

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Expository Preaching's Impact on a Congregation's Understanding of the Discipleship Process

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Doctor of Ministry

by

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Dedication

In memory of my mother, Emma, who refused to stop loving, praying, and trusting Christ for the salvation and success of her children.

Acknowledgements

To my wife Kristi and children Jesse, Lydia, and Charles. Thank you for sacrificing your time and life so I could complete this project. I love you all and could not have completed the work without your support and sacrifice.

To my mentor, Dr. Roy Lucas. Thank you for the prayers, dedication, and time you devoted to me and my family.

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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Traditional churches have struggled with a decline in membership over the past decades. The lack of balance between discipleship and evangelism has had a major influence on this decline. The question is whether the lack of understanding of the discipleship process is due to poor preaching or a lack of expository preaching within the church. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of expository preaching on the congregation's understanding of the discipleship process. Ten church members who have been under the influence of topical preaching and five pastors who practice expository preaching took part in the study by watching a four-part video series on discipleship and completing two surveys, one before and one after the video series. Five of the church members and all five pastors participated in a follow-up phone interview. Results were determined by measuring the congregation's understanding of the discipleship process before and after watching the sermon series. The growth and development of churches where expository preaching is practiced is then compared and contrasted with churches that are influenced by topical preaching. By incorporating sound expository preaching into their ministries, pastors of traditional churches can help their congregations better understand the discipleship process and can thus produce a healthier church environment where church members are disciples who make disciples rather than people who rely on their pastor alone to engage in training believers.

KEY WORDS: expository preaching, discipleship, spiritual disciplines, revitalization, Baptist

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The purpose of expository preaching as it pertains to discipleship has been under scrutiny during the past decade. For example, either biblical exposition has diminished because of the success of small groups, cell churches, and hybrid churches, or pastors have become overwhelmed with pastoral calls, office work, and the business of life. Further, some churches have resorted to the Sunday morning sermon as their opportunity to share the gospel with those who have not come to saving faith; these churches utilize small groups for discipleship. However, most traditional and fundamental Baptist churches have strong opinions about incorporating small groups into their ministry. Therefore, these pastors use the Sunday morning sermon to preach to the flock of God and to evangelize.

In distress over their diminishing churches, some pastors have begun to utilize their Sunday morning sermons to evangelize to the lost. Pastors who have resorted to evangelistic Sundays often encourage the congregation to bring family members, coworkers, or friends to the service to hear the gospel in an attempt to win them to Christ. However, despite these pastor's good intentions, there has been a decline in attendance and conversions within the traditional church leaving many congregations facing a difficult decision among three options: to close their doors permanently, to merge with another church, or to institute a church revitalization project. Many pastors of these churches are very confused about why their church failed to succeed. Therefore, it is necessary for all pastors to understand the effectiveness of biblical exposition as it relates to the discipleship process.

The evangelistic Sunday method fails to incorporate the congregation's involvement and the necessary spiritual development to become mature disciples. For instance, Christ commanded all Christians to carry out the Great Commission, not just the pastor. Moreover, the Great Commission is not merely a command to share the gospel with the lost; rather, it is a charge to win the lost to Christ, to baptize, and to teach them all that Christ has taught. Therefore, the Christian leader must guide and train the congregation to become disciples who make disciples.

Expository preaching, by definition, is not a topical effort. Many have confused biblical exposition and topical preaching throughout church history. For example, some believe that Charles Spurgeon was the best expository preacher to walk the face of the earth. However, while he was an excellent preacher and orator, Spurgeon was an outstanding *biblical* preacher: his style failed to meet the definition of expository preaching.

Today, many pastors consider themselves to be practicing expository preaching. However, most of their sermons are topical, focusing on holidays or special occasions or merely addressing various fundamentals such as sin, marriage, giving, and missions. Therefore, as many churches continue to shrink in numbers, it is necessary to correlate preaching effectiveness and its impact on the congregant's understanding of the discipleship process.

Discipleship was the main focus of the apostles and early disciples. In 1 Tim 6:12 Paul encouraged Timothy to “fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”¹ Paul, in the act of discipling Timothy, instructed him to remain faithful by reminding him of the discipleship process.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

Paul instructed Timothy to remain strong in the faith and fight the good fight.

Theoretically, the good fight is to win souls to Christ. However, soul-winning is accomplished by those who live by example. Consequently, discipleship requires spiritual formation and discipline to continue the Great Commission amid adversity. Eph 4:11–16 states:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Discipleship incorporates the entire body of Christ into a single organism that works together as a collective whole. However, just as a physical body will become weak from malnourishment and exercise, so will the spiritual body. Therefore, pastoral leadership's focus is to "equip the saints in the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph 4:12–13a). Moreover, the apostle Paul encourages Timothy to "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Tim 4:2). Paul's instruction to Timothy is a reminder of the fundamental elements of preaching.

Pastors serve as caregivers who oversee the congregation and guide believers to carry out their lives as disciples. For instance, according to 1 Pet 5:1–4 reads:

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

Peter makes it clear that it is an arbitrary delusion to believe that preaching is merely for evangelistic purposes and does not apply to the saints who are in Christ. Further, the content of

the sermon is critical to the welfare of the saints. Sermons are to be encouraging; however, they are necessary to equip the saints in the faith. Fundamentally, a homily has a twofold purpose: to equip the saints in the faith and to evangelize. A careful examination of expository preaching and its relationship to the discipleship process may be fundamental to understanding how church members fail to serve within the church and how they diminish over time.

Expository preaching focuses on exposing the timeless biblical principles and applying them in a contemporary setting. Expository preaching's unbiased nature provides an applicable principle fundamental to spiritual formation, discipline, and discipleship. Moreover, discipleship is foundational to the Christian life. Christ called believers to be His disciples; therefore, discipleship should be central to church ministry. For that reason, discipleship and expository preaching should go hand and hand. This research focuses on expository preaching and its impact on a congregations' knowledge of the discipleship process.

Many congregations understand what a disciple is; however, they fail to understand the process of discipleship. Traditional churches tend to shy away from the idea of small groups and one-on-one mentorship, because some believe they are contemporary ideas. Regardless of the church's understanding of discipleship, a church must embrace biblical discipleship to grow.

Ministry Context

Formerly known as Sandusky Baptist Temple (1970–2007) and Meadow Brook Baptist Church (1950–1969), NorthPointe Baptist Church gained its present title in 2008. Since its birth in 1950 the church has been led by five senior pastors.² Pastor Perkins gave the church roots in a small garage and later moved it into a vacant building. In 1955, Perkins was instrumental in

² The information regarding NorthPointe Baptist Church, Sandusky Baptist Temple, and Meadow Brook Baptist Church was retrieved from office records at NorthPointe Baptist Church.

purchasing three acres of land on Route 250 in Sandusky, Ohio, and Meadowbrook Baptist Church was built. Upon Perkin's departure, Russel Dennis became pastor; he led Meadow Brook Baptist Church from 1956 until 1979, when he was removed from his pastoral duties.

The church began declining before Dennis's removal. However, during its peak, Sandusky Baptist Temple had about one thousand members in attendance. Roger Green served as the next pastor of Sandusky Baptist Temple for ten years (1979–1989). Green recommended Wally Gilbert, who had formerly served as a youth pastor under Dennis, to take the lead pastoral position. Gilbert served at Sandusky Baptist Temple (now NorthPointe Baptist Church) for thirty years (1990–2020). Sandusky Baptist Temple also had a Christian school, called Heritage Christian Academy, and was starting a college. However, the schools eventually closed, and attendance at the church rapidly declined upon Ralph Gilbert's call to return to ministry as the senior pastor.

During Gilbert's first week, half of the congregation left. The decline was mostly because of Gilbert's previous connection with Dennis; however, some felt that he simply was not qualified for the position. After internal controversies regarding money and members, the church continued to rapidly decline losing support from the community and church members.

During Gilbert's time at NorthPointe Baptist the church continued to decline in numbers. However, in 2008, when the church moved onto a state route just outside Sandusky in Perkins Township, the church experienced a breath of new life. The sale of the Sandusky Baptist Temple building allowed the church to build a new building debt-free and gave it a substantial financial cushion. Attendance increased to about two-hundred people on Sunday morning. This increase slowly dissipated, however, until attendance averaged about thirty-five in 2015.

The church had grown accustomed to the pastor having a multifaceted position. In other words, NorthPointe Baptist understood the pastor as the sole caregiver of the church. The pastor assumed all hospital visits; ran errands for the congregation; provided rides for the members; planned all fellowship, youth, and church events; repaired the church building; undertook all administrative tasks; and preached during Sunday and midweek services.

Along with family care, the tasks embarked on by NorthPointe Baptist pastors left little or no time for sermon preparation. Therefore, multiple sermon-help devices were used, including downloading sermons from the internet, repeating sermons, and utilizing all holidays as opportunities to deliver a topical sermon. The content and focus of the preaching suggest the malnourishment of the congregation. Further, the multifaceted pastoral position left little or no room for the congregation to serve within the church.

In 2019, I was elected for the senior pastor position, and took office on June 22, 2020. Before assuming the senior pastorate, I had served as an assistant pastor since September 2016. During 2016, I noticed that the church congregation did not embrace discipleship, and I became concerned about the people's spiritual welfare. There was an evident lack of accountability, tithing and serving were minimal, and there was an apparent lack of enthusiasm to win souls for Christ. Further, the senior pastor ignored bylaws and the church constitution. During the annual budget meeting in 2020, 90 percent of the members confirmed that they did not have a copy of the constitution, nor had they read the constitution. Consequently, the decline of the NorthPointe Baptist Church may simply be due to poor leadership.

After my arrival at NorthPointe in 2016, the church grew numerically and as of March of 2021, has seventy-five members. Throughout my four years at the church, I have focused on biblical exposition and discipleship. Members of the church have continued to grow spiritually

and better understand how the body of Christ is supposed to operate. However, they still lack a clear understanding of the discipleship process, which hinders the church from reaching the community.

Though the church has about seventy-five members, the people in attendance are reluctant to engage in the discipleship process. Forty-five percent of the congregation is over the age of seventy. At the same time, 25 percent fall between thirty and sixty-nine years of age. Twenty percent are under eighteen, and 10 percent are nineteen to twenty-nine years of age. Only one adult over the age of seventy has family in the church. Currently, NorthPointe Baptist Church has an adult Bible study, children's church, and a youth group. Further, the church does not have a family ministry, a young adult ministry, or a worship leader. Consequently, Vacation Bible School, AWANA, and most youth events have deteriorated over the years. Many people are currently willing to serve in the church; however, they must understand the church's discipleship process in order to function correctly.

Currently the senior pastor of NorthPointe Baptist Church is filling in as the worship leader and carrying out various other duties that should be completed by other members of the congregation. Necessary steps are being taken to distribute areas of the ministry to other people. For instance, some pastoral ministry responsibilities are allocated to youth pastor James Newcomer. Also, various members have taken on responsibilities and have become more engaged with the vision of the church.

Currently, church traditions include a celebration of Easter morning breakfast, Thanksgiving pie and praise, and a candlelight service on Christmas Eve. The congregation enjoys meeting for food and fellowship and members have expressed a growing interest in community outreach, discipleship, and evangelism. NorthPointe has adopted a win-grow-go

philosophy. In other words, NorthPointe exists to win the lost to Christ, disciple those who have trusted Christ, and equip the disciples for service at our church or other areas in the community or world where they can be effective.

NorthPointe Baptist Church is location is in Perkins Township, which is often referred to as part of Sandusky, Ohio, which has a population of about thirty thousand. Within the city are multiple churches, including the Chapel, which has over one thousand members. In an effort to revitalize their church, many pastors have attempted to adopt the Chapel's ministry style. Other churches have been critical of the Chapel, making accusations that it presents a watered-down gospel. This author has not researched the Chapel's success, nor will it be examined in this study.

Small groups have been looked down upon at NorthPointe and in much of the Baptist Bible Fellowship International. When one Baptist Bible Fellowship pastor was asked whether small groups were part of the success of his church, he replied with a sarcastic remark: "Yes, we have small groups; we call it Sunday school." Several other pastors have expressed disdain for small groups that meet outside the church as a means to hold private meetings and split the church; these include a former pastor of NorthPointe. Nonetheless, the author has a firm conviction that small groups and mentorship are fundamental to successful discipleship.

Over the past several years, many manufacturing jobs that compelled people to live in Sandusky, Ohio, have either relocated or disappeared. The closing of factories and job losses have driven many people to leave the area to find work. Though new businesses and manufacturing plants are moving into the city, wages are down, and many people find themselves working long hours. The stress of work and the need for funds hinder some from attending church as frequently as they would like.

Today, Sandusky's financial support comes from tourism, including a major tourist attraction, Cedar Point, an amusement park owned by Cedar Fair. Cedar Fair is considered one of the top amusement park organizations in the world. Its home office is in Sandusky, and the company provides thousands of jobs for local people, college students, and foreign workers. The presence of Cedar Fair has also impacted local business and attracted other tourist operations. For example, the company has partnered with Firelands Regional Medical Center to build an indoor sports center and sports health center, in addition to various outdoor sports facilities. Moreover, Cedar Fair has partnered with Bowling Green State University and is implementing a project to open a college campus in Sandusky. Cedar Fair is a substantial factor in the economy of Sandusky and Erie County and provides a wonderful opportunity for NorthPointe Baptist Church to engage many people from different cultures.

Problem Presented

The problem of NorthPointe Baptist Church is that the congregation appears to misunderstand the process of discipleship and servanthood. This problem may be the result of a substantial decline in church attendance and lack of expository preaching. For the past several years, the congregation has failed to reach the lost and make disciples who make disciples. The leadership in the church has been unable to "teach the entire counsel of God." Moreover, the leadership has guided the congregation into a state of pastoral dependence. Rather than exercising the spiritual gifts that God has given to the body of Christ and working together as a collective whole, the church allowed the former lead pastor to be its sole caregiver. This disposition has resulted in a steep decline in membership and an unhealthy church that fails to understand its role in fulfilling the Great Commission commanded by Jesus in Matt 28:19.

Purpose Statement

This Doctor of Ministry project aims to teach the congregation of NorthPointe Baptist Church the process of biblical discipleship and servanthood. For example, the church's decline may result from a lackluster attempt by the former lead pastor to preach topical messages that were not prepared but downloaded from the internet or borrowed from another minister. Rather than preparing expository sermons, the pastor picked topical sermons from the internet and from books and simply read them to the congregation. The previous lackadaisical preaching justifies academic research to determine the effect of biblical expository preaching and its influence on the congregation's understanding of discipleship and servanthood. This study's outcome will establish whether expository preaching is fundamental to the church's overall spiritual well-being and purpose. The research should identify the problem that has led to the decline of NorthPointe Baptist Church and may help other churches understand the importance of expository preaching as it relates to the congregation's understanding of biblical discipleship.

Basic Assumptions

The author holds the presupposition that expository preaching is fundamental to all areas of ministry. Therefore, sound expository preaching, rooted in biblical principles, is fundamental to church growth. Yes, there is a place for mentorship, small groups, Sunday school, and pastoral calling. It is critical for all ministries to must be in good order. For example, even in introductory algebra, the order of operations is crucial for one to come to the correct conclusion. The same is true with pastoral ministry, where the sermon is the first order of operation from which all other ministries are added.

As an associate pastor, the author has witnessed the lack of congregational participation under a senior pastor. While there was an evident lack of communication between pastoral staff

and church workers, it was apparent that a lackadaisical effort to feed God's flock was detrimental to the church's health. A sermon is, at times, the only opportunity to reach a congregation during a given week. Further, the biblical principles that are exposed from the text can be applied to encourage the congregation. Therefore, the sermon needs to relate to the congregation.

The pastor must always refrain from pointing sermons at members of the congregation. There is a place for correction in the church. However, it is biblical for the correction of an individual to occur in private before it is made public. Further, utilizing the sermon on Sunday morning to address current events, social disorder, and church politics is a lost opportunity to equip the saints in the faith by preaching the timeless biblical principles necessary to live a victorious Christian life.

Instead of giving God the first and foremost of one's time and energy, pastors whom the author has witnessed have put off sermon preparation and study. Procrastination within a pastor's life is dangerous when a sermon is involved, because unexpected things occur very often, and the pastor may end up without time, and may rush and "wing" a sermon. The author believes time should be set aside at the beginning of the week strictly for sermon preparation. Therefore, the author assumes that the decline in the traditional Baptist church is due to sermon neglect.

While there are many different methods a pastor can use to deliver a sermon, expository preaching is successful because of the very nature of biblical principal extraction from the text. Rather than approaching the text with an idea of what they want to preach about, pastors can use expository preaching to bring them into a place where they learn what to preach from their exegetical study. Topical preaching can be useful when it is utilized on the right occasion. Both topical and expository preaching require a pastor to understand his disposition regarding

presuppositions and preunderstandings and not allow them to infect a sermon. However, expository preaching requires a study of the text that examines the text's literary, cultural, and geographical context. The pastor seeks to understand what biblical principle the author is communicating to the original audience, to understand the culture, traditions, and geographical setting, and to apply the principle in modern culture.

Definitions

Expository preaching is the act of extracting timeless biblical principles from the text and applying them to a specific church context through proper explanation and illustration. Typically, this act is accomplished through a verse-by-verse, chapter-upon-chapter effort. Biblical exposition is a timely effort that requires skill and discipline. For example, a preacher must be able to withhold the preunderstandings and presuppositions that define his spiritual disposition from influencing his interpretation of Scripture.

Expository preaching is often confused with other preaching styles, especially when the Word of God is preached verse by verse. However, according to Sidney Greidanus, "Biblical preaching has often been identified with expository preaching, especially in contrast to topical preaching. Unfortunately, some homiliticians brought confusion into the terminology when they contrasted the category of 'expository preaching' not only with the category of 'topical preaching' but also with that of 'textual preaching.'"³ Expository preaching requires preachers to approach the Scriptures in a fashion that forces them to find the principle they are teaching rather than searching the Scriptures for verses that support their already-chosen topic.

³ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 10.

The skill of exposition requires one to have an advanced understanding of literature and its devices. Careful attention is directed to the immediate context of the passage and the greater context of the Bible as a whole. Further, as Haydon Robinson states, “Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.”⁴ For that reason, the pastor must have an understanding of the culture in which the selected passage was written. Expository preaching, when done effectively, allows one to preach and hear the Word of God with minimal danger of the orator injecting his predisposition into the sermon.

The discipleship process requires spiritual growth. However, Christians are not to simply grow as individuals, but as a correlative whole. John Koessler states, “Discipleship is the process of edifying the church for the purpose of maturity. It takes a multitude of people to accomplish this goal. It is a collective effort with a collective result.”⁵ The discipleship process consists of learning and growing in God’s grace and understanding one’s relationship to and eternal security in Christ.

As a runner must train to complete a marathon, so do Christians train themselves to live a godly life successfully. Spiritual disciplines are fundamental Christian practices that, when developed properly, result in maturity. According to Donald Whitney, “The Spiritual Disciplines are those personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth. They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since

⁴ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House, 1980), 20.

⁵ John Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 179.

biblical times.”⁶ Discipleship is a process that requires both knowledge and a willing heart to submit to the will of God in one’s public and private worship.

One must choose to commit to become a disciple, yet one must learn to follow Christ. According to Bill Hull, “By definition, spiritual formation is a process through which individuals who have received new life take on the character of Jesus Christ by a combination of effort and grace. The disciple positions himself to follow Jesus. The actual process of reforming, or spiritual formation, involves both God’s grace and the individual’s effort.”⁷ Therefore, a congregation may understand what discipleship is but fail to understand the process by which an individual becomes a disciple. Spiritual formation is key to the discipleship process.

Limitations

The author’s conviction is that expository preaching and discipleship work together; however, while possible, it is difficult to believe that merely understanding the discipleship process will cause people to change and engage in godly discipleship unless a believer takes a personal initiative. God’s people should remember that spiritual growth is the result of God’s work in their personal life. This study focuses on expository preaching as it relates to discipleship. However, discipleship in and of itself is a topic; therefore, sermons must be taken out of a broader context that focuses on discipleship.

A sermon series can be designed to inform the participants of the biblical mandate of discipleship and to engage in the process of exegesis and deliver the message in a clear and informed manner. However, the expository sermon is not a substitute for discipleship training that may occur during one-on-one mentorship, Sunday school, small groups, or training

⁶ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 17.

⁷ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 19.

seminars. The sermon series is not designed to teach or train participants how to create discipleship programs, but to inform participants of the biblical process of discipleship.

Delimitations

Each participant in the research project viewed the same discipleship sermon series. Further, interviews and surveys were conducted by those who are over the age of eighteen, have made a profession of faith in Christ, and are members or pastors of a Baptist church. Questions within the questionnaires about definitions or opinions are to be written out. However, to capture the information from sample groups, all questions pertaining to age and church geographical location are multiple-choice.

The study provides an inside look at a congregation's understanding in multiple church contexts, including traditional churches, contemporary churches, small and large congregations, growing or diminishing churches, and congregations in a broad spectrum of geographical locations across the United States. Surveying the various churches and pastors will help provide an understanding of preaching's impact on the church's spiritual growth or decline. The data collected may help a pastor create a discipleship program that incorporates biblical principles; however, the objective is to examine the effectiveness of expository preaching.

Further, to fully grasp the participant's understanding of the discipleship process, it was necessary to record and publish a video sermon series on the internet that each participant viewed. The knowledge gained by the participants will be limited to four sermons that are only about thirty minutes in length, though it could take much more time to grasp the discipleship process fully. Each participant will be asked a series of questions before watching the sermon series and following the sermon series. Consequently, the study's success will be measured by the increase in the participants' understanding of discipleship before and after the sermon series.

Thesis Statement

If the congregation receives expository preaching on discipleship and servanthood, then the congregants should express their biblical discipleship and servanthood in various ways. Mentorship and one-on-one discipleship have their place within the church structure; however, the discipleship process is communicated best in a corporate setting. Understanding the discipleship process may help lay the foundation for a pastor to develop a more substantial discipleship program in the future.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

Throughout their lives, Christians are to mature as disciples. Therefore, the initial acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior marks the beginning of their spiritual maturity. John Koessler defines discipleship as a multitude of people working together to edify the church.⁸ However, the process of discipleship has been confused within the traditional church. For example, Koessler points out that those who grow spiritually have a natural longing to immerse themselves in the Scriptures.⁹ However, in the traditional church, biblical discipleship is often confused with church attendance, and giving financial support to the church and missionary system. Spiritual disciplines are vital to the disciple's spiritual growth; however, they must be understood by their function in the discipleship process.

Bill Hull points out that grace and humility are necessary for a Christian to grow spiritually. Hull understands a disciple as an individual committed to a specific master.¹⁰ Christians are to be committed to following Christ. Therefore, provisions are necessary to encourage a Christian's growth within the greater context of the church. Moreover, believers need to know that the Christian life is more about being the body of Christ and less about themselves as individual Christians. The body of Christ worshiping in a public setting helps to provide a venue for all to hear and understand discipleship fundamentals.

⁸ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 179.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁰ Hull, *Complete Book of Discipleship*, 32.

Spiritual Growth

To be a disciple, one should fully commit one's life to Christ. Donald Whitney suggests that Christians naturally cultivate a willingness to learn when they are in pursuit of godliness.¹¹ Therefore, understanding God's Word and applying it to one's life is vital to the discipleship process. Consequently, the discipleship process consists of learning, obedience, worship, prayer, and dedication. However, Koessler contends that the path of biblical discipleship is not easy and requires commitment and preparation.¹² Discernment is necessary, because pastors should not be awarded the benefit of the doubt regarding their biblical interpretation. The Christian disciple searches out the Scriptures to prove their authenticity.

James Wilhoit agrees that the path to spiritual maturity is difficult because it requires a special commitment.¹³ The commitment to learn and grow as a disciple is the result of one's love of Christ. Koessler points out that Christ is the standard by which godliness is measured, both individually and corporately.¹⁴ Dedication to Christ is not easy, but it is the key to successful Christian growth. However, commitment to the pastor has been more of a priority than dedication to Christ. Worship is built around commitment: discipleship is not merely an act of obedience; it is the sole commitment to imitating one's master.

Displacing Christ with the pastor is not a new phenomenon; instead, it has occurred since the church's beginnings. Koessler points out that the Corinthians believed spiritual growth was

¹¹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 24.

¹² Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 141.

¹³ James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 141.

¹⁴ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 180.

found in the teaching leadership; however, God is the producer of all spiritual growth.¹⁵

Traditional church methods seem to suppress the spiritual growth of believers. When a congregation understands its pastor as the church's sole caregiver, it is only natural to look to him as the primary source from which all ministry stems—resulting in an unfruitful spiritual dependence on the pastor. Further, congregants fail to see the importance and spiritual role that God has ordained for them.

Commitment to spiritual growth can be encouraged and taught from the pulpit, by pointing to Christ and yet doing so in a humble fashion. Hull suggests that while most believe small groups are the best setting for discipleship to flourish, many believe discipleship prospers when the gospel is presented as a life-changing process whereby God is involved in the believer's life.¹⁶ Moreover, before a traditional church is willing to become a church with small groups, the members must understand the discipleship process. All too often, the gospel is misunderstood as merely how a person is saved; moreover, believers fail to recognize the Cross as the means for daily submission to God.

Enabling Christians to work together as a corporate whole is fundamental to the discipleship process. The suggestion that Christians may understand the process of discipleship through expository preaching is not meant to dismiss the importance of one-on-one mentorship or argue that spiritual disciplines are not necessary. Wilhoit reiterates Christians are to strive to meet their own personal and spiritual needs while serving as ambassadors of Christ to a lost world.¹⁷ The Christian life is not merely that of an individual but that of a unit. The church is the

¹⁵ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 82.

¹⁶ Hull, *Complete Book of Discipleship*, 43.

¹⁷ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation*, 89.

body of Christ. Likewise, Christ committed Himself to twelve individual men, but He also declared the fundamentals of discipleship to large groups. Expository preaching that focuses on the discipleship process does not necessitate mentorship; instead, it provides a means whereby Christians can understand what being a disciple of Christ truly means and requires.

The need to grow spiritually in a corporate setting requires individual Christians to work together with other believers as a collective whole. Therefore, there are some spiritual benefits the corporate setting provides that small groups and one-on-one discipleship cannot provide. Whitney suggests that spiritual disciplines are what God has given Christians to enable their growth.¹⁸ However, a lack of spiritual disciplines and fruit in the Christian life should give pause to those who profess to know Christ. According to Whitney, those who do not intentionally seek to follow Christ and have no thought to discipline themselves are not indeed Christ's disciples.¹⁹

Without spiritual disciplines, in the corporate setting, Christians cannot grow corporately. Whitney understands that spiritual disciplines promote spiritual growth in both corporate and personal settings.²⁰ Spiritual disciplines are fundamental to the discipleship process; therefore, spiritual growth is dependent upon them. Whitney is correct when he insists that the lack of spiritual discipline is why fruit is not produced in a Christian's life.²¹ Pastors are required to equip the saints in the faith, to cast a vision for the church's direction, and to encourage Christians to accomplish their God-given task. Thus, God's vision for the discipleship process must be presented for the congregation to understand each member's purpose within the body of Christ.

¹⁸ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 17.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

Community

Togetherness is essential to the process of developing Christian disciples. Further, suggesting that the Christian life is merely a personal relationship with Christ has caused believers to embrace their role in the Christian community. Peter Scazzero understands God to be committed to believer's lives before their conversion; Scazzero points out that individualism ends the moment one trusts Christ, but that God has worked with the new convert for many years prior.²² Concerning community, the body of Christ consists of multiple members who work together as a corporate whole to accomplish the cause and mission of Christ. Christ is the head of the body; however, He called pastors to be under-shepherds that lead His church. Traditionally, the pastor is understood as the head of the local church. As the leader of the church, he has a voice that is meant to inspire and equip the saints in the faith. Scazzero suggests that whether in a nation, a church, or a ministry, the starting point for change has always been the leader.²³ One cannot command people into becoming disciples; they must see discipleship in action.

Sharing the gospel is a priority, but discipleship is more than winning the lost. It is making disciples who make disciples. While the pastor's expository message focuses on equipping the saints in the faith, it has an overarching evangelistic point. Rod Dempsey suggests that the numerical decline in North American churches is a crisis that must be addressed by looking back at what went wrong.²⁴

²² Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 34.

²³ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁴ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . . : How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2013), 242.

Pastoral leadership focuses on being an appropriate example in the appropriate settings. According to Scazzero, people can only be influenced spiritually if the pastor is committed to being healthy spiritually.²⁵ To be healthy, one must eat; if one does not eat, one dies. Greg Ogden likens the mistreatment of one's natural body to that of the spiritual body. If a member of the church body fails to work correctly, the body will suffer.²⁶ The pastor must be healthy, but if he does not feed the body of Christ, then the body naturally is not healthy. Ogden suggests that the body is only healthy when it corresponds correctly with its head, which is Christ.²⁷ Koessler insists that the church's goal should be to make disciples while casting off anything that would hinder it from growing spiritually.²⁸ Likewise, the commitment of the leadership and congregation to spiritual health requires disavowing all that would come against their spiritual health while embracing godliness and Christlikeness.

The body of Christ requires proper conditioning and revitalization. Scazzero suggests that spiritual healthiness and mental health run hand and hand.²⁹ The pursuit of godliness focuses on one's actions with other people, not just a change on the inside. Scazzero states, "To truly love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength requires that we know not only God but also our interior—the nature of our own heart, soul, and mind. Understanding that world of feelings, thoughts, desires, and hopes with all its richness and complexity is hard work."³⁰ Therefore, the expository sermon cannot merely complete the discipleship process; it can only proclaim it.

²⁵ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Church*, 37.

²⁶ Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 43.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 141.

²⁹ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Church*, 52.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

Unity is key to the church's success; however, Koessler points out that unity is only an issue when more than one person is involved.³¹ A unified community requires a healthy body that is committed to spiritual growth. Ogden states, "The image of the body conveys the two poles on which Paul builds his understanding of a healthy church—oneness and 'manyness,' unity and diversity, individuality and corporateness. These poles are inseparable. The human Body could not be a better picture of diversity within unity."³² Members do function as individuals; however, the body must function as a whole. Koessler believes that the discipleship process should consist of individual and corporate processes.³³ Rightfully, the Christian body meeting corporately, under the sound of a single voice preaching the gospel, provides an atmosphere that cannot be duplicated.

Ogden suggests that the church functions correctly when all the parts are functioning according to their role: then only can Jesus lead the church.³⁴ The greater congregation meeting together as a whole does have multiple benefits. For example, Koessler argues that a corporate congregation helps Christians with accountability.³⁵ Moreover, the recent push for small groups and one-on-one discipleship, though it has been somewhat successful, is not without error. Koessler suggests that the picture of discipleship wrongly suggests that only mentorship and small groups are the appropriate means for faithful discipleship and fails to recognize the need for a larger group.³⁶ Utilizing the larger group setting only for preaching a salvation message is a

³¹ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 179.

³² Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 42.

³³ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 184.

³⁴ Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 49.

³⁵ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 185.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

disservice to those who are maturing in their faith. Further, it has produced a false dichotomy in people's minds, who now understand that the leading service's purpose is to be a salvation message and small groups are for discipleship.

Structure

The structure of the church is at the core of the discipleship process. Traditional churches, such as NorthPointe Baptist Church, may often understand the senior or lead pastor as the church's sole caregiver. Within the traditional church, the hierarchical structure possibly causes many to see the pastor as the head of the church and body as laypeople. However, all those in Christ are redeemed saints, and all have an equal responsibility to grow in discipleship. Thabiti Anyabwile indicates that the church displays the rightful position in Christ, because the church and Christ, through the Cross, have become reunited.³⁷ When believers fail to function as disciples, this will distort the truth of Christ and the truth of His Word to the outside world. Biblical exposition is designed to extract the truth of the Scriptures and apply them appropriately. It can be used as a tool to help the congregation understand the discipleship process and grow in the grace and knowledge of God.

The church should understand how discipleship fits into its overall structure. Thabiti Anyabwile points out that the church is not a perfect display, but overemphasis in any area of eschatology is dangerous.³⁸ The idea that the pastor is somehow spiritually superior to the rest of the congregation is not found in Scripture and should not only be corrected but refuted openly.

The suggestion and communication that the pastor is somehow spiritually superior cause the congregation to develop false presuppositions of the discipleship process. Ogden understands

³⁷ Mark Dever et al., *Proclaiming a Cross-Centered Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 75.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

the hierarchical institution as a top-down institution of officeholders rather than a bottom-up structure that consists of all believers in the local corporate body.³⁹ The traditional structure separates leadership and laity, and by so doing, places the burden of discipleship on the leadership.

James Lang and David Bochman contend that the discipleship process within a small group is not merely a curriculum but a deep small-group experience.⁴⁰ However, transitioning a traditional church into any form of a church with groups would prove difficult if the church did not understand why this was being done or understand the process of discipleship.

Scholars, Lang and Bochman suggest that facilitation strategies provide the means for a Christian to understand discipleship.⁴¹ Lang and Bochman seem to indicate that the process of discipleship cannot be learned outside small groups. However, the success of the studies cited by Lang and Bochman should be credited to the biblical passages that were read and studied.⁴² Therefore, expository preaching on the discipleship process may open the door of the traditional church to successful contemporary discipleship programs, though the traditional church otherwise has been hostile toward change.

Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington agree that good things can happen in large settings that small settings simply cannot embrace.⁴³ However, Lang and Bochman believe feelings and misconceptions is why people fail to understand the discipleship process, a barrier that only a

³⁹ Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 63.

⁴⁰ James A. Lang and David J. Bochman, "Positive Outcomes of a Discipleship Process," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 71.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, *Discipleshift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 116.

group discussion and openness will overcome.⁴⁴ Moreover, Putman and Harrington suggest Jesus did not depend on preaching to and teaching large crowds as his primary method of discipleship.⁴⁵ The expository sermon is more than just a gospel message; it sows the gospel and the word of faith into the hearts of believers and unbelievers. However, many churches that boast of their discipleship groups also boast of the Sunday gathering to win the lost to Christ.

Putman and Harrington suggest experience has shown that many of the attractional church's assumptions fall short of maturing believers.⁴⁶ The church must be fed, and people must come to Christ. The Sunday sermon should focus on changing and saving lives, not just saving. It is noteworthy that Koessler understands the small group discipleship models to be limited in their capability to understand the discipleship process. Moreover, he suggests that discipleship's corporate nature is emphasized in Paul's declaration made in Eph 4:11–13 that emphasizes the role of pastors, teachers, and evangelists.⁴⁷ The New Testament church should have the proper structure to develop and train disciples, win the lost to Christ, and maintain a proper testimony to the outside world.

The structure of the church is the product of the philosophical disposition of the church leaders. Ogden describes the church as an interdependent organism that is to accomplish the task of Christ.⁴⁸ The church is interdependent; however, as is the case at NorthPointe, the church's traditional view has caused the people to understand themselves as laity and the pastor as the sole caregiver. Ogden suggests that in the traditional church setting, the leadership is often focal and

⁴⁴ Lang and Bochman, "Positive Outcomes of a Discipleship Process," 71.

⁴⁵ Putman and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, 116.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁴⁷ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 178.

⁴⁸ Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 41.

key and believes that all who fail to reach the pinnacle of professional leadership are nothing more than the laity, whereas others believe the people of God are an organism where the ministry resides.⁴⁹ The disciple's direction and their understanding of the discipleship process are a burden that falls on the pastors.

Ogden believes a pastor is a vision caster who understands himself as an equipper of the saints.⁵⁰ It is possible a pastor can cast the vision of the discipleship process from the pulpit, and, through biblical exposition, this helps the church members understand their role as Christians. In order for a church to thrive, it should understand that the pastor is not spiritually superior. Also, Scazzero declares that leaders must be spiritually healthy before the church can incorporate discipleship.⁵¹ Therefore, the pastor must understand his spiritual role for the church to be structured appropriately.

Process of Discipleship

Christians have a natural desire to grow in the grace and knowledge of God. According to Koessler, one needs to recognize that the Christian life is difficult and becoming spiritually mature will require preparation and determination.⁵² It is understood that believers do not become disciples by accident. Instead, they must learn to function together as a single unit. Hull believes that a person who chooses to follow Christ must commit to following and obeying Him, because anything less than that commitment is no faith at all.⁵³

⁴⁹ Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 75.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁵¹ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Church*, 103.

⁵² Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 141.

⁵³ Hull, *Complete Book of Discipleship*, 28.

In order to function as a body, there must be unity. Koessler indicates that there is no disunity between grace, obedience, and the gospel.⁵⁴ Therefore, it is necessary for the church to understand the fundamentals of the faith. A church should understand that the gospel is centered on the Cross of Christ. The Cross is the means of salvation, as it is the daily burden of the Christian.

Koessler suggests that the Cross is the only means to put to death the deeds of the flesh. Christians are not capable of somehow bettering themselves and conditioning themselves into godliness.⁵⁵ Therefore, the discipleship process requires one to understand the depravity of man and the power of God. Hull explains that the process of discipleship is more than merely knowing who God is and knowing about Him: it is a commitment. The commitment begins with a public display of baptism, which begins the process of obedience. Obedience requires vision, accountability, structure, and relationships.⁵⁶ Further, Koessler suggests that an essential element of the process of discipleship is the work of the Holy Spirit through human relationships.⁵⁷ Discipleship requires a commitment to the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

Koessler rightfully points out that it would be challenging to imitate Jesus' methodology of discipleship and implement it into the church today, because this would require the people to uproot themselves from their homes, sell their possessions, quit their jobs, and follow the pastor.⁵⁸ The idea that people could simply uproot themselves and follow is on the imaginative side. However, it seems that Jesus has provided a methodology that can be modeled on a smaller

⁵⁴ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 158.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁶ Hull, *Complete Book of Discipleship*, 29–31.

⁵⁷ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 158.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

scale. The principles within the sacred text are timeless and are to be applied accordingly.

Putman and Harrington explain that a pastor's role is to develop and equip disciples with the information and knowledge to follow Jesus.⁵⁹

The pastor is a disciple; however, he also serves as a vision caster. Putman and Harrington suggest that a pastor and teacher, through knowledge and zeal, have a purpose of equipping the church, but stress that he is nothing without Christ.⁶⁰ A properly communicated expository message and the healthy spiritual example of the pastor's life helps provide the means to correlate the discipleship process to the congregation successfully.

Discipleship is not something that occurs in the church; the believer practices it. There are many different forms discipleship can take. However, Koessler suggests that the lessons of discipleship are learned in the home and are foundational to the Christian life.⁶¹ In other words, disciples make disciples. As parents understand how to be disciples, they use their relationships with their children to disciple their children. Koessler points out that the Jesus model of discipleship was relational because it takes disciples to carry out the Great Commission.⁶² Scazzero agrees that discipleship requires honestly addressing how our family's culture and relationships impact their understanding of being a disciple.⁶³ However, one can only do what God allows one to do. Hull suggests that God alone calls people to be disciples, but only when a human chooses to answer the call can this individual be disciplined.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Putman and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, 119.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 163.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 160.

⁶³ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Church*, 103.

⁶⁴ Hull, *Complete Book of Discipleship*, 117.

Becoming more like Christ is foundational to the discipleship process. Scazzero rightfully states, “It takes work, energy, inconvenience, time, courage, solitude, and a solid understanding of the grace of God in the gospel to grow in Christlikeness.”⁶⁵ Therefore, the discipleship process is more than merely hearing and attending church; it is about a commitment to Christ and willingness to engage in purposeful discipleship. Scazzero suggests that God wants to be invited into the most intimate places in people’s lives so that He may liberate them from the emotional bondage they face.⁶⁶

Obedience to Christ is the cornerstone on which the discipleship foundation is built. Therefore, Wilhoit points out that the commands of Christ must be taught as a collective whole.⁶⁷ Moreover, sacrifice and diligence result in less commitment to oneself and a full commitment to Christ. Wilhoit points out that Christ provided the means of a relationship and orchestrates the transformation process into a disciple.⁶⁸ Man in the spiritual process can achieve nothing. Instead, it is Christ who provides access into a relationship with Him, transforming believers. However, as Wilhoit suggests, imitating Christ is one of the most challenging things a person could ever do, because it causes one to face some of the most challenging choices made about one’s life.⁶⁹ The lasting result of the discipleship process is that one becomes an imitator of Christ.

People are not called merely to repent and come to a saving knowledge of Christ. Instead, it is each Christian’s responsibility to submit to God and fall into His will. Jesus requires those

⁶⁵ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Church*, 58.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁶⁷ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation*, 39.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

who repent to commit themselves to a selfless pursuit of Christlikeness. Therefore, each Christian is to embrace a path of spiritual growth in order to follow the command of Christ to fulfill the Great Commission. Christians are required to be transformed to the will of God through a constant renewal of their minds (Rom 12:2). Hull states, “Most accurately, spiritual formation describes the sanctification or transformation of disciples.”⁷⁰

Theological Foundations

Expository preaching may be fundamental to the church’s ministry and to spiritual growth. Consequently, merely reciting Scripture or reading a poorly written transcript to a congregation fails to meet the standard God has called pastors to meet. A sermon should contain an explanation, illustration, argument, and application of a timeless biblical principle specific to the congregation to which it is presented.⁷¹ Failure to provide such a sermon may create an extraordinary problem of miscommunication between the pastor and the congregation. This is not to say all sermons must be articulated in the same fashion. However, a pastor must be certain his preaching is biblical, applicable, and understandable. Miscommunication of the sacred text will result in a hindrance to the growth of the Christian disciple. The apostle Paul reminds Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). Moreover, the Scripture is intended to bring forth fruit, not confusion.

The pastor of a church should concern himself to “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you;

⁷⁰ Hull, *Complete Book of Discipleship*, 35.

⁷¹ Wayne McDill, *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2006), 126.

not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet 5:2–4). To feed the flock of God with knowledge is essential; however, one must also demonstrate obedience. Therefore, the pastor’s work is not merely to do the work of an evangelist but to feed the flock of God. However, this is not accomplished by preaching alone but through the example of the pastor.

The pastoral ministry focuses on many areas; however, discipleship is of extreme importance. Consequently, when some pastors think of pastoral ministry, they tend to focus on administration and pastoral calls. Also, discipleship should not be confused with simply visiting the sick and needy. Dempsey states, “The pastor’s main job is to ‘equip’ or ‘train’ the members to grow spiritually in order for them to work together as a functioning Body. When all the parts are working ‘just as He wanted,’ then the Body is healthy.”⁷² This understanding of the pastor as sole caregiver is especially common in the traditional church model. Rather than training men and women to fulfill the command in Gal 6:2, which states, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ,” some pastors have become the sole providers of hospital visits, taxi services, and errand running. Such an undertaking leaves little time for sermon development and execution. The early church emphasized the need to focus on other pastoral duties, such as preaching and sharing the gospel, as recorded in Acts 6:2, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.” Expository preaching is essential to the work of the church and must not be substituted with pastoral calling. Attempting to utilize the pastorate as a multifaceted position hinders other Christians from growing as disciples.

The content and goal of preaching must be central to the command of Christ. Theologically sound preaching is coherent as a whole and is consistent with Christ’s teachings

⁷² Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .*, 191.

and character. Matt 28:19–20 states, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The focus of this passage is on making disciples. The discipleship process consists of three parts: winning the lost to Christ, teaching new believers, and sending believers out to make disciples.⁷³

However, this call to discipleship is not solely the pastor’s responsibility, but that of all Christians alike. Eph 4:11-14 states:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Therefore, the pastor should aim to hit the target of discipleship by equipping the saints with an exposition of the timeless biblical principles found within the sacred text. When the pastor does so, the congregants should understand their role in the discipleship process and find themselves leading and equipping other Christians for service.

The congregation’s understanding of the discipleship process begins with the ability to engage and grow in spiritual disciplines. Further, spiritual disciplines should be cultivated both in the individual and as a corporate body. Conceptually, Christian’s growth should focus on their role as members of a body, not as individuals separate from the body.

It is necessary for the people to understand that the church is not a building or a concept. It is an organism that works as a unit. Therefore, they must understand their spiritual gifts as

⁷³ Dave Earley has suggested that the discipleship requirements of Jesus are to win people to Christ, train them as believers, and send them to repeat the discipleship process. Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .*, 61. NorthPointe Baptist Church and the researcher have accepted this work as a fundamental and accurate exposition of the Great Commission.

enumerated in Rom 12:3–8. Understanding their gifts is fundamental to understanding how they fit into the body of Christ. David Peterson states, “In the final analysis, Luke indicates that effective Christian witness involves both a sharing of the apostolic testimony to Jesus and a demonstration of spiritual and moral transformation arising from personal commitment to the risen Lord.”⁷⁴ Jesus is the master teacher. He was able to instruct and apply all information to any person and in any setting. However, the crux of His instruction was the necessity of self-denial and becoming a living sacrifice (Matt 16:24). Hence, communication of the discipleship process requires obedience, sacrifice, and commitment. Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin are correct that “the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20) and the example of the Book of Acts make clear that witnessing is not simply a responsibility for ordained leaders but for all believers. No single spiritual obligation is more natural for committed believers or more important than the practice of this conviction.”⁷⁵ For that reason, a pastor is held to a high standard, and it is his responsibility to provide the instruction and example for the congregation to model.

The Great Commission

The witness of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection is the greatest news believers have to share. John Polhill states, “All the same elements are there—the witness, the call to the nations, the power of the Spirit.”⁷⁶ However, sharing the gospel is only part of the task. One should not confuse what missions genuinely are. Craig Blomberg states, “to ‘make disciples *of all nations*’ does require many people to leave their homelands, but Jesus’ main focus remains on the task of

⁷⁴ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 112.

⁷⁵ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 245–46.

⁷⁶ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 86.

all believers to duplicate themselves wherever they may be. The verb ‘make disciples’ also commands a kind of evangelism that does not stop after someone makes a profession of faith.”⁷⁷ Consequently, Christians are to be disciples who make other disciples. Donald Hagner agrees, “The emphasis on the commission thus falls not on the initial proclamation of the gospel but more on the arduous task of nurturing into the experience of discipleship.”⁷⁸

Making disciples by teaching them is something Christians are to engage in throughout their lives as believers. Hagner states, “the direct commission is given to take the message of Jesus to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, ‘all the nations.’”⁷⁹ That does not mean that discipleship aims to send out missionaries into all the world. While world missions are essential, sending *disciples* into the nations is the goal. This requires people to continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of God (2 Pet 3:18). Blomberg emphasizes that making disciples indicates a lifelong commitment, in obedience, to the spiritual development of others.⁸⁰ Fundamentally, an accomplishment of the Great Commission within the local church requires the body of Christ’s effort as a cohesive whole.

Water baptism is the first step of obedience in the Christian walk. A public confession of one’s faith is a testimony of the commitment a believer has made to follow Christ. Upon the testimony of baptism, the believer should begin learning through mentorship, expository preaching, and personal devotion. Throughout this mentorship, the believer should understand that discipleship occurs within the church, and individuals are sent into that same church,

⁷⁷ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 431.

⁷⁸ Donald Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, Word Biblical Commentary 33b (Dallas: Nelson, 1995), 887.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431.

community, workplace, and home. Some are called to lead churches or become missionaries, but the majority will be serving alongside those who mentored them, mentoring and training other believers.

The local church and pastor should use spiritual formation and disciplines to implement spiritual growth. This research aims to see whether unhealth in the church results from neglected discipleship within the church—discipleship that should begin from the pulpit. It is common knowledge that many pastors have resorted to programs and placed unqualified individuals in leadership positions to develop the church. Placing a person in a position of leadership in an attempt to encourage this person to develop as an individual in Christ is an all-too-common decision in the traditional church, and a disservice to the Christian who seeks to follow Christ. Rather, than injecting a young Christian into any form of ministry the pastor should seek to rightfully equip men and women to do their part in the discipleship process.

Benefits of Expository Preaching

Expository preaching provides a vehicle to convey timeless biblical principles accurately and effectively to the congregation. Sidney Greidanus notes three specific benefits of expository preaching: it is a means for the Scriptures to be heard in public by the church; it assures the congregation that they are hearing the Word of God; and—because it involves preaching from limited text—it helps the congregation to search out the Scripture and come to an educated position on the interpretation and application of the biblical principle that was communicated to them in the sermon.⁸¹ During the process of sermon preparation, a timeless biblical principle is extracted from the text that is teachable, applicable, and memorable. On the contrary, approaching the text with the intention of utilizing multiple Scriptures to support one's assertions

⁸¹ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 16.

about a specific topic (e.g., sin, love, obedience) without taking the general context of the passage into consideration is a recipe for homiletical disaster.

The expository process, when approached diligently, requires an examination of the historical, geographical, cultural, and literary context of a passage to properly determine the message the author intended to bring to the original audience. Without an understanding of the general context of the Bible is not only more difficult to accurately apply Scripture, but more difficult for the congregation to test, as they have been directed to do in 1 Thess 5:21. What is forgotten, often, is that the spiritual development of disciples requires them to stand on their own spiritual feet. For instance, Psalm 1 depicts a mature believer to a “. . . tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season” (v. 3). Moreover, if a believer is to be able to “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15) it is only logical that believers are trained. Mentorship may help Christians come to grip with theological questions through discernment and to seek wisdom from God and others. Thomas Schreiner states, “The truth of the gospel is a public truth that can be defended in the public arena. . . . It does mean that every believer should grasp the essentials of the faith and should have the ability to explain to others why they think the Christian faith is true.”⁸² Therefore, discerning Christians should understand whether what they hear is consistent with the biblical text as a whole and consistent with the words and teachings of Christ.⁸³ Cultivating the culture of the traditional church requires one to encourage Christians to develop and hold firm to sound doctrine so that they will understand the discipleship process with conviction.

⁸² Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 174–75.

⁸³ Elmer Towns, *Theology for Today* (Mason, OH: Cengage, 2002), 11–12.

The power of the Spirit enables discipleship. In Acts 1:8, it is written, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses.” Again, discipleship emphasizes winning the lost to Christ, training them in Christ, and sending them out as disciples. The power of the Spirit is detailed in John 16:8: “And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” Further, John 16:8 is written about the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of unbelievers, the Holy Spirit also corrects, guides, and develops the believer (Gal 5:22–23; Heb 12:6–11). Therefore, the Christian must learn to “walk in the Spirit” to be an effective Christian.

The power of the Holy Spirit enables Christians to love and serve others. Love is the fruit of the Spirit, and an essential aspect of the Christian life. For example, walking in the love of Christ is a testimony to others (John 15:12). Lea and Griffin state, “First, he [Paul] wanted the Ephesians to develop a genuine love. Paul did not specify the object of love, but he likely included both God and other persons as recipients.”⁸⁴ A Christian who walks in love has opportunities to witness the gospel of Christ and attract other believers who want to learn how to love others too.

The task of equipping the saints requires the pastor to be both teacher and an example. Paul, in 2 Tim 4:2 instructs Timothy to “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” Lea is correct when he states, “That was the word on which he [Timothy] had to focus. Every command that follows in this verse told Timothy how he should proceed about the task of preaching the word. To ‘preach’ does not imply that an ordained minister is to stand behind a stately pulpit and expound

⁸⁴ Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 68.

Scripture.”⁸⁵ The emphasis is also on evangelism. A pastor who simply feeds sheep is only taking on half of the task. It is necessary to lead by example through evangelism, training the people in Christ, and sending them into the church, neighborhood, and home to be witnesses.

In order to understand the discipleship process, one must look at Christ and at oneself. Introspection helps to determine an individual’s disposition, as long as this introspection is accomplished in light of the Scriptures. For instance, Jas 1:23 commands, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.” Consequently, if believers find themselves growing in their faith, they should ask themselves whether they are active in the discipleship process. While the first step of Christianity is becoming saved; the second is growing in grace and knowledge.

Theoretical Foundations

Scholarly research about the discipleship process is somewhat limited. This project focuses on the impact of expository preaching on the congregation’s understanding of the discipleship process. William Grigg completed a research project in May 2020 that focuses on an expository preaching effort to develop small groups in his home church.⁸⁶ However, his research centers on the development of small groups, not on the process of discipleship as this project does.

⁸⁵ Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 242–43.

⁸⁶ William Grigg, “Developing a Small Group Discipleship Model through the Expository Preaching at Macedonia Baptist Church, Kuttawa, Kentucky,” ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, May 2020.

Dempsey states, “The traditional model characterizes the majority of churches across North America. Again, the model does not encourage the releasing of God’s people to God’s mission.”⁸⁷ Rather than encouraging Christians to bring “lost souls” to church so that the pastor can witness to them, the church should be equipped to serve as the hands and feet of Christ. Unfortunately, churches such as NorthPointe Baptist Church have fallen into the pit of the church’s traditional model. This model has a hierarchy, with the pastor as the head over assistant pastors and volunteers. All people are taught to depend on the pastor for evangelism, teaching, and caregiving. As Dempsey states, “Another challenge is the way we do evangelism. We have shifted from ‘they went out and preached everywhere’ (Mark 16:20; Acts 8:4) to ‘let the pastor handle it.’”⁸⁸ True discipleship requires training in order to return to the early church model.

Consequently, revitalizing a traditional church is a difficult task. Dempsey states, “Since this mind-set is so prevalent, I often encourage students to plant new churches that will win people to Christ, develop disciples, and deploy new leaders who will ultimately reproduce new churches.”⁸⁹ The “pastor-centered” church culture embedded in its pastoral reliance makes it all the more difficult for churches to change. Therefore, the strengths of expository preaching to a sincere congregation through the Holy Spirit’s power may be the only way for the traditional church to grasp the true discipleship process. Dempsey concludes, “If your church is not structured to win the lost to Christ, grow them up in their faith, and send them out for the mission, then change it. If you are unable to change it, for God’s sake (and yours, too), do not reduce your calling to a career decision.”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .*, 244.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁸⁹ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .*, 245.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Chapter 3

Methodology

Intervention Design

Most Christians understand what it means to be a disciple; however, not all Christians may understand the discipleship process. A disciple is actively learning, developing, and engaging in the Great Commission. Further, biblical discipleship requires Christians to engage as a collective whole with other Christians for the sake of the kingdom of God. If the body of Christ does not function as a collective whole, a church fails to grow spiritually, struggles to pay bills, and may ultimately make the difficult decision to close its doors. The reality of struggling churches is an issue at the forefront of many Christian leaders' minds.

Contrary to what some may believe, all Christians are commanded to live out their lives as disciples of Christ—a command that all Christians committed themselves to obey when they chose to follow Christ (Luke 9:23). Therefore, Christian leaders should not forget their responsibility to equip their congregations with the tools necessary to be effective disciples (Matt 28:19; Mark 16:15). Unfortunately, many spiritual leaders fail to balance evangelism and discipleship. Mark Dever, Ligon Duncan, Albert Mohler, and C. J. Mahaney explain, “In the Great Commission itself, Jesus tells his disciples to teach the church not simply to believe his instruction and to teach all of it, but to teach it with a view to his people living out the truth—his truth.”⁹¹ While sharing the gospel is an essential element of discipleship, one may not simply evangelize and fulfill the commands of Christ to make disciples.

⁹¹ Dever et al., *Proclaiming a Cross-Centered Theology*, 37.

Discipleship requires the entire body of Christ to engage in learning the Word of God, growing in spiritual disciplines, and practicing the instruction given by God through His written revelation. Consequently, if congregants are not instructed by sound biblical teaching and given an example of discipleship before them, it will be very difficult for the church to understand the discipleship process. Further, not only is it the pastor's responsibility to be a living example of active discipleship for his congregation (1 Pet 5:3), but he should constantly identify the strengths and weakness of his congregation and implement various strategies to encourage their spiritual growth and development (Eph 4:12).

A comprehensive look at the effectiveness of church ministry requires an extensive look into every area of ministry inside and outside the church. The pastor and his sermon style and content are not exempt from this necessary scrutiny. All levels of Christian leadership should understand the impact that expository preaching has in the communication of biblical principles to congregations.

The purpose of this research project is to understand whether expository preaching will influence a church congregation's understanding of the discipleship process. Pastors and members of Baptist churches who consented to participate in the research completed a survey before and after viewing a four-part sermon series prepared from 1 and 2 Timothy, two letters to Timothy from his mentor, the apostle Paul. Some participants took part in a follow-up phone interview that allowed the researcher to better understand the presuppositions that formed their disposition about discipleship.

A healthy church should not struggle to compel its members to serve, give, and function as godly disciples. However, Christians will not be able to serve, give, or actively participate in the body of Christ if they do not understand their role as disciples. When a church does struggle

to exist in a community, it is essential to treat the problems within the church and not merely suppress the symptoms. Therefore, one must ask the question “where do I begin?” as it relates to revitalization. Churches are bodies of believers that are called to the distinct mission of making other disciples for the sake of the kingdom of God. The call to discipleship is something that ought to be at the forefront for a Christian leader as well as for any Christian.

The initiative for this project came when the researcher began his ministry at NorthPointe Baptist Church. During the four years before he became the church’s lead pastor, he noticed the congregation fall short of the fruit God expects from His New Testament church. Not only did the congregation fall short of engaging in discipling other believers, but they do not engage in other spiritual disciplines, such as serving, prayer, evangelism, stewardship, fasting, and Bible study.

After some time, the discipleship project researcher realized that the congregation was not provided with the knowledge necessary to be godly disciples. The previous pastor of the church, Wally Gilbert, was hesitant about providing church members with leadership opportunities. This pastor gave various reasons for why he did not get the church more actively involved in ministry. For instance, he mentioned an earlier betrayal by church members and fear of losing his job. Despite his fear of potentially being replaced by church staff, he did appoint one person as a youth director. However, he made no effort to train or equip this person for youth ministry. There were times when he said the youth director was not qualified for the position.

Not only was the youth ministry in disarray, but the children and adults throughout the church failed to reveal any sort of spiritual fruit. After much prayer and thought, I came to the conclusion that the church did not receive the spiritual instruction necessary to thrive, and that

the pastor of the church was wrapped up in trying to fulfill the needs for ministry by himself and was neglecting pulpit duty.

Participants

Five consenting pastors from independent Baptist churches were selected to participate in the study. One of the five pastors had been influenced by a previous pastor and had no training in preparing topical, evangelistic, or expository sermons. The other four pastors led traditional-model churches that have adapted to a more contemporary atmosphere. These pastors responded to questions regarding the overall growth and spiritual condition of their respective churches and provided pertinent information about their preaching styles as well. The pastors also watched the sermon series on the discipleship process and answered various questions regarding their understanding of expository and topical sermons, discipleship, and evangelism.

All the consenting pastors except one hold a seminary degree from an accredited university. They have been influenced in some form by the Baptist Bible Fellowship International and may have served as leaders in the Ohio Baptist Bible Fellowship until it was dissolved in March 2021. (The pastors of the Ohio Baptist Bible Fellowship felt that dissolving that fellowship was necessary because of the traditions, associations, and reputation of the Baptist Bible Fellowship International, and the organization has been restructured under the name Ohio Baptist Network.)

Ten members of NorthPointe Baptist Church also chose to participate in the research project. These church members, until recently, were mainly influenced by topical preaching or sermons that were not prepared by the pastor who was delivering the message. Consequently, the church members who participated in the study had little or no knowledge of the discipleship process or of the expectations that God has for them as followers of Christ.

Expected Results

If the congregation at NorthPointe Baptist Church sits under expository preaching that emphasizes the timeless biblical principles within the text, then they should gain a better understanding of the discipleship process. Expository preaching differs from topical preaching because it keeps one from committing eisegesis when approaching the text. Daniel Akin states, “Good exposition does not preach about the Bible. Good exposition preaches the Bible. It delights in the details and doctrines of Scripture.”⁹² Expository preaching is not merely a systematic approach to teaching Scripture verse by verse and chapter by chapter: it is an effort to identify the timeless theological biblical principles found within the text, to extract the principle from the historical trappings, and apply the principle to the contemporary church setting. Therefore, it is important to understand exactly what impact sound expository preaching has on the health of a church. If a declining church is shown to be under poor preaching, then perhaps the lack of exposition is the root of the problem.

Most pastors who report having a healthy congregation of godly disciples have high expectations for their congregation and its biblical training. The apostle Paul had a high standard for the New Testament churches that he and others had planted. Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon Penfold suggest that Paul’s vision for ministry was “to glorify God by reaching a growing number of unreached people groups with the gospel through (1) preaching the gospel, (2) planting churches, and (3) developing an ever-expanding leadership base who would in turn (1) preach the gospel, (2) plant churches, and (3) develop an ever-expanding leadership base! And

⁹² Daniel Akin, Bill Curtis, and Stephen Rummage, *Engaging Exposition* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2011), 153.

so, it continues.”⁹³ Church planting was essential to the early church; however, this study will focus on preaching, church health, and leadership development.

The position of the author is that expository preaching may be the hinge on which the doors of a healthy church swing. For instance, in the book of Revelation, John gives seven examples of churches, of which only one was considered to be healthy. The church in Ephesus did have good works, but the Lord was not pleased with the disposition of the members. It is thought that they had forgotten why they were a church in the first place. Rev 2:4 states, “But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.”

The Ephesian church neglected its relationship with Christ, and the Lord told them plainly that they had forgotten Him. Warren Wiersbe states, “The church of Ephesus was the ‘careless church,’ made up of careless believers who neglected their love for Christ. Are we guilty of the same neglect?”⁹⁴ Neglect is the product of a failure to cultivate and guard a relationship. Many people in the church start strong in their love for Christ but tend to decline after multiple hardships and trials. As a result, Christians tend to neglect their spiritual development and begin to go through the motions of worship rather than growing in their relationship with Christ.

Perhaps the cultivation of a Christian’s relationship with Christ begins in the pulpit, where the pastor responds to God’s instruction to “equip the saints for the work of the ministry” (Eph 4:12). Considering the decline in the traditional church, it is necessary to determine whether sermon content and delivery are at the root of the problem of decline. As Daniel Akin, Bill Curtis, and Stephen Rummage point out, “Doctrinal/theological preaching is noticeably absent in

⁹³ Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold, *Re:Vision: The Key to Transforming Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014), 45.

⁹⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 572.

the modern pulpit. Theological and biblical illiteracy is the heavy price being paid.”⁹⁵ If the people do not know who they are in Christ and their role as disciples, how can pastors expect them to carry out their Christian duty?

Because of the multiple factors that are necessary for a church to be successful, it seems that a one-size-fits-all revitalization project cannot be effective. Speaking to this danger, Tim Suttle states, “Most pastors serve in small churches. Most leadership advice comes from megachurch pastors—something is wrong with this picture.”⁹⁶ Contemporary American culture has poisoned the government, homes, and churches with the mentality that getting big fast is necessary to fulfill the so-called American dream. Ministry success, on the contrary, should not be measured by the size and numerical growth of a congregation. Consider Jeremiah the prophet, who spent the vast majority of his ministry in a pit. His message was rejected and he was a hated and forgotten man. However, Jeremiah’s faithfulness defined his ministry as successful. Faithfulness is the key to a successful ministry.

The researcher assumes that revitalization is necessary only when churches have failed to be effective disciples and not when churches fail to grow numerically. Believing that ministry success is defined by numerical growth within the church is a mistake that too many pastors have tripped into for years. Those who fall into the numerical trap tend to cross boundaries set in place to ensure effective godly ministries and make the terrible choice to value compromise over effectiveness. Suttle is correct when he states, “Being greater is not better and using poor hermeneutics or poor doctrine to inflate church growth is not how God intended the church to

⁹⁵ Akin, Curtis, and Rummage, *Engaging Exposition*, 151.

⁹⁶ Tim Suttle, *Shrink: Faithful Ministry in a Church-Growth Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 37.

grow and develop.”⁹⁷ Rather, obedience to the instruction of Christ and faithfulness to His mission are the fundamental building blocks of a successful and healthy church.

Survey participants were able to access the video series and all questionnaires at a website developed by the researcher. The questionnaires were developed to elicit each person’s understanding of the discipleship process and Christian experience and overall knowledge of the purpose of and reason for a sermon. The website to which these sermons were published is no longer live, but they are accessible on YouTube.⁹⁸

Multiple-choice questions are easier to record statistically and make the research process move smoothly, but they also force a participant to answer in a very specific manner. Open-ended questions were also used to get a broader understanding of the participant’s understanding of various subjects such as discipleship, evangelism, and preaching. As a result, the survey responses reflect many opinions about and definitions of discipleship, evangelism, and the discipleship process, depending on what influenced the respondent’s Christian values. Questions that did not require a specific definition were asked in a multiple-choice format. The researcher asserts that the open-ended questions can be compared to the multiple-choice questions to provide a better understanding of the presuppositions and preunderstandings that developed the respondents’ discipleship viewpoint.

After completing the pre-sermon series survey, all participants viewed a four-part series on discipleship that was developed from Paul’s two letters to Timothy. The process of exegesis of the study began by creating a phrase diagram of 1 and 2 Timothy. All Scripture passages were divided into coherent sections according to the subject of the text and labeled according to the

⁹⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9KaJLITQL1v3Xtceelu40A>

biblical principles found within the context of Scripture. Four sections of Scripture were chosen because of their emphasis on discipleship and the Great Commission: 1 Tim 4:1–11; 1 Tim 4:12–15; 2 Tim 1:1–12; and 2 Tim 2:1–9 were the biblical texts selected for this research project.

Sermon Preparation and Selection

Choosing the correct passage for this study was a difficult task. The study required congregants to listen to a series of sermons that focused on discipleship. Moreover, expository preaching is quite different from topical preaching. Therefore, it was necessary to find a specific book or letter from the Word of God that had more of a focus on discipleship than it did on other spiritual disciplines. Because of the apostle Paul's emphasis on spiritual leadership and discernment and his discipleship of Timothy, the sermon series was developed from select passages taken from the First and Second Epistles to Timothy. Discipleship is one of the many principles Paul reiterated in his letters to Timothy. In order to stay true to the exegetical process necessary to formulate an expository sermon, the researcher created a phrase diagram of both letters to Timothy and engaged in an inductive Bible study to determine which passages of Scripture would be suitable for a discipleship sermon series that remained true to the expository process.

Multiple hours of study of 1 and 2 Timothy and their New Testament context reveal various timeless biblical principles that focus on discipleship. The sermon series used in this study highlights four of these principles. The idea to create a phrase diagram of 1 and 2 Timothy was derived from Wayne McDill's book *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*. Such a diagram helps one to better understand an author's intended message to the original audience by analyzing and scrutinizing the various literary devices and grammatical constructions used within the context of the passage. Further, after completing the phrase diagram, one will be able

to examine how each phrase functions within the text, as well as identify all theological themes and understand the literary features of the text.

After completing the phrase diagram, the researcher consulted resources for help understanding the culture and geographical region in which the letter was written and read. A reader who does not understand the author's intended message to the original audience will not be able to apply that message in a contemporary setting. Therefore, it is important to know the context in which the passage was written.

An examination of the literary and historical context of a passage is a necessary element of expository preaching that allows the pastor to avoid some of the historical traps that impair the congregations' or the pastor's understanding of a given biblical text. Multiple resources are available that provide the necessary historical information. Eugene Boring states, "Exegetical commentaries with a theological perspective are especially valuable for the preacher in that they correspond structurally to the biblical text itself."⁹⁹ Moreover, understanding the similarities and differences between contemporary and New Testament churches helps a pastor apply the text in modern time. Peter Oakes states, "The better our understanding of first-century lives, the better our understanding of just how the New Testament teaching could change those lives."¹⁰⁰ Determining the biblical author's intended message to their original audience requires geographical and cultural knowledge as well as knowledge of the reason the author was writing in the first place. F. F. Bruce reports archaeological evidence supports the biblical account of Ephesus, as artifacts have been recovered that display symbols written in particular patterns that

⁹⁹ M. Eugene Boring, "Biblical Theology and Preaching: A Survey of Resources," *Interpretation* 70, no. 4 (October 2016): 461.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Oakes, "How Archaeology and History Can Help with the New Testament Preaching," in *Preaching the New Testament*, ed. Ian Paul and David Wenham (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 185.

spoke of magic and demons.¹⁰¹ Idols of the goddess Diana include multiple breasts that were symbolic of her willingness to nurture not just the Ephesian's livelihood but that of all the world.¹⁰²

Passages from 1 and 2 Timothy were selected for this research. Timothy was serving as a pastor in Ephesus when the letters were written. In order to develop a sound hermeneutic, it is expedient to understand, at least in a general sense, the culture and history that surrounds the historic city of Ephesus. The worship of gods and idols is not uncommon biblically or historically. Therefore, it is not a surprise that Ephesus was culturally engaged in the worship of the fertility goddess Diana. Darrell Bock states, "Artemis, Ephesus's major goddess, was known as a goddess of fertility and as 'mistress of the wild beasts,' a daughter of Zeus and Leto, and a sister of Apollo. In Roman religion she was known as Diana. In this cult she was a virgin who helped women in childbirth, a huntress with bow and arrow, and the goddess of death."¹⁰³

The city was so deeply infected with Gnosticism and idolatry that Paul even specifically wrote a separate letter to the Ephesians to help transform the believer's lives, extricating them from the pagan culture they conformed to. Michael Gorman states, "[The book of] Ephesians, then, which is sometimes appropriately described as a narration of the 'drama' of salvation, needs also to be viewed as a narration of the drama of the triune God's peacemaking mission, and of our participation in it."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 293.

¹⁰² *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Diana," Zondervan Classic Reference Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967), 216.

¹⁰³ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 607.

¹⁰⁴ Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 182.

The apostle Paul spent about two and a half years in Ephesus; Timothy took over some time after Paul had left. Ephesus was known for its cult worship. During the first three months of Paul's ministry there, he engaged people in the synagogue in discussion about the kingdom of God.¹⁰⁵

The people of Ephesus would seek to have their fertility blessed through the worship of Diana. Therefore, Timothy was charged to carry out the will of God and take a stand against the cultural philosophies and traditions that opposed fundamental biblical principles. Moreover, the believers in Ephesus had a rich history in Christianity. Matt Chandler states, "In Ephesians, Paul reminds the Ephesian church that they were predestined before the foundation of the world. He tells them about God's feelings for them and God's love for them."¹⁰⁶ In the book of Revelation, God addresses the issues of the Ephesian church more directly. According to Bock, "The believers at Ephesus were a *suffering* people who patiently bore their burdens and toiled without fainting. And they did all of this for His name's sake! No matter how you examine this congregation, you conclude that it is just about perfect."¹⁰⁷

It is beyond the scope of this research project to review the entire historical context of 1 and 2 Timothy. However, it is important to note the problem the Ephesian church faced during the time in which Timothy served as a pastor, as well as Paul's role in the discipleship and mentorship of Timothy. Understanding the reason for Paul's letter helps one better understand the theological principle that is being communicated. As Robert Chisholm states, "God's word is relevant for God's people in all ages. Our responsibility is to make the ancient text come alive,

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 600.

¹⁰⁶ Matt Chandler, *To Live Is Christ, to Die Is Gain* (Colorado Springs, CO: David Cook, 2013), 17.

¹⁰⁷ Bock, *Acts*, 572. Emphasis in original.

so that it can impact the thinking and behavior of people living, struggling, suffering, and dying in the here and now.”¹⁰⁸

By comparing the literary functions, historical and literary context, and theological terms of the sacred text, one can identify the timeless biblical principle that was communicated by the biblical author to the original recipients. This process enabled the researcher to remain faithful to the biblical text in the sermon series and avoid reading into the passage of the Scripture. It is impossible to understand what Paul was communicating to Timothy unless one first looks at the greater context of both letters and then moves to the specifics.

The timeless biblical principles extracted from the biblical text were then applied to the contemporary church setting by understanding the context in which they were written, removing the historical trappings, and formulating the sermon in a manner such that the principles are applicable to the contemporary context of the traditional church. John Dickson states, “While Aristotle was a master of formal logic, he was wise enough to know that *logos* alone was never enough to persuade people to adopt a significant, new viewpoint. We are not just intellectual beings, he insisted; we are also emotional and social beings, and these factors must be understood in the art of persuasion.”¹⁰⁹ A salesman sells a car by persuading buyers that it is the best vehicle for them. A skilled salesman will not only plead logically with potential buyers but also appeal to their emotions and morals. Therefore, sermons were constructed in such a way that all rhetoric, illustrations, and application related to the members of NorthPointe Baptist Church.

¹⁰⁸ Robert B. Chisholm, *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 221.

¹⁰⁹ John Dickson, *Humilitas: A Lost Key to Life, Love, and Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 138.

The sermons were then put into a four-part series that was made available to all the participants in the research.

Sermon Structure and Rationale

First Tim 4:1 reads, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.” Paul’s instruction served as a reminder to Timothy to remain diligent and remain faithful to the will of God. Timothy has found himself amid false teachers and apostates. These false witnesses would have to deny the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christians do not just come to the Cross of Christ for salvation but live a life of surrender at the Cross (Matt 16:24). Identification with Christ is fundamental to discipleship. Further, a disciple must be committed to the will of God and must be able to recognize false teachers and “discern what is the will of God” (Rom 12:2).

The first sermon in the series is titled “The Commitment to the Commission” was derived from 1 Timothy 4:1–11.” The sermon title is brief and theological, because using the biblical principle being preached in the form of a title helps the congregation remember and practice it. Bryan Chapell states, “Preachers build good sermons on solid propositions even when thoughtful communication strategies may cause the formal statements not to appear in the actual messages.”¹¹⁰ Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin also recommend using a simple theological title because it is designed to help those who hear the sermon to remember the sermon.¹¹¹

The believer’s commitment to the commission results in God being glorified. This, on the outside, is obvious. However, not only did false teachers infiltrate Timothy’s church, but their

¹¹⁰ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 149.

¹¹¹ Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 134.

influence and teachings were attractive to many people, resulting in an unhealthy environment. Lea and Griffin state, “Much Christian teaching involves reminding ourselves and others of beliefs and practices we know but ignore or forget. Paul commended Timothy’s obedience and implied that he was to continue more of the same.”¹¹² There is a clear rebuke of those who had spread the false doctrine.

The instruction given to Timothy by Paul was then communicated to those who participated in the study. Philip Towner states, “But genuine *godliness* is the life of faith strengthened by training in the Word of God ([1 Tim] 4:7)—that is, a lifestyle lived in obedience to *the good teaching*.”¹¹³ In an effort to promote each participant to think about their understanding of discipleship, specific instruction was given to them to examine the sermon in light of the context of the passages that were preached. In other words, if participants have a false view of discipleship (like the view that took hold in Timothy’s church), they have a personal responsibility to allow Scripture to correct them, to let go of any false doctrine, and to hold on to and practice the truth.

Lea and Griffin state that “a thinking Christian could see that godliness represented a higher priority than mere physical training. Godliness has the potential of impacting all actions, experiences, and relationships for good.”¹¹⁴ False teachers tend to draw a crowd; however, Paul made it clear that if he reminded people to be faithful to the Great Commission, the ministry would continue to be successful. Douglas Mangum and E. Tod Twist state, “At Ephesus, some of the leaders of the church had become bad examples, and Timothy’s best chance at countering

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Philip H. Towner, *1–2 Timothy & Titus*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, vol. 14 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1 Tim 4:6. Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁴ Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 135.

their teaching was to be a good example himself.”¹¹⁵ Perhaps it is best to state that if Satan has been able to achieve a lack of discipleship, then he is winning, in his mind. Moreover, God is not glorified when His children fail to practice the truth.

Chandler reiterates that Paul’s instruction to Timothy is a reminder to stand boldly against those who oppose the Gospel.¹¹⁶ Christian leaders and pastors should invest their time equipping young Christians to live a biblical Christian life. Likewise, Christians are not exempt from discipling others and should follow the example of their pastor to equip, train, and support other Christians for ministry. One of the most important things that should be taught to a young disciple is to begin to study apologetics and give a reason for the hope that is within (1 Pet 3:15).

If the content of any pastor or teacher’s Bible lesson does not cohere with the character and teachings of Christ, it is a false doctrine and should be properly judged and rejected by the disciple of Christ. A false doctrine has nothing but a negative effect on the spiritual growth of a disciple. Therefore, a disciple of Christ must learn and grow under a sound pastor who rightly divides the Word of Truth. Chandler explains that without Christ all areas of ministry and personal religious activity are in vain.¹¹⁷

Paul instructed Timothy to take heed of the things that he taught to him and by his family. Likewise, if believers take heed of the Word, then they will continue to grow in the faith, knowledge, and wisdom of God. In turn, they too will be able to win the lost to Christ, train men and women in the faith, and send believers out into the world to make more disciples. Commitment to the Commission requires a drive of love. Chandler suggests that a Christian’s

¹¹⁵ Douglas Mangum and E. Tod Twist, *1 Timothy*, ed. Douglas Mangum and Derek R. Brown, Lexham Research Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2013), 1 Tim 4:13.

¹¹⁶ Matt Chandler, *The Explicit Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 183.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

love for Christ will result in obedience; however, love is not the result of obedience.¹¹⁸ This love is because God first loved humanity. To embrace His love, one must dedicate oneself to the will of God.

Many Christians become confused by the command to not judge another person (found in Matt 7:1) and the requirement to practice discernment. It is up to the Christian to “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1). Donald Guthrie states, “Timothy is now reminded that he is himself a man of authority. He has a definite commission to hold the false teachers in check, and it is evident that Paul expects him to take a strong line with them . . . These words give a timely warning to our modern age against the quest for novelties in Christian teaching.”¹¹⁹ Christians of all times have the responsibility to remain faithful to what God has commissioned them to do and not allow false teachers to lead disciples astray.

The second sermon, titled “A Disciple’s Testimony,” uses the passage 1 Timothy 4:12–15. As with the first sermon, the title is a biblical principle found within the text that was expounded on and applied within the context of a traditional church. The context of this sermon revealed Paul’s instruction for Timothy to always be blameless and spotless in all his actions. That way, if there was ever an accusation against him, his conduct would speak for itself. Also, if an accusation was made, he could then maintain his testimony and continue to do the work of the ministry. Timothy was instructed to maintain the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, and teaching to continue to carry out the Great Commission within the context of his church.

Paul’s instruction for Timothy to remain in the study of and exercise the public reading of Scripture reveals the importance of spiritual disciplines and formation during spiritual warfare.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 218.

¹¹⁹ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 54.

Dallas Willard asserts, “It is vital for us to keep before us that there are tried and true ways we can pursue abundant life in Christ. These ways are often referred to as ‘spiritual disciplines.’ We can and must incorporate these into our lives as completely reliable ways of personal soul care. There is no substitute for this.”¹²⁰

Timothy was charged by Paul to take care of his personal well-being. Paul understood that if Timothy was not healthy spiritually, he could not lead the people successfully. Spending time in the Word of God would have helped Timothy identify anything in his life that would grieve God and keep Him from working in the life of Timothy. Greg Gilbert states, “Repentance is not just an optional plug-in to the Christian life. It is absolutely crucial to it, marking out those who have been saved by God from those who have not.”¹²¹ Spiritual disciplines are the key to a disciple’s spiritual growth, making them central to the discipleship process. Klaus Issler states, “If we do not focus on the source of our behaviors, we will keep battling our external words and actions—and our willing-doing gap will not change much.”¹²²

The apostle Paul emphasized the necessity that Timothy utilizes the spiritual gift that was imparted to him and utilize introspection to make sure his life was edified as well as the lives of those whom he influenced. Certainly, Paul was concerned about the impact culture was having on Timothy. Timothy Keller states, “Culture is complex, subtle, and inescapable . . . And if we are not deliberately thinking about our culture, we will simply be conformed to it without ever knowing it is happening.”¹²³

¹²⁰ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 132.

¹²¹ Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 79.

¹²² Klaus Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 25.

¹²³ Timothy Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 186.

Believers should regularly practice and develop spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible intake, devotion, study, giving, and obedience to the Great Commission. Spiritual disciplines, if exercised properly, will result in the growth necessary to become a disciple who makes disciples. Further, in the midst of opposition, a believer's clean testimony of faith will not just help guard them against personal attacks but reflect the love of Christ to the lost world.

The third sermon was taken from the scripture passage 2 Timothy 1:1–12 and titled “A Hope to Live For,” it was crucial to reiterate Paul's instruction to participate in generational discipleship, as it is fundamental to the kingdom of God. Paul focuses not just on the reason believers serve God, but also on the spiritual benefits people obtain when they are raised in a lifestyle of instruction in the Christian faith. Paul instructs Timothy to remember the generational discipleship that Timothy experienced through his mother and grandmother. The sermon applies this principle to the traditional church context, and congregants are reminded of the influence of discipleship within their home as well as the duty to equip other believers in the faith as well.

The final sermon, titled “Biblical Discipleship” focused on 2 Timothy 2:1–9. It was necessary to point out that Paul was not oblivious to the burden discipleship puts on the life of a believer. At times, some become weary, and some even give up. Therefore, it was up to Timothy to stir up the gift within him (2 Tim 2:1–6). While no Christian is called to walk the Christian life alone, sometimes the Christian walk can be difficult. When there is no one found from whom to seek encouragement and believers become weary, it is up to them to stir themselves up in the Lord.

Jesus made it clear that all those who choose to live a godly life will suffer persecution (Matt 10:34). Consequently, persecution is not something for one to be ashamed of, nor should one be caught off guard by it. Suffering for the sake of the gospel was counted as a privilege by

Paul. Further, Paul reminds Timothy that salvation is the result of the grace given through Jesus Christ. God's commitment to the believer will bring surety amid trials. Thomas Schreiner states, "Given God's promise to strengthen his own, to give courage instead of fear and love instead of hate, Timothy should not 'be ashamed' of the testimony about the Lord . . ." ¹²⁴

Timothy was instructed to impart the wisdom he gained to faithful men who could carry out the ministry. He was also reminded that rules must be followed to win a crown with the Lord. The Word of God does not return to Him void; therefore, while a person may be bound, the gospel cannot be bound. Likewise, applying this principle to the contemporary church implies that believers should be investing the knowledge they have gained into the lives of other believers who can then one day lead other people.

Just as Timothy was to train men who showed leadership qualities, so should a pastor train the faithful in his church. However, that is not the only training that should take place within the church. When a church is failing in the area of discipleship, some church members may tend to point their fingers at the pastor. On the other hand, pastors at times could blame the congregation for errors in the area of discipleship. That would be warranted if what the pastor communicates from the text is biblical and if he has taken the time to train disciples. However, if biblical preaching and teaching are not present, there is a greater tendency for a false view of discipleship to be taught, or—even worse—teachers may not even teach discipleship at all. According to Trevor Hudson, "The intentional inward surrender of our lives to God reminds

¹²⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters*, Handbooks on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 334.

us that transformation is always God’s work in us. We are not struggling to fix ourselves up, seeking to sort ourselves out, or trying harder to change.”¹²⁵

Implementing the Research Process

This study utilized two experimental groups. Participants included both church members and pastoral staff. The *church members* group consists of those who were 18 years of age or older, identified as Christians, and were members of a Baptist church. The *pastoral staff* group consists of senior, lead, and assistant pastors of Baptist churches. Both experimental groups accessed the specific survey for their group and then completed the requested questionnaire. Survey questions for church members were intended to help the researcher better understand how prior preaching has affected their understanding of discipleship. Other questions concerned the overall spiritual health of the church members.

After watching the video series, participants completed the post-sermon series survey that was designed for their group. These surveys elicited answers that were used to measure any changes in a church member and pastor’s that was reported before watching the sermon series. Pastors were asked about the style of their preaching, how they incorporate discipleship into their ministry setting, and whether they consider their ministry to be successful and healthy.

Following the completion of the post-sermon series surveys, five church members and five pastors participated in telephone interviews to further clarify their overall spiritual health and understanding of the Christian life. Comparing the pastor’s understanding of the discipleship process and the content of their preaching may help the researcher to understand whether their congregations are growing or declining in the area of discipleship.

¹²⁵ Trevor Hudson, “Relationships: Discipleship That Promotes Another Kind of Life,” *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (April 2019): 118.

Participant Selection Process

The researcher is the lead pastor of an independent Baptist church in Ohio. Therefore, to edify his church in a manner that is consistent with the bylaws and constitution of NorthPointe Baptist Church, only independent pastors of independent Baptist churches in Ohio were invited to participate in the research project. Invitations and consent forms were sent to both rural and city churches, as well as to churches that may or may not already have had discipleship programs in place.

Churches were selected at random through networking and internet searches. If a church identified as an independent Baptist church, an email was sent to the church inviting the pastor and the congregation to participate in the research project. This email contained the recruitment letter as the email body and a consent form as an attachment. Pastors and their congregations were welcome to participate in the research project; however, all the congregations declined—as a result, the sample of church members was derived from the researcher’s home church, NorthPointe Baptist Church.

Potential participants were asked to sign the consent form and state exactly how they qualified. Participants were selected only if they were over the age of 18, professing Christians, and church members or pastors. As mentioned in the previous subsection, all senior pastors, assistant pastors, executive pastors, and youth pastors were grouped into the *pastoral staff* group. All church members who do not have pastoral duties were grouped into the *church members* group.

Similar questions were asked of pastoral staff and church members. It is understood by the researcher that a pastor is better informed on the discipleship process than members of the congregation. However, both groups watched the same four-part video series on the discipleship

process. After participants completed the surveys and sermon series, the congregation's understanding of the discipleship process was measured by comparing their post- and pre-sermon series answers, while the pastor's pre-sermon series and post-sermon series answers were compared to their evaluation of their home church. Once the individual group's responses have been analyzed, both groups will be compared.

Successful discipleship may result in the multiplication of disciples; however, adding additional members to a church congregation should not be the primary goal of a pastor. Philip Bassham suggests, "Success can be defined in other ways than attendance numbers and this is how pastors and church leaders must learn to evaluate themselves in building God's kingdom."¹²⁶ Pastors have been infected with American culture as it relates to church growth. Ultimately, numbers and how to have more and more people are at the forefront of many pastor's minds, rather than making disciples. Calvin Miller states, "We have lost the reverence for the godly life . . . groomed by megachurch madness as so many of us are, this now seems a tedious way to go about church growth."¹²⁷ Therefore, as Bassham points out, numbers may tell part of a declining church's story, but not all of it.¹²⁸

Implementation of the Intervention Design

More than thirty pastors were asked to take part in the research; however, only five chose to participate. The majority of the pastors were not able to participate due to time constraints and prior obligations. In an effort to recruit potential pastoral staff participants, lead pastors were

¹²⁶ Philip Roy Bassham, "Cultural Kingdom Architects: Defining Success in Building God's Kingdom" (DMin diss., Liberty University, 2019), 34, Scholars Crossing: The Institutional Repository of Liberty University.

¹²⁷ Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 28.

¹²⁸ Bassham, "Cultural Kingdom Architects," 32.

reminded that they did not have to participate in the study themselves but could ask a pastoral staff member to participate. While an extensive effort was made to recruit multiple pastors and church members to participate, the number of those who eventually chose to participate was very small: fifteen participants (ten church members and five pastors). Despite this setback, the five pastors who participated provided adequate information related to discipleship, church growth, and preaching style. The pastoral interviews provided important information regarding the internal demographics and overall health of the participating churches, enabling the researcher to fulfill the research requirements for this study.

To gain more information regarding the pastoral staff's current church discipleship programs, preaching influence, and the general health of the church, the researcher conducted interviews with each of the five participating pastors. Four out of the five pastors serve at independent fundamental Baptist churches that are traditional but have some sort of modification (e.g., small groups, life groups, discipleship programs).

Five out of ten members of NorthPointe Baptist Church were selected at random to participate individually in a follow-up phone interview. These interviews helped the researcher gain a clearer understanding of the church member's understanding of the discipleship process and the Great Commission, as well as come to logical conclusions for this research project.

As noted above, the study participants were divided into two experimental groups: church members and pastoral staff. To maintain confidentiality for this study, individual church members and pastoral staff were given a single-letter pseudonym to identify the information they provided. Therefore, all illustrations and comments that reference the church member participants will be referred to as follows: Member A, Member B, Member C, Member D,

Member E, Member F, Member G, Member H, Member I, and Member J. Further, pastoral staff will be referred to as follows: Pastor A, Pastor B, Pastor C, Pastor D, and Pastor E.

Once qualifying participants signed and returned the consent form, they were sent an email that guided them to the research material. The research questionnaires and video sermon series were hosted on a website created by the researcher. Participants were instructed to complete the first survey and email their responses to the researcher before watching the video sermon series. There is no way to confirm that the participants heeded the request to return the first survey before engaging with the sermon series. However, it is assumed that all participants followed the instructions to complete the research properly.

After submitting the pre-sermon series survey, participants watched four video sermons prerecorded by the researcher. The sermon series was recorded at the researcher's church where he currently serves as the lead pastor. All sermons were delivered in the researcher's office, and no one was present during the recordings. No participants were provided inducements to participate in the research project.

After completing the video series, both control groups completed the second survey. The surveys were emailed or hand-delivered to the researcher, who printed the emails and stored all the surveys in a locked desk drawer inside his office. All material that was returned through the internet was stored on a fingerprint-locked MacBook Pro.

All research material was then separated by the control group, and within the control group, consideration was taken of the geographical location and the specific church model. Pastor's surveys were then read and analyzed. When analyzing the returned research material, the researcher kept notes and grouped all comparable material to develop conclusions based on the results of the surveys. While all the questions on the surveys were important, only questions

that focused on discipleship, preaching, church health, church size, and other pertinent information are included in the results of this research project.

The pre-sermon series questions to church members and pastors were similar. For instance, both groups provided definitions for discipleship, expository preaching, and their understanding of the discipleship process. Further, both control groups provided basic information regarding how long they have been Christians or how long they have been pastors. Other questions regarding the participant's belief about how important discipleship is within the church and outside the church were asked. See appendixes E and F for a copy of the surveys the pastors and church members completed.

All written questions were scored on a scale of 0 to 5, with 0 indicating no knowledge of the subject, 1 little knowledge, 2 some knowledge, 3 average knowledge, 4 above-average knowledge, and 5 extremely knowledgeable. A participant's knowledge of the subject was assessed on the basis of the adequacy of the answer that the participant wrote in response to the survey question. For example, if a participant provided a working definition that clearly defined the term, then the participant received a 5, indicating that he or she was extremely knowledgeable about the subject. However, if a participant provided an answer that clearly did not define the term but showed some understanding of the term, then the participant received a score of 3 or 2, depending on the depth of the answer. If a participant did not provide an answer or stated that he or she did not know the answer to the question, the participant received a 0.

The illustrations used in this project are labeled according to the topic that they cover. At the bottom of the graphs are references to the questions that were asked in the pre- and post-sermon series surveys. For example, illustrations reveal the results of pre-sermon series question 2 and post-sermon series question 5. Both of these questions ask the participant to define

discipleship. The graph reveals each church member's level of understanding on a scale from 0 to 5. At the bottom of the illustration is a reference (pre-sermon series survey question 2, post-sermon series survey question 5) to help the reader find the question within the surveys provided in appendix E or F of this paper.

After scoring the pre-sermon series and post-sermon series surveys, the researcher made a comparison with both control groups, and a score was calculated to determine who advanced in their knowledge and who did not. Further, pastor's responses were compared to the overall size and health of the church (as reported by the pastors). Church members who gained knowledge of the discipleship process and reported these changes on the post-sermon series surveys are determined to have benefited from the research. Pastors who reported using expository preaching in their discipleship ministries and reported a growing, healthy congregation suggest that expository preaching does impact a congregation's understanding of the discipleship process.

The interviews were not recorded. All information gained from the phone interviews was typed directly into a form by the researcher. The effort to have three different methods of investigation into the ministry problem was paramount to the success of the research.

The researcher's home church was excited to participate in the study. However, to avoid bias and outliers, the researcher chose not to allow family members to participate. This was a necessary step to avoid any slanted information from people close to the researcher, who have heard his argument for sound preaching and discipleship over the years. However, all non-family members were invited into the study.

It is noteworthy to add that the researcher's home church (NorthPointe Baptist Church) sat under topical preaching and sermons that were merely downloaded from the internet or derived from a book for thirty years. Moreover, the researcher has served as the lead pastor for

almost a year, during which the congregation has received expository preaching on various biblical principles through systematic exegesis of the text. However, the researcher did not preach any sermons that communicated about the discipleship process before the sermon series created for the research. NorthPointe Baptist Church has heard and begun to grasp the vision to win the lost to Christ, train them in Christ, and send them into the world. However, their understanding of the discipleship process is yet to be developed, making the church members of NorthPointe Baptist Church an excellent sample for this study.

Chapter 4

Results

The discipleship process begins at the moment of salvation. A believer chooses to follow Christ and commits to grow in the grace and knowledge of God. A dedicated young disciple will then seek the Lord through private and group devotion, prayer, and regular attendance at a church. However, the learning process should be geared toward how one can personally align one's life with the will of God as it pertains to all aspects of one's life. As the believer continues to grow, he or she should then begin to prepare to share the gospel and will get ready to provide answers to those who may have questions.

It has already been established that discipleship is fundamental to the Christian life. However, the pastoral emphasis on getting Christians to win souls for Christ and the push for individuals to accept the faith may cause some to focus more on the personal side of Christianity than on becoming a group of believers who work together as a cohesive whole to fulfill the Great Commission. For that reason, one must understand that the discipleship process begins with a personal commitment to function in the body of Christ as God has intended for one.

Over the past few decades, many pastors have urged new believers to “share their faith” with the lost; however, little emphasis has been given to discipleship. Ignatius Ferreira and Wilbert Chipenyu are correct when they write, “Firstly, the kingdom family is meant to grow in quantity, as the world is led to Christ through the witnessing of the church. Secondly, the converted peoples should be fed with the Word to become disciples of Christ and also ‘grow in

quality.’”¹²⁹ As a result, many young believers begin to believe they are carrying out their discipleship duties merely by witnessing to the lost. However, that ideology could give the impression that discipleship is an act of “witnessing” to others, not of teaching and discipling other believers.

Young believer’s spiritual growth as disciples should include understanding their own salvation experience and being established in the faith so that they understand their eternal security. Further, believers should be prepared to provide an answer for the hope that is within them, with meekness and fear (1 Pet 3:15). A thorough understanding of apologetics is central to a believer’s personal life and to a believer’s ability to share the faith with other people. Most importantly, the believer, under the guidance of a mentor, should be continually growing in the grace and knowledge of God. Upon achieving these milestones, the believer begins to win people to Christ and mentor them in the faith.

The goal of mentorship within the church is to provide the new believer with the tools to grow in faith on a personal level and eventually to mentor other new believers. Just as the mentor invested knowledge into the lives of new believers, the mentor’s apprentices should begin investing in the lives of other people.

Church Member Surveys

In the beginning stages of discipleship, believers should be instructed to understand biblical discipleship. A biblical understanding of one’s discipleship role does not come on its own but requires a mature disciple to teach new believers the process. A failure to cultivate disciples within the church leads to a decline in church attendance. The truth is church

¹²⁹ Ignatius Ferreira and Wilbert Chipenyu, “Church Decline: A Comparative Investigation Assessing More Than Numbers,” *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 55, no. 1 (January 18, 2021): 1.

attendance is down throughout the world. *Christianity Today* reported that the “Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) lost 2 percent of its membership last year—the largest drop in more than a century, according to its annual report.”¹³⁰ Unfortunately, there is no database with records of independent Baptist church membership or discipleship. It would be a costly endeavor to obtain statistics for this study to reveal the decline of the independent traditional Baptist church.

Ferreira and Chipenyu provide some information that points to the overall decline in churches in America, stating, “These high reduction figures are taken during a period of seven years (2005–2012). The Western countries comprise 77.7% of global reduction, while the other parts of the world, combined, indicate a reduction of 22.3%.”¹³¹

The church members who chose to participate were mostly over 50 years of age, married, and have children (see Table 4.1). The participants in the discipleship study had been influenced greatly by traditional church culture. For some, their pastor for more than thirty years preached topical sermons that had been previously delivered to other church congregations. The participants had diverse backgrounds in Christianity. Some had previously been members of Catholic and Lutheran churches. Conversations with some of the participants made it clear that they were dependent on their pastor to not only preach on Sunday but fulfill all discipleship duties.

¹³⁰ Kate Shellnutt, “Southern Baptists See Biggest Drop in 100 Years,” *Christianity Today*, June 4, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/june/southern-baptist-sbc-member-drop-annual-church-profile-2019.html>.

¹³¹ Ferreira and Chipenyu, “Church decline,” 2.

Table 4.1. Church Member Participants Age, Marital Status, and Children

Church members participant	Survey question		
	What is your age?	Are you married?	Do you have children?
Church member A	31-40	yes	yes
Church member B	over 50	yes	yes
Church Member C	over 50	yes	yes
Church member D	over 50	no	no
Church member E	over 50	no	yes
Church member F	over 50	yes	yes
Church member G	over 50	no	yes
Church member H	over 50	yes	yes
Church member I	over 50	yes	yes
Church member J	over 50	yes	yes

All ten church members surveyed claimed to have been Christian believers for at least ten years (see Table 4.2). Further, they claimed to be actively involved in their church in some sort of service. Ten of the ten members reported that they believe discipleship is an important part of their Christian life—but only five found it extremely important (see Table 4.3). Ten out of ten of the members surveyed have never yet been involved in any form of discipleship development group and have not had any form of a spiritual mentor, besides pastoral staff. Seven out of ten of the members surveyed believe discipleship is demonstrated outside the church by serving as an example to others. Whereas one suggested biblical discipleship requires one to be an example to

other people by sharing their faith with others. However, again, their definition of discipleship was centered on the instruction they received as an individual and their commitment to the church but did not recognize the Christians responsibility to invest in the spiritual development of new believers on a one-on-one basis.

Table 4.2. Pre-Sermon Questions on Age, Church Involvement, and Discipleship

Church members participant	Survey question		
	How long have you been a Christian?	Are you actively involved in your church?	How important is discipleship to you?
Church member A	more than 10 years	yes	extremely important
Church member B	more than 10 years	yes	extremely important
Church Member C	more than 10 years	yes	important
Church member D	more than 10 years	yes	extremely important
Church member E	more than 10 years	yes	extremely important
Church member F	more than 10 years	yes	important
Church member G	more than 10 years	no	important
Church member H	more than 10 years	yes	important
Church member I	more than 10 years	no	important
Church member J	more than 10 years	yes	extremely important

Table 4.3. Post-Sermon Questions on Discipleship

Church members participant	Survey question		
	Has your pastor ever encouraged you to win the lost for Christ?	Has your pastor ever encouraged you to be a disciple who makes disciples?	Have you ever become part of a discipleship group?
Church member A	yes	yes	yes
Church member B	yes	yes	no
Church Member C	yes	yes	no
Church member D	yes	yes	no
Church member E	yes	yes	no
Church member F	yes	yes	no
Church member G	yes	yes	no
Church member H	yes	yes	no
Church member I	yes	yes	no
Church member J	yes	yes	no

Three out of ten of the church member participants provided a somewhat substantial explanation of the discipleship process before watching the video series on discipleship (see figure 4.1). These participants stated clearly that the discipleship process begins with themselves and then utilizing the information they gained from their pastor by sharing it with other people. It is noteworthy that the participants had understood the discipleship process to apply only to their immediate family and had not understood it to mean taking a new believer under their wing to teach and guide him or her to be a disciple.

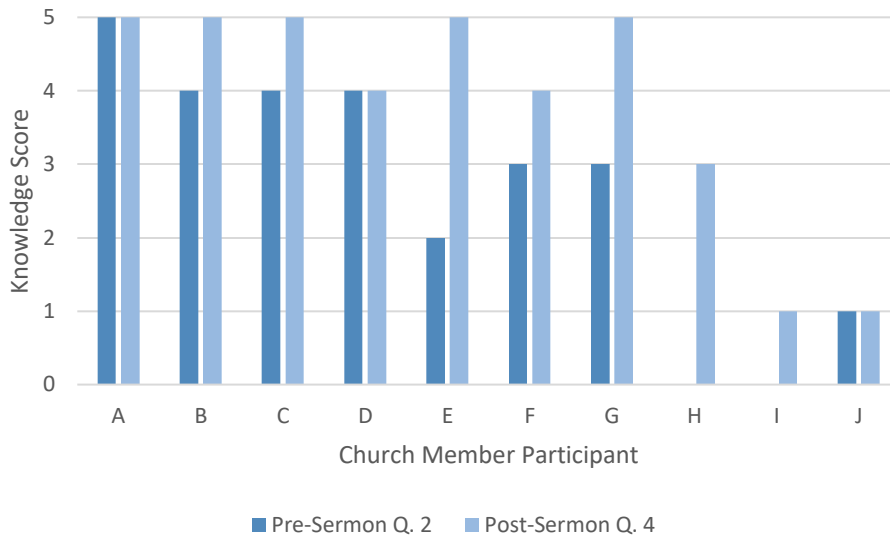


Figure 4.1. Defining the Discipleship Process

After analyzing the results of the church member surveys, it is even more clear to the researcher that the congregation did not understand what the discipleship process is, but what a disciple is. For example, to some, a disciple is one who merely reads God’s Word and spends time in prayer. Following the sermon series, these church members were yet to attain a clear understanding of the discipleship process. These members believe the discipleship process is centered by being an example even when they are working by themselves and no one else is around.

Member F reported that before watching the series, they understood evangelism as the necessary duty of a disciple but never considered investing in the life of another individual as a part of discipleship (see table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Post-Sermon Views of Discipleship

Church members participant	Survey question		
	After watching the sermon series at expositorypreaching.com, do you believe your understanding of the discipleship process has changed?	After listening to the short sermon series on discipleship, do you believe you understand the discipleship process?	Do you believe your pastor's sermon are effective?
Church member A	yes	yes	yes
Church member B	yes	yes	yes
Church Member C	yes	yes	yes
Church member D	yes	yes	yes
Church member E	yes	yes	yes
Church member F	yes	yes	yes
Church member G	yes	yes	yes
Church member H	yes	yes	yes
Church member I	no	yes	yes
Church member J	yes	yes	yes

Further, Member F and Member C, who had understood the pastor as the sole caregiver of the congregation, both reported in the pre-sermon series survey that the discipleship process begins with the pastor; however, Member F rejected this position of pastoral reliance after watching the video sermon series. This member was also eager to learn more to engage in the discipleship process the way that God has called believers to do. Prior to watching the sermon series, Member F was confident the topical preaching they received throughout their Christian life was

adequately helping them to develop their spiritual life. Interestingly, before the sermon series, church members E, F, G, and H scored poorly in their assessment of the discipleship process, but their scores drastically improved following the sermon series. This suggests that even after being Christians for as long as they have been, they still fail to fully grasp the concept of discipleship and their role as disciples.

The three participants who provided an adequate definition for the discipleship process in the pre-sermon series survey reported an even better definition for discipleship in the post-sermon series survey, showing a better understanding of the topic (see figure 4.2). This shows that the sermon series did affect the way they understood discipleship. However, other factors may have contributed to their lack of knowledge of discipleship, including inadequate leadership.

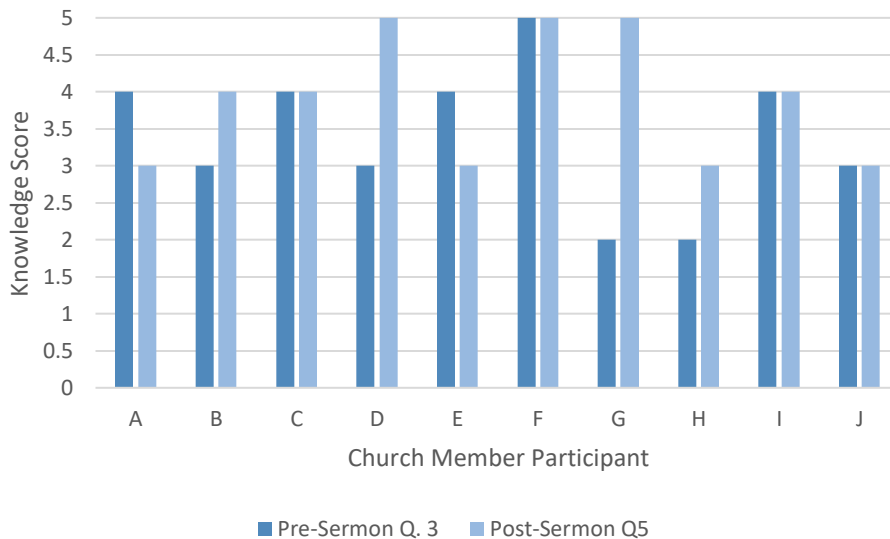


Figure 4.2. Defining Discipleship

One may only speculate as whether the participants are grounded in their faith while others are easily moved from doctrine to doctrine. The pre-sermon series survey reveals nine out

of the ten member surveyed believe discipleship is the duty of a pastor, not a church member. Further, Member G, who did not believe discipleship to be a process, provided an inadequate definition of discipleship: “God’s Word.”

Member G did not consider themselves to be a disciple of Christ yet claimed to have been a Christian for more than ten years. However, Member G did believe that all Christians should understand the discipleship process. Member G’s commitment to growing in the grace and knowledge of God involves “loving God” and “reading his Word.” Member G also understood their primary spiritual gift to be sharing the gospel with other people and exercised their spiritual gift by witnessing to other people. Member G believed they could improve as a disciple and that understanding the discipleship process will help them become a better disciple.

Member G suggested that discipleship is carried out within the church as a whole by “obedience to the Word that is taught,” but they did not know how discipleship is important outside a church service. Member G is actively involved in a church, has not been part of a discipleship group or program, and believed discipleship is very important.

Church members who believed discipleship to be a process provided a wide range of answers when they were asked to describe the process of discipleship. For instance, one member described the discipleship process as helping young Christians learn how to be model Christians and studying the Bible with them. Another member suggested that the discipleship process is much like mentoring. Others, suggested that the discipleship process begins with a minister or pastor, who equips Christians to spread the Word and make disciples by helping them understand the Word of God. Again, another member suggested that the pastor initiates the discipleship process through the Word of God. In return, they as Christians then begin practicing what their

pastor has instructed them by reaching out to others and training them, and eventually disciples begin to multiply.

Despite claiming to understand the discipleship process, three out of the ten members surveyed understood the process of discipleship to consist of simply learning more about God and growing spiritually (see figure 4.3). Only one member claimed to not understand what expository preaching is. The other members provided similar definitions that suggested they understood expository preaching to be a verse-by-verse explanation of Scripture to help people understand the text clearly (see figure 4.4). One member specifically expressed that expository preaching is the extraction of biblical principles from the text and application of them in a contemporary setting.

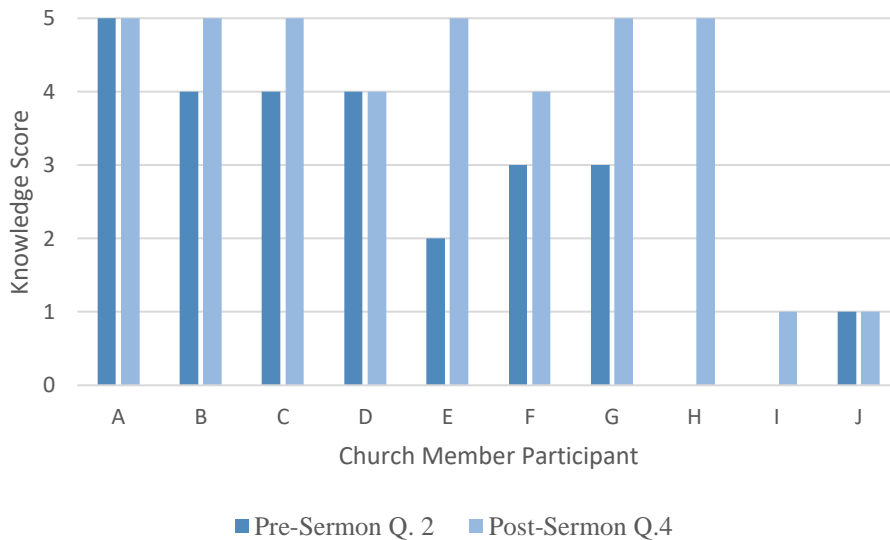


Figure 4.3. Defining the Discipleship Process

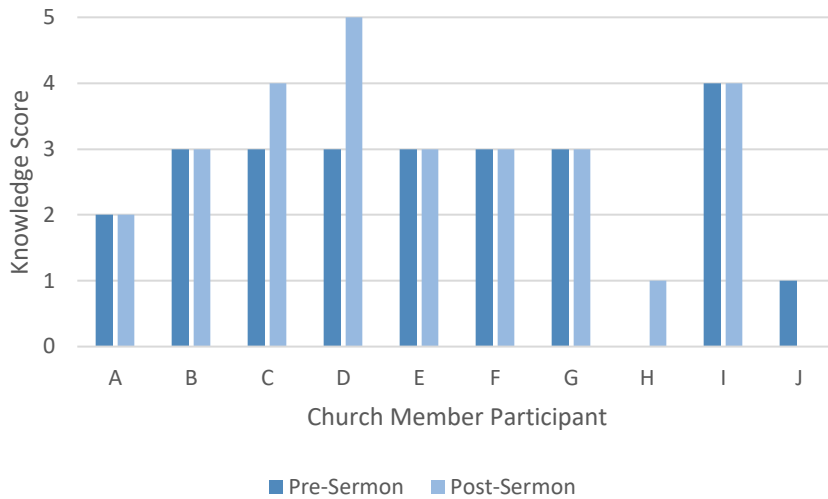


Figure 4.4. Understanding Expository Preaching

After watching the sermon series, 9 of the 10 congregation member's understanding of discipleship and their role as Christians changed (see Table 4.5). For instance, Member F understood their role in spreading the gospel but did not think discipling was as important as witnessing to unbelievers. Also, Member D, after watching the sermon series, changed their understanding of discipleship as a commitment to invest in their own spiritual life so that they can invest in others who will then be able to disciples others. Member F now believes that discipleship is an integral part of the Christian life. Further, Member F understands that discipleship is not something believers carry out by themselves, but something that involves investing in the lives of other people, and something they will practice in the future.

Table 4.5 Post-Sermon Questions Discipleship Process and Sermon Importance

Church members participant	Survey question		
	After watching the sermon series at expositorypreaching.com, do you believe your understanding of the discipleship process has changed?	After listening to the short sermon series on discipleship, do you believe you understand the discipleship process?	Do you believe your pastor's sermon are effective?
Church member A	yes	yes	yes
Church member B	yes	yes	yes
Church Member C	yes	yes	yes
Church member D	yes	yes	yes
Church member E	yes	yes	yes
Church member F	yes	yes	yes
Church member G	yes	yes	yes
Church member H	yes	yes	yes
Church member I	no	yes	yes
Church member J	yes	yes	yes

Some have changed their understanding of the discipleship process but have yet to fully grasp the concept. For example, Member G claims their understanding of the discipleship process has changed. However, it is unclear whether they grasped the concepts taught in the sermon series, because they now say the discipleship process is about dedication and being strong and faithful. Also, Member J says their understanding of discipleship changed after watching the sermons. However, like Member G, they understand discipleship to mean sharing

their faith more. Member H also claims to understand the discipleship process, describing it as believing in Christ, practicing obedience, and making a commitment to share their faith. Moreover, Member C understands the discipleship process to consist of living out one's Christian life by having a positive testimony.

Member B had only thought about winning people to Christ. However, Member B now believes that discipleship is more than just training their children in the faith but an obligation to training new believers in the faith. Before the sermon series, Member B believed it was simply the pastor's and Bible teacher's job to disciple new believers; and now seek to dedicate themselves to the developing younger Christians in the faith.

Only Member G believes their understanding of the discipleship process has not changed. In the post-sermon series survey, Member G described the discipleship process as a duty to win the lost, teach new believers, and equip them to repeat the discipleship process. Member G reported the same definition on the pre-sermon series survey.

The fundamental question is this: If the congregation receives expository preaching, will church members better understand the discipleship process? All members that were surveyed had spent at least ten years sitting under topical preaching that was themed for holidays and special events. All the participants have recently been exposed to expository preaching, but none has been involved in a discipleship group, nor has any engaged in one-on-one mentoring.

The surveys show that a majority of the participants had a better understanding of the discipleship process after watching the sermon series. What's more, these church members also see the need to further grow in their faith so that they are better equipped not just to share their faith but to step alongside other believers and guide them to be the disciples they are called by God to be.

Church Member Interviews

Five of the ten congregation members who participated in the research project also took part in a brief phone interview. All participants in the interview believed that they did have a good walk with Christ, but that there was room for improvement. Church member who participated in the interviews stated they had been a Christians for thirty-five to fifty years. Mentorship is key for a growing Christian to engage in the discipleship process. However, out of the five members interviewed, only two stated that they had engaged in one-on-one mentoring. When asked to clarify, the church members who did not engage in discipleship explained that their mentorship did not involve training disciples to be disciples, but rather being there for them in a time of need or helping them. This is a good start to becoming a biblical disciple, but it is not clear that these interviewees understood the real purpose of mentoring.

Participants suggested that biblical preaching, honesty, and leadership are the qualities they look for in a pastor. When asked what compels them to come to church, all stated the fellowship and time that can be spent together as a whole. The researcher had hoped that the church members attended church in order to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ so that they might be more effective disciples. However, all responded in a fashion that emphasized personal growth and failed to mention investing in the lives of other people.

Greg Ogden states, “To deny yourself means to deny your self-lordship. It means saying no to the god who is me, to reject the demands of the god who is me, to refuse to obey the claims of the god who is me.”¹³² Christians should seek to serve at their church rather than to have the church serve them. The participants in the discipleship study seem to have gained a sense of the

¹³² Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 14.

biblical concept of discipleship after watching the video series, but there is still room for them to grow in this area.

Pastoral Staff Surveys

Pastors have a significant influence on the spiritual development of their churches. Often, pastors find themselves torn between effective ministry and caring for the needs of their own families. Consequently, effective preaching and discipleship programs are fundamental to the success of any given local church. Therefore, the success of the pastor's ministry and the spiritual growth of the congregation will be determined by the disposition of the pastor regarding preaching and the discipleship process.

The researcher assumed that the pastors and their respective churches that claim to be healthy practice expository preaching and have sound discipleship within their congregations. Five out of the five pastors who participated in the study have been in the ministry for at least fifteen years. They all have experience within a traditional church, and four out of the five pastors have transitioned their churches into a hybrid style of worship that is fundamentally traditional but has focused on incorporating small groups into weekly ministry.

All the participating pastors believe that discipleship is a process. All believe that discipleship is an important aspect of their lives and their congregant's lives. Notably, three out of five of the pastors seem to communicate the discipleship process clearly to their congregation on a regular basis (see figure 4.5).

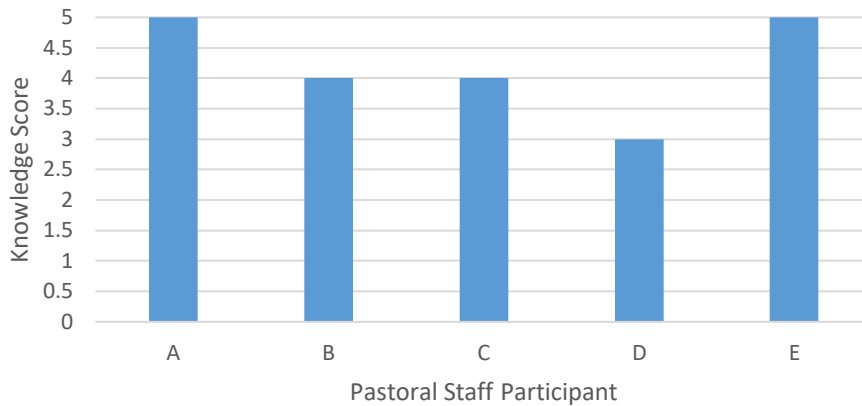


Figure 4.5. Communicating the Discipleship Process

The pastors who were surveyed lead both small and large congregations and are in both rural and urban areas (see figure 4.6). Some reported that their congregations are made up of blue-collar workers, whereas others reported congregations that consist of upper-class Americans. Pastors A, B, and D reported a congregation size of about 101-200 people, Pastor E reported a congregation size of 101–200 people, and Pastor C reported a congregation of less than 50. Pastors A, B, C, and D reported that 25–49 percent of their congregations consisted of godly disciples. Pastor E reported that 75 percent of his congregation consisted of godly disciples who actively engaged in the discipleship process.

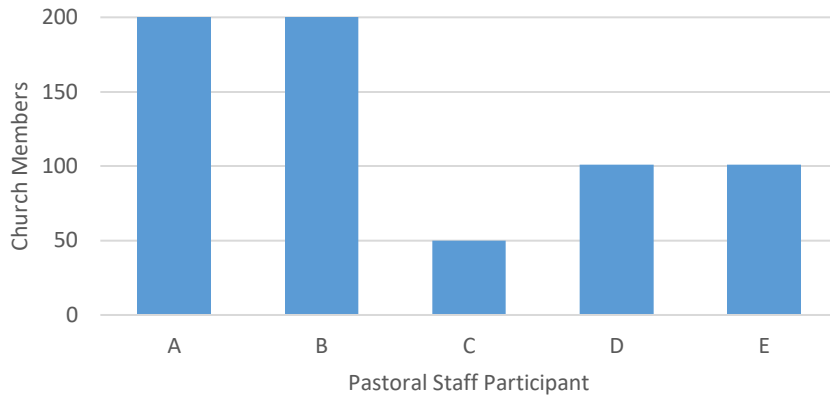


Figure 4.6 Reported Church Membership

Pastor E noted that he makes an effort to reiterate the discipleship process in every ministry setting. Further, his church practiced discipleship before his pastorate. Pastor E reported that his messages are expository and have a dual purpose of equipping the saints in the faith and sharing the message of the gospel to the lost. All the pastors believed their congregation should be moving forward in its relationship with the Lord, becoming disciples who make disciples. While there are some differences between definitions of discipleship, all of the definitions provided by the pastors demonstrate similar principles and understanding as it pertains to the discipleship process.

Pastor A suggested that discipleship has two parts: The first is the work of a mature believer helping a younger believer grow in Christ; the second is the work of a less mature believer allowing the Scriptures to mature him or her into the image of God. Pastor B defined discipleship as the act of leading another believer through spiritual disciplines for him or her to mature in Christ. Pastor D suggested that discipleship is an opportunity to mentor someone seeking to learn a certain trade or skill.

Mentors should teach Christians to implement spiritual disciplines in their own lives so that they can strive to be more like Christ. Pastor E suggested that discipleship as the ability to lead and the humility to follow. Further, Pastor E suggested that a disciple will come alongside another believer, encouraging him or her to surrender to the will of God.

Three out of the five pastors suggested that spiritual disciplines are integral to a disciple’s spiritual growth. Pastor E suggested that spiritual disciplines are the practices that all Christians can take part in to promote their growth in the Lord. However, Pastor D was much more specific, suggesting that the practices are necessary to maintain a healthy relationship with Lord.

Pastor D also pointed out that prayer, reading the Bible, fasting, tithing, and fellowship with other believers is vital to church growth and development. Also, Pastor A described spiritual disciplines as lessons gleaned from Scripture that bring about the spiritual growth of a believer. Moreover, Pastor B found that prayer and Bible study are the main spiritual disciplines necessary live their role as a Christian and pastor. Pastor E defines spiritual disciplines as routine practices helping believers to continue to grow in their relationship with God (see figure 4.7)

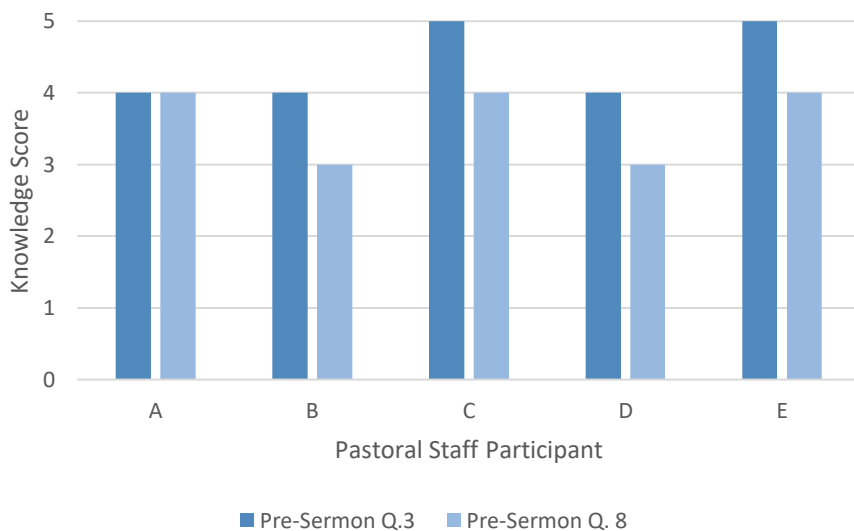


Figure 4.7. Pastoral Spiritual Disciplines

Fundamental to the spiritual growth and development of the church are the context and purpose of the sermons that are preached. For example, if a pastor spends the majority of his ministry preaching evangelistic sermons, the congregation will most likely be driven to evangelize to other people. Consequently, the sermon should equip the saints in the faith while also sharing the message of salvation with those who have not yet decided to follow Christ. The equipping of the saints in the faith is a necessary element of discipleship. Therefore, if sermons are designed merely to evangelize, then the spiritual growth of a disciple will be hindered.

Pastor E reported that the purpose of the sermon depends on the text that is being preached on a particular day. Consequently, if a preacher engages in true biblical exposition, there is substantial reason to believe that he is equipping the saints in the faith as well as sharing the message of the gospel. When asked how he teaches his congregation about the discipleship process, Pastor E responded that the discipleship process is central to the work of his church. Therefore, it is taught, mentioned, and encouraged in every area of ministry within the church. Not only is his church continuing to thrive, but the discipleship process is at the core of the church's belief system.

All the pastors who were surveyed had received some type of pastoral education through either a Bible college or a university. Two out of the five pastors hold doctor of ministry degrees, two hold at least a bachelor's degree, and one is working towards the completion of an undergraduate degree in ministry. However, their belief of the importance of pastoral education varied (see Figure 4.8)

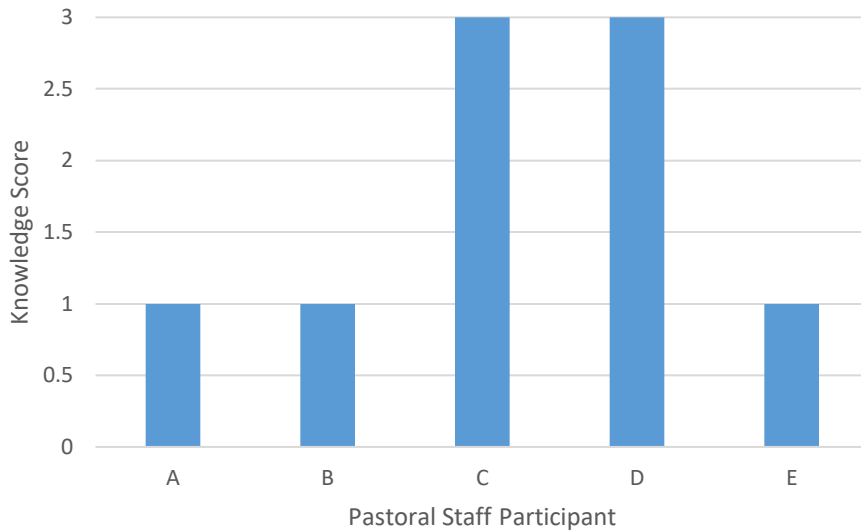


Figure 4.8. Importance of Pastoral Education

Four believed their church is growing spiritually and have incorporated discipleship programs into their ministries. Not only do these pastors describe their churches as healthy, but the majority of their respective churches actively engage in discipleship and one-on-one mentoring.

These pastors give extensive planning and time to their sermons, and while they may differ in their understandings of the main purpose of the sermon, the results show that their expository sermons and the congregation’s understanding of the discipleship process are linked. However, the pastors do not stop at teaching the discipleship process—they also use small groups and one-on-one mentorship to cultivate the spiritual development of their churches.

Pastoral Staff Interviews

All the pastors who took part in the study also participated in a follow-up phone interview. Participating pastors understand their most important duty is to remain faithful to the Word of God. Therefore, only one out of the five pastors interviewed did not see his church as a healthy church, and even he described the congregation as moving in the right direction.

This pastor—Pastor C—made it known that for several decades his church had sat under poorly constructed sermons. He reported that a new senior pastor took over in his church last year. Under the new pastor, sermons have been well prepared and expository in nature, and the church is progressing as a whole in the discipleship process. Previously, sermons were topical and were either downloaded from the internet or copied from a sermon manuscript help book.

The remaining four pastors described their preaching as expository. They said that when it was appropriate to preach a topical sermon, they took several measures to be sure the text was properly exegeted.

All the pastors interviewed stressed the need to balance discipleship and evangelism in their ministry context. Moreover, they believed that the lack of discipleship and church growth within Baptist churches is due to the lack of biblical preaching, the push for evangelism, and a failure to develop disciples for Christ. All five pastors do practice one-on-one mentoring (See Figure 4.9). Their ministry consists of preaching, teaching, one-on-one mentoring, and biblical counseling. Pastor C is the only pastor who did not report that he is involved in leading a small group. Further, Pastor C has noted that his church does not have a discipleship program, is a traditional church, and for many years has relied on the pastor to perform discipleship duties. The pastor has been understood to be the sole caregiver of the church.

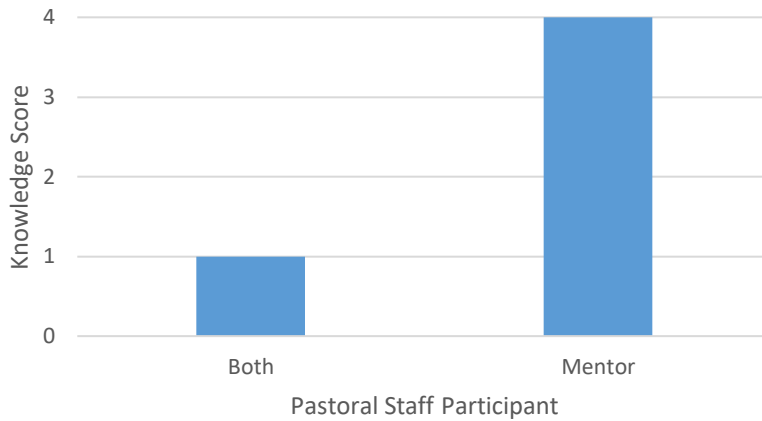


Figure 4.9. Primary Focus of Ministry

The surveyed pastors who practice expository preaching have congregations that are more focused on making disciples who make disciples. Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey state, “Discipleship is not merely a matter of information remembered. It is about a lifestyle that is practiced. It is a lifestyle of absolute abandonment to loving God and obeying His commands.”¹³³ Further, the information from the interviews and surveys of the pastoral staff participants reveals that persistent emphasis on discipleship in all areas of ministry within the church, including the main service, Sunday school, and small groups, is associated with a congregation that is visibly engaged with making disciples within and outside the church (See Figure 4.10)

¹³³ Early and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .*, 51.

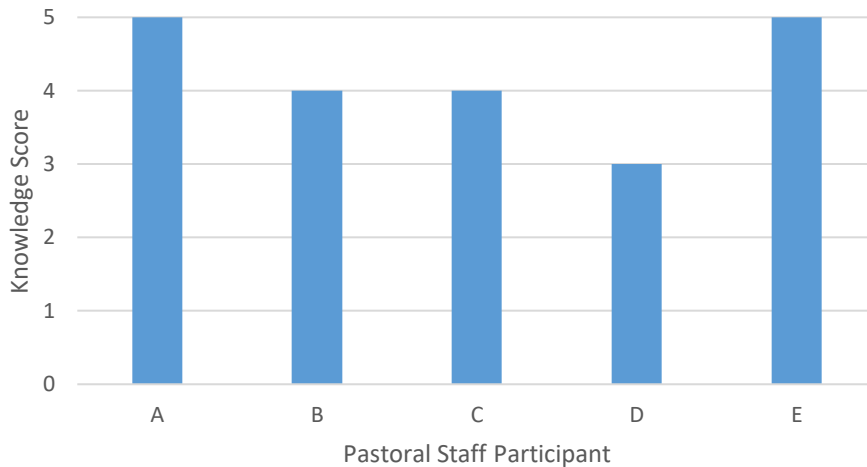


Figure 4.10. Pastoral Communication of the Discipleship Process

For the church to grow spiritually, the pastor himself must grow spiritually. Tamara Anderson and Shelly Skinner state, “The overarching goal is to be intentional in programming so that disciple-making and the multiplication of disciples (Jesus’ example with His disciples) is the outcome.”¹³⁴ Nevertheless, the example a pastor demonstrates to his congregation is also vital to the overall health of their churches. The surveyed pastors who have successful ministries see all areas of ministry as important but find it extremely important to focus their time on discipleship, mentorship, and sermon quality rather than on other areas of ministry, especially pastoral calls.

Kenneth Boa states,

Discipleship training programs stress different skills and techniques, but the most common training objectives include Bible study skills (e.g., reading, indicative study methods, memorization, meditation), cultivation of a daily quiet (devotional) time, methods of prayer, how to share one’s faith with others, discerning Gods’ will, identification and use of spiritual gifts, laying hold of spiritual resources, dealing with temptation, and leadership development.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Tamara L. Anderson and Shelly A. Skinner, “Feelings: Discipleship That Understands the Affective Processes of a Disciple of Christ,” *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (April 2019): 70.

¹³⁵ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 380.

Churches that balance discipleship and evangelism, practice expository preaching, and make it a priority to reiterate the biblical mandate of discipleship seem to have a successful ministry, and the members of their congregations are actively involved in discipleship. However, churches that have not been influenced by expository preaching and do not have active discipleship programs have fewer disciples in their church, have low attendance, and struggle to remain healthy.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Spiritual Growth and Development

A pastor's relationship and love for their congregation is crucial to the spiritual development of disciples. David Horner suggests growing in a Christ-like love is a gradual process.¹³⁶ Leading begins with the leader. All pastors should be students of the Word of God throughout their ministries and lives. Bill Hull understands humility as the greatest character trait for a pastor to have: the same humility that Christ modeled.¹³⁷ Humility binds the pastor to Christ, who then is able to work through the pastor to reach his congregation. Unfortunately, ministry success is wrongly understood by many, as Joseph Stowell suggests, "In reading most leadership literature, it would be easy to conclude that success is measured by the outcomes that the leader is able to produce. Successful leaders may have been measured by the size and scope of the enterprise—its branding, its national recognition, its profitability, and at times the notoriety of the leader."¹³⁸ Nothing could be further from the truth. Ministry success should be gauged by the actions of the congregants that receive a pastor's instruction.

Humility is not the same as shame; however, the world will shame Christians for their faith in God. A leader must not compromise the message of the gospel to appease the world outside the church. Timothy S. Laniak explains, "The apostle asserts that believers not only

¹³⁶ David Horner, *A Practical Guide for Life and Ministry: Overcoming 7 Challenges Pastors Face* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 120.

¹³⁷ Bill Hull, *The Christian Leader: Rehabilitating Our Addiction to Secular Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 102.

¹³⁸ Joseph M. Stowell, *Redefining Leadership: Character-Driven Habits of Effective Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 25.

imitate their suffering Servant, they also participate in his sufferings.”¹³⁹ The theme of suffering rings throughout the letters to Timothy. Consequently, expository preaching causes one to preach principles that could be offensive to some people.

Developing Christian character is a necessary process for all disciples, not just for leaders. As for the pastor, his character is foundational to the overall direction of the church. Therefore, as Stowell points out, a leader has a choice to make between being a leader who strives for an organizational outcome the world values and being a character-driven leader as God requires.¹⁴⁰ A pastor who fails to fulfill his biblical mandate to “equip the saints in the faith” causes the entire congregation to suffer as a whole. Hull states, “The Christian’s struggle to be humble is amplified by the fact that we do not live in a humble culture. Yes, there are pockets of humility, but humility is not the foundation of the modern culture as it once was.”¹⁴¹ Poor leadership results in an unhealthy church that fails to empower the congregation to fulfill the Great Commission.

The development of Christian disciples requires the Christian leader to model discipleship before them. Gary McIntosh agrees that the disciple is to go and win people to Christ, teach and instruct them, and then send them to make disciples.¹⁴² Therefore, the pastor should be a model of a biblical disciple before the congregation. Brian Croft reminds the church that “through these apostles, the early church leadership structure is established, and the responsibilities and roles of those who lead, care for, and shepherd God’s people are clarified. As

¹³⁹ Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Chicago: Downers Grove, 2006), 231.

¹⁴⁰ Stowell, *Redefining Leadership*, 45.

¹⁴¹ Hull, *Christian Leader*, 102.

¹⁴² Gary L. McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth: How You Can Work with God to Build a Faithful Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 65.

we will see, many of the responsibilities for leadership and care are passed down from the apostles to those called to be pastors—God’s shepherd-leaders in the church.”¹⁴³

Importance of Sermon Quality

Derek Prime and Alistair Begg suggest that there is no better time than the here and now for a pastor to evaluate his sermon content.¹⁴⁴ Taking Prime and Begg’s thoughts a step further, the biblical mandate for a pastor to be a male is also rejected by a majority of the world outside the church. However, that does not mean it is time to preach a topical sermon that justifies men in the pulpit and women as quiet bystanders. Rather, it is a time to focus on Christ-centered expository preaching that provides the necessary nourishment for spiritual growth. As Jay Kesler states, “There is tremendous danger of inoculation. As a little bit of cowpox will keep you from getting smallpox, so little doses of the gospel will prevent you from an inflammation of faith.”¹⁴⁵ Spiritual development is dependent on Bible intake—and if one does not eat, one dies. Sermons that lack substance lack the protein necessary for spiritual growth.

Contrary to what some may believe, expository preaching is not an academic process that neglects the power of the Holy Spirit in sermon preparation. Rick Yount states, “Proper discipleship requires the intentional, ongoing engagement of the Holy Spirit as Discipler. Without Him, discipleship plans and programs must fail because, being human-driven, they have no power within themselves to transform hearts.”¹⁴⁶ The spiritual formation of the congregation

¹⁴³ Brian Croft, *Prepare Them to Shepherd: Test, Train, Affirm, and Send the Next Generation of Pastors* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 33.

¹⁴⁴ Derek Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work* (Chicago: Moody, 2004), 117–18.

¹⁴⁵ Jay Kesler, “Overfed, Underchallenged: A Message Must Do Battle for the Will,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators*, ed. Haddon W. Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 10.

¹⁴⁶ Rick Yount, “The Mind: Discipleship That Forms the Thoughts of Christians—Reflections on Dallas Willard’s Thinking on the Mind (Thoughts),” *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (April 2019): 63.

must be cultivated through the pulpit. Expository preaching does not hinder the Spirit of God from moving in the lives of church members. John Carrick points out the work of the Holy Spirit does not negate the pastor's obligation to persuade nonbelievers to turn to Christ, nor does it negate the need for Christians to practice godliness.¹⁴⁷

Where Preaching Falls Short

While expository preaching is vital to the spiritual development of believers, not all areas of discipleship can be accessed from the pulpit. Pastors must heed the instruction from Paul to train others to lead the ministry. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the spiritual gifts God has given the congregation and place them appropriately within the church. For example, Dave Earley and Ben Gutierrez said it should be clear to a pastor and the congregation when a person has the call on his or her life to vocational ministry, as this giftedness is obvious.¹⁴⁸

John Hammett believes the teaching ministry begins with the pastor but overflows in classes designed for each believer's specific ministry.¹⁴⁹ The lead pastor of a church should have the primary role in discipling his staff and volunteer teachers. As he leads, the church must follow. Discipleship takes time. It is important for the pastor to spend one-on-one time with all church teachers practicing both discipleship and accountability. If this is done, the discipleship process will continue through the teachers into the classrooms designed in a ministry setting.

Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby state, "The Ultimate goal of spiritual leadership is not to

¹⁴⁷ John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2002), 3.

¹⁴⁸ Dave Earley and Ben Gutierrez, *Ministry Is . . . : How to Serve Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2010).

¹⁴⁹ John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregal, 2005), 229.

achieve numerical results, to accomplish tasks with perfection, or to grow for growth's sake. It is to take their people from where they are to where God wants them to be."¹⁵⁰

The Conviction of a Pastor

A pastor has a specific duty to care for and equip God's people as he has been commanded to do. Often, a pastor may even find himself helpless when it comes to implementing a plan to improve spiritual growth and discipleship within the church. However, by learning, developing, and using expository sermons, a pastor may find that his congregation has a better understanding not only of discipleship but of other areas of the Christian life, such as stewardship, serving, marriage, and child-rearing. There is a time and place for topical preaching; however, the Bible does not consist of topics merely, but of timeless principles that can be applied in any setting, culture, or time.

Before a church can grow spiritually it must first know how to grow spiritually. According to Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, "A disciple is a person who follows Jesus, is transformed by Jesus, and joins Jesus on his mission; that's the job of every believer."¹⁵¹ Before this research project, the majority of the surveyed members of NorthPointe Baptist Church provided a static definition of the discipleship process. However, after the project was implemented, the same congregants began to see discipleship as an action that God requires each Christian to partake.

Spiritual Impact of Expository Preaching

Analysis of the pastoral responses in this study suggests that churches that receive expository preaching regularly are more likely to have a healthier church environment.

¹⁵⁰ Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2010), 127.

¹⁵¹ Putman and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, 120.

Discipleship is the focus of these church's ministry. Kenneth Boa states, "There are three primary dynamics in the discipleship process: exposing, equipping, and encouraging/exhorting. The first centers on the example and character of the discipler, the second centers on the nature of the teaching and training, and the third centers on the accountability and character of the disciple."¹⁵² While none of the surveyed pastors accredited their preaching style to the development of the church, it is possible that the content of their preaching strengthens the discipleship structure their churches have set up.

The problem at NorthPointe Baptist Church is that the people know what a disciple is but fail to understand the discipleship process. Before this research project, the researcher believed the members of NorthPointe Baptist Church had not received adequate training in discipleship due to a failure to communicate the timeless biblical principles within the Sacred Text. The results of this study suggest that the content of the discipleship sermons did affect how 90 percent of the participants understood discipleship and their role as Christians. However, multiple factors may have influenced this change of mind, and while some participants were able to clearly define the discipleship process by the end of the study, it is clear that 60 percent of the participants failed to fully understand the discipleship process even though they do have a better grasp of it.

It would be difficult to predict how the congregants will respond to their newfound understanding of the discipleship process, because many factors may have influenced their thinking. For example, participants may have simply responded in the way that they thought they should rather than expressing what they believe. James Wilhoit states, "Christian spiritual formation refers to the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God

¹⁵² Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 377.

and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁵³ Moreover, some church members may not be grounded in their faith and thus may be easily moved by every doctrine they hear. If any study participants were easily moved by the sermon series, they may change their mind when they hear a different view of discipleship.

It is quite possible that NorthPointe Baptist Church’s problem is not a lack of expository preaching but rather failed leadership. After all, not only have the members surveyed been Christians for some time, but their lack of understanding and failure to serve Christ may simply be due to a leadership flaw. The previous pastor of NorthPointe Baptist Church spent the majority of his time making pastoral calls and using personal time to take care of the needs of his wife. Consequently, prioritizing other areas of ministry over sermon preparation and study may have had a substantial impact on the congregation’s understanding of their role in the Body of Christ.

The Value of Time

The results of this study do suggest the importance of a pastor’s pulpit duty. As Calvin Miller suggests, “It [The pulpit] is a great place to stand, for the ongoing sermon at the center of the community will in time create the community.”¹⁵⁴ In the traditional church, a pastor has perhaps only an hour of influence on the lives of his congregation. Therefore, one must remember that while pastoral calls are important, other areas of ministry cannot be neglected for sick visits. Marcus Davidson reminds us that “according to the writing of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:11–12, the pastor/teacher has a biblical mandate to equip the members of the body

¹⁵³ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation*, 23.

¹⁵⁴ Miller, *Preaching*, 212.

of Christ for ministry. This is clear biblical evidence that the pastor has a responsibility to be integrally involved in developing church members into ministry leaders.”¹⁵⁵

A pastor has a significant influence on the spiritual growth of the people in his congregation. A pastor should embrace that influence by training and equipping disciples within the church. The church members can then help meet the needs of fellow congregants as God has called them to do. Liam Miller states, “Christification provides a way of doing Christology that compels the Christian community to go beyond themselves, encountering and learning from the least in their context.”¹⁵⁶ In this context, pastors can focus on sermon and study materials while resting confidently in the knowledge that the needs of their congregations are being met. James Thompson states, “The focus of Paul’s imagery of planting and growth is that, despite the Corinthians’ focus on individual leaders, ‘God gives the increase.’”¹⁵⁷ God allows the world to continue despite humankind’s constant rebellion. Philip Yancey states, “The only possible explanation lies in Jesus’ teaching that the kingdom of God comes in stages. It is ‘Now’ and also ‘Not yet,’ present and also future. Sometimes Jesus stressed the present aspect, as when he said the kingdom is ‘at hand’ or ‘within you.’ At other times he suggested the kingdom lay in the future as when he taught his disciples to pray.”¹⁵⁸

The participating pastors suggested their personal spiritual health is vital to train and equip disciples in their respective churches. The results of the pastoral surveys and interviews

¹⁵⁵ Marcus Demond Davidson, “Developing Church Members into Ministry Leaders at the New Mount Olive Baptist Church, Fort Lauderdale, Florida” (DMin diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 11.

¹⁵⁶ Liam Miller, “Christification of the Least: Potential for Christology and Discipleship,” *Studies in World Christianity* 24, no. 3 (2018): 272.

¹⁵⁷ James Thompson, *Ministry According to Paul: A Biblical Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 14.

¹⁵⁸ Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 251.

indicated the participants believe the spiritual discipline of a Christ-like love is the key factor of a growing church. James Lang and David Bochman state, “While God’s love is the central theme throughout the entire [discipleship] process, participants come to experience that love in the context of a more profound recognition of their own sinfulness, brokenness, and need for grace.”¹⁵⁹ Perhaps love can be defined as time. Spending sincere time with Christ results in a deeper love for Him. The pastor who focuses their time to engage personally in the lives of the congregation is a demonstration of love.

Church leaders must be prepared to deliver their sermons effectively. Liam Miller states, “Since the christified at least embody or represent Jesus in a way that carries his revelatory, soteriological and sanctifying role, they necessarily shape the development of Christology and, subsequently, Christian discipleship and ethics.”¹⁶⁰ All the pastors surveyed found the main church service to be vital for the spiritual growth and development of their congregations, as well as to supplement what is learned in discipleship groups, life groups, and one-on-one mentoring.

Rather than waiting until the last minute to prepare a sermon, successful pastors have their sermons prepared in advance and are more than familiar with the subject and content they are orating to their congregations. Grigg states, “Many churches put more time, energy, and resources into who is keeping track of expenditures, than in training up faithful men who will be the indispensable link in the process of the multiplication of Christian disciples. If faithful believers never teach less mature disciples, Christianity ceases to spread.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Lang and Bochman, “Positive Outcomes of a Discipleship Process,” 71.

¹⁶⁰ Liam Miller, “Christification of the Least,” 272.

¹⁶¹ Grigg, “Developing a Small Group Discipleship Model,” 28.

One pastor described how it is a comfort to know his congregation is self-sufficient, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. He described his church as “never missing a beat”: church members were a moving force in the community while also living out the lives of disciples.

A pastor should not assume that his congregation understands what it means to be a disciple: “A disciple is a person who follows Jesus, is transformed by Jesus, and joins Jesus on his mission; that’s the job of every believer.”¹⁶² Rather, a pastor should make sure his congregation understands the discipleship process. A failure to do so may result in a declining congregation or even in church closure. Hull states, “In order to flourish, people need trust, grace, humility, submission, and affirmation in their environment.”¹⁶³

Regardless of the ministry setting, it is crucial to take steps to ensure that the congregation understands its role in the Body of Christ. Expository preaching has a benefit over topical or narrative preaching: For example, Sidney Greidanus states, “If preachers preach their own word, the congregation may listen politely but has every right to disregard their sermon as just another person’s opinion. If a contemporary preacher preaches with authority, however, the congregation can no longer dismiss their sermons as merely personal opinions but must respond to them as authoritative messages.”¹⁶⁴

There are several examples of discipleship within the New Testament. Perhaps one that most are familiar with is the apostle Paul’s mentorship of Timothy. The apostle Paul was not able to minister to all the churches he visited or planted. Therefore, he took the time to train up

¹⁶² Putman and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, 120.

¹⁶³ Hull, *Complete Book of Discipleship*, 155.

¹⁶⁴ Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 12.

leaders to serve as pastors and deacons to accomplish the Great Commission. His investment in Timothy did not just consist in verbal training, but in leading by example, reminding Timothy to continue to develop spiritually.

Tamara Anderson and Shelly Skinner are correct when they state “Christ-followers are Spirit-filled Christians who bear fruit. This is the process of growing in Christ and the task of the church.”¹⁶⁵ Looking directly at Timothy’s life shows that not only did Paul invest in him, but his mother and grandmother did as well. Generational discipleship is something that should be taught and demonstrated within the church. Further, while a focus on discipling our families is important, it is equally important to equip other Christians with whom we might not be as close, for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Discipleship programs are vital to the spiritual growth of Christians. Spiritual formation in its essence is the process undertaken by God in Christ through the Spirit that forms his effective presence and character within our spirit. Greg Ogden states, “The question is whether we will be mediocre Christians or growing Christians. A major factor in determining the answer is whether or not we develop the discipline of quiet time.”¹⁶⁶ Paul Pettit adds, “Paul is saying that such truth cannot be formed apart from an identity with and engagement of him and his community.”¹⁶⁷ However, compelling the congregants of a traditional church to participate in discipleship classes, small groups, and one-on-one discipleship may be close to impossible if the church members do not understand why they need to participate in those things. Bruce Epperly states, “Spirituality involves being fully alive to our experience, the calling of the moment, the

¹⁶⁵ Anderson and Skinner, “Feelings,” 66–78.

¹⁶⁶ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 22.

¹⁶⁷ Paul Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008), 112.

voices of children and elders, and the ‘sighs too deep for words’ inspiring us to be faithful to God by our fidelity to the world.”¹⁶⁸

One must not assume that the methods that previously helped to stimulate church growth in the traditional church, such as bus ministry and Sunday school, will continue to be effective in a changing culture. Keisha Hodge states, “After his departure, he sent the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost has many functions, including comforting, interceding, and guiding. The guidance of the Holy Ghost helps followers of Christ accomplish great and important things.”¹⁶⁹

Research Gaps

There is a gap in research regarding the effect of preaching and exactly how a church thrives and why some churches have become unhealthy or have closed their doors. Some have dismissed expository preaching, denying that it is a valuable means to develop and produce disciples that are rooted in Christ; however, others disagree. For example, Joel Breidenbaugh states, “Even though some criticize expository preaching as mere informational preaching which does not affect one’s behavior, research shows that teaching biblical doctrine affects both how one thinks and acts.”¹⁷⁰

The traditional church has used many different methods to effectively minister to people in the past. However, while these methods may have been effective in the time and culture where they were used, they are not now. Steve Bruce states, “When a congregation that is fabled for its ability to attract unchurched young people is actually so reliant on a degree of prior religious

¹⁶⁸ Bruce Epperly, *A Center in the Cyclone: Twenty-First Century Clergy Self-Care* (Lenham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 109.

¹⁶⁹ Keisha Hodge, “Becoming Fitly Joined Together: Unifying the Church Body for Vision Manifestation” (DMin diss., Liberty University, 2021), Scholars Crossing: The Institutional Repository of Liberty University.

¹⁷⁰ Joel Breidenbaugh, *Preaching for Bodybuilding: Integrating Doctrine and Expository Preaching for the 21st Century* (n.p.: Renovate, 2016), 178.

socialization that is now rare, we cannot expect religious revival any time soon.”¹⁷¹ It is not the number of members that defines the church—there have always been small churches, and further research may show that megachurches are not as effective as they sometimes seem to be.

Concerning what a congregation should do, Mack Stiles states, “So when we talk about living the life of a Christian, we are talking about living out the themes and implications of the gospel.”¹⁷²

Congregations struggle because of their lack of participation in the ministry of the church. Joseph Hellerman states, “Union with Christ should not remain merely a propositional bullet point in a theological treatise on soteriology. It should cash out in an existential experience of the presence of God in our lives. It certainly did for the apostle Paul, and he longed for the same in the lives of his converts.”¹⁷³ While this is yet something to be researched, it is noteworthy that the hierarchical structure of the traditional church exalts the pastors but considers all nonprofessional clergy to be laymen and women. D.A Carson writes, “As a Christian continues to serve in this world, they can look forward to the resurrection, but until then God will strengthen our inner being.”¹⁷⁴ Eric Hartman believes an unbiblical structure is often what makes church members hesitant to participate in church ministry.¹⁷⁵ Ogden suggests that church members’ feelings of inadequacy and insecurity may be why they choose not to serve.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Steve Bruce, “Further Thoughts on Church Growth and Secularization,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 6, no. 3 (2013): 320.

¹⁷² Mack Stiles, *Evangelism: How the Whole World Speaks of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 33.

¹⁷³ Joseph Hellerman, *Why We Need the Church to Become More Like Jesus: Reflections about Community, Spiritual Formation, and the Story of Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 107.

¹⁷⁴ D. A. Carson, *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014), 162.

¹⁷⁵ Eric Hartman, “Shared Oversight: Equipping Elders to Shepherd the Flock” (DMin diss., Liberty University, 2021), 58, Scholars Crossing: The Institutional Repository of Liberty University.

¹⁷⁶ Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 53.

Therefore, the pastor-leader must remain humble. As Christ said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Matt 9:37). Ogden states, “No hierarchy of value exists in the body of Christ because Christ values all of us equally. Any hint of devaluing our own importance or the importance of others undermines the oneness of the body and our celebration of diversity.”¹⁷⁷ Before attempting to change the church structure, it may be beneficial to educate congregants about discipleship, something this study has shown expository preaching can do.

Pastors of traditional churches often find themselves vulnerable in their vocational position. However, the pressures of ministry are not a cause to neglect the biblical mandate to make disciples. Blackaby and Blackaby state, “One of the worst mistakes leaders commit is making themselves indispensable. Insecurity can drive people to hoard all the leadership initiatives so no one else appears as capable or as successful. At times leaders become so immersed in their own work they fail to develop other leaders.”¹⁷⁸ Pastors and church members alike must remind themselves that their walk with Christ is by faith, and regardless of circumstances, one must keep the faith.

The work of the disciple requires discipline and commitment in every area of one’s life. While success is not defined by numbers, churches should still succeed. Earley states, “If we hope to be the prevailing church Jesus predicted, we must pray for our leaders. If we hope to become the leaders our churches need us to be, we must train our people to pray for us.”¹⁷⁹ Moreover, for a congregation to thrive, leaders must remain in prayer; they must also be good communicators and teachers.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 58.

¹⁷⁸ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 135.

¹⁷⁹ Dave Earley, *Prayer: The Timeless Secret of High-Impact Leaders* (Chattanooga, TN: Living Ink, 2008), 58.

Carson states, “Make no mistake: when Christ first moves into our lives, he finds us in very bad repair. It takes a great deal of power to change us, and that is why Paul prays for power.”¹⁸⁰ Therefore, discipleship will not be easy. However, through prayer and the strength of God, a thriving disciple-driven church is possible. Carson states, “He asks that God may so strengthen us by his power in our inner being that Christ may genuinely take up residence within us, transforming us into a house that pervasively reflects his own character.”¹⁸¹

The content of a sermon should not be chosen because of the influence of the world. Rather, the content of the sermon should, in some way, impact the world. This impact may be through the lives of the congregants who hear the message. Stiles states, “Those who oppose the gospel always tell Christians that the modern world has made it irrelevant. They chip away at Christians’ confidence in the power of the gospel.”¹⁸²

Further Research

This study shows that those who have received expository preaching seem to understand the process of discipleship in a much clearer fashion. Further research could indicate whether churches that receive expository preaching regularly require revitalization. Boa states, “Since there is a reciprocal relationship between thinking and habits, attitudes and actions, belief and behavior, it is important to avoid the two extremes of all theory or all technique. The equipping dynamic in the discipleship process should strive for a balanced combination of teaching and training.”¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Carson, *Praying with Paul*, 165.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Stiles, *Evangelism*, 49.

¹⁸³ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 380.

There is a shortage of sound scholarly works on the effectiveness of preaching and the discipleship process. Moreover, many works that allude to the discipleship process fail to recognize the Great Commission as anything more than a church-wide effort to evangelize the world. Most authors forget to even mention that discipleship is central to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. For example, Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen give an overview of Jesus' training of the twelve disciples. Bartholomew and Goheen narrow down the training of the disciples as follows: the disciples are those who must (1) deny themselves and (2) participate in the mission and (3) love God.¹⁸⁴

Ogden states, "An organism view of ministry begins with the people of God as the place where ministry resides, and it conceives of leadership from within the one body. In contrast, an institutional view of ministry defines the territory occupied by its ordained leadership and then attempts to tack on a role for lay ministry."¹⁸⁵ Tim Suttle writes, "Our most celebrated church leaders have been feeding the church the equivalent of performance-enhancing drugs for decades."¹⁸⁶

If subsequent studies show that churches with expository preaching are less likely to need revitalization but churches that do not receive expository preaching are more likely to be revitalized, it will be logical to conclude that the members of the respected churches or their pastors do not understand the discipleship process. It is clear that people who are being instructed in the timeless biblical principles found within the sacred text tend to have a fruitful Christian life.

¹⁸⁴ Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014), 154.

¹⁸⁵ Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 75.

¹⁸⁶ Suttle, *Shrink*, 53.

God may be calling a pastor to make changes or implement new strategies that have never been tried before. Bradley Childres writes, “Revitalization pastors must remember that God is the one who directs the revitalization effort, and the pastor is responsible for leading the people to what God wants for them.”¹⁸⁷ To measure the gap between churches that have been revitalized and those that have not but need revitalization, one would take into consideration the quality of the preaching and a congregation’s understanding of the discipleship process.

A change of thinking by church members regarding the discipleship process does not necessarily mean that they will begin to practice sound discipleship. Klaus Issler states, “To be spiritually formed deeply within our inner life involves our participation in a formation process that is supervised and empowered by God and the Holy Spirit, who indwells each believer forever.”¹⁸⁸

Further research may reveal that the more knowledgeable a church is about the discipleship process, the more open church members are to participating in discipleship groups that could then instruct and equip members to share their faith and to train others to share their faith. Putman and Harrington state, “It is essential for the leadership of a church to have a unified understanding of their goal and purpose as a church. And it’s equally important that they have a unified methodology to accomplish that goal.”¹⁸⁹ John Koessler states, “True humility is focused on others. It does not neglect itself. It continues to look out for its own interests. But it is not willing to do so at the expense of others.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Bradley Kent Childres, “Defining Revitalization as the Initial Step in the Revitalization Process” (DMin diss., Liberty University, 2021), 38, Scholars Crossing: The Institutional Repository of Liberty University.

¹⁸⁸ Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus*, 220.

¹⁸⁹ Putman and Harrington, *Discipleship*, 44.

¹⁹⁰ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 43.

A final suggestion to pastors who find themselves overwhelmed by the ministry and have little or no time for sermon preparation is to take time for themselves. Darrell Bock points out that the biblical authors constantly reminded pastors, deacons, and the church as a whole to seek peace.¹⁹¹ Our God is a God of rest. Michael Wilson and Brad Hoffman state, “The seventh day is sacred—set aside for a special purpose. Rest was a divinely ordained function, and routine labor was expected to be condensed into six-sevenths of our weekly schedule.”¹⁹² There is such thing as burnout, and a weary pastor is not able to tend to the flock of God as God commanded. Peter Scazzero states, “Bearing fruit requires slowing down enough to give Jesus direct access to every aspect of our lives and our leadership. Just because God has access to everything that is true about us does not mean God has access to us. Loving union is an act of surrender—giving God complete access—and we can’t do that in a hurry.”¹⁹³

The spiritual growth of a church requires a pastor’s commitment to the congregation, there should be a balance of time, energy, and rest. Wilson and Hoffman state, “We live in an age of complexity and overcommitment. For most, time for personal refueling is dreadfully missing. While many people dream of having more money, just as many dream of having more time.”¹⁹⁴ Not only is taking time to rest biblical, it is necessary to maintain a healthy ministry. Wilson and Hoffman point out, “A pastor who fails to take routinely take time to rest throughout his ministry, could lead to severe health problems.”¹⁹⁵ Rather than undertaking the entire

¹⁹¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Recovering the Real Lost Gospel: Reclaiming the Gospel as Good News* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2010), 220.

¹⁹² Michael Wilson and Brad Hoffman, *Preventing Ministry Failure: A ShepherdCare Guide for Pastors, Ministers and Other Caregivers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 172.

¹⁹³ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 118.

¹⁹⁴ Wilson and Hoffman, *Preventing Ministry Failure*, 172.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

ministry, failing to train leaders, and watching a church suffer, all pastors must develop disciples and leave all the consequences, whether good or bad, up to Christ. Scazzero states, “Praying for prudence and seeking to practice it to the best of our ability has served us well in our ongoing discernment process. It continues to make an immeasurable contribution to our joy as leaders, especially when joined with radical commitment to do God’s will.”¹⁹⁶

David Horner suggests that the signs of pastoral burnout are not when a pastor’s faith or beliefs have changed, but when he no longer feels close to the Lord and his prayer life lacks conviction.¹⁹⁷ Expository preaching allows a pastor to better balance study time and the other priorities of ministry, such as pastoral calling, training disciples, and equipping leaders. However, a pastor cannot avoid burnout or a failing ministry if he does not choose to train others in a manner that enables him to distribute the duties of ministry to qualified individuals. Wendall Reed states, “Many churches are experiencing spiritual and numerical deficit due to the disparate unfocused discipleship, particularly disciple-makers.”¹⁹⁸ If there is nobody in the church qualified to share duties with the pastor, perhaps it is the pastor who has neglected his duty to “equip the saints” in the faith. Owen Strachan states, “The work of pastoral discipleship is the responsibility of all pastors. Do not think because you have a smaller church that you are either exempt or disqualified from this calling. It is the duty of all the pastors of God’s churches to train the next generation.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 201.

¹⁹⁷ David Horner, *A Practical Guide for Life and Ministry: Overcoming 7 Challenges Pastors Face* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 247.

¹⁹⁸ Wendall D. Reed, “Biblical Concepts in Action: A Case for Discipleship in the Worship Ministry” (DWS diss., Liberty University, 2021), 77, Scholars Crossing: The Institutional Repository of Liberty University.

¹⁹⁹ Owen Strachan, “Pastoral Discipleship: The Urgent Need, the Biblical Mandate, and One Timothy’s Plea,” *9Marks*, February 26, 2010, <https://www.9marks.org/article/pastoral-discipleship/>.

One should not fear to practice discipleship in church. Malan Nel points out that culture has infected the church and has caused many to diminish the emphasis on biblical training.²⁰⁰ When culture tells the church it is not appropriate to tell people what to do, the church must remember “to please God rather than man.” Stephen Porter said of discipleship, “Jesus not only demonstrated a human life oriented to the will of the Father, but he taught his followers how to align their wills with the will of God.”²⁰¹

This study has revealed that expository preaching from the pulpit will likely increase the congregation’s understanding of the discipleship process. According to Eugene Lowry, “A sermon ought not be a collection of parts constructed by a preacher, regardless of how we have been taught to think so. The sermon has its roots in the truth of the Gospel which indeed has a life of its own.”²⁰² While various research has concluded that expository preaching cannot develop the spiritual life of believers and lacks emphasis on evangelism, Goldsworthy points out, “There is nothing inherently unreasonable or unbelievable about the proposition that God communicates with the authorial intent that humans who are created in his image can receive and understand his communication.”²⁰³ Expository preaching not only increases the knowledge of a congregation through memorable, applicable, and relevant biblical principles, but also saves the pastor from strenuous time of endless prayer and searching for a “sermon” within the text. This leaves the pastor with more time to attend to other areas of ministry that are not to be neglected.

²⁰⁰ Malan Nel, “Discipleship: Seeking the ‘Kingdom and His Righteousness,’” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (November 10, 2017): 2.

²⁰¹ Steven L. Porter, “Will/Heart/Spirit: Discipleship That Forms the Christian Character,” *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (April 2019): 79.

²⁰² Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Louisville, KY: WKJ, 2001), 10.

²⁰³ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 50.

Stephen Porter reminds his readers that spiritual practices are necessary to bring believers in line with the will of God.²⁰⁴ The result of a pastor's commitment to his own spiritual development flows into the lives of the people around him through the sermons he delivers as well as the example he demonstrates.

²⁰⁴ Porter, "Will/Heart/Spirit," 93.

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Appendix A

Church Member Surveys

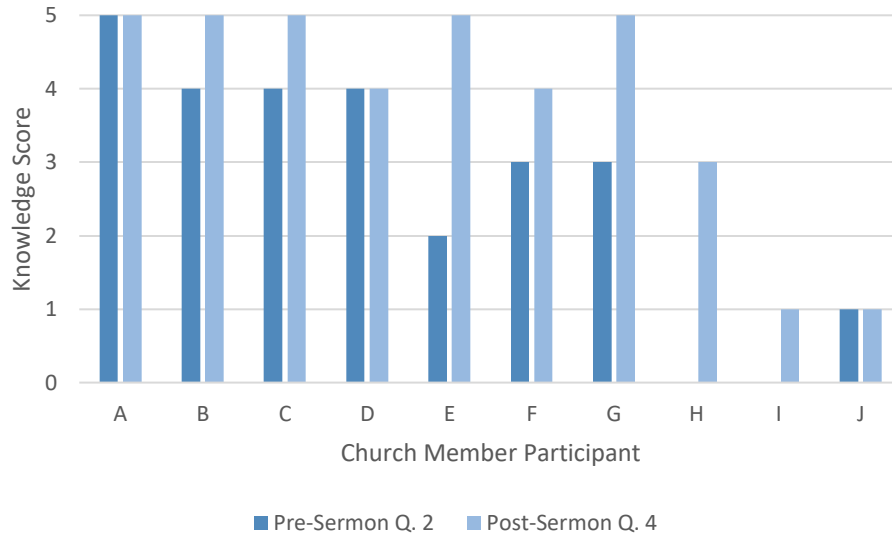


Figure 4.1. Defining the Discipleship Process

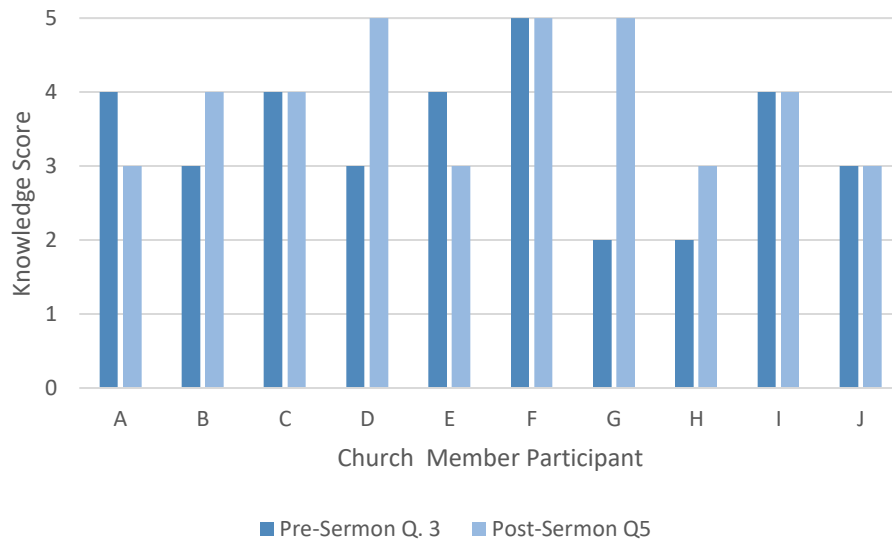


Figure 4.2. Defining Discipleship

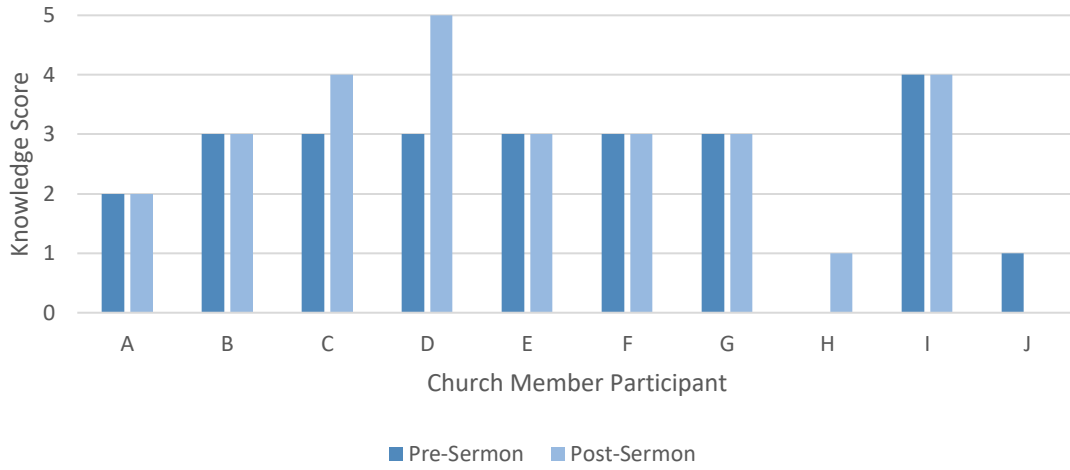


Figure 4.3. Understanding Expository Preaching

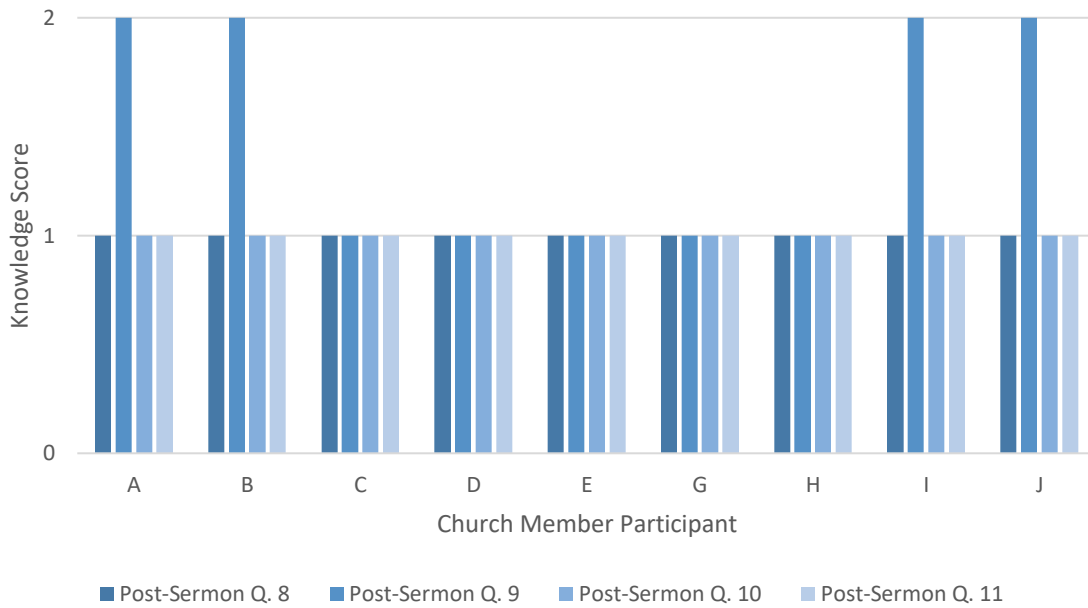


Figure 4.4. Views on Sermons

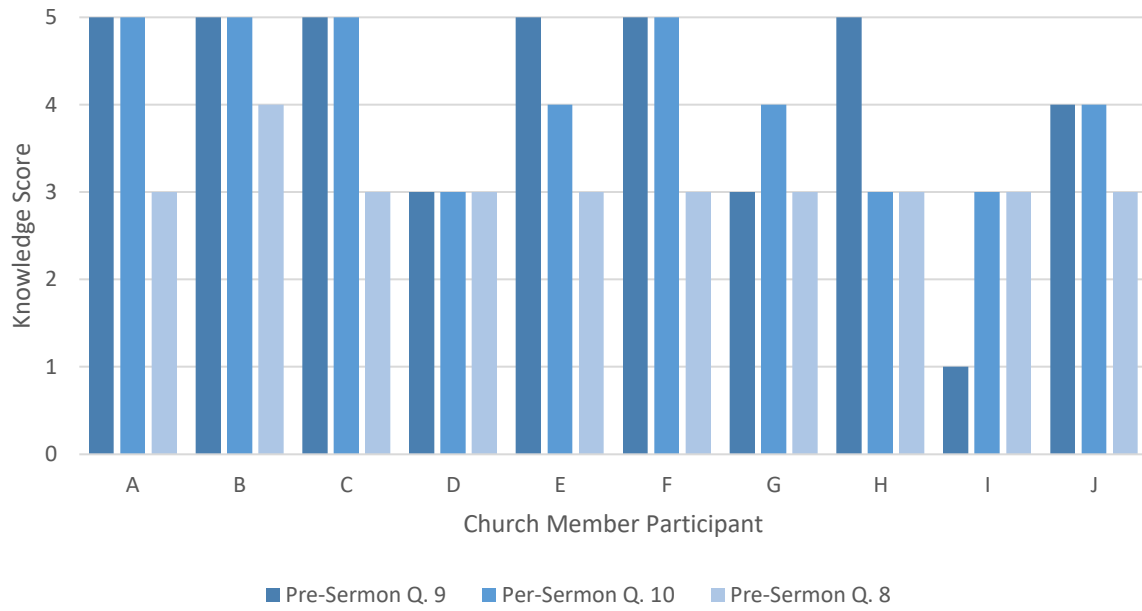


Figure 4.5. Spiritual Development, Gifts, Exercising of Spiritual Gifts

Appendix B

Survey Answers: Church Members

Table 4.1 Church member participants age, marital status, and children

Church members participant	Survey question		
	What is your age?	Are you married?	Do you have children?
Church member A	31-40	yes	yes
Church member B	over 50	yes	yes
Church Member C	over 50	yes	yes
Church member D	over 50	no	no
Church member E	over 50	no	yes
Church member F	over 50	yes	yes
Church member G	over 50	no	yes
Church member H	over 50	yes	yes
Church member I	over 50	yes	yes
Church member J	over 50	yes	yes

Table 4.2. Pre-sermon questions on age, church involvement, and discipleship importance

Church members participant	Survey question		
	How long have you been a Christian?	Are you actively involved in your church?	How important is discipleship to you?
Church member A	more than 10 years	yes	extremely important
Church member B	more than 10 years	yes	extremely important
Church Member C	more than 10 years	yes	important
Church member D	more than 10 years	yes	extremely important
Church member E	more than 10 years	yes	extremely important
Church member F	more than 10 years	yes	important
Church member G	more than 10 years	no	important
Church member H	more than 10 years	yes	important
Church member I	more than 10 years	no	important
Church member J	more than 10 years	yes	extremely important

Table 4.3. Post-sermon questions about discipleship

Church members participant	Survey question		
	Has your pastor ever encouraged you to win the lost for Christ?	Has your pastor ever encouraged you to be a disciple who makes disciples?	Have you ever become part of a discipleship group?
Church member A	yes	yes	yes
Church member B	yes	yes	no
Church Member C	yes	yes	no
Church member D	yes	yes	no
Church member E	yes	yes	no
Church member F	yes	yes	no
Church member G	yes	yes	no
Church member H	yes	yes	no
Church member I	yes	yes	no
Church member J	yes	yes	no

Table 4.4 Post-sermon church member views of discipleship

Church members participant	Survey question		
	After watching the sermon series at expositorypreaching.com, do you believe your understanding of the discipleship process has changed?	After listening to the short sermon series on discipleship, do you believe you understand the discipleship process?	Do you believe your pastor's sermon are effective?
Church member A	yes	yes	yes
Church member B	yes	yes	yes
Church Member C	yes	yes	yes
Church member D	yes	yes	yes
Church member E	yes	yes	yes
Church member F	yes	yes	yes
Church member G	yes	yes	yes
Church member H	yes	yes	yes
Church member I	no	yes	yes
Church member J	yes	yes	yes

Table 4.5. Pre-sermon questions to church members about discipleship

Church members participant	Survey question		
	Do you understand discipleship as a process?	Do you consider yourself to be a disciple of Christ?	Do you believe all Christians should understand the discipleship process?
Church member A	yes	yes	yes
Church member B	yes	yes	yes
Church Member C	yes	yes	yes
Church member D	yes	yes	yes
Church member E	yes	yes	yes
Church member F	yes	yes	yes
Church member G	yes	yes	yes
Church member H	yes	yes	yes
Church member I	no	yes	yes
Church member J	yes	yes	yes

Table 4.6. Pre-sermon series questions to church members about church and sermons

Church members participant	Survey question		
	How important is discipleship to the church?	Do you believe a sermon can be applied in any setting?	Where you raised in the church?
Church member A	extremely important	yes	yes
Church member B	extremely important	yes	yes
Church Member C	extremely important	yes	yes
Church member D	extremely important	yes	yes
Church member E	extremely important	yes	yes
Church member F	extremely important	yes	yes
Church member G	important	no	no
Church member H	extremely important	yes	yes
Church member I	extremely important	yes	yes
Church member J	extremely important	yes	yes

Table 4.7. Post-sermon series questions to congregation about their pastor

Church members participant	Survey question		
	Do you believe your pastor's sermons are expository in nature?	Do you believe your pastor's sermons are topical in nature?	Do you believe your pastor understands the discipleship process?
Church member A	yes	no	yes
Church member B	yes	no	yes
Church Member C	yes	yes	yes
Church member D	yes	yes	yes
Church member E	yes	yes	yes
Church member F	yes	yes	yes
Church member G	yes	no	yes
Church member H	yes	yes	yes
Church member I	no	no	yes
Church member J	yes	yes	yes

Table 4.8 Post-sermon questions to church members about education

Church members participant	Survey question		
	Should a sermon series like you experienced at expositoryprocess.com should be preached?	What is your highest level of education?	Have you ever attended a Bible college?
Church member A	yes	undergraduate college degree	no
Church member B	yes	undergraduate college degree	no
Church Member C	yes	high school	no
Church member D	yes	high school	no
Church member E	yes	high school	no
Church member F	yes	high school	no
Church member G	yes	undergraduate college degree	yes
Church member H	yes	high school	no
Church member I	no	undergraduate college degree	no
Church member J	yes	high school	no

Table 4.9. Post-sermon questions to church members about their spiritual walk

Church members participant	Survey question		
	Have you ever won a person to Christ?	Have you ever trained a person in the faith?	Do you feel equipped to train a person to serve Christ in a form of ministry?
Church member A	yes	yes	yes
Church member B	no	yes	no
Church Member C	no	yes	no
Church member D	no	no	yes
Church member E	yes	no	yes
Church member F	yes	yes	yes
Church member G	no	no	no
Church member H	no	no	no
Church member I	no	no	no
Church member J	yes	no	no

Appendix C

Pastoral Staff Surveys

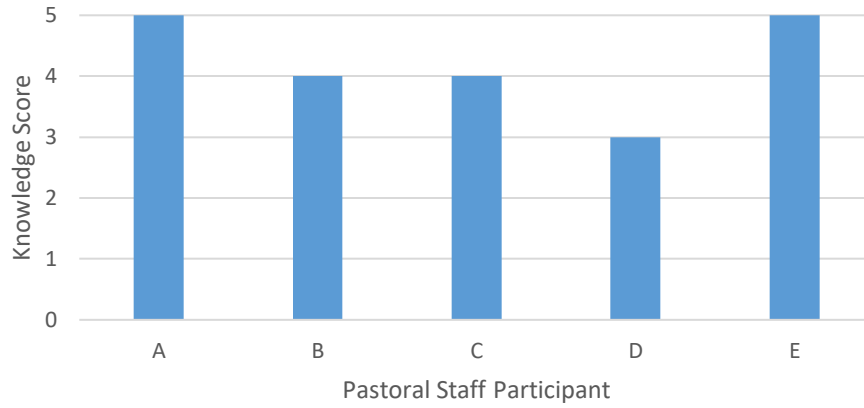


Figure 4.5. Communicating the Discipleship Process

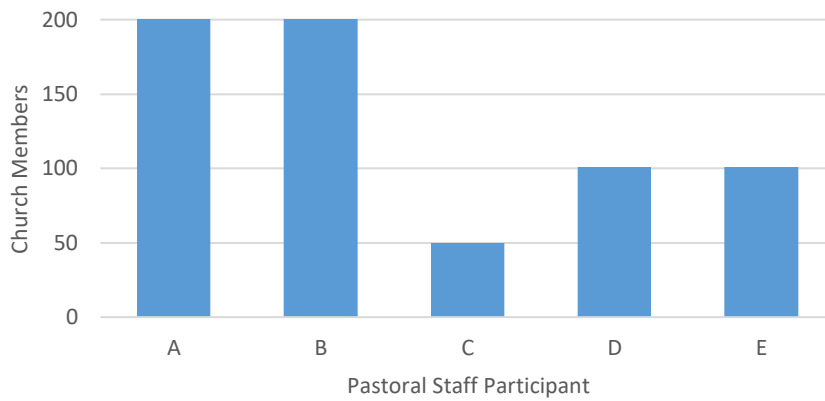


Figure 4.6 Reported Church Membership

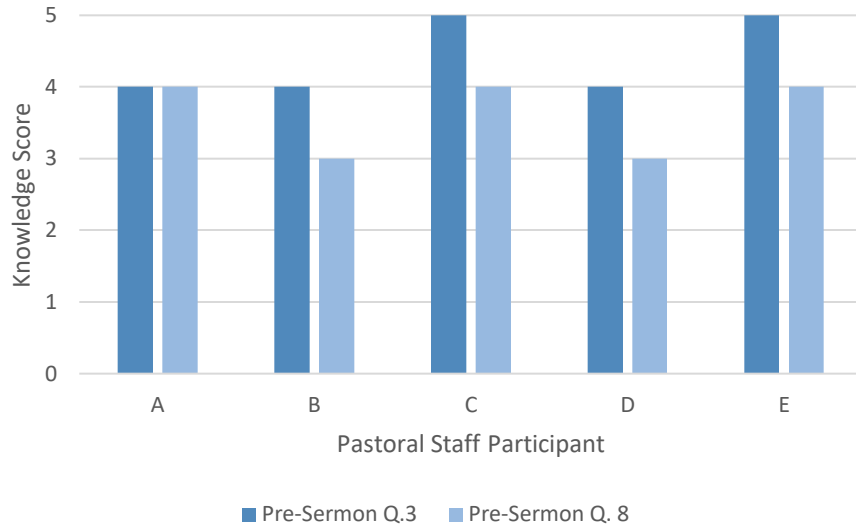


Figure 4.7. Pastoral Spiritual Disciplines

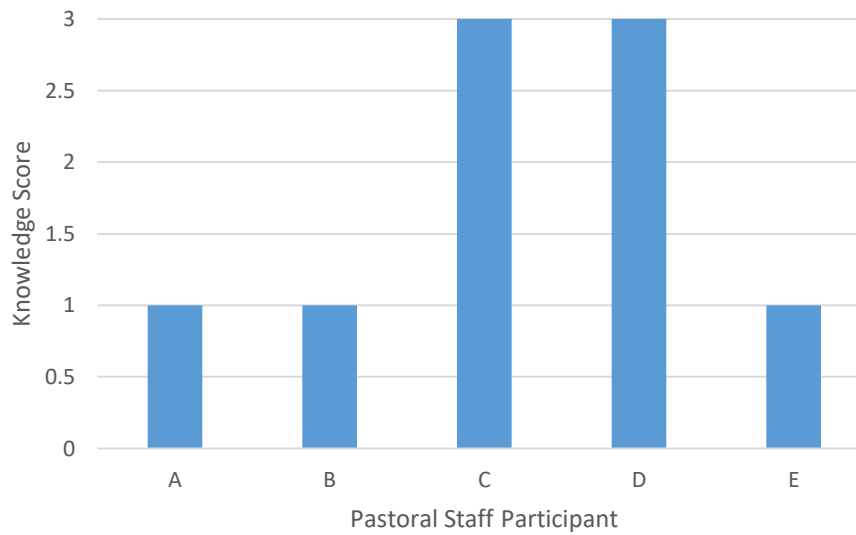


Figure 4.8. Importance of Pastoral Education

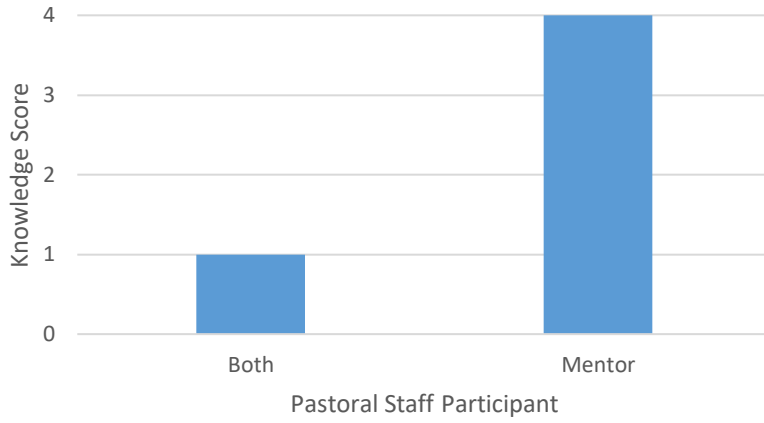


Figure 4.9. Primary Focus of Ministry

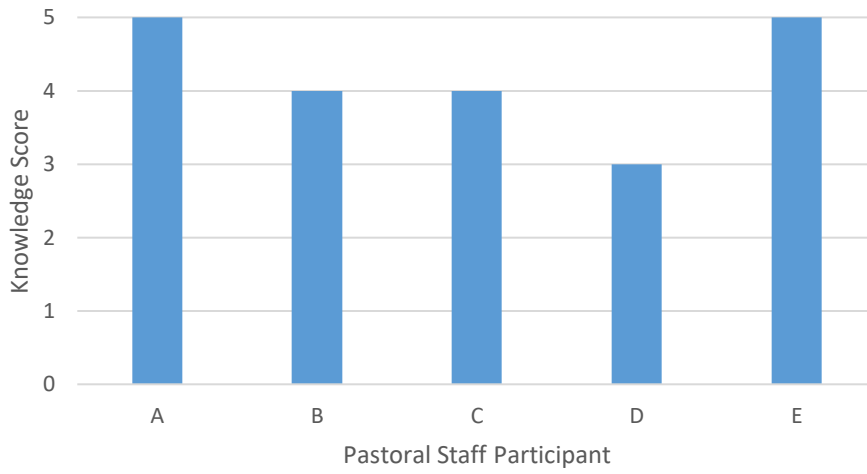


Figure 4.10. Pastoral Communication of the Discipleship Process

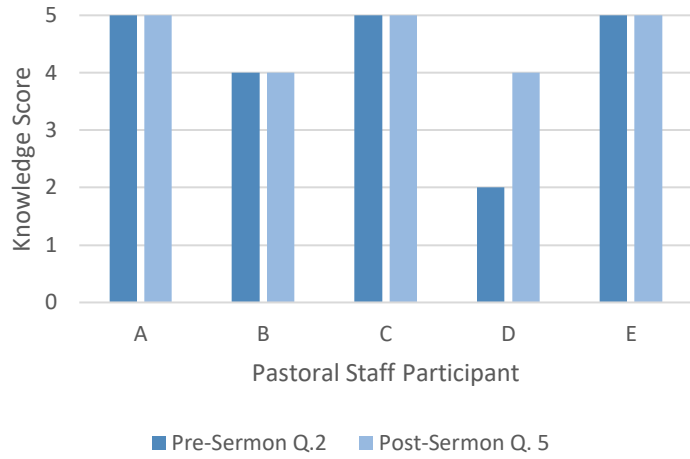


Figure 4.11. Pastoral Understanding of Discipleship

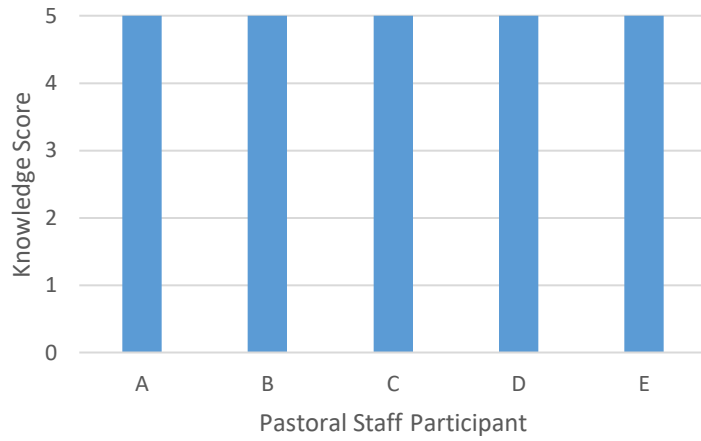


Figure 4.12. Pastoral Exercise of Spiritual Gifts

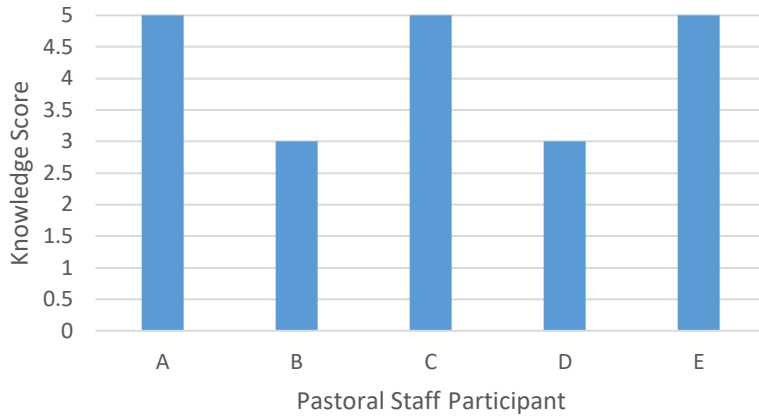


Figure 4.12. Sermon Preparation

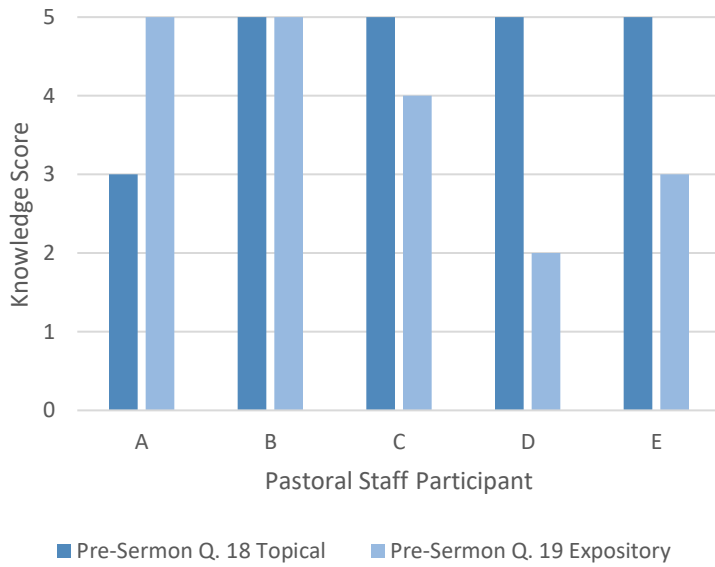


Figure 4.13. Defining Topical and Expository Sermons

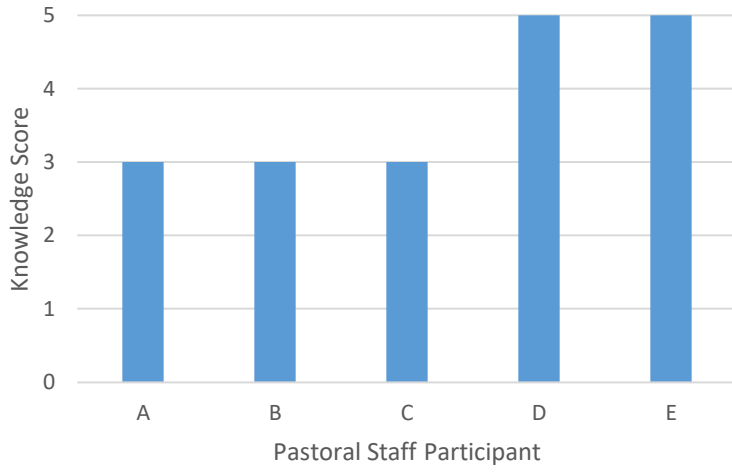


Figure 4.14. Identifying Growing Disciples

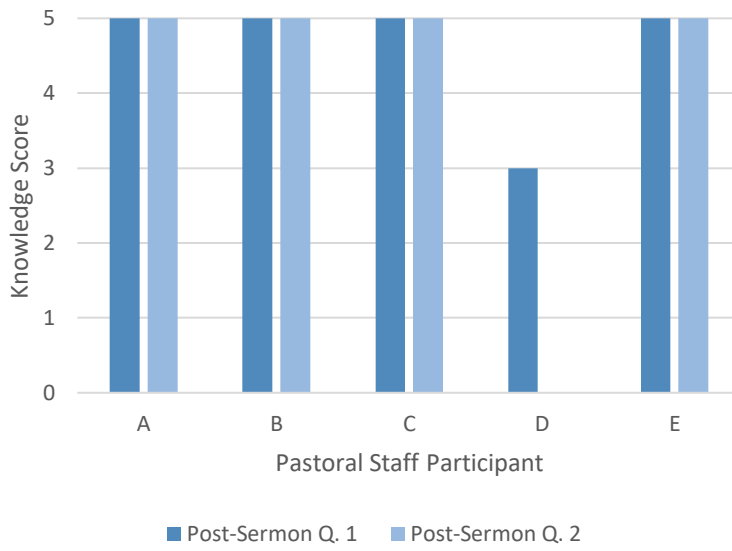


Figure 4.15. Pastoral Ministry Goals

Appendix D

Survey Answers: Pastoral Staff

Table 4.10. Pre-sermon questions to pastoral staff

Pastoral staff participant	Survey question		
	Do you understand discipleship as a process?	Do you consider yourself to be growing as a disciple?	How long have you served as a pastor?
Pastor A	yes	yes	41 years
Pastor B	yes	yes	41 years
Pastor C	yes	yes	2 years
Pastor D	yes	yes	20 years
Pastor E	yes	yes	22 years

Table 4.11. Pre-sermon questions to pastoral staff

Pastoral staff participant	Survey question		
	Do you believe all Christians should understand the discipleship process?	Do you feel you could improve as a disciple?	Do you believe that understanding the discipleship process will help you become a better disciple?
Pastor A	yes	yes	yes
Pastor B	yes	yes	yes
Pastor C	yes	yes	yes
Pastor D	yes	yes	yes
Pastor E	yes	yes	yes

Table 4.12. Pre-sermon questions to pastoral staff

Pastoral staff participant	Survey question		
	Do you consider your congregation to be growing in the discipleship process?	Do you preach topical or expository sermons?	Do you believe the Bible to be inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God?
Pastor A	yes	usually expository w/ occasional topical sermon	yes
Pastor B	yes	usually expository w/ occasional topical sermon	yes
Pastor C	yes	topical	yes
Pastor D	yes	style that uses both	yes
Pastor E	yes	expository	yes

Appendix E

Pre-Sermon Series Questionnaire for Pastoral Staff

1. Do you understand Discipleship as a process?

- Yes
- No

2. If you answered yes to question one, please describe the discipleship process?

3. Please define spiritual disciplines.

4. Do you consider yourself to be a growing disciple for Christ?

- Yes
- No

5. Please define discipleship.

6. How long have you been a pastor?

- One year or less
- Two to five years
- Six to ten years
- Eleven years or more

7. Do you believe all Christians should understand the discipleship process?

- Yes
- No

8. How do you commit yourself to grow in the grace and knowledge of God?

9. What do you believe your primary spiritual gift is?

10. How do you exercise your spiritual gifts?

11. Do you feel you could improve as a disciple?

- Yes
- No

12. Do you believe that understanding the discipleship process will help you become a better disciple?

- Yes
- No

13. Do you believe your congregation should be disciples who make disciples?

14. What methods and tools do you use to communicate the discipleship process to your congregation?

15. Do you consider your congregation to be growing in the discipleship process?

- Yes
- No

16. How do you prepare a sermon?

17. Do you preach topical or expository sermons?

- Topical
- Expository
- Other (please specify)

18. Please describe a topical sermon.

19. Please describe an expository sermon.

20. Do you believe that the Bible is inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please explain)

21. Do you believe the Bible is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice?

- Yes
- No

22. What are some ways you determine a person is “growing as a disciple”.

23. How important is understanding the discipleship process to you?

- Not important
- Important
- Extremely Important

25. The purpose of a sermon during the main worship service is:

- Evangelism
- Encouragement
- Healing;
- Equipping the Saints in the Faith
- other (please specify)

26. Does your church have small groups that meet in the church or at someone's home?

- Yes
- No

27. During which part of your ministry do you teach discipleship?

Post-Sermon Questionnaire to Pastoral Staff

1. What is your goal as a pastor?

2. What is the most important part of your ministry?

3. Describe the geographic location of your ministry.

4. What is the average attendance of your primary service?

- 50 and under
- 51-100
- 101-200
- 201 +

5. What percentage of your congregation do you consider to be a godly disciple?

- 24% or less
- 25-49%
- 50-74%
- 75% or more

6. What percentage of your considered disciples are or have trained and equipped other disciples?

- 24% or less
- 25-49%
- 50-74%
- 75% or more

7. Briefly describe how you organize/prepare/deliver a sermon for the main Worship service.

8. How important is a pastor's education to you?

- Extremely important
- Important
- Somewhat Important
- Not so important
- Not at all important

10. Have you ever attended college, Bible college, and/or seminary?

- Yes
- No

11. What degrees have you earned?

12. Which is more important? Pastoral calls or one-on-one mentorship?

- Pastoral Calls
- Mentorship

13. Do you spend more time making pastoral calls or mentoring one-on-one?

- Yes

- No

14. Do you spend more time preparing sermons or creating discipleship programs?

- Yes
- No

15. Name one area of ministry you would like to see improve, and briefly describe how you would like to change it.

16. Biblical Exposition is defined in many ways; however, it is simply understood as an act of extracting the Timeless Biblical Principle from the text and applying it to the contemporary church. When studying for your sermon, how do you select your text?

- Pray and ask God to reveal a passage or topic.
- Choose a Book of the Bible and Preach Beginning to end.

17. How important is theology to you as it applies to your sermon preparation?

- Very Important.
- Important
- Not necessary

Appendix F

Pre-Sermon Series Questionnaire for Church Members

1. Do you understand discipleship as a process?

- Yes
- No

2. If you answered yes to question one, please describe the discipleship process

3. What is a basic definition of discipleship?

4. Do you consider yourself to be a disciple of Christ?

- Yes
- No

5. What is your basic understanding of expository preaching?

6. How long have you been a Christian?

- 1 year or less
- 2-5 years
- 6-10 years
- More than 10 years

7. Do you believe all Christians should understand the discipleship process?

- Yes
- No

8. How do you commit yourself to grow in the grace and knowledge of God?

9. What do you believe your primary spiritual gift is?

10. How do you exercise and develop your spiritual gifts?

11. Do you feel you could improve as a disciple?

- Yes
- No

12. Do you believe that understanding the discipleship process will help you become a better disciple?

- Yes
- No

13. How do you believe discipleship is carried out within the church?

14. How do you believe discipleship is demonstrated outside of a church service?

15. Are you actively involved in your church?

- Yes
- No

16. Have you ever become part of a discipleship group?

- Yes
- No

17. How important is discipleship to you?

- Not important
- Important
- Extremely Important

18. How important is discipleship to the church?

- Not important
- Important
- Extremely Important

19. If there was one area you could improve in your Christian life, what would that be?

20. In the church that you attend, how would you rate your pastor's sermon during the primary service?

- Prepared and delivered in a manner that is clear and applicable
- Prepared and delivered in a manner that is not always clear
- Underprepared and delivered in a manner that falls short of expectations

21. Do you believe that a sermon can be applied in any setting, or are their specific applications to the biblical principles that are based on setting, environment, culture, and geographical locations?

- Yes
- No

22. Describe your geographical setting.

23. Were you raised in church?

- Yes
- No

Post-Sermon Questionnaire to Congregation

1. After watching the sermon series at expositorypreaching.com, do you believe your understanding of the discipleship process has changed?

- Yes
- No

2. Please explain how your understanding of discipleship has either changed or stayed the same.

3. After listening to the short sermon series on discipleship, do you believe you understand the discipleship process?

- Yes
- No

4. Please describe the discipleship process.

5. Please define discipleship

6. Please define expository preaching

7. Please define topical preaching

8. Do you believe your pastor's sermons are expository in nature?

- Yes
- No

9. Do you believe your pastor's sermons are topical in nature?

- Yes
- No

10. Do you believe your pastor understands the discipleship process?

- Yes
- No

11. Do you believe your pastor's sermons are effective?

- Yes
- No

12. How likely are you to practice the discipleship process?

13. Do you believe that a sermon series like you experienced at expositoryprocess.com should be preached during the main service at your church?

- Yes
- No

14. What do you believe should be preached during the main worship service at your church?

15. What is your highest level of education?

- No diplomas
- High School Diploma
- Undergraduate College Degree
- Masters Degree
- Doctoral Degree

16. Have you ever attended a Bible college?

- Yes
- No

17. What is your age?

- 18-23
- 24-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- Over 50

18. Are you married?

- Yes
- No

19. Do you have any children?

- Yes
- No

20. Whose responsibility is it to incorporate teaching the discipleship process to your raising of children?

21. Whose responsibility is it to make a disciple?

22. Have you ever won a person to Christ?

- Yes
- No

23. Have you ever trained a person in the faith?

- Yes
- No

24. Do you feel equipped to train a person to serve Christ in a form of ministry? (i.e. a teacher, servant, leader, or pastor)

- Yes
- No

25. Has your pastor ever encouraged you to win the lost for Christ?

- Yes
- No

26. Has your pastor ever encouraged you to be a disciple who makes disciples?

- Yes
- No

Interview Questions to Church Members

1. On a scale of 1(bad) to 10 (excellent) how would you rate walk with Christ?
2. How long have you been a Christian?
3. What is it about your church that compels you to attend?
4. Are there specific traits you look for in a pastor?
5. How important is the main service sermon to you?
6. Have you ever mentored another Christian in a one-on-one setting?
7. What do you believe are the necessary elements to fulfill the Great Commission?
8. Are you active in your church?
9. Have you ever identified your own personal gifts?
10. If you have identified your own personal gifts, will you please describe them?

Interview Questions to Pastoral Staff

1. Please describe your ministry context.
2. Do you believe your ministry is successful?
3. If so, what makes your ministry successful?
4. How would you describe your method of sermon delivery?
5. Do you plan your sermons in advance, or are they spontaneous?
6. How long have you served in ministry?
7. Do you believe the environment in your church is healthy?
8. Do you practice one-on-one mentorship?
9. How would you define pastoral ministry?
10. What is the most important ministry to a past

Appendix G

Recruitment Material

CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: Expository Preaching's Impact on a Congregations Understanding of the Discipleship Process

Principal Investigator: Jeremy Highlander, MDIV., B.S., Student, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, pastoral staff or member of a congregation, and self-report as a born-again Christian. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the study is to understand the impact of expository preaching on a congregation's understanding of the discipleship process.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Church members and pastoral staff will complete a pre-sermon series questionnaire (15 minutes).
2. Church members and pastoral staff will view four sermons prepared by the researcher (20-30 minutes each sermon).
3. Church members and pastoral staff will complete post-sermon series questionnaire (15 minutes).
4. 20 church members and 10 pastors will be randomly chosen to complete a follow-up phone interview (10-15 minutes). Interviews will not be recorded; however, the researcher will take notes to document participant responses to the interview questions.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Understanding expository preaching's impact on the congregation's understanding of the discipleship process may help to develop future discipleship programs and create disciples who make disciples. Today, many traditional churches are impacted by a decline in attendance and unfortunately, are closing their doors. Pastors and their congregation may come to a better understanding of the importance of sermons, discipleship, and their congregation

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher and researcher's faculty sponsor 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.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. All interviews will be conducted on an individual basis on the telephone, where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in a locked desk and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy data will be shredded.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or 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 study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jeremy Highlander. 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. Roy Lucas at [REDACTED].

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

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

Your Consent

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

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

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Recruitment Letter

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to understand how expository preaching impacts a congregation's understanding of the discipleship process, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, self-report as a Christian believer, and be a member or staff member of a church. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a pre-questionnaire that focuses on their understanding of the discipleship process, watch a 4-part video sermon series prepared by the researcher, and complete a post-questionnaire after watching the sermon series. 10 pastoral staff members and 20 church members will be randomly selected to participate in a brief 10-15-minute phone interview. It should take approximately fifteen minutes to complete each of the questionnaires and approximately 80-120 minutes to complete the video series. The video series consists of four sermons, each approximately 20-30 minutes in length. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please respond to this email, confirm the above inclusion criteria, state whether you are pastoral staff or a church member, and sign and return the attached consent form by email to [REDACTED]. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Once I have received your signed consent form, I will send you an email with information directing you to the questionnaires and sermon series.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Highlander
Senior Pastor

[REDACTED]
jhighlander@liberty.edu

January 7, 2021

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-326 Expository Preaching's Impact on a Congregations Understanding of the Discipleship Process

Dear Jeremy Highlander, Roy Lucas:

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

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

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

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

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

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

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

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office