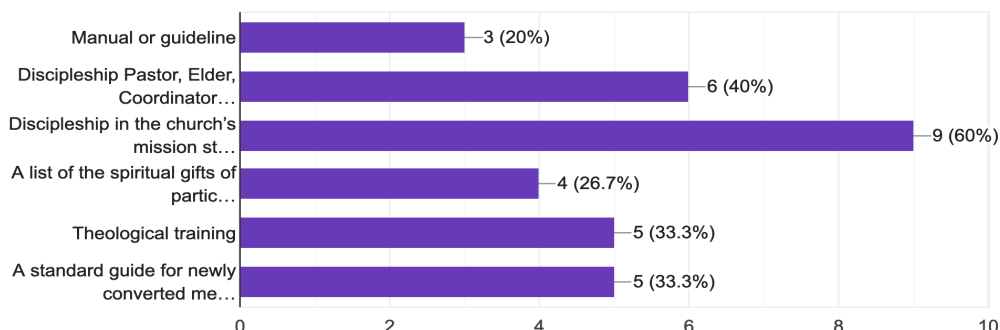| Category	Value
Manual or guideline	3 (20%)
Discipleship Pastor, Elder, Coordinator…	6 (40%)
Discipleship in the church's mission st…	9 (60%)
A list of the spiritual gifts of partic…	4 (26.7%)
Theological training	5 (33.3%)
A standard guide for newly converted me…	5 (33.3%)

Figure 3. Discipleship Process Characteristics

Every true Christian is promised at least one spiritual gift helping to determine one's place in service.[4] How many church leaders know the spiritual gifting of their members? Leadership can determine their members' gifting through observation in smaller congregations; however, the larger churches may prove more challenging. Having a list of church members' spiritual gifts would prove useful for recruiting for service in particular ministry areas. It would also be beneficial for incoming leaders to access vital church information related to their congregation. Only four out of the fifteen churches maintain a list of the spiritual gifts of their members.

The importance of applying biblical knowledge in the way one lives overshadows the significance of just knowing.[5] Moreover, if one does not know God's word, then how they are to obey it? The Bible is clear that Christians should grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord at some time. A theological training component of discipleship is required, one that provides the

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[4] Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2009), 36.

[5] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 88.

material necessary to learn and understand God's innate teachings. Thirty-three percent of the churches provide theological training, and the same ratio offers a standard guide for newly converted congregants. Only six out of fifteen churches have a discipleship coordinator to oversee their discipleship process. Lastly, every Christian church is responsible for making disciples. Nine out of the fifteen churches surveyed identify discipleship in their church mission statement even though Jesus gave the same mission to every follower to go and make disciples.[6]

Question 3:

If a member requests to be discipled by the church, what would be the process for developing them towards Christian maturation?

One of the possible reasons for slow or stagnant growth is that church leaders lack a strategy. In other words, they know the mission but do not have any specific plan in place to accomplish it. The absence of a strategy is why so many churches have become good at individual discipleship components but not discipleship as a whole.[7] One illustration is the response churches have for members asking to be discipled. Most church activities are geared towards groups rather than the individual, and the need for change in this philosophy can be positive.[8]

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[6] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 41.

[7] Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 156.

[8] Bill Hull, *DiscipleMaking Church, The: Leading a Body of Believers on the Journey of Faith*, Updated ed. edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 13.
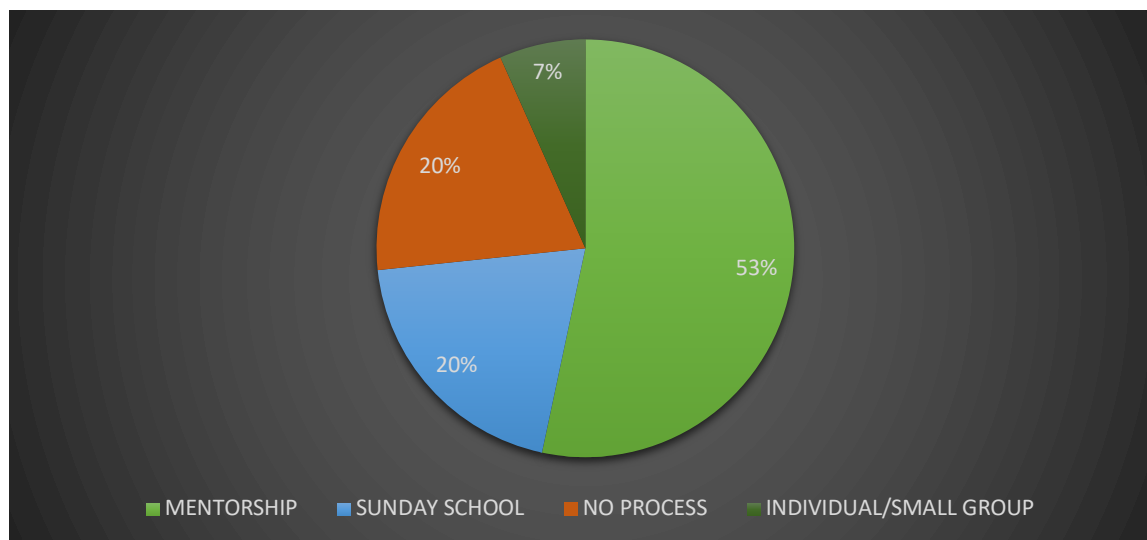
Figure 4. Christian Maturation

      Fifty-three percent of the churches surveyed practiced some form of apprenticeship concerning the spiritual maturation of those asked to be discipled. Twenty percent of the churches either placed them in Sunday School or had nothing currently in place for a church member desiring to grow spiritually. One church specified that they have a curriculum for disciple-makers that can be taught individually or in a small group. Figure 4 shows that most churches surveyed have something in place to address members desiring to grow to spiritual maturity.

1. **Commitment to a Teacher**

Question 4:

Does your church discipleship model require each participant to commit to a single teacher?

      The apostle Paul said to imitate him as he imitated Christ beginning the transformational relationship process of submitting to one teacher.[9] Ultimately, the ending result is to look more

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[9] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 63.

like Jesus Christ; however, the teacher's responsibility is to be the example of Christ to those committed to his teaching. The commitment is a personal and intimate relationship between teacher and pupil in the mutual submission to Christ, where the identified characteristics can be observed. Roughly eighty-six percent of the churches surveyed do not commit to one teacher in their discipleship process.

Does your church discipleship model require each participant to commit to a single teacher?
15 responses
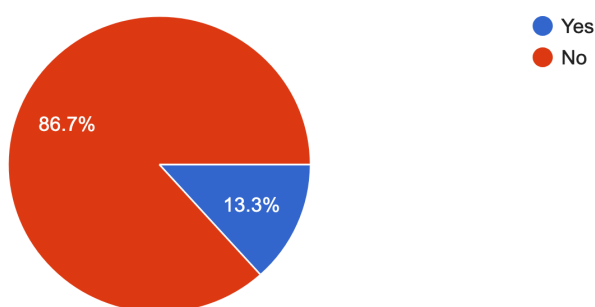
Figure 5. A Single Teacher

A supplemental question depicted in Figure 6 was used to establish how many teachers were used if churches were not committing to a single teacher in their methodology. The results show that over fifty percent of the churches surveyed use two to three teachers in their discipleship model, and no churches use more than five.

Question 5:

How many teachers will a participant encounter over a one-year period in your church discipleship model?

How many teachers will a participant encounter over a one-year period in your church discipleship model?
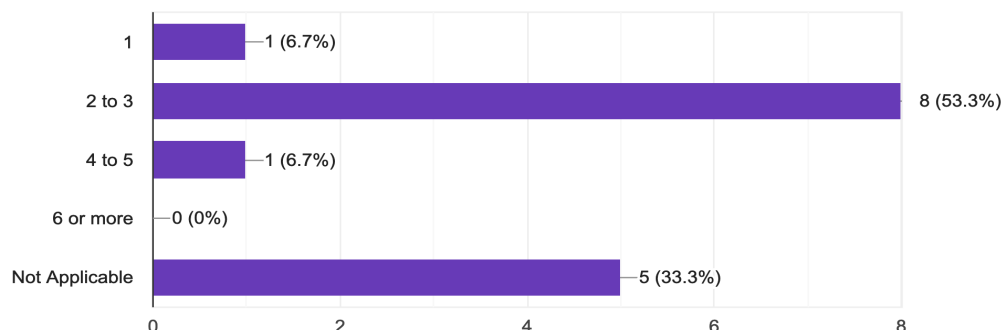
15 responses

Figure 6. The Number of Discipleship Teachers

Question 6:

Who typically teaches in your church's discipleship model (e.g., pastors, elders, ministry leaders, laity)?

In the present church culture, there is an inequality between church leadership and laity in ministry. The need to declare a two-class system of ministry obsolete is necessary for bridging that gap between clergy and laity to generate full church participation.[10] The answer to the question, who teaches the church's discipleship process, should include everyone in the body of Christ since it is a command from the Lord Jesus. After coding, the results identified sixty percent of the churches surveyed acknowledged all members' potential to teach discipleship.

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[10] "Laypeople and the Mission of God – Killing the Clergy/Laity Caste System," n.d., accessed February 17, 2020, https://edstetzer.com/2018/07/laypeople-and-the-mission-of-god-killing-the-clergy-laity-caste-system/.
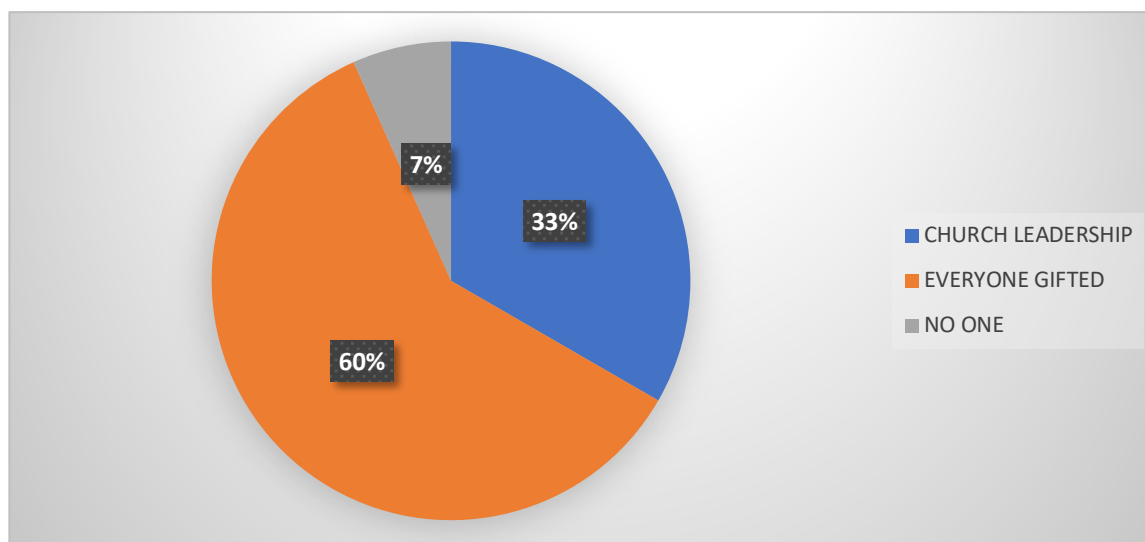
Figure 7. Discipleship Teachers

2. Regular Meetings

Question 7:

How frequently do your church's discipleship participants meet?

The regularity of meetings is an essential characteristic of the first-century model that frequently occurred for three years. The more a group meets, the more can be communicated, and the biblical principles applied to life and ministry. Over forty-six percent of the churches surveyed meet once a month, with twenty percent meeting more than four times a month. The suggestion of daily meetings may seem unrealistic in today's busy culture; nevertheless, getting together as a discipleship group frequently and at regular intervals should be the target.

How frequently does your church's discipleship participants meet?

15 responses

Once a month
Twice a month
Three times a month
Four times a month
More than four times a month

46.7% 20% 13.3% 13.3%
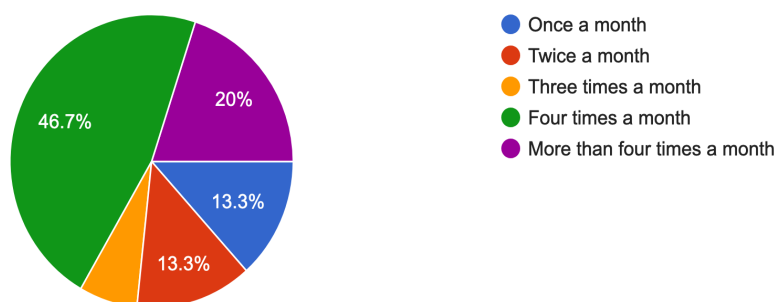
Figure 8. Regular Meetings

3. Individual Mentoring

Question 8:

Does your discipleship model incorporate individual mentoring?

Sixty percent of the churches surveyed incorporate individual mentoring as part of their discipleship process. The remaining forty percent answered that they did not utilize mentoring in their process.

Does your discipleship model incorporate individual mentoring?

15 responses

Yes
No

40% 60%

Figure 9. Individual Mentoring

Question 9:

Does your church discipleship model use another form of one-on-one guidance?

Churches surveyed were asked a supplemental question if they did not offer one-on-one mentoring. This question asked if they utilized another form of one-on-one guidance. Two churches stated they use a pastor-led type of one-on-one support, whereas another church uses the standard process of coachin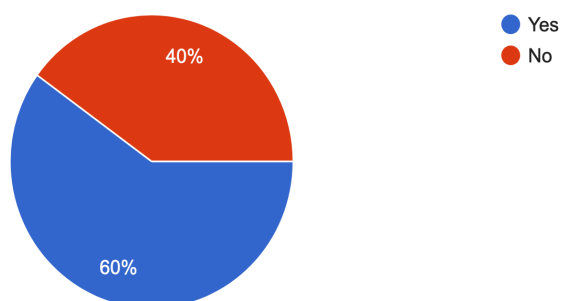g as a part of their methodology. Two additional churches responded with prayer discipleship as a form of mentoring and typed "google it" in their response for details regarding this method. However, no specific one-on-one methodology under the title prayer discipleship was found.
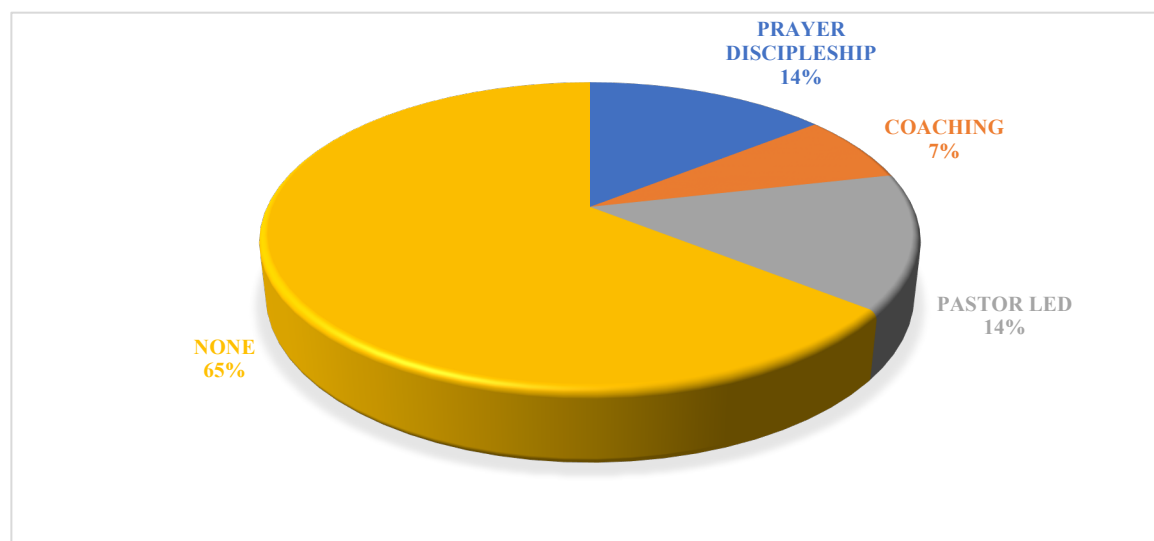
Figure 10. Other One-on-One Guidance

4. Teaching to Observe all that He Commanded

Question 10:

Are participants required to do any of the following? Check all the Apply.

The first part of the "Great Commission" is to make disciples of all nations. However, the part of the command to teach those discipled to obey all that Jesus commanded is often overlooked. One can only know what Jesus commanded through the study of the Scriptures.

Eighty percent of the churches surveyed meditate on Scripture, and slightly over fifty-three

percent actively discipline themselves to memorize God's word. An equal response of forty

percent of the churches teaches their members to know all Jesus commanded, obey all Jesus

commanded, and actively participate in discipling or being discipled themselves.

Are participants required to do any of the following? Check all that apply.
15 responses

Memorize scripture	8 (53.3%)
Meditate on Scripture	12 (80%)
Know all Jesus commanded	6 (40%)
Obey all Jesus commanded	6 (40%)
Actively disciple and be discipled	6 (40%)

0.0   2.5   5.0   7.5   10.0   12.5
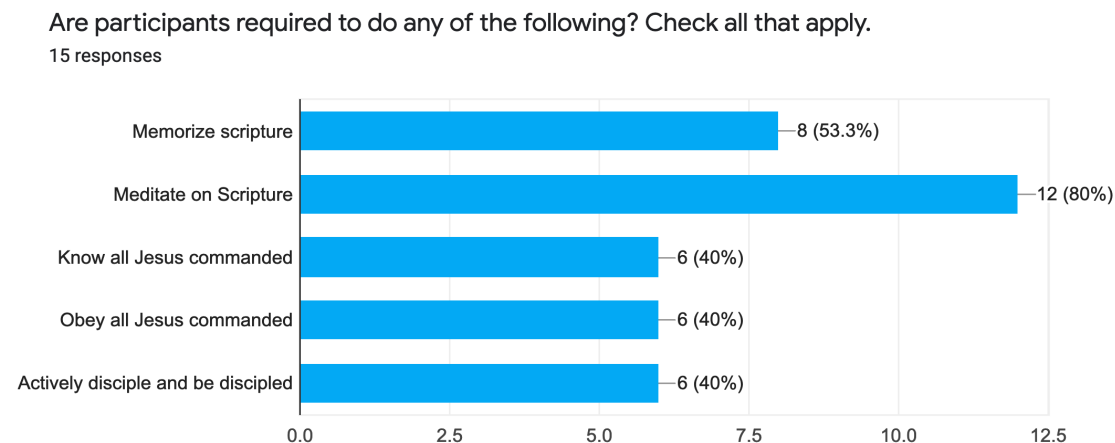
Figure 11. Disciplines

Question 11:

Does your discipleship model have a written list of Jesus' commands to follow?

Only one church out of the fifteen surveyed had a written list of Jesus' commands to

assist members in their obedience to his instruction. Although it is not crucial that any

discipleship process have a written list, it is beneficial to know all that Jesus commanded.[11] Jesus

knew his people well and that they were easily distracted. It was important that they remembered

his words; therefore, they were written down in the Gospels. Studies have shown that retention

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[11] Matthew 28:20.

improves with increased rehearsal.[12] Creating a list and continuously going over it makes it more

likely to memorize what is on the list.

Does your discipleship model have a written list of Jesus' commands to follow?
15 responses
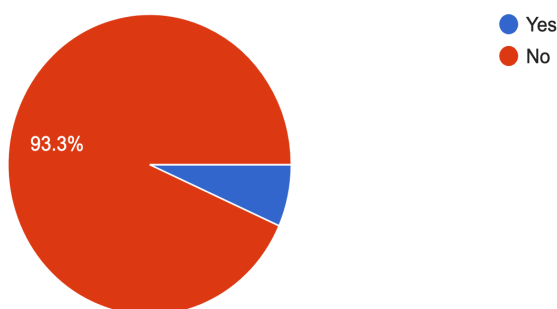
Figure 12. List of Jesus Commands

Question 12:

How does your church model accomplish this discipleship principle?

Forty-seven percent of the churches surveyed leave the teaching to obey Jesus'

commands to the individual in personal study or life application. Thirty-three percent have

nothing in place to teach their membership the critical element of following the Master. Only

thirteen percent have a church-led training process, and one church teaches obedience to the

commands of Jesus through discipleship.

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[12] Wayne Weiten, *Psychology: Themes and Variations: Themes And Variations* (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2007), 291.
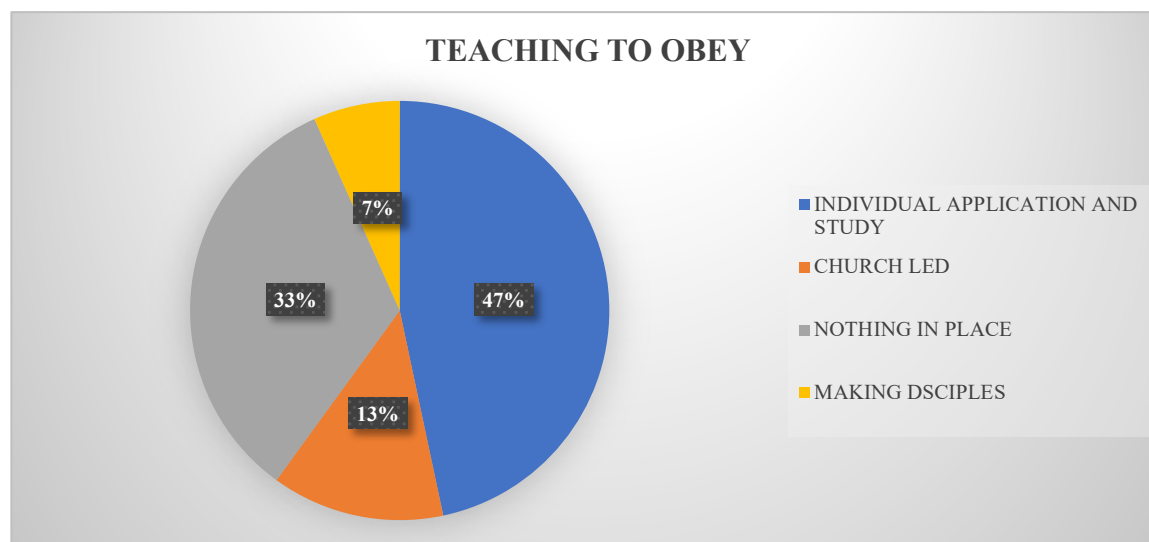
Figure 13. Teaching to Obey

5. Doing Ministry Together

Question 13:

Do your discipleship participants actively partake in ministry together?

Disciples of Jesus Christ were sent out to do ministry together in the gospels, and the same is true for disciples today to carry on with his mission. Seventy-three percent of the churches surveyed answered that those being discipled participate in some form of ministry together to further the kingdom. The question was not specific to any particular ministry other than activities carried out to spread the faith. Some additional methods of serving together are contained in the next question.

Do your discipleship participants actively partake in ministry together?
15 responses
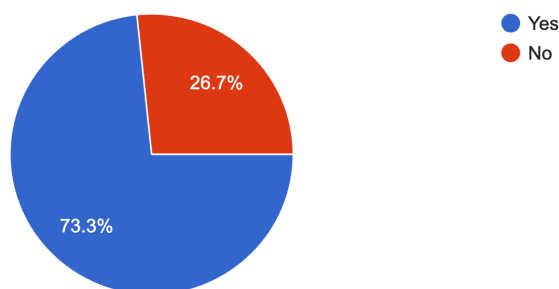
Figure 14. Doing Ministry Together

Question 14:

How do your discipleship participants share the gospel, serve in community outreach, go on mission trips together, or other ministries where they can apply the biblical principles learned through your church's discipleship process?

The majority of the churches participating in this study afford their discipleship members opportunities to apply biblical principles learned, for instance, by sharing the gospel and being involved in missions. Moreover, four churches support members who have taken this characteristic of discipleship upon themselves instead of having a church-led ministry available to serve the community and world.
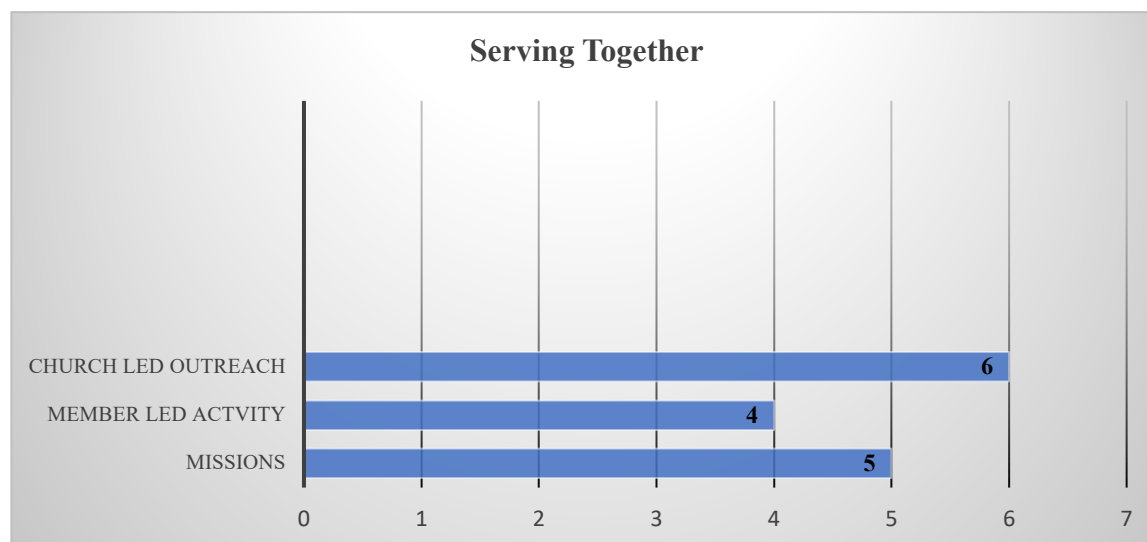
Figure 15. Serving Together

6. Imitate Jesus' Life and Character

Question 15:

Using a scale of 0 = Not at all important to 5 = Very important, please rate the following aspect of discipleship being the primary mission of the church?

There are differing arguments as to what the church's mission encompasses, but the church's primary mission is discipleship, and the goal is Christlikeness[13] Six churches answered that this characteristic is very important, and two churches believed it was important. Furthermore, four churches felt this characteristic was moderately important, with the final three churches responded that discipleship was slightly important as the church's primary mission.

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[13] Lucas V. Woodford, *Great Commission, Great Confusion, or Great Confession?: The Mission of the Holy Christian Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 3.

Using a scale of 0= Not at all important to 5= Very important, please rate the following aspect of discipleship being the primary mission of the church?
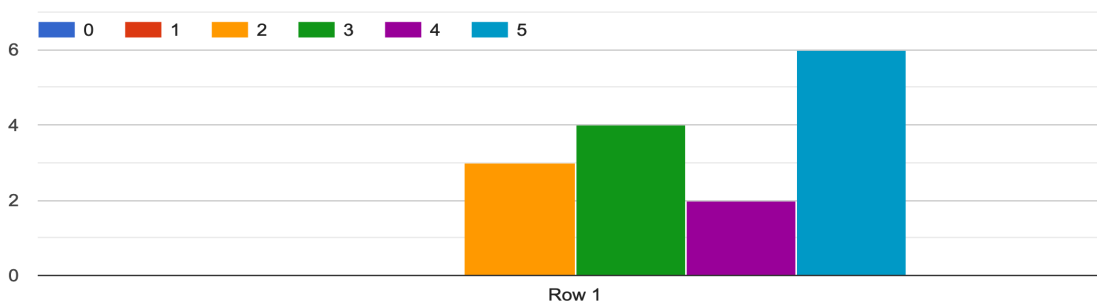
Figure 16. Primary Mission

Question 16:

Looking more like Jesus by imitating His life and character is the most important goal of discipleship?

The goal of every Christian is to be conformed to the image of Christ, thus becoming more and more like him in life and character.[14] Seven of the churches surveyed strongly agree with this, and four churches agree (see figure 17 below). Moreover, three churches were neutral, and one church strongly disagreed. A goal must not be vague, with no reliable way of determining progress. The target set for discipleship is a tangible ending result of continuous growth toward Christlikeness, as depicted in Matthew's tenth chapter.

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[14] Johnny Hunt, *Anchored in Jesus: Holding on to Truth in a Drifting World* (Irvine, CA: Harvest House Publishers, 2020), 184.

Looking more like Jesus by imitating His life and character is the most important goal of discipleship?
15 responses
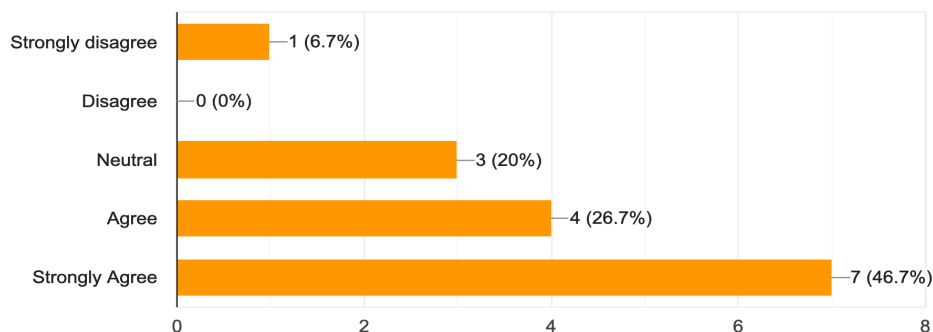
Figure 17. Looking Like Jesus

7. Designed Expansion

Question 17:

Does your discipleship model have a process for expanding the numbers of participants?

The discipleship process will expand in numerical growth if accomplished as initially designed. There is a multiplication progression of making disciples who make disciples building up leaders to go out and start new discipleship groups.[15] Sixty percent of churches surveyed responded that their discipleship method does not expand the number of participants. The likely outcome is a process that remains stagnate, with the same people never developing the leadership qualities needed to be sent out and begin a new discipleship group of their own.

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[15] Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 170.

Does your discipleship model have a process for expanding the numbers of participants?
15 responses
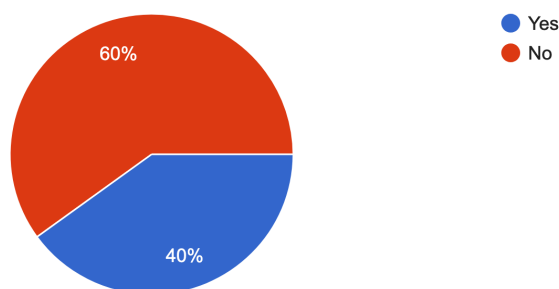
Figure 18. Expanding Numbers

Question 18:

An effective discipleship model will increase the growth of church membership?

The majority of the churches surveyed agree that an effective discipleship model will increase the church's growth. An additional five churches strongly agree, and four churches were neutral in their belief that an effective discipleship model will increase church membership. The consideration that most believe an effective model will increase growth is conflicting, considering over sixty percent does not have a process for expansion in place that will bear fruit.

An effective discipleship model will increase the growth of church membership.
15 responses
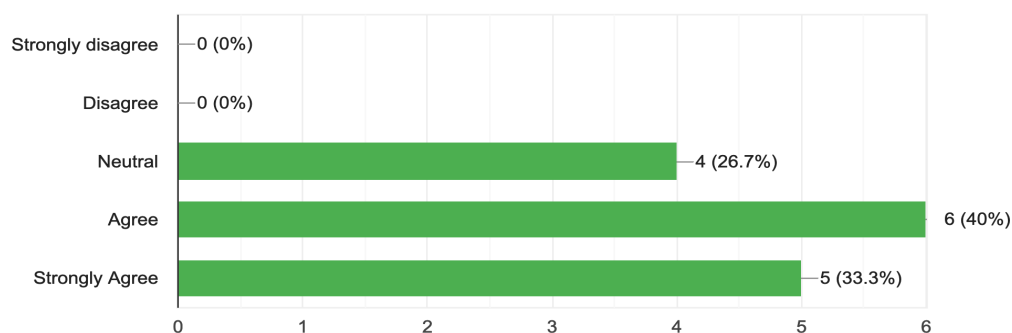
Figure 19. Growth Through Discipleship

Question 19:

How does your church increase the number of disciples in the congregation?

The formation of disciples is the only way the other acts of the commission, like evangelism, can fulfill their purpose.[16] Ten out of the fifteen churches plotted to use individual evangelism by its members to increase the church's numbers. However, increasing the number of church membership does not necessarily increase the number of disciples. Two churches responded that growth is accomplished through the discipleship process.
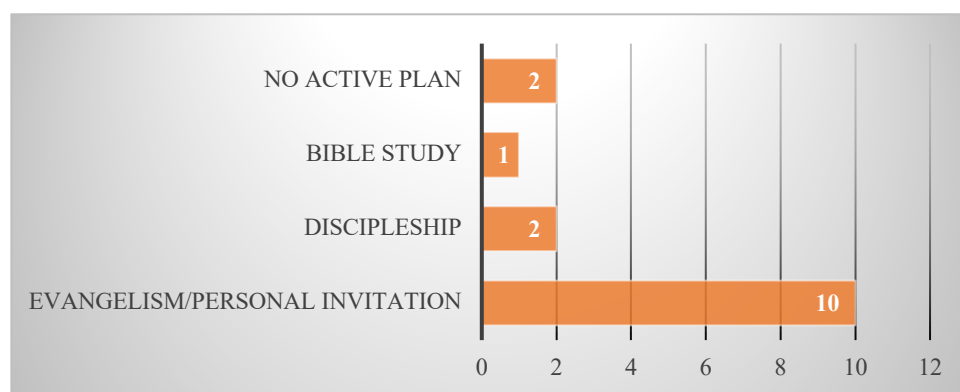
Figure 20. Church Disciple Growth Method

8. Leadership Development

Question 20:

Using a scale of 0 = Not at all important to 5 = Very important, please rate the significance your church discipleship model places on the development of future leaders.

The development of leaders is an integral part of discipleship, and an essential characteristic of being a disciple means being a leader. For a discipleship process to be effective, it must include the fundamental practice of developing leaders to continue the practice. Only three churches felt leadership development in the discipleship process was "very important," and

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[16] Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism, Second Edition, Abridged* (Ada, MI: Revell, 2010), 104.

the majority believe it "is important," while the remaining churches rate the significance of lesser value.

Using a scale of 0= Not at all important to 5= Very important, please rate the significance your church discipleship model places on the development of future leaders.
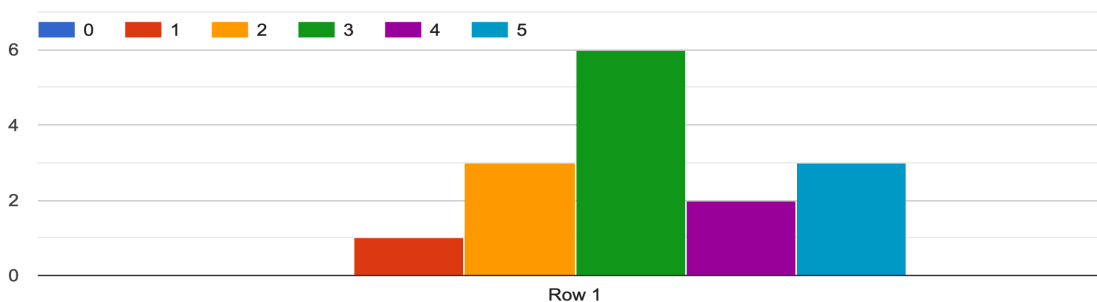
Figure 21. The Importance of Leadership Development

Question 21:

How does your church select potential leaders from membership? Check all that apply.

The selection of leaders must incorporate all of these prerequisites; however, the discipleship process is used to develop each member to take on the leadership role every disciple will eventually undertake. An indication that a church is weak in leadership development is one that has to immediately go outside the church to look for one to fill a leadership role. The majority of churches believe the selection of leadership is based on most of the qualifications; however, the responses were not unanimous that all applied.

How does your church select potential leaders from membership: Check all that apply?
15 responses

Based on talents and gifts	8 (53.3%)
Based on biblical qualifications	8 (53.3%)
Based on spiritual maturity	9 (60%)
From observing leadership traits in dis…	10 (66.7%)
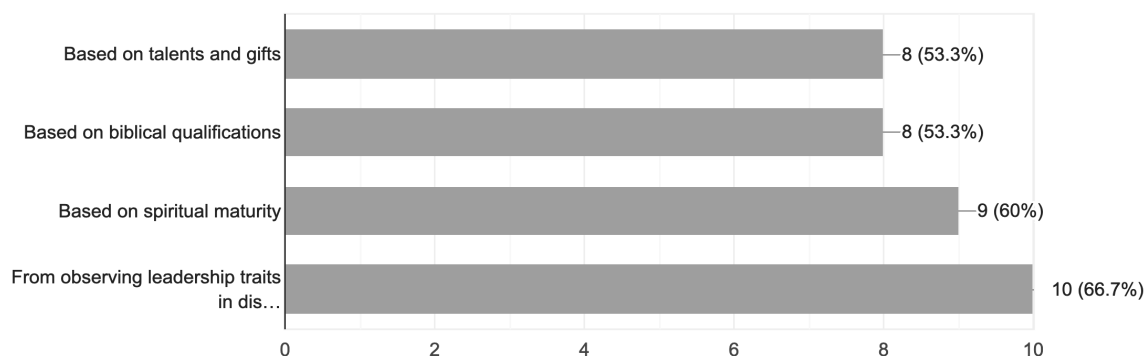
Figure 22. Leader Selection

Question 22:

Does your church provide training and resources for the development of future leaders?

"The church should be the community locus where leaders are formed."[17] Yet, a little over 66 % of the churches surveyed provide training for future Christian leaders. 33% of the churches surveyed left the development of their leaders to other outside sources.

Does your church provide training and resources for the development of future Christian leaders?
15 responses

● Yes
● No

33.3%

66.7%
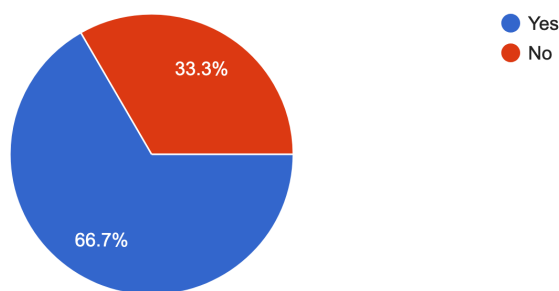
Figure 23. Training Future Leaders

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[17] Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 1.

Question 23:

How does your church develop and deploy future Christian leaders?

One church out of fifteen develops and deploys leaders through the discipleship process. Seven churches use some form of mentoring or on-the-job training, and four are developed within small groups. Still, three of the churches have nothing in place to accomplish the essential characteristic of leadership development.
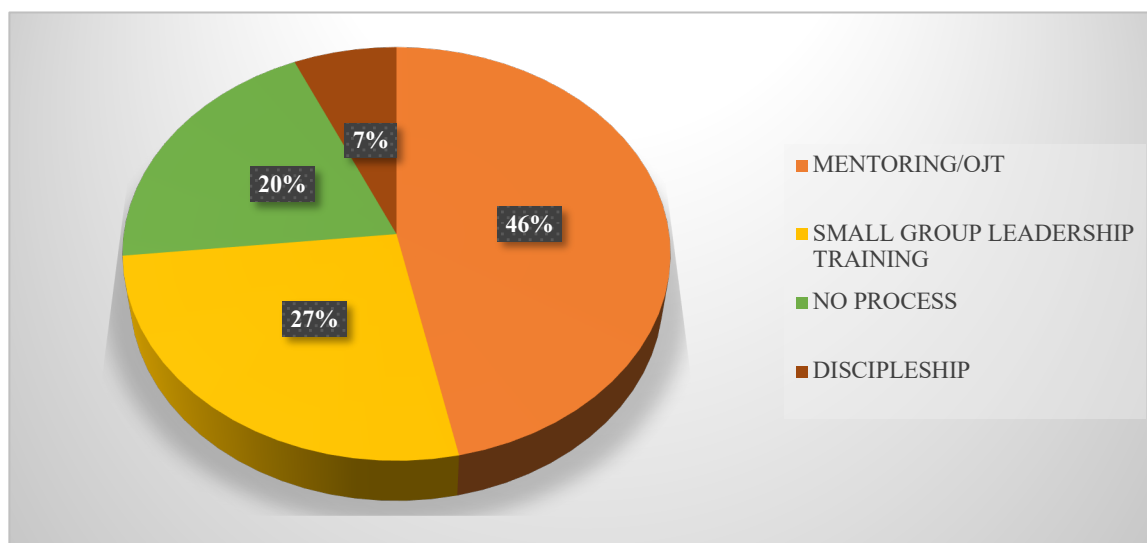
Figure 24. Develop and Deploy Future Leaders

9. Accountability

Question 24:

Does your church discipleship model incorporate mutual accountability among the participants to ensure members adhere to biblical principles and are held accountable to godly living and continued spiritual growth?

There is no hiding from the omniscient God concerning obedience to his commands.

Nevertheless, Christians are instructed to hold each other accountable in learning and devoting to

godly principles.[18] The covenant made is an essential element in keeping one's commitments to God and one another. Sixty percent ascribe to mutual accountability in their discipleship model, leaving forty percent unaccountable to each other in their obligations.

Does your church discipleship model incorporate mutual accountability among the participants to ensure members adhere to biblical doctrine and are...e to godly living and continued spiritual growth?
15 responses
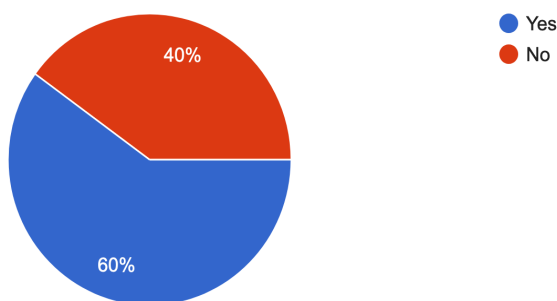
Figure 25. Mutual Accountability

10. Tangible Spiritual Growth

Question 25:

Does your church use an assessment tool to measure tangible spiritual growth toward Christian maturity?

There are many ways to assess church members' spiritual growth, including various assessment tools that can be found in books, and internet websites.[19] These tools have already

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[18] Proverbs 27:17.

[19] Todd M. Fink, *Biblical Discipleship Study Guide: Essential Components for Attaining Spiritual Maturity* (Chicago, IL: Selah Book Press, 2016), 277-346; Randy Frazee, *The Christian Life Profile Assessment Tool Workbook: Discovering the Quality of Your Relationships with God and Others in 30 Key Areas*. Workbook edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005; Roger Crew, "Spiritual Growth Assessment process" (n.d.):12. http://blog.lifeway.com/growing disciples/files/2013/08/Spiritual_Growth_Assessment.pdf; "Spiritual Maturity Assessment, " accessed April 14, 2021, https://fcci.org/assessments/spiritual maturity-assessment/.

been constructed, and one could easily find a tool that best represents their discipleship model.

None of the churches surveyed use this type of tool to measure the spiritual growth of their

members. The significance of knowing the spiritual level of members is charted in Figure 26.

The majority of churches examined do not believe it "is important" to know their church

membership's maturity levels.

Does your church use an assessment tool to measure tangible growth toward Christian maturity?
15 responses
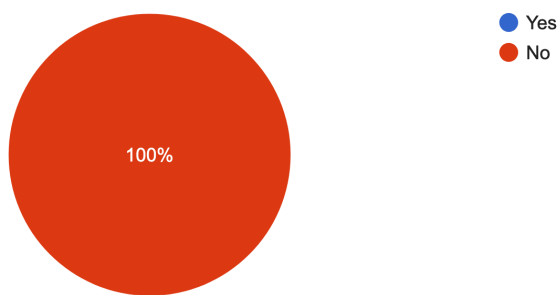
Figure 26. Maturity Assessment Tool

Question 26:

Using a scale of 0 = Not at all important to 5 = Very important, please rate the importance of knowing the maturity level of every church member.

Using a scale of 0= Not at all important to 5= Very important, please rate the importance of knowing the maturity level of every church member.
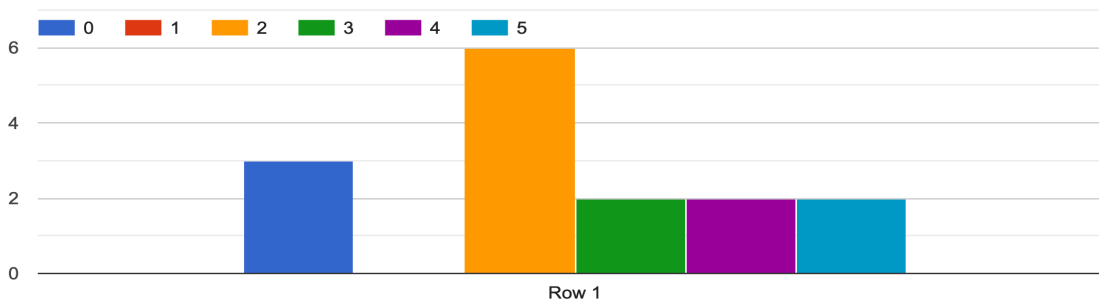
Figure 27. Importance of Knowing Maturity Level

Question 27:

How does your church measure the spiritual growth of its members?

The most common method of measuring church members' spiritual growth is through

observation by church leadership. Six churches have nothing to measure maturity, and only one

church measures through the discipleship process. A fundamental reason for knowing maturity

levels and growth is to assess whether a church's methodology effectively reaches the goals of

developing Christian maturity.
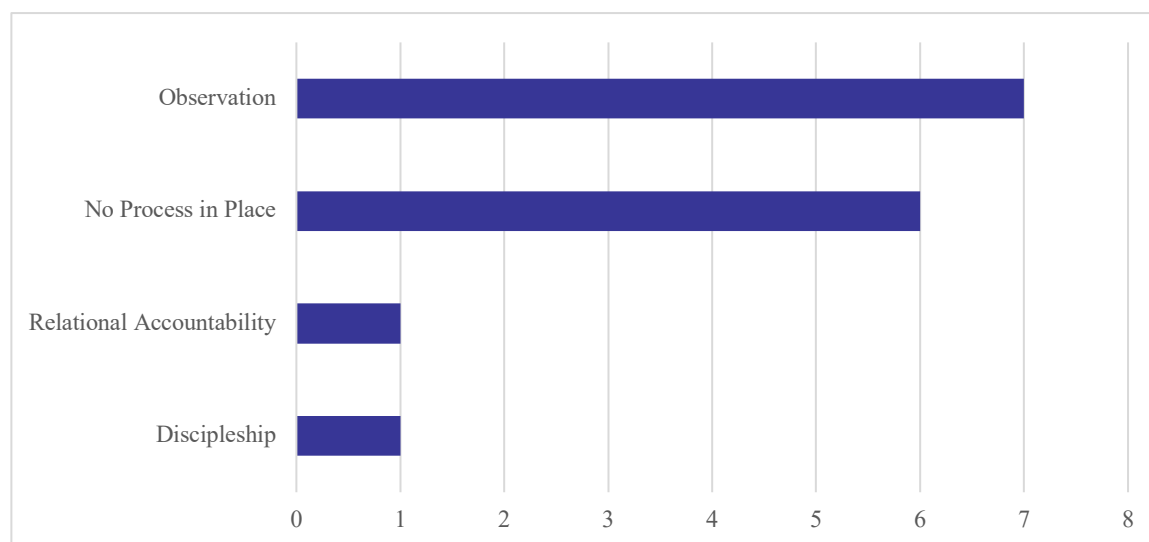
Figure 28. Measuring Spiritual Growth

11. Small Groups

Question 28:

Does your church utilize small groups as a component of its discipleship model?

The small group is one of the best places for discipleship, especially in the American

individualist culture, where large gatherings are often avoided. Churches without an intentional

discipleship process can incorporate the twelve identified "best practices" in a small group. Sixty

percent of churches surveyed integrate small groups as a component of discipleship (figure 29),

with the majority of those churches facilitating between one and five groups, as shown in the graph in Figure 30. Furthermore, forty-seven percent of the churches examined utilize small groups to study the Bible, and two churches out of the fifteen used small groups as a platform for discipling their members (Figure 31).

Does your church utilize small groups as a component of its discipleship model?
15 responses
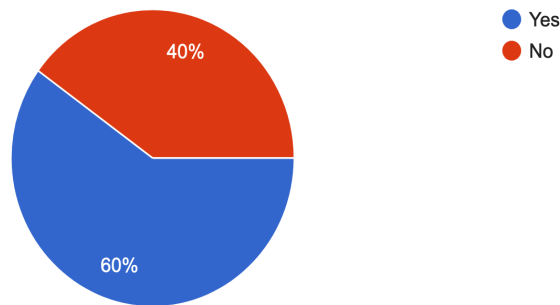
Figure 29. Small Groups

Question 29:

How many small groups does your church facilitate?

How many small groups does your church facilitate?
15 responses
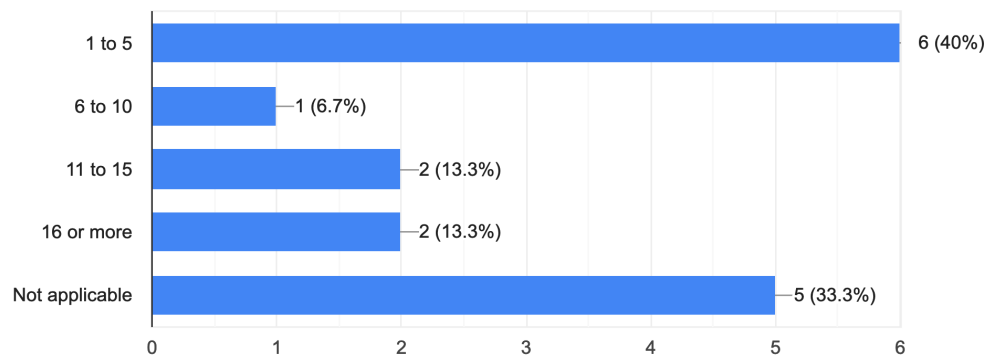
Figure 30. The Number of Small Groups

Question 30:

What is the primary purpose for small your church small groups, e.g., Bible study, fellowship, Sunday sermon discussion, etc.?
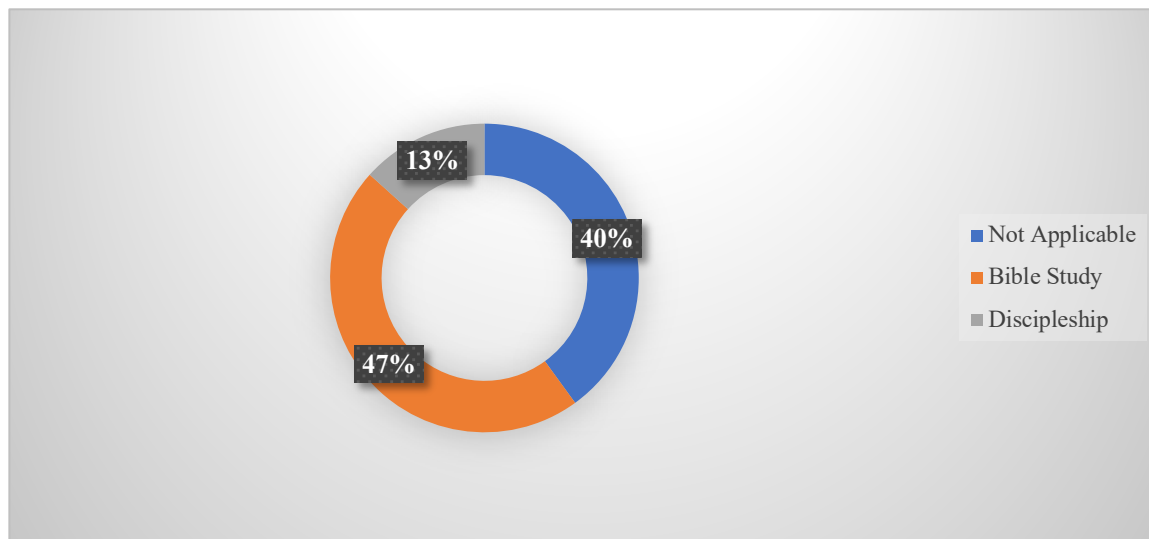
Figure 31. The Purpose of Small Groups

## 12. Sending on Mission

Question 31:

Using a scale of 0 = Not at all important to 5 = Very important, please rate the importance of sending disciples out on mission.

According to the Likert scale depicted in Figure 32, less than half of the churches believed sending disciples out on mission was very important in the discipleship process. Three churches felt it was "relatively important," and three "an important" element in the process. Two churches felt that this element was "slightly important," whereas one church declared it was "not important." Figure 33 illustrates that sixty-seven percent of the churches supported this characteristic via global missions, local outreach, or through the financial support of these ministries. Thirty-three percent of the churches were not involved in sending disciples out on mission at this time.

Using a scale of 0= Not at all important to 5= Very important, please rate the importance sending of disciples out on mission.
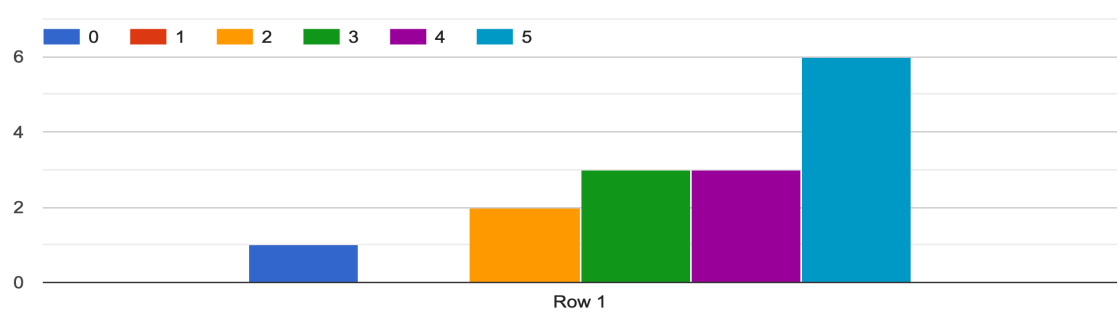
Figure 32. Importance of Sending Out on Mission

Question 32:

How is your church currently sending its disciples out on mission?
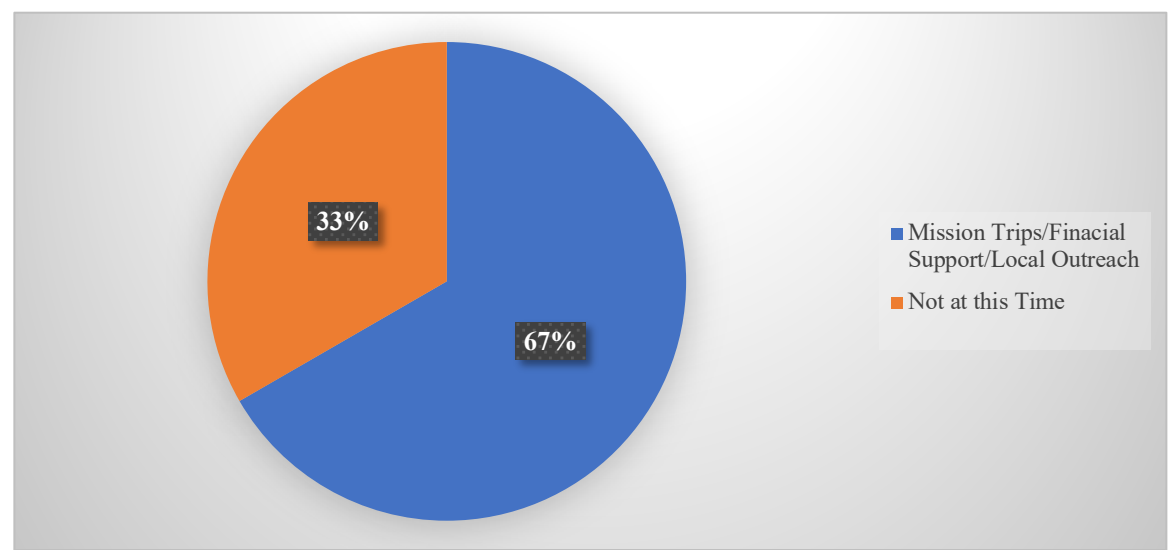
Figure 33. Sending on Mission

Summary of the Analysis

The objective of studying the discipleship process in the local church is to understand better what is currently being done to develop the church members' spiritual growth, and this study has been informative. The assumption that all churches participating would have some

form of spiritual development present was confirmed through this examination. The comparison

between the current model and "best practices" of the first-century model has illuminated the

differences between the way Jesus and Paul exemplified this process and how present-day

churches are currently conducting spiritual development. The mission of discipleship has not

changed from its inception, nor has the goal of imitating Christ in life and character. This

examination identified changes to the original model that reduce the effectiveness through a lack

of comprehensiveness of the current methodology.

<div align="center">Significance Level</div>

The importance of discipleship has not changed from the first century; however, most

knew who was responsible for the spiritual development of believers in the beginning. Some

suggest that a Christian is responsible for their spiritual growth, but if Christians are the church,

then the church body is responsible. This change in mindset is a likely culprit because there is a

divide between church leadership and its members concerning who can minister to others. Jesus,

as the head of the church, felt the discipleship process was so crucial that he exemplified it

himself with the disciples. The importance of a comprehensive discipleship method is vital in the

replicative process of making true disciples.

The Primary Mission of the Church

The intention in asking the question concerning discipleship as the church's primary

mission was to illuminate the local church's mindset regarding importance. The level of

significance of any process will ultimately determine how much effort is placed on

implementation. If most churches place a high level of importance on discipleship as the

church's primary mission, then the logical conclusion is there will be an extensive process in

place. The survey results conclude that 60% of the churches surveyed believe discipleship is not at the highest level of importance concerning the church's primary mission.

Leadership Development

The development of leaders is an essential component of the discipleship process and one of the first-century model's "best practices." "Leaders are not to be developed apart from Jesus just as leadership is not supposed to be separated from discipleship. Separating leadership from discipleship can leave one more skilled than sanctified."[20] It is the Christian leader whose life is to be imitated as he or she imitates Jesus' life and character. Only three churches believe leadership development in the discipleship process was very important, and two felt it was merely important. The remaining ten churches did not place future leader development as a critical part of their discipleship process.

Knowing Spiritual Maturity

It is imperative to know the current maturity level of church members and to track their growth. Consequently, 73% of the churches believe it is not important to know their members' maturity. Without this information, it is challenging to conclude whether a church's spiritual growth process is working. A church that does not examine its effectiveness will not know what methods are needed and what methods are unnecessary. It also ensures they are training others to accomplish the biblical mission of the church.[21]

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[20] "Leadership Development Is Part of Discipleship," *Eric Geiger*, last modified June 4, 2015, https://ericgeiger.com/2015/06/leadership-development-is-part-of-discipleship/.

[21] Glenn Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church: A Leadership Guide for the Majority of Today's Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2002), 252.

Sending on Mission

Every church should be a church that sends its members outside of its building. Missional does not necessarily mean that every member is a cross-cultural missionary, but Jesus does command every Christian to go and make disciples. The survey response that only six churches out of fifteen consider sending disciples out on mission to be very important contributes to the understanding of the churches' attitude concerning this characteristic.

Best Practices

The survey results indicated that none of the fifteen churches that participated in the study incorporated all twelve "best practices" of the first-century model. Out of the fifteen surveyed, only seven churches identified that they had an intentional discipleship process. Of these seven churches, the following were the participants' results in asserting that they included a portion of the first-century model "best practices." One church declared they included eleven of the first-century "best practices" in the discipleship process, which validates that a comprehensive discipleship process that closely parallels the first-century model does exist. Two churches acknowledged having ten, two more with nine, and the remaining two professed to have eight "best practices" present.

Church Internet Websites

Thirty-three of the Pikes Peak Association affiliated churches integrated websites to inform people of their services. Although all thirty-three were examined, only the fifteen participating churches were included in the data collection. The following are the results from a thorough website search looking for specific elements present to identify potential discrepancies or corroborate the survey's answers. It is assumed that a church will not put every detail

concerning ministries available on the website; however, it is reasonable to suggest that the ones they believe to be an essential part of their ministry will be listed.

Discipleship in their Mission Statement

The work of discipleship is the main focus of the SBC's mission statement. The survey resulted in nine out of fifteen churches that proclaimed discipleship was in their mission statement. The website search examined the fifteen participating churches to determine if discipleship was in their mission statement. Only seven of the churches out of fifteen labeled discipleship as the central focus of their mission and two more churches included the word discipleship on their websites.

Small Groups

Nine churches on the survey used small groups as a part of their ministry. The website check looked for anything that resembled a small group, including life groups, community groups, and cell groups. A total of eight churches out of fifteen incorporate small groups in their church ministry, supporting the survey results with a minimal margin of error.

Opportunities for Doing Ministry Together

The characteristic of doing ministry together was afforded to congregants in eleven out of the fifteen churches surveyed. The website search discovered thirteen churches that provide opportunities for church members to serve together in local or global ministry together. Although the number is higher in the website search, the findings do not identify any inconsistencies with the survey results.

Sunday School

The question of how many churches provide Sunday School was not addressed in the survey. The idea that historically SBC churches have used Sunday School as the primary platform for discipleship has already been discussed in this project. 54% of the church's websites denote that they offer this form of training to the congregations.

Imitate Jesus' Life and Character

For the survey question inquiring if imitating Jesus' life and character was the most critical goal of discipleship, seven churches strongly agreed, four agreed, three were neutral, and one church disagreed. A search of church websites located two churches that noted that every Christian's goal is to look more Jesus every day.

Mentoring

60% of the churches surveyed noted that they implemented mentoring in their discipleship process. A search of the websites for mentoring, coaching, or any form of one-on-one guidance disclosed no churches listing this characteristic on their websites.

Intentional Discipleship Process and Leader

The survey recorded that seven churches acknowledged they had an intentional discipleship process, and six churches relayed an intentional discipleship leader. The website analysis found only four churches out of fifteen that offered a discipleship program as part of their ministry to grow church members' spiritual maturity. Furthermore, only two church websites denoted a discipleship pastor, elder, or leader to direct their process.

Data Substantiation

The website data assisted in substantiating some of the information gathered from the questionnaire. Although it was impossible to know which participant completed which survey, it was possible to confirm which churches contributed to the survey through email conversations from specific churches that responded to the recruitment emails. The seven churches that declined to participate because of language barriers had church websites. These websites were written in languages other than English substantiating their status as non-native English-speaking churches.

Finally, the ten churches that replied to the recruitment emails stating they would not participate because they did not have a process in place were too small or too busy to participate were checked for church websites. Seven of the churches had websites, and three had Facebook pages on social media. These churches were limited in their ministry scope and did not contribute any additional statistical information to equate with the survey data.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This study examined the current discipleship practices of churches affiliated with the PPBA in Southern Colorado compared to twelve identified "best practices" of the first-century model. This research aimed to conclude how local church discipleship processes align with this comprehensive method exemplified by Jesus and Paul. This assessment would help determine whether local churches are doing enough in their processes to develop spiritually mature Christians through discipleship. This chapter will provide a summary of the project findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Summary of Conclusions

This project's results clearly show that most local participating churches are not equal to the biblical model. If the level of biblical alignment is only achieved through cooperation in implementing all twelve "best practices" thoroughly, then the results provide evidence for this conclusion. The finding that less than half of the churches surveyed even provided an intentional discipleship process increases the need for this type of study. The implication that local church discipleship methods need to be more comprehensive is accurate based on this examination results.

It is noteworthy to mention that one out of the fifteen churches incorporated eleven out of the twelve identified "best practices" in their discipleship program. Moreover, a single church website listed the existence of a discipleship pastor and a detailed description of their process that closely aligned with the comparison model. Although there was only one church out of fifteen with a comprehensive process, the finding was categorically positive.

1. **Single Teacher**

This characteristic of commitment to a single teacher needs no further clarification on how a church would parallel the elements for alignment. The survey results produced only two churches that require their discipleship participants to submit to a single teacher. An additional church was located on the website, totaling three churches out of fifteen or 20% recognized this first-century model characteristic.

The problem that typically exists with a multiplicity of teachers is the propensity for lack of collaboration regarding strategy and desired goals. This approach delivers a piecemeal teaching method that focuses on a single component of discipleship and does not offer an exhaustive process that will allow disciples to grow in all areas of spiritual maturity. However, the use of multiple teachers can be useful if the effort is collaborative through a clear line of communication.

2. **Designed Expansion**

The majority of the local churches consider that an effective discipleship process will increase their church's numerical growth though 60% do not have a straightforward means of expanding their numbers. The first-century method increased the numbers through the multiplication of making disciples who then make disciples. The survey results suggest that few churches in this project are in alignment with this characteristic.

3. Regular Meetings

The disciples met with Jesus often for three years.[1] Frequent meetings were the pattern Jesus demonstrated, even though most would protest that this is a difficult achievement in the American culture. Twenty percent of the churches met over four times a month, and forty-seven percent met weekly. This finding for any church-directed program would be an excellent attendance record. However, when compared to the first-century characteristic of meeting frequency, the comparison is not entirely equivalent. A 2016 Nielson report found that a New York Times investigation discovered that the average American spends ten hours and thirty-nine minutes a day watching television, surfing the web, using an app on their phone, or listening to the radio.[2] If so much time is spent on matters with no eternal viewpoint, it seems that one hour a night does not appear too unreasonable.

4. Leadership Development

Leadership development is an essential part of the discipleship process. Leaders were produced in the first-century model to go and lead in the discipleship of others. The majority of local churches did not find this element very important in their process even though they provided training. Most churches trained leaders through mentorship or an on-the-job training process and only one church developed its leaders through the discipleship process. The majority of churches evaluated in this project were not thoroughly practicing this characteristic in their method.

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[1] James E. Smith Ph.D., *The Longest Night in the Bible* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu.com, 2012), 163.

[2] John Koblin, "How Much Do We Love TV? Let Us Count the Ways," *The New York Times*, June 30, 2016, sec. Business, accessed March 5, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/01/business/media/nielsen-survey-media-viewing.html.

5. Individual Mentoring

The characteristic of mentoring had a 60% response that churches used this component in their discipleship process; however, none presented having this specific program on their website. When asked how they would help members develop to maturity if asked to be discipled, eight churches responded they would do so through mentoring. Five responses specified an informal method offered only to those members who asked for assistance to grow in their relationships with God. The application of this characteristic in local church discipleship methods is not equivalent to the mentoring that occurred in the first-century model.

6. Accountability

The numerical majority of churches apply some form of mutual accountability in their discipleship process. 40% of the churches do not have a way to account for their member's development in biblical education and godly living. Accountability is essential to function in society, and as a Christian, for obedience to laws and commands. Any church that excludes the implementation of this characteristic in not equal with the model exemplified by Jesus and Paul.

7. Teaching to Observe All that he Commanded

According to the survey, the characteristic of teaching to obey all that Jesus commanded was mostly an individual enterprise. Only one out of fifteen churches had a list of Jesus' commands so that their members could daily assess their commitment to obeying them. The absence of this characteristic in most present-day churches does not parallel with the first-century model.

8. Tangible Growth

The local churches consider knowing the maturity level of their members as insignificant. None of the churches use any assessment tool to establish maturity levels or their church attendees' growth. The method most commonly used to determine the congregation's spiritual growth is through the subjective approach of observation by church leaders. The absence of a way to analyze tangible spiritual growth makes it challenging to identify if the process is effective. The nonexistence of a method of measuring spiritual growth by most local churches is an indication that they are not in alignment with this first-century characteristic.

9. Doing Ministry Together

The majority of churches in this project are doing ministry together, and many offer internal ways of service to the church, missions, and community outreach opportunities. Most of the churches do not have an intentional discipleship process, so it is assumed that these opportunities are not always part of discipleship but are other activities of the church. The first-century example of doing ministry together included instruction and equipping by the teacher and then representing the teacher in service together.

10. Small Groups

The majority of churches incorporate small groups as a part of their discipleship process. All of the first-century model "best practices" were used to develop disciples during Jesus' ministry. They could also be used in the small group today without changing the standard practice of the church. However, rather than using this component to incorporate numerous discipleship "best practices," the majority of churches use it for a bible study. The lack of

comprehensiveness in the way small groups are currently being used makes them deficient in similarity to the first-century model.

11. Imitate Jesus' Life and Character

The characteristic of imitating Jesus' life and character is the goal of discipleship. Seven churches strongly agree, and four churches agree with this goal; however, regarding discipleship as the primary mission, only six churches consider this an essential component. The purpose of the disciple before Christ's example of discipleship was to take on the appearance of the teacher, which remained unchanged during Christ's earthly ministry. Today's goal is the same, and the local churches examined are not fully engaged in this characteristic of the first-century model.

12. Sending on Mission

The importance of sending on mission is mixed according to the findings regarding the local churches. Six churches think it is "very important," and three churches believe it "is important." The remaining six churches believe it is "less important," and 33% do not currently send members out on mission. The lack of interest demonstrated by the absence of implementation indicates that local churches are not in full accordance with this characteristic.

Comparing Results with Literature

The conclusions resulting from this study show that churches affiliated with the PPBA are not entirely in alignment with the twelve "best practices" of the first-century model. This study aimed to understand better what is being done in the local church concerning discipleship to accomplish the "Great Commission." Although a significant amount of literature on Jesus' discipleship methodology is currently available, no literature was located depicting a process

currently being used that precisely reproduces the first-century model. This substantiated the

premise that most churches would include some of the "best practices" assessed.

The small group was used for discipleship by sixty percent of the local churches

participating in this study. A 2016 study of churches affiliated with the National Association of

Evangelicals recorded that a higher proportion (ninety-six percent) of those surveyed claimed to

be involved in a Christian small group that meets regularly.[3] The small group is recognized by

many as one of the best environments for learning, yet six churches out of the fifteen surveyed

have not incorporated this effective component into their discipleship practices. Jesus

demonstrated this effective method of discipling, and recent research confirms the importance of

this type of connecting relationships in fostering transformative learning and growth.[4]

Furthermore, sixty percent of churches in this study implement mentoring as part of their

discipleship methodology. The effectiveness of mentoring was discussed earlier in this project,

noting that many celebrated historical figures were mentored. The process of mentoring goes

beyond the teaching of others concerning discipleship. Dale Critchley explains that "by training

others through intentional, structured mentoring, one could train an unlimited number of mature

disciple-making disciples."[5] The effectiveness of mentoring is generally new research and is

frequently focused on youth development. However, George Barna suggests that "the majority of

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[3] "Evangelicals Active in Small Groups," *National Association of Evangelicals*, last modified February 10, 2016, https://www.nae.net/evangelicals-active-in-small-groups/.

[4] Mariet Mikaelian. "The Transformative Learning Experiences of Southern California Church-Based Small Group Members." *Christian Education Journal* 15, no. 2 (August 2018): 173. doi:10.1177/0739891318784307.

[5] Dale Critchley, "Rediscovering Disciple Making," *Missio Apostolica* 23, no. 2 (2015): 344–45. https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAiBCA160725001305&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

churches studied understood the value of mentoring. Moreover, the most effective disciple-

making churches integrate mentoring or coaching into their process."[6]

Additionally, over sixty-six percent of the churches surveyed provide some form of

leadership training or resources to cultivate leaders in their discipleship process. The

development of leaders is accomplished by the church to eventually deploy in the world to carry

out the mission. There is ample secular and Christian literature on leadership development to

provide some guidance on this subject. Jesus patterned leadership development through

mentoring his twelve disciples by his side. His process of developing leaders implies that growth

can be manufactured. This is contrary to research that measures the long-term success of

leadership development based on identifying qualities and traits rather than an individual's

ability to be developed.[7] This principle corresponds with the behavioral theory that leaders are

made, not born.

Just over half of the churches surveyed have an intentional discipleship process for

developing their members' spiritual maturity. This result insinuates that seven out of fifteen

churches may not be actively involved in helping their church members with obedience to the

"Great Commission." According to Hong, "intentional discipleship has the potential to reverse

the downward spiral of the church by countering the errant attitudes and beliefs that has led the

church downward in the first place.[8] If the deficiency in current discipleship practices is a reason

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[6] George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (New York, NY: Crown Publishing Group, 2013), 123.

[7] Matt Thomas, "The Indispensable Mark of Christian Leadership: Implications from Christ's Methods of Leadership Development in Mark's Gospel." *Perichoresis* 16, no. 3 (2018): 111. doi:10.2478/perc-2018-0019.

[8] Stephen A. Hong, "Reversing a Downward Spiral: Strengthening the Church's Community, Holiness and Unity through Intentional Discipleship." *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 15, no. 1 (2012): 120. https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001951570&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

for the decline in the American church, then having a comprehensive and intentional method appears to be a reasonable solution.

Lastly, six out of fifteen churches believe that knowing their members' maturity level is less than important, with two churches responding that it was not at all important. Discipleship's goal is continued spiritual growth towards Christlikeness, so knowing maturity levels should be of some importance. As already mentioned, there are four levels of spiritual maturity extending from "(1) self-centered (2) other-centered (3) principle-centered (4) kingdom-centered. Although one cannot be reduced to predictable developmental stages because it is difficult to measure maturity levels, churches need to carefully examine their educational ministries to see if they promote or fail to promote the four levels of spiritual maturity."[9]

<center>Additional Assumptions</center>

The consideration of a discipleship curriculum is not progressive like an organic method that allows the spirit to direct as he desires. It is essential to allow the spirit to lead, yet anyone believing Jesus did not have a curriculum is not paying attention to the fact that everything he created exists and does so according to his arrangement. Curriculums give us preset outlines to follow and allow for participant accountability.

A local church wanting to examine its discipleship processes for effectiveness will often refrain from evaluating individual members in fear of invading their privacy. The fear of appearing too intrusive into their members' lives, leaders exclude accountability to ensure godly

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[9] Timothy S. Gibson, "Proposed Levels of Christian Spiritual Maturity." *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 32, no. 4 (Winter, 2004): 298, http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2F www.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fproposed-levels-christian-spiritual-maturity%2Fdocview %2F223672532%2Fse-2%3Faccountid=12085(accessed October 15, 2020).

living. The majority of churches surveyed evaluate the members' growth through observation, but because of this apprehension, will not keep lists, notes, or growth charts to assess the effectiveness of their methodology.

An effective way to find complications in an insufficient method is to compare it to one that has worked in the past. Christian discipleship has the benefit of the productive model exemplified by Jesus, and later, the apostle Paul. Comparing twelve identified "best practices" of the first-century model to local church methods identified significant differences in importance, implementation, and self-evaluation. The successful results that each characteristic produces is not disputed, but the method used to achieve the same results differs among the churches. This examination has made discrepancies that are not being addressed evident by the lack of comprehensiveness in the local church methodology.

A Path from the Conclusions

While most of the churches studied had discipleship programs, the majority did not exhibit robust plans that incorporated several elements from the examples of Jesus and Paul. Moreover, this study was limited to the analysis of current practices concerning comprehensiveness and did not delve into the effectiveness of the local church discipleship programs studied. It is assumed that incorporating each of the elements would be advantageous to the churches, but a more thorough study of a select group of churches is needed to determine how effective their discipleship efforts are. Using a control group and a test group to implement various elements would help this study determine the impact of these discipleship methods on an entire church body.

Anything Emerge for Future Projects

This research project was created to determine whether local church discipleship methods were comprehensive and if they were doing enough to develop their members' spiritual maturity. The research compared current models with twelve "best practices" of the first-century model. The results identified that the majority of local churches were not comparable with the method Jesus and Paul exemplified. A potential continuum of this project based on the information gleaned from this examination would be to explore the establishment of a discipleship process based on these twelve "best practices" and the reality of implementing such a comprehensive program in today's culture. Future research could also include the effectiveness of this method regarding individual obedience to the "Great Commission."

Moreover, further study could be conducted to determine if there is a definitive correlation between church health and the lack of attention to biblical discipleship. This premise was referred to previously in this project as a potential cause. One course of action could be to examine the historical statistics of local church growth compared to the last decade of discipleship practices. This examination could include features like membership growth, the increase or decrease of baptisms, and contributions for the past ten years. The results of this examination could provide a more conclusive answer for this premise.

Application for Replication

Any church considering their discipleship process to be inadequate can utilize these project tools to help determine and resolve their underperformance. The first step is by taking the survey giving honest answers based on what is currently being practiced. The results of the findings will identify areas of deficiency that will need to be addressed. The implementation of

twelve "best practices" will address spiritual growth, bible knowledge, daily life application, and method replication.

Some churches might have to completely overhaul their current process to accommodate this concept of making disciples. However, churches could incorporate a first-century model without making fundamental changes that would adversely affect their congregations as in a small group environment where the twelve "best practices" of the first-century model could be fully implemented. A church could initiate a pilot program where group members commit to the curriculum and this model's criteria. A group of committed believers that experience life and ministry together as they are transformed into Christlikeness. Historically, discipleship has been effectively increasing Christians' spiritual maturity when it is considered the primary focus. It has also been an influence in reviving the church during periods of nominal Christianity. Nothing less should be considered by those who profess to be his disciples.

The Lessons Learned

This project's work has been equal to the academic journey of this author concerning an overabundance of new experiences. The excitement of learning new things and the enthusiasm of examining issues in the church has conveyed a mixture of sentiments, some being wholesome and others producing a wave of righteous anger regarding the inadequacies of commitment to the Lord and Savior. This project may have been the beginning of the examination of church issues but not the end. A Christian's aspiration to explore possible solutions to problems and not just criticize insufficiencies but help to resolve some of these negative issues should be never-ending.

Positive Findings

A satisfying discovery in this examination is that not every church has abandoned the primary mission of making disciples completely. The majority of churches acknowledge the necessity of spiritual growth and wish to change the outcome. Some churches contacted identified areas that were not being addressed in their church but were working to resolve issues. There were two local churches with intentional discipleship processes and assigned leaders. One of the churches had eleven out of the twelve "best practices" of the first-century model in its program. Furthermore, a single church website referenced a discipleship program closely paralleling the first-century model. Although each component's depth was not examined in this study, the efforts of this church merit a look into their process as an example or potential option for those Christians not receiving this type of instruction at their present church.

Finding the cause of weakness is the beginning of discovering a solution. Every church has differing levels of maturity in their congregations, and perhaps, the reason for nominal Christianity is the absence of an adequate process for spiritual development. This study exposed the status of discipleship in local churches that are far from being comprehensive. An exhaustive process is needed to increase the spiritual maturity of followers producing growth. Discipleship is a life-long endeavor of development and reproduction that God knew required attention to detail. God did not relay the detailed specifics of this process to be written down and followed as he did with Moses in the building of the tabernacle. Instead, he demonstrated the method himself to be replicated until his return. The constructive take from this analysis is that the American church can always return according to the pattern. The hope is that the church recognizes a problem with steady church decline and does something about it before it is too late.

Negative Findings

An adverse finding experienced during this project was the confirmation of the statistic regarding anemic survey participation. This finding is expected in the secular world, where most are tired of being bothered by how they like a particular product and whether they would recommend the product or company to others. However, this was not expected from church leaders who were too busy or unwilling to help a fellow Christian student with the opportunity to understand a church issue better.

It was also understood that participation would be inferior because of the absence of familiarity compelled by an email request. Consequently, verbal contact was made with every church representative that did not respond to the email requests, and every church agent assured that they would respond by filling out the survey or giving a refusal to participate. Still, many of the churches did not complete the survey nor reply to the email advising the researcher that they would not participate.

The most disheartening finding was the current condition of the discipleship process in the local church. This author has attended approximately ten churches in the last fifteen years and has yet to find a church that incorporates a comprehensive discipleship program to its members. The findings have concluded that many church's discipleship processes are inadequate, and although the local church may have what they believe to be an intentional discipleship process, the churches in this project are not doing enough to facilitate opportunities to make mature disciples.

Conclusion

This project's conclusion could be discouraging if not realizing that nothing will keep God from accomplishing his plans. Even though most local churches lack a comprehensive

discipleship process and are not doing enough to develop their members towards the goal of Christlikeness, God's plan for the church will be accomplished.

Correctly, any project aims to state the problem and then work meticulously to determine if what is being evaluated is true or not. The findings conclude one aspect of this project but open doors to explore solutions to improve the process. There is no question based on this study's substantiation that some local churches affiliated with PPBA should do better regarding discipleship. The problem looking forward is whom God will choose to lead the charge. Only a fully committed and surrendered disciple of Jesus need to apply.

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IRB APPROVAL

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 18, 2019

Anthony Ray McKee
IRB Exemption 3996.121819: Proven Biblical Discipleship: Make it According to the Pattern

Dear Anthony Ray McKee,

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

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

> (2) 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:
>
> > (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

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

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

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

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APPENDIX 1:

CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM
Proven Biblical Discipleship: Make it According to the Pattern
Anthony McKee
Liberty University
School of Divinity

You are invited to be in a research study of contemporary discipleship methodologies in comparison with the first-century model. I am researching to better understand modern church discipleship methods in contrast with the models used by the Lord Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul in the first century. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a pastor, elder, ministry leader, or other appointed representative with a working knowledge of your church's current discipleship model, process, or program, and your church is affiliated with the Pike's Peak Baptist Association. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Anthony Mckee, a doctoral candidate in the school of divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The first-century church methodology of individual spiritual growth functioned to achieve the goal of Christlikeness through discipleship. God crafted a design for His church to advance followers of Jesus toward Christian maturity. His instruction for Israel to "see that you make it according to the pattern" came from the perfect mind of God and is practical guidance for today. However, the philosophies of some churches, based on a number of different strategies, communicate that growing towards Christian maturation can be achieved through any discipleship perspective.

Therefore, the purpose of this project is to study the philosophies of individual discipleship strategies in churches that offer a program, process, or pedagogy that they allege addresses Christian formation through discipleship. The author will compare local church methods with the biblical pattern exemplified by Jesus and the apostle Paul in the first-century model. The desired outcome from this examination is to establish a plausible solution for stopping or slowing the steady decline of the American church. One possibility this study will attempt to explore is the need to disengage from the modern mindset of creating a new strategy for the contemporary culture and return to the biblical model as a reasonable course for the restoration of a proven disciple-making method historically proven to increase the spiritual and numerical growth of the church.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Answer thirty-two survey questions that should take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete.

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

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

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

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the documents. Participant survey responses will be anonymous.

- Completed surveys will be kept on survey software that is password protected on the researcher's locked personal computer. The data collected from the surveys may be used in future studies or presentations; however, after three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

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

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Anthony McKee. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at armckee@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Micah Meek, at mmeek4@liberty.edu.

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

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

APPENDIX 2: WEB SURVEY

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfAW7jV-
pyjkX7vcinUYZjIELeIedDGIMSIUiO6lKmnWoKmqg/viewform?usp=sf_link

APPENDIX 3: HARDCOPY SURVEY

First Century Discipleship Comparison Survey

1. Does your church have an intentional discipleship process available to all members of the congregation? YES ☐ NO ☐

2. Does your church's discipleship process, program, or methodology have any of the following? Check all that apply.

   ☐ Manual or guideline.
   ☐ Discipleship Pastor, Elder, Coordinator, etc.
   ☐ Discipleship in the church's mission statement.
   ☐ A list of the spiritual gifts of participants.
   ☐ Theological training.
   ☐ A standard guide for newly converted members.

3. If a member requests to be discipled by the church, what would be the process for developing them towards Christian maturation?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

Commitment to a Teacher

4. Does your church discipleship model require each participant to commit to a single teacher? YES ☐ NO ☐

5. How many teachers will a participant encounter over a one-year period in your church discipleship model?

   ☐ 1
   ☐ 2 to 3.
   ☐ 4 to 5.
   ☐ 6 or more.
   ☐ Not applicable.

6. Who typically teaches in your church's discipleship model (e.g., pastors, elders, ministry leaders, laity)?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

<u>Regular Meetings</u>
7. How frequently do your church's discipleship participants meet?

☐ Once a month.
☐ Twice a Month.
☐ Three times a month.
☐ Four times a month.
☐ More than four times a month.

<u>Individual Mentoring</u>
8. Does your discipleship model incorporate individual mentoring?
YES ☐ NO ☐

9. Does your church discipleship model use another form of one on one guidance?
_____
_____

_____
_____

<u>Teaching to Observe all that He Commanded</u>
10. Are participants required to do any of the following? Check all that apply.

☐ Memorize scripture.
☐ Meditate on Scripture.
☐ Know all Jesus commanded.
☐ Obey all Jesus commanded.
☐ Actively disciple and be discipled.

11. Does your discipleship model have a written list of Jesus' commands to follow?
YES ☐ NO ☐

12. How does your church model accomplish this discipleship principle?
_____
_____
_____
_____

<u>Doing Ministry Together</u>
13. Do your discipleship participants actively partake in ministry together?
YES ☐ NO ☐

14. How does your discipleship participants share the gospel, serve in community outreach, go on mission trips together, or other ministries where they can apply the biblical principles learned through from your church's discipleship process?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Imitate Jesus' Life and Character

15. Using a scale of 0= Not at all important to 5= Very important, please rate the following aspect of discipleship as being the primary mission of the church?

0   1   2   3   4   5

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

16. Resembling Jesus more each day by imitating His life and character is the most important goal of discipleship?

☐ Strongly Disagree.
☐ Disagree.
☐ Neither Agree nor disagree.
☐ Agree.
☐ Strongly Agree.

Designed Expansion

17. Does your discipleship model have a process for expanding the numbers of participants?
YES ☐ NO ☐

18. An effective discipleship model will increase the growth of church membership.
☐ Strongly Disagree.
☐ Disagree.
☐ Neither Agree nor disagree.
☐ Agree.
☐ Strongly Agree.

19. How does your church increase the number of disciples in the congregation?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Leadership Development

20. Using a scale of 0= Not at all important to 5= Very important, please rate the significance your church discipleship model places on the development of future leaders.

   0 1 2 3 4 5
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

21. How does your church select potential leaders from membership? Check all that apply.

   ☐ Based on talents and gifts.
   ☐ Based on biblical qualifications.
   ☐ Based on spiritual maturity.
   ☐ From observing leadership traits in discipleship.

22. Does your church provide training and resources for the development of future Christian leaders? YES ☐ NO ☐

23. How does you church develop and deploy future Christian leaders?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

Accountability

24. Does your church discipleship model incorporate mutual accountability among the participants to ensure members adhere to biblical doctrine and are held accountable to godly living and continued spiritual growth? YES ☐ NO ☐

Tangible Spiritual Growth

25. Does your church use an assessment tool to measure tangible growth toward Christian maturity? YES ☐ NO ☐

26. Using a scale of 0= Not at all important to 5= Very important, please rate the importance of knowing the maturity level of every church member.

   0 1 2 3 4 5
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

27. How does you church measure the spiritual growth of its members?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Small Groups

28. Does your church utilize small groups as a component of its discipleship model?

YES ☐ NO ☐

29. How many small groups does your church facilitate?
☐ 1 to 5.
☐ 6 to 10.
☐ 11 to 15.
☐ 16 or more.
☐ Not applicable.

30. What is the primary purpose for small your church small groups, e.g. Bible study, fellowship, Sunday sermon discussion, etc.?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Sending on Mission

31. Using a scale of 0= Not at all important to 5= Very important, please rate the importance of sending disciples out on mission.

0 1 2 3 4 5
☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

32. How is your church currently sending their disciples out on mission?

_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX 4: OPEN ENDED SURVEY

Survey Open-Ended Question Responses:

Listed are the church responses to the (13) opened survey questions.

Question 3

If a member requests to be discipled by the church, what would be the process for developing them towards Christian maturation?

<u>Mentorship</u>
- Mentoring and accountability
- Assigned to a person (elder, lay member, staff)
- Mentoring and prayer
- Bible study during the week and on Sundays. There would be unofficial mentorships
- Have them join a Huddle with the leader using Mike Breen's Discipleship Process
- Assign an Encourager and use a discipleship booklet
- Pair them with a godly person
- We would encourage them to practice the Christian disciplines on a daily basis, engage in specific life groups, and, if requested, assign them to a discipleship mentor.

<u>Individual/Small Group</u>
- Walk them through our process/curriculum from learning to walk with Jesus to they themselves being disciple-makers. This is accomplished individually or in small groups of 3 or 4.

<u>Sunday School</u>
- Attend Sunday school
- Sunday School
- At this time, our discipleship is mostly through Sunday School. We have done other discipleship materials in the past but are in transition at this time.

<u>No Process</u>
- None
- Nothing in place other than Sunday Sermons
- Nothing in place

Question 6:

Who typically teaches in your church's discipleship model (e.g., pastors, elders, ministry leaders, laity)?

<u>Church Leadership</u>

- Pastor
- Pastor's and lay leaders
- Pastors
- Elders
- Pastor

Everyone Gifted
- Almost everyone is mentored and mentors someone else
- All of the above
- Everyone
- Pastor and laity
- Laity
- Pastors and laity
- Elders and those gifted to teach
- Pastors, associate pastors, and equipped church members
- Pastor, deacons, long term church members

No One
- No One

Question 9:
Does your church discipleship model use another form of one on one guidance?

Coaching
- Coaching

Prayer Discipleship
- Prayer Discipleship (google it)
- Prayer

Pastor Led
- Pastor and deacon visits
- When requested, an elder will guide the process

None
- None (9)
- Members do this on their own

Question 12:
How does your church model accomplish this discipleship principle?

Individual Application and Study
- Personnel study
- Just the Bible
- The Holy Spirit transforms people over time

- Devotion to Christ through individual holy living
- By practicing it in life
- Life application
- Attendance

Church Led
- Relational accountability
- Gathering and teaching and allowing God to use His people as He directs

Nothing in Place
- None (5)

Making Disciples
- Make Disciples is our church's purpose statement, so all life groups and programming align around our purpose.

Question 14:
How does your discipleship participants share the gospel, serve in community outreach, go on mission trips together, or other ministries where they can apply the biblical principles learned through from your church's discipleship process?

Missions
- Missions
- We use 3 Circles or the "Roman Road." Members are encouraged to participate in our outreach to Will Rogers Elementary School, as well as our people group in Sub-Sahara Africa. Members are encouraged to "serve" outside the church building. Our church family is currently focusing on the NAMB emphasis of "Who's Your One," where they are being challenged to build a relationship with one person this year as a means of sharing the gospel.
- We do a rhythm of teaching four weeks and mission one week
- Mission to the nations locally and globally
- Mission trips locally and abroad

Member Led Activity
- General encouragement
- Individually
- Individual opportunities
- A few do this

Church Led Outreach
- From the instruction in our discipleship times, participants then apply the Word to their activities.
- Various outreach ministries
- backpack giveaways, coat drive, Easter event to include the community, Halloween alternative event, etc.

- An entire variety of options
- Various Ministries
- Church sponsored opportunities

Question 19:

How does your church increase the number of disciples in the congregation?

Evangelism/Personal Invitation
- Evangelism
- Inviting others to attend
- Individually
- Our members are encouraged to share the gospel. They are also challenged to invite the unchurched to worship services at our church building.
- By engrossing oneself in praying for the harvest, learning and being obedient to the Word
- Evangelism and welcoming those who need a place to heal and grow
- Through evangelism
- Individual evangelism
- Personal invitation
- Word of mouth

Discipleship
- By discipling others
- By graduating disciples that then start discipling others

Bible Study
- Bible study

No Active Plan
- I'm not sure
- No active plan

Question 23:

How does you church develop and deploy future Christian leaders?

Mentoring/OJT
- Mentoring and accountability, sending out as the Holy Spirit directs
- Mentoring and prayer
- Through an informal mentorship relationship
- On the job training
- OJT
- Ministry leads

- Yes, on a very limited basis

Small Group Leadership Training
- We do so in small groups and by hosting a multiply conferences each year
- We do plan to implement teams to grow using a specific guide
- Right now, Media, six-week group studies
- We are currently in the process of "refining" and "re-defining" a strategy. In the past, we have hosted a small group on leadership development, having participants read a secular book on leadership, and then come together to discuss how these strategies can be implemented in our lives and in the context of church life.

No Process
- Nothing in Place
- It doesn't
- None

Discipleship
- Through the disciple making process

Question 27:

How does you church measure the spiritual growth of its members?

Church Leader Observation
- Observation
- Intuitively
- Elders evaluation
- Participation, observing, relationship growth
- Personal experience with leadership
- Observation
- Pastor evaluation

No Process in Place
- We do not at this time
- We don't
- It doesn't
- No Process
- We do not "measure" spiritual growth. We provide various avenues for discipleship and believe members participation will facilitate their growth.
- None

Relational accountability
- Relational accountability

Discipleship

- By whether the individual is involved in a Discipleship Huddle and if they are leading one of their own.

Question 30:
What is the primary purpose for small your church small groups, e.g. Bible study, fellowship, Sunday sermon discussion, etc.?

Not Applicable
- Not applicable
- Not applicable
- Not applicable
- Not applicable
- None
- Not Applicable

Bible Study
- Bible study
- Growing in our ability to hear God speak and respond to his voice
- Sunday School
- With life groups meeting in homes and in the church building, the primary focus is Bible study and spiritual growth.
- All of the above
- Bible study
- The Study of the Bible

Discipleship
- Discipleship
- Bible Study and discipleship

Question 32:

How is your church currently sending their disciples out on mission?
Mission Trips/Financial Support/Local Outreach
- Mission to the nations locally and globally
- Mission trips, local ministries, Care projects
- Some are actively serving Christ and others locally and in our community, and even to the nations (on occasion).
- Currently, we are focused on our immediate neighborhood which is a very poor area and some of our members who are struggling with finical issues. We are a church placed in a huge mission field. :-)
- Missions
- Financially only
- As stated previously, we encourage participation (1) in our outreach to Will Rogers, (2) in sharing the gospel with friends and relatives, and (3) going on mission to Africa. We have previously had teams go to Romania, Japan, Myanmar, etc.

- Many options
- This is the most underdeveloped area of our discipleship model. We have planted 69 churches
- Through teaching in the disciple making process
-

Not at This Time

- It's not
- Through their lives, as they go
- Nothing in place
- Individual leading
- Church is small and does not at this time