Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Implementing a Discipleship Curriculum among Men at Breakthrough

Church of God by Faith (COGBF) in Memphis, TN

A Thesis Project Submitted to

the Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Ministry

By

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT
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The purpose of this qualitative study was to introduce, engage, and implement discipleship concepts and practices at Breakthrough COGBF to increase attendance, spiritual engagement, retention, and membership among men. The study included comparing the biblical concept of discipleship cited in Matthew 28:18-20, the Great Commission, with contemporary perceptions held by male parishioners. The study included the participation of three parishioners from a predominately African American congregation. Theological and theoretical foundations for the study of discipleship were discussed along with current trends. Theological foundations included an analysis of Matthew 28:18-20 revealing that the imperative to make disciples was achieved by doing the continuous action of each participle, "going," "baptizing," and "teaching." Jesus promised to be with the disciples along the way, and the same implication exists today. Other theological passages included Luke 10, John 14, Acts, and 2 Timothy 2, defining love, obedience, teaching, and leadership as hallmarks of a disciple. Old Testament passages such as Genesis 1 and Exodus 18 referenced discipleship in the creation of man in God's image and Moses' empowerment of others to provide godly leadership. Theoretical foundations cited Obedience-based and Participatory models of discipleship as effective in training men to disciple other men. Semi-structured interviews, surveys, a focus group, and observation guided data collection for the qualitative portion of this study. Data was coded and analyzed, resulting in the emergence of significant individual and co-occurring themes. This qualitative study determined that discipleship engagement was positively impacted by authenticity, leadership, teachability, obedience, and transformation. Recommendations for future research were provided.

Keywords: Discipleship, Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20.

Contents

Abbreviations

COGBF   *Church of God by Faith*

COGBFFS   *COGBF Financial Solutions*

CTI   *COGBF Theological Institute*

DMIN   *Doctor of Ministry*

LUSOD   *Liberty University School of Divinity*

Chapter 1

Introduction

In the Church of God by Faith (COGBF), discipleship formation has not been a primary focus or priority among churches over the 106 years of the denomination's existence. More commonly highlighted areas in the denomination's early development were church planting, evangelism, leadership training, and the expansion of the COGBF footprint. In the "History" section of COGBF's website, the record states that founders John Bright (Moderator), Aaron Matthews (Bishop), Nathaniel Scippio (National Evangelist), and Hubert Steadman (Executive Secretary) "quickly spread the Gospel starting in the Southern United States and built churches all along the way to Upstate New York."[1] Church growth through expansion into more states and new territories, all to the glory of God, was the goal of COGBF from its inception and still seems paramount among church leadership today.

In 2014, the current presiding bishop, James E. McKnight Jr., introduced a plan known as *Vision 2020* that incorporated five primary goals for all churches within the denomination to achieve by the year 2020. The goals included the *Ocala Temple Renovation & Restoration* project, a site where General Assemblies were once held, and leaders and ministers had been trained in the early years of COGBF's existence; the establishment of *COGBF Financial Solutions* (COGBFFS), a financial entity where parishioners make contributions and healthy, financial investments that allow the church to originate loans for building and acquisition projects; *Plant 50 New Churches* project that uses funds from COGBFFS to support church plants for further expansion across the United States and internationally; *COGBF Technology 2.0*, a technological endeavor that increases the virtual footprint of COGBF while simultaneously

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[1] "History," The Church of God by Faith, Inc., accessed August 30, 2020, https://www.cogbf.org/index.php/about-us/our-fellowship/history.

raising awareness of the church's existence through a virtual platform; and last but not least, the establishment of the *National Prayer and Outreach Training Center* which provides prayer and outreach services 24 hours a day via telephone for anyone who contacts the center. All five goals have been intently pursued and achieved, even exceeded, as COGBF was able to also use funds from COGBFFS to start the COGBF Theological Institute (CTI), a church seminary with hybrid courses that gives ministers access to academically rigorous theological training from any location in the world. While all these goals are noteworthy and ambitious, the progression from convert to disciple, a command that Jesus Christ gave to his disciples in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20), has suffered great neglect at the expense of progression.

Ministry Context

This same fact impacts this researcher's local church, Breakthrough COGBF in Memphis, TN, especially among the men of the church. Men attend services but are often disconnected, and only a small group attend consistently. This detachment likely stems from a lack of understanding of the power endued to them by Christ as the church. The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, and it asserts that believers have been "called out" by Christ from a kingdom of worldliness, lies, and darkness into the kingdom of God, which is truth and light. The function for these "called out" members of the kingdom of God is to shine the light of truth as a lamp on a stand, lighting the way for others to follow who still function and remain a prisoner to the kingdom of darkness. Another factor contributing to the seeming "indifference" in male participation and attendance in church life may come from a lack of connection to purpose. The men may not see their lives as an absolute necessity and gift to the mission they have been called to fulfill by proclaiming the gospel and helping others to be released from oppression to freedom.

Complementarianism, the view that men and women are fully equal in status to God and importance to the family and church yet maintain role distinctions, helps to further the argument for the presence and necessity of male leadership within the church, especially in activities such as discipleship amongst men.[2] This view asserts that understanding the distinction of roles in the home and church is a biblical mandate.[3] Scripture captures the distinct role of male leadership in several places. The creation account provides one example. In Genesis 2:15-20, where God first created man and gave him the charge to cultivate and protect the garden, and then he made a suitable helper for Adam to complete his command for them to rule and have dominion.[4] God also allowed Adam to name his creation, "woman," which suggests authority given to man by God in his divine order (Gen 2:23).[5] Mathews states the creation-Eden narrative serves as the "authoritative fountain" for the apostle Paul's soteriology seen in Ephesians 5:21-33, and the instruction on home and ecclesiastical order cited in First Timothy 2:11-14 and First Corinthians 14:34-35 respectively.[6] Exodus 18:17-26 displayed Moses securing help as instructed by Jethro, his father-in-law, when judging the people, and in verse 21, he selected "able *men*, God-fearing, trustworthy…." (emphasis added). Acts 6:3 records deacons as "*men* of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom…" (emphasis added) appointed by the Twelve to serve the members and widows of the Jerusalem church; Ephesians 5:22-24 instructs "wives to submit to *husbands*"

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[2] Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 667.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Jerry G. Birdwell, "Training the Men of Providence Bible Fellowship, West Chester, Ohio to be Spiritual Leaders in the Home," (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 14, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[5] K. A. Mathews, "Genesis 1-11:26," Vol. 1A, *The New American Commentary*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), Logos Bible Software.

[6] Ibid.

(emphasis added) in everything as husbands lead in marriage with godly love and provision; lastly, First Timothy 3:2-12 lists the qualifications of leaders by the apostle Paul to Timothy, and he admonished that overseers must "be above reproach, the *husband* of one wife, self-controlled…" and deacons "likewise should be worthy or respect…*husbands* of one wife, managing children and households competently." These scripture passages strongly suggest and point toward male leadership as a duty, not an option, in spiritual matters that will bear fruit according to God's order and will.

Egalitarianism stands in contrast to this view. Egalitarianism suggests that women are equal partners with men in the grace and redemption of Jesus Christ, and that men and women are functionally equal in their roles as well.[7] Many egalitarian feminists argue from the same account of creation as complementarianism. They argue the point of equity from passages such as Genesis 1:26-28 and Genesis 2:23 suggesting that woman's existence was simultaneous with man's creation since woman was fashioned from the "rib" of man which was already a part of his body.[8] This claim is cross-referenced with New Testament passages such as First Corinthians 11:11-12 and Galatians 3:13 for further support suggesting that man's existence is just as dependent on woman through childbirth.[9] Egalitarians often reference the fall of man in Genesis 3 arguing that Adam's rule over Eve resulted from both parties being culpable yet this rule was not the intention of God's originally created order.[10] The previous statement and other scriptural passages are often used to challenge the position of God's mandate for men to lead, and there is no lack of support to the fact that women are actively leading in many areas of church domain

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[7] Jerry G. Birdwell, "Training the Men of Providence Bible Fellowship…," 6.

[8] Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 669.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 670.

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such as prayer, worship, business affairs, teaching, and preaching God's Word. Some of these observations are characteristic of the ministry at Breakthrough COGBF, and many people have grown accustomed to observing women function in these roles in many churches.

This researcher does not suggest that female leadership diminishes the effectiveness of ministry or the power God has given to women through a myriad of talents and gifts. The apostle Paul references several women in Romans 16 who labored in service to Christ with him, as he stated, "commend our sister Phoebe who is a servant of the church of Cenchreae …welcome her in a manner worthy of the saints…" and another place referencing the dedication of Priscilla, "Prisca and Aquila…who risked their necks for my life. Not only do I thank them, but so do all the Gentile churches" (vv 1-4). There is no doubt that God uses women and men to accomplish his perfect will, but this researcher hopes that men grasp how great their call to lead must be and what God has done and continues to do through the help of women in the faith.

This researcher hopes that the men of Breakthrough COGBF will learn to view the call to discipleship as dutiful, honorable, and an absolute necessity. Discipleship helps men to walk faithfully in their calling by trusting the one who has called them out, and they learn to know his voice, so the voice of the deceiver, Satan, will no longer be followed (John 10:5). Discipleship aims to bring the mind of Christ to his followers, removing all the lies and deception of Satan, making Christ's voice trusted in their walk of faith in the newness of life in him.

Breakthrough COGBF began its ministry in Memphis, TN, in 1984. As the ministry grew over the years, the church experienced remarkable congregational growth, and many families joined the ministry and enjoyed available fellowship opportunities. Services were three to four times a week, including Sunday Morning Worship Service, Wednesday Evening Bible Study, Friday Evening Fellowship Service, and some Saturday services. Families would gather at

various members' houses for meals, life events, and general fellowship. The ministry's focus was on advancing healthy families through the preached Word and fellowship opportunities while simultaneously aiming to achieve goals set forth by national church leadership, which primarily included the Bishop and Executive Council comprised of four Ruling Elders. In the mid-90s through mid-2000s, Breakthrough suffered a massive decline in membership for several reasons, including a church split. A former minister began an independent ministry, and many of the church's members, who were his relatives, joined the new ministry. Breakthrough COGBF never rebounded from these massive losses nor changed its focus regarding congregational growth, and services declined to twice per week, Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings which remains the current schedule today.

The congregation is predominately African American, which was historically accurate in the early years, with men comprising only 25% of the church congregation. During the decline, the ministry remained functional as an attractional modeled church and did not seek to avidly reach outside of the "four walls" to minister to the lost or surrounding community. The decline stagnated to approximately 40 faithful parishioners, which was the place this researcher and his family entered the ministry in 2013.

This researcher first encountered the pastor, Alfonso Boone, during the facilitation of his marriage counseling and subsequent marriage wedding ceremony in 2008. This relationship and the pastor's ardent proclamation of the Word during various visits sealed the decision to join the ministry. Over the next few years, this researcher, his wife, and children increasingly participated in various ministries and functions within the church but soon noted that the church's two regular services did not nourish the desire for growth, learning, and fellowship. In 2017, this researcher participated in a men's discipleship program at Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, TN, and

the exposure to discipleship ignited a yearning to employ similar concepts of discipleship and discipleship practices into his local church setting, with the hope of potentially stirring hearts in a distinct manner towards Christ while attracting more men to the ministry.

An unspoken rule at Breakthrough COGBF has been the congregational expectation that the pastors and deacons will perform all aspects of ministry, but during the time at Bellevue Baptist Church, this researcher witnessed discipleship that compelled men to trust God and get in the game of his redemptive plan by inserting themselves into the lives of others, even when it was uncomfortable. From various divisions such as race, socioeconomic status, and age, God moved in the lives of most men who got involved as Christ commanded, and by the time the yearlong program ended, the participants had undoubtedly been blessed far more than ever expected. Men fed, served, fellowshipped, worshipped, openly confessed faults to one another, shared truths and disappointments, and helped each other pray and give every concern to God who can handle all things. Real friendships evolved, and common boundaries such as race, politics, and any other minute considerations lost power, became less significant, and subject to obedience to Christ. Minds and hearts became more sensitive and attuned to others' welfare, as God's work of discipleship quickly took priority. This researcher believes discipleship will only complement the current evangelism efforts through the preached Word in his local ministry. It is apparent that more is necessary to form the "true" church and capture men's hearts. Discipleship is both a command and a necessity.

Problem Presented

The problem is that there has been a continuous decline in attendance, engagement, and membership among men at Breakthrough COGBF over the last six years. The congregation consists of approximately 30 to 40 parishioners, and most attend only the Sunday morning

worship service. The second service is a mid-week Bible Study held on Wednesday evening, where ten to fifteen members attend regularly. The current membership roster consists of ten men, eighteen years of age or older. Of this group, only half of the male parishioners attend Sunday morning worship service, which presents a significant issue to the lack of attendance and engagement among men within our local congregation. Serving opportunities on boards, committees, teams, and other general duties experience adverse impact from the inactivity, detachment, and lack in the presence of men. The absence of Christian men in service translates into less support and assistance for church members and neighbors outside the church.

The needs of the church and community are best served when men full of faith, the Spirit and wisdom choose to deny themselves, their self-interests, and submit to the authority of Christ and bear the "cross" purposed in their lives (Matt 16:24; 2 Cor 5:15). Discipleship is defined by this willing submission and embrace of responsibility for the sake of Christ first in the home, local church, community, and ultimately wherever the Lord orders a man's steps. This simply means men will fulfill their call as a disciple which is to love God and love others (Matt 22:36-40; John 13:34-35). That type of love is culminated through discipling others, as the Great Commission is fulfilled in this way to "go and make disciples of all nations" and "teach them to obey everything I have commanded you" as Jesus commanded (Matt 28:18-20). Disciples are not only believers but adherents to his word.

Complacency has seemingly gripped the men of Breakthrough COGBF, and the custom of "learning about" Jesus versus "learning from" him has become the acceptable pattern. This attitude directly contrasts with what Jesus publicly invited all who were present to do in Matthew 11:29. In this verse, he instructed them in this way, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me…." The term "learn" is the Greek word, μανθάνω (transliterated *manthano*), which meant

Jesus was not suggesting to know or learn of him through "hearing" his name alone or through the testimony of others thus deceiving oneself, but instead to know the true authority and power that only came with an intimate relationship and walking through life with him. This power comes by "doing" which means active participation in the will of God for one's life akin to rabbinic instruction between rabbi and disciple.[11] The disciple actively followed, listened, and adhered to the teaching of the rabbi, so much as to take on the likeness of his master as he grew in learning.[12] Wiersbe furthers that this invitation from Jesus to "*take*" (emphasis added) signified the grasp of a deeper experience where the believer finds "rest" or true contentment through surrender and obedience to God's will for his life.[13] He adds that the phrase "take my yoke" directly meant to become a disciple, so a believer became yoked to Jesus' tailor-made purpose for his life and needs.[14]

This true authority is the premise to Jesus' commissioning of the disciples in Matthew 28:18-19(a), "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples…" Jesus teaches his followers, who are those that love him and keep his commandments, how to obey the perfect will of the Father, and it is that fellowship, known as discipleship, that will ignite the passion of followership and service in the men of Breakthrough COGBF. These men will become more desirous of Jesus and his perfect work in their lives, but if they lack a connection to the authority, power, and gifts Jesus has given

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[11] Craig Blomberg, "Matthew," Vol. 22, *The New American Commentary*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), Logos Bible Software.

[12] Blomberg, "Matthew," Vol. 22, *The New American Commentary*, Logos Bible Software.

[13] Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), Logos Bible Software.

[14] Ibid.

them, a continued decline in membership and lack of engagement will be the continued response to the most loving and life-changing invitation of their lives.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMin action research thesis is to introduce, engage, and implement discipleship concepts and practices at Breakthrough COGBF to increase attendance, spiritual engagement, retention, and membership among men. Discipleship among men is profoundly essential. In addition to being the heart of Jesus's final command before his ascension, Paul instructed Timothy to "entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" the gospel truths Timothy had heard in Paul's proclamation of Jesus Christ amid many witnesses in Ephesus (2 Tim 2:2).[15] These "men" Paul spoke of were not "Superman" men or "super-Christians," but instead, these men were to be reliable, trustworthy, and sound in the doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ and able to protect the sheep against the heresies of the wolves.[16]

There is still the need for these types of men to disciple others, win souls to Christ, and live lives dedicated to godly principles and kingdom expansion. However, this endeavor is difficult to complete when the question remains, "Where are the faithful men?" There is a church epidemic that exists experienced as "male absenteeism," and most churches across denominational lines in the United States have a shortage of men, characterized by at least four to five times as many women as men in congregational makeups, which is synonymously true in this researcher's local church context.[17] Many men have no idea that discipleship is the crux of their "high" or "heavenly" calling in Christ Jesus, which is to follow Jesus and help others to

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[15] Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, "*1, 2 Timothy, Titus,*" Vol. 34, *The New American Commentary*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), Logos Bible Software.

[16] Ibid.

[17] David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 11.

hear his voice with prompt obedience and without the necessity of preliminaries; this is the same

urgency conveyed by the writer of Hebrews as he urges, "set your focus on Jesus…in whom we

confess" (Heb 3:1).[18] This statement asserted to the Christian audience then and to believers now

that our relationship with Jesus is about more than just entering heaven, our relationship with

Jesus compels us to expand God's kingdom on earth. This means there is work to be done, and

that work is discipleship.

Discipleship is a chief expression of one's love for Christ and at least his reasonable

service while being conformed to the image of Christ daily. Discipleship may be considered a

pragmatic expression or response to the gift of salvation, specifically sanctification, which means

to be set apart by God for his use.[19] While God reserves the sovereign and perfect right to use

believers in whatever way he chooses, his command is still to "make disciples" of all nations to

his glory that his kingdom come and his will be done in earth as in heaven. Discipleship helps

the believer reflect and not minimize their physical existence but instead find purposeful ways to

work both with and through their bodily existence to glorify God.[20]

Discipleship, a command given by Jesus Christ to his followers and even later seen in the

apostle Paul's charge to Timothy, displays gratitude and love for a life saved by and surrendered

to Jesus Christ (2 Tim 2:2). As disciples are made, kingdom expansion is achieved through the

lives of committed believers. This charge should mimic God's order and certainly be led by men

of God. This project aims to introduce discipleship practices that will hopefully promote greater

engagement inside and outside the church. Through the small group settings and open, honest

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[18] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 57.

[19] Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 759.

[20] Jason Lanker, "The Soul: Discipleship That Fosters an Integrated Soul," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (April 2019): 122–33, doi:10.1177/0739891318823212.

dialogue, this researcher's prayer is that a heart for discipleship and service will bring glory to God. The hope is that as each man grows and becomes more knowledgeable about Jesus, they learn from the depths of him personally and tell others, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" They learn the answer is, "yes," he truly is God, and that testimony becomes the catalyst to teach others to obey all he has commanded, causing them to leave their "towns," places of significance and priority, or even idols and make their way towards Jesus (John 4:29-30).

Basic Assumptions

This researcher makes these four assumptions regarding this thesis project. The intimate settings of small groups will be highly effective to encourage participation and engagement in discipleship activities based on the expressions and impactful experiences of discipleship seen in the Scriptures, specifically in the gospels among Jesus and the three (Peter, James and John), the Twelve, and with others (Matt 17:1-12; Matt 16:1-20; John 3:1-21). Second, the information, responses, and feedback from male participants of Breakthrough COGBF are considered accurate and truthful accounts of their historical experiences and thus represent other predominately African American church congregations in the United States. Third, the primary focus of introducing discipleship to this group of men at Breakthrough COGBF rests in creating or strengthening intensive, deliberate, and authentic relationships with Jesus Christ among other like-minded men. Lastly, this researcher assumes that African-American Christian churches base their discipleship practices on the same biblical foundation as most other Christian churches referencing the Great Commission powerfully given by Jesus Christ to his disciples as recorded in the Gospels of Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15.

Definitions

The following definitions are the dominant terms that will saturate throughout this thesis project: *disciple*, *discipleship*, and *spiritual formation*. A disciple is a person who follows another person or another way of life and who submits himself to the discipline (teaching) of that leader or way. Helm adds, "At the time of his ascension Christ commissioned the first disciples to 'make disciples of all nations' (Matt 28:19); hence, the term *disciples* (emphasis added) is also used in the Book of Acts to describe believers, those who confess Christ (6:1, 2, 7; 9:36; 11:26). Though they have not been directly called by Christ himself, such disciples are called by Christ's Spirit through the message delivered by the first disciples."[21] Putnam supports this view referencing Jesus' call to his first disciples in Matthew 4:19, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men," arguing from this perspective that a disciple is one who hears the call and immediately follows.[22] A disciple is a person changed by the spirit of Christ to carry out the mission of discipleship.[23] All believers today are tasked with the same responsibility to carry Christ's Spirit and deliver the gospel message, with their God-given gifts, to inspire, teach, and train others (discipleship) to do the same (Eph 4:8; 2 Tim 2:2).

Discipleship refers to the lifelong process of sanctification that all believers are called to as they are regenerated by faith in Jesus Christ for their salvation, or more simply stated, once they are "saved" in Christ the walk begins (Rom 10:9-10). Avery Willis, a renown international missionary and creator of the *MasterLife* discipleship series believed discipleship was

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[21] Paul Helm, "Disciple," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 1, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 630.

[22] J. Putman, *Real-life Discipleship: Building Churches that Make Disciples*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010), 9.

[23] Ibid.

"developing a personal, lifelong, obedient relationship with Jesus Christ in which He transforms your character into Christ-likeness; changes your values to kingdom values; and involves you in His mission in the home, in the church, and in the world."[24] This walk with Christ includes spiritual edification through spiritual disciplines such as reading the Word, prayer, discussion with other believers, meditation, and contemplation of the things of God. The spiritual edification for disciples with God and others directly parallels to Dodson's definition of discipleship. He adds that discipleship has "vertical" and "horizontal" components: Vertical discipleship points out to God's character, showing us how great He is and how far we fall short.[25] Vertical discipleship promises to close the gap between us and God's holiness through things like Bible reading, prayer, fasting, confession, and personal piety in order to know God."[26] He furthers his argument, "Horizontal discipleship points to God's mission. It focuses on the relational activities such as evangelism, social justice, and cultural renewal," adding that an integration of both components embodies the Great Commandment (Matt 22:37-40).[27] Believers are called to live a life "co-crucified" with Jesus by denying themselves, or self-will, while learning to discern and trust the greater will of God for their lives that was foreknown and predestined before the very foundations of the earth (Gal 2:20; Matt 16:24; Eph 1:4). This co-crucified life will soon be glorified as the believer transitions from their mortal life, whether through death or the "glorious change" from perishable to imperishable, to being in the Lord's presence eternally (Rom 8:17; 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Th 5:23).

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[24] A. Willis & S. Brown, *MasterLife: Developing a Rich Personal Relationship with the Master*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 75.

[25] J. Dodson, *Gospel-Centered discipleship*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 44.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 45.

Spiritual formation refers to the "intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit."[28] Spiritual formation, then, is a key component in successfully performing the "go," "baptize" and "teach" participles that fulfill the sole imperative within the Great Commission which is to make disciples. Disciples must seek to share their experience of spiritual growth in Christ with other disciples they encounter that they may become disciples who disciple others. Disciples are not authentic disciples if they only but do not follow the teachings of their master, and in this context, their master is Jesus Christ. Each participle within the Great Commission speaks to the relational environment that must be present for interconnectedness to occur that inspires change and growth. As Olmos argues, "Jesus' discipleship-focused relational environments became a crucible for spiritual formation and training that equipped a simple group of men to go out and change history."[29] Pettit supports the necessity of relational environments and communal involvement by adding "spiritual formation is cultivated in the company of like-minded comrades and sensitive confidants."[30] Disciples must be taught from other disciples the way of Jesus, through his words which are as relevant today as the time he spoke them. Jesus has promised to dwell and light the path for others to follow with, through, and in him until the end of the age (Matt 28:20). The transformative power of spiritual formation was key to the apostle Paul's admonition to the Galatians to receive their heirship to the promise of salvation through Jesus Christ, he states, "My dear children…I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is

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[28] James C. Wilhoit and Dallas Willard, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 23.

[29] M. Olmos, "The Effects of Discipleship-Focused Relational Environments on Spiritual Progress through Daily Application-Driven Bible Reading," (Phoenix, Arizona: Phoenix Seminary, 2017), 16.

[30] Paul Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2008), 78.

formed in you" (Gal 4:19), and this "forming" references the Greek word, μορφόω (*morphoō*), which means to shape, mold, or more specifically, the change that occurs as the believer embodies and is shaped by the Spirit of Christ, thus becoming conformable to his image.[31] It is spiritual formation that will build a stronger walk of faith in Christ, and as the Paul suggests in the prior verse, it is this forming of Christ in believers that keeps their walk from shifting from the grace, mercy, and salvific life he provides to untruths, alternative faiths, or other idolatrous worship.

Limitations

There are three primary limitations in this thesis project, including the location of the ministry context, the sampling used in the study, and the researcher's membership affiliation with the COGBF. Breakthrough COGBF is a single congregation within the COGBF church family with approximately 40 to 50 parishioners located in Memphis, TN. This study solely focuses on this geographical ministry context, which is only one of almost 200 churches and several affiliate ministries within the COGBF organization. Neither Breakthrough COGBF nor the COGBF church organization as a whole fully represents all geographically widespread and predominately Black ecclesiastical bodies such as the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), which consists of over 6.5 million members and 12,000 congregations or the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) embracing over 2.5 million members and 7,000 congregations.[32] The second limitation regarding the sample used in this study stems from the Breakthrough COGBF congregational composition. The congregational makeup consists of approximately 25 percent

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[31] "Morphoo," *BibleHub.com*, accessed September 6, 2020, https://biblehub.com/greek/3445.htm.

[32] "Global 63 (G63," Church of God in Christ, Inc., accessed September 6, 2020, http://www.cogic.org/connect/g63/; "Our History," African Methodist Episcopal Church, accessed September 6, 2020, https://www.ame-church.com/our-church/our-history.

(10 to 12) male parishioners, with only 50 percent (five to six) of those regularly attending. Thus, the sampling of men as participants is limited in this aspect. While the number of participants is not necessarily adverse to this study regarding small groups, it presents a potential limitation in identifying other factors of an active member on other bases besides attendance. The limited sampling could also negatively impact responsiveness and data collection if scheduling conflicts arise with participants. A third limitation includes the researcher's current membership status. The researcher left Breakthrough COGBF ministry in August 2020 but has maintained a great rapport with leadership, yet the organization could terminate the project or renounce permission because of the researcher's non-active status.

Delimitations

This researcher recognizes these delimitations within this study. The topic of discipleship was selected for investigation in this ministry context among other significant topics such as evangelism, preaching, teaching, or other biblical focuses that may inspire men to avidly follow Christ by making disciples. This study examines only male parishioners, specifically a small group of five to seven active, male members. The term active is only defined in terms of consistent, service attendance given the two services offered Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings. The age range in this group spans from 35 to 65 years old. Lastly, this is an attempt by the researcher to objectively evaluate discipleship in and among participants through assessing engagement in discipleship activities and intentional invitations to others to come and experience a relationship rooted in Christ regardless of the invitee's current status as a member of Breakthrough COGBF, other Christian denominations or affiliations, and/or faith and belief systems.

Thesis Statement

The issue to be engaged in this thesis project is the exposure of a discipleship curriculum for the men of Breakthrough COGBF to learn or gain greater awareness of the biblical mandate and call to discipleship as believers in Jesus Christ. The men of Breakthrough COGBF would likely affirm that they are Christians who love Jesus, love one another (and the rest of the church family), and desire to go to heaven and be with the Lord. Unfortunately for many, the contemporary sense of love for Jesus often starts and stops at "belief" in him, his death on the cross, his resurrection, and ascension. While these truths are fundamental to the Christian faith, the missing link for many believers is "walking" as a disciple of Christ once they have come to faith. This often happens because of the lack of discipleship after conversion. Many become spectators to a game they were "called" to play in and win to the glory of God. The apostle Paul complements this fact as he urges the church of Ephesus to "walk" or "live" worthy of the vocation or "calling" for which they have been "called" (Eph 4:1, NIV & NASB). This calling or invitation is explicitly given by Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18-20 (CSB), also known as the Great Commission:

> All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 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 everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

The invitation is to "go," "make disciples," "baptize," and "teach;" these four imperatives comprise the most specific invitation to love God for the New Testament believer that incorporates denying oneself, bearing one's cross, loving one another, and loving his neighbor, thus living Christ by following him. As in many churches, this link is missing among the men of Breakthrough COGBF and can be seen through the lack of evangelizing the lost, discipling other men, serving the needs of the church and community, and aiming to live Christ-centered, God-

honoring lives. If creative and intentional efforts towards discipleship are implemented

successfully, then Breakthrough COGBF may experience an increase in attendance, spiritual

engagement, retention, and membership among men, men who will be disciples of Christ and

dedicated to disciple others in the Lord also.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

Discipleship is part of the sanctification process in the Christian life preceded only by faith in Jesus Christ. At the time of conversion, the believer's faith in the salvific, finished work of Christ brings him into right standing with God, a state commonly as justification (Eph 2:8; Rom 3:22; Rom 5:1). Enns defines justification as "a legal act wherein God pronounces that the believing sinner has been credited with all the virtues of Jesus Christ."[33] He furthers that once a believer receives salvation, forgiveness becomes the negative aspect of salvation, meaning the subtraction of human sin, and justification is the positive aspect of salvation, with the addition of divine righteousness.[34] Simultaneously, the believer becomes sanctified, or "set apart" by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to perform works of righteousness (Eph 1:13-14; Phil 2:13; Rom 8:9-13).[35] This state is referenced as positional sanctification, one of three aspects of sanctification.[36] Positional sanctification is "achieved through the once-for-all death of Christ" as referenced in in Hebrews 10:10 (NLT), "For God's will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time."[37] In positional sanctification, a believer is accounted holy before the God and thus acknowledged as a saint.[38] This term saints, ἅγιος (*hagios*) is seen in the address of apostle Paul's to various churches in passages such as Romans

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[33] Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 751.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., 759.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., 343.

[38] Ibid.

1:7, 1 Cor 1:2, and Ephesians 1:1.[39] All joined in the unity of faith in Jesus Christ positioned in eternal holiness with God.

From this point, the believer embarks upon the second aspect, experiential or progressive sanctification where discipleship is pivotal. Experiential sanctification is characterized by living a life of righteousness imputed to the believer at the time of conversion (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21).[40] Experiential sanctification may fluctuate because it relates directly to daily life and experiences.[41] A believer's experiential sanctification grows as he dedicates his life to God in thought and deed and allows God to become the prevailing influence in all matters of his life.[42] Discipleship is central to experiential sanctification as God's word and authority in the daily lives and experiences of a believer displays a conscious choice to serve and obey God, and spiritual maturity increases as believers dedicate their lives to God and cultivate their lives through the Word of God.[43] The apostle Paul also believed that saints should not only be right positionally but also right in their daily living. He urged believers to encourage one another in daily, godly living, live in peace, pray often, be obedient to the motivations of the Spirit, and abstain from all manner of evil to be completely sanctified in spirit, soul, and body at the return of the Lord Jesus (1 Thess 5:12-23).

The third stage following experiential sanctification is ultimate sanctification. This stage occurs in the future and is characterized by the believer's transformation into the likeness of

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[39] "Hagios," *BibleHub.com*, accessed September 4, 2021, https://biblehub.com/greek/40.htm.

[40] Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 343.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 343.

[43] Ibid., 759.

Christ to be presented to the Lord without blemish.[44] This is also the stage where all believers will be joined together and transformed into their glorious state in the presence of the Lord (Eph 5:26-27; 1 Cor 15:50-52).[45] Ultimate sanctification is a perfect expression of God's plan of reconciliation preordained by the Father, executed through his Son, and sealed by his Spirit (Eph 2:10; Eph 1:13-14).

Unfortunately, positional sanctification is where many Christians become stagnant without maturing any further, and they can often become discouraged. This outlook forms from ignorance of Jesus' power stemming from love for the Father and believers through willing obedience and loving sacrifice, making living for and in him meaningful and exciting. It displays the Great Commandment's second imperative, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:39, NIV). Jesus showed us what it means to love others as yourself when he washed his disciples' feet (John 13). This is the essence of discipleship. Jesus states to his disciples, "You call me Teacher and Lord-and you are speaking rightly, since this is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (vv 13-14, CSB).

In this passage, Jesus identifies himself as Teacher and Lord. As "Teacher," he explicitly taught his disciples to imitate compassion to others, but the addition of "Lord" brings gravity to this lesson with an implication that this act is not an option but a command. The Greek word for Lord, *κύριος*, expresses absolute ownership rights over something. Jesus was ultimately saying to the disciples then, and now, that imitating his actions and teaching others to do the same is a command from the One who has total ownership and authority over them. First Corinthians 6:20 confirms this legal transaction of ownership, stating, "you (*believers*) were bought at a price.

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[44] Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 343.

[45] Ibid.

Therefore honor God with your bodies." Discipleship is a call to respond from Jesus to believers to honor God by living like Christ and teaching others to do the same, and the significance of this call is why this researcher is pursuing this study in hopes that the men of Breakthrough COGBF will embrace and act upon discipleship as a lifelong commitment to God in their daily lives.

Literature Review

Some of the emerging themes presented are hindrances to discipleship, spiritual and discipleship formation, the role of discipleship in the life of the disciple, and discipleship methods. The discussion of these themes included comparisons and contrasts between discipleship methods and an analysis of discipleship methods that may be most effective for use and implementation at Breakthrough COGBF.

The review included searches regarding discipleship in various contexts—namely among men, Black churches, and American Christian churches. Several foundational questions were considered in the research such as discipleship: What is discipleship and why is it important? Why should men care about discipleship? How can participating in discipleship programs or curriculum draw/inspire men? What is the ultimate goal of discipleship? Are churches intentional when it comes to the discipleship formation process for current and new members to the Christian faith? How will the men of Breakthrough COGBF be impacted by strong, meaningful discipleship curriculum focused on Jesus' command to make disciples? These questions undoubtedly opened a cistern of abundant possibilities that were exciting to explore via research.

Hindrances to Discipleship

"Where are the Men?" This question plagues many churches and worship centers across America and beyond domestic borders on any given Sunday morning. Of the planet's great religions, Christianity by far experiences a consistent, worldwide shortage of male

practitioners.[46] According to the US Congregational Survey, the typical church-goer was a fifty

year old, married, well-educated, employed female.[47] Another poll by ABC news reported the

typical worshipper to be most likely an older, black female who lives in the South. Although

attending church does not by default create or make one a true disciple of Jesus Christ, the non-

engagement of men is apparent, and the male demographic is not represented in both polls.

Researcher George Barna found that women were 100 percent more likely to be involved with

discipleship, 57 percent more likely to participate in Sunday school, 56 percent more likely to

hold leadership positions, and 54 percent more likely to participate in small groups.[48] While

Murrow suggested that this may be due to the feminization of church services and the skewed

presentation of Jesus Christ in a more feminine than masculine light, other researchers lend some

significant insight into the hindrances before men regarding their participation in discipleship

and other spiritually formative activities.[49] Meredith argued that pastors often depend solely on

the Holy Spirit to equip believers for every good work without providing practical training to

make disciples.[50] He referenced experienced author, pastor, and Fuller Theological Seminary

professor, Greg Oden in his assertion that churches have also diverted from person-centered

growth and replaced those activities with programs to make disciples.[51] The argument here is

that a program alone cannot replace the invaluable experience of continuous, intimate interaction

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[46] Murrow, *Why Men Hate*, 14.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Murrow, *Why Men Hate*, 18.

[49] Ibid., 6.

[50] Landerous G. Meredith, "Effective Adult Discipleship among Urban Black Churches in Los Angeles," (PhD diss., Biola University, 2018), 3, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[51] Meredith, "Effective Adult Discipleship…," 4.

and discussion focused on Christ and shared with others aimed at personal growth and maturity in Christ as seen in the intimate encounters with Jesus and his disciples. Researcher Helen Kim invaluably added blunt rationale to the discussion stating that while many claim to be Christians, only one in five claim to be totally committed to investing his life towards spiritual formation, four out of ten Christians agreed that Satan is not a living being but a symbol, more than one-fifth strongly agreed that Christ sinned when He lived on earth, and 38% strongly agreed that the Holy Spirit was a symbol of God's power but not a living entity.[52] These findings supported researcher Brad Ball's direct reference to Chuck Colson' statement that "the church is 3,000 miles wide and one inch deep. Many are babes in Christ."[53] Ball added that many churches are failing to teach many new Christians in the ways of the Lord.[54]

Upton furthers the need of discipleship among men, and more specifically African American men, citing the biblical foundation and significance of covenants established between God and man, namely Adam, Abraham, David, and the God-man Jesus Christ.[55] He powerfully contends that God's work in redemptive history is greatly displayed through individual men to reach nations.[56] Upton believes the need to target discipleship among African American men is vital to God's work through these men to an entire culture and ultimately the nations as well. He

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[52] Helen C. Kim, "Developing a Discipleship Culture in the Church through Increased 'with-God' Conversations," (PhD diss., Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2015), 18, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[53] Brad Ball, "A Believers-Discipleship Model for Oak Hill Baptist Church." (PhD diss., Union University, 2013), 29, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Jeremy H. Upton, "Contextualized Discipleship for African-American Men: Beginning a Trophic Cascade in the African-American Community," (PhD diss., Biola University, 2017), 43, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[56] Jeremy H. Upton, "Contextualized Discipleship…," 43.

notes that adverse statistics that affect black men such as systemic racism and educational

disparities are hindrances to discipleship. Many black men doubt real change occurs through

institutional systems that can include the church, and he agrees with the term sociologists used in

the early 1990's describing the lives of black men as endangered species.[57] He adds these and

other factors affect the self-esteem of black men and have subsequently damaged his sense of

self forcing a clarion call to the need of the restorative and transformative work of Christ through

discipleship.[58] Upton charges that black men need empowerment discipleship focusing on the

principles of dominion theology to become empowered to trust and transform into the "God-

empowered heroes, as in the time of biblical judges, to rescue and restore their people."[59]

Empowerment discipleship is rooted in the ultimate goal of engaging black men to become

cultural warriors by affecting "each man's understanding of his role and participation in God's

plan" and not just church attendees.[60] Campbell agrees adding that mentorship is a biblical

standard advocating for believers to walk in a way that others desire to follow (Prov 2:20).[61] He

also references statistics from a report by the National Urban League entitled *The State of Black

America 2007: Portrait of the Black Male* stating the disparities of black men in economics,

education, health, civic engagement, and social justice, and the need for empowerment to their

fullest potential.[62] Campbell argues that spiritual mentorship helps young, black men realize they

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[57] Jeremy H. Upton, "Contextualized Discipleship…," 71-72.

[58] Ibid., 78.

[59] Jeremy H. Upton, "Contextualized Discipleship…," 99.

[60] Ibid., 19.

[61] Larry E. Campbell, "Saving African American Boys: A Discipleship Training Model for the Men of St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church.," (PhD diss., United Theological Seminary, 2015), 28, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[62] Ibid., 31.

are a part of something bigger than themselves, which is the family of God, and this realization helps to cultivate and mold men who are biblically literate, "trained, mature, moral, Spirit-centered…and hopefully dangerous, not to each other, but to the 'ungodly' unholy realm."[63]

Another researcher, Gregory Moore, noted that intentional, discipleship programs fade over time and that specialized ministries such as the deacon ministry only promoted discipleship or related activities.[64] He also noted that young men were not targeted for discipleship opportunities but placed with other groups that represented younger crowds instead of promoting discipleship at all levels.[65] Davis agreed that there is a negative impact when churches adopt a program orientation towards discipleship yet do not have a clear, measurable definition of "spiritual success."[66] She added the focus of discipleship has become head knowledge instead of complete transformation, participants who desire discipleship are often taught in random rather than systematic ways, there is a lack of accountability to what is taught or done, and the primary method of small groups typically fail to provide comprehensive spiritual nurture to participants.[67] These aspects along with increasing biblical illiteracy among believers and the appearance of a de-emphasis in discipleship training within the many churches present a morbid picture in training disciples to fulfill the Great Commission. These hindrances predicate the necessity to cry aloud as believers to the life changing call of Christ to come and die to self, live in him, and be

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[63] Larry E. Campbell, "Saving African American Boys…," 41.

[64] Gregory Emille Moore, "Developing and Implementing a Discipleship Curriculum for Young Adult Men at Trinity Baptist Church in Fort Valley, Georgia." (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 3, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[65] Gregory Emille Moore, "Developing and Implementing a Discipleship…," 3.

[66] Darlene Teo Davis, "The Relationship between Christian Education Practices and Lifestyle Discipleship in African American Churches." (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 32, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[67] Ibid.

conformed to his image spiritually and physically as the new life is lived through the believer's existence daily.

<center>Spiritual and Discipleship Formation</center>

The apostle Paul captured the essence of discipleship in Galatians 2:20 (CSB), "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." The first and perhaps most critical step after coming to faith by believing in the atoning, salvific work of Jesus Christ is to allow Jesus to perform the "good work" daily through the bodies that belong to him until he returns (Phil 1:6). This "good work" is the work that Christ does through his disciples that expands the kingdom of God on earth. Disciples follow his commands and teach others to do the same, knowing that Christ lives through their lives. Therefore, discipleship must intentionally and foundationally focus on the disciple's spiritual formation.

Discipleship serves as a GPS, providing clear directions (*Christ's commands*) on the road of sanctification this side of heaven. If discipleship is the GPS, spiritual formation is the believer's commitment to stay the course as Christ's commands and reject the assumption of an alternate route or better way (Matt 16:24; John 14:5-6). Spiritual formation helps believers grow in faith, humility, and wisdom and stay the course of Christian living.[68] While believers never reach full maturity in this life, spiritual formation seeks continuous progression and advancement of believers' thoughts, passions, and habits into greater, godly stature throughout their lifetime.[69] Spiritual formation focuses on the awareness of new citizenship that believers inherit through

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[68] Peter K. Nelson, *Spiritual Formation: Ever Forming, Never Formed*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 10.

[69] Ibid.

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faith in Christ and is key to the development and growth of a disciple (Phil 3:21). John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, regarded spiritual formation as a significant influence on the human will that included personal discipline and spiritual submission.[70] This discipline included prayer, fasting, reading and studying scripture, and frequent partaking in sacraments to encourage personal spiritual growth.[71] Spiritual formation is a daily practice that aids the disciple's walk of sanctification, where he becomes progressively more like Christ and lives holy; God desires believers to grow spiritually and put aside anything that would hinder that growth.[72] Spiritual formation aids disciples in the continuous process of saying "no," the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life.[73] Hull argued that similar to the health and aesthetic benefits from the discipline of exercise, many believers want to reap the harvest of spiritual discipline while living life as a sloth.[74] This way of thinking counters the "transformed mind" Paul references in Romans 12, which discerns God's perfect will (v. 2). Hull agrees the heart of spiritual formation is transformation resulting in steadfast commitment and followship to Jesus Christ.[75]

Hull represented this effect as "The Whole Triangle": God's transforms the believer into a disciple as he 1) willingly chooses to position himself to live a particular pattern of life and be trained, 2) places himself within community to affect and influence others, and 3) willingly

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[70] D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*, (Wilmore, KY: Rafiki Books, 2016), 36.

[71] Ibid., 41.

[72] Rod Dempsey and & Dave Earley, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*, (Lynchburg: Liberty University Press, 2016), 15.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Robert W. Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006).

[75] Ibid.

submits to live under the authority of Scripture and the will of the Holy Spirit.[76] Hull agreed with Wesley's forms of spiritual disciplines adding meditation, scripture memorization, worship, evangelism, silence, solitude, journaling, and frugality to the list.[77]

Discipleship and spiritual formation are a responsive walk of love and obedience to God's love shown through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. A disciple must learn that "when Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die."[78] This response to the love of God occurs when the disciple finds commitment and purpose in hating his (former) life in this world and finding it in the life Christ lives through him (Matt 16:25; John 12:25). Discipleship recognizes that grace is not "cheap" and does not come without a price or cost.[79] The cost for eternal life was paid through the atoning death from a sinless life in Jesus Christ, and that sacrifice paid the eternal price for damnation and eternal separation from God for all who receive him, so every believer should glorify God in body and spirit as a disciple (1 Cor 6:20). "Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace with justification of sin but not the sinner, grace without the cross, and grace without Jesus Christ living and incarnate" in the life of the believer.[80] Realizing the cost of his grace, Platt stated that discipleship is an inevitable call to die and catapults the follower into those things that please Christ—obedience, love, commitment, and faithfulness, while also pleasing the Father who has graciously adopted and welcomed him

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[76] Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 11.

[79] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 43.

[80] Ibid.

into the family of God (2 Tm 2:4; Eph 1:5; Gal 4:5-7).[81] Tony Evans echoed this argument with

his comments that a critical step in Kingdom discipleship and the believer's identity with Christ

is recognizing death to sin in the old life and the discovery of operating from his or her

spiritually transformed soul rather than merely responding to his or her body, in short, new wine

in new wineskins.[82] Spiritual formation in a disciple's life causes him to make an intentional

practice of forgetting those things that are behind and strive for what is ahead in his new life in

Christ (Phil 3:13).

Role of Discipleship in the Life of the Disciple

On parallel accounts in scripture such as Mark 1:18 and Matthew 4:20, the brothers

Simon Peter and Andrew followed Jesus' immediately by leaving their nets after hearing his call

to "Come, follow Me" and the sons of Zebedee, James and John, did the same. It is an important

to note that these men along with the other eight who were later appointed in Mark 3 to "be with

him that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons" were not

in a contemporary sense, "believers," since his death and resurrection had not occurred at this

point, but they were disciples practicing discipleship based on the definition of relationship with

Jesus, preaching (sharing with others) repentance and faith that the Kingdom has come near, and

using the authority given to them by Jesus (Mark 3:14-15). This is a mirror image of the basis of

the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 that through relationship with Jesus Christ, the

believer acts upon the authority given him from Jesus to make disciples, baptize in the name

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teach others to obey all Christ has commanded knowing they

are not alone in this good work. The life of a disciple is one who not only follows Christ, but

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[81] David Platt, *Follow Me: A Call to Die. A Call to Live*. (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), xi.

[82] Tony Evans, *Kingdom Disciples,* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2017), 96-97.

intentionally responds quickly to his call to obedience in followership in faith. If the initial four disciples had not heeded the call of the Master and the call to new lives, they would have missed witnessing the kingdom work of Jesus which included healings, driving out evil spirits, witnessing the Lord's deliverance, and realizing Jesus love for us through living for him. Kingdom work is still the agenda for his disciples today.

Disciples should go about their lives with intent and purpose.[83] From family to friends and every group in between, disciples should rub elbows and shoulders with those who do not know Christ.[84] Disciples should pray, care, and eventually aim to share the gospel message with them, and sharing the gospel is not optional, since Jesus allowed this command to "make disciples" to be among his last words before his ascension.[85] A life dedicated to discipling others is evidence of God's work on earth and that Christ lives![86] In a world that continues to see problems with disparities and injustices in various ways including economics, race, gender, and a plethora of other opportunities, making disciples is God's designated way to release the power of his gospel on every problem men face.[87] Disciples have the mind of Christ which allows men to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God, which is the ultimate goal of discipleship. Bonheffer promoted this mission of discipleship towards the world stating that discipleship liberates mankind from all the manmade dogmas, oppressive thoughts and attitudes, and

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[83] Dempsey and Earley, *Leading Healthy, Growing*, 8.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Hull, *The Complete Book.*

[87] National Coalition of Ministries to Men, *How to Disciple Men (Short and Sweet): 45 Proven Strategies from Experts on Ministry to Men*, (Racine: BroadStreet Publishing, 2017), 9.

anxieties or tortures designed to marginalize groups.[88] The role of discipleship is a continuous journey of boundless mercy that brings down every "high thing" and institution against the knowledge of Christ and the love He demands to be given and shared for one another.[89] The principle of "love one another" as cited in John 13:34-35 comes with a sure marker of identity, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (v 35). Love in discipleship helps others find purposeful ways to work both with their "renewed" souls and bodily existence to see their personhood transform into the image of God.[90] When a disciple's focus is no longer on kingdom work, he does not fulfill the work he is charged by God to do and progressively leads a disintegrated life.[91]

Discipleship has even greater implications for the church, who is referenced in scripture as the "body" of Christ when discipleship is not placed at the forefront of church mission (Eph 1:23). Discipleship is mandated from the "Head" of the church, and the "Body" cannot survive without the head. Discipleship or "disciple-making" is the benchmark of success as a church, not attendance, offerings, or even conversions to this point.[92] Discipleship moves individuals into a relationship with Christ repositioning them from simple "seat" membership in the church to Christian discipleship.[93] A shift in the church paradigm regarding discipleship must clearly show the distinction between the biblical "member" of the body who was a disciple sharing his gifts

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[88] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 37.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Jason Lanker, "The Soul: Discipleship That Fosters an Integrated Soul," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (April 2019): 124, doi:10.1177/0739891318823212.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Janet Johnson, "Discipleship Formation in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the 21st Century." (PhD diss., University of St. Thomas (Minnesota), 2015), 12, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[93] Ibid., 19.

and fellowship in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the variance in these terms today. The members of the body that Paul so graciously referenced in 1 Corinthians 12 are arranged by God according to His design, and he adds that if we all were one part, where would the "body," as unit who serves God, be (v 18-20). The members served one another and thus the body according to the design of the head. In the contemporary sense, members are not necessarily disciples but attendees, and many churches are not avidly seeking to change that culture, thus this may result in many members of a church serving themselves and not the body as a whole. Members who are disciples and thus, disciple makers, realize membership is about giving not getting, stewardship not dues, and belonging to God's elect who assist in shaping the lives of others by God's grace.[94] Currently, churches render many discipleship programs in the hopes that true disciples of Christ are made. There are many methods of discipleship employed disciple believers including include small groups, classes, and other curriculum tools which will be explored in the next section.

Discipleship Methods

Discipleship methods or models vary with context and time. During the mid-eighteenth century, John Wesley used a discipleship method in Methodism that included a system of interlocking groups called Societies, Classes, and Bands. Societies focused on the cognitive mode of learning and targeted the larger population and was characterized by lectures, preaching, public reading, hymn singing, and exhortation.[95] Societies were akin to traditional worship or celebration services held today with the distinction of separating the congregation by gender, yet Wesley intentionally mixed the seating arrangements of socioeconomic classes in Societies to

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[94] Pierre Petit-Frere, "Pentecostal Discipleship: A Ministry to Haitian American Young Men." (PhD diss., St. Thomas University, 2015), 62, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[95] Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting,* 81.

represent equity in Christ.[96] Classes were the most instructional unit and focused on behavioral changes such as prohibitions, exhortations, and helpful practices known as "means of grace" and were noted as spurring radical transformation to England's working masses.[97] Classes were a group of no greater than ten to twelve people who met weekly for personal supervision of their spiritual growth.[98] Classes focused on the community the Societies served by grouping men and women from similar dwelling areas and locations. The leader of classes were selected from among the group deacons who inquired weekly to how the members' souls were prospering mimicking the biblical precedent in Acts 6 for deacons who cared for the needs of the church.[99] Bands focused on the affective mode and targeted regeneration of the soul through ruthless honesty and frank openness, and members were encouraged to share in this manner.[100] Bands were homogenous in grouping, by age and marital status, and consisted of those who voluntarily desired to grow in love, holiness, and purity of intention. Bands aimed for members to confess following the biblical truth that "out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). Bands usually met once per week, punctuality was a must unless there was an extraordinary reason otherwise, prayer began promptly at the hour, and to speak plainly about the true state of the soul.[101] Wesley's discipleship model was metaphorically stated to use the Society for the head, the Classes for the hands, and the Bands for the heart.[102]

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[96] Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting,* 82.

[97] Ibid., 91.

[98] Ibid., 93.

[99] Ibid., 93.

[100] Ibid., 110.

[101] Ibid., 115.

[102] Ibid., 94.

Dempsey and Earley agreed with Wesley's model of discipleship to effectively lead and multiply disciple-making small groups. They urged that multiplying discipling groups at its core began with a vision or dream of successful, multiplying groups.[103] They added that prayer for group members is an absolute necessity, an idea shared in Wesley's interlocking system of classes and bands, citing that prayer is an "indispensable tool in their ministry to others."[104] They also agreed that leaders should be prepared for the meetings, and mentees should be sought out and developed to continue the work as leaders in multiplying disciples.[105] Discipleship is a continuous, personal walk with Christ through spiritual disciplines such as prayer, reading, and studying God's Word, but this process also aims to pour into others and help them discover and use their spiritual gifts.[106] Discipleship must become a major priority with a clearly measurable and accountable process of spiritual development.[107]

The lack of measurement and accountability practices within the area of discipleship causes some researchers to stray from the use of programs or courses that have no measurement tools or trackability. Researcher Andrew Burggraff cited the *10-Step Systems Approach Model* he incorporated in his study to develop a measurable discipleship curriculum, and in step five of the model, assessment instruments are strongly suggested for use in the evaluation of participants understanding from prior teachings.[108] Burggraff argued that designing a curriculum via the 10-

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[103] Dempsey and Earley, *Leading Healthy, Growing*, 114.

[104] Ibid., 119.

[105] Dempsey and Earley, *Leading Healthy, Growing*, 114.

[106] Evans, *Kingdom Disciples*, 243.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Andrew Burggraff, "Developing Discipleship Curriculum: Applying the Systems Approach Model for Designing Instruction by Dick, Carey, and Carey to the Construction of Church Discipleship Courses," *Christian Education Journal 12*, no. 2 (2015): 409.

Step Systems Approach Model approach is an effective and tailored method for various ministry contexts. Other measurable ways to monitor the effectiveness of discipleship include surveys such as the Church Discipleship Survey and the Discipleship Inventory designed by Eric Erskine.[109] The Church Discipleship Survey is for pastors and leaders and is used in evaluating the relationship between their discipleship practices and the influence those practices are having upon the spiritual development of their churches; the Discipleship Inventory is for laity and reveals the influence that pastors' discipleship practices are having upon the spiritual growth of the congregation.[110] Other instruments for measurement include developing curriculums through the implementation of questionnaires that gauge pre-test and post-test responses which measure participant's knowledge and attitude towards discipleship.[111] Discipleship methods incorporate the use of spiritual disciplines that grow believers into active disciples and whether assessments are used to track effectiveness or not, the ultimate reward is a believer who becomes active in sharing his faith and helping to disciple others. The goal of any discipleship method is to provide scriptural instruction and direction so that the disciple can explain core doctrines of the Christian faith, understand the work of salvation and its security for the believer, practice spiritual disciplines effectively both personally and publicly, and understand what it means to be a disciple of Christ and serve him in his current context.[112]

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[109] Meredith, "Effective Adult Discipleship…," 13.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Moore, "Developing and Implementing a Discipleship…," 7.

[112] Burggraff, "Developing Discipleship Curriculum…," 409.

Theological Foundations

This section will lay a foundation of biblical and theological precedence in both the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) through a contextualized approach advocating the charge for men to embrace and engage in the responsibility of discipleship to other men. God intends for mankind to exhibit his image, likeness, and dominion, but this can only occur by man becoming reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 5:10). This reconciliation comes by hearing the gospel and believing it. Once reconciled, a believer lives his faith while teaching and encouraging others to do the same, which is discipleship. Roman 10:14 declares, "How then can they call on the One in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach?" The Greek word for preach in this verse, κηρύσσω (*kēryssō*), simply implies someone willing to proclaim a message publicly and is not limited to a pulpit.[113] As commissioned disciples of Jesus Christ, believers are charged to make disciples as an act of obedience and love for Christ, which starts with sharing the gospel.

Both Matthew and Mark reflect Jesus' Great Commission to his disciples. Matthew 28 captures the keen imperative and adjoining participles that comprise the heart of discipleship. Jesus commands his disciples to "make disciples" of all peoples as they continued "going" forth in his power, "baptizing" converts in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and "teaching" them to observe or obey all Jesus commanded them to do. The term "teaching" is the Greek word, διδάσκω (*didaskó*), meaning to instruct or impart knowledge primarily referencing

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[113] J. A. Witmer, "Romans," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, vol. 2, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 481.

the Scriptures or OT.[114] In this reference, Jesus exclusively suggests that his words are as

authoritative as Scripture, and he exercises his official authority (ἐξουσία, transliterated *exousia*)

mentioned in verse 18 to command his words to be taught and obeyed equitably as the

Scripture.[115] The term "observe" follows from the Greek word, τηρέω (*tēreó*), implying to watch

over with great intent, guard, or preserve.[116] These terms lend a significant implication to

contextual and contemporary disciples of Jesus Christ, as the lack of teaching others to observe

the Lord's commands directly challenges one's heart and faith. James 2:26 supports this

assertion adding that faith that does not have works, specifically those works Jesus commanded

such as teaching others and observing all he commanded of his followers, is dead just as "the

body without the spirit is dead." Wiersbe adds that obedience in faith James references is

dynamic, saving faith contrasting dead faith and demonic faith which involves only intellect and

the mind and emotions respectively.[117] He explains that dynamic faith is based on God's Word

and involves the whole man, intellect, mind and emotions, and will.[118] He assesses that the mind

understands the truth, the heart (mind and emotions) desire the truth, and the will acts upon the

truth which must be true of every disciple of Jesus Christ.[119] Discipleship is attributed directly to

love for Jesus according to his own declaration seen in John 14:15, "If you love me, keep my

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[114] "1321. Didaskó," Strong's Concordance: Greek, Biblehub.com, accessed July 10, 2021, https://biblehub.com/greek/1321.htm.

[115] Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: *An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. by J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, vol. 2, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 94.

[116] "5083. Tēreó," Strong's Concordance: Greek, Biblehub.com, accessed July 10, 2021, https://biblehub.com/greek/5083.htm.

[117] Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), Logos Bible Software.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid.

commands." The word "keep" in this verse, *tērēsete*, is from the same root word *téreó* for "observe," *tērein*, used in Matthew 28:20, so the inference here is that faithful, willing obedience equates to love according to Jesus.

Jesus graciously encouraged disciples then, and the same truth is relevant today, the task of discipleship will not and cannot be done without him and that he will always be with his disciples, especially as they make other disciples (Matt 28:20). This call for discipleship was given at a turbulent time, even seemingly inconvenient, as Christian persecution, the emergence of counterfeit prophets, and apostasy were prevalent occurrences.[120] In times of adversity, God commands his disciples to remain steadfast and trust his word, just as Moses experienced with Egypt and Pharaoh. Jesus instructed his disciples to do the same in the Great Commission despite the Christian persecution around them during that time. (Exod 3:12-13; Exod 7:2 (a)).[121] Discipleship is uncompromising obedience to Christ, living holy by faith in him and teaching others to do the same. When Jesus commissioned his disciples, they had great proof before them that the words he spoke at that time, and before that event, were true and would come to pass. They had proof with their own eyes and ears as they received the Great Commission from the lips of the resurrected Lord. He had promised earlier as the sign of Jonah in Matthew 12:40, declaring to the antagonists and opposition, the Kingdom was in fact upon them, and something far greater than both Jonah and Solomon had come, Jesus the Christ.

In Luke 24, the risen Jesus' appearance to the eleven and the disciples from Emmaus provides insight into the commitment to faith in Christ. As a disciple, following Christ transcends past death and truly begets eternal life. Jesus appeared and stood amid the disciples as

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[120] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 70.

[121] Ibid., 71.

they contemplated and discussed all that had recently occurred. Despite being awestruck and in disbelief, Jesus ate with them and showed them his hands and feet; he knew their thoughts and reassured him that he was real imploring them, "touch me and see" and that "a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see" (vv 39-40). He encouraged them that all that occurred was to fulfill the "Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms" in him (v 45). His resurrection was undoubtedly the perfect encouragement to inspire them to trust, follow, and tarry in Jerusalem, awaiting the power from on high (v 49). The trust, followship, and expectation in the Lord Jesus was discipleship and a crucial component in the inauguration of the NT church on the day of Pentecost cited in Acts 2. The disciples were witnesses of his life, death, and resurrection and now only needed "the Father's promise" to become witnesses of God's glory and hope to the world in and through Jesus Christ.

Acts 2 begins with the entrance of the Holy Spirit like the "sound of a violent rushing wind" while they were assembled expectantly waiting for God's promise to be revealed (vv 1-2). The Spirit endued the disciples with power and the ability to declare God's greatness in various languages (v 6). Peter subsequently boldly preached the sermon that ignited the NT church's existence by proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Messiah according to the Scriptures. About 3,000 souls came to faith and were baptized that day (vv 5-11, 14-41). The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost fulfilled "the Father's Promise" and Jesus's words to the disciples that they would be "baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days" (Acts 1:4). The Holy Spirit was a guarantee for disciples then and now that Christ leads and empowers his disciples to follow in unwavering trust and obedience to him in all things. He continues to instruct his disciples by the Spirit in the words and actions that must happen to the glory of God and the assigned time as seen at

Pentecost (Luke 12:12).[122] The obedience practiced among the disciples by faith in Jesus after his ascension created the opportunity and readiness to receive the Father's promise. As a result, they proclaimed Jesus as the Christ according to the Scriptures, baptizing in his name, thus making even more disciples and fulfilling the Great Commission. Faith in the resurrected Lord and power from the Holy Spirit constitutes the mortar that transcends time joining historical and contemporary disciples today to fulfill the Great Commission.

The significance of knowing the Scriptures in the revelation of Christ in Luke 24 and Acts 2 was paramount. There was no other way to know and trust Jesus as the promised Messiah except in accordance with what God had already stated in his Word. Through the Scriptures, disciples came to see the true identity of Jesus as Messiah and trusted in him alone for salvation and inheritance to the promises of God. This same assessment of trust and commitment is made by the apostle Paul to the church at Ephesus. He informed them, "But ye have not so learned Christ," implying that although they were informed about Christ, the salvation and righteousness they received was not being lived out in their everyday lives simply because there was no genuine relationship with him; therefore, he posited they had not *learned* (emphasis added) him.[123] The term learned alluded to the cost of discipleship through obedience and genuine relationship that one may honestly know Christ even beyond impossibilities.[124] This commitment was seen in Paul's declaration of the believer's identity to the Roman church as well. He urged them to understand that their baptism into Christ meant they had been crucified with Christ;

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[122] Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts: Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 49-51, accessed September 12, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[123] Wiersbe, Warren W. *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), Logos Bible Software.

[124] Ibid.

however, since he lives, they too lived through him, but their lives belonged to Christ for the glory of God (Rom 6:4-11, KJV).[125]

At the heart of the Great Commission is love, and Jesus' instruction to teach others to obey what he commanded continues to push his disciples past their borders of comfort. In Luke 10, Jesus shows what love, and thus the love of his disciples, should imitate. He addresses an expert of the law who questions him about inheriting eternal life and subsequently about who qualifies as a neighbor. He keenly offers clarity to loving one's neighbor as oneself (v 27). He cites the Good Samaritan parable and shows how those considered righteous, the priest and the Levite, passed by their fellow man in need, but a Samaritan, who had a credible reason to pass by served his neighbor graciously even to excess. The Samaritan truly considered someone else more than himself. After Jesus finished the parable, he posed a question to the man, "Which of these three proved to be a neighbor to the man…?" The man replied, "the one who showed mercy to him," and Jesus told him to do the same (vv 36-37). Jesus' disciples must walk in love past their comfort level, and from this parable, the example of showing righteous love is shown through men. The priests and Levites were well-respected but did not convey godly love in the parable. A Samaritan with the right heart, who loved past cultural limitations, showed God's kindness and compassion. In this passage, Jesus showed that men could affect and impact their culture by righteously living out the love of God, as his disciples, and teaching others to do the same.

This sentiment is echoed later to the Christians in Rome. In Romans 13, Paul urges believers to submit to authority because they exist only by God's authority, but more importantly, submit to one another in love. He proclaims that any commandment referring to the

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[125] Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*.

godly relationship between people—"**Do not commit adultery**, **do not murder**; **do not steal**, **do not covet**; and any other commandment [sic]" is included in the commandment "Love your neighbor as yourself" and is a fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:9, CSB). Boa and Kruidenier add that while this commandment governs the relationship and motives for interactions between people, it ultimately suggests that one's intentional care for oneself should be the same towards one's neighbor.[126] Discipleship encompasses obedience towards godly love in all circumstances towards all people.

In the OT, the biblical account of man's creation also implies God's intent for discipleship, allowing mankind to rule sovereignly over the earth, which he saw as "very good" (Gen 1:30). Genesis 1:26 (NIV) gives the account that God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule…" over God's "good" creation. The Hebrew word for make, עָשָׂה (*asah*), suggests the fashioning or manufacturing of an object for a specific purpose or to do a specific work.[127] The purposeful intent of God's creation of mankind was to cast his sovereign image in the earth with the work of displaying his good and perfect authority through trust and guidance in him over all earthly creation. The term "rule" meant that man's dominion over the earth was a divine signature emulating God's sovereignty over all things. God's image and likeness in man was man's first, inherent attribute and directive towards discipleship to God and eventually discipling others to live and rule in the same perfect and righteous, God-given authority in the earth.

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[126] K. Boa and W. Kruidenier, "Romans," Vol. 6, in *Holman New Testament Commentary*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 399.

[127] "6213. Asah," Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (BDB), *Biblehub.com*, accessed on 9.12.20, https://biblehub.com/bdb/6213.htm.

Abraham's life displays discipleship despite the mistakes he suffered along the way. In Genesis 12:1 (NIV), the Lord commanded Abraham (Abram), "go from your country, your people and father's household to the land I will show you." God promised to make him a great nation, and in his obedience and trust in God, Abraham went as the Lord commanded. Although Abraham experienced fear and uncertainty in this new journey, God proved mighty and protected him and Sarai despite Abraham's falsehood about who Sarai was to him. He sent plagues to the Egyptian Pharaoh and his household, negating Sarah's harm (vv17-20). God also gave Abraham victory over powerful kings and their troops, with only 318 men of his household, and Abraham trusted and honored God through his tithe to the priest Melchizedek (14:14; 17-20). After being promised a natural heir from him and Sarah, God provided, and when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his heir, Isaac, at Mt. Moriah, Abraham trusted God and did not withhold Isaac, and God provided a suitable sacrifice for an offering (15:4; 21:1-6; 22:8-18). By faith, God credited righteousness to Abraham and blessed an entire people (Israel) (15:6). This righteousness is the same credit received today when believers place faith in Abraham's descendant, Jesus Christ, and make an intentional choice to follow him as a disciple (Matt 1:1-17). Discipleship not only blesses the disciple but blesses generations to come.

In Exodus 18, discipleship is seen as Moses is given invaluable counsel by his father-in-law, Jethro, to judge the people's affairs. Once God delivered the Israelites from Pharaoh in Egypt, Jethro visited him with Moses' wife, Zipporah, and their two sons. After they were together and praised God for all that had done been done, Jethro observed the practice of Moses' judgment over the people and how arduous this task was for him. He made this statement to Moses, "What you are doing is not good" (v. 17, CSB). He then advised him to represent the people before God, instruct them about the statutes and laws and teach them the way to live and

what they must do, but appoint faithful men with spiritual integrity to govern over the people in various groups of "thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens" allowing them to judge over the people (vv 19-22). Jethro added that Moses should only hear major cases and lighten his load of the people's burdens. This act would promote a sense of individual accountability and responsibility to God, preserve and prosper Moses' overall health, and share the responsibility of discipleship with others who could instruct the people to live better and honor God.

A final OT reference of discipleship is in the faithful relationship of Joshua to Moses. Joshua was discipled by Moses as he followed the Lord. Joshua witnessed Moses' unwavering trust and commitment to the Lord. Through the exodus from Egypt, Joshua personally testified to the Lord's faithfulness to his people. As God commanded the Israelites to move throughout the wilderness from Egypt, Moses instructed the people, and Joshua followed obediently. When Moses commanded Joshua to select men and fight against the Amalekites, he did not hesitate. He accompanied Moses up Mount Sinai when others namely Aaron, Hur, and the elders could not follow; he patiently waited for Moses to return from his forty-day, forty-night communion with God at the top of the mountain (17:8-13; 24:18). Joshua witnessed the Israelites' sin against God by worshiping false gods, particularly the golden calf, and saw God's judgment of a plague to befall the people (32:35). From this act of rebellion, Moses initiated the tent of meeting where anyone could go and consult the Lord, but due to guilt, they chose to observe Moses' relationship with God from a distance. However, Joshua would follow Moses to the tent, and when Moses left and returned to the camp, Joshua would seek the Lord for himself and remain (33:11). Discipleship transformed Joshua from a man to a man of God and an instrument for his use as he committed his life to God intimately and not from a distance. Joshua sought an authentic relationship with the Lord, independent of Moses, yet influenced by him. God chose Joshua as

Moses' successor to fulfill the promise to his people of bringing them to the Promised Land (Num 27:18-21). Unfortunately, the lack of discipleship can also be seen in Joshua's life, as the Bible does not cite Joshua discipling a successor or mentee as intimately as his relationship was with Moses. A probable, grave outcome from the lack of discipleship towards someone else, while Joshua led the Israelites, can be noted from this early passage of Judges (Judg 2:8-11, NIV):

> "Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten. And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel. Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD…."

This passage reiterates an earlier assessment that discipleship, or the lack thereof, has a continuous and eternal impact for generations to come.

A NT parallel that echoes this sentiment and responsibility of discipleship shared among capable men is the apostle Paul's exhortation to Timothy, "the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim 2:2, NIV). Paul understood that the progression of the gospel message depended on others being taught and entrusted with the treasure of faith in Jesus Christ while living effectively among other Christians and non-Christians alike. Paul's missionary journey in Acts 16 with Silas and Timothy through Macedonia shows that God's power followed them while they were living as disciples teaching, praying, and sharing the gospel. They exorcised evil spirits, and the power of God even freed them while they were in prison (vv 25-27). The display of their

faithfulness and God's power, despite their sufferings, led to a guard's conversion and the salvation of his household (vv 28-34). Both accounts from Jethro and Moses to Paul and his missionary companions, Timothy and Silas, suggest one must be a faithful disciple himself, characterized by having a faithful relationship with and to God, before teaching or instructing others to follow a prescribed way of life that would otherwise be unknown to them. Paul makes this simple yet powerful statement of discipleship to the Christians at Corinth. He urges them to "follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1).

Discipleship is often attached to NT Scripture simply because the term disciple, μαθητής (*mathétés*), is more commonly seen within the NT Gospels, at least over 260 times.[128] Yet, the Hebrew equivalent of this word, לִמּוּד (*limmud*), has a potent contextual bearing in OT scripture, cited in Isaiah 8:16 (ESV), where the prophet states, "Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples."[129] In this passage, Isaiah's reference to disciples is the people of Israel called by God into covenantal relationship through their Patriarchs as a shining example of discipleship to other nations.[130] This relationship was meant to be sustained by God yet ignited and activated by steadfast faith in God alone as the refuge against all enemies, namely Assyria during this era. Whether a foreign pagan nation or the secular views of the world today, discipleship still requires those who follow Christ to remain steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work Jesus has called them to do, knowing it is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58).

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[128] "3101. Mathétés," Strong's Concordance: Greek, *Biblehub.com*, accessed on September 12, 2020, https://biblehub.com/greek/3101.htm.

[129] "3928. Limmud," Strong's Concordance: Hebrew, *Biblehub.com*, accessed on September 12, 2020, https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3928.htm.

[130] Michael J. Wilkins, "Disciple, Discipleship," *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed. Baker Reference Library, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 175-177.

Theoretical Foundations

There are many theoretical foundations regarding discipleship that have served as a basis for prior research. John Wesley was convinced that grace-empowered believers, namely laypeople, could impact and help sustain the lives of converts, encouraging them to live holy through the larger group known as societies and other smaller, discipling groups.[131] Societies, synonymous with present-day congregations, were composed of all the Methodists who lived in a specific locality.[132] These groups served parishioners in the form of an assembly that included lectures, preaching, public reading, and hymnals.[133] Classes and Bands were smaller groups that placed a more intense and direct focus on discipleship.

Classes focused on individual behaviors of prohibitions, exhortations, and helpful practices to be maintained as "means of grace" and were considered the most influential unit within Wesley's system.[134] Class meetings were composed of an intimate group of 10-12 individuals who met weekly for personal supervision of their spiritual growth.[135] A class had a group, lay leader from among them who inquired about the condition of each group member's soul and advised, reproved, comforted, or encouraged them according to their spiritual needs.[136] The 19th-century revivalist Dwight L. Moody offered this commendation regarding classes,

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[131] Daniel G. Reid, Robert Dean Linder, Bruce L. Shelley, and Harry S. Stout, *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), Logos Bible Software.

[132] D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*, (Wilmore, KY: Rafiki Books, 2016), 81-82.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid., 94.

[135] Ibid., 93.

[136] Ibid., 94.

"The Methodist class-meetings are the best institutions for training converts the world ever saw."[137]

Lastly, Wesley incorporated even smaller groups of three to five individuals known as Bands. Bands focused on the feelings and emotions of the soul that produced ungodly behaviors. These small groups comprised a homogenous grouping of parishioners of similar age and marital status who desired growth in love, holiness, and purity of intention.[138] The environment within these groups was one of ruthless honesty and frank openness with the goal of attitudinal and emotional improvement for greater spiritual growth.[139] Unlike Classes which consisted of a leader initiating discussion among group members and shared experiences, Bands motivated individuals to willingly express the true state of their own souls first regarding faults they had committed in thought, word, or deed including temptations felt from the last meeting.[140] Deep, probing questions were asked that examined their statements and prayer ended every meeting aimed towards the state of each person.[141] This same idea of frank openness, as noted in Wesley's Bands, is also present in an article by researcher Jason Lanker where he adds that discipleship small groups should "enact the concept of relational holiness."[142] This includes a powerful tool of practice known as "release and acceptance," the release of false and acceptance of true identities according to the Word of God. The truth of the soul's new identity in Christ is

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[137] D. Michael Henderson, John Wesley's Class Meeting, 91.

[138] Ibid., 110.

[139] Ibid., 110.

[140] Ibid., 115.

[141] Ibid., 115.

[142] Jason Lanker, "The Soul: Discipleship That Fosters an Integrated Soul," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (April 2019): 122–33, doi:10.1177/0739891318823212.

spoken over each member at the start of the meeting.[143] Wesley's discipleship model of the interlocking system of Societies, Classes, and Bands contributed to a radical transformation of England's working masses because it focused on the spiritual welfare of parishioners by primarily instructing and engaging them with the Word of God, encouraging righteous living through the new life Christ has commanded them to walk in by faith, and lastly encouraging others to do the same thus promoting effective discipleship.

Researcher Helen Kim notes other models that provide guidance into conducting discipleship. She notes that discipleship is a process that goes beyond a program to truly living life together with the sole goal of knowing God better and seeing Christ at work in the lives of group members.[144] She discusses Programmatic Discipleship, a method that often takes on a monologue approach. The delivery of information usually happens one way, whether pastor to congregation, teacher to class, small group leader to group members, or discipler to disciple.[145] She directly adds that this method can be relatively ineffective according to communication theory. Instead of one-way communication, she argues the Participatory Model can be more effective in changing opinions and values, thus changing people.[146] The primary reason for the shift in group members' thoughts and ideas is because this model seeks dialogue with real people who ask hard and existential questions. This type of exchange goes deeper than surface talk and can have a transformational impact.

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[143] Lanker, "The Soul."

[144] Helen C. Kim, "Developing a Discipleship Culture in the Church through Increased 'with-God' Conversations," (PhD diss., Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2015), 73, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[145] Ibid., 77.

[146] Ibid.

Obedience Oriented Discipleship is a model of discipleship that aims to train disciples to

obey all that Jesus commands by equating an understanding of obedience to love as Christ

intends. [147] The structure of this model is based on the third imperative within the Great

Commission given in Matthew 28:18-20, "teaching them to obey everything I have

commanded…" and the Great Commandment in Matthew 22:37-40, "Love the Lord your God

with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest

commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the

Prophets hang on these two commandments." The implication here is Jesus perfectly fulfilled the

Law and Prophets and charges his disciples to imitate him by faithfully walking as he did (Matt

5:17; John 14:6). If they follow the way he has commanded, Jesus states this is love (John

14:15). The researcher adds that this discipleship model also considers a component of time

between teaching and expected obedience as a critical factor, focusing on immediate

obedience.[148] Davis follows this same rationale suggesting that Jesus' teaching advocated prompt

obedience and led his disciples to forsake their "old, inadequate understanding of God" to live

the true nature of the gospel.[149] Davis agreed with Smart's declaration that the spread of the

gospel requires intimate interaction that only happens in small groups.[150] Through this type of

interaction, the disciples became disciplined and learned true fellowship and followship to Jesus

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[147] Mark Colebank, "Obedience Oriented Discipleship: A Mixed Methods Study of Effective Discipleship Models in Select Southern Baptist Churches," (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 76, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[148] Ibid., 78.

[149] Darlene Teo Davis, "The Relationship between Christian Education Practices and Lifestyle Discipleship in African American Churches," 36.

[150] James D. Smart, *The Teaching Ministry of the Church: An Examination of the basic principles of Chrsitian Education*, (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminister Press, 1954), 85, quoted in Darlene Teo Davis, "The Relationship between Christian Education Practices and Lifestyle Discipleship in African American Churches," 36.

Christ.[151] This interaction referenced as discipleship led to the movement of God's kingdom into the life of the world, just as Jesus had begun and would continue to do in his disciples through his Spirit (Acts 1:8).[152] This same concept of prompt obedience is biblically supported in the call of the disciples Andrew, Simon, James, and John from fishermen to fishers of men (Matt 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20).

Researcher Parnell Lovelace used a small group setting with the discipleship curriculum entitled the *Kingdom Man Series* by Tony Evans in his study. The curriculum communicated the biblical precedence of man's dominion in the earth and repositioning himself from worldly to biblical values.[153] Small groups provided a much better forum for reflecting, discussing, and fellowship around the curriculum, much different from the monthly men's fellowship meeting in their main auditorium.[154] The researcher states he was able to measure the men's spiritual commitment and maturity through engagement in conversation, spiritual disciplines, and the affirmation of a spiritual/social skill rather than in attendance or prompted activity such as corporate worship in larger gatherings.[155] He reports participants felt the environment was safe and less socially intimidating.[156]

In this project, the researcher's goal is to encourage frank and open discussion and dialogue among group members advocating spiritual formation and lifelong discipleship by

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[151]James D. Smart, *"The Teaching Ministry of the Church…,"*36.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Parnell M. Lovelace, Jr, "Implementing a Structured Small Group Curriculum among African American Men at the Center of Praise Ministries," (PhD diss., Biola University, 2012), 89, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[154] Ibid., 90.

[155] Ibid., 91.

[156] Ibid, 92.

facing oneself—individual biases, thoughts, emotions, and the nature of the soul. Once these areas are known, participants will be encouraged to surrender anything to God that impedes a faithful walk with him. As the men genuinely evaluate the location of their walk with God, not only by faith in the finished work of Christ but the commitment to follow him in their daily lives as well, transformation will occur. The transformation into the heroes that homes, schools, communities, churches, states, countries, and the world truly need.[157] Men become resilient wearing the armor of God as he intended (Eph 6:10-17). The researcher believes that power is derived by accepting God's truth of his identity in Christ, thus becoming empowered by the Spirit to live a Christian life (John 14:6).

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[157] Tony Evans, *Kingdom Man: Every Man's Destiny, Every Woman's Dream*, (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family Publishing, 2012), 10.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This project promoted the instruction, preparation, and development of male parishioners of Breakthrough COGBF to serve as active disciples of Jesus Christ through edification, exhortation, and empowerment to live for Christ while teaching others to do the same. Efforts toward evangelism often take center stage in church priorities and functionality, yet evangelism expresses one aspect of the Christian experience. Most Christians would agree with the biblical verse Galatians 2:20, which suggests that the Christian life is embodied by Christ living within believers' hearts and minds, empowering them to love and desire abundant and godly life choices. However, Christian living is exemplified by obedience to Christ and dependence on his Spirit for guidance which is the source for impactful discipleship. Disciples allow their faith to lead their followership to Christ and fellowship with others. The Barna Group reports that while many parishioners believe churches drive and advocate spiritual maturity and discipleship, the view of church leadership starkly contrasts as many leaders believe not many churches are effective in this area.[158] This researcher addressed this disparity by challenging male members to become more like Christ in a discipleship model. This disparity led this researcher's efforts in this qualitative phenomenological action research project to understand the participants' perception of being disciples of Jesus Christ and the value of discipleship in their lives.[159]

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[158] "Is Discipleship Effective in U.S. Churches?", The Barna Group, accessed October 3, 2020, https://www.barna.com/is-discipleship-effective-in-u-s-churches/.

[159] Ernest Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed., (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publicaitons, 2014), 36.

Phenomenology

This qualitative study included a phenomenological approach. The word phenomenon comes from the Greek word *phaenesthai*, which means to flare up, show itself, or appear. From this perspective, a phenomenological study intends to bring to light, place into brightness, and show itself in the totality of what is happening in a situational context.[160] This researcher considered the cultural context of his local church and the potential positive impact on black men to become involved in a discipleship curriculum. Phenomenology is an investigation method that explores a particular phenomenon by examining the perceptions of those directly involved or affected by a concept to create a comprehensive interpretation of their experiences.[161] It best fits the purpose of this study to ascertain the discipleship perceptions of black male parishioners providing an investigative structure for collecting data and conducting analysis.[162] This approach focused attention on one specific concept, discipleship, and allowed this researcher to gather meaningful data through individual/collective/shared perspectives of participants who shared the phenomenon.[163]

A phenomenological approach is description-centered versus analysis or interpretive-focused, and participants' perception is paramount.[164] From the multiple meanings of concepts gathered through interviewing participants, observation, collecting documentation and artifacts,

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[160] Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, (Thousand Oaks, CA:Sage Publications, 1994), 41-42.

[161] John Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed., (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2017), 35.

[162] J. W. Creswell & C.N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* 4th ed., (Thousand Oaks, CA: 2016), 77.

[163] Ibid.

[164] Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, 23.

or a combination of these data collection methods, the intent is to explain or bring "light" to the core of the phenomenon comprehensively.[165] Phenomenology is also characterized by separating participants' experiences from the researcher's bias, seeking to remove preconceived biases, judgments, and any other influences in an attempt to analyze and report information objectively.[166]

The two types of phenomenology are hermeneutical and transcendental.[167] Hermeneutical phenomenology is concerned with describing and determining meaning from participant experiences, but the primary focus of transcendental phenomenology is describing participant experiences apart from the personal bias and background of the researcher.[168] The current study followed the latter approach of transcendental phenomenology to focus attention on descriptions of discipleship from the men of Breakthrough COGBF.

Phenomenology has philosophical and psychological origins and first appeared in philosophical literature in 1765.[169] According to Moustakas, Hegel provided the first concrete definition explaining "phenomenology referred to knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience. The process leads to an unfolding of phenomenal consciousness through science and philosophy 'toward the absolute knowledge of the Absolute.'"[170] Edmund Husserl's

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[165] Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, 73.

[166] Ibid.

[167] J. W. Creswell & C.N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* 4th ed., (Thousand Oaks, CA: 2016), 77.

[168] Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, 43

[169] J. J. Kockelmans, *Phenomenology*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 24, quoted in Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, 43.

[170] Ibid.

development of key aspects, namely epoche, distinguished phenomenology as a research design.[171] The concept of epoche required eliminating every supposition seeking the raising of knowledge through inquiry above all else.[172] For Husserl, knowledge based on intuition and essence preceded empirical knowledge.[173]

Utilizing the phenomenological approach in the current research study allowed this researcher to employ several features while conducting this study.[174] Some structures for phenomenological research include the following methods:

1. Discovering a topic and question rooted in autobiographical meanings and values, as well as involving social meanings and significance;

2. Conducting a comprehensive review of the professional and research literature;

3. Constructing a set of criteria to locate appropriate co-researchers;

4. Providing co-researchers with instructions on the nature and purpose of the investigation, and developing an agreement that includes obtaining informed consent, insuring confidentiality, and delineating the responsibilities of the primary researcher and research participant, consistent with ethical principles of research;

5. Developing a set of questions or topics to guide the interview process;

6. Conducting and recording a lengthy person-to-person interview that focuses on a bracketed topic and question. A follow-up interview may also be needed;

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[171] Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, 41.

[172] Ibid.

[173] Ibid.

[174] Ibid.

7. Organizing and analyzing the data to facilitate development of individual textural and structural descriptions, a composite textural description, a composite structural description, and a synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences

This researcher used steps one, two, five, and six exclusively during the research process to gather data that would later prove invaluable in interpreting results and the overall impact of the intervention design.

The Role of the Researcher

In the initial stages of the research project, this researcher functioned as a deacon at Breakthrough COGBF. At the time of intervention implementation, this researcher had joined another church ministry. Interest in this study arose from a personal enthusiasm for the topic of discipleship, as this researcher had participated in a one-year discipleship program at Bellevue Baptist Church in 2017. Another motivating factor was the desire to further academic knowledge and experience in discipleship in partial fulfillment of a DMin degree.

While this researcher attended various churches from adolescence to mid-thirties, the connection to love and serve God with real passion did not sharpen until truly accepting salvation and the lordship of Jesus Christ seven years ago. This researcher became committed to reading, studying, and learning about Jesus, which eventually led to an interaction with a coworker who informed him of the discipleship opportunity at Bellevue Baptist. As the discipleship program progressed, this researcher realized what was missing in his local church, among a congregation comprised of black men. A fire ignited to create an opportunity to inform other black men about what a disciple truly is and begin a discipleship curriculum at Breakthrough COGBF. This researcher acknowledged the need to bridge the gap between the two terms believer and disciple, activating the God-given authority and power they have within

them. This gap converted this researcher's passion into an investigation of the biblical

foundations for discipleship for future application to the local church.

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is to act as "the primary instrument for

data collection and analysis."[175] Qualitative research is interpretative in design, so researcher

biases, values, and judgment are implicit in the final report. This researcher aimed to establish

rigor and validity in the analysis exclusively cited in the next chapter. This researcher has not

participated in any other types of discipleship activities or programs aside from the program

mentioned at Bellevue Baptist Church and some casual, virtual discussions with friends

discussing the Bible and biblical topics.

Spiritual and Social Barriers among Black Men

Spiritual barriers such as the absence or ineffectiveness of Christian leadership in the

home often lead to a lack of Christian values to be passed down into black families with

devastating effects on the family, especially black men.[176] Historically, the family has been one

of the strengths of African-American culture, but the multi-generational decay of family

structure through various modes of dysfunction has left latter generations without the advantage

of solid spiritual training.[177] As a result, younger African Americans have conveyed their

perceptions of the church and traditional religious practice as hypocritical because the actions of

believers contradict the teachings of Christ or the Bible.[178] Many stated that they encountered

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[175] John W. Creswell, Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1994), 145.

[176] Samuel White III, *My Brother's Keeper: Church Ministry for Young African American Males*, (Bloomington, IL: WestBow Press, 2014), 45.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid., 58.

little to no attempt towards biblical literacy in their homes of origin, nor was the presence of biblical living modeled or practiced in the home.[179] Restoration from these severe effects on the black family can only reverse as black men establish their God-given authority and power as men in fellowship with God, disciples of Jesus Christ, and leaders in their homes.

The decline in godly examples among men in the Black church has been characterized by the unavoidable loss of biblically founded moral standards that impact behavior and character transformation. White makes a powerful declaration in his summation of the plight, "the church is a co-conspirator of the spiritual slavery of young African American males. Its operative theology adds and abets the spiritual oppression of young Black males."[180] The failure of the church to "translate the gospel in an idiom they could appreciate" has negatively impacted the participation of many black men in Black churches.[181] He argues that non-integrative approaches to contemporary problems do not stir desire nor convince men of the power of the gospel, much less to become a disciple of Jesus Christ.[182]

The lack of vibrant, spiritually committed leaders first in homes, then churches, directly affects other environments. Dysfunctional families are multigenerational.[183] Parents and grandparents that have low self-esteem issues that manifest them in destructive and toxic behavior have passed it on to ensuing generations. Absentee fathers and the loss of positive male role models in the community are again at epidemic proportions. To overcome or simply survive

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[179] Samuel White III, *My Brother's Keeper*, 41.

[180] Ibid., 154.

[181] Ibid., 40.

[182] Ibid.

[183] Ibid., 45.

the detriment within these environments, many black men choose alternative ways to define themselves as powerful allowing money or physical prowess to be the "high premium…not their character and mental abilities."[184] This choice is nothing short of affirming worth and identity to the world, instead of seeking their actual value through a committed relationship with Jesus Christ.

White argues that the loss of moral integrity in the Black Church coupled with societal woes affect black men's standards and their perception of the gospel message.[185] Systemic issues such as hypocrisy and cultural Christianity have an impactful presence in many churches, regardless of culture or ethnicity, and this circumstance has indeed plagued Black churches.[186]

These aspects, among others, propel a compelling argument for the church in general and the Black Church, specifically, to emphasize discipleship among men

Sampling

Purposive sampling allowed this researcher to collect significant data despite the small number of participants. This aspect is a tremendous advantage of purposive sampling because a researcher can evaluate the suitability of a sampling population by considering some of the following criteria presented in the following listing.[187] The sampling process is guided by choosing appropriate principles from this list:[188]

1. Folks that are politically savvy, have a vested interest, or are key stakeholders

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[184] Samuel White III, *My Brother's Keeper*, 25.

[185] Ibid.

[186] Ibid., 61.

[187] Tim Sensing, Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach for Doctor of Ministry Projects, (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 82.

[188] Ibid.

2. A typical population that is generally knowledgeable about the subject at hand

3. A group that fits a certain demographic (But do not assume that because someone fits the target group that it means they either care or have something to say about the subject.)

4. Participants chosen by someone else (often a key informant like a church board or ministerial staff)

5. Extreme or deviant cases that exemplify the outliers of your particular study

6. Snowball or chain sampling where people you interview first give you leads and connections about who to ask next

7. The confirming or disconfirming case

8. The outsider or the newcomer, who may sometimes be quite perceptive and offer a different way of looking at a familiar problem

9. People who represent the emerging case

10. People who represent the typical case

11. People who have a particular reputation

12. Folks who represent a certain opinion

All participants were black males over 18 years of age who have been members of the local ministry for at least three or more years, although membership length was not a formal requirement of the research project. All participants had vested interest via their active membership status at Breakthrough COGBF, and they were knowledgeable about the church environment and ongoing activities at the church. While purposive sampling has been suggested to present some bias towards the beliefs prevalent among key researchers, this researcher attempted to remain as objective as possible when recording field notes and transcribing

interviews by member checking data with participants within one day of the interview to ensure their sentiments were captured with accuracy while maintaining the interview's integrity.[189]

Other sampling methods such as random, theoretical, or maximum variation sampling were deemed unsuitable for this research context.[190] Random sampling is often used in quantitative research when many participants are necessary for the study.[191] Qualitative studies seek depth, but quantitative studies seek breadth; thus, the need for a large sample population and random sampling protects the validity of the data.[192] Random sampling provides the data pool for statistical analysis, but since many DMin students are not trained in this area, a consultant or the like would likely be necessary for pursuing this type of research analysis.[193]

Theoretical sampling was not chosen because this sampling technique collects data from places, people, and events to maximize opportunities for concept or theme development.[194] Samples emerge as collected data begins to reach a saturation point, guiding the researcher to the project's next phase.[195] This sampling method has two main questions: 1) what groups of data will be collected next and 2) why? A researcher using this method does not know who will be asked questions, what question will be asked, or where the research will ultimately direct him. [196]

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[189] Harsh Suri, "Purposeful Sampling in Qualitative Research Synthesi," *Qualitative Research Journal* 11, no. 2 (2011): 63, http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fpurposeful-sampling-qualitative-research%2Fdocview%2F920894910%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085.

[190] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach*, 82.

[191] Ibid.

[192] Ibid.

[193] Ibid., 83.

[194] Ibid.

[195] Ibid.

[196] Ibid.

This sampling method was improper because this researcher knew the target population needed for the study. Time constraints also existed regarding the implementation and completion of the intervention design that would not compliment this type of sampling method.

Maximum variation sampling considers a broad range of perspectives increasing inclusivity within a project. [197] This sampling method seeks to include people who vary in age, gender, marital status, employment, ethnicity, length of membership, etc.[198] While this method strengthens the validity of common patterns that emerge from the significant variations, it was not incorporated. This project focused on observing and analyzing black men's perceptions of discipleship in a predominately black church. Other considerations such as age, length of membership, and employment are variables that likely would yield even greater insight into the potential of this intervention's impact with other groups, and emergent themes stemming from such research would be interesting to observe, either as a part of a mixed-methods or quantitative study.[199]

Intervention Design

The intervention design consisted of meetings, primarily via a virtual platform, that served as the primary vehicle to establish trust and learning in an environment that promoted openness and truth. This researcher utilized virtual meetings through Zoom for group sessions and weekly individual meetings with participants. Successful outcomes were sought through increased spiritual engagement, church attendance, and invitations to attend church services and engage others in one-on-one discipleship opportunities. This researcher fully acknowledges that

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[197] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach,* 84.

[198] Ibid.

[199] Ibid., 84.

only the power of God through his Spirit serves as the true conduit that transforms believers into disciples giving them the "desire and power to do what pleases him" (Phil 2:13, NLT).

Implementation of the Intervention Design

This researcher implemented an intervention into the ministry context over eight weeks, including weekly meetings held approximately one hour in length. Data collection methods included the use of surveys, interviews, and a focus group. Prior to the intervention, participants were asked to complete the *Real Discipleship Survey* (See Appendix A) to assess the significance and presence of discipleship in their lives. A retake of this survey was completed post-intervention to assess changes in perception and potential growth in discipleship. This researcher gathered primary data via surveys, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups.[200] The *Real Discipleship Survey* designed by Phil Maynard of Excellence in Ministry (EMC3) Coaching studies six categories of discipleship: *A Life of Worship*, *A Life of Hospitality*, *A Life Open to Jesus*, *A Life Obeying Jesus*, *A Life of Service*, and *A Life of Generosity* to assess and encourage discipleship growth relating participant responses to four, evolving action phases of believers: *Exploring*, *Beginning*, *Growing*, and *Maturing*.[201] The use of interviews with open-ended questions provided greater dialogue and clarity of discipleship efforts within participants' ministry context. Interview questions were asked individually and in a focus group to capture the exchange between participants in an open, honest discussion. Interview questions were styled as "grand tour" and "prompt questions" to collect data.[202] Grand tour questions are open-ended and set the stage for interviews. These questions enable participants to describe a situation in their

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[200] Ernest Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed., (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014), 104.

[201] "Real Discipleship Survey," Excellence in Ministry Coaching, accessed Oct 3, 2020, https://emc3coaching.com/services/real-discipleship-survey/.

[202] Ernest Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed., (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014), 108.

own words and build rapport by speaking openly regarding how they perceive activities and conditions.[203] The interview questions posed to the participants were as follows:

1. How would you define discipleship?

2. What are the characteristics of a true disciple of Jesus Christ?

3. How important is discipleship according to the Bible?

4. What is the gospel message?

5. How intentional are you with sharing the gospel message?

6. What does bearing the image of God, especially as a man, mean to you?

7. What is spiritual maturity? Can you give me an example of what spiritual maturity looks like among believers?

8. How does your church measure maturity?

9. Has your church prioritized distinct practices that relate to the discipleship process?

10. Where does your church family spend more planned time in a week, at church with each other or in the community with non-believers?

<div align="center">Analysis of Interview Questions</div>

Question 1. How would you define discipleship? This researcher began with this question because it opened a broad range and perspective for participants to embark upon, including any preconceived notions of the term disciple or discipleship. The question allowed participants to give their most honest and complete responses on the topic without researcher perception, perspectives, or interests.[204] This researcher observed and grasped the relative contrast participants expressed between the terms disciple and believer, with some referencing the term

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[203] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach*, 86.

[204] Ernest Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed., (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014), 106.

disciple as a term of biblical times and not necessarily associated with the contemporary church. This question led to the use of extension and example questions where participants were prompted to expound on their perceptions with comments such as, "tell me more about this" or "give me an example of what you mean." This initial question led the tone of the interview to remain open and fluid.

Question 2. What are the characteristics of a true disciple of Jesus Christ? This question was chosen as a direct follow-up to the initial question for continuity and interview progression. Participants often spoke of a disciple's characteristics when discussing discipleship yet reiterated the comparison when asked this question directly. Followship and obedience were often discussed, noting the actions of the Twelve who followed Christ. This question also helped to illuminate the role and activities of a contemporary disciple within the interview and focus group discussions.

Question 3. How important is discipleship according to the Bible? This question aimed to assess participants' biblical knowledge of discipleship. Most responses focused on discipleship among the Twelve with little to no implication of Jesus' mandate that affects believers now. While discussing this question with participants, this researcher gained insight into the lack of discipleship as a priority and biblical illiteracy plaguing the church.[205] The necessity and significance of teaching, an emergent theme, became evident when discussing this question. Various reflections were shared during the focus group discussion post-intervention, where participants reflected on a prior lack of knowledge and understanding in discipling others according to the Scripture.

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[205] Darlene Teo Davis, "The Relationship between Christian Education Practices and Lifestyle Discipleship in African American Churches." 32.

Question 4. What is the gospel message? This question examined what participants understood about the gospel message and perceived this message to be. There were mixed responses to this question that did not explain the core of the gospel message: salvation for sinners through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:3-4). Understanding the gospel message is imperative to discipleship, especially since this message came from a resurrected Jesus implying that God's promises are true and fulfilled, strengthening the objective of discipleship to others with the authority and power given by Jesus Christ. If the gospel message is not clearly understood, the inherent power of a disciple is not present because the power of the Holy Spirit is not with him to disciple others.

Question 5. How intentional are you with sharing the gospel message? This question, similar to question two, was a follow-up to question four and aided in exploring participant understanding of the gospel message. The reluctance or confidence to disciple others implied in this question can often be paralleled to a lack of knowledge or teaching about Christ, thus an unwillingness to teach others, a critical component to discipleship. The apostle Paul illustrates this point in Romans 10:14 (NIV), "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" If believers do not intentionally share the gospel message and live a Christian life, it will be much more difficult for others to believe and follow.

Question 6. How does bearing the image of God, especially as a man, mean to you? This question pursued participant perceptions of bearing the image of God according to Genesis 1:26-27 and the creation of man. The image and likeness of God meant that man was patterned with a personality like God, including a mind to think, a heart to feel, and a will to make decisions (Phil

2:5; 1 Sam 13:14; Romans 12:2).[206] This researcher aimed to understand the significance participants placed on having and living in the likeness of God through Jesus Christ. The question parallels the theme of obedience and assists participants in better understanding that discipleship helps other men bear the image of God as intended through learning truth, love, and obedience, which are all attributes of Christ, thus God (John 14:6; 1 John 4:8; John 5:30).

Question 7. What is spiritual maturity? Can you give me an example of what spiritual maturity looks like among believers? This question targeted how participants perceived spiritual growth and maturity. Scripture references spiritual maturity as bearing fruit, equating those with true faith in Christ as "good trees" and "every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit" (Matt 7:17).[207] That same passage states that trees that do not yield good fruit will be destroyed. The fruits of a Spirit-led life are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:23, NKJV). Participants were very familiar with spiritual maturity and what fruit encompass. This question paved the way for specific, example questions about personal experiences where spiritual maturity was not exhibited either by themselves or others. Their feedback was vital to advocating discipleship to others versus unproductive consequences resulting from a lack of spiritual maturity.[208]

Question 8. How does your church measure maturity? The question addressed the researcher's curiosity about how, or if, the participant's church assessed spiritual maturity through the use of instruments such as surveys, questionnaires, etc. All participants responded the same, noting that no known methods or activities were used to measure spiritual maturity.

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[206] Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), Logos Bible Software.

[207] Ibid.

[208] Ernest Stringer, *Action Research*, 108.

Some assessments that attempt to assist churches with spiritual maturity include the *Real Discipleship Survey* used in this study and other ministry tools that assess a spiritual gifts inventory and parishioner interests. This question helped affirm the use of survey methods in this research project, which were incorporated to evaluate participants' perception of discipleship before and after the eight-week project intervention.

Question 9. Has your church prioritized distinct practices that relate to the discipleship process? Question nine served as an inquiry into unique discipleship practices occurring in the participant's ministry context. Sunday school and Bible study were two noted activities where biblical teaching occurred. These activities were present when this researcher was a part of the ministry there, but participants cited no other distinct practices for discipleship, either individually or collectively.

Question 10. Where does your church family spend more planned time in a week, at church with each other or in the community with non-believers? This final question was posed to gain an overall perspective of the church's intentionality in using parishioners to disciple others outside its four walls. This researcher affirms Breen's statement that churches "must take down the fence and give people permission to lead."[209] The empowerment of believers to follow Christ into their destinies while allowing them to lead and advocate for others to do the same, a process called discipleship. This empowerment of the believer speaks directly to the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18). This researcher used this question to assess that effort.

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[209] Mike Breen, *Multiplying Mis Multiplying Missional Leaders: From Half-Hearted Volunteers to a Mobilized Kingdom Force*, (Pawleys Island, SC: 3D Ministries, 2012), 95-99

This researcher used tape and video recordings to capture interview experiences. A "member check," or reading back of interview notes to participants, was done post-interview transcription to ensure the collected responses were participants' intended responses.[210] A phone recorder and video recorder embedded within the Zoom software were used for recording to ensure transcriptions' accuracy, which assisted this researcher in interpreting relevant data into usable information.[211] Web-based transcription software entitled Sonix transcribed all recordings along with the researcher's manual review of transcriptions for integrity, and corrections were made when necessary.

Group Meetings

The meeting outline consisted of the following format: greetings; prayer requests; opening prayer; passage discussions and reflections from the One-Year Bible, a selected text, and scripture memorization; open discussions, confessions, or other expressions to encourage transparency and dialogue; assignments for the next meeting; closing prayer (Eph 6:18; John 17:17; 1 Thess 5:11). Greetings At the close of every session, participants prayed for one another. They were encouraged to share the gospel message and extend invitations to nonmembers to attend services on Sunday mornings or Wednesday evenings. This researcher urged participants to share their reflections and other knowledge acquired in the discipleship group (D-group) and report back any experiences and interactions to the group. This researcher regularly contacted group participants at least twice between meetings to "check-in" and address any questions or concerns and listened to feedback, primarily by telephone conversation unless the participant desired an alternative form of communication (i.e., text, email, etc.).

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[210] Darlene Teo Davis, "The Relationship between Christian Education Practices and Lifestyle Discipleship in African American Churches." 32.

[211] Ibid.

Recruitment of Participants

Recruitment for this action research project did not begin until permission was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (See IRB Approval). Permission was also granted from the West Region District Superintendent Alfonso Boone and the local pastor authorizing the participation of parishioners within the Breakthrough COGBF congregation (See Appendix B). Phone calls and email recruitment with consent forms (See Appendices C & D) were used instead of in-person communications and advertisements within the local assembly due to church and local COVID-19 restrictions. After the issuance of COVID-19 mandates here in Tennessee beginning March 2020 through April 2020 that limited mass gatherings with subsequent "Safer-At-Home" and "Stay-At-Home" ordinances, Breakthrough COGBF services transitioned from "in-person" worship to virtual worship services via Facebook Live, teleconference, and other virtual platforms.[212] This researcher desired to involve at least five to seven participants out of the approximate ten male parishioners who regularly attended service. This number of participants is supported by the number of participants in John Wesley's model for making disciples called bands.[213] Bands were small gatherings focused on overt behavioral change, active participation, confession of struggles, and subjective emphasis on how group members perceive life through godly living.[214] Sensing also adds regarding sample size in qualitative research that "quality is more important than quality," and each situation will prompt different decisions.[215] Unfortunately, only four participants responded during the recruitment process,

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[212] "Covid-19 Timeline," Office of the Governor, TN.gov, accessed June 14, 2021, https://www.tn.gov/governor/covid-19/covid19timeline.html.

[213] Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting,* 68.

[214] Ibid.

[215] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach*, 85.

three acknowledging the desire to participate and one decline. This researcher proceeded with the three respondents who decided to participate in the project.

Data Analysis Procedures

In qualitative research, collecting and identifying themes is critical to analyzing data collected during the research period. Sensing mentions three ways of handling this process effectively. First, literal reading of data highlights words, phrases, languages, etc. to form formal constructs; interpretive reading allows documents to be organized by "implied" or "inferred" meanings"; lastly, reflexive reading bears the personal feelings and understandings or "biases" of the researcher to data.[216] This researcher aimed to incorporate a mixture of these techniques to identify and code themes accordingly.

As mention before in the Sampling section, member checking was incorporated to establish trustworthiness in this study. Member checking allowed participants to review raw data, analyses, and reports derived from procedures. This process enabled them to verify that research accurately relays their perspectives and experiences. Participants provided feedback and adjusted interview transcriptions by responding to this researcher via e-mail, in-person conversations, or virtual meeting. Once transcriptions were completed from interviews, video and audio files were stored on a password-protected hard drive and cloud drive. Transcriptions from interviews were vetted through this member checking process, which took approximately twenty to thirty minutes for participants to review. The member checking process provided any needed clarification regarding received data and served as a source of credibility and reliability in the study.[217] Participants participated in debriefing as an additional step to ensure their comments and

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[216] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach*, 196.

[217] Ernest Stringer, *Action Research*, 93.

experiences conveyed accurate sentiments in response to interview questions, general comments, and observations noted by this researcher.[218]

Coding software entitled *Dedoose* was incorporated to assist this researcher in completing proper coding analysis of data.[219] Coding provides units of meaning or "tags" to the interview quotes and descriptions and assists researchers in addressing the problem and purpose of the research project.[220] This researcher aimed to reduce potentially complex social dynamics experienced within this ministry context to their simplest terms without losing the meaning and value of participants' perception along the way. Themes emerged as repeating ideas became prevalent through the expression of participant views and comments made during interviews.[221]

Conclusion

This researcher learned the significance of using an appropriate research methodology while collecting data. Sound research methodology helped alleviate difficulty during the research process, and data analysis became more meaningful. In this qualitative study, a phenomenological approach allowed this researcher to engage, record systematically, and report information. In future similar studies, this researcher would undoubtedly use this approach again when assessing participant experiences in a given context.

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[218] Ernest Stringer, *Action Research*, 93.

[219] *Dedoose*, accessed August 18, 2021, https://www.dedoose.com/userguide/.

[220] Ernest Stringer, *Action Research*, 93.

[221] Carl Auerbach and Louise B. Silverstein, *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis*, (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 42, accessed September 7, 2021, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter presents the project's data analysis. It describes the study's actual participants and contains results from the qualitative research methods: the pre-and post-surveys and individual and focus group interviews. The analysis also includes a review of the intervention design, a discussion of emergent themes, and the study's significant findings.

Participants

After the eight-week project intervention, this researcher examined and assessed all data collected to ensure all participant interviews and pre-and post-surveys were collected. Three participants, all African American male Christians between the ages of 38 and 55, comprised the project group. All participants completed the intervention process; hence, pre-and post-survey results include responses from all participants (n=3). Purposive sampling was used in selecting participants because the male participants were familiar with the church environment and current parishioners of the local ministry context, so their feedback was essential to the research project. Their feedback was "information-rich" and provided depth which is more beneficial for DMin projects; information-rich data enables a researcher to learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of sampling.[222] In this project, participant interview responses about discipleship, in both individual and collective settings, assisted this researcher in understanding their perceptions of the presence and impact of discipleship in the local church and their own lives. Valuable information was extracted from the results reiterating Sensing's assertion that the sample size in qualitative research is more quality than quantity focused.[223]

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[222] Michael Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 169.

[223] Tim Sensing, Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach, 196.

Survey Analysis

All three participants completed the *Real Discipleship Survey* before the intervention

design and immediately concluding the final meeting session. The survey focused on the

development and maturation of the participants, and the six discipleship categories and their four

corresponding action phases were evaluated. These six categories, previously mentioned,

included *A Life of Worship*, *A Life of Hospitality*, *A Life Open to Jesus*, *A Life Obeying Jesus*, *A

Life of Service*, and *A Life of Generosity*.

A Life of Worship focuses on the area of discipleship that indicates the depth of

participants' relationship with God.[224] It is about the commitment to living life fully by offering

one's life to God by seeking to bring him glory each day.[225] Although most disciples begin

worship in a corporate worship experience, worship becomes more significant than a corporate

event as participants transition through the action phases. It ignites into a lifestyle characterized

by loyalty, devotion, and the prioritization of God.[226]

A Life of Hospitality is shaped by the connection to other believers in the body of Christ

and the external community.[227] This aspect points to the element of Christianity as a relational

faith seeking to discover the depths of one's relationship with God through intentional and

impactful relationships with others.[228] The degree of intimacy a believer develops with Christ

directly impacts the degree of connection with fellow believers. Thus, this category aims to help

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[224] "Real Discipleship Survey," *Excellence in Ministry Coaching*, accessed August 17, 2021, https://emc3coaching.com/services/real-discipleship-survey/.

[225] Ibid.

[226] Ibid.

[227] Ibid.

[228] Ibid.

disciples mature by drawing towards authentic relationships with other believers beyond the church (the "unchurched"), sharing God's grace and love through the gospel message and its personal impact on the disciple's life.[229]

A Life Open to Jesus is the dimension of discipleship where disciples seek to learn and know God's grace through the work of the Holy Spirit.[230] This aspect is characterized by time spent with God via prayer, the reading and study of Scriptures, and any other spiritual discipline.[231] Disciples learn that the same Holy Spirit that inspired the writers of the Scriptures inspires believers today and reveals how God still desires to work in their lives.[232]

A Life Obeying Jesus challenges disciples to become more like Jesus and not just know about him.[233] This category captures the heart of the statement given to the church at Corinth by the apostle Paul, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1, NIV). He urged the church then, and is still applicable today, to live like the One in whom they believed. This declaration meant living kindly, justly, and considerately of others. This facet of discipleship encourages disciples to see the world as Jesus did and respond to the world's provocations as Jesus responded, thus transforming the world in the process.[234]

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[229] "Real Discipleship Survey," *Excellence in Ministry Coaching*, accessed August 17, 2021, https://emc3coaching.com/services/real-discipleship-survey/.

[230] Ibid.

[231] Ibid.

[232] Ibid.

[233] Ibid.

[234] Ibid.

A Life of Service is the ultimate call of Jesus to the life of a disciple.[235] It is central to the journey of faith. Service becomes the expression and identity of the people of God. It is the way that God expresses his love to the world, as Jesus stated, "Be like the Son of Man. He did not come to be served. Instead, he came to serve others. He came to give his life as the price for setting many people free" (Matt 20:28, NIRV).[236] According to the Scriptures, every person has at least one gift and is called by God to use these gifts to serve others (Eph 4:11-13).[237] This area focuses on maturing disciples in this way.

A Life of Generosity reminds disciples to consider their duty to be generous. As Jesus sent out the Twelve to heal the sick, raise the dead, and perform many other signs and wonders, he instructed them, "Freely you have received; freely give" (Matt 10:8). This statement meant that exclusive of whatever spiritual or bodily toil and energy needed to accomplish the tasks, these blessings were to be given to God's people liberally that they might believe and inherit eternal life, the same as the Twelve.[238] Generosity helps disciples realize that they are mere managers of God's gifts and faithfulness to God means blessing others with them.[239]

In the pre-survey analysis, *A Life of Worship* appeared most vital among participants with a raw score of 9 out of 12 points based upon corresponding action phases. Actions phases were ranked one to four: Exploring (1), Beginning (2), Growing (3), and Maturing (4). The weighted

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[235] "Real Discipleship Survey," *Excellence in Ministry Coaching*, accessed August 17, 2021, https://emc3coaching.com/services/real-discipleship-survey/.

[236] Ibid.

[237] Ibid.

[238] *Matthew 10 Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*, accessed August 24, 2021, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ellicott/matthew/10.htm.

[239] Real Discipleship Survey," *Excellence in Ministry Coaching*, accessed August 17, 2021, https://emc3coaching.com/services/real-discipleship-survey/.

score was 3 out of 4 for *A Life of Worship*, suggesting that participants were in the Growing phase. The Growing phase consists of attending worship regularly and establishing personal worship times and practices to develop greater intimacy with God.[240] The least ranked area with participants was *A Life Open to Jesus,* receiving a raw score of 7 out of 12 (weighted 2.3 out of 4). This score suggests participants were in the Beginning action phase of discipleship. This phase involves developing a daily practice of personal devotion via spiritual disciplines and opening oneself to God, seeking new ways for greater intimacy with God.[241] The remaining four discipleship categories, *A Life of Service*, *A Life Obeying Jesus*, *A Life of Hospitality*, and *A Life of Generosity,* all scored a raw score of 8 out of 12 points (weighted 2.6 out of 4), suggesting that participants were in the Beginning phase of these areas as well. The Beginning phase characterized the following circumstances: in *A Life of Service,* participants desire and discover ways to serve others using spiritual gifts selflessly; in *A Life Obeying Jesus*, participants accept their call to follow Jesus, are committed to a church family, and helping others; in *A Life of Hospitality*, participants learn to not only receive God's grace in their lives but become gracious to others; lastly, in *A Life of Generosity,* participants give more regularly and learn how faithful stewardship of financial resources honor God as well.[242]

Post-survey results yielded significant changes. All six discipleship categories experienced increases in raw score points; however, the weighted scores indicated the most effective progression. The previous four areas that were in the Beginning phase of discipleship shifted to the Growing stage. The weighted scores changed as follows: *A Life of Service* (2.7 to

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[240] "Real Discipleship Survey," *Excellence in Ministry Coaching*, accessed August 17, 2021, https://emc3coaching.com/services/real-discipleship-survey

[241] Ibid.

[242] Ibid.

3.3), *A Life Obeying Jesus* (2.7 to 3.0), *A Life of Hospitality* (2.7 to 3.3), and *A Life of Generosity* (2.7 to 3.0). The weighted scores for *A Life of Worship* and *A Life Open to Jesus* increased from 3.0 to 3.6 and 2.3 to 2.7, respectively. These results suggest a positive effect and impact with the intervention design upon participants' perception of discipleship significance in their own lives.
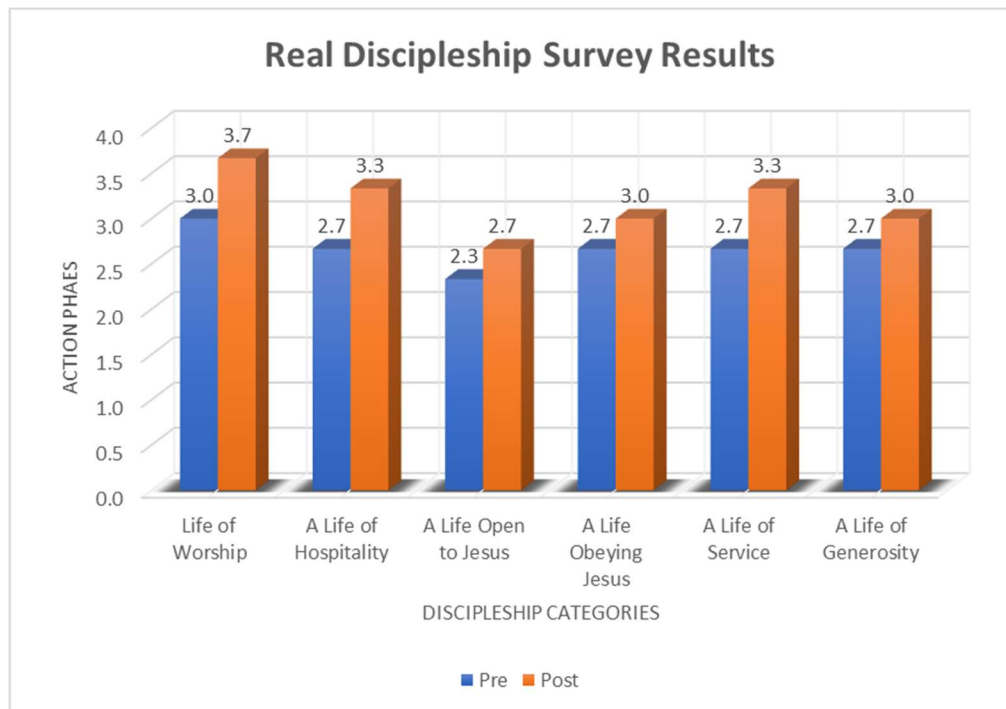

Figure 1.1 Pre-Survey and Post Survey Results

Some of the vivid excerpts from participants accurately displayed theme significance within discipleship categories. *A Life of Worship* was the strongest category reported in both pre- and post-surveys. This category was characterized by the dominant theme of authenticity and the lesser theme of transparency. Although transparency was less prevalent, it paired with teaching and proved vital in establishing trust and encouraging obedience to God's word. The following statement from Jeremy illustrated this point, "For me to be a disciple, I have to see and believe what you're doing." Brian capitalized on authenticity, adding, "Discipleship means to worship God every day by simply being thankful for what he did for us forever!" Jeremy also added that

"trust means faith; you trust Jesus enough to mimic what he did and how he lived." He furthered, "…and this is how you become a leader, trust Christ!"

<p style="text-align:center">Participant and Focus Group Interview Analysis</p>

Interviews were critical to capturing participant perception and sentiments about discipleship while administering the intervention design. A successful interview was characterized by five main aspects 1) establishing a comfort level for ease of responses, 2) moving towards broad questions to precipitate meanings from participant experiences, 3) probing for clarification, 4) noting meaningful junctures in narratives only to return to them and clarify later, and 5) supporting the flow of the narrative with probing to stay on track with the research project.[243] This researcher's goal during the interview process was to listen carefully to the unfolding story while simultaneously noting clear and particular details that were relative to the research topic and ultimately aid in data analysis.[244] This researcher allowed the open-ended structure of interview questions to maintain the relaxed atmosphere created after the initial salutations were given. This researcher followed the various narratives given by participants only interrupting when necessary for clarity or additional information about responses.[245] Through the clarification of some comments or expressions, better insight was gained about initial misinterpretations of discipleship, biblical literacy, and the church's role in discipleship according to the biblical precedence.

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[243] Anne Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond : From Research Design to Analysis and Publication*, (New York: New York: University Press, 2013), 47, accessed September 5, 2021, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[244] Ibid., 48.

[245] Anne Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond : From Research Design to Analysis and Publication*, 79.

Asking for clarification was not difficult since the questions were open-ended, the flow was seamless providing rich data that contributed to emergent themes found later during the analysis process. This researcher would simply ask participants to elaborate on a point allowing more time to record notes, think through potential, additional questions, and preserve a conversational tone.[246] This setting created space to unpack the meaning of particular examples mentioned that suggested discipleship activities such as Sunday school and outreach event held in 2017 where the church provided meals, talked, and prayed for various people in the community.[247]

Participant and focus group interviews were examined to reveal emergent themes. This researcher used *Dedoose* research software to assist in coding theme occurrences. Occurrences refer to the number of times a particular theme appeared during participant interviews. Themes were considered significant based on the number of code occurrences. Thirteen relevant themes emerged, yet five were deemed most influential with a 10% or greater allocation among the total number of occurrences among themes. These five themes comprised 65% of the entire distribution. They included teaching (19 occurrences), transformation (15 occurrences), authenticity (14 occurrences), trust (13 occurrences), and obedience (11 occurrences). Figure 1.2 displays these five themes according to participants' significance based on the number of occurrences noted during interviews. Each participant observed specific themes with a varying degree of relevance. In Figure 1.1 below, these themes are displayed per participant based on the number of occurrences. Tom indicated trust as the most significant theme of discipleship; Jeremy

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[246] Anne Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond : From Research Design to Analysis and Publication*, 82.

[247] Ibid., 85.

followed with transformation; Brian suggested teaching as a core theme; teaching emerged as most relevant within the focus group setting.

"Top 5" Theme Occurences

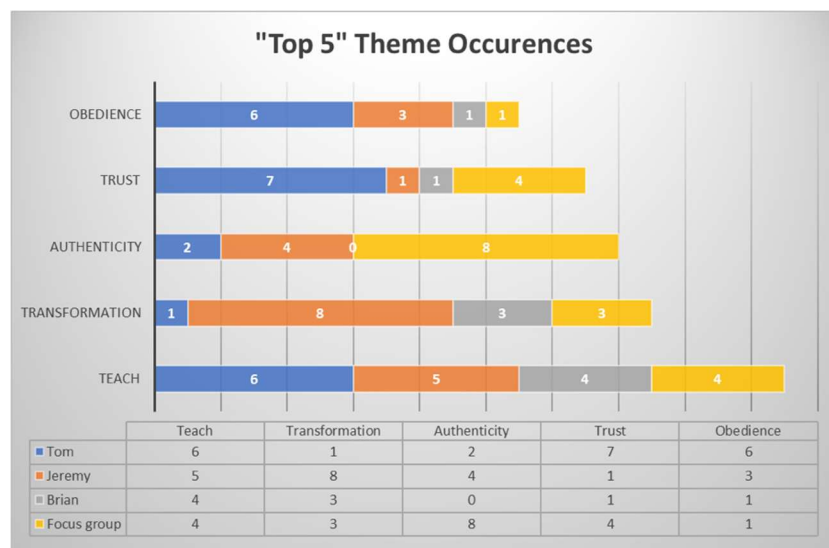|	Teach	Transformation	Authenticity	Trust	Obedience
Tom	6	1	2	7	6
Jeremy	5	8	4	1	3
Brian	4	3	0	1	1
Focus group	4	3	8	4	1

Figure 1.2. Dominant themes based on occurrences

Figure 1.3 presents all 13 themes as a packed coding cloud with sizes signifying a greater number of occurrences. Teaching, transformation, authenticity, trust, and obedience are dominant among the other emergent themes. The two values, teaching and obedience, are directly tied to the mandate of the Great Commission. Teaching obedience to Jesus' commands is an ever-present activity for every disciple to do faithfully when making disciples (Matt 28:20). Christ's followers consistently witnessed his authentic desire to do his Father's will to the point of death. Yet, Jesus was genuine and transparent about his emotional state through emotional summits and troughs. He showed compassion for others and displayed his own struggle in suffering, and through witnessing this, his disciples likely gained greater trust for him as he continued to pursue and fulfill God's will (Matt 26:39; John 11:35). This fervor and zeal in obedience to God transformed the disciples then, as it does disciples today, to become more like Jesus. Bonhoeffer stated this concept in this way, "Jesus calls those who follow him to share in his passion. How can we convince the world…when we shrink from the passion in our own

lives?"[248] Authenticity is foundational to establishing trust, creating a more effective atmosphere to teach God's word seeking obedience from those taught.
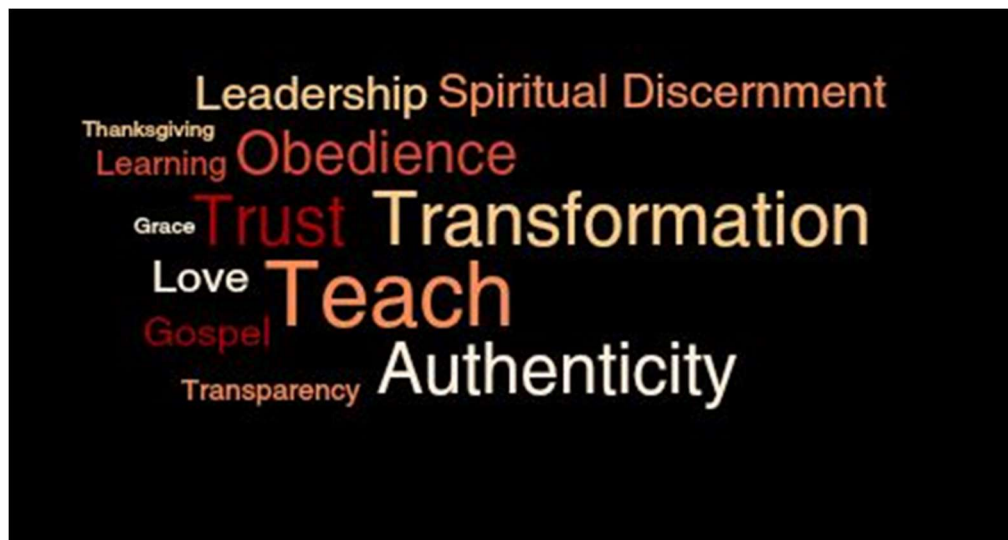

Figure 1.3 Packed coding cloud with all emergent themes

The five major overlapping themes were recorded in a co-occurrence matrix, and they included the themes of teaching, authenticity, leadership, obedience, and transformation. The code-occurrence matrix presents the frequencies for which all code pairings were applied to the same participant's excerpt, thus overlapping them.[249] The potency of this matrix is its ability to expose both expected and unexpected patterns in the pairing or non-pairing of codes.[250] Pairing relativity based upon frequency occurrence indicated that as participants were thinking and reporting on one concept, they often discussed or referenced another concept.[251] These patterns

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[248] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 161.

[249] "Analysis and Filtering Userguide," *Dedoose*, accessed August 18, 2021, https://www.dedoose.com/userguide/analysisandfiltering.

[250] Ibid.

[251] Christina Silver and Ann Lewins, *Using Software in Qualitative Research a Step-by-Step Guide*, (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014), 53.

help relate concepts, or themes, to research questions and analysis, assisting this researcher in gaining a deeper understanding of participant experiences and thought processes.

As themes emerged, the sole variance between occurrences and co-occurrences was replacing trust with leadership, respectively. Leadership became a priority theme when evaluating co-occurrences. Besides the dominant themes of authenticity, teaching, and obedience, leadership paired with valuable yet less prevalent themes as love and spiritual discernment, further supporting that a disciple becomes a leader through the power and authority given by Jesus to his disciples to make disciples (Matt 28:18-19). Jeremy pointedly asserted this point in this statement, "Discipleship to me is a leader in the way you live (for Christ) and everything you do." Both figures below illustrate these theme co-occurrences respectively.
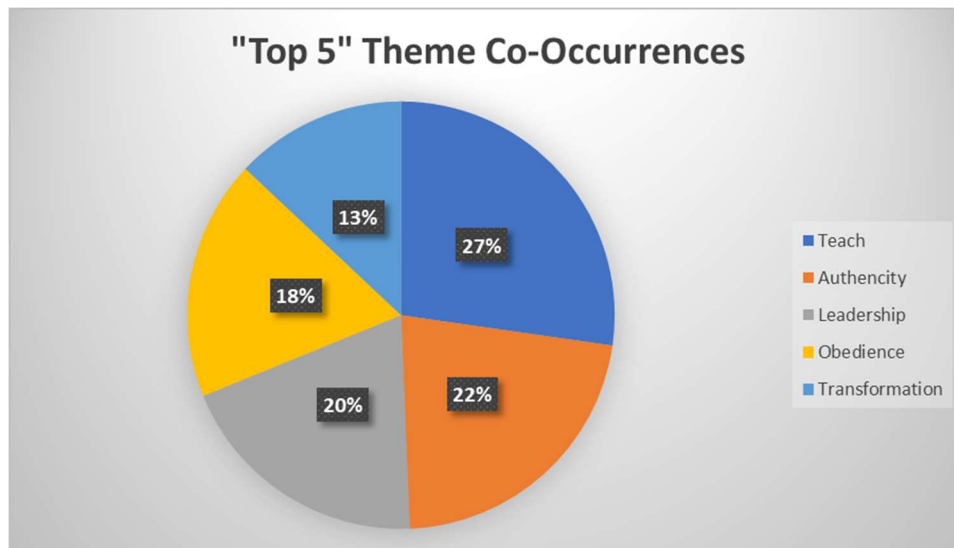

Figure 1.4 Five overlapping themes

Codes	Authenticity	Transparency	Gospel	Leadership	Learning	Grace	Thanksgiving	Transformation	Love	Obedience	Spiritual Discernment	Teach	Trust	Totals
Authenticity				3				4	3	1	2	3	1	17
Transparency								1		1		1		3
Gospel											1	5	2	8
Leadership	3							1	1	5	1	4		15
Learning										1			1	2
Grace														
Thanksgiving														
Transformation	4	1		1						1	1	1	1	10
Love	3			1							2			6
Obedience	1	1		5	1			1			1	2	2	14
Spiritual Discernment	2		1	1				1		1		1	2	9
Teach	3	1	5	4				1	2	2	1		2	21
Trust	1		2	1				1		2	2	2		11
Totals	17	3	8	15	2			10	6	14	9	21	11	

Figure 1.5 Theme co-occurrence matrix

Triangulation

Triangulation is a concept that refers to a similar idea but makes it concrete in differing ways.[252] Triangulation is a surveying and navigation term used to reference the idea of locating an unknown point from two known points, lending its' use from the geometry of the Greeks.[253] It has been defined as an attempt to explain the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint.[254] Triangulation is employed when issues of quality are discussed, often extending the researcher's activities beyond what is typically done.[255] However, this is not always the case, as triangulation is not limited to promoting or assuring qualitative research quality but extends the range of insights and knowledge produced according to the data collected.[256]

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[252] Uwe Flick, *Doing Triangulation and Mixed Methods*, (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2018), 17

[253] Ibid.

[254] Ibid., 23.

[255] Ibid., 19.

[256] Ibid.

Historically, data triangulation in qualitative research was formally recognized in the 1970s when Norman Denzin presented a more systematic approach towards triangulation to validate, challenge, or extend research findings.[257] However, earlier accounts are noted, such as Whyte's ethnographic study of a street gang in a major city in the eastern USA in the 1940s that contained elements of data triangulation using individuals' observations, personal notes, and other sources to paint a picture of the dynamics of local culture.[258] Another example was the use of verbal and visual data in a study by Bateson and Mead (1942) that analyzed more than 25,000 photographs, masses of filmed material, paintings and sculptures along with ethnographic conversations about the material.[259] A final example includes the use of multiple methods, both qualitative and quantitative methods, objective facts and subjective attitudes, and observations of current practices and historical material.[260]

Triangulation attracts attention in qualitative research because of a commitment to a thorough evaluation of methods, data, and researchers to improve validity.[261] Denzin distinguished between many forms of triangulation, such as data triangulation, investigator triangulation, and theory triangulation.[262] This researcher used data triangulation in this project study. Data triangulation refers to the use of different data sources as distinct from using methods

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[257] Uwe Flick, *Doing Triangulation and Mixed Method*s, 17.

[258] Ibid., 19.

[259] Ibid., 21.

[260] Ibid.

[261] Ibid., 20.

[262] Norman Denzin, "Triangulation 2.0," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 6, quoted in Uwe Flick, *Doing Triangulation and Mixed Method*s, 26.

in the production of the data.[263] Its use allows researchers to benefit a theoretical profit when

explaining phenomena because it uses the same techniques but various data sources.[264]

Investigator triangulation applies different observers or interviewers to reveal biases coming

from the individual researcher, so a systematic comparison of other researchers' influences on

the phenomena will emerge and on the results.[265] Lastly, theory triangulation uses theoretical

perspectives in collecting and analyzing while assessing which is more beneficial for the

phenomena being studied.[266] Theory triangulation becomes very useful when applied to a

concrete set of data such as an interview protocol where different methods of text interpretation,

the methods themselves, and even researchers are evaluated.[267] Regardless of the triangulation

method used, the goal of triangulation always remains the same with these three objectives: 1)

show how triangulation was used, 2) tell why it was used, and 3) provide examples of how

results are linked.[268]

The use of triangulation in qualitative research is vital to help establish rigor as

qualitative research methods have often faced difficulty among researchers regarding objectivity

and, subsequently, validity.[269] Validity refers to the extent to which a concept is accurately

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[263] Norman Denzin, "Triangulation 2.0," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 6, quoted in Uwe Flick, *Doing Triangulation and Mixed Methods*, 26.

[264] Uwe Flick, *Doing Triangulation and Mixed Method*s, 27.

[265] Ibid.

[266] Ibid.

[267] Ibid., 28.

[268] Ibid., 150.

[269] Nancy Carter, Denise Bryant-Lukosius, Alba DiCenso, Jennifer Blythe, and Alan J. Neville, "The use of Triangulation in Qualitative Research," *Oncology Nursing Forum* 41, no. 5 (September 2014): 545, http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fuse-triangulation-qualitative-research%2Fdocview%2F1559261620%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085.

measured in a study. In quantitative research, validity is measured by instruments such as factor analysis, correlation tests, or other models that imply homogeneity, convergence, or theory evidence, but in qualitative research, validity is tested by trustworthiness.[270] Validity aims to remove researcher bias and simplistic analysis of issues investigated, and reliability is established four ways: 1) credibility using triangulation, member checking, and observation; 2) transferability relating the details of the context, activities, and events reported as outcomes to be used in research studies in other contexts; 3) dependability meaning a systematic approach has been followed and can be repeated; 4) lastly, confirmability suggesting the procedures actually too place which also makes the research more trustworthy.[271]

Researchers determine data collection methods based on the best fit for the research inquiry.[272] Data triangulation is only one of several strategies used to ensure data dependability and credibility, such as debriefing, member checking, and the use of a reflexive journal.[273] One limitation of data triangulation is the requirement that study participants must participate in all data collection methods to ensure congruency and further establish validity during analysis.[274] However, this limitation was considered a benefit since participants engaged in every aspect of the project intervention, allowing data collection to remain consistent with observations, individual interviews, and focus groups.[275]

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[270] Roberta Heale and Alison Twycross, "Validity and Reliability in Quantitative Studies," *Evidence Based Nursing* 18, no. 3, (July 2015): 66-67, http://ebn.bmj.com.

[271] Ernest Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed., (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014), 92-93.

[272] Ibid.

[273] Nancy Carter, Denise Bryant-Lukosius, Alba DiCenso, Jennifer Blythe, and Alan J. Neville, "The use of Triangulation in Qualitative Research," 546.

[274] Ibid.

[275] Ibid.

This researcher employed data triangulation to compare separate data sources to look for consistencies and discrepancies.[276] The data sources used in this study were participant comments, survey questionnaire responses, and observations.
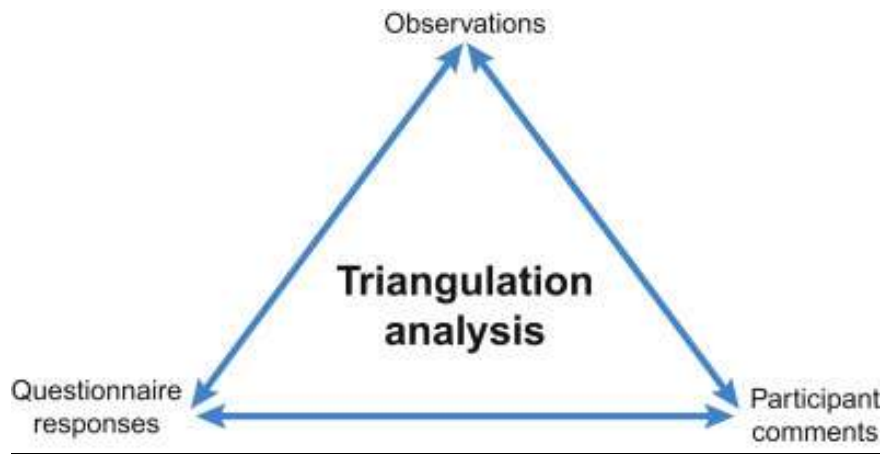

Figure 1.6 Carol M. Barnum, *Usability Testing Essentials: Ready, Set ...Test!* (Germany: Elsevier Science, 2020), 306, fig. 8.4.

From earlier analysis, the five primary, thematic co-occurrences that demonstrated a potent presence in a disciple's life were also present in triangulation. Participant comments from the interviews and focus group supported themes such as teaching, leadership, and transformation. Some comments aligning to those themes were as follows: disciples should "be very, very intentional to share Christ and the gospel" (teaching), "have a heart for people to go on in God" (leadership), "deal with your enemies and own strongholds by trusting God to push through it" (transformation), and "be able to fellowship with people and show them you are there for them, that's leadership" (leadership). In the same scope, individual interviews presented the same information. Jeremy stated, "spiritual maturity is meeting people where they are" (authenticity). Tom added, "the number one characteristic of discipleship is the way you live, the

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[276] Nancy Carter, Denise Bryant-Lukosius, Alba DiCenso, Jennifer Blythe, and Alan J. Neville, "The use of Triangulation in Qualitative Research," 546.

way you act and things you do to show others you believe" (Obedience, teaching, and transformation). Brian furthered with "one who's a leader can follow" (leadership).

The *Real Discipleship Survey* posed statements in each of the six categories that gave insight into participants' walk with Christ as a disciple and referred to the emergent themes that appeared from the research. For example, *A Life of Worship* appeared most significant among participants ranked in the Growing phase. Yet, the ultimate goal and next step for a disciple in this category are Maturing, implying that the disciple has intentionally positioned his life to honor God in work, play, and all relationships.[277] According to the survey, the progression from Growing to Maturing implies using the Sabbath to engage the world from a Christ-centric perspective and renew the body and mind.[278] Activities such as disconnecting from work, resting, cooking, and enjoying time with others focused on thanksgiving to God for the opportunity of fellowship and even scheduling an entire day each to simply be with God.[279] This transition in phases is accompanied by leadership, teaching others, obedience to prioritize God in one's life, and transformation by becoming more like Christ. All six categories of this survey seek disciples to enter the Maturing phase in their walk with Christ. The five most significant, co-occurring themes support and undergird growth in each phase of the categories. Maturation is the goal of every disciple and is biblically sound. The apostle Paul declares this same goal in his statement to the church of Colossae, "He (Christ) is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ" (Col 1:28, NIV). As a disciple matures, he contributes to the maturation of others through discipleship.

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[277] "Real Discipleship Survey," *Excellence in Ministry Coaching*, accessed August 17, 2021, https://emc3coaching.com/services/real-discipleship-survey/.

[278] Ibid.

[279] Ibid.

Interviews were held via Zoom, and this technology aided the researcher in observations as well. The use of distance learning has been a steadily growing trend in education due to the Covid-19 pandemic. From early 2020 to current, educators have dramatically shifted from in-person classrooms to virtual learning platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams, among others.[280] Although Zoom initially frustrated some educators, they have become an operational necessity in many businesses and churches. Many churches, including this researcher's local church, used Zoom technology for Bible study, prayer services, life groups, and pastoral addresses to the congregation during the height of the pandemic in 2020. In this project, the Main Session Room, the initial room participants enter when meeting, was the only room used to host gatherings and was central to active learning and correspondence.[281] In this virtual meeting room, this researcher could share his screen to view videos, review scripture, and annotate information as needed.[282]

The use of observation was valuable in further interpreting data in the focus group setting. It allowed this researcher to check for nonverbal expression of feelings, determine who interacts with whom, and grasp how participants communicate with each other.[283] Nonverbal expression of feelings included facial expressions, body language, and even nonverbal utterances

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[280] Jonathan Brennan, *Engaging Learners Through Zoom : Strategies for Virtual Teaching Across Disciplines*. (Newark: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2020), 19, accessed September 7, 2021, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[281] Ibid., 51.

[282] Ibid., 72.

[283] Barbara B. Kawulich, "Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method," *Forum : Qualitative Social Research* 6, no. 2 (May 2005), 4, http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fparticipant-observation-as-data-collection-method%2Fdocview%2F869227631%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085.

such as laughing, sighing, and even silence.[284] Participant observation permits a researcher to check the definitions of terms that participants use in interviews, observe events that informants may be unable or unwilling to share when doing so would be careless, impolite, or insensitive, and observe situations informants have described in interviews.[285] Researchers review this information and become aware of distortions or inaccuracies provided in specific descriptions given by participants regarding the same events.[286] The goal for research that uses observation to develop a holistic understanding of phenomena is to increase the study's validity.[287] Validity becomes stronger when combined with other strategies such as interviews, surveys, or document analyses.[288] This researcher included observation as part of the data collection methods, for this reason, to increase validity and objectivity within the results.

As participants interacted with one another in the focus group, this researcher noted many observations. Participants spoke more readily together than in the individual setting as a group when addressing questions. Participants likely felt more comfortable sharing openly with one another through the duration of the intervention from intimate fellowship and transparency. When asked, "How would you define discipleship," all participants promptly began to respond but allowed Tom to address the question first. They all agreed with his statement that "a disciple is someone who willfully follows Christ," adding comments like, "yep," "that's it," and nodding

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[284] Carol M. Barnum, *Usability Testing Essentials: Ready, Set ...Test!*, (Germany: Elsevier Science, 2020), 183.

[285] Barbara B. Kawulich, "Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method," 4.

[286] Ibid.

[287] Ibid., 5.

[288] Ibid.

their heads up and down, signaling agreement. Their affirmation directly alluded to the theme of obedience.

Other questions were not so promptly answered but yielded information-rich data as well, such as, "What does bearing the image of God, especially as a man, mean to you?" All participants initially sat back and sighed, awaiting one another to answer. The participants expressed that the hesitancy to respond initially was because the question seemed so vast. Jeremy spoke first but slowly and carefully. He stated, "It's to live how God has said live, and always being aware of what Jesus would do." The other participants agreed, and Brian smiled, adding that this can only occur as a disciple remains transparent with God alluding to the theme of authenticity. He laughed and stated, "It seems like you get from God what you honestly choose to give him; if you limit your experience, you get limits!" All participants laughed in agreement, affirming his statement with positive head nodding and stating, "Um-hum" and "Yep."

<center>Conclusion</center>

This researcher observed the significance of establishing rigor within research through establishing validity in the use of triangulation accompanied with the evaluation of weighted score changes based on pre-and-post survey responses. Evaluating participants' comments, observations, and surveys assisted this researcher in noting the positive impact of the discipleship curriculum towards spiritual maturity in discipleship. These findings were encouraging and definitely spurs this researcher to apply this intervention in other contexts and evaluate results towards ministry progression and within the capacity of a research study.

The analysis of participant responses and feedback helped illustrate participant perception of discipleship and implications to the meaning of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. The results suggest that a disciple receives and gives what he has gained to others while following Christ,

which characterizes leadership. The heart of the New Commandment is embraced within discipleship, loving others as Christ has loved through authentic, selfless relationships (John 13:34-35). Love is the heart's language of a disciple-maker, and that love imparts itself into the lives of others through transparency. Transparency and authenticity help strengthen *A Life Open to Jesus*, which results from observing a disciple's obedience to God in every circumstance rooted in trust. Even when a situation is complex, disciple-makers remain obedient to God's word yet transparent and authentic about their experiences. The positive growth in all six categories ranked by the Real Discipleship Survey suggests that the intervention design positively affected participants to seek a deeper relationship with God through allocating more time towards devotion, learning, and sharing the experiences with others which is discipleship.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This research contributes to the literature on discipleship and the engagement of men, specifically African American men, to disciple others. As noted in Chapter 4, the most significant impact for discipleship occurs when men perceive other men as teachers, authentic leaders, obedient and transformational. These attributes concur directly with the biblical mandate of the Great Commission to make disciples by "teaching them to obey everything I (Jesus) have commanded you" (Matt 28:20, NIV). Participants suggested in their direct comments, coupled with the emergent themes, that a discipling leader must be one who already faithfully follows Christ. The apostle Paul admonished his protégé Timothy to affirm the gospel by teaching Christ accurately and boldly to others (2 Tim 4:2). He urged him that "the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2, KJV). The progression of the gospel message was meant to be effective not only in word (teaching) but in action as Timothy lived Christ among the believers in Ephesus (transformation, obedience, leadership, and authenticity) (1 Tim 3:2-7).

Hindrances to Discipleship

Absence of Men

In Chapter 2, one of the themes that developed from the Literature Review was *Hindrances to Discipleship*. During the investigation of this theme, several obstacles were cited as hindrances to the engagement, active participation, and attendance of men in their local church. As reported in the literature, the typical church-goer was reported around 50 years old and female. In the South, this finding was characterized as an African-American woman of similar or older age posing the question, "Where are the men?"

David Murrow offered guidance in his text *Why Men Hate Going to Church* stating the shortage of men likely occurred due to the feminization of church services and presentation of Jesus Christ.[289] He added that the gospel could often be presented feeble and not as powerful as it truly is, negatively impacting the perception of Christ to men.[290] This assertion was complemented by the results of the Barna Group who reported that women were 100 percent more likely than men to become avidly involved in some form of discipleship.[291] Among African-American men, distrust for institutionalized systems, including the church, accounted for the disparity in the presence of men.[292] Upton argued that systemic racism and educational disparities plague many urban communities in the US, propelling an argument and distrust towards any system or organization established for the welfare and spiritual growth of black men.[293] Given these assessments of the absence of men, the co-occurring theme of leadership from the project results makes a strong case for the necessity of Christian men, especially black Christian men, to disciple other black men. In the theme co-occurrence matrix, leadership paired with different themes such as obedience, teaching, authenticity, transformation, love, and spiritual discernment. These theme relationships suggest that male leaders who are disciples of Christ influence other men to become obedient, apt to teach, authentic, transformational, loving, and discerning, further maturing and strengthening the local church, families, work environments, and any other setting.

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[289] Murrow, *Why Men Hate*, 14.

[290] Ibid.

[291] Ibid.

[292] Jeremy H. Upton, "Contextualized Discipleship for African-American Men: Beginning a Trophic Cascade in the African-American Community," (PhD diss., Biola University, 2017), 43, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[293] Ibid.

Training

The theme of leadership applied to another hindrance to discipleship: the lack of godly

training for everyday living. The argument that some pastors often leave most, if not all, of the

believers' equipping to the Holy Spirit without an intentional, practical application of Christian

life is an effective deterrent to discipleship.[294] The Holy Spirit has a diverse ministry. This

ministry includes testifying about him; convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment;

guiding his followers into truth; speaking whatever he hears from Jesus; declaring future things,

and glorifying Jesus (John 15:26; 16:8-14). While this ministry is indeed mighty, Jesus desires

the power of the Holy Spirit to work inside believers towards transformation and outside as his

witnesses; disciples reveal God's wisdom and power in the earth, and effective leadership

influences others to follow (Acts 1:8; Eph 3:10; Eph 3:20). Obedience paralleled leadership as

pertinent to training. Obedience combined with other less significant yet mentionable themes,

such as transparency and trust. In the focus group comments, participants suggested that teaching

or training was much more welcomed from leaders who were obedient to Christian principles

and open and honest about their struggles and potential strongholds. They added that openness

helped to establish trust within the mentor to mentee relationship, adding that it was harder to

receive from a person who seemed detached or reserved.

As remarked earlier in the literature, intimate discipleship has often been traded for

activities and various program participation stunting the growth and maturation of disciples in

the local church.[295] Discipleship leads to a committed life in Christ that continually seeks growth

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[294] Landerous G. Meredith, "Effective Adult Discipleship among Urban Black Churches in Los Angeles," (PhD diss., Biola University, 2018), 3, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[295] Ibid., 4.

and invests in spiritual formation. This life seeks intentional ways to engage the community around them while growing in a personal relationship with God, becoming more like Jesus throughout the vertical relationship with God and horizontal relationships with people.[296] Biblical literacy aids in spiritual formation, helping disciples understand themselves from a godly perspective while transforming and becoming more accountable and obedient, thus honoring God (Ps 119:11, 105).[297]

<div align="center">Uncertainty to the Importance of Discipleship</div>

For many, the term discipleship alludes to some event or reference that happened with Jesus' twelve disciples. The significance and role of discipleship in a believer's life are often unknown. Discipleship is ungirded by love, and love represented a present theme within the project. Though a non-dominant theme, love was linked with two dominant themes, authenticity and teaching. The love of God appears through authentic testimonies from believers and sharing God's word with others, impacting them with transparent truth that draws an invitation to his love for salvation and spiritual encouragement. Once the hearer accepts Christ and believes, they remember this call to love, teaching others to do the same. The maturation process from believer to disciple includes the keen understanding that sharing the gospel is not optional but a mandate. In a hurting world that constantly observes disparities and injustices of various kinds, people must be offered the only viable solution for sound and valuable thoughts and actions to handle the myriad of problems they encounter to the glory of God.[298] Discipleship is a more accurate

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[296] J. Dodson, *Gospel-Centered discipleship*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 44.

[297] Darlene Teo Davis, "The Relationship between Christian Education Practices and Lifestyle Discipleship in African American Churches." (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 32, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[298] National Coalition of Ministries to Men, How to Disciple Men (Short and Sweet): 45 Proven Strategies from Experts on Ministry to Men, (Racine: BroadStreet Publishing, 2017), 9.

benchmark of spiritual maturity within a church, as members submit to serving one another with their gifts.[299] They adopt a life of service, joining Jesus in the mission to use their God-given gifts, talents, and passions.[300] When disciples serve others, they fulfill God's promise as Abraham's seed through faith in Jesus to be a blessing to the nations offering God's grace to many who have little to no understanding of his grace and why it is the most precious gift they could ever receive.[301]

Prioritization of Discipleship

The lack of discipleship as a priority within church structure was also noted as a hindrance to the active participation of men discipling other men. Meredith agrees with this argument referencing Thomas Rainer's assessment that many church programs and activities are often prioritized over discipleship, enabling churchgoers, especially men, to dodge the responsibility for ministry and outreach.[302] This absence of intentional discipleship translates to a lack of necessity which contributes to a continued absence of men who can disciple others and practice Christian living. This circumstance points to the dominant, co-occurring theme of leadership in which participants agreed was a necessity for discipleship to be successful. A great motivation for discipleship is when men observe other men living openly obedient to Christ as a testimony and encouragement for others to do the same (Heb 10:24-25; 1 Thess 5:11). Another study mentioned that the closest opportunity noted in many churches as discipleship was through

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[299] Janet Johnson, "Discipleship Formation in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the 21st Century." (PhD diss., University of St. Thomas (Minnesota), 2015), 12, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[300] "Real Discipleship Survey," Excellence in Ministry Coaching, accessed August 17, 2021, https://emc3coaching.com/services/real-discipleship-survey/.

[301] Ibid.

[302] Meredith, "Effective Adult Discipleship…," 7.

the deacon's ministry, where men learned how to complete necessary tasks integral to church operations. However, many of the activities performed had little to no direct impact on learning about Christ, living like Christ, or teaching others to imitate that same behavior.[303] This church auxiliary often targeted older men, usually 35 years of age or older, who were perceived to be responsible and able to handle church tasks and related business, thus excluding younger men who often prove vital in attracting younger men to follow Christ and can disciple them.[304]

The dominant themes of teaching and authentic, transparent relationships with Christ were noted as absent by many black men in their youth.[305] Black men reported attending church but cited poor biblical literacy and training inside the home.[306] Training up a child is integral in their followship to Christ, as it is an investment that will last well past his lifetime and affect others (Prov 22:6). Discipleship teaches accountability and responsibility among men focusing on restoration to every part of his life, while potentially destroying the recurrence of old, disruptive patterns such as single-parent homes and absent fathers that are all too common, especially among black families.[307]

Without the intentionality to prioritize discipleship, none of the essential themes found in the project results are present creating a difficult atmosphere for impactful discipleship to occur. The absence of leaders begets a lack in teaching that begets a lack in authenticity and transparency that furthers a lack in Christian disciples with a real relationship with Jesus Christ. This lack of relationship affects both the believer and his relationship with others through the

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[303] Gregory Emille Moore, "Developing and Implementing a Discipleship…," 5.

[304] Ibid.

[305] Meredith, "Effective Adult Discipleship…," 11.

[306] Ibid.

[307] Ibid.

love he was meant to show through Christ. This love for one another will only be a shadow of what God has purposed causing many to become more concerned with self than others which is not the love of God according to his Word (1 Cor 13:5).

Obedience Oriented Discipleship

The five co-occurring themes of leadership, teaching, authenticity, trust, and transformation among participants strongly support the Obedience Oriented disciple model. As noted in the literature, this discipleship model directly equates obedience to Christ as an act of love. Participants agreed God's love was the impetus for discipling others. The foundation of this model is based on the third participle of the Great Commission, which is to teach others to obey Christ and obedience is love (Matt 28:20; John 14:15).[308] The research project yielded a robust claim backed by participants' feedback that leaders follow Christ in willful obedience teaching others to do the same. Participants added that a faithful walk included trials and difficulties to become conformed to the image of Christ. Disciples are not fair-weather friends of Christ, but they are loyal in love.

The dominant themes presented in this research project suggest that men who disciple others by obeying the commands of Jesus provoke other men to believe and follow Christ, directly imitating the actions of the discipler. Colebank asserted that obedience is love resonating Dietrich Bonhoeffer's heart in his work *The Cost of Discipleship*. As Bonhoeffer states, "Only the believers obey, and only the obedient believe," reiterating James 2:26 (NIV), "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."[309] Colebank adds that people change by the grace and love of God, which is often seen through obedient disciples working for

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[308] "Obedience Oriented Discipleship…," 78.

[309] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 76.

Christ.[310] Grace is not cheap and doesn't come "without discipleship, without the cross, and without the living, incarnate Jesus Christ."[311]

Suggestions for Future Research

The scope of this research project had several limitations. As mentioned prior in the Limitations section, the number of participants (n=3) was smaller than desired. This researcher acknowledges the potential likelihood of more emergent themes and varying theme significance with a larger pool of participants. If this project study were repeated, participants from other churches would be selected to yield a larger pool of participants with the desired sampling population. The local ministry context is also a limitation because Breakthrough COGBF is only one of over 200 churches in the corporate body. Incorporating quantitative analyses when including more men from other churches might impact thematic significances even greater. Other churches within the organization have more younger men, and based on their feedback, themes could vary as well.

Another limitation was the duration of the intervention. The intervention period was only eight weeks allowing this researcher to observe participants, collect appropriate data, and gain insight into their perceptions of discipleship. Ideally, this duration might be a year or greater, noting and recording the participants' reflections, responses, and activities. However, to gain greater perspective, this researcher would be remiss not suggesting the implications of a longer duration for this intervention. This researcher would like to understand better how the teachings within Scripture and incorporated spiritual disciplines affect participants in their daily decision making and how that may have changed over time, using interviews and field notes to capture

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[310] Mark Colebank, "Obedience Oriented Discipleship…," 29.

[311] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 47.

the transformation of minds to the image to the likeness of Christ. With this same consideration, this researcher advocates discipleship as a priority within black churches, empowering men to desire knowledge of Christ when they come to church and experience Christ in everyday life as they share those experiences with other men who are inspired to do the same.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions given by the COGBF leadership council and local city and county governments, all discipleship meetings were held virtually. This aspect of virtual rather than in-person meetings was a limitation that affected the impact of collecting data through in-person observation of church attendance and acknowledged invitations that might have been extended to others and accepted, displaying participants' willingness towards the responsibility to disciple others. In future research, observations regarding participant contribution in various church functions, acknowledging and inviting other church members to assist in church projects, and starting discipling groups would be areas to glean the effectiveness of discipleship. Some questions that need additional investigation are the following:

1) How does the church prioritize discipleship going forward?

2) Are hindrances the same for black women as they are for black men?

3) Do older and younger men perceive discipleship with the same significance of necessity in the church?

4) What modes of discipleship may be more effective for the Breakthrough COGBF congregation?

Final Thought

This qualitative research project into discipleship among men of Breakthrough COGBF aimed to increase spiritual maturity and commitment by transitioning believers to a greater degree of discipleship in their lives. This researcher desires participants' growth to become

exemplified by an earnest desire to walk diligently with Jesus Christ. If this aspect occurred within any participant, the project intervention was successful. The five co-occurring themes of leadership, teaching, authenticity, obedience, and transformation are attributes that should constantly be strengthened and developed in any disciple, whether he is the mentor or mentee. The results supported the biblical mandate to make disciples by teaching others to follow what Jesus commanded, which is most impactful through a disciple's obedience and authentic relationship with Jesus Christ. The power of Christ in a disciple's life is the most incredible testimony and motivator for others to follow as they pursue their own purposeful walk with God.

This research project also allowed this researcher to investigate the phenomenon of seemingly detached Christian men from certain aspects of church life and with one another. This project allowed growth and established an authentic fellowship aimed towards a greater community within the church and eventually outside the local church setting. As the impact of COVID-19 normalizes and a solution is found, this researcher prays this intervention also leaves a lasting effect on the lives of each participant to fulfill the Great Commission by teaching others to love and obey God and love others by encouraging them to do the same for others. This researcher looks forward to using this research in future projects and employing discipleship in various environments such as jails to aid in rehabilitation efforts while making disciples in the process. This researcher views discipleship as a path of excitement and promise to the will of God in a believer's life and the lives of others. Excitement is present because of the diverse ways God uses events, time, and people to participate in powerful ministry to others. The promise is that this work was predestined and ordained before the creation of the world and will be accomplished. Those aspects make the life given to believers by and in Christ worth living all the more each and every day.

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Appendix A

The Real Discipleship Survey

REAL DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY

Real Discipleship Survey			Please select one box of each color, then click submit. *(For the color challenged, please choose one box per each icon)*
			Reset	Submit Survey
I attend worship regularly and set aside time daily for personal worship.	I am drawn to the story of God's love and am beginning to explore the scriptures for myself.	I give some when I attend worship.	I am called not only to receive, but also to offer God's gracious acceptance to others.
I have accepted the call to be a follower of Jesus Christ and am committed to being part of the church, becoming like Jesus and serving others.	I experiment with serving in different areas as I discover my gifts, talents, and passions.	I attend worship when a friend invites me, when it is convenient, or when I feel a need.	I am developing a daily practice of prayer, scripture, and devotional reading, opening myself to God.
I am exploring new spiritual disciplines and experience a greater level of intimacy with God.	I intentionally seek to build relationships with unchurched people in order to share God's love.	I am partnering with God to help others grow in openness and obedience to Christ.	I am often amazed at the way some disciples selflessly serve others and I want to make a difference as well.
I am giving more and more regularly.	I honor God in the ways I work, play, and engage others in relationships.	I am curiously drawn to the Christians who graciously accept me as if I belong with them already.	I am daily seeking to apply the teaching of scripture to my own life.
I join Jesus in mission to others using my God-given gifts, talents and passions.	I am tithing and consciously reordering my life to free up more resources to honor God and bless others.	I am taking responsibility for my own growth through the daily practice of spiritual disciplines.	I attend worship regularly, but I am growing to realize that I must attend to God every day.
I seek to relate to others both in the church and beyond in ways that reflect God's hospitality to me.	I understand more about Jesus' teaching through Bible Study classes and my own reading.	I know Christ invites me to join him serving others and I'm discovering how God has gifted me to do this.	I am tithing and reconsidering how I spend the other 90%.

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Appendix B

Permission Template

Sunday, January 31, 2021

Dr. Alfonso Boone
West Region District Superintendent
Church of God by Faith Inc.
269 Shephard Ave.
Newark, NJ 07112

Dear Pastor Boone:

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 title of my research project is *Implementing a Discipleship Curriculum among Men at Breakthrough Church of God by Faith (COGBF) in Memphis, TN*, and the purpose of my research is to introduce and engage men with discipleship concepts and practices at Breakthrough COGBF that may lead to an increase in spiritual engagement, church attendance, and membership among men.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at Breakthrough COGBF and contact members of the church to invite them to participate in my research project.

Participants will be asked to go to https://discipleshipsurvey.com/ webpage and complete the online survey, and I will be contacting participants to schedule both individual and group interviews. For safety precautions with COVID-19, meetings will be held virtually via Zoom unless other guidance is acknowledged. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this project is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, respond by email to ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓.

Sincerely,

Shawn Cook Sr.
Liberty University School of Divinity (Doctoral Candidate)

Appendix C

Email Recruitment Template

Dear (Recipient):

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting a project as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my project is to introduce and engage men with discipleship concepts and practices at Breakthrough COGBF that may lead to an increase in spiritual engagement, church attendance, and membership among men, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my project.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete five requirements:

- Attendance to a brief, informational meeting to provide a live, interactive discussion and opportunity for Q&A (*1 hour*)
- Completion of a pre-and post-project, survey called the *Real Discipleship Survey* online at https://discipleshipsurvey.com (*15 minutes*)
- Participation in an audio-recorded, individual interview (*1 hour*)
- Participation in an audio-recorded, focus group (*1 ½ hours*)
- Participation in a 10-week, weekly group gathering that follows a format including: greetings, prayer invocation, prayer requests, topic discussions and reflections on Scripture and/or a supplemental text, and scripture memorization (*1 hour*)

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this project, but the information will remain confidential.

In order to participate in the Real Discipleship Survey, please click the link below: (https://discipleshipsurvey.com/) . In addition to the survey, I will contact you via text or phone call to schedule a suitable time to set up an individual interview as well as participation in the focus group. Over the 10-week period, weekly group gatherings will occur Tuesday evenings from 6pm -7pm, unless an alternate meeting time becomes necessary.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return a copy to me by your interview. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in this project.

Participants will receive a total compensation of $50 for their participation in this project, $10 initially once the consent forms are collected and $40 at the conclusion of the project.

Sincerely,

Shawn Cook Sr.
Liberty University School of Divinity (Doctoral Candidate)
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Appendix D

Participant Consent Form

Title of the Project: Implementing a Discipleship Curriculum among Men at Breakthrough
Church of God by Faith (COGBF) in Memphis, TN
Principal Investigator: Shawn Cook, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Project

You are invited to participate in a research project. In order to participate, you must be a male member of Breakthrough Church of God by Faith, 18 years of age or older. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the project is to explain, introduce, and engage men with discipleship. This project will provide greater understanding of Jesus' command to Christians to "make disciples of all nations" while inspiring a life commitment to discipleship in everyday living. Some goals of the project are to enable and assist male members to become more confident, apt, and spiritually driven in reaching out to other men to either begin a journey or reignite a prior commitment to Christ in their lives while removing obstacles that currently prevent them from doing so.

What will happen if you take part in this project?

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

1. Attend a brief, informational meeting to provide a live, interactive discussion of the project for one hour, unless additional time is needed to include Q & A.
2. Complete a pre-and post-project, survey called the *Real Discipleship Survey* online at https://discipleshipsurvey.com. Additional information regarding login usernames and passwords will be provided.
3. Participate in audio-recorded, individual interviews used to gain a better understanding of how you understand discipleship and its impact on your life
4. Participate in audio recorded group meetings (focus groups) to observe and record the interaction and discussion regarding interview questions.
5. Participate in 10-week virtual, with some in-person (as permissible), weekly group meetings that will follow a similar format: greetings; prayer invocation; prayer requests; topic discussion and reflections from the Bible and/or a selected text, and scripture memorization; assignments for the next meeting; closing prayer. For safety regarding COVID-19, meetings will be held predominantly virtually, with options to gather observing social distancing when approved. Zoom will serve as the virtual platform for our meetings.

How could you or others benefit from this project?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this project are primarily empowerment and knowledge regarding the biblical foundations and priority of discipleship in the life of a Christian and the ability to live confidently as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

What risks might you experience from being in this project?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this project will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected 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 using pseudonyms. Personal interviews will be conducted in virtual or physical locations that provide privacy and inaccessibility for others to listen to the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations or research as reference material. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group

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

Participants will be compensated for participating in this project. The total compensation will be fifty ($50) dollars. The initial payment of ten ($10) dollars will be issued once the participants return the consent form with approval to participate. The final payment of forty ($40) dollars will be issued at the conclusion of the project.

Is project participation voluntary?

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

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

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

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

The researcher conducting this project is Shawn M. Cook Sr. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ███████████ or ██████████████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Brian Sandifer, at ███████████████.

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

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project 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 project. Make sure you understand what the project is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the project records. If you have any questions about the project after you sign this document, you can contact the project 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 project.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this project.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

IRB Approval

February 16, 2021

Shawn Cook
Brian Sandifer

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY20-21-601 Implementing a Discipleship Curriculum among Men at Breakthrough Church of God by Faith (COGBF) in Memphis, TN

Dear Shawn Cook and Brian Sandifer,

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

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

(2) Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

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

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

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

Sincerely,

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