

Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary

Obeying the Commission: A Model for Equipping Christians to Make Disciples

A Thesis Project Submitted to
The faculty of Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary
In Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

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Lynchburg, Virginia

October 2021

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Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary

Thesis Project Approval Sheet

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ABSTRACT

OBEYING THE COMMISSION: A MODEL FOR EQUIPPING CHRISTIANS TO MAKE DISCIPLES

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Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015

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Jesus was explicit when He gave His disciples specific instructions before His ascension. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commissions his followers to be disciple-makers. Christians today are beneficiaries of the previous generations' efforts to fulfill this commission. The purpose of this project is to evaluate how discipleship is accomplished at Riverdale Baptist Church and to propose a strategy demonstrating practical ways people can begin making disciples. The traditional church model is losing relevance amid a society that is increasingly dissociating itself from formal religion. The body of Christ must be in touch with their communities and find effective ways of making disciples. This study will examine the knowledge and understanding of discipleship among one hundred adults by reviewing their current understanding of discipleship and their strategies for making disciples.

Thesis Project Topic Length: 128

DEDICATION

I want to express gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ for giving me the strength to persevere. This has been a long journey, and I could not have completed this project without depending on His Grace and Mercy.

I want to thank my wife, Sandra. Thank you for encouraging me not to give up. I could not have done this without you. You have always believed in me, and I am glad that you were with me every step of the way. Your encouragement along the way and your constant affirmation helped me not to give up.

To Moriah and Aliyah, I hope you see that there is nothing you cannot achieve. This is one of the hardest things I have done in my life, but I made it.

To my mom and dad. You came to this country with very little, but you know you have a son who excelled in academics. Thanks for your support and for raising me to be the man that I am today.

To my church families at Church of the Living God, Riverdale Baptist Church, and Downtown Hope. You laid the foundation for this project. You preached the Gospel, you disciplined me, and you affirmed my call to ministry. I am excited for the road ahead and trust that the Lord will remain faithful to his work through the local church.

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

In His sovereignty and wisdom, God has entrusted human beings with the task of propagating the Gospel. History has shown us that Christians have not always agreed on the best way to achieve this. On one side, some believe gathering a massive amount of people in a stadium, preaching the message of Christ, with the intent that many will make decisions of Christ, is the best way to promote the gospel. On the other hand, some gather with a few people and will spend months, if not years, investing in this small gathering to spread the Gospel. Even with varying views on how best to broadcast the message of Christ, one thing is sure: Jesus gave a commission, and within years what began as a small band of people following Christ became a worldwide movement. The effects of this movement are still being experienced today.

The purpose of this project is to see how Christians understand their task in making disciples. The great commission is the strategy that Jesus gave to the early church. In this commission, Jesus gave one charge: make disciples. Robert Gallaty has rightly said it is essential that the church rediscover discipleship by making Jesus' final words its first work.¹

Statement of Problem

People often find themselves in trouble when they do not mean what they say or they do not say what they mean. Fortunately, as it relates to the ministry of Christ, He meant everything He said. This should be refreshing to the contemporary church because Jesus did leave instructions and a strategy for the work that should be done after his ascension. These words are recorded in Matthew's gospel in which Jesus says the following:

¹ Robby Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus' Final Words Our First Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015).

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen”²

This text is commonly referred to as the Great Commission. Some have suggested that with the actions of the modern church, this text would better be called the “Great Suggestion.” The church’s task for all generations can be summed up by the imperative located in this text: make disciples. Unfortunately, there seems to be a disconnect between people understanding their task of discipleship and their practice of discipleship. According to George Barna, only one percent of church leaders say they are doing well at discipling others”.³ These statistics show the need for churches to think seriously about effectively engaging their congregations into active discipleship.

“Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”⁴ These words serve as a reminder of the seriousness of the call from Jesus to His followers to make disciples. To disobey this command negates the essence of what it means to be a Christian.

The primary reason for pursuing discipleship is obedience. Unfortunately, many people agree with the notion of discipleship but have no clear path on how to become involved in that process. Some believe effective discipleship is accomplished by mere church attendance. A once-a-week mentality towards discipleship is not what the Lord had in mind. People prioritize

² Matthew 28:18-20

³ Barna Research Group, *the state of discipleship: a Barna report produced in partnership with The Navigators*. Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, 2016, 35.

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 59.

what is essential and give themselves over with little thought to these priorities. According to George Barna, “eighty-five percent of church leaders say busyness is a major obstacle to discipleship.”⁵ This is alarming because Jesus, just before giving the Great Commission, identifies Himself as the one who has all authority on heaven and in the earth.⁶ Christians cannot afford to view the mandate to make disciples as low on the priority list. It is of the utmost importance.

One of the challenges of intentionality towards disciple-making among Christians is the murkiness of the word discipleship. One of the findings most evident in a survey conducted by George Barna on discipleship is the lack of agreement on what that term means.⁷ This lack of consensus may lead some to not fully understand the scope of what it means to make disciples. The most used phrase, according to Barna, is to become Christ-like. Forty-three percent of respondents used this phrase.⁸ As such, for this thesis, the term discipleship will refer to the ongoing process of becoming Christ-like.

⁵ Barna Research Group, *the state of discipleship: a Barna report produced in partnership with The Navigators*. (Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, 2016) 10.

⁶ Matthew 28:18

⁷ Barna Research Group, *the state of discipleship: a Barna report produced in partnership with The Navigators*. (Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, 2016) 19.

⁸ Barna Research Group, *the state of discipleship: a Barna report produced in partnership with The Navigators*. (Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, 2016)18.

Statement of Limitation

This project's research and survey tool was not created to describe a thorough approach to creating a discipleship culture. Context is essential in determining the best strategy to take to migrate a church towards active discipleship.

The research context is limited to Riverdale Baptist Church members in Upper Marlboro, MD. Active members are members who are currently involved in a Sunday school class. Active members comprise approximately forty percent of those who attend service on Sundays. As such, the survey results may not accurately depict the congregational understanding and practice of discipleship.

Lastly, in conducting this research, the survey tool did not explicitly define discipleship for the participants. Participants used their definition of discipleship to develop a basis for responding to the questions.

Theoretical Basis

From its inception, the Church has had the mandate of making disciples. The first step of unpacking the discipleship task is to appreciate the beginnings of the church. Some believe the church started with the commission given to Abraham. Abraham's call included the promise of blessings. This blessing was, to begin with, his family and then extended to all families of the earth. The blessing intended to reach all families of the earth would not happen by accident. Abraham would have to integrate his life into the lives of others to see this happen.

Others would say that the church started on the day of Pentecost. The context of the second chapter of Acts includes people from differing ethnicities gathering to see the mighty deeds of God. Once again, it is apparent that God has His eyes on reaching a global community.

What strategy would God entrust to His people to make sure His blessing would have a global reach? This project hypothesizes that discipleship is how this can happen. The Great Commission masterfully informs Christians how the people of God are to be a blessing to the nations that gather to witness the mighty deeds of God.

All churches committed to the scriptures must have the Great Commission as a core value of ministry. Unfortunately, many churches are unaware of the need to obey this command. This may be due to the variety of different approaches to discipleship. All efforts of making disciples should be judged by what the Bible determines to be appropriate and worthwhile. However, some churches presume discipleship as a natural outworking of the Sunday gathering. As a result, there is no intentionality to ensuring people are being disciplined.

To understand the task of discipleship, one must peer into the context in which the command to make disciples was given. The persistence of an ideology is dependent on the intentional transfer of information from one group or person to another. Historically, this transfer of information has occurred in various environments such as apprenticeship, teaching, and mentoring. Jesus chose discipleship as how His people would propagate the Christian message. This method guaranteed the church would grow and that the message of Christ would transcend cultures.

The heartbeat for the expansion of the church is realized as the church willingly submits to the commands of Jesus. One of the last commands given was that of making disciples.⁹ Contemporaries of Jesus understood what it meant to be a disciple and what Jesus meant when he said to make disciples. In the modern era, discipleship is not a commonly used term. It becomes easy for Christians today to overlook the essence of what Jesus commanded in the

⁹ Matthew 28:19

Great Commission. Dallas Willard notes that drift has occurred historically whereby churches today make converts and baptize them into membership.¹⁰ This, in turn, causes Christianity to morph into what is commonly seen today: churches filled with people who are not aware of their need to submit to the Great Commission.

To understand the grave error in overlooking the Great Commission, one must be reminded of the context in which this command was given. The Scriptures demonstrate a plethora of reactions upon people meeting the resurrected Christ. After his death, it is essential to note the various reactions of those to whom Jesus appeared. The two men that encountered Jesus responded upon realizing it was Jesus conversing with them that their hearts burned with passion as He spoke.¹¹ Other disciples gathered, met Christ, and were filled with doubt. It is within the context of doubt that Jesus issues the command. However, before giving the command, He emphasizes that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to him.¹²

Authority is a theme that is repeated in Matthew's Gospel. The first time the notion of Jesus and His authority is brought up in this gospel is in chapter seven. In this chapter, readers are invited to see the conclusion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The reaction of the crowd to this sermon is one of amazement. Their amazement is rooted in their observation that Jesus' teaching was different from that of the scribes because Jesus taught with authority. Jesus' sermon distinguished Him as being unique as compared to other teachers of that day. Teachers of that day appealed to authorities to validate their message and to gain the applause of hearers.

¹⁰ Willard, Dallas. *The great omission: reclaiming Jesus's essential teachings on discipleship*. (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 5.

¹¹ Luke 24:32

¹² Matthew 28:18

Matthew, alongside the other Gospel writers, makes it clear that Jesus designated Himself as the ultimate authority by the simple statement “I say unto you.” The crowd that heard the Sermon on the Mount recognized the uniqueness of Jesus by these statements and recognized His authority based upon the way He taught.

Matthew’s Gospel continues with the theme of Jesus’ authority in the account of the paralytic who was healed. This text introduces readers to people who had faith. Their faith moved them into bringing a paralytic man to Jesus. Jesus responds to their faith by forgiving the sins of the paralytic. The religious elites of that day understood that it was only God who could forgive sins. Their response to Jesus was to believe that He was a blasphemer. After Jesus’ teaching, some recognized His authority. Unfortunately, in this text, the scribes see His actions and label Him a blasphemer. According to Donald Hagner, calling Jesus a blasphemer implied that He was impersonating the ability to do only what God could do.¹³ Jesus’ response to this was to show that His actions had only one purpose: to show that He had authority. “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—then He said to the paralytic, “Get up, pick up your bed and go home.”¹⁴ Matthew continues the chorus of mentioning that Jesus’ deeds validate His claims of authority.

The recognition of the authority of Jesus did not go without opposition. In the twenty-first chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus’ authority is challenged by the chief priests and elders. The chief priests and elders were the religious elite of that day. They were the gatekeepers of all things about God. As such, the ministry of Jesus was challenging their authority structure. They

¹³ Hagner, Donald A., *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 233.

¹⁴ Matthew 9:6

asked Jesus two questions: what authority are you doing the things you do? And who granted you this authority?¹⁵

Jesus' ministry invalidated the authority of the religious elite. These questions were not asked to ascertain information. Instead, they were asked as "an attempt to gain more ammunition to be used against Jesus when the time was right."¹⁶ Jesus was doing ministry that was attracting much attention. The authority structures in place were not the ones that authorized His ministry. Instead of submitting to his authority, the leaders of that time wanted to find an occasion where they could entrap Jesus. Jesus does not entertain their deceptive tactics. Instead, He only gives them two options for authority. Authority is either derived from men or God.¹⁷ Their attempt to answer Jesus' question showed a vital reality: they feared people more than they did God. This response is a helpful reminder for Christians today who must answer the same question. If the command from heaven is to make disciples, then it would be necessary for believers to submit to the authority of Christ and do as He has instructed. The other option, rooted in fear of man, is to do nothing.

The disciples of Jesus, after the resurrection, had two options: disobey or obey. Jesus' official command to make disciples ironically starts with Matthew's consistent theme: the authority of Jesus. Matthew invites readers into the environment in which Jesus would share these powerful words. The words on their own are not the only means by which Jesus would send his laborers into the mission field. He would do so by reiterating what has been recognized by some, rejected by others, but reaffirmed by his resurrection; Jesus has authority, and with that

¹⁵ Matthew 21:23

¹⁶ Hagner, Donald A., *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 609.

¹⁷ Matthew 21:25

authority, He is now commissioning the church. As such, the main task of the church is to make disciples. Making disciples caused the church to grow exponentially from a few followers to a worldwide movement.

Jesus' early followers understood what it meant to be a disciple. It was common during the time of Jesus for various teachers to have disciples. The early followers of John the Baptist were called disciples (John 1:35). Discipleship in those days included following a teacher, memorizing their words, and learning the teacher's ways.¹⁸ Jesus spent over three years teaching and making disciples. It was natural for His early followers to understand and obey His command to make disciples. Their efforts in discipleship took on a new dimension. They were not to call disciples to follow their ways; they were to call disciples to be a disciple in a way that would conform them to Jesus Christ, the ultimate disciple-maker.

Jesus was successful in creating a movement that would eventually change the fabric of the world. Unlike the mass marketing appeals of major companies, Jesus used an ancient method of discipleship to a few, who would create a movement that would impact the world.

What is commonly known as the Great Commission is Jesus' commandment to His early followers to make disciples. Before his ascension, the scriptures give a consistent theme of followers of Christ being sent. As they are sent, the task they are given is that of making disciples.

Jesus' genius in leveraging a discipleship model to expand the kingdom is seen in Christianity's ability to cross cultural barriers. Jesus' command to make disciples is specific as it relates to the audience of disciples. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus makes it clear that the audience

¹⁸ Hull, Bill. *The complete book of discipleship: on being and making followers of Christ*. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006)63-64.

of discipleship is people from all nations.¹⁹ This would mean this new faith in Christ could not be limited to the Jewish people. Christians today must realize the global reach of the gospel. It has become common for Christians to get comfortable only discipling people of similar cultures and backgrounds. Christians must constantly be reminded of the reach of the Great Commission. The spread of the commission is the nations. The only way one will reach the nations is if they are willing to cross cultural barriers.

In the book of Acts, Jesus reminds His early followers of the scope of discipleship. The mission for outreach was to take place in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.²⁰ The call to make disciples demanded that the followers of Jesus Christ put away their prejudices to see the kingdom of God expand. In Matthew 4, it is apparent that Jews and Samaritans had their differences. As such, to hear Jesus now commanding His followers to take the Gospel to Samaritans must have been received with some apprehension. According to Leon Morris, “It took the church a little time to realize the significance of this, and in the early chapters of Acts, we find the believers concentrating on proclaiming their message to the Jews.”²¹ Jesus’ model of discipleship paves the way for bridging the gap between various cultures. In Acts, the disciples could cross the cultural barriers between the Jews, Samaritans, and the Gentile world.

The genius of disciple-making is that it can do what often is difficult for culturally diverse people groups to do: integrate. Jesus modeled the power of cross-cultural discipleship.

¹⁹ Matthew 28:19

²⁰ Acts 1:8

²¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 746.

He, being God, put on human flesh and lived among humanity. He made disciples by living among people, who were not like him, and taught them how to live out their faith. In doing this, he demonstrated the reality of what faith in God produces in a person. Alan Hirsh notes that “the founding of the whole Christian movement, the most significant religious movement in history, one that has extended itself through the ages, and into the twenty-first century, was initiated through the simple acts of Jesus investing his life and embedding his teachings in his followers and developing them into authentic disciples.”²² Investing in others and doing so in the context of various people groups is what makes Christianity unique. As one peruses the book of Acts, Christianity grew as Christians crossed the boundaries that ethnic Jews were unwilling to cross. It was abnormal for Jews to be in community with Samaritans and Gentiles, yet that is precisely the call on newly converted Christian Jews.

In the 21st century, Christians need to be reminded of the methods that worked to expand the Christian community and cause the Christian faith to affect the surrounding communities positively. Christianity was never intended to be a closed group of people of similar interests gathering, isolated from the realities of the world around. It was the persecution of the early church that served as a reminder of the outward nature of the Christian faith.²³ The task of disciple-making serves as a constant reminder that Christians can never be stagnant. Churches experiencing exponential growth must constantly be reminded to look outward. The challenge, however, comes as the church moves outward. It should do so without forgetting the foundation given by Jesus. Unfortunately, there is a tendency for the church as it expands outward to forget what it is to reach out.

²² Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements*, 2 ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 102

²³ Acts 8:4

There is a renewed sense of resurgence in calling churches to focus their attention on making disciples. It is difficult to imagine how today's church has seemingly forgotten about the mission of making disciples considering what is taught in scripture and through the study of powerful church movements of the past. Some have questioned the relevancy of discipleship since the word is not commonly used in Paul's writings. Mike Breen responds by stating the following:

The reason is that the gospel was moving away from the cultural heartland in the geographical area known as the Holy Land. The gospel was moving from Israel – from Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria – and was now reaching the ends of the earth. In Corinth, there were very few (if any) rabbis and disciples. So, the vast majority of the pagan cities such as Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome had no understanding of what the word 'disciple' meant because that word was always used in reference to a rabbi. These people had no idea what a rabbi was".²⁴

Twenty-first century Christians stand the furthest away from the cultural context from which the command to make disciples was given. Although many may not be familiar with the term rabbi or even with the word disciple, the task of disciple-making must become a priority in the life of every believer.

To recapture the essence of what historically has motivated Christian growth and expansion, one must develop the aptitude for creating a discipleship culture. Leaders should reconsider the goal of the Sunday gathering. Is the plan simply to build a church? Making a big church should never be the goal. The problem with building a church is the unintended consequences of shifting the focus away from disciple-making. Mike Breen rightly states that "if you make disciples, you always get the church. But if you make a church, you rarely get

²⁴ Mike Breen, *Leading Kingdom Movements* (Myrtle Beach, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2012), 151-152

disciples”.²⁵ This is an important distinction because of the Great Commission. If Jesus were to do an inventory on modern church practices based upon the Great Commission, one would wonder whether He would find activities promoting discipleship or activities promoting the church. Discipleship must once again take top priority in the life of the local church.

Statement of Methodology

The research will be conducted using a thirty-five-question survey. This survey will be given to active members of Riverdale Baptist Church to understand their perspectives on discipleship. Active members from Riverdale Baptist church or those who attend the larger Sunday gathering involve themselves in Sunday School. The survey will evaluate how active members practice discipleship, the environments for spiritual growth, their current practice of spiritual disciplines, their understanding of discipleship, and how they view the local church's role in discipleship.

The survey will be posted online, and members from the congregation will be solicited for responding to the survey. The church members will be under no obligation to participate, and no records of any kind will be recorded. No personal information will be collected. Using the results of that survey and examining modern and historical practices of discipleship, this project will develop a strategy to help the church develop a way to create a discipleship culture. The project will be laid out in the following order.

²⁵ Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 2nd ed. (Pawley's Island, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2014), 11

Chapter one will introduce the topic of discipleship and the purpose behind this project. It will give an overview of how discipleship has been understood biblically, theologically, and historically. This chapter will provide the basis for the project and the context for the research.

Chapter two will give background on Riverdale Baptist Church and how it has understood Christian growth historically. It will examine the educational model of growth as being foundational. Additionally, this chapter will provide the historical framework for understanding the importance of discipleship

Chapter three will provide a report of the results of the applied research. This chapter will highlight areas of concern that a ministry would consider when assessing the scriptural mandate to make disciples. This chapter will also note any significant findings relevant to evaluating how discipleship is perceived at Riverdale Baptist Church.

Chapter four will be the conclusion of the project. Based on the research findings and current best practices, this chapter will chart out a proposed plan to shift Riverdale Baptist Church from an educationally centered ministry to a church with a culture of discipleship.

Review of Literature

Many resources will be used while conducting this project. Books, journal articles, as well as passages from scripture will lay the foundation for this project. These resources will guide the research and provide insight into how discipleship can be implemented at Riverdale Baptist Church.

In his book, *A Better Way: Making Disciples Wherever Life Happens* 26, Dale Losch offers a fresh perspective on how the church can be effective in Christ's command to make disciples. The Great Commission is the mandate, and Losch argues that the church has accomplished this through church planting movements and the sending out of missionaries to

various parts of the world for many years. He challenges readers to note that the Great Commission explicitly calls Christians to make disciples, not plant churches. Disciple-making can occur not just around the world by missionaries but by everyday Christians recognizing their calling to disciple in the marketplace. No longer are Christians only to focus on the 10/40 window; they focus on the 925 windows. He posits that the 925 window is the 9 to 5 window that people occupy while at work. This book will help Christians understand the practical ways they can obey the command to make disciples.

Bill Hull demonstrates that conversion and discipleship go together in his book *Conversion & Discipleship: You Can't Have One Without the Other*. One cannot have discipleship without conversion, and one cannot be converted without becoming a disciple. He believes that currently, many Christians are converted without being disciples. People are converted, and discipleship is optional. This book is written to challenge Christians, Pastors, and churches to reexamine the rationale behind their existence. These entities exist to make disciples that, in turn, make disciples. He also argues that until people have a proper understanding of the gospel, the task of making disciples will not be fruitful. Many Christians understand the importance of seeing people come to faith. This book provides the rationale for churches to see salvation as being more significant than just a decision. Instead, salvation can be seen as a lifelong commitment in Christ that is actualized in discipleship.

*The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*²⁶, by Bill Hull, is a comprehensive book on discipleship. This book offers the Biblical and historical

²⁶ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006)

rationale and offers practical ways discipleship can be implemented. This resource will lay the framework for laying out the strategy of disciple-making for Riverdale Baptist Church.

Journal Articles

In *Search & Rescue: Becoming a Disciple who Makes a Difference*²⁷, Neil Cole uses his experience as a lifeguard to explore what it is to make disciples. Lifeguards constantly put their lives on the line for the sake of rescuing those in danger. Cole believes that Christians have the same task. People who do not follow Christ are likened to people drowning in an ocean. The Christian is, therefore, one who has the task of rescuing them from their calamity.

Additionally, the Christian is also called to challenge those rescued to go back into the sea to save others. This process of rescuing and equipping others is discipleship. In writing this book, Cole motivates Christians to recognize their role in becoming a disciple-maker.

In his book *4 Chair Discipling* 28, Dann Spader offers four means by which someone can be disciplined. He uses the analogy of four chairs and uses the teachings of Jesus to demonstrate how a person can be disciplined. Jesus calls people to come and see, follow, become fishers of men, and go and bear fruit by making disciples. He also uses that maturation process of human beings, from babies to parents, as another means of demonstrating discipleship across these four chairs. This book shows discipleship and how it can be accomplished practically.

Mark Dever, in *Discipling*²⁸, offers a different perspective on discipleship. He agrees that discipleship is essential for believers; however, he believes the context for discipleship is the local church. He makes the case by stating that God created the local church by design to

²⁷ Neil Cole, *Search and Rescue: Becoming a Disciple Who Makes a Difference*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008)

²⁸ Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus (9marks: Building Healthy Churches)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Crossway, 2016)

facilitate discipleship. Equally important, he adds that baptizing is one of the tasks of the great commission, and this can only be carried out in the local church. This book is helpful because it offers an approach to discipleship from the perspective of a traditional church.

In *Discipleship isn't Supposed to be Easy Keep Jesus Weird*²⁹, Frank G. Honeycutt makes the case that too often, churches compromise communicating the necessary commitment needed for faithful discipleship. He suggests this is done because churches are more concerned about attracting non-believers than presenting the truth. Jesus and His message are often antithetical to the message of the culture. As such, the scriptures show that people did not immediately follow Jesus upon first meeting Him. Instead, they went through a stage of bewilderment. After that, through the work of the Holy Spirit, they gain clarity and thus embark on a path towards true discipleship. Honeycutt calls on the church to be careful of diluting the message of Christ for the sake of reaching more people.

*Mission and Discipleship in a Digital Culture*³⁰, by Philip R. Meadows, approaches the context of discipleship in the modern era. In the same way, missionaries dissect the environment; Meadows describes the digital age as a culture that the church must examine to make disciples effectively. He identifies three types of people within the digital era: digital natives, digital pioneers, and digital aliens. This categorization of people becomes pivotal as churches seek ways to reach the multiplicity of people attending the church, especially in this ever-expanding digital age.

²⁹ Frank G. Honeycutt, "Keep Jesus Weird: Discipleship Isn't Supposed to be Easy," *The Christian Century* 132, no. 15 (2015):10-11, accessed December 13, 2016)

³⁰ Philip R. Meadows. "Mission and Discipleship in a Digital Culture," *Mission Studies* 29, no. 2 (2012): 163-182, accessed December 13, 2016.

Kevin M. Gushiken examines discipleship from a different perspective in his article “Cultivating Healthy Discipleship Settings in Multi-Ethnic Churches”³¹. Multi-Ethnic churches enhance discipleship because of the diversity of the participants engaged in studying God’s word. Everyone brings a perspective that may enhance learning. Multi-Ethnic churches broaden the discussion around scripture because the diversity of cultures introduces elements of interpretation that may not have been accessible through a church made up of only one ethnicity. However, one of the challenges of these churches is the tendency for the dominant culture to swallow up the minority culture. The goal should not be to assimilate all the cultures into one; instead, accepting the varying cultures provides the ripest environment for shared community and growth.

Racial tensions are on the rise. Jessica Mast explores how the church can respond to this crisis in her article “For you were Aliens: Discipleship in loving the other”³². Inherit in discipleship is the need to cross cultures and barriers with the intent of helping people become followers of Jesus Christ. Mast believes that the alien is one of the best candidates to be discipled. She also believes that the Christian is in the best position to help disciple this type of person. The Old Testament account of the Exodus is how God instructs Israel on how they were to relate and show hospitality to the alien. This article demonstrates the extent to which Christians can engage people with the Gospel. As this country looks for a solution to handle the immigration crisis, the Christian call to make discipleship is perhaps God’s answer to the stranger looking for a friend.

³¹ Kevin M. Gushiken. “Cultivating Healthy Discipleship Settings in Multi-Ethnic Churches,” *Transformation* 32, no. 1 (2015): 17-26, accessed December 13, 2016.

Although discipleship seems to be a current topic of discussion for Christianity, it has always been at the forefront of those engaged in Christian conversation. Allan Rudy-Froese, in his article “Learning from Luther on Christian Discipleship”³², examines discipleship from the perspective of Martin Luther. For Luther, discipleship is not about what the Christian must do. Instead, he sees discipleship as that which Christ has done in the Christian. Every action of the believer is an outflow of what Christ has done. He sees Christ as the primary disciple-maker and the believer as the operator. This article will demonstrate that for effective discipleship to occur, the believer must see Christ as the primary instructor for how Christians ought to make disciples.

In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus does not leave His early followers without specific instructions as to the task they were to embark on after He departed from the earth. As stated in Matthew 28:16-20, the Great Commission is the scripture that lays out the imperative that the main task of the followers of Jesus Christ is to make disciples of all nations. This text teaches where authority lies in giving this command: Jesus. It also provides the context for where disciple-making is going to take place: among all nations.

The Great Commission also lays out how disciple-making will take place. Discipleship happens in the context of believers going out to share their faith. Discipleship is not discriminatory and serves as a model for cultures on how multiethnic communities can exist. Discipleship involves teaching people to obey what Jesus taught. Discipleship also entails a mark of identity within the corporate body through baptism. Discipleship also has the promise of the presence of Jesus among all those who would endeavor to embark on this journey. However, it cannot be overstated that Jesus commands this commission, and not carrying it out would be an act of disobedience.

³² Allan Rudy-Froese, “Learning from Luther on Christian Discipleship”, *Vision*, 13, no. 2 (2012): 55-63, accessed December 13, 2016

This same commission is repeated in the synoptic Gospels. In Mark 16:15-16, the commissions' focal point is preaching the gospel to all creation. Luke 24:44-49 is Luke's reference to the great commission, and he emphasizes being witnesses for Christ.

To understand what it means to make disciples, one must ascertain what discipleship meant to the early believers. Discipleship was not new or unique to Jesus as is seen by others who had disciples. In Matthew 9:4, the scriptures show that John the Baptist had disciples. Additionally, in Matthew 22:16, the Pharisees are also told to have had disciples.

Discipleship was also understood to be very costly and not something to be taken lightly. In Luke 9:25-33 and Luke 14:25-33, emphasis is placed on the necessary calculation to become a follower of Jesus Christ. Texts such as this help demonstrate that discipleship is not as easy as one would hope. It is a lifelong commitment that should weigh heavily on the heart of individuals as they become followers of Christ.

In the book of Acts, discipleship takes on a new meaning and is associated with anyone who would become a follower of Jesus Christ. Acts 6 identifies Christians as disciples. After that, in the book of Acts, it is common to see all followers of Jesus identified as disciples.

Identifying all followers of Jesus Christ is a change in the terminology used in the Gospels. In the Gospels, only the Apostles that Jesus had chosen were given this title. Each synoptic Gospels (Matthew 10:1-4 and Luke 6:12-16) narrates the way Jesus chose the twelve apostles. However, in Mark 3:13-19, Mark explains why Jesus chose these men to be His disciples. Part of discipleship involves a more significant commitment towards Jesus. This level of community is now made available to all believers and not just to a select few.

Although the term disciple is not used in Paul's writings, he believed maturity and growth were integral to the Christian experience. In Philippians 3, Paul makes the case that

Christians should follow his example and the example of others in their pursuit of Christ-likeness. This text also demonstrates that even though Paul was a mature believer, he knew that he had not yet arrived and continued to pursue growth as a follower of Christ.

Paul leaves discipleship instructions with Timothy in the same way Jesus leaves discipleship instructions with his followers. This is seen in 2 Timothy 2:1-2, where Paul admonishes Timothy to ensure the spread of Christianity to others by discipling others who would then be charged with discipling others. The growth of the Christian faith for the early church was rooted in the ability of the early adherents to take Jesus' commission seriously to the church to make disciples.

Paul demonstrates that in addition to teaching the Gospel, discipleship involves sharing one's life with others. In 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8, Paul shares that in joining this church, their joy was in sharing the gospel and their sharing of their lives. This demonstrates that Paul understood that the task of making disciples was not going to take place solely in a classroom but a person's living room.

Discipleship is not a term seen in the Old Testament Scriptures, but themes of discipleship are evident. In the creation account, we see that humanity is made in the image of God and is given the task of being fruitful and multiplying. Genesis 1:28 is the first command God gives to humanity: to be fruitful and to multiply. Humanity on earth, as image-bearers, possessed the extraordinary task of replicating this Godlikeness wherever they were.

Discipleship should be understood as the means through Christ, by which the image of God is spread throughout the earth. This same theme is repeated after the flood in Genesis 9:1 when God commands Noah and his family to be fruitful and multiply to replenish the earth.

CHAPTER TWO – BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR DISCIPLESHIP

The call to the local church to create a culture of discipleship must be rooted in a proper hermeneutic of both the theological and historical contexts to which discipleship is understood. This chapter will outline the theological, biblical, and historical foundations of discipleship.

Biblical Foundations

The Great Commission, found in Matthew 28, is one of the places in scripture where Christians are specifically tasked with making disciples. Is this commission a suggestion, or is it something Christians ought to take seriously? Is this the first time the people of God are called upon to do something of this nature? A careful examination of the context of the commission will widen the scope of the task commissioned by Jesus.

The disciples, upon seeing the resurrected Christ, worship Him.³³ Scriptures explicitly mandate that worship is only appropriate towards God. Upon seeing the risen Christ, the disciples recognized Him to be more than just a human being. He was indeed God in the flesh. The women who meet the resurrected Jesus also respond to Him in worship.³⁴ One does not find Jesus rebuking them for these actions. The magnitude of the resurrection demanded a response. The first response was worship. “You do not simply offer conventional politeness to someone just raised from the dead.”³⁵ Meeting someone who has risen from the dead would have radical implications on one’s life.

³³ Matthew 28:17

³⁴ Matthew 28:9

³⁵ R T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2007), 1102.

In addition to worship, Matthew notes that some of the disciples doubted.³⁶ The Greek word for doubt is *διστάζω*, and it is only used one other time in the New Testament. It is used when Jesus rescues Peter after Peter walks on water. He asks him why he doubted. Doubt, in this instance, is not speaking of disbelief. This word could also be translated as hesitate. As such, the meaning of this word is closer to that of uncertainty about taking a particular course of action.³⁷ Therefore, in the context of worshipping the risen Christ, some of the disciples were hesitant. The disciples were uncertain in knowing what to do in that situation. Jesus will then tell them what to do.

Jesus' posture and statements to his disciples are exemplary. How would Jesus deal with their doubt? He engages them by approaching them. "And Jesus came and said to them"³⁸. Jesus first roots His commission in His authority. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."³⁹ Authority has been a theme that Matthew has emphasized throughout his gospel. Christians ought not to view this commission as an arbitrary command. This command was given by Jesus, who was given all authority. This is not the first-time scripture mentions the granting of all authority. Daniel 7 has a similar statement.

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven, there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."⁴⁰

³⁶ Matthew 28:17

³⁷ Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 252.

³⁸

Matthew 28:18

³⁹ Mt 28:18

⁴⁰ Daniel 7:13–14.

The disciples may or may not have understood the cosmic magnitude of this statement. The Jewish audience, to which Matthew was writing, most likely understood the connection. There is a similarity in that both passages speak of authority, and the kingdom's target is all nations.

Daniel's vision is of one who is brought before God's throne in heaven and given an everlasting kingship over all people. It is thus a vision of granting the ultimate authority to the people of God, who are symbolized by the 'human figure' in contrast to the beasts which represent the preceding empires (Daniel 7:3-8,17), and who are thus vindicated after their oppression by the last of those empires.⁴¹

Daniel's book highlights God's plan of establishing His kingdom. Many years would elapse as Israel waited for Daniel's prophecy to be fulfilled. As Jesus arrived on the scene, many wrestled with the idea that the time had come for God to establish His kingdom. Many perhaps believed that the fulfillment of this ancient prophecy would finally come to pass with great excitement. Disappointments filled the hearts and minds of the people as their great expectation fell short when they saw Jesus' breath his last breath while hanging from the cross. Just when it seemed as though all hope was lost, Jesus was resurrected from the dead. It is within this context of the risen savior that the Great Commission is uttered. This commission cannot be understood to have been an isolated command to his disciples. Instead, it is a wake-up call for all of creation to recognize that God had been faithful to fulfill all that was promised. The king of creation had conquered.

Speaking of the kingdom of God makes no sense if there is no king. Unfortunately, many, alive at the time of Jesus, failed to recognize him as king, and making this known became one of the tasks of Jesus' followers.

⁴¹ R T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2007), 396.

Jesus came as the promised king as foretold by the prophets. This is the point Matthew makes in his gospel account. Matthew's Gospel opens with an emphatic statement on the identity of Jesus. The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.⁴² Two important words begin the opening of Matthew's gospel: book and genealogy. In Greek, these words are *Biblos* and *geneseōs*. This is significant in making the case that Jesus was unique and worth hearing. With these two words, Matthew suggests that the most profound beginning in history was not the birth of the world but the birth of the world's Savior.⁴³ Immediately, the reader is forced to contend with the reality of Jesus Christ. This reality will be expounded on throughout this gospel account and culminate in the Great Commission found at the end of the gospel.

Matthew introduces Jesus as the Son of David and the Son of Abraham. These names carry weighty significance and point all those who would follow Jesus to discipleship? Both David and Abraham are critical figures in the history of Israel. Matthew mentioning their names are climaxed at the end of Matthew's gospel. The Great Commission carries the weight of the history of the people of Israel.

“Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”⁴⁴

⁴² Matthew 1:1.

⁴³ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12*, Revised and Expanded Edition., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 5.

⁴⁴ Genesis 12:1–3.

Abraham was a significant figure for the people of Israel. Abraham's faith in God and Abraham's promise of blessing are foundational to the people's faith at the time of Jesus. God promised Abraham land and blessing.

To understand the significance of Abraham, one must understand the context in which he is called. The creation account begins with the emphatic statement that God is the beginning of all that is seen: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."⁴⁵ With this as the starting place of scripture, it is surprising to read the following words: that the earth was without form and void. This paints a picture of chaos. Darkness has permeated God's creation, and then readers are invited into God's plan of restoring order to this chaotic environment. God calls for light and ensues the unfolding of this beautiful picture of God's power in bringing about an order through His acts of creation.

Soon into the narrative of creation, readers are once again brought to a place of disorder. Sin has entered the world through the willful disobedience of Adam and Eve. The following chapters in Genesis highlight the tragic consequences of this rebellion and the inevitable disorder that comes as a result. The climax of this disorder is seen when humanity is scattered throughout all the earth with no glimpse of hope in sight at the end of Genesis chapter 11. It is against this backdrop that Abraham is introduced.

Abraham will be the person that God would use to bring about order to the fallen world. This would be done through God's act of blessing and promise. God promises land and descendants. It would be easy to assume these promises would only be available to Abraham's descendants: the Jewish people. However, a careful reading of Genesis 12:3 highlights that the

⁴⁵ Genesis 1:1

promise of blessing would extend to the nations. The restoration of the world would occur through God's promise to Abraham.

Abram becomes the embodiment of divine grace, and it is a grace qualitatively other than the deeds of grace in primeval history. At Babel's tower and the nations scattering, the gates to the future seemed closed once for all; but now Yahweh opens them again and in a unique way, by summoning them to him through the selection of the man Abram and the people of Israel.⁴⁶

In addition to being a descendant of Abraham who could carry the original mission of blessing to the nations, Jesus is identified as being the Son of Abraham, which would have caused readers to remember Isaac. For many years, Abraham journeyed life having received the promise of God but not seeing it manifest itself with any descendants.

It would be another twenty-five years before Abraham would see the promised son born. In the same way that Abraham had to wait many years for his son to be born, Israel was waiting many years for the true Son of Abraham to be born. Matthew emphatically declares that the Son had finally come. As such, looking at the context of the Great Commission from the vantage point of Jesus being the son of Abraham shows that the commission was a continuation of God's promise to Abraham back in Genesis 12.

Matthew 28 emphasizes the need for followers of Jesus to make disciples. The people who ought to carry out this commission are covered in that Jesus is giving the commission to his followers. As such, believers are called to participate in this commission. The meaning of this commission is clarified when Jesus tells them that the task is to make disciples. The place where this commission is to be exercised is all over the earth. This is seen in that the scope of the

⁴⁶ Muilenburg, James. "Abraham and the Nations: Blessing and World History." *Interpretation* 19, no. 4 (October 1965): 387–98. <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000704839&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

commission is to reach all nations. The question left unanswered is why? Why is the church called to make disciples of all nations? The early chapters of the Bible begin to paint why it is necessary to make disciples of all nations.

Genesis is the first book of the bible and articulates the beginning of recorded history. This book lays the foundation for all that will happen throughout the biblical record through eternity. The opening verse introduces us to the author of all creation: God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning.⁴⁷ The bible doesn't start with a defense for the existence of God. Instead, it begins with an emphatic declaration that all that is seen in creation was done so at the command of God. What is God's plan in creation?

Genesis invites readers in on the early days of creation. God speaks, and there is obedience. The climax of God's creation is when He makes man in His image and likeness. The creation narrative flows towards the creation of man. Everything before the sixth day was made for man's benefit and provided the necessary elements for survival.⁴⁸ There is a distinction between the creation of the other animals and the creation of man. Each creature is commanded to be fruitful and to multiply.⁴⁹ In a similar fashion, the sea animals, were called forth from the waters, the land animals were called forth from the earth. "And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.'"⁵⁰ There is consistency up to this point in the creation of all that

⁴⁷ Genesis 1:1.

⁴⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 38.

⁴⁹ Genesis 1:21-22.

⁵⁰ Genesis 1:24

breathes: God calls them forth, and they are to reproduce after their kind. One thing, however, is missing from the creation account of the sixth day: the blessing to be fruitful and multiply. That blessing does not occur until after the creation of man. It is within the narrative of the creation of man that uniqueness is seen. Man is made in the image of God and after His likeness and is given dominion over God's creation on earth.

Being made in the image of God makes man God's representative on earth. All of man's functions on earth are to be done considering the reality of the responsibilities that God has placed upon him. Unlike what was done with the sea creatures, God speaks directly to the man and says, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."⁵¹ This commission lays the foundation for the rest of scripture related to humanity's responsibility to God. Gordon Wenham states the following:

"... focus in Genesis is on the fulfillment of the blessing of fruitfulness. This command, like others in Scripture, carries with it an implicit promise that God will enable man to fulfill it. It is repeated to Noah after the flood (9:1), and the patriarchs too are reminded of this divine promise (17:2, 20: 28:3; 35:11). The genealogies of Gen 5, 9, 11, 25, 36, 46 bear silent testimony to its fulfillment, and on his deathbed, Jacob publicly notes the fulfillment of the divine word (48:4; 47:27)".⁵²

The fruitfulness that God desires seen throughout the earth was given to man, and throughout biblical history, the people of God have always had the responsibility of bearing fruit.

To appreciate this mandate of bearing fruit, one must understand the circumstances that lead to the commission that leads to the missional mandate that applies to Christians today. Man is given the responsibility of filling the earth as God's image-bearer. As such, the world was to

⁵¹ Genesis 1:28

⁵² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 33.

be filled with the image of God so that the whole earth was filled with people displaying the glory of God. After reading about the creation of man and the events that occur, it is apparent that what is spread is sin and a marred image.

Before Genesis 3, the disposition of God towards man is that of blessing. He blesses them by saying be fruitful and multiply. Unfortunately, in Genesis 3, readers are introduced to the fall. Man's disobedience leads to God's justice in punishing sin. The serpent is cursed for his actions, and Adam and Eve are punished for their rebellion. Adam and Eve will suffer the consequences of their sin that they will die.

Additionally, Adam and Eve would no longer enjoy God's paradise for them in Eden. They were driven out of the Garden. One must not overlook the significance of God kicking them out of the garden. Two different words are used: he sends them out (verse 23), then drives them out (verse 24).

Adam and Eve's exile is decisive and definitive. "Banished" (*ṣālah*) is the same language used in Abraham's action that "sends away" Ishmael and other possible rivals to Isaac (21:14; 25:6). It is descriptive of the scapegoat that is expelled from the camp of Israel (Lev 16:10). Still stronger is the term "drove" (*gāraš*) in v. 24, which also describes God's exile of Cain (4:14) and Sarah's charge to Abraham to "get rid" of the slave girl Hagar with her son (21:10). It is the language of divorce and dispossession (e.g., Exodus 33:2; Deuteronomy 33:27).⁵³

God's creation is now moving in a direction away from him. The effects of sin are not limited to Adam and Eve. Sin has plagued the descendants of Adam and Eve. Cain kills his brother Abel.⁵⁴ After this ordeal, Cain, much like his parents, is placed in exile. Adam and Eve were sent out of the garden because of their sin. In the case of Cain, He is exiled and continues to

⁵³ K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, vol. 1A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 257.

⁵⁴ Genesis 4

move away from God in the same way as his parents. There are similarities between the accounts of the fall of Adam and Eve and the fall of Cain. The fall of man and the marred image are now replicated and spreading with the next generation.

Cain introduces clear echoes of chap. 3 as he likens his expulsion (גָּרַשׁ) from the face of the ground to Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden (3:24). Like them, he must "hide" (different Hebrew roots) from the face of the LORD (3:8). He seems to be suggesting that he is being driven even further from the divine presence symbolized by the garden than his parents were.⁵⁵

The next event further gives evidence of the spread of sin through the flood account found in Genesis chapters six through nine. The opening of this narrative should serve as a reminder of the initial blessing God gave to humanity: to be fruitful and multiply. Unfortunately, this text demonstrates that humanity is multiplying; however, it is the multiplication of the sin nature. The tension is rising throughout this text, with terms forcing readers to remember the creation account. In the creation account, God saw all that He had made and saw that it was good. In this chapter, however, God looks down and does not see good. God looks down and sees wickedness and evil. God's response to the events of the day is a recreation.

As one reads the Genesis account just after the flood, it is apparent that recreation is in mind as several elements from the Genesis account of creation are repeated. Some of the similarities include the blessing of man, being fruitful, multiplying, filling the earth.⁵⁶ Genesis 6:6 recounts the notion that man is made in the image of God. Gordon Wenham states that the "mention of the image of God in which man was made leads back to the first command given to

⁵⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 108.

⁵⁶ Genesis 4:1

man, “Be fruitful and multiply.”⁵⁷ As such, even after the creation account, God’s purpose in seeing His image-bearers spread across the earth is reemphasized.

Genesis 11 records another instance of sin and scattering. This chapter documents the building of the tower of Babel. Interestingly, the text explicitly states why the people wanted to build a tower: to make for themselves a name and prevent themselves from being dispersed over the face of the earth.⁵⁸ What would be the reason for this hesitancy to want to be spread across the earth? Wenham suggests that this hesitancy is rooted in the desire to congregate in one place and a rejection of the divine command ‘to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth, which has been seen both in the original creation account and the account after the flood.’⁵⁹ It is apparent that Genesis paints a clear picture of a man not only rebelling against God but in rebelling against the notion of being image-bearers that are spread across the nations. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that in the modern-day, there is reluctance for the people of God in scattering across the earth as a means of fulfilling the creation mandate of being fruitful and multiplying.

Through the first eleven chapters of Genesis, one must come to terms with the debacle related to God’s plan of spreading His image across the earth. His creation is multiplying and filling the earth; however, sin and a marred image are spread. At the end of the eleventh chapter, God’s creation has moved away from the garden of Eden, has moved in a direction away from the presence of the Lord, and has now been scattered across the earth as a direct result of their disobedience. What plan would God put in place to restore order to this broken?

⁵⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 194.

⁵⁸ Genesis 11:4

⁵⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 240.

God's plan to remedy this problem is discipleship. This plan began with Abraham and continues until this day. At Abrams' call, it is apparent that God is raising a family tasked with impacting each generation, and that impact would extend to neighboring peoples. This is discipleship.

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed." ⁶⁰

The very same thing Jesus asked of his early followers is the same asked of Abram and is even the same thing asked of Adam and Eve: take what you know of God and spread it throughout the earth.

The call to make disciples is a call that all followers of Jesus must take seriously. Jesus details the qualifications that make one a disciple. "So, therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." ⁶¹ Abraham's call models this renouncing of all and following, which forms the core of disciple-making. Abraham was called to leave his family and his home to follow God. The purpose of sending Abraham was that the nations of the earth might experience the blessing that God would bestow upon Abraham and his family. "These verses are of fundamental importance for the theology of Genesis, for they serve to bind together the primeval history and the later patriarchal history and look beyond it to the subsequent history of the nation."⁶² Israel may not have fully understood the implications of Abraham's call. Jesus,

⁶⁰ Genesis 12:1–3.

⁶¹ Luke 14:33

⁶² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 274.

however, in the Great Commission uses similar terminology to make sense of biblical history up to that point and uses discipleship as the conduit to fulfill God's purposes for His people.

Christians today must-see discipleship through the lens of the Biblical record. Discipleship is not something Jesus deemed to be a good idea in the context of Roman oppression. He saw it as how the purposes of God in filling the earth with His image are accomplished. As Christians disciple, they watch God recreate the new man. This new man is given the same commission that has always been given since the days of Adam: be fruitful and multiply. Much like Abraham, the reach of the commission is to the nations. Churches throughout history have recognized discipleship as a theme rooted in scripture, but throughout history, one can see that it is discipleship that has sustained the church.

Historical Foundations

Christianity is designed to be a people's liberation movement, a social force, a viral idea passing from person to person through the medium of gospel and discipleship, creating gospel communities in its wake".⁶³ If this statement is true, then it should drive today's churches into massive disciple-making movements. Many people are held captive because they have not experienced the goodness of God. Each day is a day when the effects of sin burden people. There is brokenness all around, and people are yearning for answers. The church has the answer. One of the church's hopes is cultural influence, and this appears to be possible as churches embark on making disciples.

⁶³ Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson, *On the Verge: A Journey into the Apostolic Future of the Church*, Exponential Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011), 32.

Jesus' model for reaching people was through the making of disciples. He started with twelve, that group expanded, then this group was commanded to do the same thing with others. His investment in His disciples over time set the tone for disciple-making movements still being experienced today.

Jesus used a four-step approach to calling disciples that shaped them and set them on a trajectory to change the world. He invested in these men over the long haul. Unfortunately, some are living out their faith without the investment of others, over time, in their lives. As such, they cannot make the same investment in others. Bill Hull describes Jesus' methodology as four invitations that Jesus used to develop the disciples.⁶⁴

The first invitation was to come and see. This welcomed an individual to experience Jesus without a sense of having to commit to him. This stage would last for a few months. During this time, the disciple had the opportunity to experience Jesus. The beginning journey for any would-be disciple is to see Jesus.

The next invitation was to come and follow. This is where a disciple commits for a more extended period to sit at the feet of a teacher. To follow as a disciple means one is giving their life towards becoming like their teacher. This could be considered the learning phase of discipleship.

The next step in the discipleship process was to come and be with Jesus. During this phase, the disciples begin to shoulder some of the ministry responsibilities. This is like modern-day interning. They were getting on-the-job training.

The final chapter in Jesus' model of preparing the disciples was an invitation to come and remain. It is during this phase that the disciple is now charged with being a disciple-maker.

⁶⁴ Hull, Bill. *The complete book of discipleship: on being and making followers of Christ*. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006)170.

They are called to replicate to others what Jesus had done with them. This is only made possible as the disciples maintain an abiding relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

The scope of this expansion was the entirety of the world. Today Christianity has spread and continues to spread throughout the various people groups of the world. Disciple-Making plays a critical role in crossing some of the cultural barriers created by society. Believers are spread out across the globe and are in proximity to those that need to hear the truth of Jesus.

Unfortunately, at times, churches can become siloed off from the rest of the world and, as such, limit any interaction with those nearby. Disciple-making was never intended to be something done in a classroom amongst people that believe the same thing. It was Jesus' strategic method of thrusting believers into the world.

Paul played an integral part in expanding Christianity beyond the early Jewish converts to the Gentile world. Perhaps, the modern Christian believes Paul walked the streets of Jerusalem preaching with a megaphone. People heard his excellent preaching and the church saw mass conversions. Even if this was the case initially, Paul transitioned his missionary efforts by "refusing to go anywhere without careful prior arrangements and some commitments of support."⁶⁵ This could only happen through relationship building.

At the heart of the expansion of the Christian movement is disciple-making through relationships. One cannot make disciples without working on new relationships. One of the ways Christianity spreads was through already existing social networks. Rodney Stark notes that people tend to convert to a religious group when their social ties to members outweigh their links to outsiders who might oppose the conversion. This often occurs before a convert knows much

⁶⁵ Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion*, Reprint ed. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2012), 67.

about what the group believes.⁶⁶ As such, as some take on the challenge of missionary work to those outside of their social networks, Christians must capitalize on the existing relationships they have and begin the work of disciple-making.

What happens when the call to make disciples put people in uncomfortable situations? Sharing the Christian faith and discipling individuals usually comes more straightforward when it is done within homogenous circles. One must not forget that the call to make disciples was to do so among the nations. Two critical events occur in the book of Acts that demonstrate the call and necessity of doing discipleship across cultures. These events not only present, biblically, the realm of discipleship but would serve as a reminder throughout church history of being intentional about serving the gospel in cross-cultural environments.

The book of Acts traces the response of the disciples to the commission of Jesus. Acts 1:8 once again demonstrates the task of the early followers of Jesus Christ. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”⁶⁷ This text serves as a reminder to the disciples and those who would later read the text of the commission of Jesus. Witnesses saw the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus at His baptism before Him proclaiming the Gospel. Jesus’ followers are now in the same manner, being commissioned to do the same. One must not overlook the scope of what is said in this text: Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. John Calvin notes:

⁶⁶ Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion*, Reprint ed. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2012), 68.

⁶⁷ Acts 1:8.

Here he showeth, first, that they must not work for the space of one day only, while that he assigneth the whole world unto them, in which they must publish the doctrine of the gospel. Furthermore, he refuteth the opinion which they had conceived of Israel. They supposed those to be Israelites only, which were of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh. Christ testifieth that they must gather thereunto all Samaria; which, although they were nigh in situation, yet were they far distant in mind and heart. He showeth that all other regions far distant, and also profane, must be united unto the holy people, that they may be all partakers of one and the same grace.⁶⁸

The book of Acts does not just show the expansion of the church in Israel. It demonstrates that the task of fulfilling the great commission had to cross cultural barriers. This is seen in the scattering of the disciples to regions of Samaria as a result of persecution.⁶⁹ Peter is thrust out of his supposed comfort zone when He is tasked with sharing the gospel with the Gentile people through Cornelius.⁷⁰ What is fascinating about these specific examples is that God ushered people into a place of ministry in which they, on their own, may not have been inclined to serve. The Jews had animosity with the Samaritans, yet God used persecution to send them into Samaritan land. The Jews had issues with fellowshiping with the Gentile world, yet God used a vision given to Peter to break down this barrier. Christianity has become a global entity because of the multicultural aspect of God's act of redemption.

Discipleship and Missions

Throughout history, God has been strategic in fulfilling His redemptive plan of seeing the nations come to faith. When a person thinks of missions and God's strategy for reaching the nations, one may think of the going aspect. Missionaries are sent out to foreign regions to

⁶⁸ John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 48.

⁶⁹ Acts 8:1

⁷⁰ Acts 10-11

proclaim the gospel and disciple people. Jonathan Lewis identifies this as the centrifugal nature of the church in that it expands outwardly to reach the nations.⁷¹ On the other hand, like the Abrahamic promise found in Genesis 12, the church can also take on an attractional discipleship model. Instead of the church sending people outward, God sends people towards the church to proclaim the Gospel and disciple people. Jonathan Lewis calls this the centripetal force of the church.⁷² This echoes the sentiment of Jesus as taught in the Gospels when He challenged His followers to live publicly in such a way that light shines and God gets the glory.⁷³

Discipleship throughout History

Christianity spread because of disciple-making movements. The New Testament church was faithful to its call to make disciples. As an underground movement, the church flourished as a scattered body throughout the region, proclaiming the news of the resurrection. The church was embraced by Roman culture and began to become more organized and became an institution. There have always been movements to realign the church with its simple mission of disciple-making.

One of these movements was led by John Wesley, from which the Methodist church came. This movement began with John Wesley, who met with a small band of students that would later be called Holy Clubs. These clubs met while Wesley was at Oxford. The club was

⁷¹ Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds., *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader (Perspectives)* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2013),1.

⁷² Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds., *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader (Perspectives)* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2013),1.

⁷³ Matthew 5:16

made up of students who gathered to read and study. When Wesley joined the club, he added regular periods of prayer, fasting, confession, and frequent partaking of the sacrament.⁷⁴

Wesley brought the Holy Club approach to ministry in the United States in the eighteenth century. His model was to break up the church into smaller groups where they could further study. This would be equivalent to the modern-day small group. Within those groups was another division that Wesley would meet with on Sunday afternoons for more intensive training.⁷⁵

This framework of larger gatherings, smaller groups, and smaller bands would influence the eventual Methodist church and its way of doing ministry. Additionally, many discipling models have borrowed from Wesley's model and seen success in building a church composed of smaller groups intentionally on formation.

A contemporary model where discipleship groups have formed is one suggested by Robby Gallaty. Gallaty calls his discipleship groups D-Groups and identifies each group's five 'marcs': missional, accountable, reproducible, communal, and scriptural.⁷⁶

A vital facet of a successful discipleship group is that it is missionally focused. Christians must not forget the Great Commission. Jesus' last words to His followers were that they were to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.⁷⁷ There are

⁷⁴ Henderson, D. Michael. *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*. Rafiki Books. Kindle Edition. 31

⁷⁵ Henderson, D. Michael. *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*. Rafiki Books. Kindle Edition. 33

⁷⁶ Gallaty, Robby. 2015. *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus' Final Words Our First Work*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan. 183

⁷⁷ Acts 1:8

too many people and places in the realm of the ends of the earth. As such, a missionally minded group is a group aligned with Jesus' mission. Cities could be changed for the better if Christians lived on mission.

The business of life often hinders the ability for missional activity. Gallaty suggests that participants are held accountable to build intentional friendships and engage in lifestyle evangelism within a D-Group framework.⁷⁸ Contemporary small groups cannot just be containers for Christians; they must hold group members accountable to live out the responsibilities of being a disciple-maker.

The second characteristic of D-Group is that there is accountability. Discipleship groups should not feel like an optional mid-week activity to do when there is time. If that is the case, then no one will show up. Discipleship groups are seen as a necessity. There is an expectation of meeting consistently. John Wesley understood that living in Christ was not optional and put himself in the sphere of other people to make sure that a life pursuing holiness was true for him and accurate for his band of brothers. When Jesus called the disciple, it was clear that they were committing to follow him. A few people wanted to follow Jesus but had other things to tend to, like burying one's father.⁷⁹ Jesus, in an almost non-compassionate way, gave the ultimatum that in following him, there was no room for excuses. Effective discipleship group members show a high level of commitment to being part of the group. Here are some of the questions asked of D-Group participants to hold them accountable:

⁷⁸ Gallaty, Robby. 2015. *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus' Final Words Our First Work*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan. 183

⁷⁹ Luke 9:60

Have you spent time in the Word and prayer this week?
Have you shared the gospel or your testimony with an unbeliever this week?
Have you spent quality time with your family this week?
Have you viewed anything immoral this week?
Have you had any lustful thoughts or tempting attitudes this week?
Have you told any self-promoting lies or half-truths this week?
Have you lied about any of your answers today?⁸⁰

These questions may feel a bit over the top. This is the same accusation made to John Wesley's holiness standards of his band of brothers. These methods were so out of this world that people labeled them Methodists.

The third identifying mark of a D-Group is its reproducibility. Multiplication is first mentioned in the creation account when God blessed Adam and Eve and said be fruitful and multiply.⁸¹ In the call of Abraham was the promise of descendants. The only way that would take place is by multiplication. As such, Jesus' command to make disciples must be understood in the context of multiplication. Gallaty offers this as a solid admonition for Christians today: if you claim to be a follower of Christ, but you are not working to help others become followers of Christ also, are you taking Jesus' words seriously?⁸² With a challenge like this, believers must see the opportunities to flourish in groups that lovingly encourage disciple-making. Neighbors and friends, experiencing the pains of life, are the mission field that Jesus sends His disciples to. Christianity is a significant worldview of today, but it began with Jesus and twelve ordinary men. These men were not scholars or polished individuals. They were disciples. They committed themselves to their teacher and did as He did.

⁸⁰ Gallaty, Robby. 2015. *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus' Final Words Our First Work*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan. 194

⁸¹ Genesis 1:28

⁸² Gallaty, Robby. 2015. *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus' Final Words Our First Work*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan. 195

Reproducibility is not limited to work done in a group. Group members can start new groups or engage with the lost at any time. Apartment complexes, children's sports teams, neighborhood block parties are all environments where a person can begin to be a witness. In the parable of the sower, celebration occurred as the fruit was multiplied. One seed produces many fruits. As such, discipleship cannot be seen as complete until new disciples are making more disciples.⁸³

The incredible thing about the opportunity to reproduce and bear fruit anywhere is the limitless environments this can occur in. One example is a local church that saw a need in a public housing community. This neighborhood was not seen as a project where believers could drop in and out and go home, having felt they had done something to make people's lives feel better. Instead, they saw this as a neighborhood where the Gospel could be planted. This meant long-term relational investment before inroads could be made. Once relationships were in place and trust was earned, the church started a community group of church members and neighborhood residents. Within a few months, leaders from the neighborhood emerged. They came to faith, were baptized, and began leading and starting new groups. There is no limit to where the ministry of Jesus can reach. It would not have been helpful, in this context, to bus the residents to the church because the two cultures would have clashed.

The fourth mark of a D-Group is communal. Gallaty defines community as a quality that develops when men and women unite around the common interest of the Gospel.⁸⁴

Fellowshipping together is not a new phenomenon for people. People fellowship for a variety of

⁸³ Gallaty, Robby. 2015. *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus' Final Words Our First Work*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan. 197

⁸⁴ Gallaty, Robby. 2015. *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus' Final Words Our First Work*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan. 197.

reasons. The beauty of the gospel community is that people have a unified mission to see the gospel planted in unreached areas.

One of the effects of the age of enlightenment is individualism. The mantra that came out of the enlightenment was Descartes. *I think, therefore, I am.* The logical consequence of that is that people are more isolated than they have ever been throughout history. People are looking for community. It is not uncommon for stores to mimic the Starbucks model of providing chairs and tables for customers to sit down and enjoy time with friends. The age of technology has not added any benefits to bringing about community. However, people long to find a place to belong. Discipleship groups offer that, not only for believers but also as equipping centers where members can model community life with their non-believing friends.

Small groups provide self-environments for people to live out the one another's of scripture. These groups also demonstrate to upcoming generations the value of community and set the trajectory to model the same in the future.

The final mark of Gallaty's D-Groups is that they are scriptural. The first disciples of Jesus were disciples because they sat at the feet of Jesus. Today, disciples don't have the opportunity to sit at the physical feet of Jesus. Jesus is God's word. As such, any group that positions itself under the authority of God's word is doing so in the same way the disciples did with Jesus many years ago.

CHAPTER THREE – DATA RESULTS

Max DuPree is noted as coining the phrase the first responsibility of any leader is to define reality. One of the challenges of ministry is to ignore what is taking place and assess if the efforts put in place are helping achieve the desired result.

The researcher surveyed 124 members of Riverdale Baptist church in the areas of discipleship. The survey consisted of 35 questions designed to assess members' understanding of discipleship and how they believed it best to occur. The survey was conducted online via surveymonkey.com. Participants were presented with informed consent information before participating. Participants taking part in this study did so entirely voluntarily, and participants were welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

This chapter details the findings from the survey conducted among members of Riverdale Baptist Church. The collection of this data is neither intended to be exhaustive nor representative of the vision of Riverdale Baptist Church nor a representation of all members and staff of Riverdale Baptist Church.

Riverdale Baptist Church

Riverdale Baptist Church is an independent Baptist church located in Upper Marlboro, MD. It was initially founded as a mission outreach of the First Baptist Church of Hyattsville in 1926. It was originally called the First Baptist Church of Riverdale. The church services were held initially in homes until the first sanctuary was constructed in 1928. The original facilities were expanded in 1946 and 1962. In the early 1970s, the First Baptist Church of Riverdale

moved locations to Upper Marlboro, MD, and became Riverdale Baptist Church. An 1,800-seat sanctuary was constructed and is the current location of the church.

Riverdale was well known and experienced its most significant growth in the 1980s.

Herb Fitzpatric was the pastor, and Riverdale was known for its intense passion for evangelism.

Pastor Fitzpatric took on his role in 1964. He has taken a congregation of approximately 275 and made it one of the first mega-churches in the area, reaching regular attendances of over 3,000 each Sunday. Fitzpatrick was well known in the Washington, D.C., area for his television ministry, *The Riverdale Baptist Hour*. Towns included Fitzpatrick in his 1972 book, "America's Fastest Growing Churches." At the time, Fitzpatrick's church was one of the ten fastest-growing churches in America.

Riverdale now averages about 500 adults each Sunday and has a robust adult Sunday School and provides different learning environments for attendees to grow in their knowledge of the Bible. Many members now commute to the local church, and it no longer boasts of being one of the largest churches in the area.

Riverdale Baptist Church is a Pastor lead, staff-administered church. The Senior Pastor is the sole pastor of the local church, with all other roles being that of a director. The leadership positions in place are Director of Christian Education, Director of Operations, Director of Senior's Ministry, Director of Women's Ministry, Director of Students, Director of Children's Ministry, and Director of Singles Ministry. Each director has oversight over a given area under the leadership of the Senior Pastor to help people connect, grow, and serve. All the literature and activity of the church is intent on these goals. Riverdale connects people into the church's life; people grow in groups with the aim of serving.

One of the learning environments for adult learning is through Sunday morning Sunday School classes. About 40% of the congregation is spread out over eleven classes. Classes range from topical studies, Lifeway Curriculum studies, and books of the Bible studies. Many members of Riverdale have been attending this church for over forty years, and many have been in the same class for the same amount of time. One of the senior adult classes first began as a young couple's class many years ago.

Another learning environment is through the men's and women's ministry of the Church. In addition to weekly classes, both ministries provide yearly retreats which serve as intensives for Bible instruction. These retreats happen over three days. The women's retreat titled L.I.F.T (Ladies Inspiration and Fellowship Time) occurs during the spring with an average attendance of 150 women. This retreat is topical in nature, and various speakers are invited to speak over several sessions throughout the weekend. Time is also dedicated to meeting other women, doing activities together, and enjoying time away from home. Men's Advance retreat occurs in the fall, with just over 70 men in attendance each year. The format for the men's retreat is like that of the woman. In addition to these retreats, both the men's and women's ministry has monthly fellowship events as an on-ramp to help people connect to the Riverdale community. Men's breakfast, women's prayer meetings, game nights, crab feasts are a few of the activities throughout that calendar year. People who attend are encouraged to plug into a Sunday school class or participate in the larger men's/women's activities.

Another opportunity that Riverdale sought to mature believers in the faith is through its gatherings. Riverdale held two meetings each week. The main gathering took place on Sunday mornings, with an additional gathering on Wednesday Evenings. The Sunday morning gathering is like what is found in most evangelical churches with songs, scripture, and sermon. Oasis, the

midweek service, was used as a midweek refresher to encourage the body. Both gatherings are centered on the sermon, with the Senior Pastor doing most of the teaching.

Riverdale is not only serving those that attend their weekly meetings. There are programs throughout the year that are geared towards reaching the lost. These programs are seen as on-ramps to bridge the gap between the surrounding community and the church. The most significant program done each year is the Living Christmas Tree. This event occurs over the weekend through five performances. Each performance highlights the church choir as well as a play that proclaims the gospel message. Over 5,000 people attend this program, and it is not uncommon to see people drive across the state to watch the performance.

Riverdale also does two family-centered events to reach community families: an easter egg hunt and trunk or treat. Both these events do a phenomenal job of generating traffic to the church. One of the noted gaps with these community events is that most people come only for the event and are never heard again. Even if salvations are noted through prayer cards, very few people respond when followed up with.

Another environment that connects Riverdale with the local community is through its school. The school was established in 1971, and many of the students enrolled come from the surrounding community, with many families attending different churches or are not engaged with any church. This places Riverdale at the doorstep of many of the families in the community who have yet to experience the new life of Jesus Christ.

The senior Pastor of Riverdale, Brain Mentzer, decided to shift from a classroom-based approach to a discipleship approach in 2012. Pastor Mentzer came to Riverdale in 1994. He co-pastored with Pastor Fitzpatrick until he retired in 1998. Pastor Mentzer had the daunting task of leading a church that experienced incredible growth in the 1980s. During this transition,

Riverdale saw many new families coming to the church. Mentzer's charisma and effective teaching appealed to a more diverse audience than Riverdale had ever experienced in its history. The church was now made up of an aging segment of the congregation that experienced Riverdale under Fitzpatric and a new segment of people who only knew Pastor Mentzer. One thing was consistent with the entire body: they were committed to Jesus.

Pastor Mentzer enjoyed the high participation of the congregation in the teaching environments of Sunday school but knew something was lacking. Nothing formational seemed to be happening beyond the classroom and teaching environments Riverdale provided. Yet, with all of this, something seemed to be missing from the ministry.

As new members were joining the church, there was excitement for the latest additions. However, interactions with the surrounding community were becoming scarce as many were now commuting to the church from afar. Even the weekday service saw a decline in attendance due to the distance people traveled to attend. Additionally, children's sporting activities were beginning to compete with time at the church with younger families.

In 2012 Riverdale began a shift in its approach to ministry. Instead of elevating the teaching environments of the Sunday morning service, Sunday School, and the midweek service, Riverdale began to transition to a discipleship model of ministry. Instead of centralizing activities at the main campus, Riverdale attempted to host smaller groups at homes during the week. These groups were called Life Groups. The intent was that these groups were put in place to provide environments for people to share life.

During this transition, the Director of Christian Education retired, and the new hire was the Director of Discipleship. It was during this transition that the assessment of discipleship was conducted.

The information collected in the survey shows a disconnect between how the church equips members to make disciples. The data will be presented in categories surveying being discipled, making disciples, personal growth, and discipleship beliefs. Respondents have a good grasp of personal growth and the need for discipling, but respondents show that the church's role around discipleship is unclear.

Being Discipled

Participants were asked to rate the following questions. The intent was to discover in what ways participants were on the receiving end of discipleship. The results are presented in Figure 3.1.

- Question 9 I am currently being discipled by someone
- Question 10 I have been discipled by someone in the past
- Question 11 I attend the Sunday worship service at least three times a month
- Question 12 I participate weekly in a Bible study class
- Question 14 I am part of a small group that meets at least once a month

Being Disciplined

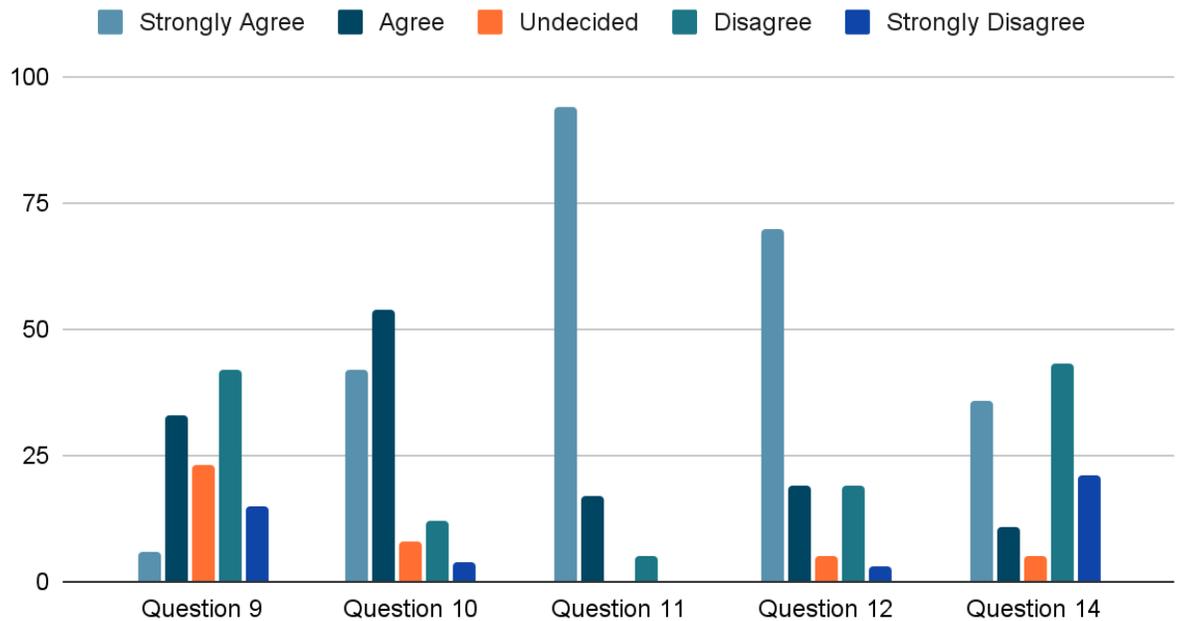


Figure 3.1

Interpretation

The scriptures teach that a person's formation is ongoing and best takes place in the context of community. As one surveys the book of Acts, it is apparent that formation took place as disciples, being disciplined were discipling others. Sixty-seven percent of the participants surveyed indicated that they were either undecided or were not actively being disciplined. Most participants in this survey have been Christian for over fifteen years and have attended Riverdale for more than fifteen years. Many of those surveyed attend services regularly and are part of a Sunday school class; however, very few are intentionally being disciplined by others. A point of interest of this survey is that although many people are not currently being disciplined,

80% have been disciplined in the past. This shows that over the years, something has occurred people no longer have those discipling relationships. Part of the changes over the years at Riverdale is that the congregation is more spread out, with many commuting 20-30 minutes to attend church. With the business of people's lives, perhaps there is no longer the set-aside time to be intentional about discipleship?

While there may not be time for the receiving end of discipling relationships, the survey showed the priority and how time is made to be faithful to scripture. 95% of the participants attend a Sunday gathering at least three times a month. Even with the ever-increasing activities of youth sports on Sundays, this response shows that Sunday gatherings are a top priority. At the gatherings, songs are sung, and the word is preached. This may be what most people believe to be their response back to God as a believer. Unfortunately, this renders the congregation passive as they become spectators to those on the stage.

If the Great Commission is relevant to the church today, then people ought to see what things may be in the way of faithful obedience to the commission. The church's growth and expansion, which many benefits from today, was made possible by responding to Jesus' call to make disciples.

Making Disciples

Participants were asked to rate the following questions. The intent was to discover in what ways participants were making disciples. The results are presented in Figure 3.2.

- Question 8 I have discipled someone in the past
- Question 13 I have taught a Bible study class in the past
- Question 15 I lead a small group that meets at least once a month
- Question 16 I can comfortably share my faith with someone else
- Question 17 I am confident that I can help someone grow spiritually

Making Disciples

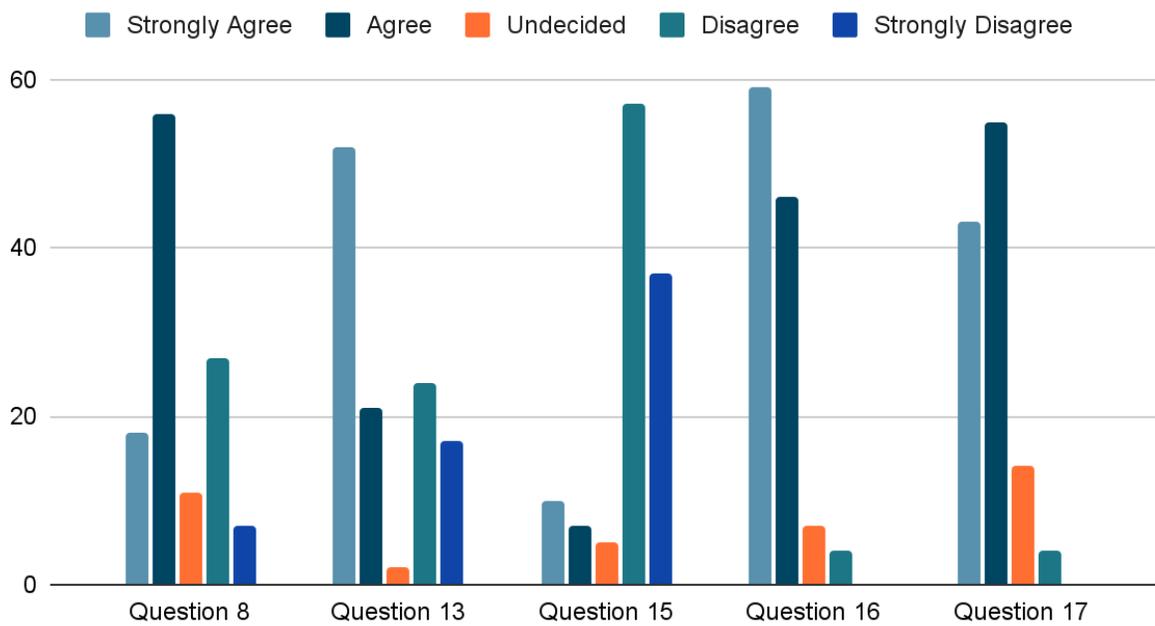


Figure 3.2

Interpretation

One of the challenges of the traditional church model where the Sunday gathering is the ultimate win is the unintended consequence of feeding consumers. Today, many would describe the United States of America as being heavily challenged by a nation of consumers. Consuming is not bad. Consumerism is where the problem lies. When consumerism invades the church, we create a culture of people who come to the gatherings to get, and then they go home. One of the

things lost in consumerist church culture is the notion that things are where answers lie. Leroy Elms rightly states that people need to know that people are not helped by things but by people⁸⁵. This is where discipleship becomes crucial: it is people helping people. Many attend church looking for more programs to help them versus investing in others to help and be helped.

Although most respondents were not on the receiving end of discipleship, a few more are helping others' spiritual growth. This makes sense as Riverdale has people who have been Christians for many years, and it is logical for these same people to invest in others. Of the people surveyed, 62% have participated in discipling someone in the past year. One of the challenges to this question is the definition of discipleship. Many may be believing themselves to be disciple-making, but this may not be the case. Of the participants surveyed, 62% have taught a Sunday school in the past. As such, disciple-making for many people at Riverdale is equated with teaching a class. Sunday school participation, whether through teaching or attending, is popular because it occurs during the week's main attraction: the Sunday gathering. While there is high participation in Sunday school, 85% of the participants lead a group. Leading a group differs from Sunday school because groups are not Sunday-centric, smaller, and not classroom-based.

Part of disciple-making is the ability to share content with others. Gospel-centered, disciple-making multiplication occurs to the extent that God blesses people's work in communicating the truth of the Gospel. Ninety percent of the participants surveyed feel

⁸⁵ Eims, Leroy. 1984. *The Lost Art of Disciple Making*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corp.
50

comfortable sharing their faith with someone else. This is encouraging because it does show that the evangelical heartbeat of a traditional church model like that of Riverdale does an excellent job of equipping believers to share their faith. Additionally, 84% of those surveyed also expressed confidence in their ability to help someone grow spiritually.

Many people are willing to share their faith and are confident they can help someone else; however, a disconnect exists between merging those desires into action. Unfortunately, many view the people on the stage as the experts, and the extent of sharing their faith is an invitation to a church service or an evangelistic event being held at the church.

Personal Growth

Participants were asked to rate the following questions. The intent was to discover in what ways participants were personally growing. The results are presented in Figure 3.3

Question 18 I spend time reading scripture daily

Question 19 I spend time in prayer daily

Question 20 I read Christian literature

Question 21 I view/listen to Christian broadcasts at least weekly

Question 22 I have attended Christian conferences

Personal Growth

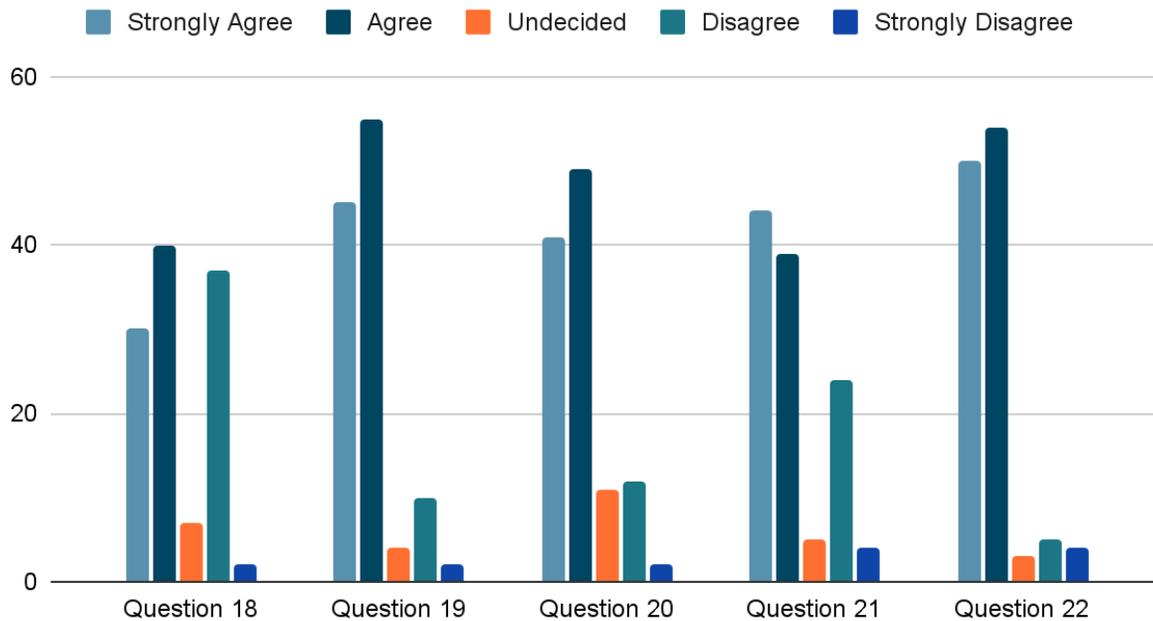


Figure 3.3

Interpretation

Making disciples happens out of an abiding relationship with Jesus Christ. There are two extremes that one must caution against. One extreme is to see Christianity as solely what one does in their private time with the Lord. Activities like prayer and time in God's word are phenomenal in aiding one's growth, but they must be coupled with a view towards others. These disciplines internally ground a person; however, they must be motivated towards seeing others mature in their faith. Leroy Elms notes that an inward and outward orientation is one of the keys to embarking on a disciple-making movement. The inward motivation orients someone towards fellowship with Jesus, while the outward motivation orients a person to witness Jesus.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Eims, Leroy. 1984. *The Lost Art of Disciple Making*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corp.

To gauge the spiritual practices of the participants, each participant was asked to respond to time spent in the word and time spent in prayer. 86% of the people surveyed affirmed that they spend time in prayer daily. This is encouraging because most disciple-making movements have some flavor of prayer rooted in everything being done. There is no lack of prayer within the people of Riverdale. The area of prayer that would help change the culture is learning to pray missionally. This entails praying for the lost or praying for the Lord to open new opportunities to develop discipling relationships.

Another discipline that is important to shifting culture is that of time spent in the word. The word of God is what guides and provides the support and encouragement needed for a discipling culture. Sixty percent of the participants indicated that they spend time reading the Bible daily. This number is lower than ideal as with the amount of Sunday activity; one would hope that that intensity would continue throughout the week. Unfortunately, these responses demonstrate that most of the Bible people interact with is occurring in a Sunday-centric environment. It would be essential to develop a resource that encourages daily reading within the church community.

To shift the culture, what has been considered normative Christian living needs to change. One of the ways these changes can occur is through the practice of spiritual disciplines. Bill Hull states that the spiritual disciplines develop new habits for the heart.⁸⁷ Discipleship cannot be seen as a new program that the church is inviting people to attend. A culture shift can occur only to the extent that people develop new habits orienting them to being a disciple that

⁸⁷ Hull, Bill. 2006. *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*. Colorado Springs, Co: Navpress. 194

makes disciples. It would be helpful to make sure people do not solely look at the person on stage as the keeper of all truth. While practicing spiritual disciplines, each believer has the baseline to live a life intent on faithfulness to the great commission.

Discipleship Beliefs

Participants were asked to rate the following questions. The intent was to discover what the discipleship beliefs of the participants were concerning discipleship. The results are presented in Figure 3.4.

- Question 23 I understand what it means to be a disciple
- Question 24 Part of being a Christian involves discipling others
- Question 25 Discipling others is optional
- Question 33 I believe discipleship happens only among Christians
- Question 34 I believe discipleship happens in the context of everyday relationships
- Question 35 I believe non-Christians can be discipled

Discipleship Beliefs

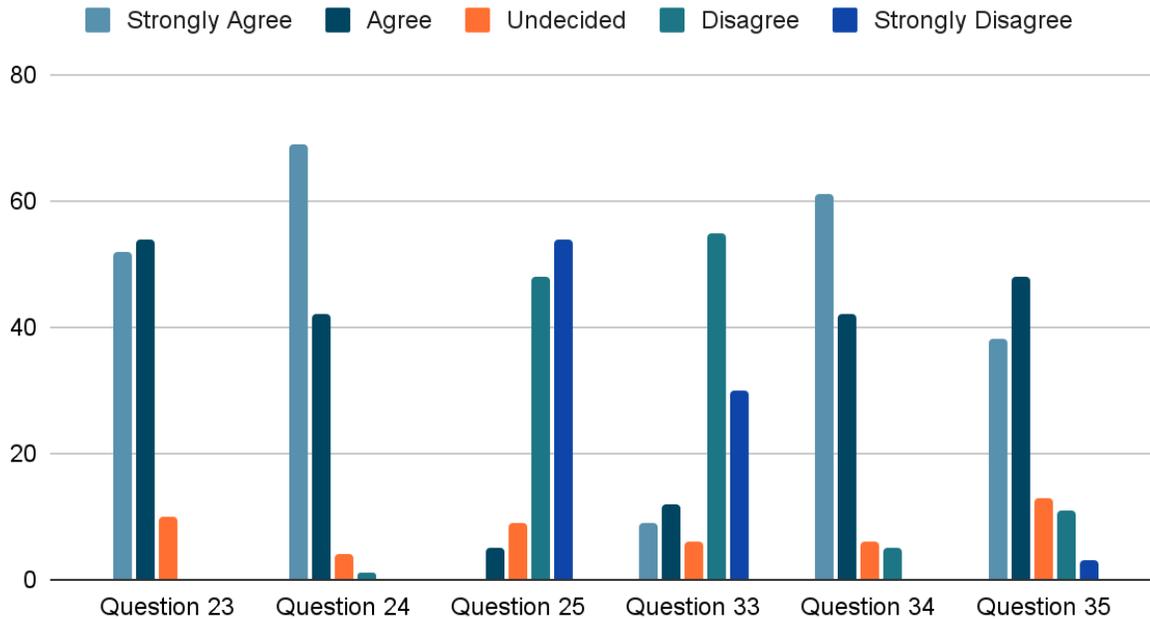


Figure 3.4

Interpretation

Ask several people to give a definition, and one may be surprised by the different answers given. Many surveyed are confident that they know what discipleship is and their responsibility towards making disciples. Even with this confidence, the survey demonstrates a disconnect between beliefs and how it is practiced. Ninety-one percent of those surveyed agreed that they understood what it means to be a disciple. An equally affirmative response came when asked about a Christian's involvement in discipling others. Ninety-five percent of those surveyed responded that they agreed that part of being a Christian involved discipling others. This is promising in that people believe they understand what a disciple is and what a disciple does. The problem is how that reality is played out in day-to-day relationships, as most surveyed people are not discipling others.

Most of the responses concerning discipleship beliefs demonstrate good teaching and information dissemination concerning discipleship. Eighty-seven percent of those surveyed responded that discipling is not optional. However, knowing something is not optional, and not living accordingly can be two very different things.

Another interesting response is on where discipleship best happens. Eighty-four percent of those surveyed agreed that discipleship best happens through one-on-one relationships. Ten percent believed small groups to be the best and only one person (.87%) thought a classroom was suitable for making disciples. Interestingly enough, no one in the survey believed a sermon was the best environment for making disciples. Many churches like Riverdale have a heavy emphasis on the Sunday sermon and the Sunday school classroom environment. Even though people understand one-on-one discipleship to be necessary, perhaps there is no time to do it. With all the activities taking place both in the church and outside of the church, it is no surprise that very few participate in doing what they believe should be done. The opportunity exists to show people where they spend their time is the very place God is calling them to begin praying about making disciples. Bill Hull says that believers should be actively involved in finding someone to disciple.⁸⁸ Maybe it is that people do not see the opportunity right before their eyes. Of those surveyed, 90% agreed that discipleship happens in the context of everyday relationships.

The foundations are in place for shifting the culture to that of disciple-making. People seem to have a baseline understanding of what the task of Christians today is. They are to be

⁸⁸ Hull, Bill. 2006. *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*. Colorado Springs, Co: Navpress. 34

faithful to the Great Commission, which entails leveraging smaller group settings as disciple-making environments. The most significant disconnect for those who took part in the survey was not in their belief about discipleship, but in connecting discipleship with the church they attend.

Riverdale Discipleship

Participants were asked to rate the following questions. The intent was to discover how participants viewed Riverdale’s approach to discipleship. The results are presented in Figure 3.5.

Question 26 My church has a plan for discipleship

Question 27 My church does an adequate job of discipling people

Question 28 My church does an adequate job of equipping people to disciple

Question 29 I understand my church’s model for discipleship

Riverdale Discipleship

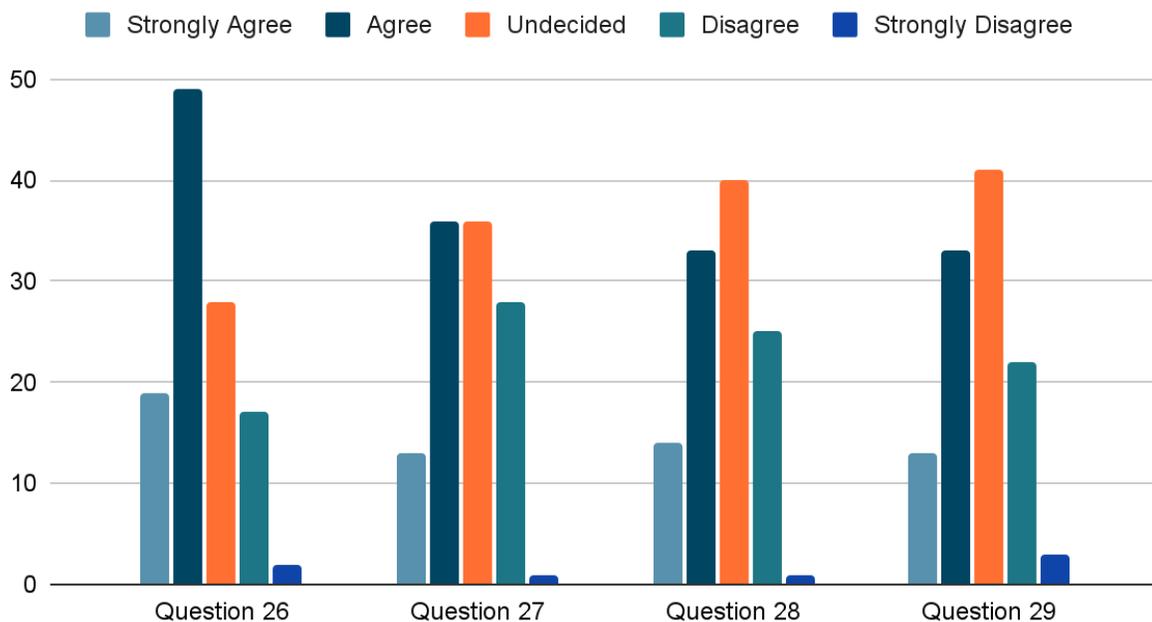


Figure 3.5

Interpretation

Messaging is everything. To find what an organization values most, follow the messaging. Values will be elevated and be central to what is done. The traditional model of church is centered on the pulpit. People gather for the sermon. If a sermon is preached, people go home satisfied. What of discipleship. Is anyone going home disappointed if there is no emphasis on the mission of Jesus?

This portion of the assessment tool was most helpful in identifying where the gaps are between knowing discipleship and practicing discipleship. Forty percent of the participants surveyed were unclear on the church's plan for discipleship. This is disturbing when you consider that most of the respondents have been attending the same church for over fifteen years. Either discipleship has never been a priority, or there has been a slow drift away from the discipleship emphasis that the church once embraced. One of the responsibilities of the church is to be a place where believers are being equipped to do the work of ministry.⁸⁹ The people of the church are to be participants in the mission of Jesus. It should be crystal clear how the church's mission aligns with Jesus' mission and the mission seen throughout scripture of multiplying disciples.

When asked about the job the church was doing of discipling people, only 42% believed the church was doing an adequate job. Sixty-five percent of participants in this survey felt the church was doing an inadequate job. There are many extensive programs done throughout the year that are inviting to those disengaged from the church. Much money, time, and resources are used to make sure everything goes well. There is an abundance of Sunday school material

⁸⁹ Ephesians 4:12

that is provided to teachers. Additionally, with Sunday sermon series and Wednesday midweek services, one would hope for a more encouraging outlook on discipleship. However, long-time attendees of the church respond that it is not effective in discipling people.

As it relates to being equipped to make disciples, the responses show areas of growth and opportunity to strengthen this area. Almost 60% of those surveyed felt the church was not doing an adequate job of equipping people to disciple others. There is a hunger among the congregation to get involved in helping others mature in the faith, as is seen in the high number of people involved in the life of others. Unfortunately, these lay leaders are not being disciplined nor are they being equipped to disciple. Perhaps the low involvement in making disciples is not due to lack of want but rather a lack of training to that end. Much time is spent preparing for Sunday, but these Sunday gatherings do not have the desired effect of sending people out into the mission field.

Participants were also asked about their understanding of the church's model for discipleship. Thirty-six percent were undecided, while another 22% disagreed that they understood the church's model for discipleship. This is where the opportunity to shift the culture of the church best can occur. As the church realigns itself with the mission of Jesus, people can gain clarity on what discipleship means in any given context. Each church may have unique ways in which ministry is practiced. As new people join a church, it is crucial to elevate what is essential consistently. If it is agreed that Jesus' mission is the most important and accomplished by making disciples, then this must be the clear messaging heard. However, it is not just the messaging. This assessment shows that information is not the problem. It is aligning the messaging with what is emphasized in scripture.

Research Conclusion

Discipleship is mandated through scriptures. Jesus' model for initiating a movement that would change the world was through making disciples. He called a band of men to follow him for three years and then sent them on a mission. They learned the practices necessary for this mission, and when the time came, they replicated what Jesus did with others. Christians today are sent on the same mission.

Participants responded to 35 questions relating to discipleship and assessed how the church is aiding in this understanding and practice. The survey results show that most people understand discipleship and the best environments for it to occur. Challenges occur when merging this understanding with how the church is helping people be faithful to the work of disciple-making.

In the area of being disciplined, participants have high involvement in church activities through weekly Sunday attendance, including Sunday school. Many have been disciplined in the past, but very few are currently being disciplined by anyone. Additionally, there is not much participation in smaller groups outside of Sunday services that might meet at homes or in different communities throughout the week. Because most respondents have been Christians for over fifteen years and have attended the same church for just as long, there may be some ingrained practices that would have to be undone to shift the culture towards discipleship.

In the area of making disciples, many participants are discipling others. However, very few lead small groups, indicating that the participants depend on others to disseminate information. They do not see themselves as leaders. This may be due to leadership being done in the church is by the paid staff. Perhaps the model in place is intimidating to others who desire to lead but may not feel adequately equipped to do so. It is encouraging to note that

many participants are confident that they could help someone else in their faith journey if given the opportunity.

Additionally, most of the participants would take on the responsibility of discipling someone if asked to do so. This is excellent news in that churches are filled with people willing to do the work. These people need to be equipped, resourced, and supported well.

In personal growth, it is evident that participants value time in the word and prayer. Additionally, most participants are involved in activities outside of the church to aid their growth, such as listening to podcasts, reading Christian literature, and attending conferences. Once again, it is evident that there is a desire for more. The problem comes into play when more is only relegated to information. Churches today are filled with people who know much information but find it difficult to put this knowledge into practice. These findings pave the way for the church to create onramps and training and equipping environments for people to implement all they know. This will shift the culture from being consumeristic to a training culture like that experienced in medical residency programs.

In the area of discipleship beliefs, the participants demonstrated high competency in discipleship. There is agreement on what, who, and where of discipleship. Discipleship is not optional; all Christians should participate in discipleship, which best occurs in smaller group environments. The disconnect is that the activity of the church does not reflect this. The church must think of ways to hold people accountable for what they believe concerning discipleship. The church should explore ways to encourage people as they embark on discipling others.

In how Riverdale aids in Discipleship, this part of the assessment was most beneficial to pivoting towards a disciple-making culture. With the high participation in Sunday-centric activities, there was little understanding of what the church was doing specifically to disciple

and equip people to make disciples. The action of the church may be sending a mixed message on what is most important. Most of the activities imply that people should come to the church to get, as opposed to a message that says the church exists to equip one to be faithful towards Jesus' message. This is not to say that the church intentionally hinders people's ability to be faithful to the Great Commission. However, it demonstrates the need for the church to assess the effectiveness of what is being done. It is not enough to rename roles or to preach through a new sermon series. The church must discover tangible ways to equip, resource, and support people as they go out as disciples that are making disciples.

The areas addressed in this chapter highlight growth areas for the church to consider as it shifts from a Sunday-centric traditional ministry model to a decentralized movement of disciple-makers. The next chapter will present a model for how this pivot can take place.

CHAPTER FOUR – RECOMMENDATIONS

Jesus was clear on what the task of His followers ought to be: make disciples. The collective of believers across the world is known as the church. For many contemporary Westerners, the image that comes to mind when thinking of the church is an organization with programs. To pivot towards a disciple-making movement, believers must see the church through a new lens. The new lenses are old lenses that perhaps have become cloudy over the years. The metaphor most helpful for a disciple-making movement is to see the church as Jesus' bride. The collective body of believers is responsible for being presented as a beautiful bride for God's Son. The bride will become stagnant if the church becomes insular and forgets to make disciples among the lost. No one wants that.

One of the areas to be examined is what success will look like for the local church. It is not uncommon for success to be rooted in how many people attend and how much they give. The church will not look like the magnificent bride promised in scripture if that is the ultimate win.

From Teaching to Training

Many models of church ministry are heavily centered on teaching. Teaching is a necessary component of ministry. However, if all that is done is teaching, it is no surprise that many people know what discipleship is but cannot integrate that reality into their lives. It is common to hear people walk away from a church sermon filled with joy because of the powerful teaching that comes from the pulpit. One of the pastoral positions seen in some bigger churches is that of a teaching pastor. There is nothing wrong with teaching. However, teaching by itself will not produce the desired result of disciple-makers. Damian Gerke has identified this gap:

Teaching centers on cognitive understanding and factual retention. Training, on the other hand, moves beyond the cognitive domain to include the affective (feelings and values) and even the psychomotor (physical activity) domains by focusing on practical application and accountability around measurable behavior change and skill development.⁹⁰

This reality is best seen in how medical professionals are trained. They spend time in the classroom. No doctor goes immediately into medical practice simply because they have had classroom experience. After classroom time, the medical professional spends a few years in a residency program. This program is put in place so that doctors can put into practice all that they have learned. Churches could become more than educational centers. They can become training grounds in which Christians are mobilized and put into practice all that has been taught.

The membership intake process can be the first step in orienting someone towards a training model of discipleship. Membership classes are a helpful environment for people to commit to a local body. Membership classes can vary from a few hours as an orientation or a several-week course offered to individuals. These classes tend to focus on the church's history, the church's beliefs, the ministries of the church, and what needs to be done to maintain membership in good standing. A shift that needs to occur is to move from classes to orient members to classes equipping believers to make disciples.

Membership classes are environments where churches have a few moments to convince someone to join their church. Churches ought to expand the purpose of membership classes. What would be the best use of a membership class if the class served as a decision-making point for a potential new member? The person may go through the class and then decide not to join

⁹⁰ Gerke, Damian. 2020. *In the Way: Church as We Know It Can Be a Discipleship Movement (Again)*. Springfield, Mo: Three Clicks Publishing. 50

the church. As such, membership classes should do more to equip believers towards the mission of Jesus than to just join a local church.

Membership classes should focus on articulating the disciple-making strategy for a local church. This would clear any confusion related to the church's model for discipleship and the expectation of anyone who would consider a local assembly their home church. Below is a four-week template for leveraging a membership class as an onboard to equipping believers to Jesus' mission. The four classes center on the Gospel, Discipleship, Community, and Mission.

Class 1 - The Gospel

One area that needs to be realigned for people joining a church is being a disciple that makes disciples. Churches need to move away from the common idea of joining a local body to joining a local body that is partnering with Jesus' mission in the world. As such, the beginning point for this equipping class is the Gospel.

The Gospel is God's story of what He is doing in the world. Often when the Gospel is shared, it is done in two parts: humanity's sin and Jesus's remedy. A fuller picture of the Gospel that is declared from Genesis to Revelation is in four parts: creation, fall, redemption, restoration.

Creation is the opening scene of God's story. It is humanity's first interaction with God in the Biblical narrative. He is the creator. In Genesis, God calls all things into being by His word. Throughout the first chapter of Genesis, there is a constant echo of all things being good. declared "good." God's creative work reaches its pinnacle at the creation of human beings. They are made in His image, and God declares them very good. This is an essential aspect of the Gospel. Before the fall, humanity was commissioned to cultivate, be fruitful, and multiply. In

the early stages of an equipping track, believers must understand that the responsibility to multiply was given before the fall.

The next part of the Gospel narrative is the fall. This is the area everyone can identify with. The fall speaks of the brokenness that occurred in God's good creation. Adam and Eve are cared for and given boundaries within which to experience God's Garden. They have his word as expressed in commands, they have his presence, and they are in His place: the garden. Another being is also in the Garden: Satan. His lies shatter the image-bearers. Because of their sin, they are now removed from God's place and His Presence. Their actions have a rippling effect on the rest of creation. Their children are currently infected with the same bend towards sin. Humanity is multiplying but as marred image-bearers. But amid this unraveling is a promise. The promise is fully experienced in the person of Jesus. That promise is God's remedy for humanity's sin.⁹¹

The next part of the Gospel narrative centers around redemption. This is the area in which we are officially introduced to the person and work of Jesus. Alan Hirsch identifies Jesus as being pivotal to any missionary momentum within the Christian faith.⁹² Jesus comes in fulfillment of all that God has promised. But it is not just God's promises in the past that Jesus comes to fulfill. Jesus initiates a movement to put into place the completion of all that God has promised. This is the crux of the Gospel. Jesus came to deliver humanity from the bondage of sin.

Additionally, Jesus now sends those whom He has rescued back out into the waters to rescue those still drowning. This is critical in orienting new members into a ministry. They are

⁹¹ Genesis 3:15

⁹² Hirsch, Alan, and Darryn Altclass. 2009. *The Forgotten Ways Handbook: A Practical Guide for Developing Missional Churches*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press. 94

not just joining a church to consume. They are joining a movement that began back in the garden and was solidified at the resurrection of Jesus when he commissioned believers to make disciples.

Jesus, in redemption, exemplifies the work of the Church. Jesus came to repair what was broken. He restores it through his death and resurrection. His followers, known as disciples, ought to follow the same pattern as the disciples of his day. They followed the practices of the master teacher.

At its very heart, Christianity is therefore a messianic movement, one that seeks to consistently embody the life, spirituality, and mission of its Founder. We have made it so many other things, but this is its utter simplicity. Discipleship, becoming like Jesus our Lord and Founder, lies at the epicenter of the church's task.⁹³

Without this firm understanding of Jesus and his mission, the church will risk being a container of Christians that have little to do with His mission.

The final portion of the Gospel narrative is that of restoration. Jesus promised that one day he would return and complete the work he had begun. Each day is filled with opportunities for believers to demonstrate what the world can be like considering the truth of Jesus. Jesus came, pronouncing God's kingdom had come to earth. He now reigns through the church. The church has the message of hope for a broken world. People all around are looking for solutions to their brokenness. Believers know where the answers lie.

The book of Revelation gives a sneak peek into what the world will become. Christians are not saved solely to now wait for things to get better. Part of discipleship is working to make things better to give a glimpse to others of what Jesus will ultimately accomplish. The final

⁹³ Hirsch, Alan, and Darryn Altclass. 2009. *The Forgotten Ways Handbook: A Practical Guide for Developing Missional Churches*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press. 94

pages of scripture paint a picture of complete restoration. This is where the church is headed. This is what the church is inviting people to join into.

Once the foundation has been laid concerning the Gospel, the importance of Jesus, and the mission, the next orientation phase should elevate the importance of discipleship.

In addition to understanding the grand narrative of the Scripture and the Gospel understood through the lens of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration, members, are shown how the Gospel has worked its way through their lives.

Each believer should identify how God has saved them and is transforming their lives through the Gospel. Processing their life through the lens of the Gospel provides a framework for them to begin discipling others.

Each person has a beginning and a shaping. Part of appreciating the Gospel is seeing what has formed a person into who they are. This is a process of examining their life before faith in Christ. This is helpful because it demonstrates that they were not born getting things right with God.

Each person recognizes the sin in their life. The reality for everyone that walks around today is that there is brokenness all around. One can turn on the news, read an article, or talk to friends and see the reality of sin all around. Peoples' lives are deeply affected by the existence of sin, and helping a person uncover their brokenness is a needful step for them to appreciate the grace of God.

In addition to identifying the brokenness in one's life, it is essential to identify ways people try to save themselves. This uncovers the idols in a person's life that they have turned to try and fix the brokenness they have experienced.

If a person is a believer, they have experienced God's rescuing. If they are not believers through this conversation of the Gospel, they may discover the truth of Jesus' redeeming work for the first time. This was the area in a person's life when they heard the good news that Jesus had done the work to deal with the brokenness in their life and the world.

The final opportunity for merging God's story with a person's story is to acknowledge that Each person is continually being transformed as God's work is not complete until Jesus returns. This also paves the way for people to see how they are now commissioned to join in proclaiming good news to friends and family.

As people get more versed in the Gospel, the next step in this class is to elevate evangelism's importance. The Gospel is not just good news for believers. It is good news for those who have yet to come into the new life of Jesus Christ.

Seeing the link between the Gospel and Evangelism is essential in equipping believers towards discipleship. When people share the Gospel with others, it is called evangelism. Unfortunately, the word evangelism causes many people to become frightened. Evangelism, for some, entails standing on a street corner preaching to others. While there are instances where this may be helpful, this is not the only way for evangelism.

Every believer has the tools necessary to share their faith. Believers must recognize that the solution to the brokenness seen all around is the Gospel. The challenge is that Christians must see their role in evangelizing the lost.

In Luke 10, Jesus offers a model for reaching the lost. Jesus recognized that many people in the surrounding community were lost. As such, he called on the disciples to begin praying that the Lord would send out laborers into the harvest.⁹⁴ Interestingly, the laborers the disciples

⁹⁴ Luke 10:2

were praying for were themselves, for just a few verses later, they were the ones Jesus sent into the fields.

Membership classes can raise awareness of the need for believers to evangelize the lost. Unfortunately, evangelism has been relegated to inviting people to church to hear the preacher preach the Gospel. The invitation method may appeal to some; however, many people have no desire to walk into a church building. Therefore, believers must see their role in evangelism.

The reframing of evangelism is necessary to have a better grasp of the task at hand. The traditional model of evangelism is that of extraction. People are challenged to reach their friends with the Gospel and then invite them into the church's culture. This model has the unfortunate consequence of alienating these new converts from the communities they were involved in before being extracted. The new believers are so adapted to their new environment, the church, and so alienated from their old communities that challenges are created for them to reach their families, communities, or nations.⁹⁵ The church is now viewed as the organization that took a friend from their community. This taints the witness of the Gospel in the community with this approach.

The solution to the extraction model of evangelism is disciple-making evangelism. In this model, believers go to where people are and make disciples. Evangelism occurs in the places where people work, live, and play. Inviting people to share their faith with their non-

⁹⁵ Watson, David L, and Paul D Watson. 2014. *Contagious Disciple-Making*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson. 108

believing friends in these environments can seem daunting. Dave Ferguson has presented a model to overcome this potential hesitancy.⁹⁶

B.L.E.S.S is a practical model for helping believers evangelize their friends and neighbors. The acronym stands for, **B**egin with prayer, **L**isten, **E**at, **S**erve, and **S**tory. By using these steps, there is no longer the burden of having to convert people. Conversion is the work of God, while evangelizing and discipleship is the task of believers.

The foundation for evangelism is prayer. Believers must see prayer as an essential function of evangelism. Before one can reach their neighbors, they must first ask the Lord who around them they might be able to bless. If a person is already identified, an essential part of evangelism is consistently praying for this person. This can be prayers focused on a particular need or prayers for their salvation.

The second aspect of the b.l.e.s.s acronym is to listen. As one engages with their friends and neighbors, it is essential to spend time listening. This step can prove to be challenging because of the propensity to want to do something. To listen is to hear and understand the needs of those one has been praying for.⁹⁷ Listening shows people that they are not a project and that their needs are being understood.

The next aspect of the b.l.e.s.s acronym is to eat. Eating a meal with someone is a powerful evangelistic tool. Jesus leveraged meals throughout his ministry to reach people. As

⁹⁶ Ferguson, Dave, and Jon Ferguson. 2021. *B.L.E.S.S. : 5 Everyday Ways to Love Your Neighbor and Change the World*. Washington, Dc: Salem Books, An Imprint Of Regnery Publishing.

⁹⁷ Ferguson, Dave, and Jon Ferguson. 2021. *B.L.E.S.S. : 5 Everyday Ways to Love Your Neighbor and Change the World*. Washington, Dc: Salem Books, An Imprint Of Regnery Publishing. 56

one reads Luke's Gospel, it is apparent that one of the things Jesus did a lot was to eat. Eating with people breaks down barriers. It is an easy way to posture oneself to listen to the needs of those around. It is around the table that meaningful conversations can happen.

The third part in the ways one can b.l.e.s.s their neighbors is through serving. It is important to note that serving can be serving one's neighbor or serving alongside one's neighbor. An aspect of the Gospel that cannot be overlooked is its ability to better an environment. Neighbors should be happy to see churches to the extent that the church serves the surrounding community.

The final way disciples can love their neighbors is through stories. The story shared is the story of how the Gospel has changed one's life. They share about their life before Christ, how they came to know Christ, and their life resulting from Christ. These stories show the practical workings of faith in Christ.

This model of evangelism is not for the sole purpose of conversion. Conversion is important. To b.l.e.s.s. is to love one's neighbor. This is how the world can be reached: believers with knowledge of the Gospel loving their neighbors.

Class 2 - Discipleship

Discipleship should be the main activity of everyone attending a local church. Churches ought to be filled with people who are being discipled and people who are discipling others. One of the challenges to streamlining discipleship is that it is one message mixed among many. The second session of the membership orientation should show how discipleship is integrated into everything a church does.

At its core, discipleship is following. Disciples mature as they follow Jesus, and Disciple Makers help others become disciples. These two truths should drive everything a church does. As Bull Hull states, discipleship is not an added program to a church; it is the church's activity.

Sermons are a consistent staple in church gatherings, and they can be leveraged to encourage discipleship. The church can shift the main focal point of Sunday mornings to the teaching occurring throughout the week in smaller communities. As an example, a church traditionally may preach through the book of Luke over the course of several weeks. Inevitably portions will be missed, or sections will be summed up together to save time. One problem with the Sunday-only sermon series is that it teaches the people that the central place you will learn is Sunday from the pulpit. A different approach is to have smaller weekday groups as the primary teaching environments and then on Sunday as a supplement. For example, if Church was walking through the first few chapters of Luke, it may break down as follows:

- Luke 1:1-4 - Series introduction
- Luke 1:5-25 - Birth of John the Baptist Foretold
- Luke 1:26-39 - Birth of Jesus Foretold
- Luke 1:38-56 - Mary and Elizabeth
- Luke 1:57-80 - The Birth of John the Baptist
- Luke 2:1-21 - the Birth of Jesus
- Luke 2:22-40 - Jesus Presented at the Temple
- Luke 2:39 - The Boy Jesus at the temple

This series would typically take place over two months, with each Sunday focusing on each section. The potential problem with this approach is, other than taking notes, what would motivate a person to continue in the passage throughout the week?

The first step in tackling this is to train parishioners on how to interact with the Word of God. Approaching the bible should not just be for gathering information. This approach is not leading to a massive movement of people making disciples. The church can become a training

ground where believers are constantly challenged to walk with others to discover the gospel's truth being played out in their lives. The commands of Jesus offer a simple pathway to formation in Christ. Believers are encouraged to continually answer three questions, anytime they interact with scripture, based upon Jesus' first command found Mark 1:15, His last command, which is in Matthew 28:16-20, and what He said were the two most important commands which are found in Matthew 32:34-40.

Jesus' first command is to repent and believe the Gospel⁹⁸. This implies that there is content to be understood. As such, this command leads to the question of the *what* of the passage. This question opens the door for a discovery model of learning. Instead of being taught everything, disciples, through a question, begin to discover the truths of a given passage. Questions such as "What does this Scripture say" or "What is the Lord teaching us through His Word?" This is a discovery model of bible study and learning. Jesus often taught by asking discovery-type questions: Whom do men say that I am?⁹⁹, throughout Jesus' ministry, Jesus is found asking questions, drawing people out, inviting them to come and see, not forcing, but allowing people space to discover.

The two most important commands given by Jesus are to love God and to love people.¹⁰⁰ These commands come with actions that can be gauged. As such, these commands lend way to the *how* of the passage. One might ask, "how am I convicted of sin" or "how am I to take a simple step of action"? Disciples of Jesus are called to obey Jesus. The word of God gives instruction. Some Bible studies stop disseminating information with no intentionality to see how

⁹⁸ Mark 1:15

⁹⁹ Matthew 16:15

¹⁰⁰ Matthew 22:34-40

the Lord might be calling someone to obedience. A passage may cause conviction. For example, a person may be reading Luke's gospel and coming across Mary's praise song in response to the angelic declaration. There is definite truth to be gleaned from this passage. But by asking the how of the passage, the disciple is positioned to respond in obedience to the Holy Spirit's nudging. This is what it means to be a disciple. Obedience to scripture is one of the ways disciples demonstrate love towards God and, as a result, towards other people.

The last command, the Great Commission, is where disciples are called upon to walk with others as they discover Jesus.¹⁰¹ Having a heart for others should naturally flow from time spent in God's word. This last command compels disciples to ask the *who* of a passage. This question may not be directly tied to the passage, but because of this passage, one might ask, "who am I walking with that I can share this with?" Disciples of Jesus are called to form new disciples wherever the Lord sends them. After reading a passage, time should be spent praying and seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit on whom we can share life with. The desire here is for the Holy Spirit to pave the way for disciples to love others and intentionally walk with them to discover Jesus. A disciple of Jesus should constantly be aware of where the Lord has called them and precisely whom He has put on their hearts. Disciples are always taught to ask whom the Lord is sending them to

With this model in place, the need for a Sunday sermon to tackle all the passages is alleviated. It would benefit churches to create more environments for smaller groups to gather and walk through the three-question study model. Now the sermon can serve as a supplement to the heart of what has been taking place each week in smaller groups. A new model for series development would flow like this.

¹⁰¹ Matthew 28:16-20

Luke 1:1-4 - Series introduction - Sermon
Luke 1:5-25 - Birth of John the Baptist Foretold - Group Study
Luke 1:26-39 - Birth of Jesus Foretold - Sermon
Luke 1:38-56 - Mary and Elizabeth - Group Study
Luke 1:57-80 - The Birth of John the Baptist - Sermon
Luke 2:1-21 - the Birth of Jesus - Group Study
Luke 2:22-40 - Jesus Presented at the Temple - Sermon
Luke 2:39 - The Boy Jesus at the temple - Group Study

In this model, instead of preaching over two months through two chapters of Luke, the preacher speaks four times while the rest of the chapter is dealt with and processed throughout the week in smaller groups. This encourages people to jump into smaller communities. Instead of asking why the preacher did not preach on the Birth of John the Baptist, the congregation will want to be involved in a group to read the passage and ask what, how, and who of the passage. The sermon would follow the same format. The bulk of the sermon would be spent on the what of the passage. Perhaps, time could be spent at the end of the sermon to give space to reflect and discern the actionable step of obedience (the how) and whom they could share this truth with.

One final recommendation is to encourage people to read the Bible outside of the Sunday gathering and even smaller group gatherings. The model integrates with the above-mentioned sermon and small group structure through daily readings that coincide with the scripture shared on Sundays and in groups.

Many Christians are encouraged to have daily devotions to continue to grow in their faith. Many do so, and there is an abundance of resources that help, such as devotional books, Our Daily Bread, or daily readings from the YouVersion app. These are helpful resources and have done a great job assisting Christians to develop a consistent rhythm of word and prayer. Churches also have an opportunity to encourage the body through an integrated daily reading plan that coincides with the sermon series and smaller group activity. Below is a sample of an

integrated approach to daily reading, small group discussion, and sermon passages that could work.

Sermon: Luke 1:1-24- Luke Introduction

Daily Readings

Monday - Luke 1:1-4- Introduction + Purpose for writing

Tuesday - Luke 1:5-7- Zechariah and Elizabeth

Wednesday - Luke 1:8-17- Zechariah and the angel

Thursday - Luke 1:18-20- Zechariah silenced

Friday - Luke 1:21-25- Elizabeth conceives

Sermon: Luke 1:26-38- Birth of Jesus foretold

Daily Readings

Monday - Isaiah 7:14- Prophecy of Jesus' birth

Tuesday - Micah 5:2-3- Prophecy of Jesus' birth

Wednesday - 1:26-33- Gabriel visits Mary

Thursday - Gen 28:1-6

Friday - 1:34-38- Mary's response

Sermon: Luke 1:39-55- Mary's Magnificat

Daily Readings

Monday - Luke 1:39-45- Mary visits Elizabeth

Tuesday - Luke 1:46-49- Magnificat 1- Blessed

Wednesday - Luke 1:50-51- Magnificat 2- Mercy

Thursday - Luke 1:52-53- Magnificat 3- Humility

Friday - Luke 1:54-56- Magnificat 4- Israel

Sermon: Luke 1:57-80 - Birth of John the Baptist and Zechariah's prophecy

Daily Readings

Monday - Luke 1:57-64- John is Born

Tuesday - Luke 1:65-66- What will this child be?

Wednesday - Luke 1:67-75- Promise of Deliverance

Thursday - Luke 1:76-79- Prophet of the Most High

Friday - Luke 1:80- Growing Strong

Sermon: Luke 2:1-21- Birth of Jesus Christ + The Shepherds (Christmas Eve)

Daily Readings

Monday - Luke 2:1-7- Birth of Jesus

Tuesday - Luke 2:8-21 The Shepherds and the Angels

Wednesday - Luke 2:22-35 Jesus Presented at the Temple

Thursday - Luke 2:36-38 Anna's Words

Friday - Luke 2:39-52- Jesus in the temple

This approach unifies a local body to the scriptures and offers shared conversations with consistent themes throughout the week. Small groups that meet throughout the week can then gather, following the three-question model, and choose any passage from the daily readings. These readings can be emailed to members each morning as a devotional.

Below is a sample email:

Introduction: As was a Jewish custom, on the 8th day after Jesus was born, according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple to consecrate him to the living God and offer a sacrifice to Him. While at the temple, the Power of the Holy Spirit revealed the truth about Jesus to Simeon. Simeon then spoke a beautiful prayer of thanksgiving to God. May God grant us also, through the power of the Holy Spirit, eyes to see the truth today about our Savior Jesus and what he wills for us to do in these divided and challenging times.

Passage: Luke 2.22-35

[WHAT] Is This Passage Saying and What Is a Key Truth or Thought That We Learn?

- Why take Jesus to the temple on the 8th day? What is the significance?
- What (or who) is the consolation of Israel?
- What did the Holy Spirit reveal to Simeon about Jesus? Salvation?

[HOW] Is the Lord Calling Me to Action/Obedience?

- Is there sin to confess or a next step to take? How has it gone since last time?
- How might God be calling you to proclaim the salvation of Jesus this week leading up to Christmas Day?
- Have you thanked GOD for his son Jesus lately?
- Are there any sins you need to ask GOD for salvation and deliverance from?

[WHO] Am I Walking with and Praying to Discover Jesus?

- What is my next step?
- Who are you praying for to discover the truth of Jesus Christ?
- Who can you step out in faith to discuss the birth of Christ with this week?

The critical element in this approach is that it is more than just information. It is more than a devotional. This is more than a daily reading plan. This is an equipping opportunity. It centers people on Jesus, they respond in obedience, and they have their eyes open on whom they can serve. It would benefit churches to limit then the amount of extracurricular activity asked of members. Using this model, churches ask believers to gather on Sunday, spend time with Jesus, and live on mission.

Class 3 - Community

The next portion of the class emphasizes a shift from today's radical individualism to life in a community. It is not uncommon for churches to have smaller groups. These groups are not attended in their masses because it often is one more other thing added to their already full plate.

The community should be an essential part of the Christian journey. Believers living on mission for Jesus is best done in the context of a group. It is not uncommon for Christians to gather. These gatherings are called different things by different organizations such as missional communities, small groups, life groups, and d groups. One of the things churches must guard against is these groups becoming isolated groups with no mission. The Bible as the study is central to these smaller groups, but it cannot end there. Groups that offer teaching are exciting for people that want to learn more. Members of these groups can tend to come and go based upon their individualized need to learn something new. Other types of groups lean more towards a social gathering. These groups meet the needs of those looking for encouragement. This group is where their friends are located. Both types of groups are needed; however, they rarely replicate.

Churches must convince members that Jesus is on a mission, and they play an integral part in seeing that mission fulfilled. Instead of seeing these groups as safe places to huddle, they should be seen as triage centers where believers are held accountable to the mission. The vast opportunity for growth and maturity can occur as believers are released into what Alan Hirsch describes as a dangerous journey to unknown places.¹⁰² Smaller groups that tend to stay together for the long haul are groups with a commitment to share life. The fourth part of the Gospel shared earlier of a world made new (restoration) fuels these groups to live on mission. They go into unreached places because of the belief that God is ultimately going to do something to bring about final restoration.

When believers are grafted into God's kingdom, they are given a new identity and new brothers and sisters in Jesus! Formation and join in Jesus' mission happen in the context of this new daily life. Disciples must be known in a committed group where they are encouraged and challenged to live a life on mission.

To align a group with the mission of Jesus, each group should embody five practices. These practices work with any type of community centered on Jesus with a shared mission. These practices are time in the word, prayer, fellowship, mission, and formation. These practices are based upon the activity of the early church, as seen in Acts 2.

The foundation for any group is the word of God. The scriptures are God's unique revelation to the world. The Bible gives insight into how life ought to be lived and how it can be lived under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Followers of Jesus must submit to the truth of God's word and be motivated to be changed by it. Without the guidance of the truths of scripture, it

¹⁰² Hirsch, Alan, and Darryn Altclass. 2009. *The Forgotten Ways Handbook: A Practical Guide for Developing Missional Churches*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press. 221

will be easy for small groups to experience mission drift. They will continue to do good things and be an encouragement. But unfortunately, disciples may not be mobilized into Jesus' mission.

Groups focused only on the word will be great bible studies but will not produce the disciples needed to partner in Jesus' mission. Take note of Alan Hirsch's warning:

The Western church has more theology, commentaries, training, and intellectual tradition than at any other time in history. It certainly hasn't produced the desired revival --perhaps it has even influenced the opposite! This is not to say we ought to be biblically illiterate, but we must remember we are perfectly designed to produce what we are currently producing. I'm sorry to say this, but more beautifully delivered three-point sermons are not going to solve your missional problems-- or any serious strategic problem, for that matter! If they could do that, we would be there now.¹⁰³

This is probably one of the most substantial areas of most small groups. As such, this model does not suggest doing away with bible content. On the contrary, the content is necessary, but it is only one part. All groups must have time spent in God's word. Time in God's word is something early believers did when they gathered, and they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.¹⁰⁴

The next practice that each group should incorporate into their meeting is prayer. Prayer is foundational for everything done. There is a consistent theme of prayer seen after the ascension of Jesus. The next thing they do after Jesus ascends is return to Jerusalem is devote themselves to prayer.¹⁰⁵ Groups today would do well to follow this example. Prayer is often seen as a difficult thing because it feels pointless.

¹⁰³ Hirsch, Alan, and Dave Ferguson. 2011. *On the Verge: A Journey into the Apostolic Future of the Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan.88

¹⁰⁴ Acts 2:42

¹⁰⁵ Acts 1:14

In prayer, disciples learn to wait, be quiet, and watch for the Lord's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Prayer can be made for the needs of the group or the needs of the city. Prayer is offered to give God thanks for how He is on the move. Prayer time can be structured or free-flowing.

It is a good practice to pray as a group. This is an opportunity for the group to come together to make requests known and align the group towards God's mission. Prayer can be for the lost, for the people in the group, or praying using the format of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication.

Another component integral to a small group is fellowship. In addition to time in word and prayer, each group should spend time enjoying the company of each other. Contemporary America is fractured, and people have drawn a line of demarcation separating themselves from others based upon varying ideologies. The church has an opportunity to create a new kind of community. The Lordship of Jesus governs this unique community of people even though they have varying ideologies but them.

Fellowship is an essential aspect of a group gathering. Fellowshiping is one of the activities of the gathered believers in Acts 2:42. The Greek word translated fellowship is the word *koinonia*, and it has the meaning of a sharing of life with others like that of God the Father and God the Son as taught in 1 John:3.¹⁰⁶

Fellowship is more than just spending time with others. It is the deep partnership experienced over a shared commitment to the Gospel. Believers coming together to fellowship is an agreement that within this group, members will share life to begin to discover the unique

¹⁰⁶ Bridges, Jerry. True Community: The Biblical Practice of Koinonia. Navpress. Kindle Edition. Location 97

fellowship that exists between the Father and Son. The commitment to each other is not the primary goal of the group. It is because there is the sharing of life that these same members can be on mission. Fellowship includes breaking bread and spending time together, but it also paints a picture of the more extensive community God is forming to experience true friendship with Him.

Each group must have a mission. Part of being part of a group is a shared vision of reaching those disengaged from Jesus. These groups can serve as a place of invitation, or they can serve as a place where believers living on mission are encouraged as they are out in new areas making disciples. For example, a group participant may be walking with a coworker to ask questions about Jesus. This coworker is a long way away from attending a church service.

Additionally, attending a small gathering of Christians can also be intimidating. As such, the workplace has now become the mission field. Members of the group can keep their group members accountable for how things are going at work. They can become a place of support as this person, from time to time, may be encouraged or discouraged by the efforts to walk with their coworker.

The groups may have a unified mission that they are praying to see the Gospel planted. Some churches are surrounded by communities that may look a bit different from the local church's makeup. The gospel has the unique opportunity to provide the bridges necessary across apparent differences. A small group at the local church should always begin by praying for the Lord to open the door for disciple-making in this new environment. The breakthrough may first come through first serving in a particular context. As an example, small groups can rally together to help meet a need in a specific area. This service opportunity may just be a group serving for a long time. However, as the group builds relationships in this new context, the Lord

may open a door for someone to share their faith. The goal is not to then invite that potential recent convert to the church. The next step is to meet with that person and begin walking alongside them.

The goal of any group that gathers is formation. Formation is discipleship in action. It is the notion of the believer continuously becoming more like Christ. Part of being part of a local assembly is ensuring each person understands what formation looks like. The practices of word, prayer, fellowship, and mission ultimately play a role in the person's formation. Each believer should aim to see Christ formed in them.¹⁰⁷

One item that would aid churches in helping in the formational process that is to be taking place in groups is to have an idea of what formation looks like. Bill Hull offers six areas where formation takes place: the mind, the character, the relationships, the habits, the service, the influence.¹⁰⁸

Once a person comes to faith, they are brought into a process of formation. This formation is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify a person. The benefit of experiencing formation alongside other believers is the added joy of processing areas the Lord might be maturing a person. This offers group members more opportunities to pray and support the person on this journey.

Christianity does not need to be viewed and lived out through the lens of individualism. God calls on believers to grow in community. Salvation is an invitation to a new family. By committing to these practices, believers position themselves to live a life faithful to the mission of Jesus.

¹⁰⁷ Galatians 4:19.

¹⁰⁸ Hull, Bill. 2006. *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*. Colorado Springs, Co: Navpress.130

Class 4 - Life on Mission

The things a church celebrates become the things its members see as important. In many traditional church models, salvation is the goal. Large evangelistic events are put together with the hopes that people will give their lives to Jesus. Some churches boast after each program to highlight how many people came to faith. The hero of this salvation is Jesus. He used the speaker, the performance, or the song, to touch someone's heart, and they responded with repentance and faith. The one drawback is that if everything ends, the church has done a lousy job of fulfilling Jesus' command to make disciples. Unfortunately, in some churches, Jesus' command was to be a disciple without making disciples.

The critical component that aligns a body of people with Jesus' mission is multiplication. Churches must move from a ministry of addition to a ministry of multiplication. When the focal point is addition, a church only needs a few gifted leaders to exercise their gift. The wider congregation only has the responsibility of inviting their friends to hear the gifted speaker. This leads to slow growth and is dependent on the charisma of a leader.

A better approach to ministry and one that fuels disciple-making movements is a ministry that is intentional about seeing multiplication. In this model, everyone is participating in the expansion of God's kingdom. Everyone participates in response to Jesus' Commands.

Multiplication is the outcome of people sharing their life in Christ with others early and often. People will eventually respond with interest, and when they do, the follower of Christ personally begins to disciple them. This, Lord willing, eventually leads the person being discipled to believe in Jesus. Along the way, the disciple-maker equips the person being discipled to share their faith experience with others - implementing the disciple-making process modeled for them.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Gerke, Damian. 2020. *In the Way: Church as We Know It Can Be a Discipleship Movement (Again)*. Springfield, Mo: Three Clicks Publishing.68

This model of multiplication has the potential to change the dynamic of a local church. Now, the church is filled with people living their lives with the hopes of seeing people come to faith, who then become disciples, who are making disciples. These disciples all gather in smaller communities to be encouraged and experience formation. As such, the church's reach is far greater. Instead of coming up with new programs to reach the city, the members are mobilized and sent. The church then becomes a scattering of believers across a given area.

This approach is especially needed in the fractured world of today. People are moving farther and farther away from each other because of hot-button issues like politics. Society has lost touch with bringing people together. As a decentralized entity, the church ought to send people out of their buildings to do the work of ministry. There is a tendency for people to want to centralize and collect people into a building. This seems to be what was taking place in the early church. Jesus gave the commission that believers make disciples of all nations. The only way this can happen is as people are sent out to the nations. The nations do not only exist across the ocean. They are the family, neighbors, and friends that people are in proximity to every day.

Making disciples among the nation's positions disciple-makers as people who can cross cultural barriers and roadblocks that may cause people never to cross paths. Churches are often caught in the crosshairs of the growing dividing lines that continue to be drawn in the United States. Some have decided to leave the church because their issue is not being addressed as they would like. Even though they may leave a church, they cannot leave being around the church. Instead, the church cannot help but be around them because the church is the people living missionally in fulfillment of the call to make disciples among the nations.

At the beginning of the book of Acts, the early disciples appeared to centralize Jerusalem's efforts. Just before His ascension, Jesus reiterated the commission when He

informed them that they would be His disciples in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.¹¹⁰ By the eighth chapter of Acts, the believers are still in Jerusalem and have not made inroads into the other regions. God, in His sovereignty, uses the persecution of the church to thrust them into an outward-moving multiplication movement. Perhaps, this is the opportunity that the church finds itself in today. With the limitations of gatherings, due to the pandemic, this might be the time to recalibrate and align itself with Jesus' model of sending disciples that make disciples.

Personal Equipping Resource

After learning about what discipleship looks like in a church, members will inevitably wonder what resources exist to begin walking with other people personally. The membership classes orient someone into how discipleship is done at the group level. To thrust people into the mission field, a resource needs to be put in their hands.

The pandemic has shown that gathering, at times, can be complex. With differing convictions, it has become challenging for churches to gather. Even small group environments are not as attractive. Meeting in smaller bands one to one, like Wesley's bands, still has the potential for the work of disciple-making to thrive. This resource offers a step-by-step progression for a believer to walk within a smaller band if a group cannot meet. This follows the same basic framework as the discipleship progression detailed above.

The first step in the discipleship band is to offer encouragement and accountability. This is accomplished by asking how the Lord has been transforming their life since last time? Because discipleship is ongoing, it is always good to check in to see how things have been going

¹¹⁰ Acts 1:8

since the band's previous meeting. This demonstrates care and love. Walter Henrichsen likens this type of care to spiritual pediatrics.¹¹¹ Mothers who spend nine months carrying a baby know the journey has not ended when the child is born. The journey has just begun. To make sure the child is thriving, there are scheduled checkups. This same type of activity should be done at the beginning of each discipleship band.

The next step focuses on abiding in Christ. The question posed during this step is to ask what the Lord has been teaching through His Word and Prayer? A healthy Christian spends time in God's word. Jesus declared that a person could do nothing without abiding in Him and His word abiding in them.¹¹² God's word should be treated as more than just a book. It is God's living word. In some circles, the word of God is leveraged for gathering stones to hurl at people whose lifestyle is in opposition with Biblical teaching. Before the word of God does anything for anyone else, it must be appreciated as God's living truth that must be worked out in a disciple's life.¹¹³

The third step is the confession of Sin. The discipleship band focuses on sinful behavior growing in one's life that the Lord wants to transform during this conversation. Discipleship bands are safe environments for dealing with sin. Unfortunately, many live two different lives. Many ministers have had to step down from their roles due to unconfessed sin.

¹¹¹ Henrichsen, Walter A. 2002. *Disciples Are Made, Not Born: How to Help Others Grow to Maturity in Christ*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: Victor Books. 88

¹¹²John 15:1-8

¹¹³ Hull, Bill. 2006. *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*. Colorado Springs, Co: Navpress. 218

The fourth component of a discipleship band is to turn from sin. This is done by prayerfully discovering what is at the root of the unhealthy behavior. Confessing sin is only the first step to finding victory. Learning to recognize the idols or the heart issues paves the way for overcoming sin. As these issues are uncovered, the next logical step is to turn from sin. Walking with others on this journey proves to be critical in not sweeping sins under the carpet.

The next truth for the discipleship band to focus on is believing the Gospel. At this point of the discussion, the band focuses on aspects of the Gospel that speak to what is true. Often people are discouraged because they believe the lie that God is perpetually angry with them. When a person comes into the new life of Christ, they are freed to rest in his love and grace.

The next aspect of a discipleship band meeting is to respond in obedience to Jesus. Any time a group, a band, or a sermon is preached, actionable steps of obedience should be encouraged. Believers do not obey to earn God's love, however, responding in obedience is evidence of a maturing disciple.

The final step in a discipleship band is to encourage each other to reproduce and make disciples. The band ought to spend time praying to see whom the Lord is sending them to disciple. The discipleship band must not just become an environment for two friends to hang out. This smaller band is necessary to provide the safety and support required to continue making disciples.

Training for Movement

In addition to orienting potential members into the model of discipleship for a local church, churches also must develop a training ecosystem that makes discipling second nature to being a member at church. After attending the membership orientation, new members are given

two simple requirements for being a member: lead a group or join a group. Elevating membership to these requirements elevates the importance of being in a group.

The next phase in creating this ecosystem is to reframe everything. Anyone who has been to church for any amount of time has expectations of the church. Reframing the church from an institution with goods to be consumed to a training environment for Jesus' mission becomes the top priority.

Luke 10 provides a simple framework for how the church should be understood. Contextually, Jesus is training His disciples on how they would effectively do ministry. The first thing observed is that ministry is meant to be done in teams. Before they are sent into towns, Luke emphasizes that they were being sent to places where Jesus was going to go. Believers being thrust into new areas to make disciples should know that they are going to places where Jesus is going. This is foundational for whom this message of living their life, joining Jesus on His mission for two reasons. One, Jesus is already at work in any place they will be making disciples. Two, the best strategy to do the mission is in teams.

The work of making disciples in new areas is not going to be easy. Luke says that although the work may be difficult, the disciple is looking for a person of peace. Peace is central to the Gospel. Peace is what Israel has always been praying for. It is shalom. Shalom is the desire for restoration for how things used to be, in the garden, before the fall. This is encouraging because in praying for where one might make disciples, there is the possibility that someone else is looking to be discipled. That is the person of peace that Jesus speaks of.

Another example demonstrated in Luke 10 is community. As the disciples go from town to town, they are told to enter any house that receives them and remains in that house. This is what a disciple-making church looks like. It is a training environment where teams are being

trained to go out. As they go out, they are looking for a person of peace. Once they find a welcome place, the goal is not to bring them back to the larger body of people but rather to plant the gospel in that house. A church as a training environment is a church that sends people from house to house.

CHAPTER FIVE - CONCLUSION

Jesus' command to make disciples is explicit. His people are sent to the nations for one purpose: to make disciples. This commission is given with the promise that Jesus will be with His followers forever. This is not whether people should be making disciples but how a church can ensure that people are making disciples.

Disciple-making is part of the cultural mandate. When God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, it becomes apparent that the only way they would have accomplished this was by expanding their family. They were to spend their lives reproducing and multiplying. Sin enters the world through humanity's rebellion; however, the plan is not nullified. Just after the fall, Adam and Eve are given a promise about one of their descendants undoing the problem of sin.¹¹⁴

Abraham is called to go. He, too, carries the same mission. He is to be a blessing to the nations. The means through which this was to happen was through the family. God was going to use this growing family as a witness to the nations. This was the remedy for sin.

Abraham's family would eventually become the children of Israel, and they had the same mandate. Fill the earth with God's knowledge so that the nations might come to know the one true God. The Biblical account shows that they did not do a great job of this. Even with their failures, there was an expectation and hope for the Messiah to come and undo the sin problem.

Jesus came in fulfillment of all that God had promised. He set in motion God's plan of redemption, and He did so with a twist. Jesus did not just come for the people of Israel. Jesus came for the whole world. How he would share God's goodness to the world was through discipleship. He called twelve men to walk with him. He put them through a discipleship

¹¹⁴ Genesis 3:15

process where they saw, followed, were with, and now remain in Jesus. Discipleship was not a new thing. It is simply following in the footsteps of a master teacher. Jesus, three years after calling these men, now gave them a commission. What Jesus had done with them; they were to do with others. This is God's plan for planting the gospel throughout the world. Discipleship is God's master plan for redemption.

Historically, the church has sprouted into new regions when disciples make disciples. This movement is reproducible, it goes into new territories, and it multiplies. Today's church must be reminded of what worked in the scripture and what has worked historically.

Churches today come from a long history of believers embracing their call as disciples that make disciples. Riverdale Baptist Church is a church that once thrived in the 1970s and 1980s. The evangelistic message of the Gospel was effective in seeing souls won for the kingdom. As the church continued to mature, programs began to replace grassroots life on life ministry. Now a stable church, Riverdale is on the precipice of rediscovering how best to serve the people in the surrounding communities.

The assessment tool used focused on the areas of being discipled, making disciples, personal growth, discipleship beliefs, and how Riverdale approaches discipleship. Those surveyed have been Christians for over fifteen years and have attended the same church for the same amount of time. Riverdale thrives off its strong Sunday school program, with almost 40% of the congregation actively involved in a class.

The survey demonstrated competency on discipleship but a lack of clarity on the church's plan to effectively equip believers to make disciples.

Being Discipled

Every believer needs to be in a discipling relationship. These relationships are where a person matures. The Bible lists several scriptures that can only be accomplished in the context of discipling relationships. One of the passages that would benefit Christians is the confession of sin to each other.¹¹⁵ Being discipled cannot be understood to be happening during a sermon. With all the charisma of popular speakers, sermons were not the model Jesus left for His disciples. People cannot depend on sermons for their maturation. Proper growth is going to occur in discipling relationships.

Making Disciples

Most respondents suggested they were making disciples. Because this survey included a high number of people involved in the Sunday school environment and due to the historical evangelistic bent of Riverdale, this may mean that information is being passed. Information dissemination cannot be equated with discipleship. Jesus's most contentious critics were with people who had much information, but they lacked in the obedience department. Information-only discipleship is dangerous because it gives the impression that something is taking place. In contrast, there is not a system in place to ensure its tracking towards obediently making disciples. How to check is by gauging practices that aid in personal growth.

¹¹⁵ James 5:16

Personal Growth

Many respondents are consistent with practices that will aid in their growth. One of the shifts necessary to pivot towards a disciple-making movement is to see these practices as part of the resource pool for making disciples. Identity becomes key in how one approaches the spiritual disciplines. If one sees themselves as a sinner saved by grace without regard to the mission, then spiritual practices are done through the lens of individualism. The Bible is read for personal development. Prayer is done to gird oneself. Christians are disciples of Jesus Christ. That is what is true. His mission is the mission of everyone that professes him as Lord. This positions someone to realize that they are no longer in control of their lives. The life of a disciple is a life of denying oneself for Christ. This shift in thinking opens one up to the treasure hunt, where one learns daily about Jesus and His mission.¹¹⁶

Discipling Beliefs

The respondents of the assessment tool believe the right things about discipleship. This further confirms one of the problems of today: people know but do not do. This same concern was raised by Bill Hull when he stated that the Global North's church culture lives in what he has termed non-discipleship Christianity.¹¹⁷ This is a strong indictment but bears true when one

¹¹⁶ Hull, Bill. 2006. *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*. Colorado Springs, Co: Navpress. 125

¹¹⁷ Hull, Bill. 2006. *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*. Colorado Springs, Co: Navpress. 41

examines what is happening. Many in the church know in theory about discipleship, and they know it is something that should be done; however, the practice of most is to attend Sunday service, attend a Sunday school class, then go home and enjoy the rest of the week disconnected from the mission of God. It would be easy to place the blame solely on the backs of lazy Christians. However, the disconnect seems to lie in the messaging of the local church and what the church models as important. The solution lies not in giving more information but in moving members through a discipleship process. They live life in a community with others striving to be faithful to the mission that Jesus put in place upon his resurrection.

Riverdale and Discipleship

Riverdale's plan for discipleship was unclear for many of the respondents. This is an area where Riverdale can begin to resource and train the congregation on discipleship intentionally. Part of discipling others is to have someone else also disciple the disciple. If people are only investing in others, they may burn out or not tend to the areas in their life that need addressing. A challenge often heard by people challenged to make disciples is a lack of knowing what to do.

Ideally, in discipleship, a person is walking a person through a similar formational process that they experienced. As such, Riverdale should equip all leaders with how to train disciple-makers.

Most of the people surveyed were actively discipling others, but very few were being disciplined by someone else. Upon researching the people at Riverdale Baptist Church, it became evident that people felt they had a good understanding of discipleship. Still, it was unclear how

the church was equipping them to make disciples. There is a willingness to begin sharing life with others, but there was no clear direction for how the church would partner towards this work.

As a result of the assessment, a model has been presented on how a traditional program-driven church model can shift towards a disciple-making church. The model presented was through a revamped membership orientation process. Instead of teaching through the statement of faith, church history, and serving opportunities, these classes can set the course for members to make disciples.

The membership orientation focuses on four topics: the gospel, discipleship, community, and mission. These four areas orient someone into a life of disciple-making. The foundation of the membership class is the Gospel. The Gospel is God's story that follows the narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.

Intertwined within the Gospel narrative is the essential practice of evangelism. Christian can reach their neighbors by showing them love through the practice of b.l.e.s.s: begin with prayer, listen, eat, serve, and story. This model equips believers with the tools necessary to reach their neighbors in practical and loving ways.

The second class focuses on discipleship. This class will articulate what a disciple is and what a disciple does. A disciple is a follower of Jesus who is going into Christlikeness. One of the activities of a disciple is to make disciples. The third class would focus on community. This is the area where disciples thrive as they share life with others living in community. Within the community is a commitment to practice word, prayer, fellowship, mission, and formation. The final class would be a discussion centered on the mission. The focal area of this class is the mission of God and how each person and group have an opportunity to join God in what He is doing.

This approach should move the church towards a more decentralized flat structure. No longer will the Sunday gathering be the end all be all. The mission is where everyone is. The Sunday gatherings still serve as moments when the wider body can come together to experience corporate worship. However, the heartbeat of the church will be its members sharing life in the community as they live on mission.

Discipleship is a critical element of the church. Making disciples is not an optional activity for Christians. It is done in response to what Jesus has commanded. Christianity has expanded to where it is today because the early followers of Jesus took seriously the command to make disciples. The best way to reorient Christians to this reality is train them in the art of disciple-making through a robust membership process. Even if that person decides not to become a member of the local church, within that four week span they have been equipped, reminded, and prepared for their responsibility to be faithful to Jesus' mission. Without disciples making disciples, the church will fail. May churches today, reimagine the efforts of their ministries and spend their energy equipping Christians to make disciples.

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APPEDIX A - IRB APPROVAL/WAIVER PAGE

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
10/7/2016 to --
Protocol # 2653.100716

CONSENT FORM

Understanding Discipleship and How it is Carried Out
David Bempong
Liberty University
School of Divinity

You are invited to be in a research study of discipleship. You were selected as a possible participant because you attend Riverdale Baptist Church and are 18 years of age or older. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

David Bempong, a doctoral candidate in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to learn how Christians understand their role in making disciples

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: 1. Complete the following survey. The survey will be anonymous and should take no more than 15 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study: The risks involved in this study are minimal, no more than you would encounter in everyday life. There are no benefits to participating in this study.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is David Bempong. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at dbempong@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Rod Dempsey, at rwdempsey@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

APPENDIX B – SURVEY QUESTIONS

Demographics

What is your Age?

- a. 18-24
- b. 25-34
- c. 35-44
- d. 45-54
- e. 55-64
- f. 65-74
- g. 75+

Gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female

How long have you been attending your current church?

- a. Less than year
- b. 1 – 5 years
- c. 6-10 years
- d. 11 -15 years
- e. More than 15 years

How long have you been a Christian?

- a. Less than year
- b. 1 – 5 years
- c. 6-10 years
- d. 11 -15 years
- e. More than 15 years

What is your marital status?

- a. Single
- b. Married
- c. Divorced/Separated
- d. Widowed

Do you have any children under the age 18 living with you? If so, list their ages.

Discipleship Practices

I am currently discipling someone

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

I have disciplined someone in the past year

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

I am currently being disciplined by someone

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

I have been disciplined by someone in the past

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Current Growth Environments

I attend the Sunday worship service at least 3 times a month

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

I participate weekly in a Bible study class

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

I have taught a Bible study class in the past

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

I am part of a small group that meets at least once a month

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

I lead a small group that meets at least once a month

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

I can comfortably share my faith with someone else

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

I am confident that I can help someone grow spiritually

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

I spend time reading scripture daily

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

I spend time in prayer daily

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

I read Christian literature (i.e. books, blogs, study guides, magazines)

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

I view/listen to Christian broadcasts at least weekly (i.e. TV, radio, podcast)

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

I have attended Christian conferences

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Discipleship Understanding

I understand what it means to be a disciple

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Part of being a Christian involves discipling others

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Discipling others is optional

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Local Church's Role in Discipleship

My church has a plan for discipleship

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

My church does an adequate job of discipling people

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

My church does an adequate job of equipping people to disciple

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

I understand my church's model for discipleship

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

If someone approached me to be discipled, I would:

- a. Disciple them
- b. Invite them to church
- c. Refer them to my pastor or other church leader
- d. Refer them to a small group
- e. I'm not sure what I would do

Discipleship BEST happens:

- a. Through a sermon
- b. In a classroom
- c. Through one on one relationships
- d. In small groups
- e. I don't know

Who should be discipled:

- a. The non-Christian
- b. The new Christian
- c. All Christians
- d. a,b
- e. b,c
- f. a,c
- g. All of the above

I believe discipleship happens only among Christians

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

I believe discipleship happens in the context of everyday relationships

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

I believe non-Christians can be discipled

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree