

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Understanding Discipleship and How to Effectively Spread the Gospel

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

by

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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This project will work to help Greater Purpose International formulate a plan that will better serve its congregants and aid them in gaining the confidence to share their faith with others. Although the overall health of the church may have been attributed to a lack of discipleship, it is evident that congregants can be comfortable sharing their faith even if expected results are not obtained. The fundamental purpose of this study is to focus specifically on the congregants of Greater Purpose International and their ability to share their faith with others. Using qualitative research, a collection of interviews, and group sessions, the results of this study suggest that the congregants are expressive of their faith. Some underlying factors may have attributed to the recent decline, but measures have been included in this research, and the necessary recommendations have been made to reverse the problem.

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Abbreviations

ABF	<i>Adult Bible Fellowship</i>
COVID	<i>Coronavirus</i>
DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
ESV	<i>English Standard Version</i>
IRB	<i>Institutional Review Board</i>
KJV	<i>King James Version</i>
LUSOD	<i>Liberty University School of Divinity</i>
NIV	<i>New International Version</i>
PDP	<i>Personal Development Plan</i>
T4T	<i>Training for Trainers</i>

Chapter 1

Introduction

Discipleship can be considered one of the final mandates that Jesus left for those who followed him. Matthew 28:19 says, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”¹ This statement, known as “The Great Commission,” played an integral role in the next phase of ministry for them and is the foundation for this research. This proclamation would lead the disciples and help to equip them with the tools necessary to lead others.

Making disciples can be seen as the standard for Christian living today, and there must be procedures in place that help believers grow spiritually and communicate the gospel effectively. Is it the responsibility of the believer to share their faith with others? This is one question that will be answered throughout this research along with implementing a practice model that is easy to comprehend. The current ministry is looking for ways that will make it easier for the congregation to express themselves more freely and, through research, find alternative ways that may lead to church growth. As a leader, one may suggest that it is their responsibility to train and deploy their congregants to be disciple-makers. They play a crucial role in empowering them and inspiring them to live by the Christian values that are presented in scripture. However, difficulties may arise that both interfere with having a successful ministry that makes disciples and with attracting new people that want to be a part of what they are doing.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the King James Version Bible (KJV).

Ministry Context

The church that has been selected for this study is named Greater Purpose International. It is in Johnston County, which is located in North Carolina. The church is situated in a rural area on a major highway just East of I-95 in the town of Princeton. The congregants are predominately African American where a majority of them do not live in the town where the church is located. The overall population of the county as of July 1, 2019, is 209,339.² The county has sixty-seven percent of its race population attributed to whites alone, and seventeen percent attributed to African Americans. The remaining sixteen percent is attributed to Hispanic or Latino.³ The median household income in Johnston County in 2018 was reported at \$56, 842 and the rate for persons in poverty was at 13%.⁴

Covering 791 square miles, Johnston County is the 10th largest county in the state of North Carolina. The town of Princeton is between the town of Smithfield and the town of Goldsboro, which is home to Seymour Johnson Air Force Base. The town of Princeton was incorporated in 1873 and currently has a population of nearly 1,300 people.⁵ Sixty-five percent of the population in Princeton consist of whites and twenty-five percent consists of African Americans. This leaves the remaining ten percent divided between Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians. The median household income in 2017 was \$31, 668 with a poverty rate of 26.9%. Religious affiliation sees roughly sixty-four percent to have no religious adherent as

² United States Census Bureau, "QuickFacts: Johnston County, North Carolina," 2018, accessed August 28, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/johnstoncountynorthcarolina/PST045219>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Princeton, NC, "Who We Are," accessed September 5, 2020, <http://www.myprincetonnc.com>

twenty-five percent are Evangelical and seven percent Protestant. Only two percent is Catholic, and one percent Black Protestant.⁶

The church was founded in 2012, and services are held in a commercial building that has been outfitted specifically for a church. The church has been in the same building since its inception and has plans to remain there until they build a new sanctuary. The culture of the church is non-traditional even though the founders of the church come from a Holiness background. It is a nondenominational church that practices many traditional rites such as communion, water baptism, evangelism, praise and worship, and sermons. The core philosophy of the church is dedicated to prayer and teaching and helping others to find their purpose in the kingdom of God. The mission of the church is to empower God's people through teaching and studying the word of God. An accompanying vision proclaims to provide facilities where people can focus on becoming better individuals by using the Bible as the foundation of their spiritual life. The church has a statement of faith that outlines what they believe. Nine truths of the statement of faith include the Bible, who God is, the salvation of man, the resurrection of Christ, water baptism, communion, the Holy Spirit, five-fold ministry gifts, and God's interpretation of marriage help to comprise the statement of faith and each is provided with scripture, further explicating those truths.

The leadership approach that is common in the church is charismatic leadership. The senior pastor works to build loyalty and devotion among those that chose to follow. The belief is that the gospel of Jesus Christ must be promoted through practical teaching and living by example. Worship services are held weekly on Sundays, and Bible study is on Wednesdays. This

⁶ Princeton, North Carolina, accessed September 5, 2020, <http://city-data.com/city/Princeton-North-Carolina>.

time is dedicated to praise and worship followed by biblical preaching and teaching. Time is also dedicated on 1st and 3rd Sundays specifically for Sunday School, and it is scheduled before regular worship service. New converts are asked to attend the Sunday School class due to the curriculum. The class is designed to inform the new convert regarding the history of the church, and to teach lessons from the Bible designed to help them to grow. Every leader in the church is also asked to attend class, and that time is used to empower them, train them, and develop them for deployment. The services held makeup about 75% of the church's activities and are the basis for training and instruction. The leader uses this time to encourage believers and help them grow spiritually. The overall purpose of the church is to operate and maintain a religious corporation and to propagate and disseminate the religious principles of Christianity.

The current ministry is family-oriented and uses that as a general focus. The founders are husband and wife, and they lead the organization together. The researcher of this thesis project is the senior pastor. The auxiliaries in the church include ministering to men, women, and children separately, and a significant amount of time is focused on ministering to the whole family collectively. Church auxiliaries include men's ministry, women's ministry, youth ministry, praise and worship ministry, music ministry, marketing, and evangelism. In addition to the senior pastors who are the overall leaders of the ministry, the church has leaders who serve as executive pastors and youth pastors. The church recognizes them as key leaders who have delegated authority from the senior leaders. Deacons, ushers, hospitality staff, finance committee, and pastor's aid are positions that are held in the church. The position of Deacon is ordained, while the other positions are appointed and reevaluated every year.

The organization's funding source comes from the contributions of tithes and offerings. The senior pastors do not take a salary but do include themselves in weekly giving. The budget

of the church is minuscule to include monthly rent of the facility, church transportation insurance, utility bill, and miscellaneous expenditures such as supplies. Everything that the church receives is used specifically for those purposes. The church experiences positive financial growth from the congregants, and this is helpful considering that every office and position held in the church is on a volunteer basis. The main influence comes from the senior pastors who have the final authority to rule on decisions. The board of directors helps govern policies and procedures, and the finance committee is in place to make sure that funds are appropriated correctly. The senior pastors have elected to surround themselves with mentors outside of the congregation that give wisdom and spiritual insight. Even though the church is independent and not affiliated with any specific denomination, the senior pastors do have a spiritual covering that oversees them and consults them concerning their spiritual lives.

The thought process of the leaders consists of the church becoming a community of believers that are enthused about creating relationships, engaging more in discipleship, and practicing outreach to grow the church. Projects that push outreach are critical, and they are designed to help the church engage the community on a more personal level. Members make up roughly ninety percent of the congregation in attendance, and over the past two years, the church has seen no significant growth in membership. The church would like to see the number of visitors increase to about thirty percent, which should then increase attendance by that same number in hopes of it becoming a growing trend that is repetitious. Addressing the issue of congregants expressing themselves more freely must become a priority if the church is going to fulfill its mission of empowering God's people and helping them to recognize their purpose in the kingdom.

Some activities that help support this agenda are seminars and conferences every quarter. The seminars are banquet style, and it is open to anyone who wants to participate in the church and the neighboring cities. It includes keynote speakers and vendors who work to promote financial stability and networking opportunities. The conferences usually last three days and include preaching and panel discussions on topics that range from discipleship to entrepreneurship. Regular activities that aid in the context of this research consist of zoom meetings that give those involved the opportunity to motivate each other on how to share the story of Jesus Christ. The leaders have presented a Dream Meeting that is intended to help steer the church into a more specific direction. The Dream Meeting was an idea to give the attendees an opportunity to do a vision board that represented their dreams and aspirations, in hopes that it would inspire and motivate them to accomplish their goals. This meeting included an idea of where those involved saw themselves in the next five to ten years and what kind of role they would play in the ministry. This has been a successful activity and will be used yearly to promote ventures such as family, history, and life lessons.

The leaders at Greater Purpose International hold the view that if scripture is applied practically, everyone will mature spiritually and live out what it means to be God's express image on the earth. Each person should seek spiritual development, and the church works to ignite that passion through teaching, community gatherings, and equipping them with the necessary tools to profess their love for Christ through sharing him with others. George Barna emphatically states that churches work hard at trying to grow and strengthen the kingdom of God with various types of ministries, but a better strategy is igniting people's passion for God and get out of the way.⁷ One would suggest that the key is not to inundate congregants with a different

⁷ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 3.

ministry every month in hopes of coercing them to better display the attributes of Christ but to present Christ to them in a way that allows for expression their way. The leaders work together to equip the people and to help build confidence in them so that they can participate in growth by applying what is shared.

Some may view that simply attending church and paying tithes is the day's agenda, and it causes the individual to limit themselves to just work in the building. This cripples the church and causes them to be ineffective to those outside the walls. Spiritual development comes from leadership, and it is their responsibility to provide an atmosphere that makes it uncomfortable just to sit when there are opportunities to share who God is to others. Bill Hull exclaims that spiritual development should occur through stages. He goes further by identifying eight steps that Jesus used to make and equip disciples. Those steps included: selection, association, consecration, impartation, demonstration, delegation, supervision, and reproduction.⁸ This research is being developed to engage the congregants and make them comfortable in expressing themselves. This will include working closely with a group of individuals who are over the age of eighteen, already attending the church, and are willing to participate in this research project.

Problem Presented

The following problem is being presented: How might the congregation at Greater Purpose International express their understanding of discipleship towards others? Disciples are taught to demonstrate and articulate the gospel through their understanding of what it means to be a fully committed follower of Christ.⁹ There needs to be a natural and straightforward way to

⁸ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 165-167.

⁹ Ken Hemphill, *Splash 2: Discipleship* (Tigerville: Auxano Press, 2009), xi.

carry on a conversation about Christ and grow in their relationship with him. Discipleship is a journey of faith and transformation that leads to growth, and it is impossible to nurture the faith of someone who has just come to know Christ if believers are not relational. The life of Jesus in Matthew chapters 9 and 10; gives insight into embodying what it means to declare the good news of the kingdom. It is the responsibility of the believer to equip others to walk in fellowship with Christ. Discipleship is not just a matter of information remembered, but a lifestyle practiced on loving God and obeying his commands.¹⁰

Jesus could see people where they were going, not where they were at that moment. This also allowed him to see them in their need and potential. Jesus knew that through a relationship with them, he could lead them to a place that would free them from their sin and their past failures.¹¹ As a Christian, helping others grow, develop, and serve, is essential and Jesus proved that. Sharing the truth of Jesus teaches others how to be fruitful in their character while discovering the gifts that God has entrusted to them. Christian discipleship, at its best, opens the door for spiritual growth and a public expression of serving the kingdom.¹²

George Barna gives insight into churches across the nation and how they produce true disciples of Jesus Christ. He concludes that effective discipleship is about life transformation and that a church engaged in this activity will grow steadily and solidly.¹³

When it comes to emulating Christ, truly effective churches use tools to gain a more objective picture of reality. These tools include knowledge measurements, behavioral

¹⁰ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2013), 51.

¹¹ Ken Hemphill and Paula Hemphill, *SPLASH: Show People Love and Share Him* (Tigerville: Auxano Press, 2007), 24.

¹² Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 202.

¹³ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 107.

assessments, gift inventories, behavioral surveys, and goal statements and measures that work to indicate levels of achievement.¹⁴

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this action research project is to help better equip the Greater Purpose International congregation with the necessary tools to express their faith to others comfortably. Jesus' last words to his disciples were, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:18-19).¹⁵ This final meeting was a direct result of Jesus asking them to "come after me." That mandate teaches that their obedience has led them to the moment where Jesus now relies on them to carry forth the mission that he started in Matthew 16:24.

The basic call to discipleship is outlined in Luke 9:23-25. This helps in understanding the urge to follow Jesus. God is at work in everyone, and responding to his call assures that. A direct call to live differently, not just in words, but deed also is needed.¹⁶ Discipleship requires obedience to the attributes seen in the life of Christ, and a call to faithfulness to his mission and mandate. The gospel of Christ allows reaching people and showing them what is required to understand God and what he asks of his people. The sacrifice that Jesus made by giving his life for mankind is essential and is a mark of a true disciple. This further proves that following the pattern of Jesus means offering oneself to him, his service, and for his glory.¹⁷ The Christian faith is based upon the understanding of who God is and the revelation of truth in His word.

¹⁴ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 111.

¹⁵ Matthew 28:18-19, *The Amplified Bible*, The Lockman Foundation (AMP).

¹⁶ Hull, *Book of Discipleship*, 117.

¹⁷ Kevin Brooks, "Addressing Apathy in the Church: Moving People Towards a Biblical Healthy Discipleship Model", *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing* (2014): 87.

Discipleship carries a cost that is associated with it. Belief is that a new position in Christ has freed them from sin's domination, but not its influence. The sinful nature has been crucified with Christ, but it has not been eliminated; according to Paul, although he is no longer living in sin, sin continues to live in him (Romans 7:17). A previous condition is at work in people's lives that places them in a state of rebellion against God and causes them to be more inclined to follow a path that is opposed to the rule of God.¹⁸ An expression of faith can contribute to an understanding that though there is a condition, there also is a solution. A vital component of a believer's faith includes sharing the gospel.

Basic Assumptions

It is believed that this research will help the congregants formulate a strategy that can be implemented regularly to promote the continual process of sharing their faith. The researcher will attempt to present a model capable of being used by anyone who chooses to follow it. The assumption is that through proper teaching and nurturing of church members in the process of discipleship, the congregants will work to express their faith more freely, and it will lead to an increase in attendance. Responsibility is not the motivator for sharing one's faith, but to be obedient to the calling of the Great Commission. Success begins with sharing faith and living for Christ.¹⁹ Remember that at the heart of the church growth movement or anywhere in the world is the Great Commission, and every human being and the whole world must never lose sight of this perspective.²⁰

¹⁸ John Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 31.

¹⁹ William Fay, *Share Jesus Without Fear* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1999), 143.

²⁰ Gary L. McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth: How you Can Work with God to Build a Faithful Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 67.

The researcher assumes that the target population for the study will be able to give accurate and truthful responses to help guide the author to address any questions and objectives acceptably. More importantly, comparisons will be made with that of scholarly findings to establish a basis for consistency and dependability within the research. The researcher assumes that upon completion, the outcomes will be a culmination of interrelated inquiries that set the foundation for future studies.

Definitions

Adult Bible Fellowship (ABF) is an adult alternative interactive Bible study that is a content-heavy, mid-sized teaching experience with a collection of small groups, between thirty to eighty people.²¹

Bill Hull defines a **community of believers** as mature Christians who reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature together.²²

Discipleship is defined as “abandoning the things of the world and following Jesus” by David Earley and Rod Dempsey.²³ Bill Hull defines discipleship as the state of being a disciple or becoming a disciple rather than having been made a disciple.²⁴ For the purposes of this project, discipleship is defined as leading someone from where they are, and transforming them into the image of their master.

Discovery Series is a curriculum that covers a spectrum of fundamental theological and doctrinal issues, including conversion, baptism, the work of the Holy Spirit, prayer, church

²¹ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 122.

²² Hull, *Discipleship*, 164.

²³ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is.*, 22.

²⁴ Hull, *Discipleship*, 35.

involvement, Satan, the nature of God, community, service, world impact, evangelism, and apologetics.²⁵

T4T is the acronym for **Training for Trainers**, a church planting movement where believers who follow Jesus can pass on the gospel and discipleship to others they lead to the faith.²⁶

Limitations

This research set out to help believers at Greater Purpose International better express their faith to others. This will be done through qualitative research, and it is suggested that this research will give them the necessary tools to be successful in sharing their story with others while potentially sparking an increase in attendance. The church has engaged in weekly Bible study lessons that have contributed to training the congregants on what disciple-making is and how Jesus intended for believers to spread the gospel to others. The ultimate purpose is to create a core curriculum that focuses on disciple-making and training congregants to become comfortable sharing Jesus.

Limitations begin with using the theoretical basis as the foundation of the study. The research focuses on defining discipleship and developing strategies to motivate congregants to express themselves. Other researchers may have carried out specific strategies such as training modules, seminars, and role-playing, and though they have experienced success, there is no guarantee for immediate results within the current ministry context. Differences in results may vary considering that prior studies include congregations that are greater in numbers and

²⁵ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 148.

²⁶ Steve Smith and Ying Kai, *T4T: A Discipleship ReRevolution* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2011)

resources than the ministry involved in this study. The researcher will be using a convenient sample to record results, and the congregation is currently limited in number due to COVID-19 restrictions mandated by the state. Current health concerns will also limit the study, and this may put restrictions on who can participate and make accessibility difficult. Another limitation is the time and availability of the participants. With varying schedules, it may become difficult to receive all information on time, and though the study may provide a successful program, challenges may arise from having sufficient time to determine whether the research is yielding positive results.

Lastly, self-reports will be the primary tool, and it may be difficult to truly decipher whether the participant has shown a particular bias to the research. This may affect the reliability of the findings once the answers are collected. Motivation may be a key limitation due to no incentives or the lack of this being a mandatory study. All participants will be encouraged to complete the process, but it is completely up to the individual to do so.

Delimitations

The major delimitation is that there has been no baseline study to gain insight into why the congregation seems reluctant to express themselves. The research alone is depending on past researchers and how they were able to be successful. Having the available research will hopefully allow the researcher to focus on what has yielded the best results. This research project will be available to no more than ten congregants. It is with the hope that those who agree to participate will be able to duplicate the process with others in the future. The participants are required to be over the age of 18, and gender does not matter in this research. The research will take place in two types of settings. First, the researcher will use the current location of the church to disperse information and initiate the parameters of those involved. The second setting will be

up to the participants, and they will be allowed to complete the study wherever they choose, and the researcher will work to meet the participants individually to provide a more intimate space to release information.

Conclusion

The work of God in a believer's life renders them closer to the image and actions of Jesus Christ. This change that occurs is best served in the Christian community as a service towards God and others.²⁷ The foundation and process that one must undergo to facilitate change start with spiritual formation. God facilitates this change, but it is the believer's responsibility to implement the necessary life changes to draw a closer relationship between them and the Holy Spirit. God's initiative and involvement constitute an action plan from the believer that promotes growth. The church has a destination and a role to play in the lives of those they encounter, and this requires passion, motivation, outward expression, direction, and purpose.²⁸ If the congregation is shown how to express themselves outwardly and present the gospel of Jesus to others, it may fulfill its mission of making disciples and increasing attendance at their services.

Church growth is referenced as results that are expected from faithful disciple-making. This means everything involved in bringing men and women who do not have a personal relationship with Christ into fellowship with Him and with others is termed as "church growth."²⁹ God's faithfulness to his people is unconditional, but he desires loyalty in their relationship with him. Without obedience, there is no faithfulness, and that can lead to no

²⁷ Paul Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*. (Grand Rapids: Kregal Publications, 2008); 19.

²⁸ Andy Stanley, *Visioneering: Your Guide for Discovering and Maintaining Personal Vision*. (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2016), 9.

²⁹ Gary L. McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003); 18.

growth. It is not simply about doing the right things, but it is about understanding why the right things need to be done. God gives life, and his nature is to give life to whatever he does. When God first created man, he ensured that man would have an environment to sustain life in. He created that environment to be conducive for growth so that things could prosper in it. God then imparts life to humankind that would give credence to Him, creating the environment and everything that would live within it. This mandate was established from the beginning so that humankind could possess the same character and attributes that God did to ensure that those same results would stretch down to earth and be fulfilled through discipleship.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

Circumstances or influences are constantly at work in the lives of people that play an integral role in disciple-making. Though they vary, a few examples are God's word, glorifying God, the Holy Spirit, faithfulness, effective ministries within the church, a targeted focus, and a simple discipleship structure. As the expression of Christ in the earth, one must determine what purpose they will pursue. The church must remember why they are here and bridge the gap between the present and the future.

When Jesus was leading his disciples, he always required certain qualities in them. He was searching for men and women who were passionate and hungry for change. This mindset was based on the principle that involved one person influencing another, which would result in a change in their heart and mind.³⁰ By nature, the church is a learning community that engages God, and His life is found in the church when there is a clear vision and practice of actually being the church.³¹ Taking the time to formulate a relationship with God so that He can reveal His plan for one's life is essential. No one can practice being the church if they do not know what God desires and what He expects. Five key roles will be discussed in further detail to help

³⁰ Hull, *Discipleship*, 28.

³¹ Don Saines, "Learning to be the Church: The Value of Learning Theory for Discipleship," *Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies* 28 no. 3 (October 2015): 295.

clarify the circumstances that influence believers. This literature review will examine: 1) Discipleship through relationships, 2) Discipleship through spiritual maturity, 3) Discipleship through commitment and training, 4) Discipleship through spiritual transformation, and 4) Success through discipleship.

Discipleship through Relationships

Relationships are essential to development, and this can help lead to effective discipleship. This section examines the importance of discipling through relationships and how it can play a role in the current ministry. Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey write that the church is trying to grow by addition when the world grows by multiplication. While addition does produce incremental growth, multiplication produces exponential growth.³² They further this notion by saying that the power of multiplication is needed to fulfill the Great Commission, and this is done through fostering relationships with others and winning people to Jesus.³³ A common understanding of what is believed and how they live together in harmony is necessary.

George Barna writes that relationships promote unity in faith and knowledge that will lead to the intentional training of people who will submit to Christ because they want to be an imitator of Him in every facet. This works through thought, word, and deed.³⁴ Barna continues that discipleship is not optional and that the church's strength depends on the commitment of others. The Bible gives insight into the importance of discipleship and its relation to the church and those who attend. Salvation is free, and it is the primer that starts the journey to discipleship (Luke 13:1-5).

³² Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 118.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 17.

James Francis exclaims that the foundation of becoming Christ-like is through a daily relationship with God and reciprocating relationships with others into human development. Experiences contribute to the development and strengthening of relational capacities allowing for intimacy with God and spiritual maturation within Christian life. The more an individual becomes aware of themselves, a higher purpose and meaning is harnessed, and it evokes an insight outside of themselves leading to relational growth.³⁵

George Barna continues to write that there is no progression if there is no relationship that leads to accepting God's gift through Jesus. The Christian life is lived through faith, and that faith can only be passed to someone else if the possessor has it. God gives specific laws and commands that allow those following them to live with Him in harmony (Galatians 5:16-24). The believer's life is to reflect the ways of God, and that will require honoring Him in all that they do. The true purpose of discipleship is to help Christians to become transformed into an imitator of Christ.³⁶

Bill Hull states that when discipling through relationships, the focus is on those relationships and how Christians are to become the corporate Christ. This is achieved through Christians allowing God to intervene in their everyday lives. Individual roles must be performed to understand that maturity must take place through character, association with others, and spiritual development.³⁷ He continues to write that there must be a relational environment for discipleship to occur. This requires work and commitment but will also teach believers the importance of effective care. Jesus gave a working model of discipleship and how the

³⁵ James E. Francis, "Integrating Resilience, Reciprocating Social Relationships, and Christian Formation." *Religious Education* 114, no. 4 (2019):505.

³⁶ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 22.

³⁷ Hull, *Book of Discipleship*, 165.

community helped people change. Following Christ starts with having a personal relationship with the creator.³⁸

Kevin Brooks contends in his thesis project about healthy discipleship models; to be a follower of Christ, one must have a personal experience that opens the door for that relationship to occur. Everyone must make this decision themselves through surrendering and allowing Christ to be the head of their life.³⁹ This comes from his chapter, “What It Means to Follow Christ,” and it focuses on being a better disciple through knowledge in the Word of God.

William Cox and Robert Peck write on this subject that Jesus’ primary focus was to reveal the nature of the Father (John 14:9). The door is opened for Christian living to be more about being with Jesus than simply doing for Jesus. The plan of Jesus was not just to destroy the works of Satan, but that all humanity would have the opportunity to be in the right relationship with God. Humanity was created in His image and intended to fulfill its purpose and destiny through an interpersonal relationship with God. Discipleship is about reinforcing that agenda through educating others of their Jesus-validated identity and equipping them for their eternal destiny.⁴⁰

Malan Nel and W. J. Schoeman writes from the perspective of how discipling is negatively viewed. They contend that discipling is a way of life and is learned through the way one lives one’s life as Jesus gives it. There is a circular relationship/response that discipling leads to discipleship. As one learns from the one who has called them and seeking his righteousness as

³⁸ Hull, *Book of Discipleship*, 180.

³⁹ Kevin H. Brooks, “Addressing Apathy in the Church: Moving People Towards a Biblical Healthy Discipleship Model,” *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing* (2014): 85.

⁴⁰ William F. Cox and Robert A. Peck, “Christian Education as Discipleship Formation,” *Christian Education Journal* 15, no. 2 (2018): 251.

a priority for their life, Christians need to grow into reproducing, devoted followers of Christ through the process that comes from being united in accountable relationships.⁴¹

Discipleship through Spiritual Maturity

Differing aspects that lead to discipleship through spiritual maturity play an integral role. George Barna, John Koessler, Bill Hull, Aubrey Malphurs, and Gordon Penford, Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson, and Miriam Martin write on these aspects and how they are beneficial to the believer.

George Barna writes that in doing research on Christians, it seemed as if personal spiritual development was not a top priority. He continued that some may yearn for a deep, personal commitment to the Christian faith but that there also may be others that are not looking to invest in their pursuit of spiritual growth.⁴² He then poses the question, how do people pursue spiritual development? He also suggests that Christians are limited in their ability to grow spiritually when they fail to set development goals. The key is to prevent failure in developing standards that work to measure growth and a failure to establish procedures that help to keep them accountable.⁴³

John Koessler writes that it is hard to understand God without having an encounter with Him. The Bible is a written record of God's revelation on himself to humankind, and it is central to the knowledge of the believer, and it is the way they come in contact with a living God that acts on their behalf. It is the complete source for knowing the plan of God for their life. Koessler

⁴¹ Malan Nel and W.J. Schoeman, "Rediscovering 'Disciplemaking' and the Role of Faith-Sharing," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019): 5.

⁴² Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 34.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 36.

blames a failure to grow on not having the proper focus and understanding what stage of growth the believer is in.⁴⁴

For Bill Hull, Hebrews 5:12 sums it up. He writes that it is expected that Christians are to grow over time and not continue in “elementary truths of God’s word all over again.” Spiritual growth happens in stages and is characterized by the knowledge of God. Jesus taught that the knowledge of God is the essence of eternal life (John 17:3).

The first thing that matters in following Jesus is the process that comes from getting God into men and women. The goal of discipleship is to imitate Christ and to imitate other disciples. This cannot happen if there is no growth. The illustration of what God can do in a person is directly provided through the Christlike qualities of someone close to them.⁴⁵

In their writings, Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold present that Christians are gifted with spiritual gifts or abilities at the point of conversion by God as an extension of his grace. God then gives the Holy Spirit to help implement those gifts, and the purpose of receiving the Holy Spirit is to be empowered to do ministry. The Holy Spirit makes those gifts operational and aids in the pursuit of spiritual maturity.⁴⁶

Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson lend their contributions by writing that just before Jesus left, he gave his followers the mission of helping people find their way back to God. Jesus made a promise that everything needed would be available to fulfill that mission. As Jesus speaks to his followers in Acts 1:8, he is clear that anyone who follows him will receive the power to complete the task. There is a movement that lives within the ones that take on this responsibility.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 73.

⁴⁵ Hull, *Discipleship*, 114.

⁴⁶ Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold, *Re:Vision: The Key to Transforming Your Church*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 61.

⁴⁷ Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson, *Exponential*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 20.

Martin expresses that if others fail to see themselves as a part of the whole fabric of creation, then it limits the effect of discipleship. The message of the gospel is proof that there is work to be done in the church. Martin calls this faithful living and authentic Christian practice.⁴⁸

Discipleship through Commitment and Training

Discipleship is becoming a complete and competent follower of Christ through intentionality.⁴⁹ Commitment and training are essential, and the writings of Ken Hemphill and Paula Hemphill, George Barna, Christopher Johnson, Kevin Brooks, John Koessler, Bill Hull, and Mark Colebank help set the foundation for it in this section.

Concerning commitment and training, Ken Hemphill and Paula Hemphill write that being a witness is not an option. The sovereign God of the universe desires a relationship with man, and he paid the ultimate price to make it possible.⁵⁰

George Barna exclaims that a church engaged in effective discipleship is a church that will grow steadily and solidly.⁵¹

Discipleship, as described by church leaders that are highly effective disciple-makers, gave nine similar components. Those components are the passion that is needed or it is simply described as organizational programming, the depth that includes fostering the development of total Christian believers, the maturity that leads to the believer reaching their highest potential, practicing to become spiritually mature, the process of the journey and continually pursuing spiritual completeness, interactive in the community, multifaceted to grow in various areas, lifelong commitment to be engaged in a permanent process, and being Christlike by modeling Jesus.⁵²

⁴⁸ Miriam K. Martin, "The Human-Nature Relationship: Challenges for Practical Theology and Christian Discipleship." *Practical Theology* 8, no. 3 (2015): 172.

⁴⁹ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 17.

⁵⁰ Hemphill and Hemphill, *SPLASH*, 10.

⁵¹ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 107.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 108-110.

Christopher Johnson lends a hand on this topic by writing that the call given by Christ for his followers is to participate in the growth of the church and a commitment to be conformed to the image of Christ through following and going. The need for a commitment to help others embody what it means to be a follower of Christ is essential. The human experience sees this transformation element through Christian discipleship, and this is the pattern that God gave to build His kingdom.⁵³

Kevin Brooks writes that the idea of obeying everything Jesus has commanded is both overwhelming and impossible for man, but the Bible declares that with God, all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). He continues that perfection is not possible, but the desire to live for Christ leads a person through the process of discipleship and in a closer walk with God. An active Christian that practices the spiritual disciplines and engages in evangelizing and training others is indeed what constitutes one as a disciple.⁵⁴

Ken Hemphill adds to the argument by writing that the greatest example of engaging in training others for the sake of the gospel is seen in the life of Jesus. As Jesus was dying on the cross, he spoke of the work of redemption. His ministry was able to touch thousands, but he only trained twelve. Hemphill continues that it was his commitment to them that ultimately led to him giving his life for many. This was accompanied by prayer, and Jesus found out that prayer was essential for carrying out the Father's will and that the very breath of the Christian life will rely on prayer as well.⁵⁵

⁵³ Christopher Johnson, "4D's of Spiritual Growth: The Local Church's Role in Spiritual Growth and Discipleship," *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing* (2020): 40.

⁵⁴ Brooks, "Addressing Apathy in the Church," 29.

⁵⁵ Hemphill, *SPLASH 2*, 28.

Daniel McKaughan implies that faith is something that comes from a commitment and it is owed to the one who is faithful to us. It perseveres and can be an unbreakable value. Jesus' closest followers abandoned him as he died on the cross, but resilience was evident when those relationships were faced with difficulty and are tested. By remaining committed, faith contributed to the stability and endurance of the relationship.⁵⁶

John Koessler says that discipline is an important factor when it comes to commitment and training. He adds that it is an example of the nature of God and how God loves enough to intervene in the lives of his children. Divine discipline is a sign of love that God uses as proof for those that belong to him. It is analogous to discipline and parental training that motivates one to trust.⁵⁷ Koessler also adds to this commentary even more by stating how some have a belief in the power of effort at the moment of action to accomplish what is wanted while completely ignoring the character of change in their lives as a whole. This limits their ability to be completely transformed inside and out. It is compared to imitating someone without engaging in the life preparation and training that enables them to perform their task with effort. The understanding should not solely be based on effort, but effort empowered by the Holy Spirit that demands training and practice.⁵⁸

At the moment of spiritual birth, the Spirit of God plants himself in those who accept him and provides the source of their motivation. Bill Hull reiterates this and continues that God does not desire one to earn salvation through just practicing a set of disciplines but that he loves the effort. He honors and urges them to put forth the effort to invoke spiritual training and growth.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Daniel McKaughan, "On the Value of Faith and Faithfulness," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 81, no. 1 (2017): 19.

⁵⁷ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 144.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁵⁹ Hull, *Discipleship*, 199.

Mark Colebank emphatically states that extensive practice and repetition are needed in acquiring a skill that can be executed with little thought. He continues that this replaces old behaviors with new ones.⁶⁰

Jesus would demonstrate the desired activities he wanted others to learn, delegate those activities to His disciples, and then have them do what he had been doing. He would then send them out to practice doing it and review what they did once they returned. Through commitment and training, through repetition and practice, Jesus showed biblical principles that could be observed and emulated.⁶¹

Discipleship through Spiritual Transformation

Spiritual transformation is moving from the person one is and continuing to change by degree into the image of Christ.⁶² This section includes the writings of Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, John Koessler, George Barna, Jeff Christopherson, Jonathan Falwell, and Aubrey Malphurs, and Gordon Penford that also help to lend information on this subject.

The starting point in Christian discipleship begins with the health of the individual. Based on the writings of Dave Early and Rod Dempsey and understanding that the continual health of the organization is a concern, but not the primary motivation.

Health is a result of individuals maturing and ministering according to their specific role in the body. Unity and purpose are fulfilled when everyone is doing their part. Making disciples is a developmental process called spiritual transformation that moves one from the person they are into the image of Christ. The natural progression is that Great Commission leaders will emerge as disciples grow and develop in the body.⁶³

Koessler argues that God's standard for the disciple's life is no less than Christ. He is the mark by which spiritual maturity is gauged and the aim of all training. The church is to be built

⁶⁰ Mark Colebank, "Obedience Oriented Discipleship: A Mixed Methods Study of Effective Discipleship Models in Select Southern Baptist Churches," (*ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2017), 58.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Hull, *Discipleship*, 188.

⁶³ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is..*, 195.

up through spiritual gifts that are given to believers. To one day be like Christ is the ultimate hope of the believer.⁶⁴

Dale Lemke offers commentary that derives from the tendency to overemphasize the role of leaders as it pertains to spiritual gifts. Based on Ephesians 4:7-16, most of those verses speak to the broader community of faith through leadership and the idea that all believers are gifted by the Spirit and essential to the healthy functioning of the faith community. Though there is a broader emphasis on leaders playing an important role, all believers participate in Christ's mission for his church and in achieving its purposes.⁶⁵

George Barna lends to the conversation by writing that the life of Jesus exemplified how he expects his followers to live. It is with passion, zeal, and purity that their lives should be demonstrated.

Knowing God's truths and principles is essential when it comes to claiming what one believes. This is critical because some are more likely to reject absolute moral truth in favor of relativism, which opens one up for a redefinition of values, attitudes, and behaviors.⁶⁶

Bill Hull explains that as disciples, a follower of Christ chooses to live under the authority of scripture and submit to the will of the Holy Spirit. The most benefit is gained from the Holy Spirit's work and God's instruction of living a life of unity through his word. No individual has the power to live the Christian life or grasp the whole of scripture on their own. The conscious decision to live by God's rules includes a life of submission, sacrifice, and obedience, built on the foundation of humility.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 41.

⁶⁵ Dale Lemke, "A Philosophy of Disciple-Centered Leadership," *Christian Education Journal* 14, no 2 (2017): 279.

⁶⁶ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 70.

⁶⁷ Hull, *Discipleship*, 190.

Jeff Christopherson submits that the gospel is a person, a set of propositional truths that was God and man and lived within the guidelines of human history. Jesus is the person by which these truths speak and is to be worshipped more than the set of truths that make up what is the gospel. Christopherson continues to write that discipleship is about bringing people to Jesus, not to the precepts about Jesus. Effectively communicating Jesus, the person rather than a set of statements is needed so that people do not feel they are trying to be convinced to change their ways. Offering good news is what will bring people to the person of Jesus Christ.⁶⁸

It is one thing to believe in the existence of God, and another to believe that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh. Jonathan Falwell makes mention of this and continues saying that Jesus claimed to have come from heaven, to be equal with God, to be the incarnation of God, and to represent the power and authority of God. This was not just a claim to be God but a demonstration of his power and ability to be one with the Father.⁶⁹

Aubrey Malphurs adds that one's own unique culture shapes their practice of faith and ability to see this truth. This leads to a failure in helping reach those who are a part of different cultures and because of these cultural differences, reaching people for Christ becomes limited.⁷⁰

George Barna makes a healthy contribution by writing that the priority is to recruit and train disciples, and this should never change. Ministry components are numerous, and they are important but should be packaged into the discipleship process.

Oftentimes some find internal struggles within the church that believe the emphasis should be on something different, but this leads to a model of James and John that asks who will be first, rather than a model of Jesus that asks who wants to be whole (John 5). Becoming a disciple of Christ integrates the varying ministries in the church into a

⁶⁸ Jeff Christopherson, *Kingdom First: Starting Churches that Shape Movements*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015), 164.

⁶⁹ Jonathan Falwell, *Innovate Church*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2008), 210.

⁷⁰ Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold, *Re:Vision: The Key to Transforming Your Church*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 168.

seamless blend of faith-driven activities. Jesus' ministry was to make disciples now, make them continually, and use whatever resources available to do so. This would also include never stopping molding people into Christlikeness. God knows that when people become Christlike, the expressions of their faith emerge naturally.⁷¹

Discipleship through Communicating Effectively

One's life must reflect the ways of God. This commentary is given by George Barna, and it is based on responses that he presents on the topic of communicating effectively. He continues that the corporate goal is to introduce other people to Jesus, help them to accept him as their Savior, and enable them to live the life worthy of someone known as a Christian.⁷² Barna is joined by Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, Bill Hull, Jeff Christopherson, Jonathan Falwell, and Dave Earley and David Wheeler. All of them give credence to how communication is essential in discipling.

Christian followers are to help individuals grow, develop, and serve the King and his kingdom. Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey believe this and continue to say that sharing the truth with others helps them to discover and accomplish the will of God. They become fruitful as they grow and use the gifts God has given them. The plan and the overall approach are to ensure that God gets all the glory.⁷³

Bill Hull's contribution to this topic begins with the act of mentoring and using communication as a form of discipleship. He states that mentoring is at the core of discipleship because it directly correlates with one person following another and becoming like that individual.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 162.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷³ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2013), 202.

⁷⁴ Hull, *Discipleship*, 216.

The tragedy of non-discipleship Christianity is people who are quick to profess their conversion, but they never act on their faith. God is the one who helps disciples to discover how they fit into his scheme, and he rescues them by raising their value with purpose. People realize how important they are through mentorship and communication of the ministry of Jesus and the expression of Christ's love.⁷⁵

Jeff Christopherson adds that effective communication takes place through four distinct components: a sender, a message, a medium, and a recipient. A communication strategy is to be developed that productively appreciates those characteristics. He continues that the communication process is successful when the receiver understands the intended message.⁷⁶

Jonathan Falwell explains that clear and effective communication is critical to growth. Though the disciples did not fully understand all that Jesus spoke to them, they were prepared to carry out his will due to him effectively communicating with them. Ineffective communication causes one to suffer in their ability to fulfill the Great Commission, says Falwell, because God should be communicated to bring out positive development.⁷⁷

Dave Earley and David Wheeler write on the subject the story of Jesus with the woman at the well and how communicating effectively helped bridge a commonly understood physical reality to spiritual issues. They continued that engaging people in everyday conversation can be the springboard to a spiritual conversation⁷⁸ Communication is a convenient and effective way to bypass intellectual defenses through sharing salvation and understanding how Jesus can walk into the heart of a lost person. Earley and Wheeler expound on the difficulty of arguing against the evidence of a changed life.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Hull, *Discipleship*, 216.

⁷⁶ Christopherson, *Kingdom First*, 107.

⁷⁷ Falwell, *Innovate Church*, 40.

⁷⁸ Dave Earley and David Wheeler, *Evangelism Is: How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2010), 122.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 248.

George Barna gives a defining conclusion on this subject by interjecting that ineffectiveness comes from a lack of communication. His contribution to the subject continues by saying that an effective servant of Christ displays evidence that God is at work in the lives of his people and that the current condition of discipleship in the church should come from the activity of guiding individuals to become spiritually mature.⁸⁰

Success through Discipleship

One of the primary goals of ministry is to reproduce additional ministers. Dave Earley states this and continues to write that there is a challenge to develop more followers and helpers, but multiplying leaders is essential.⁸¹ Earley's commentary on success continues and is combined with several other writers contributing to this section. They are Bill Hull, John Koessler, Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson, and Dave Earley and David Wheeler.

Multiplying disciple group leaders is not complete until their potential leaders are leading their group. Dave Earley continues that there is a goal of developing a disciple and developing them to do something. The only agenda should include disciple-making in cooperation with God to create more disciple-makers.⁸²

Bill Hull suggests that people try to make discipleship into other things that diminish it. This causes leaders to make the wrong choice when it comes to prioritizing. Diluted forms of discipleship need to be dismantled. Hull writes that it is not just a program or just a production line, not just for the highly literate, nor is it just for those who like structure. It is for those who desire to grow spiritually.⁸³

⁸⁰ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 88.

⁸¹ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 165.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 165.

⁸³ Hull, *Discipleship*, 40.

John Koessler explains that proof of success comes from being an example. Teaching was an important part of Paul's discipleship ministry, but his life was equally important. Koessler writes that in 2 Corinthians 6:4, Paul gave a list of circumstances he would encumber, and it is a model to others. He suffered at the hands of others, he suffered afflictions, and he would go through hardships caused by self-imposed discipline. His goal was to communicate his heart.⁸⁴

Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson contribute to this subject by writing that leadership is another key to success or failure, and Jesus understood the importance of this dynamic when he challenged his friends to spread the gospel. He knew that a movement was the only way to accomplish his mission of bringing good news to everyone who would hear. The momentum of Jesus' movement would continue to increase and add to their number daily, and the missing element today is people obeying the leading of God's Spirit and moving together in one direction on the same mission. There are spiritual dynamics to a movement that takes the believer where God is leading them more quickly than they could ever do on their own.⁸⁵

Dave Earley and David Wheeler explain that winning someone to oneself is a major victory that is to be followed up with winning them to church. It is not about a building because Jesus did not give his life on the cross for a building. He died for a group of people who would be passionate about following him. They continue to write that the goal is to get the nonbeliever around genuine Christians so that they can see the love and power of God at work in human lives. This will get them in an environment where the Holy Spirit can speak to them through the word of God and help them to feel like they belong before they can believe.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 172.

⁸⁵ Ferguson and Ferguson, *Exponential*, 199.

⁸⁶ Earley and Wheeler, *Evangelism Is*, 191.

Dave Earley writes in a different book, but on the same topic, success requires the right amount of involvement and freedom. One needs to be available, know how to pray, able to celebrate every success, and willing to challenge others to continue multiplication. Disciple-making is developing and deploying new disciples to continue the work that has started.⁸⁷

Theological Foundations

This project's theological foundation revolves around Jesus' practice of discipleship and the mandate he gave to those who followed him. The primary focus that Jesus would display to his disciples included being an example and effectively spreading his message to everyone they met. Bill Hull stated that discipleship characteristics include mentoring, a disciplined program of Bible study, and training in witnessing and speaking.⁸⁸ Jesus would exemplify those three attributes throughout his ministry with the disciples, and the congregants may benefit from a similar program. The principles that Jesus established in His teachings should be the center of discipleship and for the development of those that choose to follow Him.

Framework of Discipleship

Several passages in the gospels relate directly to the mandate that Jesus gave to his disciples. This mandate called the Great Commission is outlined in Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:14-18, Luke 24:44-49, and John 20:19-23 of the New Testament. The disciple-making ministry of Jesus would move through three phases: investigation leading to repentance, immersion into ministry, and intentional commissioning. The Great Commission was the catalyst to make His disciples ready to reproduce the process in the lives of others.⁸⁹ The command to

⁸⁷ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 173.

⁸⁸ Hull, *Discipleship*, 18.

⁸⁹ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 78.

make disciples was clear that it would involve commitment and a transformational process. The relational dimension of discipleship is a bond that must be strengthened through following, memorizing, learning, imitating the life of the one who is teaching, and making disciples.⁹⁰ The three-fold phase of discipleship is outlined below.

Table 1. Phases of Disciple-making⁹¹

Investigation Leading to Repentance	Apprenticeship into Ministry	Intentional Commissioning
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigation, leading to repentance and faith in Jesus 2. A committed belief 3. Regeneration 4. Saved 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Immersion, abandonment, and apprenticeship into ministry 2. Reckless obedience 3. Transformation 4. Trained 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Intentional multiplication of leaders 2. Multiplying leader 3. Reproduction and multiplication 4. Sent

Investigation Leading to Repentance

Investigation, leading to repentance and faith in Jesus, is the first stage of discipleship that is accomplished through the acknowledgment of being a believer. The first part of the Great Commission says to “baptize them.” This does not mean limiting disciple-making to just training people who are already Christians but to find those who need Christ and introduce them to a life of following Jesus.⁹² It can be generally accepted that those who give their life to Christ are his disciples. It can be possible to have all the qualities listed and still miss a connection required to be a follower of Christ: following someone who can teach others how to follow Jesus. To define what Jesus means as a disciple is to submit to a form of authority to become more like that

⁹⁰ Hull, *Discipleship*, 64.

⁹¹ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 128.

⁹² Hull, *Discipleship*, 34.

individual as that person follows Christ. To be shaped into the image of Christ is the disciple's intention.⁹³

Romans 10:9 says, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. (KJV)" Salvation is promised as two things occur: 1. Confessing the Lord openly and professing relation to him and dependence on him. 2. Believing in the heart and acknowledging the power of profession in the heart. The Christian faith relies on the revelation of the gospel concerning Christ.⁹⁴ Those who believe in Jesus receive the person of Christ, and this truth carries with it propositional content that those who find the truth will find Him. This is relative to the notion that those who rejected Him rejected His teachings, but those who held to His teachings would find the truth (John 1:12).⁹⁵

Apprenticeship into Ministry

The second stage of discipleship outlined by Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey is development through immersion, abandonment, and apprenticeship into ministry, and this is achieved through total commitment. Memorization and replication are requirements of a lifestyle that includes following Christ, choosing to be with Christ, learning from Christ, and becoming like Christ.⁹⁶ Belief in Jesus is not enough to be considered a disciple. The cross must be embraced with a need to forsake all to follow Jesus and the ability to bear fruit. The book of John 1:35-50 gives an example of what interest in Jesus' ministry and teachings promote. Pursuit is achieved, and this is a call to action that leads the men from repentance and faith in Jesus to

⁹³ Hull, *Discipleship*, 68.

⁹⁴ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, 6th ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 437.

⁹⁵ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 17.

⁹⁶ Early and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 68.

abandonment and apprenticeship.⁹⁷ Character and capacity are created from committing to Christ. Matthew 28:20 says, “teaching them to observe,” and this component of the Great Commission is the single step that helps lead to spiritual transformation.⁹⁸

Being Spirit-led is a critical quality in the life of an apprentice of Jesus. What does that mean? Being Spirit-led is simply “hearing from God and obeying what he says.”⁹⁹ Bill Hull uses a Transformation Triangle (Figure 1) to illustrate better what is needed for development. The elements of the triangle are the community, Holy Spirit and scripture, training and pattern of life, circumstances and events, and mission. It represents living together in common conditions with common devotion. Acts 2 better exemplifies this notion. The Holy Spirit and scripture are the authority that disciples choose to live under. Communication with God and the work of the Holy Spirit are better defined through the word of God as it relates to the context of the community. Choosing a life of following Jesus is what refers to training and pattern of life. The essence of discipleship is a representation of the process that marks the believer’s goals and intentions. Circumstances and events shape the believer. The inner person is formed and transformed through God. Jesus built their faith and formed their thinking on the Mount of Transfiguration, where he fed five thousand (John 6). The circumstances and events of life are designed to squeeze out what is inside to reveal the Spirit. The mission is the mystery of God that is found in losing one’s self in serving others. Life is found by giving it away (Romans 12:1).¹⁰⁰

Mark 8:34-37 says, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? (ESV)” This

⁹⁷ Early and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 68.

⁹⁸ Hull, *Discipleship*, 34.

⁹⁹ Ferguson and Ferguson, *Exponential*, 51.

¹⁰⁰ Hull, *Discipleship*, 188-192.

is the mysterious challenge of mission from Jesus to the crowd. Without mission there is a fall into the trap of endless waiting for a “call from God” before one goes to the world and make disciples.¹⁰¹

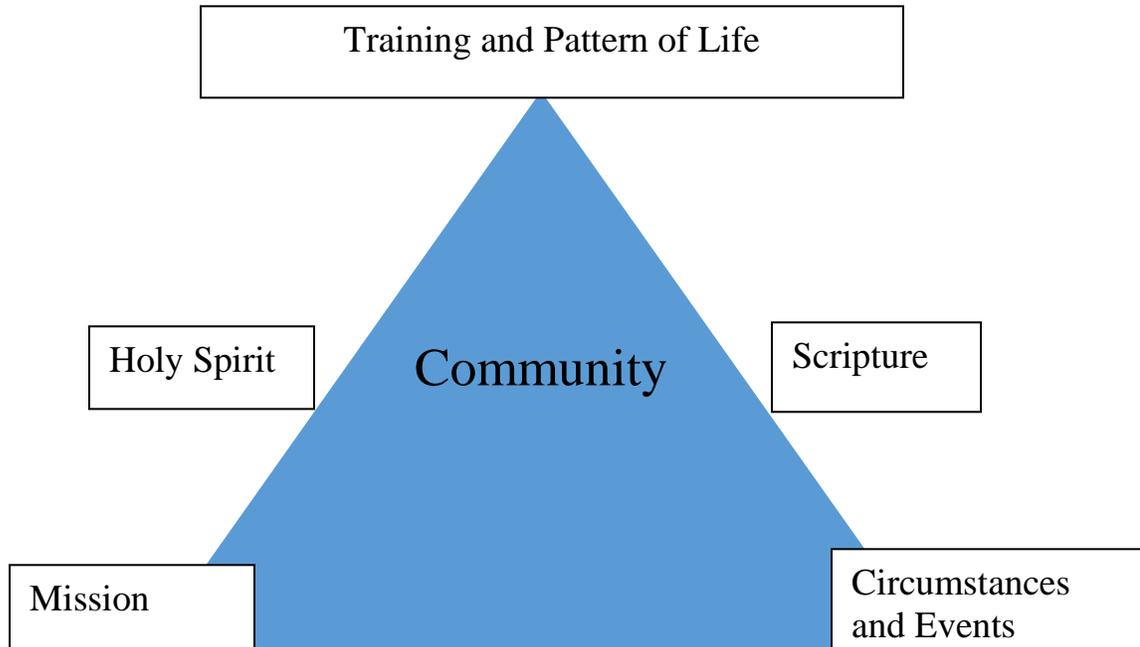


Figure 1. The Transformational Triangle¹⁰²

Intentional Commissioning

The final process of disciple-making includes calling disciples to intentional global commissioning. This is the third stage and poses the question, “Will you go for Jesus?” *Missio Dei* (Mission of God) is a Latin phrase that reminds the church that its mission is not the invention, responsibility, or devised plan of human origin.¹⁰³ Earley and Dempsey continue to say that the acts of God are the description of the mission rather than the activities of the church. It is the church getting in sync with the heart of God and meshing with the activity of God.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Hull, *Discipleship*, 192.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁰³ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 78.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Making true disciples was the underlying philosophy of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was relying on people becoming Christlike and allowing the fundamental expressions of faith to emerge naturally.¹⁰⁵

Training of a disciple leads to the final step of sending or the "go" aspect of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19. God's kingdom grows organically through relationships and includes individuals willing to cross-cultural and geographic barriers to reaching others.¹⁰⁶ Luke 10:1-2 is an example of Jesus giving instructions on how to execute the commission given. The ministry of the gospel will call men to receive Christ while bringing strength and encouragement to the ones who are relaying the message. True discipleship will facilitate people who are devoted to a journey of imitating Jesus rather than just merely completing menial tasks and responsibilities.¹⁰⁷

Universal Model of Leadership

The Greeks and Jews had a well-known practice of discipleship. Instructing disciples was a practice of philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Jesus' way of attracting disciples was similar and engaging in ways that resembled them.¹⁰⁸ Obedience was important to Jesus as he expressed the genuineness of their love for him (John 14:23-24). Jesus worked to show the disciples that they were equal and see themselves as servants, not "great ones." Jesus would model this himself, and his willingness to teach to multitudes was the difference in what set him apart from other teachers.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 162.

¹⁰⁶ Hull, *Discipleship*, 34.

¹⁰⁷ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 168.

¹⁰⁸ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 150.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

Five elements make up what a disciple should be, and they are as follows: a disciple submits to a teacher who teaches how to follow Jesus, a disciple learns Jesus' words, a disciple learns Jesus' way of ministry, a disciple imitates Jesus' life and character, and a disciple finds and teaches other disciples who also follow Jesus.¹¹⁰ 2 Timothy 2:2 is indicative of this. It says, "What you have heard of me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."¹¹¹ The New Testament teaches that humility is revealed in relationships with others. This character trait is built in the community through the strength required to hold them together as they face challenges to their faith.¹¹²

Leadership motivation is about helping others grow and become what God has in mind for them to become. The key to Jesus was to make the disciples mature and productive. Making disciples is a developmental process. Bill Hull describes it this way: "We call this process spiritual transformation. In spiritual transformation, we move from one person we are, and continue to change by degree into the image of Christ." The natural progression as disciples grow and develop is that Great Commission leaders will emerge.¹¹³

Jesus' call to discipleship was implicitly a call to take on the character of Christ personally. Mark 1:17 explains this by saying, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men (ESV)." Jesus was describing his kingdom assignment and the only process that makes that assignment possible. The character necessary for multiplying true disciples grows directly in proportion to a personal following of Jesus.¹¹⁴ With certainty, it is proper to unequivocally

¹¹⁰ Hull, *Discipleship*, 68.

¹¹¹ 2 Timothy 2:2, English Standard Version, Crossway Bibles, 2016 (ESV).

¹¹² Hull, *Discipleship*, 68.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹¹⁴ Christopherson, *Kingdom First*, 35.

ensure that the call one is following is that of the voice of God. One way to ensure credibility for tomorrow is to lead well today. Any outward leadership is suspect if it does not flow from a well-examined heart. Everyone is starting from a different place, and one path will not work for everyone. Some people have no belief system at all, and only a few may have some kind of church or religious history. An ongoing commitment or influence is essential to ensure which path is the right one. 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 is an example of Paul's discipleship process. He was determined to help disciple-makers develop a strategy for investing in others.¹¹⁵

For the mission to succeed, a predetermined plan, a clear path, and intentional steps are needed. The important question becomes, "What kind of disciple should be made?" A fruit-bearing disciple is key in three areas: 1. Engage people with the gospel, 2. Obey the commands of Christ, and 3. Demonstrate a Christ-like character. In the discipleship process, environments and relationships are created that will help others move through stages of growth. The task becomes creating a coaching environment and a teaching environment as Jesus did. A universal result is achieved and helps to determine where the individual is, what God is saying, and where the individual is going.¹¹⁶

Role of the Believer in Discipleship

For a Christ-follower, the most significant level of self-discovery is getting a picture of how one has changed since becoming a subject of the King. Submitting one's life to the lordship of Christ promises that His Spirit will dwell within and be an ever-present guide. Through a relationship of humble submission guided by the authority of His word, a sense of God's sovereign plan is unveiled. God works from the inside out while preparing those who belong to Him for a kingdom adventure that is beyond the depth of those he is working through.¹¹⁷

Determining one's ministry direction involves a personal mission and vision in addition to the

¹¹⁵ Christopherson, *Kingdom First*, 203.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 203-205.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

gifts, passions, and temperament that God provides. God designed his creation uniquely, and he guides their life's ministry direction. God would have the believer become a part of a local church ministry, and that the church would have an organizational mission and vision to be fulfilled. The mission and the vision to make disciples, according to Matthew 28:19, are what God places within the individual so that it can be shared.¹¹⁸

The believer must answer the call to follow and become like Jesus. Based on the life of Jesus, six issues of transformation are evident to become like him. Living this way leads to being formed then conformed, and that leads to transformation. The six-fold definition of being conformed to Christ is as follows: a transformed mind, a transformed character, transformed relationships, transformed habits, transformed service, and transformed influence.¹¹⁹

Romans 12:2 gives insight into the role of the believer. Paul told the church in Rome that they are to be transformed by the renewing of their mind. The mind is the base of operations for humans, and the quest should be to believe what Jesus believed so that one can live the way he lived. A transformed mind is the attitude of the believer in how they act, feel, and think. Matthew 5:1-12 provides the inner core of how to live from a satisfying spiritual center. To have a transformed character is to study the life of Jesus and emulate it. Understanding his life and how he overcame trials and sufferings lead to a transformed relationship. Not intellectually agreeing with hearing how he loves, but to experience that love. Disciples will arrange their life around the practices of Jesus. Through humility, obedience, sacrifice, and submission, regeneration takes place after choosing to follow Him. Luke 2:41-52 further proves that even Jesus had to grow and learn.¹²⁰

Matthew 7:24-27 explains the importance of building a house on a solid foundation. Jesus warns about the perils of building a house on sand that when the rains fall, the rivers rise, and the wind blows and pounds the house, the house collapses. What does a disciple of Jesus look like? Being a disciple requires discipline in spiritual habits and purpose. The epistles show a relation

¹¹⁸ Malphurs and Penfold, *Re:Vision*, 63.

¹¹⁹ Hull, *Discipleship*, 130.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 130-142.

where disciples are developed in the context of a body of believers. Disciples are to obey the Great Commandment (Matthew 28:19), the New Commandment (John 13:34), and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19). Disciples become the hands, feet, and voice for Jesus in the world and their development helps the body grow in maturity as each one plays their part.¹²¹

Role of Multiplication in Discipleship

If being a fully developed follower of Jesus is a matter of taking the next step, then being a disciple-maker is a matter of helping others take the next step. Jesus led his followers through a three-stage process that resulted in multiplication. The three stages of discipleship are believer, disciple, and disciple-maker. As one moves from one step to the other, there is an increase in commitment, but the overall impact becomes enhanced.¹²² Disciple-making is not running a program, but it is investing in people. Without people, there is no one to disciple. Effectiveness is contingent on the effectiveness with people, and disciple-makers must determine ways to make deposits in the lives of those they hope to disciple. Paul is an example of someone willing to learn the words of Jesus and then lead others through masterful deposits that he made into teaching them (Galatians 1:11-12, 15-18). Multiplying disciples like Paul requires learning and obeying everything that Jesus commanded, identifying faithful men, meeting them regularly, doing ministry together, and staying focused on the bigger picture. The bigger picture is a reminder that a disciple is to multiply their life into the life of faithful disciples.¹²³

It was evident that the disciples did not understand the exponential power of multiplication. Jesus understood that the fastest way to reach many was through the process of

¹²¹ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 22.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 127.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 156-163.

multiplication. The message of the gospel multiplies through a consistent witness. Enlightenment to the power of biblical multiplication will come through investing in the lives of others. The disciples were changed when they were confronted by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the discerner of all truth and will mold believers into the image of Christ. God can erase the deepest fears and prejudiced attitudes and replace them with courage (Acts 4:18-20) and boldness (Acts 4:31) to spread the gospel.¹²⁴

First Corinthians 11:1 says, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”¹²⁵ Paul is an example of a role model, and he implored others to imitate him as he once imitated Jesus. The discipleship strategy of the early church involved long-term relationships and responsibility for ministry. One important thing to take note of is that effective discipleship takes time. True discipleship will require more than regurgitating biblical or theological content. Effectiveness in discipleship will come from practice in ministry.¹²⁶

MacArthur acknowledges that not every disciple in the New Testament was a Christian but asserts that every Christian is a disciple. God’s grace will produce spiritual fruit in the life of the believer. The discipleship relationship has an important dimension of Spirit-empowered human responsibility. The church’s primary goal is to lead people into a lifestyle of full commitment to Jesus Christ. Jesus uses a relational approach, and it takes a disciple to make a disciple.¹²⁷

Perhaps the most common word associated with discipleship is reproduction. Just as Jesus trained his followers, the same must be done today. Training disciples is what makes the Great Commission possible, and spiritual reproduction creates spiritual generations that can last for decades. God created the discipleship process to cause believers to become little Christs, who

¹²⁴ Earley and Wheeler, *Evangelism Is...*, 134.

¹²⁵ Corinthians 11:1, New International Version, (NIV).

¹²⁶ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 155.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 160.

can change the world where they live, work, and play. The best approach is to combine a reproductive and multiplication approach into discipleship that can dramatically change the world.¹²⁸ The passing on the trust of the gospel to others is evidenced in scripture with Paul and Timothy's relationship, "What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Jesus Christ. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you. Guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives inside." (2 Timothy 1:13-14, NIV).

Theoretical Foundations

The current research integrates the believer's role in the discipleship process and best practices to express that understanding. A biblical foundation is used to develop a baseline in which a believer can function as a willing disciple. The research aspect of the project is an examination into whether there is a direct correlation between the believers expressing themselves openly and whether the current church construct is capable of aiding in the process. The Great Commission, as Jesus Christ outlines it in His teachings, is at the center of current discipleship models. George Barna studied several churches that would invite everyone to get involved in a discipleship program, whether saved or not. The consensus was that fifty to sixty-five percent of the congregation became presently involved in the process of spiritual development. Figures were based on measures of a consistent commitment to growth and an intensive discipling process that started before the person reached adulthood.¹²⁹

The discipleship experience should entail both a personal and a corporate dimension. The goal of corporate self-analysis is to better understand others well enough to help them live the Christian life successfully and learn what motivates them. F. F. Bruce suggests in the writing by

¹²⁸ Hull, *Discipleship*, 280.

¹²⁹ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 114.

John Koessler that there is a problem with isolating oneself instead of becoming a continual extension of the church. This further limits the opportunity to provoke love and good works throughout the community.¹³⁰ At the fundamental level, true discipleship is a function of the believer as he yields to the transformative work of the Holy Spirit in his life. Knowing Christ helps to constitute being a believer, and it begins the transformational relationship that leads to changing into the image of Christ. It is the same Christ that called the twelve to follow Him and now is calling every believer to do the same.¹³¹ Foundationally, this principle is evident in many successful models and will be integrated into this study.

Discipleship in Small Groups

Small groups can fill a vital role in discipleship. Imagine a setting where more are focused on group members' spiritual lives and using a small group to enhance further how members grow. A small group allows for determined believers to work together to reach their networks for Christ. Included is a system that finds and equips others and a forum for creating the community necessary for accountability. Success comes from developing a set of principles that guide the group. Knowing the objective is essential and should include mission and secondary objectives that train people to witness, study the Bible, help understand biblical teaching, supporting those in need, or reaching out to the poor.¹³²

Small groups are broken into five sub-groups that can be defined by their general makeup: 1. Covenant groups are low in commitment and move from six to twelve weeks, providing ways to introduce people to a small-group experience. 2. Support groups address specific issues that hinder spiritual growth. It may require intimacy and is usually a closed group. 3. Basic accountability groups require a year-long commitment. It is designed to help formulate healthy habits while practicing spiritual disciplines. 4. Ongoing accountability groups are closed groups that work together year after year. 5.

¹³⁰ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 185.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹³² Hull, *Discipleship*, 230.

Open and closed groups are used to reach new members. Closed groups typically do not accept new people once there is a clear mission and members are in place.¹³³

The Fuller Church Growth Institute conducted a study on open and closed groups. The study would divide people into two groups that included a consolidated adult Sunday school class that was open to everyone, and the other group included multiple classes in one place that serviced a specific need. The consolidated group attendance declined while the multiple class groups multiplied. Richard Myers of the Church Federation of Greater Indianapolis established the principle, Let's Face It. It was based on Myers' Law that stated, "The church grows in number and meaningfulness to its members as the number of face-to-face groups increases."¹³⁴

Through research, George Barna studied that the most popular tactic to motivate people to experience a more personal discipling environment came from joining a small group. A handful of the churches researched did not generate the desired results; most considered the small, home-based, church-directed aggregations to be the cornerstone of their development process. Acknowledgment of ample training for facilitators, a better accountability process, strong relational connections, and a purposeful selection of material to cover are needed, or the small groups would fail to produce disciples. Southern Baptist churches most commonly use Sunday school classes in their discipleship efforts. Few of the other effective disciple-making churches studied relied on those classes. A popular adult alternative is the Adult Bible Fellowship used in several congregations. ABF is a teaching experience for small groups that meet before or after worship service. The primary purpose is to provide high-quality Bible teaching that is related to the sermon for that week.¹³⁵

¹³³ Hull, *Discipleship*, 230-233.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹³⁵ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 121.

Basic principles need to be incorporated into small groups that foster spiritual growth. Assuring the believer that the process will sustain them if they continue is a way to be intentional towards commitment. The group's statement of purpose will provide a foundation, and a covenant will provide the solid structure needed. The development of good habits is formed along with reaching the goals that have been established. Establishing relationships from those goals will provide love and support through accountability. Every small group needs a mission outside of itself. Without outreach, Bible study becomes academic, prayer becomes stale, and fellowship becomes superficial.¹³⁶

Models of Effective Discipleship

A long-term discipleship process must be introduced to new believers to allow them to become self-feeders from the Word and obedient to the Spirit. Long-term discipleship requires a pattern of inductive study and application of scripture that can be used in the future. Steve Smith introduces the T4T process that helps new believers become equipped to move forward toward Christlikeness and fulfilling God's purpose.¹³⁷ A basic church structure can be examined as a strand of healthy DNA, and Earley and Dempsey give examples of four church models: The Traditional Church, Attractional Church, Organic Church, and the Hybrid Church.¹³⁸

The Traditional Church model has a senior pastor who oversees programs and ministries of the church. The organizational structure is not complex, and discipleship is taught from the pulpit during the Sunday school hour. The role of a spiritual caregiver is that of the pastor. The traditional church will have a narrower Great Commission perspective. The model is based on addition and not multiplication. The Attractional Church is a seeker church. Unbelievers are attracted to "come and see" what God is doing. Church members are encouraged to be intentional about spending time with their lost friends and inviting them to church. Prayer takes

¹³⁶ Hull, *Discipleship*, 234-235.

¹³⁷ Steve Smith and Ying Kai, *T4T: A Discipleship ReRevolution* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2011), 223.

¹³⁸ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 229.

on a more personal and introspective dimension that occurs within small groups. The Organic Church is described as a simpler, more relational way to do church. It is organized around incarnational relational groups living on a mission in the community. The Hybrid Church combines elements from both the attractional and the organic church model. Making disciples is the focus of the day through small group systems that have been laid on top of a traditional/attractional model.¹³⁹

The current ministry model for this research is the traditional church. Understanding the model of the church will help in formulating the proper system needed to accomplish their goal of training disciples to express themselves freely. The church wants to be more of an attractional model, but lack of commitment from people and other constraints limits that possibility at the current moment. Love and leadership are the building blocks for a foundation of disciple-making, and the love for God will produce love for others. The systems and structures that are being developed in the church should reflect the nature and character of God's kingdom. Being aware of the characteristics that make a traditional church will help the current ministry not become stagnant in its mission.

George Barna gives an overview of five models of effective discipleship. The five models emphasize enabling people to think and act like Christians. The models are as follows: The Competencies Model, the Missional Model, the Neighborhood Model, the Worldview Model, and the Lecture-Lab Model. The five models focus on character development, thinking and decision making, and building affirming relationships.¹⁴⁰

The Competencies Model is used at Pantego Bible Church and emphasizes personal assessment and integration with all aspects of ministry. The Great Commandment and Great Commission are broken into thirty competencies: ten core beliefs, ten core

¹³⁹ Ibid., 230-234.

¹⁴⁰ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 134.

practices, and ten core virtues. The use of an objective and focused measurement strategy is the responsibility of the believer. Primary concerns of this model emanate from the foundational tool, the Christian Life Profile. The evaluation of one's performance in a core competency is measured through questions.¹⁴¹

Table 2. Thirty Specific Competencies¹⁴²

10 Core Beliefs	10 Core Practices	10 Core Virtues
The Trinity	Worship	Joy
Salvation by grace	Prayer	Peace
Authority of the Bible	Single-mindedness	Faithfulness
Personal God	Bible study	Self-control
Identity in Christ	Total commitment	Humility
Church	Biblical community	Love
Humanity	Give away your time	Patience
Compassion	Give away your money	Integrity
Eternity	Give away your faith	Kindness
Stewardship	Give away your life	Gentleness

The Competencies Model requires a substantive integration of everything the church does. Inspiration to become disciples is arranged through worship services that minimize other church programs and specialized ministries in favor of accomplishing all ministry through the existing avenues.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 136-137.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁴³ Hull, *Discipleship*, 303.

The Missional Model practiced at Fellowship Bible Church of Little Rock was designed to help people become spiritually mature as manifested in six qualities: 1. Being passionately committed to Jesus. 2. Evaluating everything according to biblical standards. 3. Being deeply committed to a healthy family. 4. Being morally pure. 5. Being evangelistically bold. 6. Being socially responsible and impactful.¹⁴⁴

The model incorporates two types of groups: standard small groups geared to personal development and ministry groups geared to external service and outreach. An appealing aspect of the model is its simplicity. It takes planning, anticipation, resources, and a clear mission, but the process is easy to understand and implement. The model is responsive to the needs of the congregation. The church identifies desired outcomes through the mission statement and provides resources to facilitate the outcomes.¹⁴⁵

Small groups are sponsored and make it possible for members to create a Personal Development Plan (PDP). Once the plan is developed, the individual shares it with others in the group. Encouragement and prayers follow throughout the year in efforts to grow in a specific area of emphasis. The PDP will help to determine the six outcomes that will be the center of focus that they want to achieve.¹⁴⁶

The Neighborhood Model created by Perimeter Church is a model that is the church's primary delivery for spiritual nurture and care. Members of a geographic unit are encouraged to get involved in an intensive discipling environment by joining a discipleship team. Each disciple leads five to nine individuals of the same gender through the development process. The plan defines the person's mission, vision, values, goals, and schedule for pursuing desired growth outcomes.¹⁴⁷ The plan is designed to allow the individual to strive to mature in Bible knowledge,

¹⁴⁴ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 140.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁴⁶ Hull, *Discipleship*, 304.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 305.

practicing ministry skills, outreach, prayer, and accountability. The model takes both a systematic and practical approach to theology. It is the belief that discipling others are achievable after completing this model. Competency is key, and living the Christian faith allows for proficiency at teaching and coaching others.¹⁴⁸

The Worldview Model originated by Fellowship Bible Church North is designed to increase participation in the church, to upgrade the level of service to other people, and to improve their ability to understand issues and make decisions from a biblical perspective. Encouraging people to think and behave biblically is the primary objective of the process. The curriculum used is known as The Discovery Series. It encompasses four topical books that reflect on personal reading, study, and reflection. The Worldview Model asks people to identify the issue at hand, study the Bible concerning that issue, gather wisdom from other sources, make personal responses to the accumulated information, discuss the response with other members of the group and developing personal strategies for living out the truth discovered.¹⁴⁹

The Lecture-Lab Model developed by North Coast Church delivers content through sermons and uses small groups to explore the content further to follow through on applications. The purpose of biblical knowledge is to live obedient lives, bear spiritual fruit, and persevere through the trials and tests of life. Within small groups, trained leaders facilitate discussion, prayer, and accountability to help people use their gifts and serve others. Emphasis is placed on making relationships in the life of the church and allowing those relationships to lead people to integrate spiritual growth.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 145.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 152.

Bill Hull gives a summary of the five models from George Barna's perspective. Six statements are included that are helpful for application in life and ministry. 1) The senior pastor is an irreplaceable advocate of discipleship, 2) Church membership is granted when a person covenants to participate in the discipleship process, 3) Ministry programs are intimately tied to discipleship outcomes, 4) Programs are minimized to a refined focus on the church's ministry through the discipleship process, 5) Teaching is done in the church during Sunday morning classes, 6) The church's mission statement serves as a practical tool for identifying ministry outcomes that are tied to goals directly related to the mission.¹⁵¹

The believer's role in discipleship is essential, and its necessity is evident throughout the presentation in this section. Functioning as a believer requires a solid foundation, and it works in conjunction with how effectively a believer expresses. This can be achieved through self-motivation, coupled with group sessions that promote unity in the faith. Philippians 2:2 says, "Fulfill ye my joy, that ye may be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." (KJV) The intention is to be a community of the Spirit that is fitly joined together and intent on the purpose of reflecting faith and spreading the gospel. The Greater Purpose International congregation can continually work to accomplish this by reinforcing their confidence in reaching others through the knowledge of scripture and practical teaching of what discipleship is.

¹⁵¹ Hull, *Discipleship*, 307.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The research project disclosed a predominant paradigm utilized to study the difficulties congregants have in expressing their faith to others. The methodology was derived from the theological foundation of discipleship and the mandate given by Jesus to those who followed him. This research's primary focus was to equip congregants to be living examples and effectively spread the message of Christ to everyone. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19 helped explicate this notion further and was the starting point for addressing the current issue.

The methodology evolved from a collaboration of nine congregants within the church, and this section plays an integral role in explaining the format from which the research was extrapolated and how it may be used in the future. This study used a qualitative approach to evaluate each congregant's effectiveness and determine how they could improve on being followers of Christ. The criteria developed in this chapter were done through questions that evaluated and assessed each participant and their approach to discipleship. The proficiency of each participant was recorded and used as a metric to gauge progress and formulate a plan for future successes.

Intervention Design

The intervention works in conjunction with the study's processes to suggest the existence of what is needed for the development and the implementation of what it means to be a disciple. The design includes questions that are used as a roadmap and guide to address the current problem. The final design consisted of feedback and data that had been received from each

participant. The design focused on specific activities such as interviews and group sessions that required each congregant's involvement to achieve the study's goals and to implement work from other ministries that had been successful in recent years. The model used helped gauge progress during the research and offered ways to improve on what the ministry currently has to offer as a template for disciple-making. There is no current working model that the church uses for teaching and training in discipleship, and this study will serve as an introduction to advance those efforts further.

The intervention plan began with seeking permission from church participants and asked them to participate in this study. The participants were required to fill out a consent form that permitted them to be involved and explained the research's nature. Consent was obtained in letter form that IRB provided, and it included the type of project and the principal investigator who would be conducting the study. The consent form gave a brief description of the study, what the study involved, and the potential benefits of participating, if there were any. It is a standard form that outlines what is involved in the study and what the participants can expect. The form also lets the participants know that their information was protected and, upon request, have the right to remain anonymous. The form in its entirety is located in Appendix C, further explaining the consent form's use.

The intervention design consists of three steps. First is the development of five open-interview questions to assess the participant's role or involvement in the sharing of their faith. Second is the interviewing of the participants. The third step is the practical evangelism over six weeks, which concludes with an exit interview. The following discussion goes into the three steps in detail.

The first step included a list of five open-ended questions for the interview. The questions are explained in greater detail in Appendix A, and they were used to determine any active role that the participant may play in the problem that is being addressed. In the following sub-section, there will be a rationale presenting for the planning questions. The second step consisted of using the formulated questions in a 45-minute interview with each participant. The key component was hoping that the questions' feedback would provide an insightful interview that delved deeper into disciple-making and ways to share Jesus effectively. Each participant was asked the same set of five questions in the initial interview, which was scheduled and completed within the first week after the research began. The interview was to be recorded on a camera and analyzed by the researcher to be arranged in a paper form to be submitted for research. Due to restrictions and state guidelines surrounding COVID-19 practices, some interviews were conducted through live videoconferencing and recorded.

Step three included a field study where the participants worked to express their faith to others for six weeks. During that time, the researcher was required to solicit help from resources that other ministries implemented. They were used to help coach the participants and provide pertinent information that was used during the field study. The researcher met with the participants in a small group setting once every two weeks for a total of three additional meetings. These meetings were held over a conference call via the internet. The meetings were open discussion, and each participant could discuss various ways they were able to commit to the research. Once the six-week period was over, the researcher conducted individual exit interviews consisting of thirty minutes. The interviews were recorded and used as a time of reflection, as well as a time to find ways to continue in the process once the study was complete.

The intervention design was used to promote accountability amongst the participants. The hope in the research was that there would be a benefit in having something tangible that the participants could use to better express themselves as far as the gospel is concerned. The model presented was designed to build confidence and give the ministry a roadmap that could be used in various problem-solving situations. Everyone involved in the project was informed personally or by direct message on how the research was to proceed. The congregation had already been initially informed of a potential research study coming and of some being solicited to contribute to the research. The study was limited to persons 18 years of age or older, and they were required to acknowledge, through the consent form, that they were of age during the time of the study. There was no preference of gender, and the researcher reserved the right to elect someone that was not directly involved with the study to collect information or conduct the initial interviews, if necessary, to prevent bias. The researcher hoped that the participants could be interviewed, given ample time for responses and implementation of the 6-week practical evangelism, and then back for the exit interview to close out the study.

Each participant was required to approve their participation, and the consent form allowed them to give that permission. Since the participants were over the age of 18, there was no need for parental permission. Verbal consent could be accepted initially, but the idea was to have a consent form on file so that the data could be accurately collected and attributed to the right participant. The notion was that the information from the data might be used compared to other research in areas such as evangelistic practices, witnessing sessions, and discipleship efforts that may be related to this project. The only additional resources that were necessary were for the data to be collected from other ministries that may have implemented some type of discipleship training successfully. The intention was not to be limited to any denomination or

affiliation but to account for any additional help from independent information gathered from the researcher. The study's initial interviews were to be conducted at the local church over the first week once the study began and would only consist of the researcher and the participant in question at that time. Every participant was a member of Greater Purpose International, and they were informed that the interview would last 45 minutes and be recorded. If the participant could not attend the interview, then the researcher would choose to meet at the home of the participant or through a conference call or internet. If the researcher had to visit a participant's home, there would be a form readily available for all parties to sign that would safeguard against COVID-19 and any restrictions that the State of North Carolina has implemented. Due to heightened restrictions due to COVID-19, all interviews were done through phone calls and video conferences on the internet.

The researcher assumed that the expression of Jesus was not prevalent enough in the current ministry context, which was the reason for this problem being addressed. The researcher cannot definitively determine that no one was actively expressing themselves, but there was some indication that members were not as expressive as they could have been, and the evidence was seen in their participation through the services they attended every week. Members had indeed asked for help in being more vocal to others outside of the church walls, and finding a more productive way to help share feelings was essential to the research. If it was possible to help break that barrier, then it was believed that a positive result would show, and more involvement would help to disciple others at achieving the same outcomes. This would likely result in a working example of the Great Commission so that the congregation would see an increase in weekly attendance.

Planning Questions for Research

Planning questions were used to measure changes in each participant's perception of discipleship. The same questions were asked to all participants, and they all had the same amount of time to respond to the questions during the initial interview. Different questions were utilized in the group sessions every two weeks as a part of the study as well. The group sessions were designed to allow each participant to give their input. The time would also allow for the participants to engage each other throughout the process. The questions used were all open-ended questions that looked to encourage discussion in the sessions so that they were purposeful and achieved a rewarding result. The understanding of discipleship is essential to the purpose of development, and these questions helped serve the purpose of getting the participants to express that understanding and see how they could implement ways to be more effective. It would also help lead to a dialogue between the participants in the hope of helping each other to share their feelings and open up about experiences they have encountered. This helped present an overview of how mature they were and the steps needed to share better how they feel to those they would encounter in the future.

Preventing the Hawthorne Effect

Social expectations influence people and can lead to them managing how they may appear to others. From daily activities to research, it occurs in many aspects of life. This is understood as the reactivity in responding to social desirability or the influence of the Hawthorne Effect.¹⁵² The term Hawthorne Effect has been used to refer to the change in behavioral

¹⁵² Van Nguyen, Charne Miller, Janine Sunderland and William McGuiness, "Understanding the Hawthorne Effect in Wound Research- A Scoping Review." *International Wound Journal* 15, no 6 (August 2018): 1010.

performance of research participants because of their awareness of the observation, monitoring, assessment, or the research itself. Evidence suggests that the Hawthorne Effect was a common source of bias, potentially working to distort the research outcomes.¹⁵³

While the Hawthorne Effect may influence a participant's behavior, there may be other factors that play a part as well. Some factors include: 1) demand characteristics where the researcher displays clues to let the participants know what they are trying to find, 2) novelty effects where the researcher observes behavior, and it leads the participants to respond based on what they know is happening, and 3) performance feedback where increased attention from the researcher results in specific feedback that is relevant to the results that the participant thinks the researcher wants.¹⁵⁴ It is essential to minimize these problems through researching in natural settings and making the responses anonymous to increase the credibility of the results of the research. The researcher addressed the potential factors by conducting separate interviews aside from the three group sessions. Each participant was interviewed separately through videoconferencing on two occasions. There was an initial interview before the group sessions, and there was a final interview after the group sessions were conducted. All interviews were independent of the group sessions, and they were conducted confidentially. The participants were all asked the same questions, and none of the responses were revealed to another participant to protect the integrity of the study. Two of the eight respondents are married, and to accommodate the accuracy of their responses, their interviews were also conducted separately and not shared with the other. The researcher wanted to limit any possibility of the participants being dishonest, so all the questions were open-ended and required that the participant give full answers during

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ VeryWell Mind, "The Hawthorne Effect and Behavioral Studies," accessed February 27, 2021, <http://www.verywellmind.com>.

the interview. The researcher kept a reflective journal to ensure that the participants were not led during questioning. The participants were allowed to lead the questioning and respond in ways that were comfortable for them. Each interviewee was made aware that their interviews were confidential. No one would have access to them except for the researcher, and the interviews would be kept on a password-protected computer.

Additions to the Design

Upon IRB approval, the project began within a month. The intervention plan was approved, and permission was acquired to proceed with the study. Once the interviews were scheduled and the consent forms were returned, the study began. The interviews were conducted in four days following a weekly Sunday morning service and extended to conclude before a scheduled Bible Study the following Wednesday. Due to state restrictions and concerns for the COVID-19 pandemic, the church only holds its weekly Sunday Morning services in person. All other services have been relegated to videoconferences for the foreseeable future until restrictions are lifted, and leadership feels it is safe to attend more services in person. The initial interviews took approximately 45 minutes to complete, and the plan was to conduct all interviews and have them completed within the first three days. Results were recorded between all participants, and bi-weekly group sessions were conducted to monitor progress.

The trial period consisted of ten weeks which included six weeks to do the research and an additional four weeks in between to evaluate the plan and make necessary adjustments during the group sessions. The six weeks included the initial interview, three group sessions, an exit interview, and the participants practically applying what was recommended. The interviews and sessions were video sessions that helped update progress. The four-week evaluation period consisted of the time needed to properly sort the data and put it into a working model throughout

the research. The study gave each participant adequate time to complete their portion of the study. For the sake of time, it was possible to conduct the initial interviews all within three days, and that allowed for the plan to stay on schedule. Each component of the study was thoroughly monitored, and adjustments were made so that the research could be utilized in the future.

An evaluation was important, and the age requirement was verified through written consent and the use of proper identification. Participants in the study were active members of the congregation and were asked if they were converted and had a basic knowledge of scripture. If there was not a reasonable amount of participation, then there was an option to consider individuals from outside of the congregation, but congregants of the local congregation filled participation. When someone agreed to participate in the research, they were asked to provide the length of their salvation and a brief description of their conversion in the interview. The key was to include individuals that had a working knowledge of what discipleship was and how they were converted, and the role it played in the ability to share Jesus. This helped to determine which participants had an active role in ministry and whether they were able to remain unbiased and truthful to the study definitively. These measures constituted a successful outcome within the intervention plan.

It was essential to walk away from this study with confidence and reassurance of faith among the participants. An increased hunger for sharing one's faith would hopefully work in conjunction with increasing membership and local church participation. The goal was to help the participants to exemplify being a follower of Christ and to find a correlation between sharing their faith and recognizing cultural boundaries that may have inhibited their ability to share their faith. The research was not intended to manipulate the participants but to help use their history, family, and life experiences as the driving force to help motivate them in the future.

A true gauge of the plan included comparing what was done previously to what was being implemented now. The ministry had seen moments where many would talk about what they were doing and how they were effective, but there was no growth to substantiate those claims. Bible study and training modules had been implemented in recent years to strengthen the congregants and teach them the importance of spiritual disciplines and discipleship. Attendances at those meetings were lackluster, and there was no way to record whether it was truly effective. This new approach helped use weekly attendance as a measurement to see if things were any different. It fostered participation and led to accountability among those who were involved. Using ten weeks to complete this study did not show the full results needed, but there was hope that it would continue, and results would be seen over an extended period. The current study approach was able to complement what had previously been implemented and cause the participants to work towards expressing what discipleship meant to them.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Data and Measures

The implementation process of the design was essential in helping determine the effectiveness of each congregant and their willingness to express their faith more freely. Maturity in understanding discipleship and knowledge of what scripture says concerning the Great Commission helped add validity to the research. Reflection was also a significant contributor in developing and providing quality moments of vision-casting and goal setting. To share faith effectively requires willingness and ability to implement practical strategies and to take part in understanding what discipleship is.

When gathering data and measuring the effects of the intervention, specific tools were used. The consent form from IRB was an essential tool to this study and is where the research

began. The consent form was a requirement for everyone involved before the study began, and a signature was required with an acknowledgment that they would be recorded during the study. For recording, a camera was used that contained a secure digital card for storage. The card only contained interviews and information pertinent to the study, and it was secured in a locked office once the study was complete. Each interview was recorded, and the video files were extracted onto a password-protected computer and archived for safety. The computer used was also the same computer that hosted the video conferences held for the focus-group sessions. Each meeting was recorded on the church's zoom account, which was under password protection. Other tools that were used included the planning questions that were generated for the research. The planning questions consisted of five open-ended questions that each participant was asked. The researcher selected the questions, and all participants received the same questions. There were also questions provided for the group sessions and the final interviews. The final tool used was the researcher, who conducted the interviews and facilitated the focus-group sessions independently. It was the researcher's sole responsibility to schedule interviews, conduct sessions, and ensure that all information was secure. The researcher kept a reflective journal to document the journey of this study. Note-taking was essential and was evident during all sessions to include using them for team building as the study progressed.

The triangulation method was used to gather data. Three methods were used to increase the credibility of the research and to gather the data needed. The methods used included interviews, focus-group sessions, and scholarly sources. Each method played an integral role in collecting sufficient data to test the validity of the problem that was being addressed. A good understanding must be gained from different perspectives of what is being addressed so that a plan could be put in place to build upon what was being discovered through the research. The

objective was to strengthen the research using these methods to collect the data. Using the triangulation method gave the need for interviews to be conducted twice. The first method was the initial interviews, where the problem questions were asked and recorded. The recording of the conversation that was taking place helped gauge the participant's knowledge of discipleship and what it meant in their current culture.

The second method consisted of focus-group sessions. Three sessions took place over videoconference for five weeks. They were conducted every other Wednesday, allowing the participants to gather, interact and provide updates on how the study was impacting them. After the five weeks, there was a final interview to go over what had been collected and to determine the effectiveness of the study for each participant. The information collected was to be compared with the scholarly sources that were introduced throughout the thesis to determine how to use this research for future study better.

During the research project, a reflective journal was kept. Each interview session presented opportunities for documentation in the journal of the experiences and comments. The key to keep a reflective journal was to prevent biases and so that the answers received during the research period were not looked at critically. There was hope that the participants would bring validity to the research through their experiences and willingness to cooperate. A way to remain unbiased throughout the research is not to offer input or ask suggestive questions during the interviews that may steer the participant to respond uncharacteristically. Documentation also took place after the focus-group sessions. Any personal feelings that occurred during those sessions were documented. Everyone does not think the same way, and personal convictions are different, so it was important for them to express themselves and give differing opinions freely. The journal also was used to record how the study was progressing and whether it was thought to

be a success. All this information was deemed critical to any future projects that would assist the church moving forward.

Participants and Data Collection

At the start, the research project was explained to the potential participants in the form of a group gathering. There was an open invitation to every member during a Sunday morning service to meet after service that day to be potential candidates for participating in a group study. They were assembled in a room and informed of the research study and what was expected of those who chose to participate. The consent forms were distributed at that time, and the participants were told that they had been selected to participate in the research project. They needed to understand that it was voluntary and that there would be no direct benefit if they elected to participate. A commitment to be involved for ten weeks was necessary, and each participant was made aware of that. The participants were notified that this study was not designed to interfere with their everyday lives or inhibit them from performing their daily activities. The first three days included the initial interviews, and they were asked questions about the problem being addressed and asked to give truthful answers. There was a notification that all interviews and sessions were recorded and may be used for future research but would not be released publicly without their prior consent. The following five weeks involved focus-group sessions to occur every other week on Wednesday evenings, and the final week would consist of final interviews. The interviews were to be conducted individually with the interviewer and interviewee. Each participant's progress was recorded, and they were asked to provide information on what they had learned throughout the study period. Once the outline of the study was presented, the participants were allowed to either continue scheduling their interviews or choose to end further participation. The walk-through of the process for the participants at the

group gathering provided all the information about the study so that they could ask questions and make an informed decision on whether they want to participate.

The researcher wanted a total of eight participants to conduct the study, and if the invited participants choose not to participate, then the number of participants would have been minimized to no less than five people before the study can proceed. For the sake of the study, going outside of the general congregation to solicit participants from area churches affiliated with the current ministry was initially presented as an option. However, there was a decision not to pursue that avenue and keep the research within the confines of the current ministry construct. In any case, no participant chose to drop out after the study had begun, and the study was able to continue with its original participants not having to be replaced. The research reflects the number of participants it began the study with and was recorded accordingly since every participant chose to stay in the research. This was a qualitative study, and the ramifications were minimal due to not being based on the need for numerical data. Because the participants chose to stay with the research and not drop out, there were no significant threats to the validity of this research.

Analysis of the Data

While the triangulation method was used to gather data, it was used to help in analyzing the data as well. The three parts that were being evaluated were personal, ecclesial, and theological. The personal analysis included the interviews, while ecclesial analysis was through the focus group sessions, and information gathered from scholarly sources would contribute to the theological analysis. The interviews were used in comparison with one another. Each interview conducted was cross-referenced, and data was compiled to generate questions for the group sessions. A clear projection of whether the project was working included participation and

whether there was evidence of improved confidence. It was noted that each participant followed through the entire project and was willing to see it through until the end. Confidence was gauged on the responses of the final interviews. Each participant was asked to summarize what was learned during the study and what contributions they could make in helping train someone else in discipleship. It was evident that there was a change in responses from the initial interview to the final interview. There was evidence of progress throughout the whole study.

The second part of analyzing the data included the focus group sessions. Each session was designed to build from the previous one and record the responses accordingly. The sessions were conducted with all the participants together. It was an opportunity to reflect on experiences and to determine whether they were more likely to respond differently when all together. Though many of the responses were similar, the sessions allowed for the participants to see that everyone is different and have their own experiences that work to frame their understanding. The group sessions were measured according to their responses and whether they were open to giving their own commentary during the focus groups. The data collected was formulated into charts to show progress and similarities among the participants. Each participant was able to give answers independent of one another that worked to validate each personal interview. Its relevance was due to an increase in confidence and a reliance on the Holy Spirit that was acknowledged. The final part of analyzing the data consisted of scholarly sources used to analyze the results and bring final relevance to the study. The results were compared to reliable sources and the impact that similar studies had on their research. The intention of analyzing the data using the triangulation method was to use personal, ecclesial, and theological relevance to validate the study. Personal experiences were used to create a baseline for the study that would lead into the group sessions serving as an indication of whether the study was progressing. The progress

would be compared on an ecclesial level to gauge whether there was a clear understanding of discipleship and ways to prioritize their goals in expressing themselves. This would then end with a theological analysis that would use scripture and sources to bridge any gaps in the study. Measuring progress from this concludes that the study was needed and that it was a priority for each participant that they work on their relationship with God and with one another.

Chapter 4

Results

Results and Analysis

This chapter works to revisit the methodology of the research and answer the following question, “Did the congregation at Greater Purpose International learn how to effectively spread the gospel and share their faith with others?” The results of the research project’s plan are detailed through an evaluation of the results that were found and an evaluation of its conclusion. The researcher was responsible for providing an adequate viewpoint that validates the research that was conducted. The intervention consisted of three parts which included an initial interview, three group sessions, and a final interview. The initial interview was comprised of five questions that also contained subset questions for the interviewee to answer. Each group session included a range of questions that were interactive and initiated a group response. The final interview comprising of five questions helped to develop a conclusion to what the interviewee learned and how to move forward in applying those practices.

Evaluation of the Results

Initial Interview

This set of questions had an intended purpose of giving an overview of the interviewee’s perspective on discipleship as it relates to the role it plays in their life. Each interviewee was initially asked to provide their age so that the age requirement could be satisfied, and they were asked how long they had been a Christian, along with a conversion story to provide a basis for

what they believe. Figure 2. below shows the disparity in ages among the participants and their years of conversion. This was provided to satisfy a requirement of the study that ensured those involved would be 18 years of age and that there was diversity in the years of their Christian conversion to help give validity to the study.

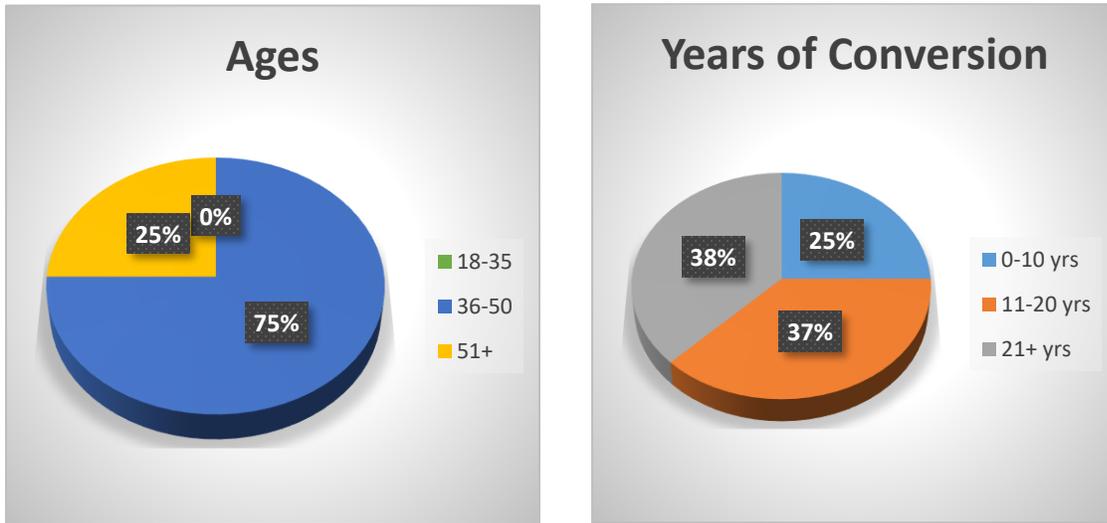


Figure 2. Percentage of Participants Showing Ages and Years of Christian Conversion

Question 1: What are your thoughts on discipleship and the role it plays in your life? What is your understanding of discipleship? What biblical basis do you know for determining what makes a follower of Christ? ¹⁵⁵

Interviewee 1 began answering the question with a brief history of his conversion (since the Interviewee's sex is not identified in the report, the pronoun "he" used is just a placeholder and can represent either sexes). The interviewee had been raised in the church and attributed his knowledge and acceptance of Christ to that. His thoughts on discipleship were that it was necessary and is the key to maturing and recognizing what strengths and weaknesses are present. The interviewee further stated that this leads to productivity in the body of Christ. Discipleship was stated as the initial source of his assignment and gave the example of the disciples' role to

¹⁵⁵ Initial Interview Q1, in Appendix A.

Christ in scripture. The interviewee added, “It is an ever-evolving component because of the role that the Holy Spirit plays in the life of the believer as he or she goes through the process.” The interviewee explained that his understanding of discipleship equated to the ongoing learning and growth into the knowledge of Christ and his relationship with Him. The message for someone who does not actively know who God is was to learn how to live a life of liberty through the Holy Spirit and God-given grace. He continued by acknowledging that it is not about being perfect nor can a person change himself, but he must accept the fact that there is something greater that can change him from who he is to whom Christ has desired him to become. The biblical basis for determining what makes a follower of Christ was referenced to the Old Testament life of Enoch, Elijah, Elisha, and Jeremiah. There was also a reference to the New Testament relationship between Jesus and the disciples, and the interviewee concluded by adding the examples of Jesus’ character and how he carried himself before men throughout His ministry.

Interviewee 2 has been saved for 15 years, and experiencing trouble in his life over time is what led to him giving his life to Christ. He felt as if he was heading in the wrong direction and decided to attend a church to see if something different would be offered than what he was experiencing. The interviewee’s thoughts on the role of discipleship in his life are centered on past experiences and using that to help others. The interviewee continued that they had to get their priorities straight and allowed that to complement their story. The interviewee stated, “You cannot just tell others about God, but you need to tell them about you first and your experiences.” This allowed for the interviewee to express the goodness of God and how he was helped to get through those experiences. The interview continued by him including what God is capable of and how He has shown mercy in his life. The interviewee used the biblical example of Psalms 23, as it relates to being a follower of Christ. The interviewee referenced that attendance

was critical to his success and needed to be a priority in the life of everyone who chooses to follow Christ.

Interviewee 3 has been in the church throughout his life but has been newly saved for almost two years. The interviewee stated that prayer and seeking God on specific things in his life led to change. There was an understanding that his walk was not perfect and that things would not change overnight. The difference this time was the process that he went through and how it has made his current walk with Christ easier. The interviewee's thought on discipleship and the role it plays in his life now involves taking the necessary steps and measures to help others understand and come to know Christ. The interviewee stated, "You can live and do God's will. It is not about losing friends or whether it is going to be fun, but it gets better, and sharing my story is rewarding because it helps someone else obtain the same goal that I had help with." The interview continued with the interviewee explaining that he cannot stop telling others about Jesus. Discipleship was likened by the interviewee to the Bible and how Jesus chose the twelve. The interviewee described it as a worker, someone who wants to do God's work in His nature and His shadow. When it comes to expressing himself to others, the interviewee said that his main issue was not wanting to make others feel that Jesus was being forced on them, but just having a general conversation that leads to Christ was found to be more receptive, and it helped to not make them feel unworthy. The interviewee added that he felt like God was being forced on him and that his memory of the church was how judgmental the people were, and that played an integral role in him not coming back to church until the last two years. Getting to know a person, what he feels, what he knows, and what he is going through was key points that the interviewee made, and he wants to tell others, "that there is someone who can heal you from all the hurt and anything that people go through."

Interviewee 4 has been saved for over 13 years, and the story of his conversion began with the realization that there was nothing for him outside of the church. He had experienced several things in his life, and he was ready for something different because he was used to being in the church environment for so long, and it helped make his decision easier. His understanding of discipleship begins in being a believer in God and trusting Him regardless of what things look like. It helps to strive to do better and improve his relationship with God. He said discipleship played an important role in his life, and it is needed in the body of Christ. His explanation of whom God is, started with him saying, “We cannot see Him, but when you take the time to get to know Him and develop a personal relationship, then you learn more about who He is, and you gain a better understanding of Him.” His biblical basis for what makes a follower of Christ included being able to rely on what Jesus promised when he said to take his yoke upon you and learn of Him.

Interviewee 5 has been saved for thirty-six years, and conversion began with him being tired of living a life of sin and experiencing the fun that those he knew were having in Christ. His thoughts on discipleship are that it plays a major part in his life, and he wants to live up to what God has called him to do. His focus is being an example, and discipleship to him begins with being bold and helping others know Christ. The interviewee stated, “God is good and has brought me through many obstacles. There have been moments where tears were shed, but I trust God no matter how difficult it gets.” The interviewee continued that he is not someone who just says what others want to hear, but he always relies on his personal history as an example he uses with those he meets. The biblical basis for what makes a follower of Christ that the interviewee used included that people should not lean to their understanding but acknowledge God in all things.

Interviewee 6 has been saved for twenty-three years and was converted shortly after high school. The interviewee stated that he had an encounter with Christ in the military, and it happened after he had already promised that he would never step foot back in church again. It was the acknowledgment of friends and visitors during a church visit with family that helped him decide to turn his life over to Christ. When it comes to the thoughts on discipleship and the role that it plays in his life, the interviewee said, "It is a life-long journey that never stops with learning about Christ and His revelation. It is needed in the church, and the world needs to know about Christ." The interviewee equates discipleship with learning about Christ and then turning around to pull others to Christ as well. It is a duty to introduce Christ to someone else, and the interviewee said that he tries to hear others' stories so that he can encourage them. He practices discipleship based on letting others know that everyone has a purpose on the earth, and it is only reached in a relationship with God. The biblical basis that determines a follower of Christ by the interviewee starts with faith. The interviewee continued with how God gave His only son to die for them and how He can turn their flaws around. The session ended with sharing that regardless of color, gender, or demographic, God died for everyone.

Interviewee 7 gives a brief description of his conversion story, beginning with growing up in the church from an early age and staying involved throughout. He was made to go to church but found common ground in attending, which led to giving his life to Christ. His relationship with Christ has now spanned for over 15 years. The interviewee described discipleship as working in church while spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. His understanding on what discipleship is in his life begins with taking heed to what a true Christian is supposed to do. The interviewee said, "There are thoughts of whether I am worthy enough to share my story, and I have been short of moving forward, and I feel the push from Christ, but I am hesitant." He

continued that discipleship should be first in his life, and God's will needs to be done. There must be a willingness to do what God requires, and sometimes it takes a push. God has a standard, and everyone should work to fulfill what He asks. The interviewee feels that he could accomplish more, and he would explain what it is to be a disciple by sharing his story and how God can use anyone. "God must be sought, and we must humble ourselves so that a relationship in Christ can be obtained." The biblical basis for determining what makes a follower of Christ was described through John the Baptist's story and stories of how man is not perfect. One scripture that sticks out to the interviewee is "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord."

Interviewee 8 has been saved for 21 years and describes his conversion as one that was founded on a friendship. He grew up in the church but found himself living an unsaved lifestyle and saw God actively working in the life of a friend. He attributes his salvation to knowing the individual before his conversion and seeing the change that God made in that friend's life. The interviewee said, "I wanted to see what the hype was all about. I wanted to see if what others were saying was true, and I was tired of living the way that I was, and I wanted something different." The interviewee's thoughts on discipleship and the role it plays in his life are that discipleship is a follower of Christ and someone who tries to live up to Christ's standards for his life. The interviewee said, "it is hard to show love when someone treats you wrong, but I work to display such a love that others see that it does not matter what you do and that God can clean us all up through the process." The interviewee continues that before speaking to someone about Christ, there must be a display or an example of what it is like to live a life of Christ. The interviewee concludes that the biblical basis for determining what makes a follower of Christ begins with the scripture that says, "By this love, all men will know that you are my disciple." The interviewee also included John 3:16 as a basis for a follower of Christ.

Each interviewer was asked the extent of their knowledge of discipleship. The graph below shows that each participant had a basic understanding of discipleship, and each of them could quote scripture that included examples of what discipleship looked like in the Bible. There was a slight disparity in how comfortable they were in expressing their faith, and the graph reflects that result (Figure 3).

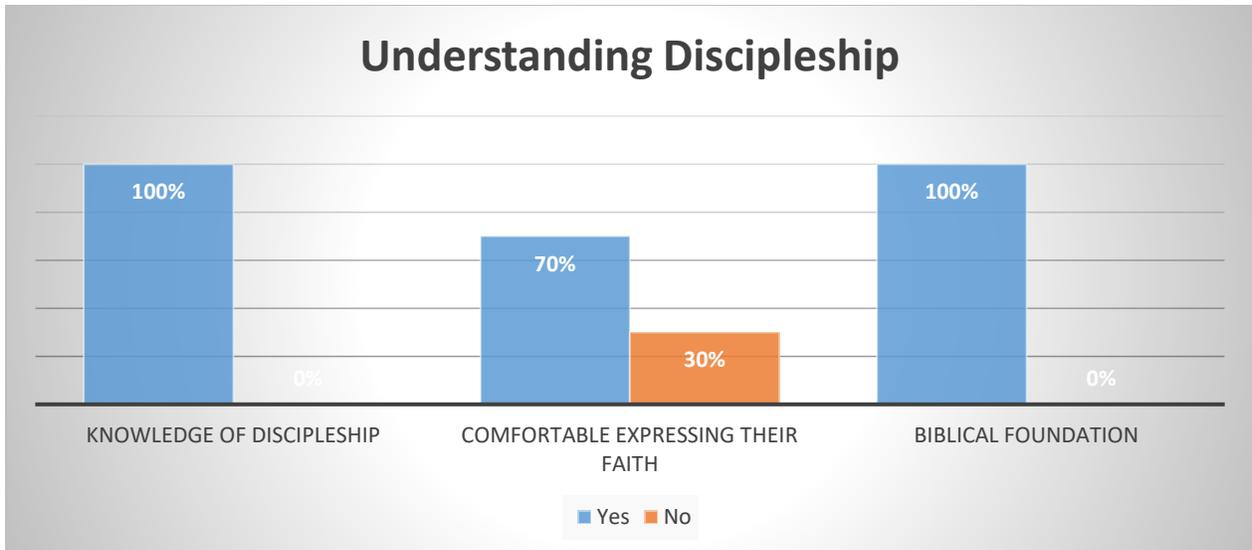


Figure 3. Knowledge of Discipleship

Question 2: How do you feel about believers of today and how they express their faith? Describe commitment? Differentiate between being a believer and being a follower of Christ?¹⁵⁶

Interviewee 1 responded to this question with the tools available today. The interviewee stated, “Many times the media illuminates those who are professing Christ and living in a negative light and not upholding the biblical standards that we are expected to, but I am encouraged because of the liberty we have to experience Christ today, and despite personal interests, there is a ministry available for everyone.” The interviewee described the commitment as practicing what one preaches and allowing one’s love for Christ to grow into true adoration and a deeper level of relationship through growth and maturity. Differentiating between a

¹⁵⁶ Initial Interview Q2, in Appendix A.

believer of God and a follower of Christ was explained by the interviewee as the difference between someone who just believes in Christ and acknowledges that there is a higher power at work and one having a relationship and time invested with Christ that separates the individual from the ordinary.

Interviewee 2 answered this question, responding that it depends on the message that the preacher is sending. The interviewee believes that things have changed from a reverent fear of God to now where people are not as concerned about God. The interviewee stated, “Some people you cannot change about anything. You may be able to talk to them, but they are set in their ways and will not change.” The interviewee gave a strong reference to the lack of commitment today, and in years past, there was no question of who was saved and who was not.

Interviewee 3 feels that believers today express their faith more freely. The interviewee said, “Church was a place where open persecution took place, and now leaders are more open to talking to their sheep. There is not a judgment zone like it was years ago, and I now understand why it was so easy for the best of the best to fall to the wayside because of the pressure.” He continued that there may be moments where judgment comes, but leaders now are more patient, and due to the potential they see, leaders continue to encourage and help the members press on. The interviewee described commitment as running the race, staying true to oneself, learning to encourage others, staying connected, and serving in the church. The interviewee said he feels a burden to interact more and do what he can.

Interviewee 4 responded to this question by expressing how the traditional church was and how it was a major part of his life. He described it as if “religion were being beaten into you instead of choice.” The interviewee said, “I try to live like I am supposed to and let my light shine so that others can see it. People are watching, and there is not much you can say to them,

but they will see if you are living how you supposed to.” A commitment was described by the interviewee as not having anything before God, and to stand on His Word, and staying true regardless of what one goes through. The interview continued by differentiating between a believer in God and a follower of Christ, “Someone can believe in God, but they may not have fully accepted Christ into their life to follow Him and do His will for your life.”

Interviewee 5 answered that believers today express their faith more loosely, and it seems as if they are not genuine. The interviewee continued that years ago, more believers were free to worship because God was all they had. The key is not trying to handle things by oneself but to depend on Christ. The interviewee said, “It is easier today for me to express my faith than 30 years ago. I have a leader that breaks the Word down, and it makes it easier as opposed to just being given the Word and told to go find out for yourself. Today is better because the expression is easier.” A commitment was explained as being steadfast and doing what God called one to do. The interviewee continued that, “you must be willing to do whatever it takes and whatever is asked of you.” The interviewee finished by differentiating between a believer and a follower of Christ as doing what God wants one to do and doing one’s best to satisfy Christ. It is about being led by Christ.

Interviewee 6 answered this question by saying, “I think that there has been a lost concept in the church about discipleship. We have been comfortable and trying to pass it on to someone else, and we became lazy. God is waking us up now with all that is going now, and people are turning to God and asking questions.” He described commitment as a process, not something that happens overnight but understanding that commitment takes time, and the excitement at the beginning does not mean one is committed unless one stays with it. To the interviewee, the difference between a believer in Christ and a follower of Christ starts with believing. He

continued that anyone could believe in Christ, but many do not want to follow the guidelines. He adds, “It’s not about the miracles and what He can do for you, but you must follow Him and die to your own beliefs. It is self-sacrificing and requires a deeper long-term commitment.”

Interviewee 7 answered the question by saying, “To me years ago required having to tarry, and there was an emphasis on being committed, and it seemed stricter. It was not easy to express yourself, and the standard was different. I find people able to express themselves more today. The music is different, and people are not as afraid.” The interviewee continued that they are more open today because people are showing more than one way to come to Christ. The church is different today, and many ministries cater to everybody's needs instead of trying to make everyone fit the same mold. There is a shift in this generation and how they express themselves in God. The interviewee described the commitment as being all-in, “There is no turning back, and you must trust and move forward.” The interviewee said, “Commitment says that when I commit, I put my heart in it, and I continue to push and move forward.” The interviewee concluded this question by differentiating between a believer and a follower of Christ. He said, “You must believe in God, to follow Him. Anyone can follow, but if you do not believe, then what are you following.” There was a reference to the disciples seeing what Jesus was about. He continued that his belief is what allowed him to follow Him.

Interviewee 8 feels that believers today express their faith differently than it was 21 years ago. He remarked, “When I first got saved, it was about going to church and allotting a time to go out and witness, but today you do not have to leave your house. We have new technology and many ways to tell someone about the goodness of Christ.” The interviewee thinks that more people are being reached today because of access through social media and phones. He continued that there is no wrong or right way to reach people because one may reach someone

that another cannot. The key is to make sure that anything someone does is in line with scripture. The interviewee described a commitment as being solid. Not starting something one day and then not following through the next. It takes determination and not wavering in what one believes. The interviewee said, “Anyone can believe, but that doesn’t mean I am going to do it. I can acknowledge that God died for me, but I must follow His standards and the oracles that He has set for me. It is easy to believe and not follow because there is no accountability in that. I cannot be held accountable for what I do not know, and it is not until I follow Christ that I decide to do what He asks of me.” The interviewee continues to add that one must make sure that one is instilling the Word and getting an understanding of it, “You must abide by the Word of God to the best of your ability and make sure that there is a relationship with Christ because that will make you want to follow Him.”

Figure 4 below depicts how each participant answered the ease of believers expressing their faith today. The consensus was that it seems to be easier to express faith today as opposed to when they first came to know Christ.

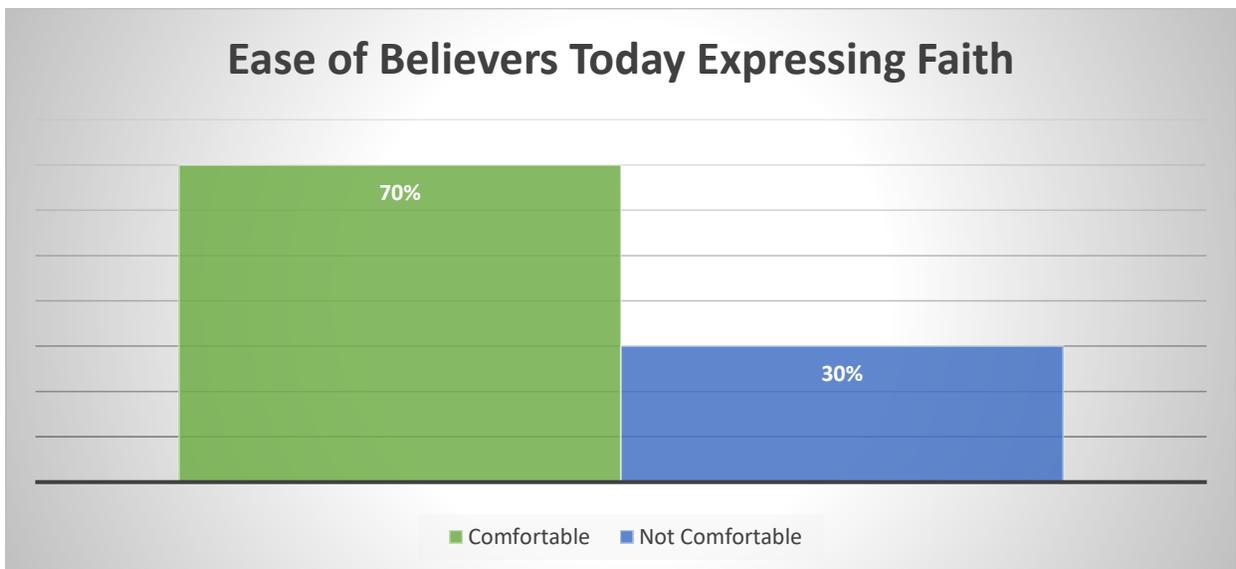


Figure 4. Ease of Believers Today Expressing Faith

Question 3: What is the reason you think that Greater Purpose International is not seeing an increase in attendance every week?¹⁵⁷

Interviewee 1 attributed the lack of attendance to the current pandemic. The interviewee stated, “I can see the engagement on our social media platforms, but the impact in membership is directly correlated to COVID. People are a bit reluctant, but there is no true way to test it now until people feel a better sense of normalcy.”

Interviewee 2 responded to this question by saying that Greater Purpose International is a good church and one way to spread the gospel is by getting on television for others to see. The interviewee continued and said, “I believe that if you begin to tell people about the church, then more will come, and you need to be more visible.”

The response that interviewee 3 gave for this question started with finding ways to reach existing members and others. There was a suggestion that there is a need to meet people at their need and find ways to encourage them regardless of whether they are actively attending or not. The interviewee said, “I invite people to come, but you cannot make them come. I pray for the congregation and always pray that God blesses those that are coming and those who have yet to come because I see that things will turn around.” The interviewee concluded that the current pandemic has stopped a lot of things but gave more suggestions to bolster the social media footprint and reach as many as possible.

Interviewee 4 answered that a reason Greater Purpose International does not see an increase in attendance every week is because of COVID-19. He continued that being safe is the priority during this time. The interviewee said, “Those that want to come are going to come. People who are hungry for the Word is going to try to be in service.”

¹⁵⁷ Initial Interview Q3, in Appendix A.

Interviewee 5 said that the reason Greater Purpose International is not seeing an increase in attendance can be attributed to people being concerned about the pandemic. The interviewee said, “This pandemic is real, but God is in the pandemic like He is in the church. God is real, and he will protect those who belong to Him. You must trust God, and we cannot be afraid. I am more afraid to not get closer to God than to worry about the pandemic.”

Interviewee 6 answered this question by saying, “I think the issues are prevalent in many churches. It is not leadership, but the people who are looking for someone to spoon-feed them instead of getting into the Word themselves and going through the process of maturing so that they can become disciples. They have to take the initiative.” He continued that people must mature and allow the Holy Spirit to do the work that needs to be done in the lives of His people. He ended by saying that it is going to take a hunger that changes the heart of people.

Interviewee 7 answered this question by saying, “I do not know. I do not equate it to the pandemic, but for me, it seems that I tell people about my church but do not invite them. I try not to pressure people, and sometimes that plays into me not inviting people. I am big on missions, and I know that is what it takes to grow the church.” The interviewee ended by adding that God will send people one’s way, and not feeling worthy is not a good excuse, but discipleship has to be a key component in the church because so many people need Jesus.

Interviewee 8 answered this question by saying, “It is not necessarily due to a lack of discipleship or the pandemic but can be attributed to several reasons. When you try to explain the vision, everyone cannot see what the leader does, and it needs to be seen through the eyes of Christ so that they can make it their own. The pandemic is here, but it is not an excuse for not doing what you know to do. We all have to be held accountable.” The interviewee continues that people must see that they are valuable and need to know that they are important, “The message is

one of love and letting them know that God loves them. There is a way to reach people, and it takes them knowing that God gives us all a clean slate when we come to Him.”

The graph (Figure 5) below gives the percentages of what the participants believe in contributing to membership's potential decline. The participants believe that discipleship is not an underlying issue in the church but that the current COVID restrictions in North Carolina play an integral role. There were other circumstances that the participants mentioned, and it is reflected in the section titled, “Other Factors.”

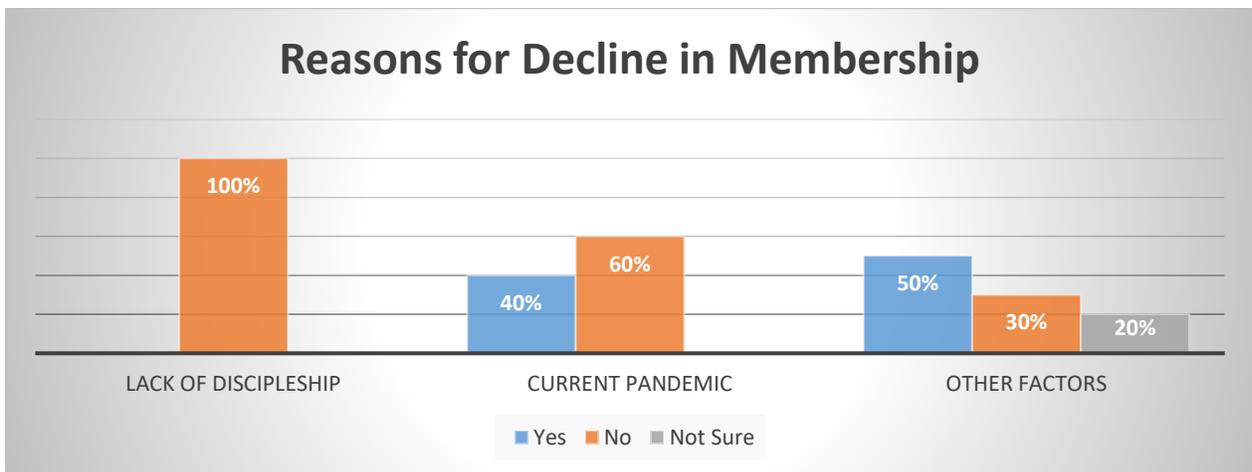


Figure 5. Reasons for Decline in Membership

Question 4: What can you contribute to ensure that discipleship is a priority in your life?¹⁵⁸

Interviewee 1’s contribution to making discipleship a priority is time. The interviewee acknowledged that it is not a sprint but a marathon, and it takes time to develop someone into being a disciple. It is about building a relationship with Christ, and there must be a personal responsibility for it to be beneficial. This led to the interviewee saying, “My biggest contribution is my time because that is what it is going to take to learn and to grow.” The interviewee reminisced on times where he could see that he could have spent more time doing specific

¹⁵⁸ Initial Interview Q4, in Appendix A.

things, witnessing more to others, and not being so reluctant to focus on his situation and how he could have spent more time trying to reach others.

Interviewee 2 said that to ensure discipleship is a priority in his life, he needs to express his church experiences more. He continued that it is important to give good information so that an individual can make a good decision. He expressed a commitment to be more vocal and more visible so that others can see him as an example.

Interviewee 3 said that his contribution could begin by generating ways to reach out to people and encourage them. This will help them to become more comfortable with their salvation and help to maintain a relationship with other members of the congregation that have been a bit reluctant to attend due to the pandemic.

Interviewee 4 responded that his contribution to ensure that discipleship is a priority in his life is to make sure that he lines up with God's word. The key is to attend services and do what one can when needed. Interviewee 5 responded to this question by saying, "if we love Christ, then we will show Him and be visible in front of people. It is about being united and showing God that we are grateful for His blessings."

Interviewee 6 responds by saying, "It takes understanding scripture so that discipleship can be a priority. Christ must mean something, and I knew how I was when I did not know Christ, and this is personal for me. I cannot lose Him because there is no telling where I would be. Discipline and growth are a priority." The interviewee ended by using the example of Peter and his tenacity and how he never gave up.

The contribution that Interviewee 7 can make to ensure that discipleship is a priority in his life begins by being more vocal. There must be a move when God gives an inkling. The interviewee said, "I have to answer God because I feel bad when God impresses upon me and I

do not respond. If I were at work and told to do something by my boss and not do it, I would be fired, and I have to show a reverent fear to God because I want Him to use me and not take Himself from me.”

Interviewee 8 says he must hold himself accountable to ensure that discipleship is a priority in his life. He continued, “It is easy to talk about what someone is or is not doing, and I want people to see that I am not asking someone to do something that I would not do, and that starts with accountability.” The interviewee believes that the church can be more vocal and show unity. Do not turn anyone away but welcome them and love them as God would. The interviewee said, “No one is the same, and I cannot put my convictions on someone. It takes time to come to the knowledge of God, and I cannot be judgmental but need to remember that it took work for me to get where I am today. We cannot see people through our own eyes, but through the eyes of Christ, and we cannot judge anyone.”

Question 5: What measures do you believe are necessary to get the most out of your commitment to Christ? How can you effectively achieve that goal? Why do you believe it has been an issue up to this point?¹⁵⁹

Interviewee 1 responded by saying, “Patience! so many times, it is easy to look at someone else and see where they are and not knowing where they have been and desire to be like the person you see. I believe patience is huge because it takes time to develop and grow into whom you are supposed to be.” The interviewee continues to say that trust and consistency, coupled with accountability, are necessities that are needed to benefit from discipleship. The interviewee said the way to achieve those goals requires being obedient and willing to be longsuffering. The interviewee continued by saying, “Patience for me comes from my acceptance to do the will of God, and I must relinquish my way of thinking how things should

¹⁵⁹ Initial Interview Q5, in Appendix A.

be. It is about serving others and putting myself last, and accountability helps me to set goals. I did not just see the difference in my initial acceptance of Christ. It did not come for me until I decided to go all-in and be responsible for my walk with Christ.” The final point that the interviewee made was about those measures being achieved and how it had been an issue in his life. He elaborated that complacency and fear played major roles in not achieving it, and just doing the basics was the norm for him. It was just a matter of doing the right thing and going beyond what he knew, and trusting God to lead him further.

Interviewee 2 answered this question by suggesting that he can improve his attitude, temper and not allow life challenges to be a permanent stumbling block. The Interviewee contributed a lot of his recent success to participating in the church’s yearly corporate fast and making the most of the opportunity to make a change. The interviewee said, “I need to be more aware of what I do so that I do not fall into the same traps. Since I have been fasting, things have changed, and I am determined not to go back to how I used to be.” The interviewee believes that it had been an issue up to this point because of past experiences, and he said the key is to have a new mind not to do it again.

Interviewee 3 answered by saying, “I need to read my Bible more. It is so easy to pick up the phone and do it, but I feel like I need to be more in my actual Bible.” He continued that he is always finding ways to talk to God and wonder if he is doing it the right way and if it is effective. The interviewee continued that it has been an issue because of life and how busy he is. He equated it to a bunch of excuses and the need to adjust his time so that he can put a plan in action.

Interviewee 4 suggests that he can trust God more, depend on His Word, and keep the faith so that he can get the most out of his commitment to Christ. He continued, “Praying and

reading the Bible is essential, and attending church is instrumental in achieving my goals.” The interviewee concluded that these measures had been an issue because of desire. Everyone’s level of commitment is different, and having a hunger for God and being willing to push himself is going to make a difference.

Interviewee 5 said, “I need to get closer to God, be obedient, read more, pray more, and let God know that I want everything that he has for me.” He continued by interjecting that it can be done, and it is about just doing it when it comes to achieving those goals. It is about being better and not getting in the way. The interviewee concluded that the issue is personal, “It is not about promises but about doing what I can to please God.”

Interviewee 6 concluded that getting the most out of a commitment to Christ requires staying a part of a local church where the Word of God is being preached and care demonstrated. It is about coming together and allowing God to do the rest by fitting everyone together for a specific purpose. The interviewee said, “I am not perfect, and I need someone to tell me when I am not right. I need that correction in my life so that I can be better.” He continued that being lazy and getting too comfortable was why things are the way they are, “Being honest with God and allowing Him to get involved so that the necessary adjustments are made were critical to my growth.” The interviewee ended by saying, “Most times I do not know why I do stuff or why I did it, and then I get in God and see that He ignites me every time that I need that jolt. It is like a fire that will not quit, and it keeps me going. I cannot see it now, but I know that it is working, and the manifestation will come.”

Interviewee 7 answers this question by suggesting that the necessary measures to get the most out of his commitment are sacrifice, letting go of things, and seeking God’s face. The interviewee said, “I feel the need to do something and to lay something down so that I can

accomplish what God has for me. It is something that is always on me, and there is no measure because I want to do whatever He has for me to do.” The interviewee added that prayer is key, and asking for guidance is essential to reach those goals. He cannot allow his nerves and negative ways to get in the way anymore. The interviewee concluded, “I have to forgive myself and let some stuff in the past be. It comes to haunt me at times, and I try to put it in the back of my mind, but I get nervous when I experience things that remind me of what I have been through in years past. I have to stop holding back and allowing those things to trouble me.” The interviewee answered that these things had been issues mostly because of his ability to let those things get to him.

Interviewee 8 says that the measures that are necessary to get the most out of his commitment to Christ begin with faithfulness, being true to the Word of God, and not slacking or being a lazy Christian. The interviewee said, “It is all in your mindset. You must take it day by day, and when you see slackness, you need to recognize that it is a new day and be persistent. The key is to thrive and not stop. We must not be so hard on ourselves but continue to stay determined.” The interviewee concluded that these things had been an issue up to this point because of an understanding of grace and mercy. The interviewee said, “You do not live to be saved; you are saved. God is a forgiving God, and if you make a mistake, it is all right. God will forgive us, and it is that simple. We must accept that forgiveness and move forward. Salvation is not learned the first day, but we make mistakes and will continue to make mistakes, but God allows for us to keep moving.” These mistakes became issues because of a lack of a relationship with Christ, “You cannot live off someone else’s relationship with Christ and their understanding. You must get your revelation of God and have your own personal relationship.”

Group Session 1

The first group session was conducted to monitor any progress that occurred. The session included a video interview of all the participants, and it allowed the researcher to have everyone together to access any adjustments that needed to be made before the next group session. This session included three questions to help steer the conversation and keep the group on task. The researcher began the session by presenting some icebreakers. The conversation began with acknowledging the importance of sharing one's faith. Interviewee 3 led off the session by adding that there are unbelievers all around, and sharing God's goodness will not change that, but it is still necessary. Interviewee 5 says, "It is important to share what we go through because the one we are ministering to may be going through something similar. Talking is essential to let others know what God can do."

The researcher asked, "How do you share your faith so that it is universal and can apply to anyone?" Interviewee 4 responded, "Sharing would include people who do not believe, but God is universal, and we depend on Him to turn it around." Interviewee 3 added to the question that some purposeful attack and try to discredit, but the key is to be positive with the message. The researcher then asked, "Why is it hard for people to believe unless we physically see it?" Interviewee 3 said that some could only believe what they see, and they cannot trust it if they do not see it. Interviewee 7 said that sometimes it is fear of the unknown that causes someone not to believe. For some, it requires that they tangibly have something to touch and see. Interviewee 3 then asked the question, "Has anyone ever been asked a question about how you can believe in a God that you cannot see?" The response was overwhelming, and many of the interviewees responded with a yes. The conversation continued and some asked that same question themselves. Interviewee 5 added that one example given as a response to believing, lies in Jesus

Christ. The conversation then transitioned to the importance of faith and tapping into the faith that everyone is given. Interviewee 1 said, “At some point, we all had to see something whether it was with our eyes or through our experiences. We all had an encounter that helped us to believe.” The icebreaker part of this session ended with the need for prayer and how essential it is in the life of anyone determined to be a disciple. Prayer was likened to special communication moments with God, the highway to God, and a lifeline.

Question 1: What changes have you noticed in your ability to understand scripture?¹⁶⁰

Interviewee 3 answered this question by saying, “I find myself praying more while attempting to navigate through scripture. It has changed my outlook on the Word of God, and I find myself doing it more throughout the day.” They also relied on scripture to help them through a fast that they were doing over the week, and having access to scripture helped them to be encouraged, and it opened their eyes to a greater understanding during the process.

Interviewee 8 responded to this question by saying that scripture is important, and it helps to challenge you so that you can be effective in what you do. They continued by saying, “There are things that I might not know, and the Holy Spirit is needed to give me directly through the Word of God.” Interviewee 5 answered and said, “I started to read my Bible more, and now I have a better understanding. I decided to include multiple translations of the Bible, and it has excited me because it makes sense now.” The interviewee added that they wanted to commit not just to share their story but to be knowledgeable so that their encounter with others would have a foundation built on what God says. Interviewee 3 continued that understanding scripture helps in encouraging others. Interviewee 5 answered that it takes being determined and having a mind to want to learn. Interviewee 6 answered this question by adding that scripture is needed, but there

¹⁶⁰ Group Session 1, Q1, in Appendix A.

are also other ways to interact that would help to understand it better. They continued by saying, “I use a Rubik’s cube that has scripture in it, and it helps in sharing Christ to others. It has all types of information in it from the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and I have found it to help when I share the gospel.”

Question 2: Can these changes be attributed to accomplishing the goals we set in our initial interview? Give me one goal that you have made progress on?¹⁶¹

Interviewee 3 answered this question that fasting is essential to accomplishing their goals. Interviewee 6 answered that they take every opportunity to obey the Spirit when sharing the gospel. They continued that they could see moments where they are more attentive, and the pandemic has helped. The interviewee said, “This thing that the world is going through now is universal. We are all going through it, and now I see what the earlier generation spoke of when they said that people are going to be hungry for God like never before.” Interviewee 7 added that they have so much to do throughout the day that makes it hard to accomplish their goals, but they continued that making the necessary adjustments will be the key for them to stay healthy in Christ. They said, “I have to remind myself that my problems are going to be there, but I have a responsibility not to allow those things to hinder my progress with God. I am no longer going to allow the world to overwhelm me and then forget that God should be number one in my life.” The group agreed that there are avenues that help to make obtaining these goals possible.

A suggestion was made that putting an app on the phone to remind you of scripture or recording specific times to do essential things can go a long way to helping you accomplish those tasks. Interviewee 5 said that putting God first is going to make a difference in accomplishing their goals and being obedient. Interviewee 3 added that it would take stronger commitment.

¹⁶¹ Group Session 1, Q2, in Appendix A.

Interviewee 7 said that it would require deciding to move forward and take it one step at a time. The group agreed that you need to keep pushing and not stop in what you want to accomplish. Interviewee 2 added that you must keep trusting God. Interviewee 1 added to that comment by saying, “He never stops working. Even at times where it seems as though God is not there, He is still working on our behalf.” Interviewee 3 continued by adding that continual prayer is necessary to accomplish goals and living by example. Interviewee 7 said, “Communication is necessary for me to accomplish my goals. I cannot be afraid to share my feelings and seeking help when I do not have the answers.” Interviewee 8 finished out this question by saying, “I saw the opportunity to minister to my family in a way that I never noticed before. There was a conversation with my daughter that led to a gospel song, and she said something that sparked God in me. I realized that regardless of age or lifestyle, I must proclaim the gospel to everybody.”

Question 3: What accountability measures are needed to continually accomplish your goals?¹⁶²

Having structure was introduced as a key component to being able to accomplish one’s goals. Sharing one’s faith is about being disciplined and having a plan that helps to share one’s story. Most people seem to be interested in knowing whether a person is concerned about them and not necessarily there just to beat them over the head with questions of whether they are saved or not. Interviewee 8 answered that each person needs to hold themselves accountable. The gospel will only be known when others take the responsibility to do what God has commissioned them to do. Interviewee 5 answered this question saying, “there must be a connection so that you have something or someone to give you an honest assessment of what you are trying to accomplish.” Interviewee 3 said, “it takes trusting in someone to help you in those critical

¹⁶² Group Session 1, Q3, in Appendix A.

situations.” It is not easy to trust someone due to past experiences, and it takes time to foster a relationship. The group agreed that trust is earned, and it is necessary. Interviewee 7 added by saying, “Something that you have when you are not in Christ can come with you when you give your life to Christ, and you must check yourself to ensure that you are carrying over the right thing so that you can be successful in your relationship to Christ.” Interviewee 6 said, “I think that God had a plan from the beginning, and it is going to take all of us working together. God designed it that everyone would play a part in what He is doing, and we must take it seriously. My hand is not designed to work like my foot, and we must play our part so that each person can accomplish what they are designed to do.” Interviewee 4 added, “You must make sure you are a true witness when you encounter someone.” Interviewee 3 said, “Be a testimony any time you find yourself talking to someone about Jesus.” Interviewee 1 added that every conversation should be led with Christ without forcing Christ on that individual. They said, “There is a way to insert God strategically in how you respond to people.” The session ended with agreeing that there needs to be a plan and a strategy to accomplish any goal. There must be some knowledge of scripture because of its ability to be practically applied to their life. They continued that there must be a biblical basis for what determines a follower of Christ and that there must be a personal experience with God to effectively share the gospel.

Group Session 2

Group Session 2 was conducted to build off the previous exercise and to continue monitoring progress. This session included all the participants and was conducted as a video interview so that the information could be extracted and recorded for continual research. The interview began by the researcher asking the question, “Is God universal, and if so, why is it difficult to relate to others that are close? Interviewee 3 started off the session by saying, “People

want to live their life the way they want to. For me, I did not want to hear what others had to say because it was my life, and I knew that I needed to change, but I did not want someone else to point that out to me. I wanted to be hard-headed and do what I wanted to do.” Interviewee 2 said, “Coming to Christ may begin with not fully dedicating yourself, and no one wants someone close to them to point that out. There were times where I pulled back in the beginning, and it took time for me to go all-in for God, but it was a decision that I had to make.” Interviewee 8 answered by saying, “Our family sees us all the time and in our various situations. It is hard not to be transparent with family, and it can work against you at times if you are not always exhibiting what it is to be like Christ. At the end of the day, we are all human and have to remember that.” Interviewee 7 added that they have relatives that believe in different things, and it has affected their relationship. They do not feel comfortable talking about God to them because they do not want to offend others. They find themselves conversing about different things instead of focusing on religion. Interviewee 1 said that they try not to share a religion but Jesus. They continued by saying, “The key is to share the purest form of Christ in the world. People try to equate you to what church you attend, but discipleship is about the message, not a denomination.” Interviewee 2 added again that it all starts with how you approach someone and your approach to them. Interviewee 6 added that there is a disconnection at times because some people are unrealistic when it comes to what Christianity is. The interviewee continued by saying, “People expect us to live up to almost impossible things. Many years ago, it may have been preached that we are supposed to go through things and not show it or respond, but it is hard not to show emotion when things are happening in your life. My family was strict in church, and there were limits to what you could do, and I do not serve God like that. I see the extension of God’s grace and mercy, and I work to let people know about that.”

Question 1: What are your thoughts on sharing your faith with your family or close friends? Give some ideas of how to witness to someone that you are in a close relationship with?¹⁶³

Interviewee 3 started off the interview by saying that it is important to be vocal, and you must be willing to explain to them why you choose to live a life for Christ. Establishing relationships are clear, and it is no different when it comes to those who are in your closest circle. Interviewee 6 responded that family tends to remember you by what you did. The interviewee continued by saying, “I told someone that no one wanted to hang around me coming up, and I was considered the black sheep of the family. I found it easier to converse with someone I did not know because it seemed as if the family was always trying to find fault in whatever I did.” Interviewee 2 said, “I feel like I have to express myself to my family by showing them that God is real. I tell them that it is easy to say that you are saved, but you must have a relationship with Christ. I continually talk to my family, and I can see a change through our conversations.”

Interviewee 7 added to the conversation by saying, “family can be so judgmental, and you cannot force Christ on them.” They added, “I try to live a life that they can see because of them being so close to me. I work to show them that I am changed, and I try to let my light shine so that they can see God in me.” Interviewee 8 added that it is easier to share Jesus with family because they have been able to see two sides of me. They continued by saying, “It is like there is a balance now because they saw me how I was before I came to know Christ, and know they can see me today, and it has made it easier for me to share with them.” They concluded that the key was to show them a side of Christ that did not include being judgmental, but showed love like Christ showed love to me.” Interviewee 1 said, “It is important because you should want to share

¹⁶³ Group Session 2, Q1, in Appendix A.

what you have received. You must be strategic because the closer they are, the more familiar they are. They may tend to find it hard to distinguish between the new you and the old you.”

Witnessing to one’s family is important, and the participants were asked if it was difficult to disciple those who are closest to them. Each participant was asked to describe whether it was hard, easy, or depending on the situation, and the graph below (Figure 6) summarizes the results pictorially.



Figure 6. The Difficulty of Witnessing to Family

Interviewee 3 responded to the question about ideas on how to witness to people by stating that it starts with praying and establishing a relationship with people. Interviewee 7 said that checking on people and letting them know that one cares are essential. Interviewee 2 said, “You must be sensitive to the spirit and let God lead you. There will be times where God impresses on you to be a blessing to someone, and you must listen.”

Question 2: What factors have you noticed to be a hindrance to you expressing yourself?¹⁶⁴

Interviewee 3 answered this by saying, “attitude.” He clarified by sharing, “I do not necessarily know what happens, but I can get an attitude quick, and I am finding ways to combat

¹⁶⁴ Group Session 2, Q2, in Appendix A.

it more. I know that God is working on me because things that used to get on my nerves, I am noticing it and not giving it the power to overtake me.” He continued that prayer is the key to handle the situation and not allow it to divert their attention. Interviewee 7 said it is about being unsure of the outcome. He continued, “Rejection is big for me. I have issues with people responding in a specific way, and I am unsure how to approach individuals because of my fear of what may happen. I think the issue begins with whether I am giving them the right information from God and not just what I want to say.” Interviewee 1 answered this question by saying, “Fear and rejection are big for most people, but for me, it is patience. I am impatient, and when I share Christ, I like to see results. My biggest hang-up is that once I witness, I want to see the move of God immediately, and I have to realize that it is not realistic to want that.” Interviewee 2 said, “I am impatient as well because when I expect something, I expect it. I have to pray because it gets to the point where I allow it to overtake me at times. I work to put my best in anything that I do, and it bothers me to see when others do not have that same drive.” Interviewee 6 answered this question by saying that sometimes expectations are a hindrance. Sometimes there is a false sense of expectation that can lead to not being productive. Interviewee 8 added to this by saying, “There is going to be disagreement, but your faithfulness must remain. Because I do not agree with everything, I cannot allow for that to dictate how I choose to express God to others.”

Question 3: How important is it to share the gospel with other people?¹⁶⁵

Interviewee 8 answered this question by saying. “It is a mandate of Christ that we share the gospel, and no one should wish that anyone is lost. We know how it feels not to have Christ, and we should afford that same opportunity to other people and share the gospel so that others

¹⁶⁵ Group Session 2, Q3, in Appendix A.

know that they do not have to live the same way continually.” Interviewee 1 answered this question by saying, “It is vital.” Everyone agreed that all people deserve to know about Jesus. Interviewee 7 said, “When I was at my lowest point in life, it took for someone to come to me and share Jesus. I did not accept Christ right away, but I remembered what they told me, and it played a major role in me turning my life over to Him. I needed someone to tell me that I needed Christ.” Interviewee 3 responded by sharing a moment in their life that included a healing moment. They continued that they had a family history of cancer, and their doctor told them that the same cancer cells were in their body. The interviewee said, “I remember going to a service, and someone prayed for me and told me that everything that was bothering me was going to disappear. I swore against going to the doctor again, but I remembered what that individual said to me, and I decided to go back, and the report changed. The doctor told me that the cells were gone, and that moment defined for me how important it was to receive Christ and go all out for Him.” Interviewee 6 answered by saying, “We know that Hell is real, and the reality is that if we die today and do not know Christ, then we are destined to spend eternity there. It takes action, and it is everyone’s responsibility to pull someone else up the same way that they had to have help.” Interviewee 2 also gave a recount of his healing moment and how it helps him to share Jesus. He said, “I was healed from cancer twice, and it drew me closer to Christ and sparked something in me that makes me want to tell others about Him. God told me to tell everybody about Him and what he had done for me. Interviewee 1 added that the biggest difference is how they live their life. They said, “I know me, and God was the only one that could change me. Everyone should know Christ because I feel that if he could come into my life, then everyone deserves that same chance. When I witness, the first thing that comes to mind is knowing that if he could save me, then he can save anyone.”

Question 4: Do you believe discipleship training is necessary? Why?¹⁶⁶

Everyone in the group agreed that training is a necessity for discipleship. Interviewee 1 said that every good workman should know their craft and work to be perfected in it. He continued by saying, “Church is one place where many people walk into and do not have the proper training to work in the assignment they have been given.” Interviewee 2 said, “It is important because people will try and come and say anything or do anything, and there is a right way to learn to do something.” Interviewee 3 added that this is essential because anyone new to church deserves to know how to operate and how it functions. He also said, “I am the first person to sit back, watch, look and observe, and for me learning is important because I cannot do anything if I do not know what I am doing. I know what I have been taught, but I do not know everything, and I want to do the right thing, and that is done through training. It also helps in my personal growth.” The interviewee ended by saying, “How can I help someone else if I do not know what I am doing?” Interviewee 7 said, “I think teaching is important because you need to know how something works. You must be taught, and not every church does things the same way. What you learned at one church may be different for another because their emphasis on discipleship may be different.” Interviewee 6 said, “I believe training is necessary because Jesus trained the twelve. We should be able to use the same format to accomplish it. The Holy Spirit is there to help us, and it is what gives us the power to do what we do in Christ.” Interviewee 8 added that training is a necessity and can be likened to what everyone does every day. The interviewee said, “I cannot work a job without being trained. We are showed what to do and the proper way to do it. It should be the same way in the church. We do not know everything, and we need to be properly trained so that we can be effective.”

¹⁶⁶ Group Session 2, Q4, in Appendix A.

Sharing the gospel is important, and the graph below (Figure 7) shows the participants' responses and how closely they are correlated. They all agree that training is essential in discipleship and it is an important component. There was a slight difference in their belief of sharing life experiences and sharing the gospel, but it was common among them that they all were necessary traits.

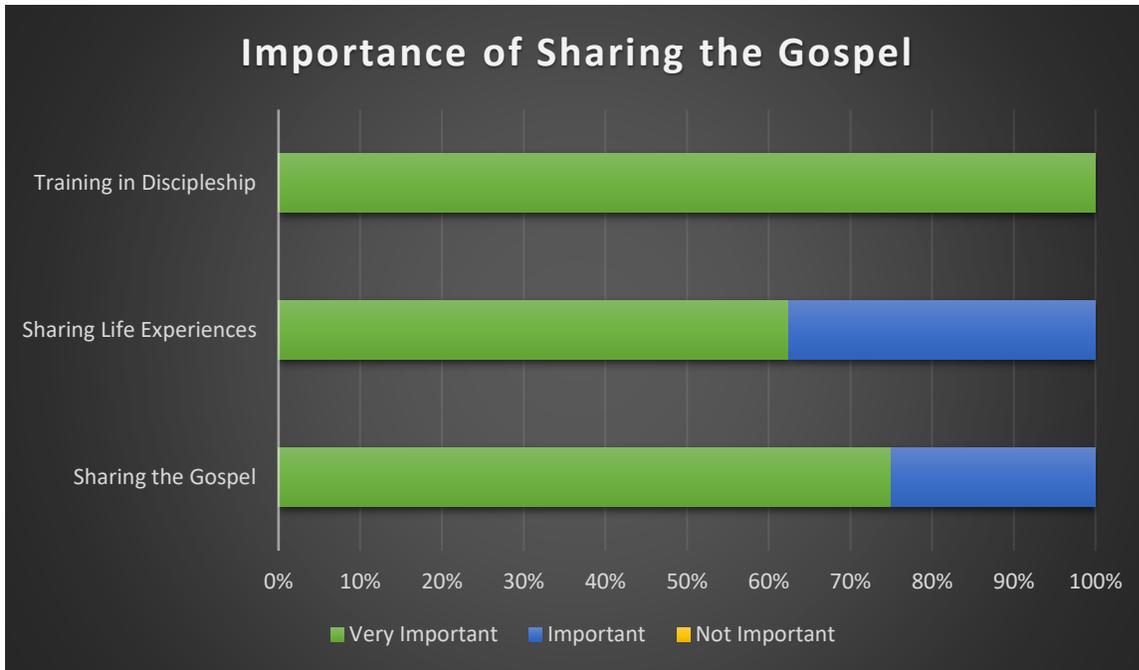


Figure 7. Importance of Sharing the Gospel

Group Session 3

Group session 3 was the final installment of the session interviews. This session was a moment for all the participants to feed off one other and add commentary that would help move the church closer to its goal. This session was designed to elaborate on various situations that may hinder spreading the gospel. During the session, the researcher introduced a book titled *SPLASH* by Kenneth Hemphill.¹⁶⁷ This was in addition to a Bible study class that was

¹⁶⁷ Hemphill, *Splash*.

previously taught from the same book. The researcher asked each participant to give their thoughts on this book and come up with a way to implement it in the church today.

Question 1: What have you noticed to be a roadblock when it comes to discipleship?¹⁶⁸

Interviewee 8 answered this question by saying that your way of thinking is a roadblock. They continued by saying, “A lot of times I try to pattern myself with what was done years ago, and it caused me to have habits that were not good. It was important that I got into the Word of God myself and got a revelation of who God was for me. I was trying to pattern myself by what was done years ago, and my way of thinking was causing me to get in my way.” Interviewee 6 added that commitment is a major roadblock. The interviewee said, “The commitment level has changed. Whether it is due to time or the manifestation of it is not here yet, I think that it is taking longer than I would like. I do believe that God is about to raise us to be more vocal for Him, and new tactics are being devised so that we can be effective, but we have to be patient and sensitive to what God is trying to show us so that we do not miss it.” Interviewee 3 answered, “The main roadblock that I have noticed is separation from friends. Distractions come in different forms, and some people are just a distraction for me. The more that I stay connected to them, the more I see where it is an issue, and I have a tendency to get off track. I am learning not to indulge in those things and not entertain them.” The interviewee continued that many challenges occur, but you must stay focused and determined. They finished by saying, “I am finding more positive things to do, and I spend more time with genuine people that have my best interests at heart. I have decided to let go of my past.”

Interviewee 1 responded by saying that one major roadblock is self. The interviewee continued, “Often we have preconceived notions of how things are supposed to be or what we

¹⁶⁸ Group Session 3, Q1, in Appendix A.

think we know due to our experiences.” Interviewee 5 added that love could be a roadblock. The interviewee said, “If people see that you are a true believer and you profess to love everyone, but choose not to help them when needed, you look the other way.” Interviewee 4 added that trust is a major roadblock. They continued by saying, “We all face different situations, and when it comes to discipleship, we must not be so quick to turn on someone because of what we heard. Trust is important, and you do not want to be known as the believer whom no one wants to communicate with because you cannot be trusted.” Interviewee 2 says that a roadblock is not living what you say. The interviewee explained that some people might say one thing but show it to be different around specific people, and that becomes a hindrance. They continued, “It took me some time before I gave my life to Christ because I was so used to seeing people live two different lives. I told myself, why should I go to church when I can continue to do what I want to do just like some of the believers that I knew.” Interviewee 7 said, “In discipleship, some people watch what others do, and they use that as an excuse not to do something. We cannot wait and see what someone else is going to do before we decide to share our faith.”

Question 2: How can you prioritize your goals so that you can be more effective in discipleship?¹⁶⁹

Interviewee 6 answered, “Our job gives us an evaluation, and the church needs to begin to evaluate individuals also, as to give them something to gauge their progress by. There must be something in place because a lot of us just do not have the initiative to do what needs to be done. This can be done out of love, and it will help us to grow to be Christ-like as we should”

Interviewee 8 responded by saying, “Accountability is a major part of the equation. It may seem harsh to some, but we need to be accountable. Sometimes we do not know that we are not doing

¹⁶⁹ Group Session 3, Q2, in Appendix A.

what is asked of us, and it has nothing to do with our capabilities, but we can be blind to the notion that there is more that can be brought out of us.” Interviewee 5 answered by saying, “I have to start doing those things that are a requirement of God. I need to be ready to pray more, read more, and be obedient. A plan must be in place to do these things and stick to what I say that I am going to do.” Interviewee 4 added that prioritizing his goals begins with keeping their faith and trust God. He said, “Even though it looks a certain way, I can think back to what God has brought me through and use that as motivation. God has already shown me things throughout my life that are a reminder of what He can do. I will always trust Him, and I can use that as an example for someone else. It is better for the ones that I encounter to see the life that I live.” The interviewee concluded that reading the Word and committing to Christ is essential for Him to reveal these things to you. Faith is important, and it is what will help you to accomplish what you need to. Interviewee 2 answered the question by saying, “I do not have patience, and I can prioritize those goals through prayer. I have decided to pray before I speak.”

Interviewee 7 added to the conversation that one way to prioritize their goals is to be more aware of what they do and sacrifice to seek God first so that the right things fall into place. The interviewee continued by saying, “If I do not give up something and let God know that I am serious, how can I share that with someone else. I have found that sometimes the main problem is not other people but for myself. I must pray daily and speak to God so that I can stay on the straight and narrow” Interviewee 1 answered by saying that selflessness needs to be put first so that everything can fall into place. The interviewee said, “I must be accountable to God, my leaders, and set the right goals. I can write down my progress and see what is being accomplished to help me with keeping these things prioritized.” Interviewee 3 concluded the question by saying, “I find myself praying more and having that conversation with God. I am not

afraid to ask for help, and I realize that my life in Christ is not boring or worthless, and I will not compromise that. God knows what is best for me, and I will do what I can to not disappoint Him.”

Question 3: What do you think of the acronym SPLASH (Show People Love and Share Him), and how can it be implemented today?¹⁷⁰

Interviewee 8 answered by saying, “The Bible tells us that love covers a multitude of sins and love will be what drives us to Christ. You can tell people everything you know about Christ, but it is the love you show that will continue to draw them. Love is an action word, and people need to see that it is genuine. Church’s need to implement a follow-up plan that continues to keep you connected to individuals that come to church.” Interviewee 6 responded by saying, “I think it takes a scriptural approach, and we need to be willing to leave the confines of the church to reach people. There is more to church than going on Sundays and Wednesdays. People need to be able to trust us, and it may require going to them instead of waiting for them to come to us. I am reminded of a statement that said you cannot catch a fish by just waiting for it to come to shore, but you must throw your rod in the water where they are, and that sticks out to me that we must be the same way.” Interviewee 3 answered by saying, “The key is to welcome everybody and let them know that you care. We must make people feel comfortable coming and have a follow-up plan that stays in contact with them. People want to feel like they matter because they are there looking for something, and we do not want to isolate them or make them feel like they are not important.” Interviewee 5 said that the key to SPLASH is to invite people. The interviewee continued, “If we invite someone and they come and see the love of God through us, they will come back. It is up to God to change us, and it is our responsibility to love them.”

¹⁷⁰ Group Session 3, Q3, in Appendix A.

Interviewee 7 responded to this question by saying that one cannot be judgmental. The interviewee said, “People should feel the Spirit of God when they come to church, and we cannot hinder that.” Interviewee 4 said, “Everybody should feel welcome when they come to church. We must have a smile on our face when they come, and they need to feel the love.” Interviewee 1 said, “I think sometimes we need to go where people are. We do not have to always wait for them to come to church. Jesus went to where the people were, and He showed love to them regardless of what situation they were in.” Interviewee 2 added to the conversation by saying, “Showing people love is needed. Everyone deserves to feel loved, and we cannot judge people. We are to greet them with love and take the time to know them. Kindness is very important.” The group agreed that there must be a follow-up system put in place that helps to keep up with visitors and that can be used to help the members interact with one another. Some suggested that there should always be a way to contact those who come and let them know that someone is thinking about them and that the church was grateful for them choosing to attend.

Question 4: Why is discipleship the key to effective evangelism?¹⁷¹

Interviewee 4 answered that evangelism involves witnessing. They continued by saying, “Witnessing is important, and you can witness to people outside of the church and people in the church.” Interviewee 5 said, “We are to go out and help others and lead them to church.” Interviewee 2 said, “Evangelism is for people who do not know Christ.” Interviewee 1 added that discipleship is needed to build up the ones who know Christ. The group continued that the key to effective evangelism begins with discipleship. Interviewee 1 said, “You cannot properly evangelize if you do not know how to disciple.” Interviewee 7 said, “Discipleship is more like the rules of the church so that you can be effective in the world and bring people in. As a

¹⁷¹ Group Session 3, Q3, in Appendix A.

disciple, if you learn how to be effective in church, you will be effective outside of the church.” Interviewee 6 answered, “Once you learn, you go out and catch others and bring them back in and teach them. It never stops and should be a reciprocal process in the life of a believer.” The interviewee continued, “Go is an action word, and you have to be willing to leave. We are supposed to take what we have learned and go teach others. It is not so much about what I say, but how I live. if we live according to scripture, it will draw people, and that makes it easier because we will be excited about what we are doing because of the results we are getting.”

Interviewee 5 said that the key to evangelism is being connected through discipleship. The interviewee continued, “We must go out and connect with people and what they go through. We also need to connect and be responsible for one another. People of like faith should be communicating with each other and building each other up. Just coming together on Sundays and Wednesdays is not enough. We must connect outside of that and learn from each other so that we can build ourselves up.” The session ended with interviewee 1 saying, “It gets difficult to share things at times. Sometimes we feel intimidated, or we become afraid that someone is going to find out something about us that we do not want them to know. It all depends on what we have been told and what we have been taught. To evangelize effectively, we must be able to minister to each other. Evangelism is done on occasion when the need arises, but discipleship is ongoing, and it is a practice. We must do it every day. It is vital and prepares us for the time to evangelize.” Interviewee 3 stated, “Working is at the heart of discipleship. There is work to do, and nothing from nothing leaves nothing. If we are going to move forward, we must put work in. We do not want to be stagnant because we are not putting in the time that it takes to grow.” Interviewee 9 answered, “Discipleship is about being a follower of Christ and what I learn needs to be shared with someone else. It is an ongoing chain of events that should continue. Jesus said,

go ye therefore and teach all nations. It does not matter if they are a believer, know Christ or not, but it is a mandate.” The interviewee continued by saying, “Anyone can follow Christ, but to be a disciple requires me to do all I can and living the best way I know. I am walking in the light the best that I can, and I am obeying His Word to go teach others about Him. I am not only listening, but I am doing and helping others to become disciples as well.”

Final Interview

The final interview was a time of reflection for both the researcher and the interviewee. The researcher wanted to allow the interviewee to share their experiences and record any interviewee's progress. Each interview was done in sequential order to go in line with the initial interviews.

Question 1: What lessons can be taken from this project?¹⁷²

Interviewee 1 answered by saying, “How to disciple properly and how to be a good disciple were traits to take from this project.” He continued that sharing the gospel and having a willingness to engage others is a mark of a good disciple. The interviewee said, “The biggest thing begins with being taught. There must be a guideline that we can refer to and go back. We must ensure that the way we are taught is in a manner where we can learn. We must read, keep a knowledge base going because discipleship evolves, and we must write down things we can do. Lastly, I can recite these things so that it becomes a part of me.”

Interviewee 2 started the conversation by saying that patience, understanding, and communication have been the biggest takeaway from the study. They continued by saying, “I have more confidence, and I feel good because I am headed in the right direction. I am managing

¹⁷² Final Interview, Q1, in Appendix A.

myself better, and God is helping me through prayer. My prayer time has increased because I see a need to do more.”

Interviewee 3 answered this question by saying, “I have been strengthened through this study. I have learned more about discipleship because all I knew was about the twelve that Jesus chose, and this has opened my eyes to a lot more. I have learned that I have a part to play in the ministry, and I can be a help to others. It is my responsibility to dive in and do whatever needs to be done so that we can reach others, saved or unsaved.”

Interviewee 4 answered by saying, “I feel that if I continue to apply everything that has been done in this study, I will be a better steward. It has made me want to do things better, and it has given me a greater sense of fellowship. There needs to be a connection, and getting to know one another is helpful in discipling. We do not know everything about everyone, but we can work to learn from each other better.”

Interviewee 5 responded to this question by saying, “I have learned how to love people more and help them. I am more considerate about the feelings of others and how to tell people how to trust God. I have taken it upon myself to pray more and not allow what I have done to make me lose focus. It is about getting closer to God and allowing Him to do the work in our life. I know more now that prayer is a game-changer. I want to know more about God, and scripture helps me with that. I have learned over the last few weeks to let God be in control.”

Interviewee 6 answered, “This has been good for me because I got a glimpse of what the church needs to go back to. I have been looking at statistics over the last couple of weeks, and it seems as if Christianity is not growing as it should. Many have lost their zeal, and God has placed us on the earth to handle this. It is like it is not as important as it should. It is up to the individual, and I am excited that this is a personal thing within us.”

Interviewee 7 said, “I have learned a lot about the members in this study. I am expressing myself more, and I have moved closer to God through this. During this time, I have seen that we all have similar circumstances, and it has helped me in my walk with Christ. I see myself as a better listener, and I see the importance of relationships and care for my brothers and sisters in Christ. we have moments where we are vulnerable and not comfortable with sharing, but this has taught me to be more sensitive and not so quick to dismiss others because we all go through something.”

Interviewee 8 responded and answered, “People say that they can tell you about Christ and how they have lived for years, but as an individual, I must have my relationship with Christ and find out who He is for myself. This is a personal walk, and I cannot go off what someone else says; it is an individual walk. The Word of God says to walk in the light as you see the light, and as I continue to grow and foster my relationship, I will know more about Him and what He represents.”

Question 2: How will you respond in moments that allow for you to share Jesus?¹⁷³

Interviewee 1 responded, “I cannot continue to be apprehensive. One of the biggest things this study has taught me is that I need to take the time to share when those moments present themselves. I think being able just to do it is the key. The only way to share is to be more open-minded and engage people more.”

Interviewee 2 answered, “It is a process, and you have to make up your mind that Jesus is what you want. God can do anything, and all he asks is for our heart. I need to remain faithful and not get so discouraged if I do not get the results that I want. People need to see how God is doing in me, and that will help them to see exactly who God is.”

¹⁷³ Final Interview, Q2, in Appendix A.

Interviewee 3 answered, “I will respond by continually sharing my story. I am amazed by what God has done in my life, and I do not want to hide that. I want to share that no one has to be stuck, but they can overcome.”

Interviewee 4 responded, “I would continue to pray for others and let them know that I am here to help in any way. I want to be as much of a help that I can. I am a people person, and it does not matter where I am or whom I talk to. I have been able to make an impact on my job by being an example. My main goal is to share Jesus with others through the way I live my life. I have people that are watching me, and I do not want to influence them in a bad way. I am finding it easier to be myself and not pressure people into being what I want them to be.”

Interviewee 5 responded, “I will be more patient with people. It is wrong to be judgmental because we all are free to have our own opinions. I must show others what God says in His Word, and we must be patient and wait for God’s timing. We must remain faithful and understand that our trust is to be in God so that we are ready when He wants to use us. I will continue to tell of God’s goodness and all that He has done for me. How he has healed me and has constantly brought me through many situations.”

Interviewee 6 responded to this question by saying, “Sharing Jesus will never stop. Now, this generation is focusing on turning towards God, and they want answers. God is the only one that has the answers, and we need to have a closer relationship with him so that we will be able to answer those questions when the time comes. This world has been predestined, but we can have hope in these times if we trust Jesus. I am not threatened or scared, but I am confident that everything I have been living for will pay off.” The interviewee continued, “Now that I know God better and the Holy Spirit will lead me. I must be willing to be led so that I can get the right

instructions on what to do. I need to be more intentional and let God lead me on what to say and what to do.”

Interviewee 7 answered this question by saying, “When it comes to Jesus, I can no longer hesitate. Everyone needs to hear about Jesus, and I cannot hold my tongue anymore. There is someone who needs to hear what I have to say, and I have people that I have to reach. Just knowing that makes me want to do more for Christ, and it has helped me to appreciate what this study has done.”

Interviewee 8 answered, “Discipleship is a lifestyle, and I cannot just turn it on. It is who I am, and we are to be the imitation of who Christ is. People will see God through us, and this is an everyday walk. It is not about what we say but about how we live. Our lifestyle will be the Bible that people pick up and read. I may not always be perfect, but I will remain to live a life in Christ.” He also said, “It is easy to get so overjoyed and be quick to tell someone else of Christ, but I need to get to know Christ first. Sometimes I have noticed where I was trying to share so much of Christ in one setting and not allowing the other person to interact. I am learning to relax and let the Holy Spirit lead me. I am His mouthpiece and need to listen when I speak.”

Question 3: What can you contribute to help others that may experience reservations about expressing themselves? How can you help in training disciples?¹⁷⁴

Interviewee 1 answered this question by saying, “I can share how, why, and what I have learned through this story. I believe that most people have a different way of saying what our reservations are, but we all have that fear that gets in the way, and I can share my way of overcoming it so that someone else does not have to feel afraid. There is a fear of not knowing everything and not being adequate or wondering what people think of you, but I can share what I

¹⁷⁴ Final Interview, Q3, in Appendix A.

know that can help with that fear.” Interviewee 1 added that they could contribute to training disciples by sharing the story of Christ and how effective he was in discipling others. The interviewee said, “The first thing they would do is have a plan to train. People get better the more they do something, so it would be beneficial to have a guide. I would have steps and scripture references to support what I teach, to give them support for why things are done the way that they are. I would employ a visual aid for them to refer to so that they could have familiarity with the process. It would take implementing moments of practice as well so that they could become comfortable with sharing their faith.”

Interviewee 2 responded, “God has all the answers, and what we do not know, we need to take it to him. There is nothing wrong with not having the answers. I am not the smartest, and I am older, and I may need to consult with others in certain situations. I do not want to lead anyone in the wrong direction.” The interviewee continued by saying, “You can lead a horse to water, but not make it drink. You can tell people about God, take them to church, but they have to make up their mind that they want to follow Christ.” The interviewee contributed to the question about training disciples by saying, “First, you have to love what you do. Giving your life to Christ is not easy, but He will show you how to love once you give your life to Him. We must love one another and make good decisions, and that is what I would tell others. I would also tell them that you will have some that do not believe, but you cannot let that stop you. We must train others how to be like Christ. There will be ups and downs, but if you keep holding on, God will come through for you. God needs to see that we are not wavering, and we will overcome.”

Interviewee 3 answered by saying, “I have to keep pushing towards my goal. I want to be able to point out scriptures that will help people when they need them. I will continue to educate myself, study, read the Word and be a friend. The interviewee responded to the question about

training others in discipleship by saying, “We all need patience. I used to have an issue with getting along with people who did not think that me, and I could not understand why things needed to be done a specific way in the church. I learned that everyone was not as sincere as they portrayed, and it was a learning experience for me. I would teach them about patience and help them to learn the inner workings of the church and what it takes for things to run the way that they do. Building trust is essential, and that is what it takes for us to be effective. It takes commitment and respect as well.”

Interviewee 4 answered this question by saying, “I can tell others that the key is to make it simple. You do not have to speak elaborately or know it all, but your light is going to shine, and people will know that you are different. I feel that from growing up in church, I can express myself and speak freely without offending people, and that is something that I can help others with. We do not have anything to prove to people, and we should focus on what God desires of us.” The interviewee responded to the question about training someone in discipleship by suggesting using the Bible as a template. He continued, “Sometimes we may fall short, but we need to stay focused and rely on scripture. Training is not easy, and we need to have a specific plan on what discipling is about. We can use handbooks and do roleplaying to act out scenarios that we may face sharing our story.”

Interviewee 5 said that he could contribute to help others by sympathizing with them. The interviewee said, “I felt reservations early on, but I learned to trust God and listen to those who are over me. Doubt is there, and we all will face moments when we feel like He does not hear us, but we must be patient and wait on him. They need to keep trusting God and lean on Him. I used to be homeless and was able to make it through because I trusted in God. There are times where we cannot even trust ourselves to make a good decision, but God can bring us through

everything. It will not look like we want it to, but when God puts His hands on it, it will be beautiful.” The interviewee said that he would train someone in discipleship by doing icebreakers. He said, “Training is about connecting with someone and finding ways to communicate effectively. We must put God first, and I would tell of ways to teach each other through phone calls and interacting. I would not try and pressure anyone, but I would show them ways to tell of God’s goodness without being overbearing. If it were a class of people, I would teach about love, commitment, and action. We must be who we say we are, and we need to learn how to show the attributes of Christ by example. It is about duplication, and we must be real in our actions and be honest.”

Interviewee 6 responded to this question, “I could tell others that we must learn to trust God. We can never see God, and we must be close to our brother, whom we see every day. We all have experienced church, and we need to take a good look at what we have done through the years, but we must project an accurate picture of who God is on the earth. I am not perfect, and I need to be myself. Jesus showed examples of freedom that I can experience and show others. We have been taught to present the gospel in a specific way, but Jesus showed a more perfect way, and we are to follow that example. Someone will always find something wrong in what you are doing, but we need to mature and show others a side of Christ that makes them want to be a part of it. No matter how old our children get, they are still our children, and we will always be there for them. As disciples, we are to always be there for each other regardless of what transpires.”

The interviewee answered the question about training someone else in discipleship by saying, “I think that it is about ministering to those that respond to the call. You do not have to reach millions of people but be willing to care for those who respond. The more we present Jesus, those that are hungry will ask and seek Jesus on another level. I would personally ask them

questions and outline what God expects of us. I always wanted to be around someone who was teaching about Jesus. That hunger was there, and I learned to practice what I was taught, and we need to do that with others. “

Interviewee 7 answered, “The best that I can do is be real and down to earth. I can let them know what I went through and how God saw me through. I have been able to overcome with His help, and I remain humble to help someone else. I was raised a stern way, and I was structured. For years I was intimidated and always wanted to do things someone else’s way, but this is different. We must be ourselves and know scripture so that we are comfortable when we share with others.” The interviewee shared a memory of when he was younger and did something in church that he was scolded for, and it shook his confidence in public speaking. The interviewee continued and said, “Now in the church, if I mess up, people encourage me and tell me to keep on, and that means a lot. I would share with others that they need to be persistent and not let mistakes define them.” The interviewee answered the question about training others in discipleship by saying, “I would first make sure that I am studying and familiar with scripture so that I make a good presentation. I would see what they knew about discipleship and take the time to point out what God says about it and find ways on how to be effective. I would also include my leaders so that they could answer any questions. I would encourage them to take that first step and not to worry about others, but to be patient and make the most out of every opportunity to share the gospel. Having a relationship with God is key, and we cannot be afraid.”

Interviewee 8 responded to this question by saying, “This is a 2-part thing because I have to be an open book. At first, we are so careful in what we say and try to be perfect, and it is hard for people to see us differently, and it makes it hard to mess up. I must be transparent and not be afraid to let people know that I make mistakes. I can also be more vulnerable and relate more to

those I share Jesus with. I go through things, and I cannot make others feel like it is impossible to follow Christ. The second part is that this is an individual walk. I cannot allow excuses to keep me from progressing. We all are humans, and we all hurt, and I cannot let that stop me or keep me from fulfilling God's mandate." The interviewee continued, "I would train someone in discipleship by ensuring that they knew who Christ was. You cannot disciple if you do not know who He is. I would start with the basics of salvation and teach them what it takes to know Christ. It does no good to try and teach someone something without them having a basic level of understanding in discipleship and in who Christ is. We need to know how to follow Christ and how to be effective, and that will start with proper training in salvation."

Question 4: What should be at the heart of discipleship?¹⁷⁵

Interviewee 1 said, "The focus of discipleship should be people and serving others. Discipleship is serving other people, and a love for people needs to be at the heart of it."

Interviewee 2 responded by saying that being an example is at the heart of discipleship. The interviewee continued by saying, "It is our responsibility to bring them in, and God will do the rest. God just asks us to do our part, and He will prick that heart and do the remaining work. It takes time, and you cannot get discouraged. It takes a hard person not to accept the call of God, so we need to be patient." Interviewee 3 responded that the heart of discipleship is ministry. He continued, "You are learning, and it opens us up for teachable moments."

Interviewee 4 answered by saying, "God is at the center of discipleship. If we put God first in anything that we do, there should not be a struggle to accomplish it. If we pray and ask for guidance, then God will be at the center of what we do, and He can lead and guide us through that." Interviewee 5 said that teaching is at the heart of discipleship. They continued by saying,

¹⁷⁵ Final Interview, Q4, in Appendix A.

“We must help guide people the right way. Some people do not know what it takes, and they need to be taught things from the Bible. We must be willing to take the time and help others to get a good understanding of what is being taught. We must find what ways work that help to lead people to a closer relationship with Christ.” Interviewee 6 responded that love is at the heart of discipleship. The interviewee said, “I must show love to my brother if I am going to take the time to teach him. I cannot just love God and think that is enough, but I must show love to my fellow man so that we can work together and accomplish more. Jesus said that if you love me, you will feed my sheep, and that still holds today. I can show God how much I love Him by helping others reach the same goals that I am trying to attain.”

Interviewee 7 said, “Commitment is at the heart of discipleship. It is about doing what needs to be done. Our commitment to God is essential and should be ongoing. We cannot doubt Him in those moments, and we need to trust Him when we do not have all the answers. He will work it out in the end, and we must know that. He said in his Word that he would be there for us, be our Father, our Comforter, and our Friend. We must believe in that even when we do not see it or feel it. God will show up, and our commitment is in letting Him know that we mean business and trust Him.” Interviewee 8 answered, “Teaching is at the heart of discipleship. We all must be taught what to do. The Holy Spirit is a teacher, but it does not just drop in our lap. We must be willing to sacrifice, seek change, and be teachable. If I am not willing to learn, then I will never be able to be taught because my motivation is elsewhere when it should be on God.”

Question 5: Summarize your final thoughts on what you have learned?¹⁷⁶

Interviewee 1 answered this question by saying, “There are two things that stood out to me during this time. Number one is how vital discipleship is, and number two is the benefits of

¹⁷⁶ Final Interview, Q5, in Appendix A.

discipleship. It does not just benefit the person being disciplined, but there is a benefit for the individual doing the discipling as well. I can say that in the moments that I have participated in discipleship, my outlook has changed, and it is enjoyable. The more I do it, the easier it becomes. It is vital to my walk with Christ, and it is encouraging to someone else. Lastly, I can see how when a ministry is not discipling as it should, how lack of growth, division, and strife can come in the church and it affects new membership or people visiting because of how important discipleship is.” Interviewee 2 said, “This has taught me to think and appreciate what I think of God. I have always trusted God, but I was not thinking about how I responded to people and what I was saying. It has been a learning experience for me, and I am getting more comfortable with expressing myself. I have always been looked at as a person, who brings drama, but people have seen a difference in me over his time, and I am grateful.”

Interviewee 3 summarized their experience by saying, “I have been taught about discipleship, and what we should be doing in our walk with Christ. I have learned that leaders cannot do it all, and there is a part that I play in the ministry. As we learn more, we should be more helpful. I also see that there is always someone who needs to hear my story, and I do not need to shy away from that. Someone depends on me, and they can see the change. It is about bringing others to Christ and being a willing vessel.” Interviewee 4 said, “I have to live by example and let God lead me. I am trying to work on trust issues, and it has helped me not let stuff overwhelm me and bother me like it was before. I also see instances where I have prayed that God keeps my tongue so that I do not fly off the handle like before. The trust issues are personal and involve the church, but I am learning to let God handle those insecurities. I want assurance that things are going to be all right and that God is not looking to judge me but help

me become all that He desires me to be. This has been a season of reflection, and I know that I am heading in the right direction.”

Interviewee 5 responded by saying, “I enjoyed this study. It brought us closer together, and it has been helpful. I understand discipleship more, and this study has made it simpler to understand. I am more comfortable now, and I thank God because there was a lot that I did not know. I can share this with someone else and do my part in the Kingdom of God.” Interviewee 6 summarized their final thoughts by saying, “For me, it has lit a fire in me. I worked as an Evangelist for several years, and I always look for opportunities to share the gospel. I was at work last week, and the first thing that I did was seek out someone to share God with. I was able to talk to a coworker about life in general, and the response made me excited because they were able to take our previous conversations and relate them to what we are dealing with today. It allowed me to point out scripture, and my focus was how I could help someone else gain eternal life. We are all afraid of this world and things that are happening because of the uncertainty today, but God can be seen in everything we do. I have become aware, and I am trying to be more in tune with the Holy Spirit. I can see how advantageous this study was and how it can be taken further to help others.”

Interviewee 7 answered this question by saying, “My final thoughts on this study is that it is good to talk to others and for us to come together to help each other. The church is where many of us go for safety when we cannot find it in our families. I am glad for this study because it has brought us together and helped us learn from each other. We all had different views, and it did not take away from who we were or from us accomplishing what we set out to do.”

Interviewee 8 responded by saying, “I can take away (from the study) the importance of discipleship and spreading the gospel. It is needed, and I see how much God has allowed me to

see myself closer and how I can contribute more. COVID is here, but that is no excuse. There are other ways that I can reach people. Going door to door is no longer the norm, but there are new ways to reach people. I know that everyone is not the same, and they may not all respond the same, but my eyes are open to the significance of discipleship and how much it is needed in the church.”

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The hypothesis that Greater Purpose International congregants were having difficulty understanding discipleship and sharing their faith with others was not supported. Although the outcome was not a desirable one, the study did yield positive results. Moving forward, the researcher intends to focus on training modules and measures that will move the congregation to a more intentional approach. The reason for including this approach is to help the congregants become more comfortable with what they already have been taught to share the gospel fluently. The study yielded results that the congregants are comfortable with sharing their faith but find moments where they are reluctant to do so because of varying obstacles at that present time. The implications of the research further suggested that a combination of factors also contributed to why they shared their faith the way that they did. These factors remain a common theme for the congregants, and it was evident throughout each interview. The findings of this research will stand to prove the validity of the study, and the researcher used each experience of the interviewees to formulate three main objectives: (1) offer recommendations for future study, (2) maintain a journal for moments of reflection, and (3) offer final considerations.

Relevance of the Study

The researcher found this study to be relevant with significance. The researcher found that the significance helped produce evidence that aided the results and concludes that it was a successful study. The relevance of the study is being examined in three stages: personal, ecclesial, and theological.

Personal Relevance

The project prompted reactions that included listening, sharing, and reflection. During the study, there was the development of a deeper awareness and an appreciation for those involved. The key was to remain focused during the study and to see it through until its completion. Each response from the interview questions sparked moments of reflection that included a renewed sense of accountability. Each participant's situation was unique, and yet the responses were similar, and the qualitative nature of the study facilitated the need for patience and clarity. The study helped build confidence in areas that the researcher would usually shy away from. The research was instrumental in moving the researcher to a more relational approach with the congregants. There were moments where safeguards such as a reflection journal, open-ended questions, and individual interviews were put in place to protect the integrity of the study and ensure that the ideals of the researcher did not bias the responses of the participants.

Plans consist of transforming the research into a training module that mirrors the recommendations identified within the project. The training modules will be used as Bible study tools and help confirm its validity through its availability to other churches. The target is to focus on clearly defined groups of responsive people and the need for adequate research to understand the people they seek to reach. This will help promote a deliberate strategy to create a widespread culture to the needs of everyone and the overall health of the church.¹⁷⁷

Ecclesial Relevance

The ecclesial relevance takes shape in the form of the research problem that was previously presented: expressing an understanding of discipleship towards others. There was a

¹⁷⁷ Gary L. McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth: How You Can Work with God to Build A Faithful Church*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 137.

concern for a need to equip the congregation with the tools to express their faith comfortably. The study participants support the importance of sharing their faith, and the study further validates their willingness to improve in discipleship efforts. It was learned that each participant had a conversion story and was knowledgeable in basic scriptural principles. Each participant played a significant role in the study and showed a desire to be more vocal in their relationship with Christ related to discipleship. The participants were encouraged to build upon the foundation of this research and work to motivate others to fulfill the same purpose. The study did reveal that most of the participants were sharing their faith with a false sense of comfort that led to missed opportunities on multiple occasions. There was a sense of complacency highlighted throughout the interviews, which further substantiated the need for the study to continue.

Each participant identified with discipleship in similar ways, and it was mainly attributed to their upbringing and experiences in a traditional church setting. The participants were members of the local body and perceived themselves to be active members in good standing. It was determined that they were comfortable with one another. However, there were moments of observation that proved the participants to be a bit reluctant in sharing their experiences due to fear, feeling judged or lack of trust. It was introduced that the participants were a community of believers, and the need to reconcile past experiences was necessary to get the most out of this study. There was an introduction of 1 Corinthians 12:25 that says, "There should be no schism in the body, but the members should have the same care one for another." It was noted that the participants wanted to mature in their walk with Christ, and there was a willingness to foster deeper relationships with one another that would lead to a sense of community and fellowship. The significance of presenting scripture led to a practical way of relating it to their personal experiences, which helped shape the study's ecclesial relevance.

Theological Relevance

The theological relevance of this study is taken from the discussions on the theological foundations of the project. It was argued that the practice of discipleship was a mandate of Jesus Christ and was exemplified throughout His ministry. Hull stated that individuals who received new life in Christ take on the character of Jesus through a combination of grace and commitment.¹⁷⁸ The believer must act on God's grace and, through an individual effort, be reformed. The principles that Jesus established in His teachings should be at the center of discipleship. Every believer in the ministry plays a significant role, and it requires commitment and the transformational process that leads to living a life that is comparable to the one who is being imitated.

The emergence of the need for congregants to take on a more prominent role of discipling will work to strengthen the ministry and usher them to becoming more involved in their maturation process. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, it is stated that “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” This study has shown how vital it is to make scripture a major component of any discipleship platform due to its ability to empower and motivate. The intentional approach that was mentioned earlier in the chapter will include a teaching model based on scripture and the demonstrations of Christ that led to him discipling others.

It has been revealed in the study that there is a significant disparity between being a believer and a follower of Christ. This led to a decline in discipleship efforts because the congregants felt that it was the individual's sole responsibility to take part in their own discipling.

¹⁷⁸ Hull, *Discipleship*, 19.

Many misconstrued the scripture in Philippians 2:12 that says, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” to mean there is no community and context for discipleship. Thus, it was apparent that there needs to be some reconditioning so that the congregants can embrace what is spoken in scripture that tells everyone that the message of Christ should fill their lives, and they are to teach and counsel one another with all the wisdom that Christ gives.¹⁷⁹ Resistance to sharing the message of Christ is not new, but one must refrain from being disobedient to God. The participants expressed that it was important to be guided by the Holy Spirit, and it can be determined that the decision to share Christ resides in one’s mind, emotions, and will. It was not a question of whether the Holy Spirit was active in their life or whether the Bible was an important component of their discipling efforts. There was a strong sense of inadequacy among the participants and a lack of certainty that God could speak to them and lead them to play active roles and complement the ministry. Koessler suggested that the nature of discipleship is a corporate one. It is a process of edifying the church for maturity, and it takes a multitude of people to accomplish this goal. He continued:

Maturity is achieved in unity and knowledge, and the result is being fully like Christ. Unity requires faith that is believed by the church as a whole. It forms the basis for all that the church teaches and practices. Knowledge is the second component that comprises the heart of the church’s faith and has Christ at the center. This leads to a true understanding of biblical truth and leads to a deeper understanding of the person of Christ. The more we know Christ, the more we are changed into His image. The result is to be fully like Him. Not an individual goal, but a corporate one.¹⁸⁰

Recommendations for Future Study

The validity of this project was confirmed through scholarly sources and published material. Identifiable factors of the congregants sharing their faith consisted of commitment,

¹⁷⁹ Colossians 3:16 (NLT).

¹⁸⁰ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 179.

trust, and training. The congregants all benefited from a commitment to Christ which led to a willingness to share the gospel. The need to build trust with one another was a significant factor, and it was so prevalent among the congregants that they all worked to build interpersonal relationships among themselves. Finally, the congregants all agreed that training was essential and necessary to make disciples who would duplicate themselves regularly. Familiarity coupled with the Holy Spirit made it evident that each participant became more comfortable as the study progressed, which allowed them to be more open and honest with the researcher throughout the study. The three identifiable factors are being submitted in further detail below.

Commitment to Christ

A commitment to Christ is critical for any believer. The biblical basis for spirituality begins with John 14:12, where Jesus said, “He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do.” It takes a heart of spirituality to have an encounter with God and express Him, and Jesus empowered his disciples to complete his ministry in John 14. This is to be accompanied by spiritual tools that are accomplished through worship and prayer, prophetic sensitivity, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. It will require a connection with God through song and speech that occurs during weekly services, hearing from God, and learning to minister supernaturally through the gifts of the Spirit. Believers are to be activated through clarity in the church’s belief system and priorities. The core leadership must demonstrate a dependence on God, be willing to model this to the church, and be first partakers of worship, prayer, and prophesy to create a model of spirituality for all to follow.

People will develop in discipleship, and there must be clearly defined goals and processes of discipleship. The church will need to foster a developing culture that demonstrates spiritual maturity regularly. William Fay wrote, “God never forces us to love or to serve Him. God

consistently offers his love and the opportunity to serve him, but he will not force it on anyone.”¹⁸¹ Christ calls believers to be disciples and to disciple other people, but for it to be effective, there is a role that the believer must play in their relationship with God. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, “If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” An enduring relationship with Christ is at the foundation of a disciple’s life, and that is coupled with having a renewed mindset from what it once was. Christ-followers are Spirit-filled Christians who bear fruit. This process requires growing in a commitment to Christ, through Him shaping and changing one’s behavior. Luke 14:27 says, “Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” Tamara Anderson wrote, “Jesus exemplified power, authority, and teaching. All of these are centered in Christ, and no matter how gifted the individual, disciple-making is fueled by the transformational work of the Holy Spirit through a commitment to Him.”¹⁸² Character is essential and the product of a secure foundation where flesh and blood human beings are asked to make constant judgments. Believers are expected to reflect the moral commitments of the gospel, and the grace and mercy of God are to be demonstrated through the transformation of every dimension in their life. Becoming like Christ is the result of the commitments one makes. Whatever one is committed to, one will become.

Building Trust among Believers

The second recommendation is building trust among believers. When there is no trust, misunderstandings can arise from a lack of communication. Believers are to bind together in

¹⁸¹ Fay, *Share Jesus Without Fear*, 60.

¹⁸² Tamara L. Anderson and Shelley Skinner, “Feelings: Discipleship that Understands the Affective Processes of a Disciple of Christ.” *Christian Education Journal*, 16, no. 1 (April 2019): 70.

moments of uncertainty, and when there is a disconnection, there exists a disparity in values, goals, gifts, callings, priorities, expectations, interests, or opinions. The Bible teaches that there are some natural and beneficial differences that believers may face. God has created humankind to be unique individuals, and that does not mean that their differences are inherently wrong or right, but that they are simply the result of a God-given diversity and personal preferences.¹⁸³ Relationships travel best over solid bridges of trust. Trust is the ability to build confidence in a relationship so that both parties believe the other will not intentionally hurt them but will act in their best interest.¹⁸⁴ Ephesians 4:2-3 says, “With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Building trust is not to force one's will on another but rather an opportunity to demonstrate the love and power of God in their life. When people are convinced that someone will do everything in his or her power for their good, they will trust the individual. There must be a demonstration that everyone's interests are important, and that the success of the whole group is important. There must be a passion for helping others flourish and not a need for personal fulfillment.¹⁸⁵

The building block of a growing church community includes caring for one another. God called believers to be kind to one another and to honor one another. Ensuring the safety and well-being of one another is primary, and that they agree with one another.¹⁸⁶ God has shown that he blesses unity and community, interdependency, and an individual contribution to the

¹⁸³ Ken Sande, *The Peace Maker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 2004), 30.

¹⁸⁴ Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christlike Humility*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 77.

¹⁸⁵ John MacArthur, *The Book on Leadership*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 12.

¹⁸⁶ Romans 12:9-21.

community.¹⁸⁷ Trust is at the heart of the community, and God desires that those who belong to Him love one another. Trust among believers helps lead to identity, community, maturity, responsibility, and destiny. This is done through the role of hospitality that becomes an unconscious practice interwoven into every member of the congregation. Trust must be nurtured and takes time to grow. Only through a variety of experiences will believers evolve into a comfortable, confident relationship. Trust will require risk, it must be nurtured, and it must be built from the other person's perspective.¹⁸⁸ It will require intimacy that promotes vulnerability and transparency, forgiveness that helps to manage offenses in the ministry, and cooperation that creates a culture of honor that turns competition into synergy. A model that must be created includes fostering practices and programs that promote unity among the community, emphasizing a relational connection, and loving one another.¹⁸⁹

Training as a Necessity

The final recommendation that was a consensus of the group was the need for training. Training is essential if believers are expected to multiply effectively. To be successful in discipleship, the believer's spiritual development must take place. There must be a focus on transformation and truth that works to develop disciple-producing disciple-makers. Spiritual growth must take place because it is God's will for every believer. Ephesians 4:14 says, "Be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." Spiritual growth is intentional and requires commitment and effort. A person must want to grow, decide to grow,

¹⁸⁷ Psalms 133; John 17:21; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:16.

¹⁸⁸ Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood*, 78.

¹⁸⁹ "Breaking 70 Challenge," Pastor's Coach, August 2020, accessed February 10, 2021, <https://pastorscoach.com/course/breaking-70-challenge-august-2020/>.

and make an effort to grow. Discipleship begins with a decision to follow Christ.¹⁹⁰ Spiritual growth will take time, and it will be backed by the right behavior, as referenced in Figure 8 below. The strategy below was developed by Rick Warren as a basis for developing and growing people with a process that develops disciples through membership, maturity, training in ministry, and sending them to missions.

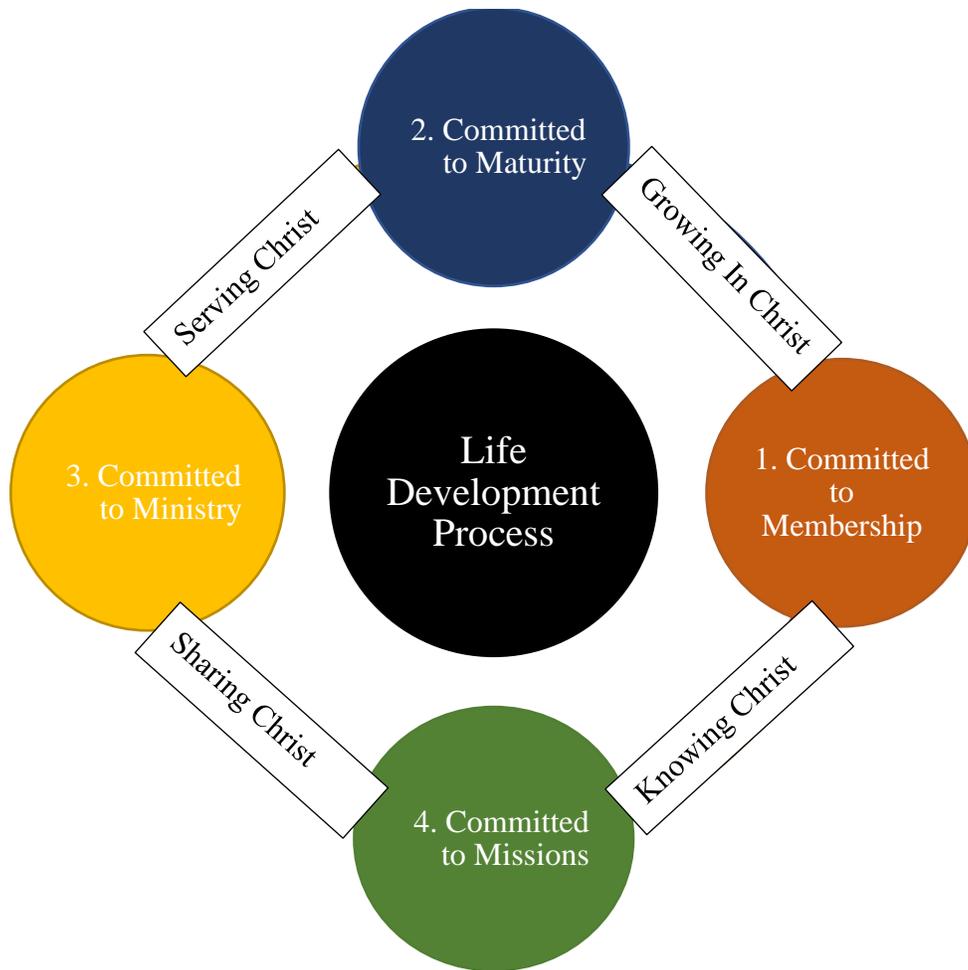


Figure 8. The Life Development Process¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 332.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

Having the proper infrastructure will be the key to empowering membership. Jesus changed the world through intentional development and deployment. Jesus also made a priority of training and then sending those who followed Him. Development begins with a call to raise self-producing believers of Christ through how they live and respond. Matthew 5:13 says, “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt has lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted?” The church is to be a destiny incubator for all who attend. The goal that Jesus had for his disciples would include his life being reproduced in them and then through them into the lives of others. It took adequate training and faithfulness to produce the same kind of fruit that Jesus did. The real test is: Are those who are being reached reaching others? Is the fruit-bearing fruit? Are we building leaders who can build other leaders? This is the example of a program that is not relegated to just some people who are being reached for the first time.¹⁹²

There must be tools of development in place that work to include a system that can create programs and create a winning culture. This can be managed through categories of development that include health, head, heart, hands, and the Holy Spirit. This will promote the spiritual health of the believers being trained and manage their progression as they move throughout the ministry's infrastructure. Participating in groups will help accomplish this, and it will spark interaction that can become both behavioral and transformational that can lead to redirection in attitudes and motives, gathering and fellowshiping, strategic training, and social rehabilitation.¹⁹³ There must be a conclusion that the main element of Christian maturity is the ability to engage in intimate, authentic relationships with fellow human beings.

¹⁹² Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1993), 161.

¹⁹³ Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*. (Wilmore: Rafiki Books, 2016), 130.

Final Considerations

The question arises whether the results of this study just apply to Greater Purpose International or does the study expose similar needs that it can be utilized in other church settings. The findings were solely concentrated on the specific ministry at Greater Purpose International, but they can be modified to accommodate any current ministry. The participants were all members of the congregation within the study, and the factors associated with the problem presented allowed for a course of action that can be implemented immediately. The research data included results from the collection analysis of the interview sessions, and an evaluation process continued once those interviews were completed so that the proper recommendations could be made for future study. This project was the culmination of a local research study that supported a specific need that the congregation was experiencing. Discipleship efforts were not visible among congregants through the eye of the senior leadership, and it led to a belief that a plan needed to be put in place that would push them to be more vocal in their expression.

Whether there is a direct correlation between discipling and increasing church attendance remains unanswered, the researcher is determined to further explore other avenues that will work in conjunction with applying biblical principles and training modules to expand the research. Attendance continues to be a dilemma, but the research substantiates that it may be due to the current pandemic rather than the need to be more expressive of their faith which makes its relevance to the study unfounded. State restrictions and regulations have caused the church to operate below capacity, and it can be compared with other ministries that may be experiencing the same. This project has sparked more interest among the participants and has given them

added incentive to include the rest of the congregation. This is an example of spiritual maturity that has taken place throughout the time of this study.

Another takeaway from this research is the need to promote a healthy environment that leads to trust and confidence among the congregation. During the group sessions, participants were open about their commitment issues and why they devalued their time with one another. This substantiates the need for further study and the introduction of teaching techniques that will lead to communion among believers and exercises that build trust. There is a recommendation to (1) outline a teaching module on what constitutes a community of believers and how they function in the church, (2) devise a plan to include role-playing and life experiences in those modules that specifically work to promote trust, and (3) introduce clear measures such as goal-setting, assessment tools, and productivity markers that are established so that there is a process for spiritual development. The church must meet the challenges that believers face and work to include relevant scripture that works to transform lives while introducing the grace and love of Jesus Christ.

There is an understanding that it will be vital to evaluate and analyze what has worked and what has not and let it lead to positive change in the church. The hope is that there will be a more transformative experience that leads to a greater commitment. Continual expression of the proposed recommendations will foster familiarity and increase the vital components of the study. Having a plan in place will help congregants grasp the significance of discipleship and guide their desire to continue in future research. Barna exclaims, “The real obstacles to becoming fully devoted disciples of Christ are not money, time, methods, or knowledge; it is the heart. A heart that is transformed through character and leads to true discipleship in the community, through being a blessing to others, pursuing spiritual growth, developing renewed lifestyles, quality of

character, a culture of love, commitment and service, and a devotion to a lifelong journey to imitate Christ.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 165.

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**Appendix A -
Initial Interview Questions**

- 1) What are your thoughts on discipleship and the role it plays in your life?
 - a) What is your understanding of discipleship?
 - b) What biblical basis do you know for determining what makes a follower of Christ?
- 2) How do you feel about believers of today and how they express their faith?
 - a) Describe commitment?
 - b) Differentiate between being a believer and being a follower of Christ?
- 3) What is the reason you think that Greater Purpose International is not seeing an increase in attendance every week?
- 4) What can you contribute to ensure that discipleship is a priority in your life?
- 5) What measures do you believe are necessary to get the most out of your commitment to Christ?
 - a) How can you effectively achieve that goal?
 - b) Why do you believe it has been an issue up to this point?

Group Session 1

- 1) What changes have you noticed in your ability to understand scripture?
- 2) Can these changes be attributed to accomplishing the goals we set at our initial interview?
 - a) Give 1 goal that you have made progress on.
- 3) What accountability measures are needed to continually accomplish your goals.

Group Session 2

- 1) What are your thoughts on sharing your faith with your family or close friends?
 - a) Give some ideas of how to witness to someone that you are in a close relationship with?
- 2) What factors have you noticed to be a hindrance to you expressing yourself?
- 3) How important is it to share the gospel with other people?
- 4) Do you believe discipleship training is necessary? Why?

Group Session 3

- 1) What have you noticed to be the main roadblock when it comes to discipleship?
- 2) How do you evaluate your goals so that you can prioritize them and be effective in discipleship?
- 3) What do you think of the acronym SPLASH (Show People Love and Share Him) and how can it be implemented today?
- 4) Why is discipleship the key to effective evangelism?

Final Interview

- 1) What lessons can you take from this project?
- 2) How will you respond in those moments that allow you to share Jesus?
- 3) What can you contribute to help others that may experience reservations about expressing themselves? How can you help train someone in discipleship?
- 4) What should be at the heart of discipleship?
- 5) Summarize your final thoughts on what you have learned?

Appendix B -

Members Recruitment Letter

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am researching as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to better equip the congregation at Greater Purpose International with the necessary tools to express their faith to others, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and members of the congregation. Participants, if willing, will be asked to attend 2 video interviews and 3 group sessions. It should take approximately 45 minutes to complete the initial interview and the final interview. The 3 group sessions should take approximately one hour each to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please complete the attached consent form with your signature and return it by handing it to the researcher during the scheduled participant meeting.

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the participation meeting. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the research.

Participants will not receive any compensation for their participation.

Sincerely,

Christopher Kornegay
919-634-8068/ckornegay@liberty.edu

Appendix C -

Consent

Title of the Project: Understanding Discipleship and How to Effectively Spread the Gospel

Principal Investigator: Christopher Kornegay, Liberty University, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years old and must be an active member of Greater Purpose International. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the study is to determine how the congregants at Greater Purpose International are expressing their faith to others. The study ultimately seeks to find why there is a lack of willing and qualifying disciplers, and how to address the issue by first, understanding the biblical role of discipleship, and developing a practical plan for expressing your faith and increasing membership in the church.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Remain truthful and non-biased in all answers
2. Able to complete the entire study which will require 2 interviews. The first interview will be 45 minutes, and the second interview will be 30 minutes. You will also be asked to participate in 3 small group sessions that will be conducted online via zoom. Interviews and sessions will be video recorded.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

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

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- These records will be located in the church office inside of a file cabinet that will be locked. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer if necessary and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and focus group discussions will be recorded. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in small group settings. While discouraged, other members of the small group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

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

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

The researcher conducting this study is Christopher Kornegay. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at 919-634-8068 and/or emailing ckornegay@liberty.edu and include Research Study in the subject line. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Joe Easterling, at jeasterling2@liberty.edu.

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

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

Your Consent

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

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

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

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix D - IRB

November 24, 2020

Christopher Kornegay

Joe Easterling

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY20-21-382 Understanding Discipleship and How to Effectively Spread the Gospel

Dear Christopher Kornegay and Joe Easterling,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason: Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

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

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.

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

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office