

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**The Impact of D-groups on the Spiritual Health of
Church Membership at FBC Barbourville, KY.**

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

by

Joshuah T. Shields

Lynchburg, Virginia

July 2021

Copyright © Date by Joshua T. Shields
All Rights Reserved

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Dr. Norman Mathers

Dr. Russel Woodbridge

THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Joshuah T. Shields

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, 2021

Mentor: Dr. Norman Mathers

For years, First Baptist Church in Barbourville, Kentucky, has been in steady decline. Additionally, there is no personal discipleship program in the church. This project addresses the problem by studying the impact of D-groups on the spiritual health of the membership of the church. Participants in this project completed a spiritual health assessment during the first week of study. The same assessment was retaken after six weeks, and the results of both assessments were compared. Participants who were part of a D-group performed higher on the second assessment when compared to a control group which did not participate in D-group activities. The results of this study show that D-groups could be an effective discipleship tool for the membership of First Baptist Church. The potential exists for D-groups to be effective on a larger scale or in a variety of church settings.

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Introduction	1
Ministry Context	2
Problem Presented	7
Purpose Statement	11
Basic Assumptions	12
Definitions	13
Limitations	15
Delimitations	16
Thesis Statement	17
Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework	18
Literature Review	18
The Goal of Discipleship	18
The Discipleship Process	21
Biblical and Historical Discipleship	22
Small Group Discipleship	28
D-group Discipleship	31
Conclusion	34
Theological Foundations	35
Theoretical Foundations	45
Chapter 3: Methodology	49
Intervention Design	49
Implementation of Intervention Design	53
Chapter 4: Results	63
Results of Spiritual Health Assessment One	63
Participation Results	66
Results of Spiritual Health Assessment Two	69
Comparison of the Spiritual Health Assessments	73
Differences Related to D-group Participation	77
Chapter 5: Conclusion	82
Appendix A	93
Appendix B	96
Appendix C	98
Appendix D	99
Appendix E	100

IRB Approval Letter	101
Bibliography	102

Tables

1.	Group Leader Weekly Reflections on Group Time	57
2.	Total Averages for Spiritual Health Assessment 1 by Participant/Section.....	64
3.	Total Averages for Spiritual Health Assessment 1 by Group/Section.....	65
4.	Participation Data by Group/Participant.....	67
5.	Total Averages for Spiritual Health Assessment 2 by Participant/Section.....	69
6.	Total Averages for Spiritual Health Assessment 2 by Group/Section.....	71
7.	Total Average Difference in Scores by Group/Section	72
8.	Total Average Difference in Scores by Group/Participant.....	74

Illustrations

Figures

1.	The Discipleship Pathway of First Baptist Church, Barbourville, KY	10
2.	Average Scores for All Participants	75
3.	Average Scores for Individual Questions	76
4.	Score Difference and Participation Data	77

Abbreviations

AWANA *Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed*

DMin *Doctor of Ministry*

FBC *First Baptist Church*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The imperative of the Great Commission given by Christ to his church is to make disciples.¹ Failure to complete this task is not only disobedience to God but also results in negative consequences for the church such as poor spiritual health among members. The following project will examine the state of First Baptist Church in Barbourville, Kentucky through the lens of its discipleship methods such as children's programs, Sunday school, and Bible studies. The absence of a personal discipleship program and an unclear discipleship pathway in the church not only form a tremendous impediment to fulfilling the Great Commission, but also do not provide clear expectations and opportunities.² The research will address the impact of implementing a specific, personal discipleship program with the expectation that doing so will enhance spiritual growth for participants.

The term disciple is popular in contemporary Christian literature and among church leaders, but it is often used without definition.³ Disciples are not merely converts, nor are they individuals participating in the activities of a church. In the purest sense, disciples are "apprentices of Jesus" on a course of doing, learning, and following.⁴ The intentional act of setting individuals on this course and guiding them along it is discipleship. In its simplest form and based on the Great Commission, discipleship involves baptizing those who have positively

¹ D. A. Carson, "Matthew" in *Matthew & Mark*, vol. 9, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Tremper Longman, III and David Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 666.

² Thom Rainer, and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 113.

³ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor: The Key to Building Healthy Christians in Today's Church* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1988), 72.

⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), xi.

responded to the gospel message and teaching them to obey everything Jesus has commanded.⁵

In assessing the impact of implementing a discipleship program at First Baptist Church of Barbourville, this study will further examine the nature of discipleship, the definition of a disciple, and the Great Commission.

Ministry Context

Barbourville is the county seat of Knox County, Kentucky and has been called “the oldest town in the mountains.”⁶ It is in southeastern Kentucky and is one of Kentucky’s fifty-four Appalachian counties. The town was officially established in 1801 with the first church, the Cumberland River Baptist Church, being founded in 1804.⁷ Cumberland River Baptist Church originally met in the homes of members until the first log structure was built a few miles southwest of the town in 1814.⁸ Even during its first several years of existence without a formal meeting place, the church aided in the organization of at least seven other regional churches.⁹ From its earliest existence, the church emphasized missions and valued outreach. During the first several decades of church history, the church displayed great spiritual maturity among the membership. This trend continued until the year 1861 when the nation was divided by the civil war.

⁵ Jim Putman, Bob Harrington, and Robert E. Coleman, *DiscipleShift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 32.

⁶ Knox County Historical Museum, *Knox County* (Barbourville, KY: 2020), 1.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ H. Warren Robbins, and Tony Todd, *A History of First Baptist Church, Barbourville, Kentucky* (Barbourville, KY: 2019), 1.

⁹ Ibid.

The United States Civil War even impacted the small, mountain community of Barbourville, which is recognized as the site of the first Civil War skirmish in eastern Kentucky.¹⁰ The Cumberland River Baptist Church subsequently held no services during the war and did not resume meetings until 1869. Following the Civil War, the church reorganized and implemented new curriculum from the Southern Baptist Convention's Sunday School Board. Sunday school then became a strong ministry of the church as the congregation met regularly in various locations until 1921 when the current site of the church was purchased. After constructing a sanctuary fitted with educational space near the heart of Barbourville, the Cumberland River Baptist Church formally changed its name to the First Baptist Church in 1926.¹¹

For many years, the church grew and remained quite strong even completing several extensive building programs. Total membership grew to more than one thousand people. During the 1900's, First Baptist Church planted at least seven more churches in the region. Sunday school remained the primary teaching agency of the church while mission involvement transitioned from a hands-on approach to emphasizing monetary support of missions through the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program.¹² The Cooperative Program is an effort of churches to pool resources to support mission agencies, seminaries, and the executive committee of the convention. When presented with an opportunity to lower Cooperative Program giving and invest in a missions pastor to equip the church to again engage in missions, the church voted down the proposal.

¹⁰ Knox County Historical Museum, *Knox County*, 1.

¹¹ Robbins and Todd, *A History of First Baptist Church, Barbourville, Kentucky*, 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2.

In the early 2000's, the church made strides in facilities and ministry programs. The church opened an innovative outreach center for youth, called Oneway, in a building separately located from the main campus. The church launched the AWANA program in 2002 to reach and disciple children in Scripture. Likewise, the church launched Upward Sports in 2010 to better reach out to the surrounding community. This was also the year the Family Life Center of the church was completed following a robust financial campaign during which church members pledged more than one million dollars to its construction.¹³

In 2019, Knox County had a population of 31,145 while Barbourville-proper had a population of 3,119.¹⁴ For the two decades leading up to that year, the church experienced a steady decline in worship attendance, Sunday school attendance, and baptisms even though demographics for the community remained relatively steady.¹⁵ The decline also took place despite launching significant ministries and taking on a major building project. This researcher has an insider's perspective of the situation having been a member of the church for several years as a youth and being the current lead pastor of the church. There could be a correlation to this period in the church's history and an aging congregation with little drawing power for younger families.

Knox County is not an ethnically or racially diverse community. The population is 96.8% white-only with Hispanic and mixed races being the next common comprising 1.3% each. First Baptist Church membership reflects the racial makeup of the county. Forty seven percent of the total population of Knox County is between the ages of eighteen and sixty-five. The church is

¹³ Robbins and Todd, *A History of First Baptist Church, Barbourville, Kentucky*, 2.

¹⁴ United States Census Bureau, "Barbourville City, Kentucky," accessed October 28, 2020, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=1600000US2103574>.

¹⁵ Kentucky Baptist Convention, "First Baptist Church Barbourville 20 Year Statistical History Report," Annual Church Profile, accessed October 28, 2020, <https://ky.sbcworkspace.com/reports/view/94?orgid=19044273>.

reflective of this statistic with fifty percent of church members falling into the same age bracket. A key difference between the county and church age demographic lies on each end of the spectrum. The church has a much older demographic than the community with thirty-eight percent of members being sixty-five years old or older compared to only 17.3% in the county for the same age range. Throughout much of the church's history in the past half century, the church has emphasized ministry programs and missional giving through means such as the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program but has not emphasized transformational discipleship.

Discipleship as part of the total church program has primarily been informational. The tools for making disciples have revolved around Sunday school, Training Union (in years past), and other classes offered by the church. Discipleship through the church has never included smaller groups existing for the sole purpose of making disciples. Because discipleship has emphasized knowledge transfer, replication in groups and individuals has rarely occurred. It is believed this absence of transformational discipleship has contributed to a spiritual immaturity among many members and a disconnect among the membership. This absence could be one factor leading to an aging congregation and a declining church.

The church has long received recognition from the community as the pretentious and condescending church in town. The median individual earnings in 2019 for Barbourville residents was \$33,280.50 annually.¹⁶ However, First Baptist Church received \$485,267 in undesignated receipts the same year from 360 resident members.¹⁷ While the church has

¹⁶ United States Census Bureau, "Barbourville City, Kentucky," <https://data.census.gov/>.

¹⁷ Kentucky Baptist Convention, "First Baptist Church Barbourville 20 Year Statistical History Report," Annual Church Profile, <https://ky.sbcworkspace.com/>.

faithfully been a significant financial contributor to missions and making disciples, it has largely neglected the personal and individual investment in its own community. The community at large boasts a poverty level of 31.9% while the church is debt free and occupies most of a city block.¹⁸ Much of the church's regular activities focus on those actively attending the church rather than reaching out to the surrounding community. This emphasis has contributed to little visibility of the church within the community.

Currently, the church has several ministry programs. Sunday school is a major emphasis and the highest attended even apart from corporate worship. Weekly worship on Sunday morning, further worship and study on Sunday evening, and midweek Bible Study are staples. There are multiple children's programs such as AWANA, Upwards Sports, Children in Action, and Oneway Youth. There are several fellowships and groups such as the B.A.L.L. (Be Active Live Longer) club, Men's Brotherhood, and Women's Ministry Union. With the exception of Upwards, these are largely only attended by members. The church has four full-time employees and several part-time employees. It operates on nearly a \$500,000 annual budget and heavily relies on a handful of standing committees and numerous volunteers for routine functions.

Based on Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey's twenty-five-point test, the church is primarily a traditional church.¹⁹ The test reveals that most activities revolve around the facilities of the church. Much of the budget is dedicated to personnel and to facility maintenance and utilities. Leadership primarily comes from the pastor with influence from the deacon body. There are also attractional elements to the church such as disciple-making revolving around classes and curriculum. The growth engine is also evangelism and activity. In times past, the senior pastor

¹⁸ United States Census Bureau, "Barbourville City, Kentucky," <https://data.census.gov/>.

¹⁹ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 236-237.

has been viewed as the preacher or the CEO of the church. Missions primarily involves support of the International Mission Board and North American Mission Board resulting in no multiplication or church planting from the church in recent history.

Problem Presented

In the Great Commission, Jesus made the mission of the church abundantly clear. Bill Hull notes, “When he issued the Great Commission, he could have spoken about contemplation, study, worship services, or gathering people together for revival meetings in the temple...But he didn’t.”²⁰ Jesus emphasized disciple-making and commanded the church to disciple the nations. Since that time, the church has been involved in many ministries and many parts of the social order. Throughout history, the church has emphasized discipleship at times and evangelism at other times. While all these pieces are critically important, the church fails its mission given by the mouth of Christ when it fails to make disciples.

First Baptist Church of Barbourville, Kentucky has experienced steady decline over the past two decades in nearly all measurable areas of the church. Resident membership dropped from 674 to 349 individuals. Total annual baptisms dropped from nineteen to two. Average worship attendance was cut in half dropping from three hundred to one hundred fifty. Sunday school enrollment dropped from 531 to 315. Total annual undesignated receipts dropped approximately ten thousand dollars.²¹ The church also moved from multiple, full-time staff

²⁰ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 25.

²¹ Kentucky Baptist Convention, “First Baptist Church Barbourville 20 Year Statistical History Report,” Annual Church Profile, <https://ky.sbcworkspace.com/>.

members to a reduced staff. Recently, the church experienced a complete staff turnover with only the custodian remaining in 2020 due to an encouraged retirement of the senior pastor.

Research indicates that many North American churches are failing to produce mature believers. A survey of over 4,000 churchgoers from thirty-five different denominations carried out by T-NET International revealed that 24% of participants were digressing in personal behavior while 41% were static in their spiritual growth.²² This study indicates that upwards of 65% of Christ-followers are plateaued or declining in their spiritual life meaning the church is struggling to fulfill the Great Commission. Statistically speaking based on this information, many members of First Baptist Church of Barbourville are likely not growing or are even declining spiritually.

Aubrey Malphurs describes the reality of the sigmoid curve in all areas of life from Fortune 500 companies to the second law of thermodynamics.²³ Every organization's lifecycle greatly reflects an S-curve. Even the church is not immune to the power of the S-curve. Like other organizations and organisms, many churches grow, plateau, and die unless another sigmoid curve can be initiated before death occurs. FBC Barbourville has certainly not been in the growth portion of the S-curve in recent decades, but the church is still alive albeit plateaued or in decline. The hope for organizations such as the church in contrast to living organisms is that new waves of growth and revitalization can occur by launching new sigmoid curves in the lifecycle of the church.

²² Aubrey Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making: A Practical Tool for Successful Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 25.

²³ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 10.

While the church may appear healthy from the outside, there are severe warning signs of deterioration. The church meets all six of Thom Rainer's indicators of a church that is very sick.²⁴ A long period of decline, conflict, lack of visibility in the community, apathy, and a desire for days long passed are indicative of poor health in the church. While many factors likely contribute to this decline, there is an obvious missing element in the total church program. The church has excellent facilities, an abundance of resources, a strong volunteer force, and numerous ministries but the church does not have a clear discipleship pathway. Without this pathway, the church does not know what it is to be and what to produce.

Because there has been no clear goal in making disciples, production of disciples has been haphazard, and the church has suffered for it. When someone is saved through preaching, revival, or another outreach of the church, there is no clear path to set them on for continued spiritual growth and development. Many of the ministries have become ends to themselves. While people grow through certain ministries such as Sunday school, these ministries also fulfill other attractional purposes and do not exist for the sole purpose of discipleship. Additionally, the greatest potential for service is to serve in or lead one of the already existing ministries of the church. This model produces good ministry leaders but has failed to produce mature disciples causing the church to suffer. Likewise, the community of the church has suffered for the church's failure in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Taking the church's programs and placing them on a continuum while overlaying the summarized purpose statement of the church, which is reflective of the three participles of the

²⁴ Thom Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 93.

Great Commission, reveals natural gaps in the total church program. Figure one portrays these gaps and demonstrates the need for added elements along FBC’s discipleship pathway to serve primarily for growth and sending. Underneath the umbrella of discipleship in the Great commission, “gather” reflects the baptism participle, “grow” reflects the teach participle, and “go” reflects the go participle.

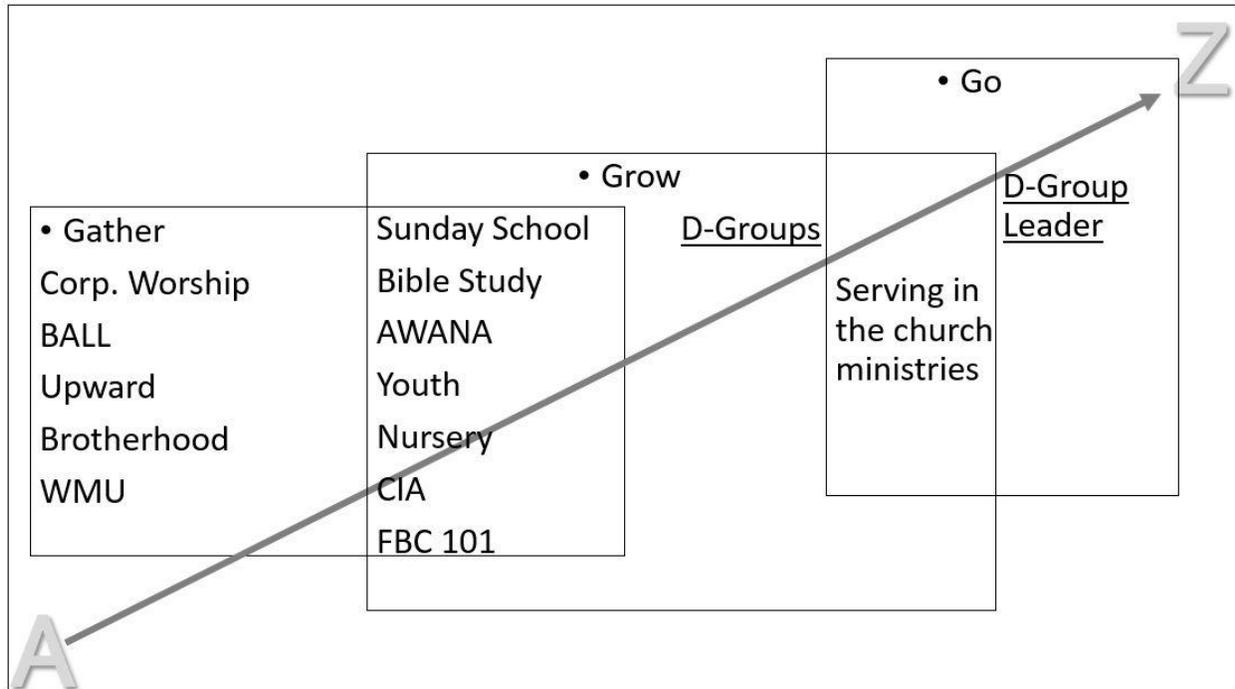


Figure 1. The discipleship pathway of First Baptist Church, Barbourville, KY.

The current model does not offer a way for members to continue growing in their faith unless knowledge alone equates spiritual growth. A church members could begin attending a Sunday school class and continue meeting with this same group week after week for decades with no replication or significant investment into other believers. If said member does take an additional step in leadership and becomes a Sunday school teacher, then that member could teach the same group of people (or same age group of people) for decades without further challenge and replication. This situation could be problematic for an adult teaching a group of young children over an extended period of time and only diving as deep into Scripture as the age group

they are teaching. The problem is the absence of a personal discipleship program in FBC Barbourville, KY.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMin action research project is to study if implementing D-groups as a discipleship program can contribute to the spiritual growth of the church's membership. The church has various small group options, but none of the groups focus on intentional discipleship and replication. Specifically, Robby Gallaty describes how D-groups take discipleship to an even deeper level than most existing small group ministries.²⁵ D-groups are same-sexed groups of three to five individuals who meet regularly for the purpose of discipleship. D-groups could be the missing piece in the discipleship pathway of FBC Barbourville both in terms of spiritual growth and lay leader development for multiplication.

Currently, there is no clear discipleship pathway at FBC Barbourville. Over the years, the standard operating procedure has been to insert church members into an area or ministry with the hope that the individual will grow into a mature follower of Christ. However, the absence of a clear goal or picture of a disciple negatively impacts the results of the church's discipleship methods. Implementing D-groups alleviates this problem due to the replicative nature of the groups. Ultimately, the goal for the church is to produce disciples who make other disciple-makers. If D-groups become the means to that end, then the practical goal is to produce D-group leaders across the church.

The position of D-group leader reflects an individual who is mature enough to guide others in an intense, intimate discipling relationship. However, D-group do not have to have an

²⁵ Robby Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus' Final Words our First Work* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 183-202.

abundance of biblical knowledge or any professional qualifications. A D-group leader is one who has adopted discipleship as a continuing way of life. Serving in this role allows church members to also serve in other important and necessary ministries of the church while allowing each member to also be in discipling relationships strictly for the purpose of spiritual growth and multiplication. With D-group leadership as a goal, each area of the church's purpose which is reflective of the three participles of the Great Commission is also fulfilled underneath the umbrella of the Great Commission's imperative to make disciples.

Basic Assumptions

There are several assumptions feeding into this research project. The first assumption is that members of First Baptist Church are not as spiritually healthy as they could be. Given that all believers are to continually grow in their relationship with God throughout the course of their lives, this is a reasonable assumption. Likewise, data trends of the church indicate a group that is not producing disciples on a large scale. Mature disciples naturally produce other disciples as a fruit of their relationship with God. Failing to fulfill the Great Commission by making more disciples could be an indicator of stunted spiritual growth. This is an indication that there is room for measurable improvement.

The second assumption is that D-groups provide a pathway to greater spiritual maturity. D-groups fulfill several needs for individuals as far as discipleship is concerned. The groups place individuals in intimate, discipling relationships for growth and accountability. The groups steer members towards the Scripture through daily readings, memorization, and journaling. The groups also guide individuals towards the goal of replication through starting new D-groups with new members. It is assumed that all these factors promote growth and greater spiritual maturity

among group members. This project exists primarily to test this particular assumption and determine if D-groups fulfill this need.

A third assumption is that the membership of First Baptist Church is willing to participate in D-groups for the purpose of personal discipleship and growth. Group participation is strictly voluntary and may not be welcomed by all church members. It is assumed that church members desire to grow in their faith and will be attracted to this model after witnessing growth in those who choose to participate. This project hinges heavily on these basic assumptions. The assumptions must be tested against the research to be performed. A negative outcome across any of these assumptions would potentially undermine the research project.

Definitions

D-group. For this research, this is defined as "...a group of three to five gender exclusive (men with men, women with women) believers meeting together for the purpose of accountability, reading God's Word, and Scripture memorization."²⁶ D-groups or discipleship groups have been contextualized to take on various forms and formats. For this study, the understanding of D-groups, as provided by Gallaty, will be used given that the implementation of such groups is the focus of this research.

Disciple. Earley and Dempsey define a disciple as "...a person who has trusted Christ for salvation and has surrendered completely to Him. He or she is committed to practicing the spiritual disciplines in community and developing to their full potential for Christ and His mission."²⁷ It is necessary to narrowly define this term because disciple has meant different

²⁶ Robby Gallaty, *CSB Disciple's Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 2031.

²⁷ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 28.

things to different groups throughout church history and replicating disciples is the goal of D-groups.

Discipleship. Throughout this research, discipleship will be considered, “Intentionally equipping believers with the Word of God through accountable relationships empowered by the Holy Spirit in order to replicate faithful followers of Christ.”²⁸ Discipleship has taken on many forms throughout history and can involve countless methods. This definition considers the importance of Scripture, the power of the Holy Spirit, the necessity of relationships, and the goal of replication through discipleship.

Discipleship pathway. Gallaty defines the discipleship pathway as “...a four-part model for moving people through the discipleship process represented by the Congregation, Community, Core, and Crowd. Each group is representative of where people are in their spiritual journey and where they can go next as they move through the discipleship process.”²⁹ This term may be unfamiliar to readers and must be clearly defined. While many retain an understanding of discipleship, the discipleship pathway adds the intentional progression of individuals along a continuum of spiritual maturity.

Small group. For this research project, small groups will refer to the system in the church where groups of people smaller than the corporate worship group gather for the purpose of discipleship.³⁰ The concept of small groups can be broad and vaguely understood to reference numerous practices for multiple purposes. This definition narrows the concept and emphasizes the relationship between small groups and discipleship.

²⁸ Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship*, 155.

²⁹ Gallaty, *CSB Disciple's Study Bible*, 2031.

³⁰ Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 175.

Spiritual growth. Spiritual growth for this research project must be clearly defined within the scope of Christian development as it involves the discipleship process. Spiritual growth in this project is understood as disciplining ourselves spiritually so that we shed the weight of ungodliness and worldly desires while increasing in self-control, uprightness, and holiness for increased godliness.³¹ It is biblical discipline for the purpose of Godliness and Christlikeness.

Limitations

Certain factors remain uncontrollable and may impact the research project. The first limitation is the willingness of the members of First Baptist Church to participate in a D-group and to answer a spiritual health survey. Another limitation is the potential of a participant dropping out of a D-group prematurely. Group participation is voluntary, and participants may leave the group before adequate research can be conducted on their spiritual growth. All participants will be highly encouraged to remain active in the project for the duration of the research period. Likewise, participants may not adhere to group standards and expectations. As volunteers, group participants cannot be forced to read, journal, and memorize Scripture. Therefore, personal participation is a limitation.

Another limitation is that group participants may not be entirely honest and accurate in their personal assessments of their own spiritual health. Members may unknowingly score themselves higher on the second assessment out of an expectation that they should be more spiritually fit after participating in a group. Members may also score themselves too high on the first assessment making it difficult to note statistically relevant changes between the two

³¹ Robby Gallaty, *Growing Up: How to be a Disciple Who Makes Disciples* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2013), 55.

assessments. Scoring may fluctuate between participants as well. For example, a more mature participant may score themselves lower than a less mature participant based on their view of themselves. Because this factor will highly depend on how the participant views themselves, it is a limitation.

A final limitation could be external influences skewing the data gathered in this project. Members of the D-groups could report spiritual growth over the research period but that growth could possibly be attributed to factors outside the scope of this study. Spiritual growth could come through life circumstances, a personal decision to greater devotion, or an experience totally outside the realm of D-group life. Likewise, members of the control group could experience and report perceived spiritual growth which would certainly have to be attributed to factors outside of this study. Such external influences are very difficult to pinpoint and will be considered limitations to this research project.

Delimitations

While there are uncontrollable factors to plan for, there are also factors which can be controlled. The first delimitation is that all research will be conducted through First Baptist Church in Barbourville, Kentucky. It will only include members of the church eighteen years of age and older who agree to participate in a D-group. It will involve a group of men and a group of women from various ages and perceived levels of spiritual maturity. A control group, which does not participate in a D-group, will also be utilized and given the same spiritual health assessment at the same time as group participants. Thus, the research will involve approximately twelve to eighteen members of the congregation.

The method for discipleship and spiritual growth will only be Gallaty's concept of a D-group coupled with the rest of the total church program. As the group leader, the researcher has control over meeting times, locations, format, content, and frequency. All participants will be scored using the same data analysis and the same spiritual health assessment. The only difference in the church program between the research groups and the control group will be participation in D-groups. This procedure will provide an adequate picture of any differences D-group involvement could make to the spiritual health of church members.

Thesis Statement

If the church implements Gallaty's D-group model as a personal discipleship program, then there may be spiritual growth within the church. Spiritual growth will have to be measured via survey and gauged based on involvement in D-groups and their multiplication. Numerical growth will be measured at all levels including the large group setting, small group setting, and D-group setting. By adding this final element in the discipleship process, the church will intentionally produce disciples who make other disciples through a continual process of growing members and replicating groups. The discipleship pathway of First Baptist Church will be much more complete and directed.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

Discipleship is of utmost importance to the Christian faith given that the words of the Great Commission reflect Jesus' highest priority for his followers.³² Throughout church history, various methods for discipling believers have been utilized such as preaching and teaching the masses, small group ministries, and one-on-one models. Several of these different methods will be examined. However, one common practice has been proven successful since Jesus applied it in the first century. Even in recent years, research indicates that small group discipleship methods are among the most effective means of making disciples.³³ The following literature review will analyze and synthesize current literature focusing on small group discipleship and Gallaty's D-group.

The Goal of Discipleship

A major theme which must first be understood is the goal of discipleship. What is a disciple and what does the discipleship process entail? The end state must be clarified in order to formulate a biblical and practical process to reach it. On the most basic level, to be a disciple of Christ means to be a follower of Jesus by abandoning the things of the world.³⁴ Francis Chan and Mark Beuving note that a disciple, at its most basic form and when taken literally, is being a follower of Jesus by obeying his call to follow.³⁵ Thus the initial phase of discipleship requires

³² Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 2.

³³ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 117-118.

³⁴ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 22.

³⁵ Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2012), 16.

producing an individual willing to follow Christ in obedience by turning from a former way of life and to Christ himself. The first characteristic of discipleship is followership. Still, discipleship must go deeper than mere followership.

Hull agrees and adds, “A disciple, then, is a reborn follower of Jesus...a more serious Christian active in the practice of the spiritual disciplines and engaged in evangelizing and training others.”³⁶ Two additional elements are added under this definition provided by Hull: practicing spiritual disciplines and replicating the discipleship process with others. The imperative in Matthew 28:18-20 is the verb *mathēteuō* meaning “to disciple” or “make disciples.” Hull labels this process “disciple-making” and notes that it spans from the deliverance of the gospel, through development as a committed follower, to being deployed as a disciple-maker.³⁷

Others agree that following Jesus entails much more than a decision to do so. In *Leading, Teaching, and Making Disciples*, Michael Mitchell expounds on the concept of followership noting that it involves more than submission but also a commitment to change; specifically, a willingness to be changed into the likeness of the one being followed.³⁸ The image which the literature at large begins to portray of a disciple is that of an obedient follower of Christ committed to being conformed into the image of Christ. Many church discipleship programs have sought to achieve this growth by implementing the “teaching” participle of the Great Commission very effectively. However, there could be another missing element in the definition of a disciple.

³⁶ Hull, *The Complete Book Discipleship*, 32-33.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁸ Michael Mitchell, *Leading, Teaching, and Making Disciples: World-Class Christian Education in the Church, School, and Home* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2010), 5.

While following and becoming like Christ are vitally important to being a Christian, the element of replication is as equally important to the Christian faith. Replication involves joining Christ in the Great Commission to disciple the nations. Jim Putnam, Bob Harrington, and Robert Coleman agree that being a disciple means being a person who is following Christ (head), is being changed by Christ (heart), and is also committed to the mission of Christ (hands).³⁹ If true discipleship results in a follower of Christ becoming like Christ, then the follower must naturally become a disciple-maker just as Christ made disciples. Christ replicated himself in the lives of others who would do the same. Discipleship requires a follower to both be like Christ and to produce others who are like Christ. As George Barna notes, “Discipleship, in other words, is about being and reproducing spiritually mature zealots for Christ.”⁴⁰

Being a disciple is as much about replication as it is transformation. Since a disciple is consistently transforming into the image of Christ over the course of their lives, they must also continuously be replicating themselves in the lives of other believers. A disciple has not become a disciple of Christ in the truest sense until they are multiplying other disciples in their own life. Hull does not disagree with this sentiment. He explains that the complete discipleship process of the First Century contained at least five characteristics: Deciding to follow a teacher, memorizing the teacher’s words, learning the teacher’s way of ministry, imitating the teacher’s life and character, and raising up one’s own disciples.⁴¹ The culminating event of becoming a disciple is becoming a disciple-maker and the task for the church is produce disciples who become disciple-makers.

³⁹ Putnam, Harrington, and Coleman, *DiscipleShift*, 51.

⁴⁰ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 18.

⁴¹ Hull, *The Complete Book Discipleship*, 63-64.

The Discipleship Process

Becoming a fully devoted disciple is not a singular event but a process which unfolds over time. Mitchell writes, “This process must produce disciples who worship Jesus and proclaim him to the world, utilizing knowledge and competencies acquired in the processes of reconciliation, restoration, correction, and perfection.”⁴² Certain elements are required to be present in the process for continued development of the disciple. The process itself requires a tremendous deal of intentionality and commitment by both the discipler and the disciple to produce results.⁴³ Understanding that the end goal is to replicate obedient followers of Christ committed to becoming like him and who make other obedient followers of Christ, it is imperative to understand what the discipleship process is and what it is not.

The discipleship process stems from the overflow of the life conformed into the image of Christ and cannot be overprogrammed as a one-size-fits-all approach to discipleship. Barna describes discipleship as a commitment to a lifestyle rather than a church program or certain ministry.⁴⁴ Discipleship is to be the norm for all followers of Christ and must be more than a program of the local church. In *True Discipleship*, John Koessler proposes, “Discipleship is not primarily a matter of what we do. It is an outgrowth of what we are.”⁴⁵ For this reason, a disciple must first experience and understand the elements of restoration and reconciliation which Mitchell discusses. The disciple must experience correction and transformation which pours over into the lives of others.

⁴² Mitchell, *Leading, Teaching, and Making Disciples*, 241-242.

⁴³ Rodney Mills, “Healthy Church Grow,” *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 10, no. 2 (2016): 74.

⁴⁴ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 19.

⁴⁵ John Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus*. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 12.

If a disciple is to invest into the lives of others and produce other disciples, then the discipleship process must naturally be relational. Koessler further discusses the relational approach which discipleship must take based on the example of Jesus.⁴⁶ Discipleship must be less program-driven and more people-driven. The emphasis of the discipleship process is the transformational relationship between teacher and disciples. Barna agrees saying, “Discipleship must be done in community rather than in isolation. Other people provide a level of objectivity, accountability, creativity, and encouragement that we cannot muster by ourselves.”⁴⁷ It takes disciples to produce other disciples.

Disciples follow Christ, become like him, and produce other disciples who do the same. This goal is achieved through an intentional and relational discipleship process occurring over time. Much of the literature agrees on these overarching principles. Yet what details form the elements of a relational discipleship process resulting in multiplication? If discipleship cannot be programmed, what specific environment is most conducive to the spiritual development of Christ followers? To find these answers, the research must turn to biblical and historical practices which have proven successful.

Biblical and Historical Discipleship

While most Christians seek to duplicate the process and results of Christ from the First Century, it is important to note that discipleship did not begin with Jesus but that “a similar practice was already well known among the Greeks and the Jews.”⁴⁸ However, it could be argued

⁴⁶ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 160.

⁴⁷ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 109.

⁴⁸ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 150.

that Jesus perfected this practice and provided the model for his disciples to use. Throughout his ministry, Jesus typically disciplined on three levels or to three group sizes. Gallaty describes these as the multitudes, the Twelve, and the three.⁴⁹ Although Jesus' ministry had far-reaching effects, most of his time was spent discipling the Twelve and the three.

Jesus demonstrated that a smaller group was more conducive to intentional, relational discipleship than by ministering to the multitudes alone. Dempsey and Earley argue the significance of this truth writing, "One of the main things Jesus did was invite a handful of men to be gathered together with Him in an intensive, ministry-focused small group. Jesus was a small group leader."⁵⁰ The Twelve followed Jesus, learned from his teaching, and gleaned from the experiences as they witnessed his ministry to the masses. Kevin Brosius agrees, "Even though Jesus preached to large crowds of people, He spent the majority of his time in small group discipleship. He did not just teach; he focused on doing life with his disciples."⁵¹ Jesus understood the importance of ministering to smaller groups of people.

There are numerous reasons to break people down into groups of varying sizes. In the biblical narrative, this practice dates to the early books of the Old Testament. Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson contend, "In the Old Testament, we find that God's people, the nation of Israel, were organized around large and small groups. Israel was divided into tribes, and the tribes were broken down into families or clans, and the families or clans were subdivided into single family

⁴⁹ Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship*, 113.

⁵⁰ Rod Dempsey and Dave Earley, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University Press, 2011), 26.

⁵¹ Kevin M Brosius, "Culture and the Church's Discipleship Strategy," *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 21, no. 2 (2017): 149.

units."⁵² Smaller groups and a handful of subordinate leaders are more manageable than an entire nation. More important than the practical implications, though, are what small groups throughout Scripture provide in support of the discipleship process.

For the twelve who had abandoned their lives to follow Jesus, they experienced a newfound sense of community within their small group. Joel Comiskey adds, "Yet, on another level, Jesus concentrated on the Twelve to model community. These twelve men discovered that community can be a difficult place to mask limitations, egotism, ignorance, and jealousies."⁵³ The idea of community links discipleship to the commands of Jesus and the teachings of the New Testament. Dempsey and Earley agree with Comiskey writing, "The Bible supplies the clearest guidelines for how to develop community in your group. Small groups will experience dynamic community by obeying the 'one another' commands found in the New Testament."⁵⁴ The small group community creates an environment where a disciple can learn to be obedient to Christ, accountable to others, and responsible for replication.

Community is absent in one-on-one discipleship models. While Jesus did invest in single individuals as in the dialogue with Nicodemus in John 3, the norm was to disciple people in a group setting. The Gospels present discipleship as a group endeavor revolving around the teachings and example of the one who has called the group into existence.⁵⁵ A small group dynamic avoids many of the pitfalls of one-on-one relationships and those of larger group

⁵² Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson, *Exponential: How You and Your Friends can Start a Missional Church Movement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 90.

⁵³ Joel Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-based Church: New Testament Insights for the 21st Century Church* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2012), 77.

⁵⁴ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*, 38.

⁵⁵ John Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 3, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 41-45.

settings. Group relationships also allow the leader to maintain the role of discipler as opposed to teacher only. Such discipleship relationships tend to be “more personal, more practical, and more powerful” resulting in shared life and a deepening faith.⁵⁶

Building on Jesus’ use of the small group, the early church relied heavily on this model and applied it to the house churches observed throughout Acts and the Epistles. There are great practical reasons for following this method. Harley Atkinson and Joel Comiskey note, “Paul wanted the house church believers to freely share, to encourage one another, and to rejoice in God’s goodness. We do not see a rigid agenda. Rather, the meeting was a time to minister to one another and meet needs.”⁵⁷ Ministering to one another and meeting individual needs would have been exceptionally difficult in a large group setting assuming the early church could have gathered in large groups.

It is also through the house church or small group that the Church itself grew and was established. Atkinson and Comiskey add, “House churches played an essential role in the rapid growth and ultimate triumph of Christianity, and it would be safe to say that the first three centuries belonged to the house church movement.”⁵⁸ Incredible growth and multiplication occurred in the Church due in large part to the use of small groups. During certain periods, small groups were vital to the survival of the Church and were crucial to its existence throughout much of history as meeting in large groups was often impractical and unsafe.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Joel C. Rosenberg and T. E. Koshy, *The Invested Life* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), 35.

⁵⁷ Harley Atkinson and Joel Comiskey, “Lessons from the Early Church for Today’s Cell Group,” *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (2014): 80.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵⁹ Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-based Church*, 35.

In the communal life of the early church, leaders such as Clement of Rome emphasized the importance of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving for spiritual development.⁶⁰ A similar approach was taken by Ignatius of Antioch while Polycarp believed true disciples would suffer or even experience martyrdom for their faith. During this period, believers not only sought to adhere to the principles of Scripture but to imitate Christ personally in his life and in his suffering. Discipleship through the church during these periods revolved around communal worship and guidance offered by bishops or overseers.

During the first period of church history, the young church relied heavily upon small groups and house churches not only for its existence but for its expansion. With no church buildings and no large places to gather corporately, the church met wherever they could even in family-sized groups. While this thought seems counterintuitive to many contemporary models whose goal is to create large gatherings, the church literally grew exponentially from house to house during this period of history. Although a very difficult time for Christianity, the first three centuries were among some of the purest in terms of discipleship and evangelism until Christianity became the formal state religion of Rome.

During the legal period of Christianity following the edict of Milan in 313 A.D., the most effective form of discipleship was perhaps seen among the monastics. Monasticism sought to practice the disciplines of Christ as their predecessors had. However, they realized the value of community as it provided accountability and encouragement in the faith. Their lives and spiritual development revolved around "...a life of humility, sacrifice, submission, and service."⁶¹

⁶⁰ Richard A. Burrige, "Jesus and the Origins of Christian Spirituality," in *The Story of Christian Spirituality: Two Thousand Years from East to West*, ed. Gordon Mursell (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 36.

⁶¹ Hull, *The Complete Book Discipleship*, 83.

Throughout the entire period leading up to the Middle Ages, the common threads of successful discipleship were imitating Christ in community and going deeper in one's relationship with God.

The Middle Ages presented difficulties for discipleship, but some factors remained the same. Because of high rates of illiteracy, discipleship revolved around communal celebrations and the liturgy. Therefore, most Scripture reading and prayers occurred during community worship. The idea of personal devotion was somewhat foreign during this period due to the necessity of community spiritual formation. However, in the period of the Reformation following these years, personal devotion became more popular as literacy increased along with access to the Scriptures. Despite this shift, groups still recognized the need for community and the accountability which comes with it. The Moravians, for example, lived in close community and unity to grow in Christ and reach those outside their own community.

The use of groups for discipleship has been revisited in modern history. John Wesley implemented a three-level method of classes, bands, and societies for intentional discipleship and continued spiritual growth which continues in many circles even today.⁶² The Wesleyan model reflected the three groups which Jesus ministered to in the First Century.⁶³ Wesley also recognized the traits of the First Century church in the Moravian believers and was drawn to their "simple lifestyle, sincere faith, and untiring service" to others.⁶⁴ Understanding that small group ministry such as this has a biblical foundation and has been used effectively for

⁶² D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Wilmore, KY: Rafiki Books, 2016), 81-122.

⁶³ Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship*, 113.

⁶⁴ Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 51.

discipleship throughout history, the research must examine the traits of small groups which could render them an effective discipleship tool for the modern church.

Small Group Discipleship

Small groups provide an environment fitting to produce obedient followers of Christ who are committed to becoming more like him and replicating that process in others. While much of the literature agrees on the important role of small groups in discipleship, there is less agreement on the details of the perfect small group apart from its size. Chris Shirley recommends an integrative model of discipleship which includes the total church program and the use of small groups.⁶⁵ An integrative model seeks to move people along a discipleship pathway from their point of entry to a point of greater maturity and continued spiritual growth. Brosius agrees on the importance of a healthy assimilation process across the total church program.⁶⁶

The goal of many assimilation processes is to move Christians into a small group environment. As noted, the literature reveals that such environments come in many forms. Shirley continues, “Small group options include Sunday school classes, home groups, accountability groups, gender groups, and special interest groups.”⁶⁷ Likewise, in *The Big Book on Small Groups*, Jeffrey Arnold notes that different group options include cell group, discipleship group, ministry group, special-needs group, affinity group, and house church.⁶⁸ While there are various options for small groups and certain authors have preferred methods,

⁶⁵ Chris Shirley, “It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship for the Church,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 50, no. 2 (2008): 222.

⁶⁶ Brosius, “Culture and the Church’s Discipleship Strategy,” 138.

⁶⁷ Shirley, “It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple,” 221.

⁶⁸ Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 76-80.

there are specific qualities of small groups which make them suitable for intentional and relational discipleship. These specific qualities reveal why small groups have proven successful throughout church history and could be beneficial today.

One of the commonly recognized qualities of small groups is the sense of community experienced by the members. Arnold further adds, "Small groups provide a format where every area of the Christian life can be experienced in a loving community."⁶⁹ Community is often lost in groups of larger size and the idea that small groups provide community reflects what the literature has already revealed regarding discipleship. Christian community in small groups allows meaningful relationships to develop which are a basic need not only in terms of discipleship but as a craving of the current culture.⁷⁰

Experiencing community through small groups leads members to invest more into the group. Brosius comments, "Studies indicate that when people contribute, they tend to feel more appreciated and involved rather than just listening to a speaker."⁷¹ By contributing to group life, members become more engaged in one another's lives as they walk through life together. This atmosphere makes accountability, encouragement, and openness more possible. Because such traits exist in small group ministry through strong interpersonal relationships, small groups are an excellent field for intense discipleship. Earley and Dempsey agree, "The church that 'is' groups has the greatest potential for developing disciples."⁷²

⁶⁹ Ibid., 39.

⁷⁰ Brosius, "Culture and the Church's Discipleship Strategy," 147.

⁷¹ Ibid., 150.

⁷² Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 279.

Even though small group ministries have permeated Christian discipleship methods from the time of Christ spanning through the Reformation, the Pietistic movement, and even Wesley's system of groups, it was the Sunday school movement that dominated most American churches during the first half of the twentieth century.⁷³ First Baptist Church experienced this same trend. While many other churches have added other options for small group ministries, churches such as First Baptist Church have held onto the Sunday school model alone. While Sunday school has been an effective evangelism and discipling tool, other options could be necessary especially in the coming years. For churches in the twenty-first century to experience spiritual growth, various forms of small group ministries will be required.⁷⁴

By the 1980s, the small group movement in the United States gained even more momentum than the once-thriving Sunday school movement. This trend only gained steam throughout the 1990s.⁷⁵ One reason for this shift to small group ministries was a tremendous growth many churches throughout much of the mid-twentieth century. As churches grew numerically, more means of retaining intimate, interpersonal relationships within the church became increasingly important. A shift back to small group ministries in the church was not only popular in the United States but around the world during the same time. For some churches in certain locations it was for the same reasons. For others, the necessity to meet in small groups stemmed from widespread Christian persecution in certain areas as it did during the first portion of the history of the church.

⁷³ Harley Atkinson and Joshua Rose, "The Small-Group Ministry Movement of the Last Four Decades," *Christian Education Journal* 17, no. 3 (2020): 547-548.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 557.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 550.

As the world changes drastically and quickly, one common method of ministry offers hope for a continued fulfillment of the Great Commission. Atkinson notes, “Many experts...believe the Great Commission can be fulfilled to a large degree through the effective use of small-group ministry strategies.”⁷⁶ Across the spectrum of the total church program worldwide, there are small groups for all varieties and purposes. Many small groups promote evangelism, outreach, and multiplication. Many others focus on personal growth and development. Very few focus solely on discipleship while relying on the natural outcomes of discipling relationship to provide multiplication and replicating groups.

The literature largely agrees on the importance and relevance of small groups. They are necessary for additional community, stronger Christian relationships, and deeper accountability. Small groups come in many forms and can be tailored for almost any context and situation making them highly attractive and versatile. However, there is still a missing element to the discipleship pathway in much of the literature and in many church programs. This even smaller group reflects Jesus’ three and Wesley’s bands. Such groups are specific types of small groups designed for discipleship. These final groups are what Gallaty calls D-groups.

D-Group Discipleship

D-groups are closed small groups of three to five same-sexed members and reflect Jesus’ closest group of three and Wesley’s bands.⁷⁷ The bands, as developed by Wesley, were the method of discipleship which facilitated affective redirection of the heart whereas the other types

⁷⁶ Harley Atkinson, “Small Groups: Context and Strategy for Christian Formation and Evangelization,” *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (2014): 71.

⁷⁷ Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship*, 183-202.

of groups facilitated cognitive and behavioral change.⁷⁸ This smaller group allowed for the most intimate and confidential conversations among group members. Groups were expected to meet at least weekly, to begin with worship or prayer, to engage members in searching questions with each member speaking freely and openly, and to end in prayer for each member.⁷⁹ Because these groups were designed for the explicit purpose of discipleship, they were off-limits to unbelievers and by invitation only.

D-groups follow a similar structure and capture the benefits of other small groups such as accountability and deeper relationships while adding dimensions often missed in larger groups. As closed groups, these groups develop even more intimate Christian relationships than a Sunday school class or mixed-sex small group. While Sunday school classes and other groups are often evangelistic in nature, these closed groups are focused on discipleship. Hull adds, "Closed groups provide an atmosphere for practicing spiritual disciplines...People who graduate from a closed group can more effectively lead either open or closed groups, because those steeped in the disciplines can teach those who are less experienced."⁸⁰ D-groups require members to practice the spiritual disciplines as part of group time and in preparation for group time.

Unlike other small groups which may use a published curriculum, D-groups typically rely solely on Scripture and the relationship of the group for material. This element allows the Word to transform member's lives on levels which could be missing in other group settings. Koessler writes, "Those who grow spiritually do not merely enjoy the Scriptures; they have a desire for it that is equal to the most fundamental longings of human experience."⁸¹ Through journaling and a

⁷⁸ Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 100.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁸⁰ Hull, *The Complete Book Discipleship*, 233.

⁸¹ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 83.

group reading plan, the D-group takes members deep into Scriptures emphasizing its personal application in their lives. Personal application is encouraged and even held accountable through the discussions in the group setting.

Using only the Bible for material drifts away from the norm for many other small groups ministries. Many groups rely on video curriculum or for the group leader to spend vast amounts of time in preparation and study for group time. Many curriculums take group members through extensive and expensive workbooks. D-groups immerse the leader into the group experience and allow them to become a facilitator and co-learner along with the group. While group members study the Word together, the HEAR (highlight, explain, apply, respond) method of Bible study and journaling provides the foundation for the group experience. This method of study “...promotes reading the Bible with a life-transforming purpose.”⁸² The method guides participants to read for understanding, application, and active response to the truths relayed through Scripture.

While many ministries have implemented a form of discipleship groups, Gallaty recommends a specific structure and format for D-groups. Groups are to be missional, accountable, reproducible, communal, and scriptural.⁸³ While these groups are for the purpose of discipleship, their goal is replication by creating new D-group leaders. After the course of twelve to eighteen months, every group member will ideally begin another group with other individuals to begin the process over again. While Gallaty does not promote this model as a boxed ministry or Bible study, the model is easily implemented and potentially powerful in discipling followers of Christ.

⁸² Gallaty and Gallaty, *Foundations New Testament*, 6.

⁸³ Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship*, 184.

Some current models of discipleship promote one-on-one discipleship. A D-group could be a group of two but is discouraged for five reasons which make one-on-one discipleship less effective.⁸⁴ One-on-one settings place a much higher demand on the leader as in a mentor/mentee relationship. This model is also more difficult to reproduce and does not replicate at as high of rates as groups of three to five. Thirdly, a one-on-one setting has the potential to turn into a counseling session as opposed to a discipling setting. Theologically, Jesus utilized the group model with the rare exception of one-on-one conversations. He did not disciple over time in one-on-one relationships. Lastly, the group of three to five offers a unique level of natural accountability and encouragement not found in groups of smaller or larger size.

Conclusion

Disciples are made and not born. It takes disciples to make other disciple-makers. Therefore, a structured and intentional discipleship process is required. Small groups are a proven method in making disciples. The D-group retains the elements conducive to intentional and relational discipleship which can be replicated in most settings. The D-group is founded on historically successful and theologically sound practices. More research is needed to determine the impact of implementing D-groups as part of a church's discipleship pathway within the total church program.

⁸⁴ Robby Gallaty and Kandi Gallaty, *Foundations New Testament: A 260-Day Bible Reading Plan for Busy Believers* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2018), 47-49.

Theological Foundations

The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 provides the primary theological foundation for discipleship. The commission begins with Jesus ensuring the disciples that all authority has been given to him in all places. This authority is a delegated authority given to the Son by the Father suggesting that the Son is acting in the will and power of the Father. These words echo the language of Old Testament passages such as Daniel 7:14 and are indicative of Christ's eternal, indestructible kingdom.⁸⁵ Christ's authority has been increased in its scope to now include all of heaven and earth. In this authority, Jesus is commissioning his followers to disciple the nations. The very authority of the Creator of Heaven and Earth is sending the disciples out to fulfill God's will. With this assurance, Jesus prefaces the Great Commission.

The rest of the passage is made up of five major parts consisting of one command, three participles, and one promise.⁸⁶ Indeed, the participles of verses 19-20 are subordinate to the command to make disciples.⁸⁷ This one command is occasionally misunderstood and even mistranslated. In some translations, the command "make disciples" is translated "teach" and the emphasis is sometimes placed on the participle translated "go" as opposed to the primary verb. The practical implications of this miscommunication are tremendous. When the emphasis is taken off the command to make disciples or the command is mistranslated, the church emphasizes teaching and evangelism over biblical discipleship.

⁸⁵ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 1112.

⁸⁶ Rod Dempsey, "Historical Discipleship and the Priesthood of the Believers," *Reading and Study*, accessed April 17, 2020, <https://learn.liberty.edu/>.

⁸⁷ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 431.

Gallaty argues that the prominence of the King James Version which mistranslates *matheteusate* in the Great Commission has led to decades of a lack of biblical discipleship.⁸⁸ Discipleship programs have relied heavily upon knowledge transfer as opposed to life transformation through discipling relationships. For this reason, the primary command to disciple the nations must be clearly understood with the other supporting participles remaining secondary.⁸⁹ D. A. Carson comments, “The main emphasis, then, is on the command to ‘make disciples,’ which in the Greek is one word, *matheteusate*, normally an intransitive verb, here used transitively....”⁹⁰ If Jesus’ primary mandate in the Great Commission is to make disciples, then his methods for discipleship must also be understood.

Jonathan Dodson describes each of the three supporting Greek participles as they uphold Jesus’ method for making disciples.⁹¹ Going is the missional aspect of the Great Commission whereby every believer participates in taking the gospel to others. Baptizing is the relational aspect of the Great Commission through which believers encourage others to profess their relationship with Christ through the act of baptism and enter the church. Teaching is the rational or learning aspect of the Great Commission whereby every believer is to teach others about Jesus and how to follow him better. Like the legs of a stool, these three participles uphold the process of discipling the nations.

The process must involve going, baptizing, and teaching in accordance with the Great Commission. The language of the commission reflects the importance of the final goal, which is

⁸⁸ Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship*, 121.

⁸⁹ H. A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1984), 400-401.

⁹⁰ Carson, “Matthew,” 666.

⁹¹ Jonathan Dodson, *Gospel Centered Discipleship* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 394-480.

discipling the nations, as opposed to the means of reaching that goal or proclaiming the good news.⁹² While the participle often translated “go” is important to understanding and fulfilling the Great Commission, misplaced emphasis must be avoided even though the word order has it first. Matthew uses this same participle to lead into an imperative elsewhere, and its commonality suggests it is an expectation that baptizing, teaching, and discipling take place wherever a disciple may find themselves.⁹³

However, the expectation is also that the discipleship will spread as the Gospel spreads throughout the Jewish and Gentile world. In Acts 1:8, Jesus instructs his disciples where they should go beginning with where they were and eventually reaching the ends of the earth. It could be expected that Jesus’ disciples would replicate many of the discipling methods he had used with them to include the same processes and teachings. If so, the first task would be to call followers just as Jesus had called them to follow him. Carson discusses the depth of this followership as consisting of a physical following between master and students for the purpose of intentional training.⁹⁴

It must be understood that Jesus grew up under a staunchly Jewish system of religious education. It was only natural that he should implement many of the same techniques into his own discipleship process. While many consider the discipling relationship as one of student and teacher, it is much more complex than that. In the First Century and in Jewish culture, the relationship was one between *rabbi* and *talmid*. While this was a teacher/student relationship to an extent, it also involved the *talmid* becoming the *rabbi* and discipling his own *talmidim*.⁹⁵

⁹² France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1115.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 1114-1115.

⁹⁴ Carson, “Matthew,” 148.

⁹⁵ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 151.

Discipleship in this form is naturally replicative whereas its survival requires a constant revolving door of disciple-makers making future disciple-makers.

In First Century Judaism, young boys began their formal education at the age of five by studying the Torah or first five books of the Christian Bible. After five years of study, the first cut was made. It was at the age of ten that Jewish boys continued their formal education or returned home, often to learn the trade of their fathers as an apprentice. For those who continued learning, they were educated on the rest of the Old Testament for the next seven years. At the age of seventeen, there was another educational culling. Those who moved on past this point would attain the goal of many Jewish boys: to be a religious leader or teacher of the Law. To continue on towards reaching this goal, these young men had to apply to rabbi in order to become his *talmid*. At the age of thirty, they could then begin their formal teaching and leading of their own *talmidim* as religious leaders.⁹⁶

The original disciples of Jesus present an unusual but interesting situation. Rather than the nation's brightest and most promising students applying to follow Jesus as their rabbi, Jesus selects a group of men who had intentionally or unintentionally missed the cut in the religious educational system at some point in their lives. In Matthew 4, Jesus selects four fishermen who had quite possibly been part of the trade from the age of ten. Certainly, these men were not trained scribes or rabbis.⁹⁷ Rather than apply to Jesus to become a follower, Jesus hand selects this group and others like them to become the Twelve in whom he would invest the final years of his life and ministry. Their followership and relationship with Jesus literally depended on Jesus calling them to himself.

⁹⁶ Robby Gallaty, *The Forgotten Jesus: How Western Christians Should Follow an Eastern Rabbi* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 37.

⁹⁷ Carson, "Matthew," 149.

New disciples are called to follow Christ through the proclamation of the gospel in accordance with Luke 24:47 and Mark 16:15-16. The gospel message is proclaimed by individuals sharing their faith and proclaimed through the gospel preaching of the church. If the Great Commission is a mandate for every Christ-follower, then every believer shares a responsibility to proclaim the gospel message in some way. The expectation is that believers will share the gospel of Christ wherever they may go; from their Jerusalem to the ends of the earth in accordance with Acts 1:8. Proclaiming the gospel where they go, disciples will lead others to decide to follow Jesus.

The decision to trust and follow Christ is not explicit in the Great Commission. It can be understood that the Great Commission implies the sharing of the gospel in Christians going and baptizing. However, the call to follow Christ is better reflected in the early chapters of Matthew when Jesus simply calls his disciples to “follow” him. The command to preach the gospel is better reflected in Luke 24:47 when Jesus tells his disciples that repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations. This theme of spreading the gospel to all nations is not isolated to the Great Commission or to the New Testament. Passages such as Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6 could undergird Christ’s words in Luke 24:47 as the fulfillment of the Gentiles coming to the Lord.⁹⁸

Luke presents a more abbreviated form of the Great Commission emphasizing Jesus’ proclamation that repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached to all nations. While this emphasis seems to depart from Matthew’s theme of discipleship, it does help present a full view of the Great Commission through a different perspective. Reaching the Gentile world and all the

⁹⁸ Walter L. Liefeld and David W. Pao, “Luke” in *Luke ~ Acts*, vol. 10, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, ed. Tremper Longman, III and David Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 352.

nations is a common theme for Luke which even carries over into Acts.⁹⁹ Luke's perspective on the Great Commission is not incongruent with Matthew's Gospel. One of the most important implied tasks of making disciples is preaching and proclaiming the gospel message. Luke is merely highlighting the action which Matthew captures in the 'go' participle of the Great Commission.

Mark similarly captures a slightly different aspect of the Great Commission in Mark 16. Even though many scholars reject the authenticity of the verses surrounding Mark 16:15-16, they do present words congruent with the overall purposes of the Great Commission.¹⁰⁰ Specifically, Christ elsewhere promotes and commands that the gospel be preached to all the world. Unlike Luke, Mark adds the idea of baptism to his perspective of the commission. Although these descriptions of the details of Christ's final words vary, they do not contradict one another. When taken together, they form a more complete understanding of the Great Commission and support the more exhaustive details given by Matthew.

The words of Jesus to the disciples in John 20 present a seemingly different take on the Great Commission. Although John captures some unique details apart from the other Gospel writers, his form of the Great Commission is also congruent. John captures the missional aspect of the commission very sufficiently through Christ's sending of the disciples as the Father had sent him. Theologically, this detail reiterates the truth that the mission of the church is firmly rooted in the mission Christ to mankind.¹⁰¹ John also captures the role of the Holy Spirit in carrying out the Great Commission. Luke captures the same theme in Acts 1 while Matthew

⁹⁹ Ibid., 352-353.

¹⁰⁰ Walter Wessel and Mark Strauss, "Mark" in *Matthew & Mark*, vol. 9, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Tremper Longman, III and David Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 988.

¹⁰¹ Robert Mounce, "John" in *Luke ~ Acts*, vol. 10, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Tremper Longman, III and David Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 648-649.

captures it in the promise of Christ's presence for all ages at the end of the Great Commission. Like Mark, John emphasizes the importance of the forgiveness of sins and the initial step of following Jesus.

The decision to turn to Christ is to be followed by baptism based on the participle of Matthew 28:19. *Baptizo* in the Great Commission involves not only the ordinance of immersing new believers in water but also incorporating them into the community of the church for continued discipleship.¹⁰² The theological implication is that the Great Commission requires the church and the establishment of other local churches. It is through the local church that new converts will be disciplined and taught as part of the body of Christ. The church is the mechanism God has decided to use as a sending and discipling agency for the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

The order of the two uncoordinated participles, baptizing and teaching, are interesting. The language suggests that baptism is an initiatory act which many churches have recognized. Rather than following a substantial period of instruction, baptism is to timely succeed a decision to follow Christ. Baptism is not a culminating event or graduation ceremony but an initial rite of passage into the life of the church. As such, it is to be a sort of enrollment into a discipleship process through which one is taught the various commands of Christ.¹⁰³ Baptism itself is also a teaching moment displaying the gospel message through a transformed life in Christ and pointing to the triune nature of the Godhead.

The teaching participle of the Great Commission is quite specific. Even though teaching is not the primary verb of Matthew 28:18-20, the Great Commission is partially fulfilled by

¹⁰² Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 5.

¹⁰³ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1116.

disciples teaching others to observe everything Jesus has commanded. Discipleship requires more than merely transferring knowledge but also a wholesome teaching resulting in obedience to or the keeping of the commands of Christ. While many consider Christ's summarization of the Law to be the extent of his commands, it has been noted that Jesus issued upwards of fifty different commands throughout his ministry.¹⁰⁴ Disciples must be taught these various commands through word and example to become obedient followers of Christ.

An interesting moment occurs in the early church in Acts 14 when Paul and the others minister to the city Derbe. In this passage, *matheteusate*, which is found in the Great Commission, is used to describe the actions of the missionaries to this city. Likewise, the King James Version translates this word as "taught" while other versions such as the Christian Standard Bible translate it as "made disciples." Luke clearly separates two actions in this passage. The city was preached to or evangelized, and it was taught or disciplined. John Phillips notes that Paul stayed long enough to proclaim the gospel and to teach the new converts while organizing the church.¹⁰⁵ The answer to whether the appropriate translation is teaching or discipling can likely be found in the methods applied by Jesus for discipleship.

While Jesus called the Twelve and spent most of his time with them, there was yet another group he invested into. In Mark 9, Jesus takes this inner circle of disciples consisting of Peter, James, and John up on the mountain where he is transfigured before them.¹⁰⁶ This same group of disciples are recorded to be with Jesus for a miracle in Mark 5 and in Gethsemane in Mark 14. While all the disciples spend quality time with Jesus, these three were afforded greater

¹⁰⁴ Matthew Payne, "The Fifty Commands of Jesus," *Spirituality*, accessed December 1, 2020, <https://ezinearticles.com/?The-Fifty-Commands-of-Jesus&id=468177>.

¹⁰⁵ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001), 284.

¹⁰⁶ Wessel and Strauss, "Mark, 837.

insights into his life and ministry which likely prepared them for the roles they would take on in the early church.

Jesus clearly taught the crowds, the Twelve, and the inner circle of disciples many invaluable lessons. However, his time spent with the three disciples was not always used for knowledge transfer but for experiential discipleship. They witnessed the Master perform miracles others were not allowed to see. They caught a glimpse of the Son of God the others were not granted witness to. In short, these men were equipped through close relation to Jesus for the roles they would play in the early church as leaders and even martyrs. It could be that making disciples in this manner not only requires teaching but also an equipping element through a close, discipling relationship.

The Apostle Paul captures this theme in his letters to the churches. Ephesians 4:12 discusses the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry for the purpose of building up the body of Christ. It is not only the pastor and teacher who ministers and who disciplines other believers. Harold Hoehner comments, “In brief, the point is that the gifted persons listed in verse 11 serve as the foundational gifts that are used for the immediate purpose of preparing all the saints to minister. Thus, every believer must do the work of ministry.”¹⁰⁷ Like the Twelve who inherited the ministry of the church from Jesus, the modern church must be equipped through relational discipleship for the work of the ministry.

While teaching aids in equipping the saints, Millard Erikson notes the emphasis Paul places on the edification of the body and how teaching is merely one part of the broader task of making disciples.¹⁰⁸ Discipleship, then, is an overarching command involving multiple subtasks

¹⁰⁷ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 549.

¹⁰⁸ Millard Erikson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 1063-1064.

such as evangelizing, teaching, and baptizing believers into the church for the purpose of building up the church by producing disciple-makers. A proven method for this entire process is that which was used by Jesus in calling his disciples and ministering to the crowds, the Twelve, and the three.

It can be argued that simply covenanting together in relationship is insufficient to produce the maturity necessary to continue to fulfill the Great Commission and make disciples. However, Jesus not only lived in relationship with his followers but he guided them through an intentional educational process whereby they became more like him. Likewise, modern Christ-followers using the small group ministry model must commit to a greater Christlikeness in order to be further equipped for the work of the ministry. For this reason, small groups must provide an environment suited for a modern disciple to grow or learn all aspects of Christlikeness. It is by becoming more like Christ that believers are ultimately equipped for ministry.¹⁰⁹

One action that is crucial to the life of the church and captures multiple facets of the Great Commission is preaching. Preaching has a role in discipleship by fulfilling the ‘go’ and the ‘teach’ participles of Christ’s command. However, preaching alone is insufficient to produce disciples. Peter Adam determined that preaching is one form of the ministry of the Word but certainly not the only form, and preaching alone cannot bear the burden of everything Scripture requires from the ministry of the Word.¹¹⁰ Preaching can serve to create converts and edify the body through teaching but lacks the relational aspect of intentional discipleship. The importance

¹⁰⁹ Joshua Rose, “Equipping Members for Ministry Through Small Groups,” *Christian Education Journal* 14, no. 2 (2017): 364.

¹¹⁰ Peter Adam, *Speaking God’s Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 59.

of biblical preaching cannot be overstated, but Jesus coupled it with a discipling method of creating close followers who become the leaders of others.

The task of discipling the nations through going, baptizing, teaching, preaching, and witnessing is a daunting task. For this reason, the promise of the Great Commission is the promise of the ages. In the Great Commission, Jesus, the one who has all power and authority in heaven and on earth, promises to be with his disciples as they carry out his instructions. As comforting as the promise is to Jesus' hearers, the promise is not only about their confidence but about Christ's equipping of them to successfully complete his mission.¹¹¹ Not only does the promise extend through the lives of the disciples standing before Jesus then, but it reaches across history through all future disciples obediently working through the end of the age.

Theoretical Foundations

If the Great Commission is to be taken seriously, then the church must take its role in making disciples seriously. To do everything else superbly but to fail in making disciples is to fail the mission of the church set forth by Jesus. Many churches minister to the crowds and to the smaller group such as the Twelve. However, the missing element in many churches is the ministry to the three. Gallaty provides a model for this specific discipleship ministry. The model is founded on Jesus' specific ministry to the inner circle of disciples often including Peter, James, and John. Like Jesus' ministry, D-groups consist of three to five same sexed individuals meeting together regularly for the specific purpose of discipleship.¹¹²

¹¹¹ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1119.

¹¹² Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship*, 184.

If this method were applied to the church, two groups would be initiated: one consisting of males and one consisting of females. These groups of individuals will meet weekly to discuss Bible readings, reflect on journaling, pray together, hold one another accountable, and share Scripture memorization. After the course of twelve to eighteen months, every member of the group will prayerfully launch another group to replicate the same discipleship process. Assuming each person disciplined replicates the process by leading another group and assuming each group has a total of six members and meets for twelve months, the church could intentionally disciple 330 people in three years.

In only four years after implementing this discipleship model, the number of people personally disciplined leaps to more than one thousand individuals. Part of the beauty of this system is that the original disciple-maker only disciplines twenty people over the course of those four years or five per year. This factor makes the model incredibly feasible. While it is true that these numbers reflect a near perfect scenario, consider even a fifty percent success rate. Even if the model is halfway successful and effective then more people could be disciplined in four years than currently attend the church on average.

More than the numerical impact of people disciplined, this project will focus on the spiritual impact of participating in a D-group. The spiritual impact of daily Bible reading, journaling, Scripture memorization, and meeting together with other believers for accountability could be tremendous. This project will measure the spiritual effect of D-groups through a spiritual health assessment at the beginning and ending of the project. These results will be compared to a control group who participates in regular church activities but not D-groups. It is possible that merely participating in a discipleship group could significantly impact one's self-perceived spiritual health.

This model reflects Jesus' method and creates disciples who create disciple-makers. Jesus ministered to various sizes of groups in different ways. On occasion, Jesus ministered to the crowds through his public teachings and miracles. More often than that he ministered to the twelve disciples who were his *talmidim* or students. This group spent a significant amount of time with Jesus and followed him closely learning from his words and actions. In addition to these groups, Jesus also took a few disciples aside on occasion for special training. This model seeks to capture the intentionality and intimacy of discipleship at this level.

In accordance with the Apostle Paul's teachings to the churches, this model equips the saints for the work of discipleship. Through this process, believers are edified, and the church is built. The work of the ministry is placed into the hands of the people rather than into the hands of professional ministers only. The model places every church member in a discipling relationship and keeps them in a discipling relationship in perpetuity. The overflow of this type of biblical discipleship is evangelism as groups seek new members and individuals mature in their faith. Through this process, the church is obedient to Christ and does well to fulfill the Great Commission.

While some literature exists on D-groups, very little research on their effectiveness has been conducted. However, research has been conducted on the effectiveness of general small group discipleship. One study from 2018 determined that perspective transformation was realized through small group discipleship.¹¹³ Such findings indicate D-groups, as a form of small groups, could be effective as well. A key difference is that D-groups are designed and structured for the purpose of fostering spiritual growth and maturity among believers. Not all small groups are structured this way.

¹¹³ Mary W. Mwangi, "Perspective Transformation Through Small Group Discipleship Among Undergraduate University Students in Nairobi, Kenya," *Christian Education Journal* 15, no. 3 (2018): 358.

Another study on discipleship from 2015 validated the importance of learning the Scriptures, internalizing their truth, and applying them to one's life.¹¹⁴ While there are numerous ways to achieve these goals in discipleship, D-groups provide a direct path to do so. The Scriptures could be learned, internalized, and applied through preaching, Bible studies, and other small group ministries. However, the curriculum for D-groups are the Scriptures. Through Scripture reading, journaling, and memorization group participants learn, internalize, and apply the Bible directly to their lives. Group members also learn a valid process for leading others to do the same while sharpening one another through the natural accountability experienced through group life.

¹¹⁴ Andrew Burggraff, "Developing Discipleship Curriculum: Applying the Systems Approach Model for Designing Instruction by Dick, Carey, and Carey to the Construction of Church Discipleship Course," *Christian Education Journal* 12, no. 2 (2015): 412.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Currently, there is no clear discipleship pathway or intentional discipleship program at First Baptist Church of Barbourville, KY. Discipleship currently consists of attending either Sunday school or midweek Bible study and primarily consists of knowledge transfer. The result of this void has been the production of some knowledgeable yet immature followers of Christ who do not produce disciples. The intervention addresses the problem by implementing a pilot program for discipleship at First Baptist Church. This intervention firmly established the goal of the discipleship pathway in the church by creating an avenue for intentional, relational discipleship reflective of the inner circle of Jesus' disciples. It provided a means for church members to continually live in a discipling relationship with other church members. The intervention also provided a means to measure spiritual growth among participants.

Intervention Design

The intervention used to address the problem was Gallaty's concept of D-groups.¹¹⁵ D-groups are a relatively simple, inexpensive, and efficient model of small group discipleship. Gallaty describes D-groups as "...a group of three to five gender exclusive (men with men, women with women) believers meeting together for the purpose of accountability, reading God's Word, and Scripture memorization."¹¹⁶ Unlike other discipleship programs and Sunday school, D-groups do not require the use of published materials or literature. The primary resource used for study, discussion, application, and accountability is the Bible read and studied in accordance

¹¹⁵ Gallaty, *CSB Disciple's Study Bible*, 2031.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

with a determined reading plan. Group members read and study through the Bible together using a reading plan and the HEAR journaling method.¹¹⁷

D-groups were the discipleship strategy researched for effectiveness in filling the absence of a personal discipleship program at First Baptist Church of Barbourville, KY. Two D-groups were launched using voluntary members of the church. One group was an all-male group led by the Lead Pastor. The second group was an all-female group led by the pastor's wife. Each group consisted of four members-each plus the leaders and met weekly for approximately one hour over the course of six weeks. Group activities included a Bible reading plan, Scripture memorization, journaling, prayer, and general accountability.

Application to conduct research for this project was made to the Institutional Review Board prior to any data collection. A copy of the IRB's determination can be found in Appendix F. The IRB approved the project based on the findings that this project is not considered human subject research. The rationale for this decision is that the project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge according to 45 CFR 46. 102(1). The study is limited to members of First Baptist Church of Barbourville, and only seeks to address the absence of a personal discipleship pathway in the church.

DMin students have both an ethical obligation to their congregants and to their project participants.¹¹⁸ One of the greatest risks with this project is the potential for participants' personal information to be breached. It could be personally detrimental to a participant and congregant should other church members learn of their spiritual weaknesses shared through the

¹¹⁷ Gallaty, *Growing Up*, 148.

¹¹⁸ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 31.

data collection of this project. To ensure personal dignity and respect for persons, the researcher gained informed consent from each participant by providing detailed information about the project using the consent form in Appendix A. There were also safeguards in place to ensure that individual responses and data gained through this study cannot be linked to any specific participant.

All records and data gathered through this project were kept private. Reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records were stored securely, and only the researcher had access to the records. Participants were assigned a research ID ensuring that names and other personally identifiable information were not on any research records. The researcher maintained a key which matched participants to collected data in a locked location for the duration of the project. The key will be destroyed once all data has been compiled thus keeping participant responses to the spiritual health assessment and group participation data confidential.

DMin students have a unique connection to the participants in their project due to the pastoral relationship which is often a piece of the project. It can be easy for the researcher to confuse the priorities of the two relationships and possibly neglect one for the other. Because of this, it is critically important to remember that the first priority in the project is to the ministry and the service of those in the congregation.¹¹⁹ This project seeks to benefit the entire congregation by seeking a discipleship model which will help the members grow spiritually through accountable discipling relationships. The researcher must ensure that time spent working on this project and conducting research does not take precious time away from the members of the congregation.

¹¹⁹ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 42.

To participate in this project, participants were required to be active members of First Baptist Church who were over eighteen years old. Group one was an all-male group, group two was an all-female group, and an equally sized control group consisted of three females and two males. The two groups who participated in weekly meetings met either at the church or in a church member's home in Barbourville, KY. Group one met on Tuesdays at 7:00 A.M. while group two met on Sundays at 4:00 P.M. The total number of participants for this study included fifteen members of First Baptist Church. Each weekly group meeting lasted approximately one hour and the total project lasted six weeks. The only resources required for the study were a Bible for each participant (not provided), a journal for each participant (provided), and the reading plan and participation log found the Appendices.

The concept of this project was for three groups to complete a spiritual health survey during the first week of the project. Two D-groups met weekly over the course of the study while the control group only participated in the normal activities of the church but not a D-group. All three groups completed the same spiritual health survey during the final week of the project. The researcher could then examine the data to search for differences in self-perceived spiritual fitness among participants while comparing that data to participation data gathered by group leaders each week.

As mentioned in Chapter one, the researcher has a unique relationship with project participants as their Lead Pastor. Because of this relationship and past experiences with D-groups, biases have the potential to invade research. To mitigate this risk, a reflective journal was kept by the researcher and the second D-group leader. Both leaders met weekly to discuss highlights and observations from that week's group meetings. Past experience creates an expectation that D-group participation will lead to spiritual growth in members. Journaling will

help bracket out potential biases and reflect on the group experience objectively. This research project is designed to test the legitimacy of the thesis and cannot be skewed by past experiences or beliefs regarding the success or failure of D-groups as a discipleship strategy.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Upon approval from the institution, participants were recruited for the project.

Participants were required to be members of First Baptist Church of Barbourville, KY and had to be at least eighteen years old. Members were recruited by the Lead Pastor and his wife who led two different D-groups. Four male members and four female members were recruited for group participation. The Lead Pastor also recruited five additional church members of varying genders and ages to participate in a control group. Invitations to participate were by in-person invitation or by phone call made to church members selected by the group leaders.

Approval was not needed from the church to launch these D-groups whereas they bore no cost or burden to the church. However, other key leadership such as the chairman of the deacons and the pastoral staff were made aware of the pilot program prior to its launch. Due to their simplicity, D-groups as prescribed by Gallaty require few additional resources other than a Bible which group members already had. Members also needed a journal which was provided by the group leaders. One group met at a home and one group met on church property. The only approval necessary was from the group members themselves. Consent was obtained to share information about members' D-group experience and personal growth over the designated time for the project. Consent was gained from group members in writing using the form found in Appendix A. This procedure took place during the first group meeting when other expectations were shared with participants.

The project was explained to the participants in two parts. The first part consisted of the invitation and instructions for joining a D-group in the church. These instructions covered all expectations for group attendance and participation, the goals of the group regarding personal spiritual growth and replication, and a distribution of required materials such as a journal and reading plan. Participants were also informed that participation was not only in a D-group for spiritual growth but also part of a DMin action research project. This phase spanned from the initial invitation to join the group taking place in the month prior to the group start date and extended through a portion of the first group meeting.

The second piece of explanation, revolving around the project itself, took place during the first group meeting. During this part of instruction, participants learned more about the DMin project and were given the consent form from Appendix A to review and sign. Participants learned about the purpose of the project which is to examine the impact of D-groups on the spiritual health of the members of First Baptist Church. Should members not desire to participate in the research project, they were still encouraged to remain part of the D-group as non-research members for the sake of other project participants. However, all members consented to participation.

During the first D-group meeting, group members were also given the spiritual fitness inventory found in Appendix B. A third group serving as the control group was given the same inventory the same week the groups began to meet. Participants were strongly encouraged to answer all questions honestly whether in the positive or negative. Participants understood there would be another assessment in six weeks and that their answers would be compared for use in this research project. The control group which did not participate in a D-group also retook the assessment during the same week D-group members retook it after six weeks of group meetings.

Over the course of six weeks, group members met weekly for approximately sixty to ninety minutes covering the seven key elements from Gallaty's D-groups.¹²⁰ D-group meetings opened with prayer requests and prayer offered by one of the group members. Ten to fifteen minutes were then spent in intentional conversation discussing highs and lows of the previous week and fostering deeper relationships. Following this conversation, participants were asked to quote memory verses for the week. Twenty-five to thirty minutes were then spent sharing HEAR journal entries as explained in Chapter two, a sample of which can be found in Appendix C. Any supplemental resources were then discussed followed by a period of accountability stemming from the application portion of HEAR journals. Groups always closed with a period of prayer.

The bulk of the meeting time each week was devoted to discussing HEAR journal entries. These journal entries stem from the daily Bible reading plan found in Appendix D. This plan took participants through a portion of the New Testament, specifically the Gospels, and covered many passages. Each week contained five reading assignments plus memory verses. Group members were encouraged to complete a HEAR journal entry for each daily reading assignment. If completing five journal entries each week was not feasible, members were encouraged to complete at least two entries weekly. A premise of the D-group method of discipling is helping participants form a habit of daily Bible intake. The HEAR method helps accomplish this by having participants read the biblical passage, discern its explanation, and form an application and response while memorizing verses.

D-group leaders prepared weekly by praying for the group and the meeting. The leaders kept up with their own Bible readings, HEAR journals, and Scripture memorizations in preparation for group meetings. The leaders also maintained contact with group members

¹²⁰ Replicate Ministries, *Blueprint Training Manual* (Hendersonville, TN: Replicate Ministries, 2019), 23-25.

throughout the life of the group and encouraged participation at all levels. The leaders facilitated discussion during group meetings and ensured meetings followed the general outline with the seven key elements described above. Leaders captured participation data each week and assigned each group member a project number for the duration of the study to ensure anonymity and to prevent bias.

Following each weekly meeting, group leaders captured personal reflections concerning group time in a personal journal. These reflections were also shared and discussed weekly by the group leaders during a planned debriefing. Topics of discussion included items such as perceived changes in participants' spiritual health, group participation, and the general atmosphere of the group meeting. A synopsis of these weekly leader meetings and reflections can be found in Table 1.

Individual participation levels varied across the groups. Some group members were not able to attend as frequently as others. Some did not keep up with daily readings, journaling, or Scripture memorization. While members were encouraged to participate fully and were naturally held accountable by the other group members, no participants were asked to leave the group. However, it is expected that a lack of participation will be reflected in the spiritual health assessments. For this reason, the group leaders tracked participation through attendance, group discussion participation, ability to quote memorized Scripture, etc. In addition to the reflective journals of group leaders, these statistics were also recorded and factored into the overall research using the log found in Appendix E.

Table 1. Group Leader Weekly Reflections on Group Time

Week 1	Group 1	All present; members were excited about the group; mild intimidation regarding weekly assignments.
Week 1	Group 2	All present; members were very excited; members intimidated by Scripture memorization.
Week 2	Group 1	All present; mostly full participation; some members struggling with assignment completion; still very excited to be in a D-group.
Week 2	Group 2	All present; all Scripture memorized; all members completed 5 HEAR journals.
Week 3	Group 1	All present; all assignments completed; journals were much deeper and reflective; appears that the habit of reading and reflecting on Scripture is taking root (members discussed feeling bad for missing days).
Week 3	Group 2	All present; all assignments completed; members are very strong in their Bible study and understanding of Scripture.
Week 4	Group 1	4/5 present; one did not memorize verses; all other assignments complete; discussion of HEAR journals was more reflective and longer this meeting; members discussed liking the HEAR method of studying and journaling.
Week 4	Group 2	All present; all assignments completed; HEAR journals were deeper in reflection
Week 5	Group 1	4/5 present; members are already discussing the excitement for launching groups in the future
Week 5	Group 2	All present; assignments complete; members really enjoy the HEAR method and reading plan
Week 6	Group 1	4/5 present; spiritual health survey conducted; members eager to continue with new reading plan
Week 6	Group 2	All present; spiritual health survey conducted; members excited for potential of D-groups in the church

Group leaders' weekly meetings provided critical information for this project. Common themes arose for both groups. Participants were provided minor instructions and expectations prior to the first meeting. Both group leaders shared that members were excited for the groups and the potential they could have on the church. During this meeting, all members were given the Bible reading and memorization plan, a sample HEAR journal, and a blank journal. All members took the first spiritual health assessment during this meeting while the control group took it sometime during the same week. Members from group one (the male group) expressed intimidation regarding the reading assignments which typically covered multiple chapters each

day. Group two members (the female group) expressed concern for being able memorize the required verses each week. Both groups were eager to begin and settle into routine group time.

Week two began the regular form and structure for group meetings as all participants had all the required materials and knew all group expectations. Meetings began with a time of prayer led by the group leader. All members were then encouraged to share highs and lows for the week past followed by a check of Scripture memorization. The bulk of the remaining time was spent discussing HEAR journals for the week and how members were applying the Word to their lives. All members prayed for one another to close the meeting. This would be the standard form for all D-group meetings in the future. Both groups had excellent participation during the second week. Some members had difficulty with the reading assignments but most were able to memorize the assigned verses.

Week three displayed a turning point for both groups. During week three, the habits forced upon members began to take root. HEAR journal entries began to dive much deeper into the meaning and application of the texts. Members only have five days of assignments each week with two makeup days. However, several members expressed remorse for missing any day of the assignments and having to utilize the makeup days. Group members began considering other sources such as study Bibles and commentaries to help them gain a better understanding of the texts.

Week four was the first time there was not perfect attendance across both groups. One member in group one had to miss due to a preplanned vacation. This week's meetings saw both groups spending more time discussing HEAR journals. Group members expressed appreciation for this method of Bible study even compared to other similar strategies. The period of the group meetings during which HEAR journals were discussed were much more reflective during week

four than in previous weeks. Members began seeing more clearly how the Scriptures applied directly to their lives based on the original context of the passages. Group one had one member who openly did not memorize the verses for the week while group two's members completed all assignments.

Week five was similar to week four in many regards. Group one had one absent member also due to a preplanned trip. Group two had perfect attendance again and all members completed all assignments successfully. In addition to enjoying the HEAR method of study, members expressed appreciation for the Bible reading plan. The plan is difficult but not impossible and presents a healthy challenge to participants. Memory verses are relevant and feasible for retention generally requiring that participants memorize two to five verses each week. For the first time, group members expressed interest and even excitement for launching new groups across the church body as the study begins to come to a close.

The final week of the project was similar to previous weeks with the exception of taking the second spiritual health assessment. The second assessment was also administered to the control group during the same week. Outside of the scope of this study, it was decided to continue the life of the groups with a new reading plan. Participants were eager to continue with the new plan and expressed continued excitement about the potential impact D-groups could have on the life of First Baptist Church. While members had been eager to share each week, it was on or about the sixth week that members truly began to open up and share more freely as relationships within the group grew and became more comfortable.

Another possible scenario would be if a group member was to drop out of the project entirely. Members were strongly encouraged to stay in the group throughout the duration of the group's life and there were no dropouts. However, if a member had dropped out, the member

would not have been replaced. No new members would have been added once the group had begun meeting. If a dropout member were willing, they would have still taken the second spiritual health assessment regardless of participation. Their data from the log in Appendix E would have noted the dropout and length of time they participated in the group. Groups would continue despite dropouts for the duration of the research project or until there are no members.

After six weeks and the completion of both spiritual health assessments, the data was compiled for review. The researcher examined any differences between group members' first and second spiritual health assessments. This data was also compared to the data from the control group. The researcher sought to discover correlations to changes in the spiritual health assessments and the participation data logged using Appendix E over the six-week period. This data was additionally compared to the notes of group leaders and their personal reflections. If a member had dropped out of the group, a correlation between the length of time spent in a D-group and changes in spiritual health would have been examined. All this data was used to help determine the effectiveness of D-groups as a discipleship program in the church.

To help validate the data and findings, triangulation methods were used. Triangulation is a research concept derived from the fields of navigation and surveying meaning to use various known locations or methods to fix a certain point.¹²¹ There are various ways to implement triangulation into the research process such as considering different sets of data, using different methods, or consulting various investigators or evaluators. Sensing suggests researchers use the three different angles of outsider, insider, and researcher to collect data covering the entire

¹²¹ Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles and Practice*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 231.

spectrum of the project.¹²² These three angles can be consulted by simply considering the participants, the researcher, and an outside source such as an independent expert.

For this research project, the surveys and participation logs were the primary tools for gathering data. In addition to these tools, participant HEAR journals were discussed each week during group sessions and group leaders such as the researcher kept reflective journals on weekly group meetings. Each leader gauged potential growth based on group member interaction and participation during group meetings. For triangulation in this study, the researcher and the participants provided the researcher and insider perspectives. The researcher considered insider data from participation logs and reflective leader journals. The two spiritual health assessments provided an unbiased, outsider perspective gauging change in spiritual health over time. The control group and second group leader also helped provide an outsider's angle while the researcher by providing data for further comparison. Together, these perspectives provide a more holistic picture of what the data is revealing.

Success in this project did not depend on proving the author's thesis statement. Success came from understanding the impact or lack of impact D-groups have on the spiritual health of members and the role this plays in the church regarding discipleship. Even if no major change is noted in the spiritual health of participants after six weeks, then the project was successful in that it addressed the problem. While such a scenario would not be preferable, this outcome would provide grounds for further research. An ideal outcome in this intervention would be participants fully engaging the method, reporting tremendous spiritual growth over the course of the intervention, and a successful implementation of the solution in the church long-term. However,

¹²² Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 75.

that is not required for this intervention to be successful. To be successful, the intervention must address the problem appropriately.

If the outcome is not the ideal outcome, there are other successful possibilities. One possibility is that the opposite of the hypothesis is proven. The intervention could prove that participants are not interested in D-groups and/or they experience little or no spiritual growth over the course of the research. This outcome would still be successful in that it would disprove the thesis and show D-groups are ineffective. Another successful outcome would be that the data reveals no change to spiritual health through D-groups. This would mean further research is required in this field to determine the most appropriate discipleship method or length of time for the intervention in this context.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

As stated above, the purpose of this DMin action research project is to study if implementing D-groups as a discipleship program contributes to the spiritual growth of the membership of First Baptist Church. The primary tools to determine this outcome were the survey found in Appendix B and the participation data for each group member captured using the log found in Appendix E. The survey was administered to two D-groups and one control group at the beginning of the project and again after six weeks. This chapter will discuss the results of those surveys and the participation data from each D-group member. Any links between participation and spiritual growth will be examined. Differences between the D-group member responses and the control group member responses will also be addressed.

This chapter will also examine each spiritual health assessment independently to observe unique trends in answers and how those answers relate to the type of question being asked. Each assessment consists of three different sections with ten questions in each section. It is likely that themes will appear among the answers based on differences in individual group participants such as gender and self-perception. The baseline answers for all three groups must be compared. The baseline for the two D-groups must certainly be contrasted with the baseline answers for the control group.

Results of Spiritual Health Assessment One

All fifteen participants completed the spiritual health assessment found in Appendix B during the first week of the research project. The survey consisted of thirty questions divided into three sections of ten questions each. Each question contained five potential answers ranging from one to five. An answer of five meant the participant strongly agreed and an answer of one meant

the participant strongly disagreed. Section one emphasized the participant's upward relationship and health, section two emphasized the inward health of the individual, and section three emphasized the participant's outward relationships and health. Table 2 provides the results from the first spiritual health assessment for all three groups.

Table 2. Total averages for Spiritual Health Assessment 1 by participant/section

Participant	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Total
1 Group 1	2.1	3.9	4.3	3.4
2 Group 1	3.9	3.7	3.5	3.6
3 Group 1	4.8	4.8	4.9	4.8
4 Group 1	3.5	3.6	3.4	3.4
5 Group 1	4.2	4.1	3.4	3.9
1 Control Grp	2.9	3.7	3.2	3.2
2 Control Grp	3.3	2.7	2.7	2.9
3 Control Grp	3.9	3.7	3.6	3.7
4 Control Grp	3.9	3.7	3.6	3.7
5 Control Grp	3.9	3.5	2.7	3.4
1 Group 2	4.5	3.7	4.3	4.2
2 Group 2	4.5	3.7	4.2	4.1
3 Group 2	4.7	3.7	3.8	4.1
4 Group 2	4.0	3.7	3.4	3.7

5 Group 2	3.8	3.4	3.5	3.6
Total Avg.	3.9	3.7	3.6	3.7

The first survey results provide several interesting insights as a baseline for understanding. The highest overall score was 4.8 with the lowest being 2.9 for a total spread of 1.9 points. The total average across all groups was slightly higher than neutral at 3.7 points. Within each of the three groups, the total average varied significantly for all five participants with an average difference of 0.9 points across the groups. The survey section with the highest overall average was section one at 3.9 points while section three had the lowest average at 3.6 points. Section two split the difference at 3.7 points. However, the highest and lowest averages for each section were different for each of the three groups as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Total averages for Spiritual Health Assessment 1 by group/section

Group	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Total Avg.
1	3.7	4.0	3.9	3.9
2	4.3	3.7	3.8	3.9
CG	3.6	3.5	3.2	3.4
Total Avg.	3.9	3.7	3.6	3.7

Group one, the all-male group, scored significantly higher on section two than the other two groups. Group two, the all-female group, scored significantly higher on section one than the other two groups. The control group scored significantly lower on section three than the other two groups. Across the entire survey, the two D-groups scored the same for their total average while the control group scored significantly lower. Relevant to this study is the change in perceived spiritual health among D-group participants over the course of the research period

compared to the perceived change for the control group members. While the overall average score for all groups was 3.7 points, the average score for individuals participating in D-groups was 3.9 points or a full 0.5 points greater than the control group.

When the control group's data is split between the other groups based on gender, the average total score for males and females becomes the same at 3.7 points indicating that gender is a neutral factor in spiritual health. While total averages were the same for both genders, there were very interesting results for individual questions based on gender. Based on the survey, women from the church were statistically already better at reading Scripture daily, maintaining a prayer list for people and requests, and listening to music, psalms, and hymns to strengthen their faith in God. Likewise, women were already better at meeting in a small group with other believers on a weekly basis. Men, on the other hand, were better at understanding their spiritual giftedness, not engaging in gossip and slander of other believers, taking care of their physical bodies, and building relationships with those who do not yet know Christ.

Participation Results

The survey data provided the baseline for the spiritual health of the members of this research project. Over the course of six weeks, groups one and two participated in weekly D-groups while the individuals of the control group participated as they normally would in the activities of the church but not in a D-group. Group leaders captured weekly participation data using the participation log found in Appendix E. Participation was measured through attendance, the number of HEAR journals completed (which indicated reading was also completed), and whether an individual memorized that week's Scripture memorization assignment. The results of this tracking can be found in Table 4.

Participation for group two, the all-female group, was perfect. Group members had perfect attendance, completed the full number of HEAR journals, and memorized all Scripture assignments. The participation rates for group one, the all-male group, were less than perfect. However, the reflective journals of group leaders indicated that all members enjoyed group time and grew in depth as group life matured. Participants noted enjoying group time and looked forward to seeing more groups launched throughout the church body.

Table 4. Participation data by group/participant

Group 1 Participation Data			
Participant	Attendance	HEAR Journals	Memory
1	100%	100%	100%
2	66%	97%	100%
3	100%	100%	100%
4	100%	100%	83%
5	83%	73%	83%
Group 2 Participation Data			
Participant	Attendance	HEAR Journals	Memory
1	100%	100%	100%
2	100%	100%	100%
3	100%	100%	100%
4	100%	100%	100%
5	100%	100%	100%

Individual participation somewhat varied. Group two had perfect participation at all levels with each member attending every group meeting. Each member of group two also kept up with readings, completed all HEAR journals, and memorized all assigned Scripture each week. Group one had less participation. Two members missed weekly meetings due to preplanned vacations and trips. Some members also completed fewer than the required number of HEAR journals for the week and some members struggled with Scripture memorization. Group members discussed time management as being an issue for not keeping up with readings, journals, and Scripture memorizations.

Overall, participation in this research project was considerably high. As discussed in Chapter 3, weekly reflections were captured by the D-group leaders. The consensus was that participants enjoyed group time, appreciated the HEAR journaling method for personal devotion, and looked forward to implementing more groups in the church. The all-female group fully participated while the all-male group participated slightly less. This reality reflects the differences in answers between males and females on the spiritual health assessment. This was reflected by how females were more apt to read the Bible daily and meet with a small group of other believers.

Group leader reflections and journals noted that any lack of attendance by a participant was not due to a lack of enthusiasm for group participation. All absences were due to preplanned trips or vacations scheduled prior to the launch of the D-group. Members who had to miss still maintained weekly assignments for the most part and returned to group ready to discuss observations and applications from Scripture. No members dropped out of the project during the research period. Incomplete assignments were generally one or two missed HEAR journals or the inability that week to memorize the assigned verses.

Going into this project, a potential link could be made between the current level of spiritual fitness and individual participation in the D-group and its activities. The three members who did not fully participate scored 3.4 points, 3.6 points, and 3.9 points on the first spiritual health assessment. Two of these scores were lower than the overall average score of 3.7 points and were among some of the lowest scores for D-group participants. Only members of the control group scored lower. When the control group's scores are removed and only D-group participants are considered, the average score on the first assessment jumps to 3.9 points. This data shows that among all group participants, those who did not fully participate in the project scored at or below average on the first spiritual health assessment.

Results of Spiritual Health Assessment Two

After six weeks, all three groups completed the same spiritual health assessment that was completed in week one. Groups one and two completed it during their sixth D-group meeting while the control group participants completed it at some point during the sixth week of the project. Before comparing the data between the first and second survey, the results of the second spiritual health assessment will be examined and explained as the first. The total averages for the second assessment broken down by participant and section can be found in Table 5.

Table 5. Total averages for Spiritual Health Assessment 2 by participant/section

Participant	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Total
1 Group 1	3.9	4.7	5	4.5
2 Group 1	4.1	4.5	3.7	4.1
3 Group 1	4.8	4.8	5	4.9

4 Group 1	4.7	4.4	4.5	4.5
5 Group 1	4.6	4.1	4.3	4.3
1 Control Grp	3.2	3.7	3.2	3.4
2 Control Grp	3.3	3.1	3.4	3.3
3 Control Grp	3.9	3.7	3.6	3.7
4 Control Grp	3.9	3.7	3.6	3.7
5 Control Grp	3.5	4	3.7	3.7
1 Group 2	4.8	4.5	4.4	4.6
2 Group 2	4.7	4.5	4.1	4.4
3 Group 2	4.8	4.2	4.6	4.5
4 Group 2	4.6	4.6	4	4.4
5 Group 2	4.1	3	4.1	3.7
Total Avg.	4.2	4.1	4.1	4.1

The second survey results tell an interesting story. There were notable changes in the data after six weeks. The total average for all three groups increased from a score of 3.7 points on the first assessment to a score of 4.1 points on the second assessment. The highest score on assessment two was 4.9 points with the lowest being 3.3 points for a total spread of 1.6 points. This is an increase of 0.1 points and 0.4 points from the first survey and a narrowing of the overall range by 0.3 points. Within each group, the total average varied slightly less than it did with the first assessment with an average span of 0.7 points across the groups compared to 0.9 points on the first assessment.

The survey section with the highest overall average was still section one at 4.2 points while sections two and three had the lowest average both at 4.1 points. These numbers show that scores across all three sections were more consistent on the second survey indicating an overall healthier and balanced individual. Section averages varied by 0.3 points on the first survey compared to only 0.1 points on the second assessment. However, the highest and lowest averages for each section were still different for each group as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Total averages for Spiritual Health Assessment 2 by group/section

Group	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Total Ave.
1	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.5
2	4.6	4.2	4.2	4.3
CG	3.6	3.6	3.5	3.6
Total Avg.	4.2	4.1	4.1	4.3

Group one, the all-male group, scored lowest on section one while group two, the all-female group, scored highest on section one and equal on the last two sections. The control group scored lowest on section three but scored relatively consistent across all three sections. The control group also scored significantly lower on all three sections on assessment two than the D-group participants. Across the entire survey, the two D-groups did not score the same for their total average on assessment two as they had on assessment one. Group one, the all-male group, scored higher than group two with each averaging 4.5 points and 4.3 points, respectively. However, when the control group's data is split between the other groups based on gender, the average total score for males and females becomes closer at 4.2 for males and 4.1 for females. This is a similar trend from the first spiritual health assessment.

While total averages were almost the same for both genders, there were still interesting results for individual questions based on gender. According to the survey, women from the church were statistically still better at reading Scripture daily, listening to music, psalms, and hymns to strengthen their faith in God, and meeting weekly with other believers even after the research period. Additionally, females were more prepared than men to share a simple explanation of the gospel. Men, on the other hand, were more confident in methodically memorizing Scripture, using their spiritual gifts, and having a growing awareness for the needs of others. Men also continued to top women in the care for their physical bodies and building relationships with those still outside of the body of Christ.

When the change in specific sections of the assessment is examined by groups, there are noteworthy trends. For both D-groups, scores increased the most on the second assessment on sections that the groups scored the lowest on. Likewise, both groups' scores increased the least on sections that the groups scored the highest on. The same was true for the control group whose scores increased the most in areas which were weakest on the first assessment. This trend was only exacerbated by D-group involvement. Differences in scores per section and group can be viewed in Table 7.

Table 7. Total average difference in scores by group/section

	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3
Group 1	0.7	0.5	0.6
Group 2	0.3	0.6	0.4
Control Grp	0	0.1	0.3

On the first assessment, the all-male group scored the worst on section one which primarily deals with one's relationship with God. This group also improved the most in this area. Group two improved the most on section two which primarily deals with one's inward spirituality. Both D-groups moderately improved on section three which focuses on one's outward relationships. The data suggests that participating in a D-group and being made aware of certain spiritual weaknesses leads to improvement in those specific areas.

Overall, it is somewhat surprising that group one improved the most overall between the two spiritual health assessments. Both D-groups had the same overall score on the first assessment, but the all-male group improved 0.2 points more on the second assessment than the all-female group. Because both groups utilized the same format and materials, it is unlikely that a factor within the group caused the difference. Likewise, when the control group data is split between the D-groups based on gender, there is still an overall difference in scores comparable to the difference between the two D-groups. This data suggests that men stand to benefit more from group life and/or coming to realization of the spiritual weaknesses through a self-administered survey.

Comparison of the Spiritual Health Assessments

Pertinent to this research project is the potential improvement in scores between the two assessments specifically among D-group members relative to participation in a group. As noted, every individual's score improved on the second assessment. The difference in scores per participant and group can be found in Table 8. The D-group participants' overall scores improved significantly more than those of the control group. Two members of the control group showed no total change in scores between the two assessments. Two D-group participants'

scores increased by more than a full point and the overall average for D-group participants was an increase of 0.5 points.

Table 8. Total average difference in scores by group/participant

Participant	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
1	1.1	0.4	0.2
2	0.5	0.3	0.4
3	0.1	0.4	0
4	1.1	0.7	0
5	0.4	0.1	0.3
Total Avg.	0.6	0.1	0.3

D-group members' scores greatly improved over the course of the research period. Only one participant's score remained below four points only increasing by 0.1 point overall. Half of D-group participants moved from a score in the three-point range on the first assessment to one above four points on the second assessment. In contrast, no member of the control group scored in the four-point range on the second assessment with the highest score being 3.7 points. The average scores for all fifteen participants for both spiritual health assessments can be found in Figure 2.

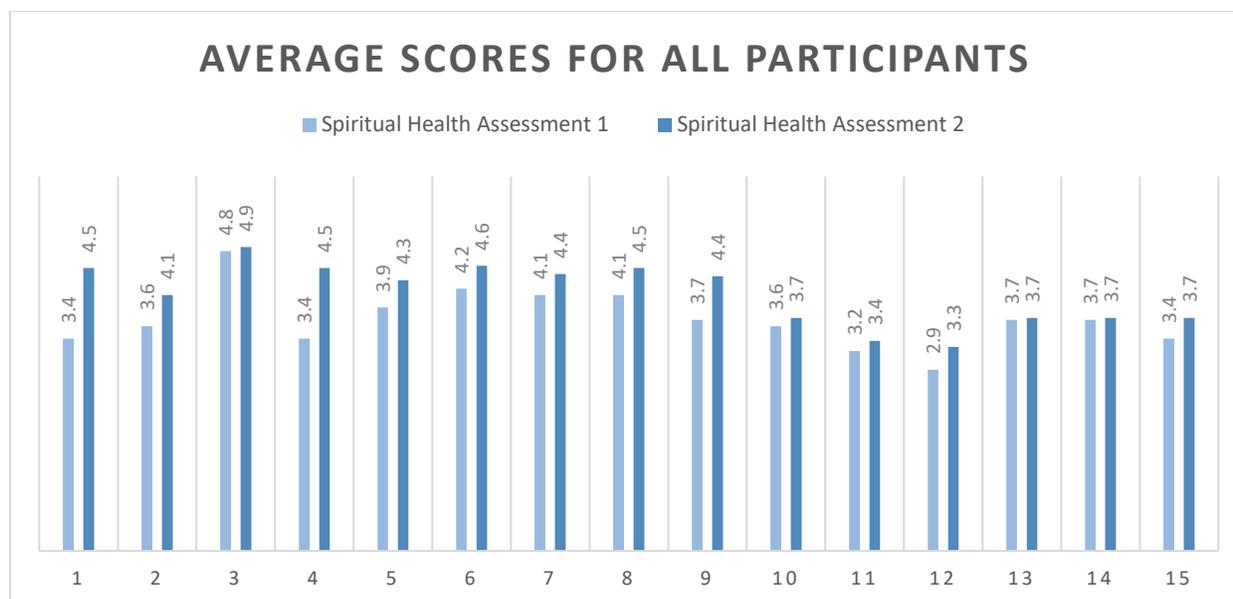


Figure 2. Average scores for all participants

The average score for all individual questions on the spiritual health assessment increased except for two questions whose scores remained the same for both. No individual question's score decreased between the two assessments. The questions whose scores did not change were both answered above neutral at 3.9 points and 4.1 points. The first question dealt with having a daily prayer time and strategy while the second question dealt with listening daily for the still small voice of Jesus. These questions were largely unaffected by the study. The average answers to all thirty questions for both assessments can be viewed in Figure 3.

Overall, the answers to the questions on each assessment trended the same in relation to one another. Peaks and valleys in scores for assessment two largely reflected peaks and valleys for assessment one only at generally higher scores. However, this was not always the case. Three questions broke the trend and saw significant spikes in score, or the score increased in areas where answers from the first assessment decreased. The first question for which this was true dealt with meeting weekly with a small group of believers. The second question dealt with

praying specifically for lost people while the third dealt with building relationship with those outside of the body of Christ. These trends are also available in Figure 3.

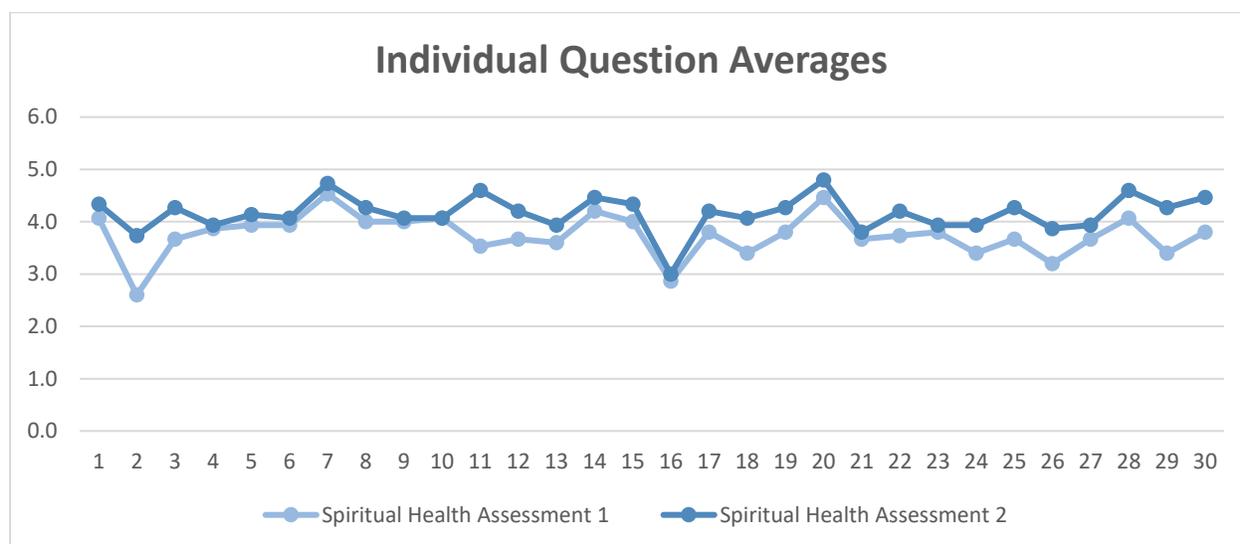


Figure 3. Average scores for individual questions

In addition to the three questions discussed above, several other questions had a spread of at least 0.5 points between the first and second spiritual health assessment. While all but two answers improved in average score, thirteen questions or nearly half of all questions increased significantly on the second assessment. Two questions from section one, four questions from section two, and seven questions from section three improved dramatically. The Bible study and memorization requirements likely affected the section one results. The other questions were apparently a by-product of spiritual growth during the six-week period. These questions involved understanding spiritual gifts, not holding grudges, resolving conflict, praying for and being involved in missions, loving enemies, and being prepared to share the gospel.

The data shows that after six weeks scores on the spiritual health assessment improved indicating improved spiritual health. The total average score increased from 3.7 points on the first health assessment to 4.3 points on the second health assessment. Likewise, those who participated in a D-group for six weeks scored significantly better than those who did not. D-

group participants' scores increased from an average of 3.9 points to an average of 4.4 points while the control group's scores increased from an average of 3.4 points to an average of 3.6 points. All indications are that participating in a D-group enhances spiritual growth among the members of First Baptist Church.

Differences Related to D-Group Participation

While this information is encouraging, the necessary research question to answer is whether participation in a D-group can be linked to increased spiritual health. So far, the data has indicated that participation in a D-group does, in fact, positively affect spiritual health. When participation data gathered from the forms in Appendix E is scaled to match the average difference in scores for individual participants, there is an obvious correlation between score improvement and D-group participation. The relationship between score differences and participation data for all individuals can be seen in Figure 4.

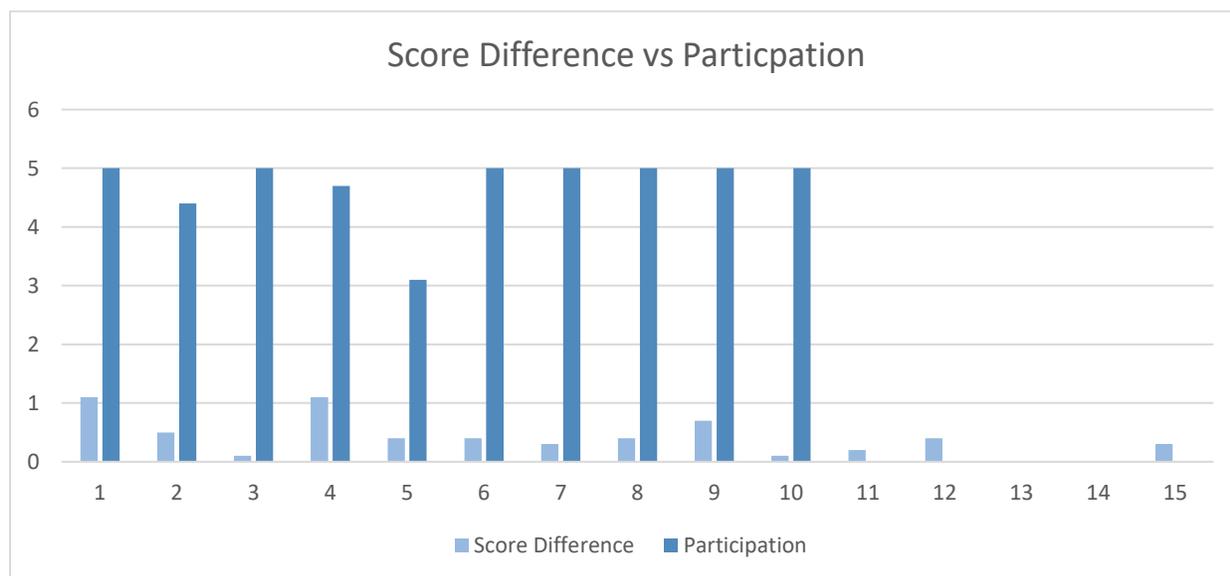


Figure 4. Score difference and participation data

As stated above, D-group participants certainly increased scores at a higher rate than members of the control group. However, some members of the D-groups improved their scores relatively little even though they fully participated in group activities. Such results were not the norm, though. As an average, those who participated in D-groups more than doubled the average increase in scores of the control group on the second assessment. Several of the questions relate to issues greatly affected by group participation such as meeting with other believers, reading the Bible daily, and memorizing Scripture. However, many questions related to other spiritual issues that could only be affected by spiritual growth in the individual. The extent of improvement in scores, specifically among certain questions, further indicates that the D-group experience enhances spiritual health among the members of First Baptist Church.

The D-group participant with the lowest level of participation still had a significant increase on the second spiritual health assessment. This participant's overall average score increased by 0.4 points which is double the average increase for participants in the control group. This participant had a participation score of 3.1 points or sixty-two percent of overall assignments and attendance combined. Such information further reveals that even some participation in a D-group is better for one's spiritual health than no participation in a D-group at all.

When considering all the data, a theme emerges across the various methods of collection. The reflective journals maintained by group leaders, the participation data, and the spiritual health assessments all indicate that D-group participation had a positive influence on the spiritual health of participants. All data points converge on the theme that D-groups enhance spiritual health of group members. The data provided by the control group further supports this theme

whereas the primary and common difference control group members and D-group members was participation in D-group activities.

While the data converges around the theme that D-group participation enhances spiritual growth, there could be slippages in some of the data. Sensing describes slippage as disconfirmations of the findings.¹²³ Even though strong conclusions can be drawn from the data, there were outliers and exceptions within the project. For example, several control group members demonstrated improved spiritual health on the second survey even though they had not participated in a D-group. This slippage could point to other factors outside the study bearing influence on the results. Likewise, some members of the D-groups revealed less growth than members of the control group indicating the same possibility. However, it was for this reason that each of the three groups contained multiple members from whom to form trends for each particular group as a whole.

The most significant silence from this study is defining the exact reason why D-group participation had the positive impact on the spiritual health of members. Possible reasons for the impact will be discussed in Chapter 5. Based on the form and content of D-groups the reasons could be anything from the accountability to the immersion in Scripture. It could be the strong sense of fellowship among group members spurring one another towards greater maturity. It could be the HEAR journaling method for Bible study forcing members to discover an personal application. It could be the combination of activities within group life which contribute to spiritual growth as a whole. Whatever the exact reason within the D-group experience, this research is silent.

¹²³ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 200.

The applied intervention yielded the expected results. It was anticipated that participation in a D-group would enhance the spiritual health of participants, and this was supported by all data points. However, there were unexpected results as well. It was not expected that scores on the spiritual health assessment would improve as drastically as they did in only six weeks. It would be interesting to observe the change over a greater period of time. It was also not expected that the control group would have an increase in scores as high as what was observed. One potential reason for this change could be that the first spiritual health assessment made all participants in the project more aware of things lacking in their spiritual lives which were implemented because of taking the assessment.

An unanticipated result of the intervention not captured by data but gleaned from the observations of the group leaders was the hope of group members to launch groups of their own with other church members in the future. While this information is not captured in any data points but revealed in group leader reflective journals, it is relevant to note that D-group participants largely desired to maintain group life and to invest in other church members through a discipling relationship. Perhaps one way to capture this in the data would have been to include a question on the spiritual health assessment dealing with being in a discipling relationship with other believers or meeting regularly with a small group of believers for the purpose of growth and discipleship.

The increase in scores on the spiritual health assessment for members of a D-group as compared to those of the control group in this project reveals that D-groups are an effective way to help church members grow spiritually. D-groups are then a valid tool for making disciples or a person who "...is committed to practicing the spiritual disciplines in community and developing

to their full potential for Christ and His mission.”¹²⁴ D-groups provide church members with the opportunity to facilitate spiritual growth among a group of fellow-believers through a proven method. Not only can individuals grow spiritually through this discipleship process, but they will also become disciple-makers as they transition from D-group members to D-group leaders.

¹²⁴ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 28.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this DMin action research project was to study if implementing D-groups as a discipleship program could contribute to the spiritual growth of the membership of First Baptist Church in Barbourville, KY. The expectation for this project was that implementing D-groups would have a positive impact on the spiritual health of group members. To reach this determination, the researcher inserted church members into D-groups and used a survey method to gauge changes in spiritual health compared to a control group which did not participate in D-group activities. These changes were weighed against group participation data noted over the course of six weeks. This chapter will compare the thesis project proposal with the results of the research project and then formulate conclusions. This conclusion will address implications of the research and any possible applications stemming from it. The chapter will also address any needs for further research.

Prior research beyond this project and the available literature indicated that small groups were a proven method for aiding in the spiritual development of believers. Small groups were considered one of the most effective ways for discipling individuals and mobilizing the laity for the work of ministry.¹²⁵ This research project further confirmed that premise, specifically for small groups following Gallaty's D-group structure and form.¹²⁶ Table 8 of Chapter 4 specifically demonstrated the difference in spiritual health among D-group participants compared to a control group. D-group members expressed a significantly higher change in perceived spiritual health over the course of six weeks as compared to the control group which did not participate in D-group activities.

¹²⁵ Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 175.

¹²⁶ Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship*, 183-202.

The higher rates of positive change in spiritual health for D-group participants proves that D-groups are a feasible option for a personal discipleship program at First Baptist Church. Until this intervention, there was no clear discipleship pathway in the church and no personal discipleship program. It was anticipated that D-groups could fill this void in the total church program. Observing the success of the pilot program through this research project provides hope that D-groups will offer First Baptist Church a discipleship tool which will bridge the gap between new believer and mature church member.

Those who participated in D-groups improved their average score on the spiritual health assessment found in Appendix B by 0.5 points. This average is more than double that of the control group who took the same assessment. Based on the data, D-groups could particularly be beneficial to men as a discipling tool whose average scores increased by 0.6 points compared to the all-female group whose scores increased by 0.4 points on average. Every project participant who participated in a D-group improved scores between the first and second spiritual health assessment. The same was not true for members of the control group. The data demonstrates the ability of D-groups to significantly improve the spiritual health of the membership of First Baptist Church.

While these results were expected, there are several points of interest concerning the research project. The results reveal that D-groups are a viable discipling tool to affect positive change in the membership of First Baptist Church. However, the research does not indicate which characteristic of a D-group that brings about this change or if it is brought about by the entire D-group experience. It is likely that immersion in Scripture through reading, journaling, memorization, and discussion highly contributes to this positive change. Of all the spiritual

disciplines of the Christian life, nothing can substitute for the impact and importance of the intake of Scripture for spiritual health.¹²⁷

Through the Bible reading plan, HEAR journaling method, and Scripture memorization assignments, D-groups are designed to immerse participants in Scripture at least five days each week. This practice applied through the accountable, discipling relationships of the group assist members in being conformed to the image of Christ. The core of discipleship hinges on fostering a heart that knows God better as it has been transformed by the renewing of the mind through the study and application of Scripture.¹²⁸ In essence, a follower of Christ loves and obeys God better the more they know God through his Word.

The HEAR journaling method was widely accepted and appreciated by project participants. The method stands for highlight, explain, apply, and respond. For every reading assignment, participants highlight a major verse or section, explain it in its context and original meaning, find an application for their life based on that meaning, and then respond through prayer and action. This process forces Bible readers to read for understanding and response as opposed to merely checking a box on a reading schedule. The intent for journaling this way is to not only have readers engage and understand Scripture but to create an atmosphere where they can hear from God through his Word. The application of the HEAR method is the pinnacle of the form of study. Personal application moves beyond gaining knowledge to the point of shaping and transforming a life..

In addition to engagement in Scripture, the D-groups offered other aspects which could have led to the noted spiritual growth. D-groups provide a level of accountability not found in

¹²⁷ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 22.

¹²⁸ Gallaty, *Growing Up*, 140.

most other programs of the church. The accountability of group life holds members at higher expectations and measures how well they meet those expectations or fail to do so.¹²⁹ The environment of three to five individuals provides a safe place for accountability which may not be experienced in a larger group setting. The same dynamics are also not present in a one-on-one discipling relationship. An added benefit to D-groups is that these traits and the overall D-group experience can be easily replicated across the membership of the congregation assuming individuals are willing to participate.

While D-groups are a form of small group discipleship, there are key differences between the two which could be why D-groups are a successful discipleship tool. Gallaty identifies three key differences about D-groups leading to this conclusion.¹³⁰ D-groups are closed groups unlike most Sunday school and other small groups meaning they are not open to just anyone to attend. D-groups also serve a unique purpose unlike other groups whose purposes often include discipleship, fellowship, and evangelism. D-groups exist solely for the purpose of discipleship although these other purposes will emerge from the group. Gallaty explains, “It is not evangelistic in its form or function, but in its fruit: it makes disciples, who then make disciples.”¹³¹ Lastly, the setting for D-groups is less of a lecture and more of an intimate and accountable relationship between a few believers.

A 2008 study determined that certain factors must be present in a small group in order for positive spiritual growth to occur.¹³² Bible study and sharing for accountability topped the list.

¹²⁹ Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship*, 191-194.

¹³⁰ Gallaty, *Growing Up*, 37.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Mark Lamport and Mary Rynsburger, “All the Rage: How Small Groups are Really Educating Christian Adults,” *Christian Education Journal* 5, no. 2 (2008): 397.

Additionally, a proper understanding and application of internal forces, external forces, group leadership, and the role of the group as an agent of spiritual change are also necessary. D-groups combine all of these elements precisely through the group experience creating an atmosphere very conducive to spiritual growth among members. Unlike other small groups, D-groups emphasize the role of Scripture in the life of the believer through personal devotion and the change such study and application bring about. These factors together are likely what make D-groups as successful as they are in affecting positive spiritual growth.

While this research project focused specifically on the membership of First Baptist Church, additional investigation should be considered for other congregations. It could be that implementing D-groups as a discipleship method in other churches in other localities may result in similar outcomes. A potential research project for the future could be examining the impact of this same intervention across multiple congregations and areas. It would be worthwhile to have a larger demographic to help determine if this method of discipleship is effective across different locations, cultures, ethnicities, etc. Pastors of other churches should consider examining the impact of D-groups on the churches they lead.

An outcome of this research which warrants further study is how most participants expressed improved spiritual health even if they did not participate in a D-group. While D-group participants certainly improved survey scores more than non-group members, even several members of the control group increased their overall average. There are a few possible explanations for this occurrence which warrant further study. It could be that taking the first survey highlighted areas of weakness in the spiritual life of the participant thus encouraging them to make changes on their own volition which were then captured on the second survey. It could also be that participating in the normal life of the church apart from being in a D-group helped all

project participants grow spiritually over the course of the research period. Being able to isolate these factors would enhance the understanding of the impact of D-groups specifically.

It would also be worthwhile to study the impact of D-groups on spiritual health in the church over the entire course of the intended group experience. This research project only spanned six weeks, but the expectation for D-groups is that members will participate for at least a full year. A longer project such as this would place a larger amount of time between the two spiritual health assessments making it more difficult for members to remember their previous answers thus preventing any unintended bias. In addition to a longer period of research time, it would also be beneficial to observe the replication rate of D-groups at the end of a year of meetings. To be more faithful to the heart of the Great Commission, groups would need to be missionally replicating themselves at a high rate as more disciples are produced.

Apart from an improvement in spiritual health, there were other implications observed for those who participated in D-groups. One implication of the D-group experience is that it fosters a deeper sense of Christian community among participants. This was true within each group but also true between groups as members were able to share a common understanding and experience with one another. D-groups move church members from viewing community as a series of events experienced through church life to viewing community as a lifestyle experienced holistically with other believers on a regular basis.¹³³ A paradigm shift such as this has the potential to move individuals from self-identifying as a congregation, Bible Study, or Sunday school to a true community of Christ followers.

Another implication of the intervention is that it elicits greater commitment from congregants. D-group members must not only commit to an additional hour of meeting each

¹³³ Brad House, *Community: Taking Your Small Group off Life Support* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 96.

week, but they commit time and energy to reading, studying, journaling, and memorizing Scripture. Likewise, the accountability of group life fosters greater commitment to the community of believers within the group. This dynamic has the potential to reverse the trend in the American church culture which largely discourages deeper commitment to a local community of believers.¹³⁴ Such a reversal could see church members moving from a consumer mindset to one in which individuals realize the importance of a personal investment into their own faith experience.¹³⁵ Again, it would be worthwhile to study the effects of this intervention on a larger scale.

From a theological perspective, D-groups are a viable tool for use in fulfilling the Great Commission in that they help disciples reach greater maturity in Christ and provide a method for one to disciple other believers. These groups reflect the inner circle of Jesus' three to four disciples and provide all the unique traits available to such a group including community, accountability, and reproducibility. While D-groups do not expressly fulfill the "baptism" and "go" participles of the Great Commission, they do help fulfill the "teaching" participle and the overarching command to make disciples. The overflow of discipleship stemming from D-group participation does create a second order effect of fellowship and evangelism. Therefore, D-groups provide a practical means based on Jesus' methods to fulfill his mandate to disciple the nations.

Knowing that D-groups support the spiritual health of the members of First Baptist Church, the theoretical foundations discussed in Chapter 2 are promising. As noted in Chapters 3 and 4, group members were eager to see D-groups implemented across the church body and

¹³⁴ Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church was A Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 152.

¹³⁵ George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Waco: Word, 1998), 18-19.

looked forward to launching groups under their own leadership. The potential exists for groups to replicate over the coming years at a high rate meaning that the discipleship pathway of First Baptist Church would be much more complete. With D-groups in place, the church would have a clear discipleship pathway in which all members could continually live in a discipling relationship with other church members. The goal of the church in discipleship could then be to produce D-group leaders who, in turn, do the same.

D-groups, coupled with the ministry of the pastors and deacon body, could help see the church through the next growth barrier in congregation size. As First Baptist Church grows, it will be imperative to establish a network for lay-led groups for leadership development, pastoral care, and continued discipleship.¹³⁶ D-groups provide the framework for all these important pieces of healthy church life. Having or not having such groups can also mean the difference between a church remaining under the current growth barrier or surpassing that growth barrier.¹³⁷ D-groups not only could help the church grow spiritually but could also indirectly aid the church in growing numerically by making disciples who make disciple-makers.

D-groups also have the potential to assist with growth as First Baptist Church seeks to surpass a certain growth barrier it has hovered around for some time. Such a movement often demands a personal touch from the pastor in order to keep the congregation focused on the importance of continued growth.¹³⁸ D-groups all the lead pastor, pastoral staff, and deacons to be members of small and even lead small groups for discipleship while maintaining a personal touch with church members as the church grows. This contact with key leadership is crucially

¹³⁶ Carl F. George and Warren Bird, *How to Break Growth Barriers: Revise Your Role, Release Your People, and Capture Overlooked Opportunities for Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 154.

¹³⁷ C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Great Harvest* (Ventura: Regal, 1990), 130.

¹³⁸ George and Bird, *How to Break Growth Barriers*, 157.

important for many church members-especially those who have been part of the congregation for a substantial amount of time-as the church grows. D-groups provide an avenue for deepening relationships within the church even as new relationships develop within the growing congregation.

From another practical standpoint, D-groups offer a sustainable method for creating discipling relationships within the church. The change experienced in the small community of participants within this project exhibits a sustainability which could be integrated into the larger community of the church.¹³⁹ Although D-groups take believers deeper in their study and application of Scripture, they are very simple in their form and function. There little to no monetary cost associated with each group. There is no formal training required to host or to lead a D-group. As far as systems are concerned, D-groups are far less complex than others. There is no curriculum required for purchase or distribution. As groups replicate with existing members launching groups with new members, D-groups could be easily sustained across the total church program of FBC.

This project sought to measure and gauge spiritual growth and spiritual health which is a surprisingly daunting task. Physical growth, changes in numbers, and visible changes are simple to observe. However, measuring change in the spiritual realm can be much more difficult. This project quantified those spiritual changes by using the spiritual health assessment tool. Part of the problem identified for this project was the need for improved spiritual health among the membership First Baptist Church. D-groups offer a discipleship tool for the church to evaluate the spiritual health of the membership. If D-groups are indeed a viable method for helping believers grow in their faith, the health of the overall church body can be determined, in part, by

¹³⁹ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 227.

how many people are participating in D-groups. Likewise, the number of new groups launched each year and the number of group leaders provide a clearer picture of the spiritual health of the congregation.

Because of their replicating nature through discipling relationships, D-groups offer First Baptist Church an excellent tool for creating exactly the kind of Christ followers the church desires to produce. It is wonderful that the groups allow participants to group spiritually. More than that, it is excellent that the groups exponentially produce disciples who make more disciples in accordance with the Great Commission. Such practice reaches at to the heart of the Great Commission whereby believers not only master the teachings of Christ through obedience and knowledge but reproduce disciple-making disciples.¹⁴⁰

This DMin action research project had a tremendous impact on the researcher. It was refreshing to see church members come alive through the study of Scriptures and to find a renewed appreciation for personal devotion and deep, Christian relationships. This project was a reminder of the transforming power of Scripture to help believers grow into the image of Christ. The researcher found a renewed appreciation for Bible study, meditation, and memorization. Having participated in the project, the researcher saw personal weaknesses in spiritual health but also how improvements were made through D-group participation. The project also serves as a reminder of the importance of fulfilling the Great Commission and the personal responsibility every follower of Christ has to making disciples.

Taking the first spiritual health assessment was a humbling experience for the researcher. As the lead pastor of the church, there was a personal expectation that the researcher would score higher than other participants and prove to be more spiritually fit. However, the researcher tied

¹⁴⁰ Joshua Rose, "Equipping Members for Ministry Through Small Groups," 370-371.

for the lowest score in his D-group. This reality proved that everyone has room for improvement. There is the possibility that some individuals graded themselves harsher than others, but the truth is that even the lead pastor needed to grow spiritually. This was especially true for the areas of personal devotion and meeting with members for continued spiritual growth and accountability each week.

The flipside of realizing personal spiritual weaknesses was observing personal improvements throughout the course of the research project. Although the researcher tied for the lowest initial score in his D-group, he also tied for the most improved score for all participants in the research project. Seeing these results reminded the researcher of the great importance of even the smallest spiritual disciplines. The often-overlooked disciplines and routines can be some of the most advantageous to personal spiritual health. Something as simple as maintaining a prayer log or journal can serve to improve one's overall spiritual health because these seemingly small tasks feed into other disciplines such as worship and even evangelism.

Another result of this research project was coming to a better understanding of the role of Christian relationships in the life of the believer. Outside of Sunday school and a few other groups in the church, opportunities to build Christian relationships are sparse. Even most of the Sunday school classes limit the intimacy of the relationships due to the number of people in the class. Through this research project, D-groups provided a viable option for building those much-needed relationships. Group members not only grew in their faith over the course of the study, but they also grew closer to each other. During the prayer time each week, groups members often expressed gratitude for one another. The researcher realized the importance of spending such quality time with members of the church.

It was an incredible experience to witness how each member personally studied the Scriptures. The HEAR method of Bible study requires individuals to discover a personal application and to respond with a prayer of commitment. As group members shared from their HEAR journals each, the researcher was deeply moved. It is an incredible experience to observe church members glean application from God's Word and responding to it in humility and dedication. Hearing these reflections from Scripture and how God dealt with each person through the Word allowed group members to grow closer together. Each person was sharpened by another as iron sharpens iron. The researcher grew in his understanding of Scripture through this process as well.

The project also served as a personal reminder of how simple and rewarding it can be to live in obedience to the Great Commission. Through the D-group experience, individuals grew spiritually. In other words, discipleship took place. This simple method of meeting with a handful of people for the purpose of spiritual growth can be an avenue for making disciples who make more disciples. Watching group members come alive through the power of the Word and desire to replicate this process in the lives of others is a rewarding experience. The researcher observed how quickly group members grasped the significance of what took place over the course of the study. Members personally realized their own growth through the D-group experience and naturally desired to replicate that for other believers.

The final token of appreciation for this research project goes to the academic field. The core and cognate courses of the DMin program greatly enhanced the researcher's understanding of biblical discipleship and the Great Commission. The research process gave the author a much better understanding of qualitative and quantitative research methods. This knowledge can not only be applied to the researcher's field of study but also to other topics or projects. The

researcher gained a deeper understanding of how to gather and process information while analyzing it for potential conclusions and applications. The ability to gather and process data can even be applied to the ministry. As a pastor, the researcher can take the acquired skills from this project and examine potential or existing ministries of the church for effectiveness and efficiency.

Lastly, as a pastor, it can often be difficult to maintain personal devotion given that much of one's time spent studying is for the purpose of leading or teaching others. Many pastors find themselves neglecting personal devotion to the Word and even time in personal prayer. Other ministries and work in the church can often rob pastors of this precious time. Leading a D-group as a pastor forced the researcher to spend time daily in the Word for himself. The significance and appreciation of this cannot be overstated. This pastor regained a personal appreciation for the Word through this project and grew closer to Christ by participating in it. This project helped the researcher refocus on the spiritual disciplines and not solely on task and time management. If a pastor is going to help other church members grow in Christlikeness, the pastor must also be growing daily. D-groups provide even an avenue for this in the life of a busy pastor who is committed to the Great Commission.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: The impact of D-groups on the spiritual health of church membership at FBC Barbourville, KY.

Principal Investigator: Joshua T. Shields, M.Div., Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Project

You are invited to participate in a DMin project. To participate, you must be 18 years old and a member of FBC Barbourville. Taking part in this project is voluntary.

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

What is the project about and why is it being done?
--

The purpose of the project is to study if implementing Gallaty's D-groups as a discipleship program can contribute to the spiritual growth of the membership of FBC Barbourville.

What will happen if you take part in this project?

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

1. You will participate in a weekly discipleship group with four other same-sexed individuals. Group meetings will last approximately one hour and will meet weekly for six weeks. Three groups will be involved in this study. One group will consist of men selected from the church by the researcher. The second group will consist of women from the church selected by the researcher. The third is a control group consisting of men and women randomly selected from the church membership.
2. If participating as a control group member, you will not participate in D-group meetings, the Bible reading plan, journaling, or Scripture memorization. The control will only complete two spiritual health assessments; once at the beginning of the study and another after six weeks.
3. If participating in a D-group, you will complete a spiritual health assessment prior to the first week's meeting. This same assessment will be completed again at the conclusion of the final week of the project.
4. If participating in a D-group, you will participate in a Bible reading plan and will journal what you learn. You will memorize select Bible verses each week. Group attendance, the number of journals complete, and the number of verses memorized will be recorded.

How could you or others benefit from this project?

- The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are spiritual growth as a Christian, camaraderie with other group members, a deeper understanding of Scripture, and the development of discipleship as a lifestyle.

What risks might you experience from being in this project?

The risks involved in this study include:

- Questions on the spiritual health assessment could be personal in nature. It is likely that the assessment will require personal reflection. You may skip questions you do not wish to answer.
- Other group members could share your personal information from group discussions. It is possible participants could share information outside of group meetings. All members will be asked to maintain confidentiality regarding everything shared during group sessions.
- A breach of confidentiality on behalf of the researcher could occur. A breach is possible but unlikely. All identifying information will be removed from records and replaced with a research ID. Any identifying information linking data to you will be destroyed upon the completion of the research project.
- Gathering information could trigger a mandatory reporting requirement. The researcher is required to report suspected cases of child/vulnerable adult abuse, neglect, dependency, and trafficking.
- 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 project 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.

- Participants will be assigned a research ID. Names and other identifiable information will not be maintained in research records. A key, which matches participants to collected data, will be kept by the researcher throughout the project and will be maintained in a locked location. This key and all personal information will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project once all results have been recorded. All participant responses to the spiritual health assessment and group participation data will be kept confidential using the research ID.

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

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this project.

What are the costs to you to be part of the project?

To participate in the project, you will need to pay for your own transportation to and from group meetings.

Is project participation voluntary?

Participation in this project is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or with FBC Barbourville. 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 project?

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

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

The researcher conducting this study is Joshua Shields. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Norman Mathers at [REDACTED].

Your Consent

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

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

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX B

SPRITUAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT

The following assessment consists of thirty questions in three categories. Please select the answer which describes you best based on the following criteria: 5-strongly agree, 4-agree, 3-neutral, 2-disagree, 1-strongly disagree.

Section One: Up

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I read Scripture daily. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. I methodically memorize Scripture. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. I regularly meditate on God's Word for application. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. I have a daily prayer time and strategy. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. I have a prayer list for people and requests. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. I pray and seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7. I generously give a portion of my income to God's work. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. I listen to music, psalms, and hymns to strengthen my faith in God. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9. I shun things in my life which grieve and quench the Holy Spirit | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. I listen daily for the still small voice of Jesus. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| • Add up this section and divide by 10 = _____ | | | | | |

Section Two: In

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I meet weekly in a small group with other believers. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. I have discovered my spiritual gifts. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. I am using my spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. I pray daily for other believers. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. I have a growing concern for the needs of others. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. I confess my faults, sins, and shortcomings to other believers. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7. I am not involved in gossip and slander against other believers. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. I am not holding a grudge or offense toward any person. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9. I consistently resolve hurts and offenses toward other believers. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. I delight in the routine gathering and activities of the church. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
- Add up the section and divide by 10 = _____

Section Three: Out

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I have a prayer list for people who do not know Christ. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. I pray specifically for the salvation of lost people. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. I seek to be a good example in the care of my physical body. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. I seek and build relationships with people who do not know Christ. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. I am involved in global missions through praying, giving, and going. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. I seek to use my spiritual gifts to serve those outside the body of Christ. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7. I seek and pray for opportunities share the gospel to my community. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. I am prepared to share a simple explanation of the gospel with others. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9. I extend love and forgiveness to enemies. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. I pray for laborers to go out and into the harvest fields. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
- Add up the section and divide by 10 = _____

OVERALL SCORE: Add up the three sections and divide by 3 for an overall score = _____

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE HEAR JOURNAL

Read: Matthew 4:23-25

Date: 2-7-21

Title: Teaching, Preaching, Healing

H (Highlight) “Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.” (4:23)

E (Explain) Jesus has called his first disciples. He has been tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Now, he is beginning his public ministry. By teaching, preaching, and healing he models for those disciples the very things they would be doing as the early church. Teaching means to teach the truth of God’s Word. Preaching means to proclaim the Gospel message. Healing means to provide relief or cure for some physical ailment.

A (Apply) As a follower of Christ, I am still called to teach, preach, and heal in the sense that I can teach the Word, proclaim the good news, and help relieve someone’s physical problems.

R (Respond) Lord Jesus, please help me live up to the ministry model you provide for your followers. Give me the ability to teach, the boldness to preach, and the compassion to heal (provide relief for physical needs).

APPENDIX D

6-WEEK BIBLE READING PLAN

Week 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 1 Luke 2 Matthew 1-2 Mark 1 John 1 Memory Verses: John 1:1-2 John 1:14	Week 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 3-4 Matthew 5 Matthew 6 Matthew 7 Matthew 8 Memory Verses: Matthew 5:16 Matthew 6:33	Week 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 9:10-62 Mark 9-10 Luke 12 John 3-4 Luke 14 Memory Verses: Luke 14:26-27 Luke 14:33
---	--	---

Week 4 <input type="checkbox"/> John 6 Matthew 19:16-30 Luke 15-16 Luke 17:11-37; 18 Mark 10 Memory Verses: Mark 10:45 John 6:37	Week 5 <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 24:32-51 John 17 Matthew 26:47-27:31 Matthew 27:32-66; Luke 23:26-56 Memory Verses: Luke 23:34 John 17:3	Week 6 <input type="checkbox"/> Mark 16 Luke 24 John 20-21 Matthew 28 Acts 1 Memory Verses: Matthew 28:18-20 Acts 1:8
--	--	---

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPATION LOG

Attendance

Week 1	
Week 2	
Week 3	
Week 4	
Week 5	
Week 6	

of HEAR Journals Completed

Week 1	
Week 2	
Week 3	
Week 4	
Week 5	
Week 6	

Scripture memorized y/n

Week 1	
Week 2	
Week 3	
Week 4	
Week 5	
Week 6	

First Spiritual Health Assessment Score: _____

Second Spiritual Health Assessment Score: _____

Participant Dropped Out/Date: _____

February 15, 2021

Joshuah Shields
Norman Mathers

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY20-21-598 The impact of D-groups on the spiritual health of church membership at FBC Barbourville, KY.

Dear Joshuah Shields and Norman Mathers,

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:

(1) 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

Bibliography

- Adam, Peter. *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching*. Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1996.
- Arnold, Jeffrey. *The Big Book on Small Groups*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- Atkinson, Harley. "Small Groups: Context and Strategy for Christian Formation and Evangelization." *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (2014): 71-74.
- Atkinson, Harley, and Joel Comiskey. "Lessons from the Early Church for Today's Cell Group." *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (2014): 75-87.
- Atkinson, Harley and Joshua Rose. "The Small-Group Ministry Movement of the Last Four Decades." *Christian Education Journal* 17, no. 3 (2020): 547-559.
- Barna, George. *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*. Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2001.
- . *The Second Coming of the Church*. Waco: Word, 1998.
- Blomberg, Craig. *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, The New American Commentary*. Nashville: Broadman, 1992.
- Brosius, Kevin M. "Culture and the Church's Discipleship Strategy." *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 21, no. 2 (2017): 127-161.
- Burggraff, Andrew. "Developing Discipleship Curriculum: Applying the Systems Approach Model for Designing Instruction by Dick, Carey, and Carey to the Construction of Church Discipleship Course," *Christian Education Journal* 12, no. 2 (2015): 397-414.
- Burridge, Richard A. "Jesus and the Origins of Christian Spirituality." In *The Story of Christian Spirituality: Two Thousand Years from East to West*, edited by Gordon Mursell. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.
- Carson, D. A. "Matthew." In *Matthew & Mark*. Vol. 9, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, edited by Tremper Longman, III and David Garland. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- Chan, Francis, and Mark Beuving. *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2012.
- Comiskey, Joel. *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-based Church: New Testament Insights for the 21st Century Church*. Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2012.
- Dempsey, Rod. "Historical Discipleship and the Priesthood of the Believers," *Reading and*

- Study*, Accessed April 17, 2020.
https://learn.liberty.edu/webapps/blackboard/content/listContent.jsp?course_id=_560757_1&content_id=_36097189_1.
- Dempsey, Rod, and Dave Earley. *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*. Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University Press, 2011.
- Dodson, Jonathan. *Gospel Centered Discipleship*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2012.
- Earley, Dave, and Rod Dempsey. *Disciple Making Is...How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013.
- Erickson, Millard. *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998.
- Ferguson, Dave, and Jon Ferguson. *Exponential: How You and Your Friends can Start a Missional Church Movement*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- France, R. T. *The Gospel of Matthew*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007.
- Gallaty, Robby. *CSB Disciple's Study Bible*. Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017.
- . *Growing Up: How to be a Disciple Who Makes Disciples*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2013.
- . *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus' Final Words our First Work*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015.
- . *The Forgotten Jesus: How Western Christians Should Follow an Eastern Rabbi*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017.
- Gallaty, Robby and Kandi Gallaty. *Foundations New Testament: A 260-Day Bible Reading Plan for Busy Believers*. Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2018.
- George, Carl F., and Warren Bird. *How to Break Growth Barriers: Revise Your Role, Release Your People, and Capture Overlooked Opportunities for Your Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017.
- Hammersley, Martyn and Paul Atkinson. *Ethnography: Principles and Practice*, 3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Hellerman, Joseph H. *When the Church was A Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009.
- Henderson, D. Michael. *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*. Wilmore, KY: Rafiki Books, 2016.

- Hoehner, Harold W. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.
- House, Brad. *Community: Taking Your Small Group off Life Support*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2011.
- Hull, Bill. *The Complete Book Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006.
- . *The Disciple-Making Pastor: The Key to Building Healthy Christians in Today's Church*. Grand Rapids: Revell, 1988.
- Ironside, H. A. *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew*. Neptune: NJ, Loizeaux Brothers, 1984.
- Kentucky Baptist Convention. "First Baptist Church Barbourville 20 Year Statistical History Report." *Annual Church Profile*. Accessed October 28, 2020. <https://ky.sbcworkspace.com/reports/view/94?orgid=190044273>.
- Knox County Historical Museum. *Knox County*. Barbourville, KY: 2020.
- Koessler, John. *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003.
- Lamport, Mark and Mary Rynsburger. "All the Rage: How Small Groups are Really Educating Christian Adults." *Christian Education Journal* 5, no. 2 (2008): 391-414.
- Liefeld, Walter L. and David W. Pao. "Luke." In *Luke ~ Acts*. Vol. 10, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, edited by Tremper Longman, III & David Garland. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- Malphurs, Aubrey. *Strategic Disciple Making: A Practical Tool for Successful Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009.
- . *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013.
- Meier, John. *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Anchor Bible Reference Library, Vol. 3. New York: Doubleday, 2001.
- Mitchell, Michael. *Leading, Teaching, and Making Disciples: World-Class Christian Education in the Church, School, and Home*. Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2010.
- Mills, Rodney. "Healthy Church Grow." *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 10, no. 2 (2016): 68-76.
- Mounce, Robert. "John." In *Luke ~ Acts*. Vol. 10, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, edited by Tremper Longman, III & David Garland. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.

- Mwangi, Mary W. "Perspective Transformation Through Small Group Discipleship Among Undergraduate University Students in Nairobi, Kenya." *Christian Education Journal* 15, no. 3 (2018): 340-360.
- Ogden, Greg. *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
- Payne, Matthew. "The Fifty Commands of Jesus," Spirituality, Accessed December 1, 2020. <https://ezinearticles.com/?The-Fifty-Commands-of-Jesus&id=468177>.
- Phillips, John. *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 2001.
- Putman, Jim, Bob Harrington, and Robert E. Coleman. *DiscipleShift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.
- Rainer, Thom. *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014.
- Rainer, Thom, and Eric Geiger. *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006.
- Replicate Ministries. *Blueprint Training Manual*. Hendersonville, TN: Replicate Ministries, 2019.
- Robbins, H. Warren, and Tony Todd. *A History of First Baptist Church, Barbourville, Kentucky*. Barbourville: 2019.
- Rose, Joshua. "Equipping Members for Ministry Through Small Groups." *Christian Education Journal* 14, no. 2 (2017): 361-375.
- Rosenberg, Joel C., and T. E. Koshy. *The Invested Life*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2012.
- Sensing, Tim. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011.
- Shirley, Chris. "It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship for the Church." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 50, no. 2 (2008): 206-224.
- Stetzer, Ed, and Thom Rainer. *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010.
- United States Census Bureau. "Barbourville City, Kentucky." Accessed October 28, 2020. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=1600000US2103574>.
- Wagner, C. Peter. *Church Planting for a Great Harvest*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990.

Wessel, Walter, and Mark Strauss. "Mark." In *Matthew & Mark*. Vol. 9, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, edited by Tremper Longman, III and David Garland. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.

Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014.

Willard, Dallas. *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship*. New York: HarperOne, 2006.