

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Overcoming Obstacles to DNA Group Engagement

Submitted to Dr. P. Adam McClendon

In fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of
the Doctor of Ministry Degree

Department of Christian Leadership and Church Ministries

by

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Lynchburg, VA

27 January 2022

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, January 27th, 2022

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Discipleship is the primary command given by Jesus to his disciples. The elements of discipleship growth are best carried out in smaller cell groups of ten to twenty people. In the model used by the researcher, these cell groups (called missional communities) are subdivided into groups of three comprised of the same gender. These subdivided groups are called DNA groups. It is within DNA groups that a more intimate environment is created for transparency, biblical learning, and accountability. The researcher found three primary obstacles to engagement in a previous iteration of DNA groups. Those three obstacles are overscheduling / busyness, an unwillingness to have difficult conversations, and a general incompetency in using the Bible alone for personal spiritual formation due to an over-dependence on premade curricula. The researcher did both a presurvey and a postsurvey. The intervention was a series of presentations on how to overcome each of the three obstacles. Comparison of the data from the surveys demonstrates that teaching alone is not enough to create measurable change in personal behavior. However, the missional community model contains within it the components necessary to create measurable change over a longer period of time.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The Great Commission¹ is renowned for its use in emphasizing the importance of world evangelism. The Matthean passage records a direct and specific set of commands from Jesus Christ prior to his ascension.² The portion of the passage that often spearheads exhortations is the phrase “go into all the world.” However, care must be taken to carefully consider what it is that Christians are to be doing as they go. Part of Jesus’s command is for disciples to be teaching converts to observe all that he commanded. The aim of this project focuses on that imperative.

The struggle to fulfill this command to teach has ancient roots. The writer to the Hebrews complains of lack of spiritual progress among early Christians. Significant personal spiritual development was expected, but instead early converts floundered as they needed to be instructed again in the basic principles of the oracles of God. However, those failures were not exhaustive, as seen in the biblical writer’s reference to those who had indeed become mature and had their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.³

Oceans of ink have been spilt concerning methodologies involved in the vital role of spiritual development implied by Jesus’s command to teach others. The spectrum of research covers not only content but method of delivery. It is the author’s contention that a particular model of church structure most readily lends itself to effectiveness in this mission.

¹ Matt 18:16-20, ESV.

² Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 241.

³ Heb 5:12-14, ESV.

Within the context of the development of cell groups is a model most notably proliferated by Pastor Jeff Vanderstelt, the founder of the SOMA network of churches.⁴ That model contends that the organizing principle of the local church should be “missional communities.” These smaller groups gather corporately and regularly as a local church. Within a missional community, there are sub-groups often called DNA groups. These groups are intended to be Bible-driven, Spirit-led accountability groups. These gender-specific groups of approximately three people meet weekly and create a context where Jesus’s directive to teach others to obey his commands is naturally and effectively carried out.

Modern culture has both unique advantages and challenges when facing the task of teaching as we go. A positive aspect of modernity is that it brought with it technological tools that aid in discipleship. Resources in both print and online media are extensive. Computers, tablets, cell phones, apps and other innovations make access to material quick and easy. The downside to this deluge of information is that the bar is low for quality. Sometimes the needle of good information can be difficult to find in the haystack of half-truths.

Another set of difficulties that modern people face is the speed of life. Busyness constantly tempts Christians to stay so busy with daily important tasks, that critical long-term perspective is lost in the fog of industriousness. This dizzying pace of life contributes to shallow relationships in the church since time is short for the natural development of personal relationships. A dependence on pre-made curriculum is another component of a “microwave generation.” That easy-out has atrophied many Christians’ ability to utilize the Scriptures alone as a source of faith and practice.

⁴ SOMA, accessed August 24, 2021, <http://www.wearesoma.com>.

This thesis project sought to address these obstacles of modern discipleship through research, intervention, and follow-up. This approach was couched in the Missional Community model, and specifically in the DNA sessions in which regular, deep times of Bible-driven accountability swim against the current of a modern frenetic lifestyle.

Ministry Context

Athens, Georgia, was selected in 1801 as the site for the first chartered state university in the nation. The most prominent feature of the city is being the home of the University of Georgia, which is located along the north Oconee River in Clarke County.⁵ When Athens was founded by a committee in 1785, the “state legislature made a bold step to endow a ‘college or seminary of learning,’ thereby initiating the concept of state-supported higher education.”⁶

Athens was named for Athens, Greece because of the latter’s emphasis on classical culture. By the early 19th century the city excelled in textile manufacturing, powered by the Oconee River, and supplied cotton to nearby plantations.⁷ Many houses built during the Antebellum days of the South still stand today. In this way the city architecturally merges its pre-Civil War past with modern facilities at the University.

⁵ “Athens,” New Georgia Encyclopedia, accessed May 21, 2021, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/counties-cities-neighborhoods/Athens>.

⁶ “Athens,” New Georgia Encyclopedia, accessed May 21, 2021, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/counties-cities-neighborhoods/Athens>.

⁷ “Athens,” New Georgia Encyclopedia, accessed May 21, 2021, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/counties-cities-neighborhoods/Athens>.

Politically, the city of Athens is distinct from its immediate neighbors. Athens is a politically liberal city in the midst of the politically conservative surrounding area.⁸ The University of Georgia is similar to other large universities in their liberalizing political impact on the city in which they exist.

Demographically, Athens is within the Clarke County region which consists of a population that is 63.2% white, 28% black, and 10.9% Hispanic.⁹ The percentage of black residents within the city limits is higher, while the bulk of the 63.2% white population lives outside the city limits within the large Clarke County region.

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⁸ “Georgia Presidential Results,” Politico, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/2020-election/results/Georgia>.

⁹ “Athens-Clarke County, Georgia,” United States Census Bureau, accessed May 20, 2021, [census.gov/quickfacts/athensclarkecountybalancegeorgia](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/athensclarkecountybalancegeorgia).

¹⁰ “Races in Athens, GA (2000),” City Data, accessed August 28, 2021, [city-data.com/city/Athens-Georgia.html](https://www.city-data.com/city/Athens-Georgia.html).

The population of Athens (according to the 2019 estimate) is 126,913 people. The University of Georgia enrollment (as of Fall 2020) stood at 37,283. The University lowers the median age compared to typical cities so that the median age is 28.0 years old.¹¹

Demographic data indicates that the majority of Clarke County residents identify their religious interest as that of “none.” In 2010 that category of survey participants registered a total of 62.5% Evangelical Protestants made up 12.7% of the population. However, there was a slight increase in the Evangelical Protestant group between 2000 and 2010, while other categories of religious affiliation saw a decline.¹²

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¹¹ “Demographics,” Athens-Clarke County Unified Government, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://www.accgov.com/105/Demographics>.

¹² City Data, accessed August 28, 2021, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Athens-Georgia.html>.

¹³ “Religious Adherents – Change between 2000 and 2010,” City Data, accessed August 28, 2021, [city-data.com/city/Athens-Georgia.html](http://www.city-data.com/city/Athens-Georgia.html)

Green Acres Baptist Church (GABC), located on the east side of Athens, began as the result of Rev. A.W. Green's conviction that a church should be located in every community. Having purchased two farms, he deeded "portions of four choice lots on the corner of Barnett Shoals and Forest Roads to Sarepta Baptist Association for use in establishing a mission."¹⁴

The services began in May of 1958. They included Sunday School and a worship service led by Rev. A.W. Green. There were 58 charter members. Rev. A.W. Green pastored until August of 1959. GABC has had nine pastors in its existence. It is now pastored by Dr. Cameron Ford (2018 – present).

Green Acres currently has a Senior Pastor, Youth Minister, Children's Coordinator, Weekday Coordinator, and office secretary. The structuring of their staff reflects the common elements of small to medium size churches in the Southern Baptist Convention. The weekly attendance (pre-Covid) was approximately 200 people. That number decreased during the pandemic but is expected to recover.

GABC has followed a path of development that is traditional for churches within the Southern Baptist Convention. They began with WMU and Brotherhood but transitioned to Women's and Men's ministry in 2001. GABC began an AWANA program for children in 2003. GABC maintains a traditional youth program. They have a Wednesday night dinner and teaching/prayer service. GABC has traditionally engaged in both domestic and international mission trips.¹⁵

GABC's statement of faith is the Baptist Faith & Message 2000. The church adopted the latest version of the BF&M during the tenure of its current pastor, Dr. Cameron Ford. The

¹⁴ History Committee of 1990, *History of Green Acres Baptist Church*, (np), 2008.

¹⁵ History Committee of 1990, *History of Green Acres Baptist Church*, (np), 2008.

church and its staff maintain a conservative theological stance that is consistent with its statement of belief.

The demographics of GABC is generally Caucasian and middle class. The official membership is 98% Caucasian and 2% non-white. There is a higher percentage of minorities represented in the attendance than is represented in official membership.

GABC has an International Ministry that ministers to adults that are in the primarily in the area due to graduate work at the University of Georgia. There are currently around 30 participants visiting GABC. The ministry is hosted by the Sarepta region of the Georgia Baptist Convention and has hundreds of participants across the churches of the Sarepta region.

GABC has a benevolence fund that ranges between two to five thousand dollars annually. It is run by the deacons of the church. The church pantry is available for walk-in benevolence and is mainly distributed by the secretary. There a Sunday School class of senior adults that regularly supports a battered women's shelter, and Operation Christmas Child is participated in annually.

The church gives approximately 6% of their annual budget to the SBC's Cooperative Program, as well as seven thousand dollars to both the Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong missionary offerings. During the tenure of the current pastor, the church has regularly met its budget. Giving has been steady even throughout the pandemic of 2020-2021.

The rituals which are most predictable and central to the congregation's culture are typical of Southern Baptist churches. GABC raises funds annually for the Lottie Moon Christmas offering. The church has a "hanging of the laurels" event one Sunday every year to prepare the sanctuary with decorations for the Christmas season. There is a Wednesday night dinner and prayer meeting. Every week, flowers are placed at the front of the sanctuary in honor

of someone. The pastor references those flowers to the congregation which supports a feeling of connectedness among the members. Operation Christian Child is an event that is annually supported at GABC, which serves as a central location of depositing boxes from other churches. Newcomers from other traditional Southern Baptist churches would find that the church calendar likely mirrors the church calendar from which they came.

Sunday School attendance is very important in the life of GABC. These gatherings serve as times of Bible study and fellowship. They are instrumental in shaping people and influencing what this group thinks of itself not only in the corporate sense, but in the small group sense as well.

The most recent sanctuary building has an iconic pointed roof and steeple and is a symbol that is recognized in the community. The cross is a prominent symbol as well as green palm leaves that represent the name of the church itself.

The routine practice of gathering for Sunday morning worship and warm interpersonal relationships best capture what this congregation values most. They are welcoming and giving, as demonstrated not only through their demeanor, but their heart for local ministry as well.

The culture of GABC is one that expects a practicing member will be a regular attender on Sunday mornings and in the other programs of the church. A member is expected to hold to the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, which is the adopted statement of faith for the church.

GABC is one congregation. While there has been a church split in recent decades, there are no satellite campuses or churches planted out of the original church. However, the church has begun a new small group ministry that has church planting as a part of the long term strategy.

The author's relationship with the group is that of a leader of small group ministries. Having moved to the Athens area at the beginning of the pandemic of 2020, the author's family

originally attended virtually. Pastor Dr. Cameron Ford was initiating a “leadership pipeline initiative” that eventually coalesced into launching the mission community model, of which the author is directing the pilot group.

GABC has used a traditional Sunday School model. The pandemic of 2020-2021 caused a disruption in its ability to maintain those classes. However, during the subsiding of the pandemic, Sunday School classes began to resume. GABC is also beginning to shift to a “missional” small group focus. The shift includes use of a small group model known as the “Soma” model. The small groups are called “missional communities,” and focus on discipleship and evangelism. There is currently a pilot missional community with plans to multiply as God allows.

GABC is a traditional church that has followed traditional methods since its beginning in 1958. While there is much to be thankful for during its history, the church now finds itself situated in a community that is demographically very different from its membership. The increase in technological efficiency and a general increase in personal isolation has engendered a way of relating to others that suffers from hurry and unfamiliarity in the church context. Bible curriculums have sought to save time by pre-packaging biblical material but in the process have short circuited much of the skill needed to handle the Word rightly. The combination of societal change and the increasing ineffectiveness of biblical skills have caused the three obstacles addressed in this project to come to the forefront.

In order to evangelize and disciple effectively the church must be missional. Missional communities are the primary organizing structure that accomplishes that purpose. Missional communities have three critical components that are necessary for success. One of those components is the DNA group. These Bible-driven, Spirit-led, accountability groups are

necessary for the health of a missional community. The three obstacles addressed in this project cause lack of proper engagement in not only the DNA group, but the missional community as a whole. Addressing these problems allows for a healthy missional community which then allows for GABC to reach a diverse and lost community.

The intervention is designed to remedy three primary obstacles to engagement in DNA groups. The origin of the researcher's interaction with these obstacles stems from the first missional community that the author led. That initial mission community (and its DNA component) was the Habersham Missional Community. It existed in Habersham County, Georgia from the Summer of 2017 until the Summer of 2019.

The Habersham Missional Community contained three potential DNA groups. Those groups would have consisted of two men's groups and one women's group. This configuration was due to the number of men and women represented in the overall missional community. The time that the groups were to meet were determined by the available windows of time in the participants' schedules.

All members of the missional community were trained in the theology and practice of DNA groups. Missional community members practiced the rhythm of "discover, nurture, and act," in the larger missional community gathering in order to prepare them for efficient engagement in their particular DNA groups.

The two men's DNA groups began meeting regularly. There were three men in one group and four in the other group. One of the men's groups met at a restaurant early in the morning before work, and the second group preferred an evening time at a participant's house. These groups were edifying to their participants and continued on during the life of the missional

community. One of the men's groups even continued long after the original missional community ceased.

The women's DNA only met twice. The obstacles that the women's DNA group encountered serve as the basis for the problem and intervention pursued in this project. Those obstacles were: 1) busyness and overscheduling, 2) hesitancy to have difficult conversations, 3) over-dependence on pre-made curriculum as opposed to competency in using the Bible alone. Each of these obstacles are directly related to different participants in that particular DNA group. The author interviewed women in the DNA group to gather the data used in his findings.

Problem Presented

A statistical analysis of the religious landscape of the United States shows rapid changes. "In Pew Research Center telephone surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019, 65% of American adults describe themselves as Christians when asked about their religion, down 12 percentage points over the past decade."¹⁶ The decline has taken place within the milieu of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD).¹⁷ The American church has suffered due to neglect of biblical discipleship, including but not limited to lack of involvement in very small, transparent, edifying groups that provide the context for biblical study, exploration, and accountability. The problem is that busyness/overscheduling, hesitancy to engage in difficult conversations, and incompetency in handling the Bible apart from a pre-made curriculum are serving as obstacles to engagement in these critical smaller groups.

¹⁶ "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," Pew Research Center, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace>.

¹⁷ Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 162.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN project is to increase participation in the DNA groups through teaching interventions that address overscheduling, hesitancy to engage in difficult conversations, and incompetency in handling the Bible apart from a separate curriculum. Each of these three areas of difficulty contain their own causes, effects, and remedies. They must be addressed separately and corrected over time with teaching, coaching, and modeling.

Basic Assumptions

There was an underlying assumption that Green Acres Baptist Church will support the research until completion and that the participants will be engaged in the missional community. The commitment by participants includes attendance, training, participation in both the pre-survey and post-survey, and participation in the DNA component of Missional Community.

There was also an assumption that if the missional community members can increase their understanding of proper scheduling and prioritization, the need for difficult spiritual conversations, and methods of Bible study and application, they would increase their efficient participation in the DNA group component of missional community.

These assumptions are based on the similar backgrounds that the people of GABC have to those of HMC. The increased pace of life, combined with the increasing number of people who have been affected negatively by the intrusion of technology and relational engagement are comparably represented at GABC.

Definitions

Discipleship: Leading people to increasingly submit all of life to the empowering lordship and presence of Jesus Christ.¹⁸

Biblical Competency: The ability to use the Bible alone as a tool for study and application to self and others.

Overscheduling/busyness: Scheduling so many activities that margin is not left for relational engagement or spiritual reflection.

Hesitancy to engage in difficult conversations: An aversion to engage in dialogue that would transgress ordinary societal norms of superficial conversations.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism: A belief that 1) A God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth, 2) God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions, 3) The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself, 4) God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem, 5) Good people go to heaven when they die.¹⁹

Missional Community: A small group of approximately ten to twenty people within the context of a local church that focuses on discipleship of themselves and others through fellowshiping together, being in DNA groups, and being on mission to a target group.

DNA Group: A gender-specific group of approximately three individuals that meet together weekly in a Bible-driven, Spirit-led, accountability group.

¹⁸ “Jeff Vanderstelt, Saturate Interview,” Replicate, accessed June 1, 2021, <https://replicate.org/jeff-vanderstelt-saturate-interview>.

¹⁹ Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 162.

Target Group: A community of people that is primarily composed of non-Christians which is chosen and ministered to by a Missional Community for the purpose of discipleship.

DNA Process: A three-step process undertaken by a DNA group that consist of (D)iscovering what the Holy Spirit its teaching a person through Scriptural meditation, (N)urturing that discovery through biblical counseling questions by the other two members of a DNA group, and (A)cting in obedience to what the Holy Spirit has been teaching and accountability to the other two members of a DNA group.

Minimalist: A personal who eliminates all but that which is essential in life. This could include both material possessions and responsibilities.

Self-Care: Caring for others by while maintaining our own physical and emotional well-being.

GDP: Gross National Product

Deep Work: Professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit. These efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate.

Shallow Work: Noncognitively demanding, logistical-style tasks, often performed while distracted. These efforts tend to not create much new value in the world and are easy to replicate.

Daily Office: A non-legalistic, systematic daily regimen of stopping your activity at set times, centering your mind and emotions, embracing silence, prayer, and mediation on Scripture.²⁰

Historical-Cultural Analysis: The examination of all the layers and processes of social historical consciousness, paying attention to the agents who create it, the media by means of which it is

²⁰ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), ch. 6.

disseminated, the representations that it popularizes and the creative reception on the part of citizens.²¹

Contextual Analysis: An analysis that combines features of formal analysis with features of “cultural archeology,” or the systematic study. It situates a text within the milieu of its times and assess the roles of author, readers, and critics in the reception of the text.²²

Lexical-Syntactical Analysis: The study of the meaning of individual words (lexicology) and the way those words are combined (syntax) in order to determine more accurately the author’s intended meaning.²³

Limitations and Delimitations

As a part of this study, the author surveyed participants in a missional community at Green Acres Baptist Church. Research limitations include the missional community members’ willingness to complete the surveys and receive the instruction given during intervention sessions. Another limitation is the survey participants willingness to be honest in their self-evaluation.

The study also contains several delimitators. These include surveying only members of Green Acres Baptist Church who are actively participating in the missional community. Another delimitation of this study was the survey method. A Likert scale was used in which participants ranked themselves based on given statements. This particular method will not allow for nuance

²¹ “What is Historical Culture?” accessed August 28, 2021, <https://culturahistorica.org/what-is-historical-culture/>.

²² “Using Contextual Analysis to Evaluate Texts,” accessed August 28, 2021, <http://english.unl.edu/sbehrendt/StudyQuestions/ContextualAnalysis.html>.

²³ Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Process of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 98.

or explanation beyond the numerical ranking. The time frame chosen for this study was also a delimiter. The missional community participant pre-survey was given in April of 2021 and the post-surveys were given in December of 2021.

Thesis Statement

Apart from making time for intimate, sometimes hard conversations, that involve biblical counseling, and learning the skill of properly handling the Bible, people do not grow spiritually in a significant way. DNA groups are designed to accomplish these specific components and help people grow significantly. For people to make the sacrifice necessary to participate in these groups, it is imperative they recognize the value of intimate, gender-specific, Bible-driven accountability groups.

If people value these groups, then they will naturally participate in them. However, a key component of valuing DNA groups is having the ability to feel successful in them and helped by them. Three obstacles stand in the way of that success. They are 1) busyness and overscheduling, 2) hesitancy in engaging in difficult and personal spiritual conversations, and 3) incompetency in using the Bible apart from a separate curriculum.

Therefore, this project is designed to 1) address busyness and overscheduling by looking at sociological trends and comparing them with biblical priorities, 2) address psychological and spiritual reasons that people feel uneasy about addressing personal and spiritual problems in the lives of others, 3) persuade participants of the need to be able to function independently of premade Bible curricula and train them in basic Bible study skills. The desired result is to see all members of the missional community at Green Acres Baptist Church effectively participate in DNA groups.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

Engagement in a small group is a critical component of discipleship living. However, small groups are not sufficient if they do not incorporate smaller groups of intense vulnerability and accountability. The DNA groups within missional communities provides an environment where three members of a gender-specific group use the Scriptures, the Spirit, and intense relational engagement to promote serious spiritual growth.²⁴

The author has encountered three primary obstacles to engagement in DNA groups and has researched the pertinent literature. The literature review covers the topics of busyness/overscheduling, difficult conversations of a spiritual nature, and biblical competency. The author will interact with each of these aspects as well as demonstrate how the missional community model addresses these obstacles.

Intervening in all three of these challenges promotes spiritual maturity that benefits Christians in their relationships both in the local church and on mission to those who do not yet know Jesus.

Overscheduling & Busyness

The United States is known for its creativity and industriousness. American culture is ripe with initiative and creativity that is in large part responsible for our economic advantages. Our national history is built upon a biblical foundation that includes Paul's admonition that it is good to work consistently and whoever does not work should not eat.²⁵

²⁴ Jeff Vanderstelt, *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 107.

²⁵ 2 Thess. 3:7-13.

However, the virtue of industriousness can quickly become the vice of mis-prioritized busyness that is so consumed by the urgent that it neglects the truly important.²⁶ The issue is not that the ordinary person is now doing fewer number of tasks; rather, the issue is that the increase in the volume of tasks may be good and necessary but do not directly relate to overarching goals that serve well-being.

For many Christians who ventured to the New World centuries ago, ingenuity and hard work were a prerequisite for survival. The postmillennial eschatology of many of America's Puritan forefathers energized a work ethic that would help colonize the New World and believed it would lead to the proliferation of Christianity worldwide.²⁷ However, the commercial and industrial success of the United States eventually came to provide the necessary ingredients for an ever-busier workforce whose lives centered on chasing the "American Dream."

The societal shift was not without its repercussions on the American church.²⁸ Christians are emersed in both an educational system and the resultant zeitgeist that both subconsciously and explicitly communicates the danger of being left behind socioeconomically.²⁹ Because Christian discipleship is founded on building relationships with God and neighbor, overscheduling often causes people to find themselves at odds with prioritizing kingdom work and community.³⁰

²⁶ Larry Wayne and Charles H. Hummel, *Tyranny of the Urgent!* (Westmont: IL: IVP Press, 2013).

²⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 1213.

²⁸ David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2010), 2-3.

²⁹ Jennifer Hochschild, "The American Dream: A Cultural History," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 18, no. 2, (2016): 198.

³⁰ John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 46.

The proliferation of technology has exponentially increased time-consuming tasks. Having to engage seemingly endless emails has for many become the quintessential representation of the eternal conveyer belt of business drudgery. Some have specifically taken the email nemesis head on.³¹ Carl Newport has a range of suggestions ranging from using filters to explain that you only answer emails that would be a good match for your endeavors, responding more deeply to emails in order to find final solutions, to not answering emails unless they certain criteria.³² While the example of the proliferation of email's impact on the busyness of the ordinary person is only one example, it is representative of the dangers of technology as a whole on the well-being and life goals of most modern individuals.

Newport is not an arbitrary minimalist. It is for the purpose of achieving more foundational goals that Newport, like Wayne and Hummel, seek to eliminate life's time leeches. Newport approaches this philosophy of life from a secular perspective. However, the intention of this project is to utilize the same type of course corrections in order to enrich the spiritual lives of its participants.

The societal ills of busyness and overscheduling are perpetuated by a cycle of assimilating into secular cultural values, leading to a weakened spirituality that increases the likelihood of the cycle continuing.³³ As Michael Zigarelli explains, "It may be the case that (1) Christians are assimilating to a culture of busyness, hurry and overload, which leads to (2) God becoming more marginalized in Christians' lives, which leads to (3) a deteriorating relationship with God, which leads to (4) Christians becoming even more vulnerable to adopting secular

³¹ Tom Cochran. "Email Is Not Free." Harvard Business Review, accessed September 11, 2021. <http://blogs.hbr.org/2013/04/email-is-not-free>.

³² Cal Newport, *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2016).

³³ Gilles Lipovetsky, *Hypermodern Times* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005).

assumptions about how to live, which leads to (5) more conformity to a culture of busyness, hurry and overload. And then the cycle begins again.”³⁴ Rather than people becoming so heavenly-minded that they become no earthly good, people are so disconnected from spiritual realities that the immediate good that is accomplished shifts from the eternal to the temporary. This misplaced perspective was stated plainly by Jesus when he said, “What good is it if you gain the whole world and lose your soul.”³⁵

Paradoxically, modern people “have an enhanced quality of life, but at the same time they are adding to their stress levels by taking on more than they have resources to handle.”³⁶ There is little margin in the everyday schedule of the average American for the relationships and disciplines that require time and patience. Margin is defined by Richard Swenson as “the space between our load and our limits.”³⁷ Swenson makes the point that being margin-less exemplifies modern culture. Therefore, concerted effort to obtain margin in life is by definition counter cultural.³⁸ This margin-less malady is not limited to socio-economic, educational, or even faith levels. It is a cross-cultural phenomenon that lives in the subconscious and is reinforced by societal rituals and practices.³⁹

³⁴ Distracted from God: A Five-Year, Worldwide Study, Christianity9to5, accessed May 22, 2021, <http://www.christianity9to5.org/distracted-from-god>.

³⁵ Matt 16:26, ESV.

³⁶ David Allen, *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2015), ch 1.

³⁷ Richard Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2004), 69.

³⁸ Richard Swenson, *Margin*, 1.

³⁹ Richard Swenson, *Margin*: 12.

While the hours required to complete certain kinds of work has decreased due to technological advances, there has not been a corresponding increase in leisure time. The data indicates an inverse effect. Time that has been saved from work, has led to an increase in more low-level work. Unfortunately, there seems to be a never-ending well of urgent tasks that spring up and push out important tasks that would be more fulfilling.

First-world countries are increasingly educated but also increasingly bereft of time to devote to non-work activities. For the Christian, this outcome implies less time to pursue meaningful, long-term life and spiritual goals. Rather than people being freed up by technology and education for higher pursuits, we have simply increased the margin we make available for important, but less impactful tasks.

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⁴⁰ Jessica Pioneer, *Busyness Is Not a Virtue*, “The Evolution of Leisure Time,” accessed September 11, 2021, www.thefioneers.com/too-busy.

Ironically, the productivity per hour worked has increased while at the same time people have become less productive in the most important aspects of a balanced life. Western countries lead the way in this trend. From the lens of GDP, this data seems to indicate success. However, the success of productivity comes through the lens of western materialism, not biblical community.

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There is a Finish proverb that says, “God did not create hurry.”⁴² It is important to note the deviation that this hurried pace is from the normal physical and spiritual rhythms honored in the Scriptures. John Mark Comer notes that this level of hurry is not compatible with the type of Christian love that is defined in 1 Corinthians 13:4 by the descriptor “patient.”⁴³ Comer lists

⁴¹ Our World in Data, “Productivity Per Hour Worked,” accessed September 13, 2021. <http://ourworldindata.org/economic-growth>.

⁴² John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2019), 22.

⁴³ John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 23.

symptoms of “hurried sickness” that include irritability, restlessness, workaholism, and emotional numbness, among others.⁴⁴

This type of hurry works against the idea of self-care. Self-care comes through “good nutrition, sleep health, time with family and friends, exercise, and stress management techniques.”⁴⁵ Self-care is not only necessary in the category of physical health but in spiritual health as well. A person cannot fulfill their responsibility to make disciples of others if they are neglecting their own spiritual well-being. What might appear on the surface to be selfishness is in fact the first step toward loving others.

Busyness and overscheduling are subtle and misleading scourges on Christian discipleship. Because hard work is generally lauded, and many Christians also busy themselves with a programmatic church lifestyle, the undercutting of healthy lifestyles and discipleship often goes unnoticed. The Christian life can proceed with an increasing amount of metaphorical merit badges, all the while wasting away from neglecting healthy community and discipleship. John Ortberg describes the spiritual sleight of hand this way, "For many of us the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it. We will just skim our lives instead of actually living them."⁴⁶

In order to live a properly balanced Christian life, the pace of life must be subjugated to kingdom time. Kosuke Koyama reminds us, "God walks 'slowly' because he is love. If he is not

⁴⁴ John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2019), 50.

⁴⁵ Rachel Spurlock, “Self-Care: A Stewardship Perspective,” *Journal of Christian Nursing* no. 38 (2021): 98-101.

⁴⁶ John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 38-39.

love he would have gone much faster. Love has its speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed. It is 'slow' yet it is lord over all other speeds since it is the speed of love."⁴⁷

In seeking to correct the unbalance in the Christian life, we must look primarily to Jesus. The life of Jesus demonstrates that having the busiest life is not equivalent to having the most efficient life. A.E. Whiteham explains Jesus led a life of spiritual rest, even in the midst of a physically demanding life. He walked and talked with an air of leisure, and yet made a short life of about thirty years a “finished” life.” Whiteham quips, “We cannot admire the poise and beauty of this human life, and then ignore the things that made it.”⁴⁸

Jesus did not schedule every hour of every day. He had a mission with a goal but allowed margin in his life to deal with circumstances and people the Father would send His way. “He prayerfully waited for his Father's instructions. Jesus had no . . . blueprint . . . [but] he discerned the Father's will day by day in a life of prayer.”⁴⁹

The command to wait on the Lord is universal to all God's people.⁵⁰ All cultures and subcultures, from the rice farmer in Asia to the Wall Street executive in New York, are called to walk (not run) in the footsteps of Jesus. While differences among individuals abound, this universal command is a starting line for all who would follow “The Way.”⁵¹ “Unlike money,

⁴⁷ Kosuke Koyama, *Three Mile an Hour God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1980), 7.

⁴⁸ A.E. Whiteham, *The Discipline and Culture of the Spiritual Life* (London, UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1939).

⁴⁹ Larry Wayne and Charles H. Hummel, *Tyranny of the Urgent!* (Westmont: IL: IVP Press, 2013), 10.

⁵⁰ Isaiah 40:31, ESV.

⁵¹ John 14:6, ESV.

time comes to all of us in equal amounts . . . in the last analysis, how we use our time depends on our goals. We make the hours count for what we think is important."⁵²

Our goals determine our priorities. Christians have a moral obligation to prioritize those things which most promote the advancement of personal discipleship and the discipleship of all nations. Because Christians need to pursue those goals at a spiritually healthy pace, we must learn to become efficient instead of busy. Matt Perman reminds us, "Knowing how to get things done is a component of our sanctification. Since productivity includes serving people and doing good works, it is actually a component of sanctification and Christian discipleship."⁵³

While most Christians would give verbal ascent to the overall aim of efficiency over busyness, the time and work necessary to translate that into daily life is mostly neglected. Often this is not done intentionally, but rather absorbed through cultural norms. However, there are concrete steps that can be taken to make our actual goals and priorities align with our stated ones.

In order to make progress in reprogramming the metronome of our life, people must first become self-aware of the cultural and familial dynamics that have shaped our view of a successful life. We must deal with our past in order to move forward. Discipleship requires putting off the sinful pattern of our family of origin and relearning how to do life in God's way in God's family.⁵⁴

No one is looking for a solution that does not first understand that they have a problem. However, once we recognize and admit our faulty goals and priorities, we can reorient our lives

⁵² Larry Wayne and Charles H. Hummel, *Tyranny of the Urgent!* (Westmont: IL: IVP Press, 2013), 14.

⁵³ Matt Perman, *What's Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 23.

⁵⁴ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), ch. 3.

around kingdom priorities through systematic, but authentic means. Peter Scazzero in *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* encourages the use of “the Daily Office,” and “Sabbath.”

Scazzero uses the term “Daily Office” to describe a non-legalistic, systematic daily regimen of stopping your activity at set times, centering your mind and emotions, embracing silence, prayer, and meditation on Scripture.⁵⁵ He encourages a process of trial and error to discover variations that are most useful to the individual. The timeframes for this activity range from a few minutes to an hour, depending on how much time is available or needed.

Scazzero also advocates using a Sabbath principle by incorporating a weekly day of stopping work, resting, delighting in God’s creation, and contemplating Him. He also advocates striving for simplicity in life, play and recreation, service, care for the physical body, and community.⁵⁶ Donald Whitney defends the biblical nature of this simplicity by attaching it to Paul’s instruction to maintain “the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”⁵⁷ and encouraging every other motivation for simplifying to be in service to this one.⁵⁸

Christians can take advantage of any means that helps us plan our time with kingdom priorities. David Allen in *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity* encourages us to think carefully about how we think about our tasks. He stresses the need to (1) capture what has our attention; (2) clarify what each item means and what to do about it; (3) organize the results, (4) reflect on the contents consistently to keep them functional.⁵⁹ This pragmatic

⁵⁵ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), ch. 6.

⁵⁶ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, ch. 8.

⁵⁷ 2 Cor 11:3, ESV.

⁵⁸ Donald Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2003), 25.

⁵⁹ David Allen, *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2015), ch 2.

approach to scheduling can be applied to bumping spiritual disciplines and community up the priority list and engaging in those efficiently.

The problem of business can be conquered by loving God with all of the heart, soul, and mind.⁶⁰ To love him with the heart, Christians must examine the extent to which their hearts have been captivated by the love of what this world has to offer, including the influence of both popular culture and particular families. Christians love God with their souls by taking time to stop, pray and rest daily and in a weekly Sabbath-like pattern. Disciples love God with their minds by being strategic in analyzing and applying scheduling criteria and pace of life in order to provide margin for the patient, slower, intentional speed necessary for discipleship because it is the speed of love.⁶¹

Spiritually Intimate and Difficult Conversations

A hagiographic time in American history was that of the “wild, wild west.” The dominant theme of this historical period was that of “rugged individualism.” Samuel Bazzi writes that the American frontier experience favored people “who preferred to work in isolation from a larger community and might have shifted attitudes at the frontier in favor of individualistic thought over collectivism.”⁶² In the speech that closed Herbert Hoover’s

⁶⁰ Matt 22:37, ESV.

⁶¹ Kosuke Koyama, *Three Mile an Hour God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1980), 7.

⁶² Samuel Bazzi and Martin Fiszbein, “Frontier Culture: The Roots and Persistence of ‘Rugged Individualism’ in the United States,” *Econometrica* 88, no. 6 (2020).

presidential campaign, he expressed his view that the American system was based on this “rugged individualism” and “self-reliance.”⁶³

An entrepreneurial spirit is beneficial for settling a country and making headway in developing a national economy. However, when “rugged individualism” is applied to Christian discipleship it makes for a marriage with irreconcilable differences. Rather than a characteristic to be celebrated, it is an obstacle to be overcome.

The metaphor of the church used by Paul is that of a body whose parts cannot operate separately, but rather are wholly in need of each other.⁶⁴ Mark Dever correctly states, "As God's people are built up and grow together in holiness and self-giving love, they should improve in their ability to administer discipline and to encourage discipleship. The church has an obligation to be a means of God's growing people in grace."⁶⁵ Western Evangelicals must overcome their individualistic impulses and embrace the communal nature of Christian discipleship. Hugh Halter and Matt Smay in *The Tangible Kingdom* strategize against spiritual individualism by saying, “We win out over individualism by discipling togetherness, through gentle confrontation, and by eliminating spiritual services that allow people to remain autonomous or invisible.”⁶⁶

Jesus assumes this type of loving confrontation in his admonition to approach a brother who has sinned against you so that you may show him his fault.⁶⁷ Jesus regularly demonstrated

⁶³ Herbert Hoover, “Rugged Individualism” Campaign Speech, Digital History, accessed May 22, 2021, https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=1334.

⁶⁴ 1 Cor 12:12-20, ESV.

⁶⁵ Mark Dever, *9 Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 215.

⁶⁶ Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 151.

⁶⁷ Matt 18:15, ESV.

this behavior in his admonishments to his disciples. Jesus still lovingly confronts his disciples today for the purpose of godliness through the church, which is his body.

The DNA component of missional communities seeks to provide the structure within which these difficult conversations are not only possible but expected. Training is given on how to be a good listener and guide difficult conversations through leading questions that get to the heart issues involved. There is a way to confront sin without being unloving or disagreeable.

Not only is individualism incompatible with healthy spiritual development, but the seedbed of vigorous spiritual growth comes in a small, intensely authentic community. Neal Cole notes, "The basic unit of Kingdom life is a follower of Christ in relationship with another follower of Christ. The micro form of church life is a unit of 2 or 3 believers in relationship."⁶⁸

Jesus's command to his disciples was to go into all the world and "teach them to obey everything I have commanded you." Teaching to obey means more than telling people they should obey. It means providing the encouragement, discipline, support, and training that is vital for prolonged spiritual development. Its purpose is to facilitate spiritual growth, to maintain godliness among the body, and to rid the body of people who would pollute, destroy, and bring shame to the name of Christ."⁶⁹ Small groups provide the trellis of community in which the vine of intimate discipleship grows.

People who are connected to biblical community develop specific characteristics. Dustin Willis and Aaron Coe list these characteristics as: "(1) They have people with whom they are honest and transparent about their struggles with sin (see James 5:16). (2) They gracefully

⁶⁸ Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 99.

⁶⁹ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1988), 159.

confront sin in other believers and humbly accept correction brought by others (see Gal. 6:1-2).

(3) They willingly sacrifice in order to help others carry their burdens (see Gal. 6:2)." They go on to say that people "need to see the grace of God lived out among a group of people. They need to see other believers repenting, confessing, rejoicing in God's grace, and forgiving others. They need to see the gospel applied to life."⁷⁰

Thabiti Anyabwile exhorts us to serve others in the church, bear with one another, love one another, correct one another, and encourage one another, and so participate in "a kind of 'spiritual maturity co-op' where our stores and supplies are multiplied. The end result is growth and discipleship."⁷¹ However, because of a culture of spiritual privatization and our cultural history of "rugged individualism," people are often hesitant to fulfill their obligations as brothers and sisters in Christ who are responsible for each other. The timidity comes into play when difficult conversations arise within a small group setting.

A biblical examination of this hesitancy to either give or receive biblical correction reveals a "fear of man."⁷² Edward Welch in *When People are BIG and GOD is Small* gives three reasons we fear people, "(1) We fear people because they can expose and humiliate us; (2) We fear people because they can reject, ridicule, or despise us; (3) We fear people because they can attack, oppress, or threaten us."⁷³ We know that when we open ourselves up to giving or

⁷⁰ Dustin Willis and Aaron Coe, *Life on Mission: Joining the Everyday Mission of God* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 133.

⁷¹ Thabiti Anyabwile, *What is a Healthy Church Member?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008).

⁷² Matthew 10:28, ESV.

⁷³ Edward Welch, *When People are BIG and GOD is Small* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), ch. 2.

receiving criticism, that we are likely to be confronted with one or more of these deeply rooted fears.

However, to be most like Christ is to confront sin by speaking the truth in love. John Mark Comer points out that Jesus did not avoid conflict but was regularly in conflict with those both with him and against him in order to disrupt the false peace all around him. Only by disrupting the superficial peace would true peace be restored.⁷⁴

To properly use the Scriptures in love to teach, reprove, correct, and train others, people must grow in the skill of biblical counseling. Biblical counseling is not a skill to be relegated to the “professionals,” but rather an expectation for all believers in a local church.⁷⁵ The Scriptures and the Spirit are sufficient to train, guide, and empower loving correction that leads to spiritual development and growth.

David Powlison demonstrates the Bible’s potency in these matters. Powlison makes the case that the book of Ephesians in particular “teaches and illustrates . . . ingredients in a comprehensive methodology of face-to-face ministry: radical dependency on God . . . core attitudes of kindness toward others’ failings . . . timeliness and appropriateness that arise from knowing people and their life-situations . . . appropriate self-disclosure . . . grasp of the change process as progressive, practical, and detailed . . . awareness of the other voices and instincts that tug at people . . . ability to communicate with constructive and compelling reasonableness . . . and faithfulness to God’s revelation.”⁷⁶ Powlison is a guide who seeks to not only give a man a

⁷⁴ John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2019), 32.

⁷⁵ Stuart Scott and Heath Lambert, *Counseling the Hard Cases*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2012), xii.

⁷⁶ David Powlison, *Seeing With New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), 4-5.

fish but teach him how to fish. It is Powlison who makes the case that the church is “God’s new society in Christ, come into its own and coming into its own, is *the* institution for counseling ministry.”⁷⁷

The missional community model, and the DNA component in particular provides the framework for practicing the skill of biblical counseling. Regular training in biblical counseling methods are made available through the larger weekly missional community gatherings. Those who become part of GABC will find themselves in a community that not only moves outward evangelistically, but also inward through soul-care. Like Powlison, this model seeks to enact the belief that the church is the primary place for physical, psychological, and spiritual healing and God’s people are the means through which it is to be accomplished.

Biblical Competency

“Have you not read” was a regular refrain of Jesus.⁷⁸ There was an explicit expectation that God’s people would know and apply God’s Word. However, there is a common lack of skill in using the Bible alone as a tool to promote spiritual development both individually and in small groups. A contributing factor to this unfortunate incompetency is the ubiquitous existence of Bible study curricula. Often these curricula are poorly worded, composed of poor scholarship, or so theme-centered that they skew the meaning of passages in order to fit their intended modern context. The inability to use the Scriptures alone causes an obstacle to small group use of the Bible for understanding, meditation, and application. All Christians need to be competent in

⁷⁷ David Powlison, *Seeing With New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), 6.

⁷⁸ Matthew. 21:42, ESV.

using the Scriptures appropriately and understanding them to be a sufficient guide for faith and practice.

God has written His Word such that it is empowered and illuminated through the work of God the Spirit in a way different than any other source. To be unable or unwilling to use the Scriptures apart from a manmade curriculum is to opt for a lesser guide. Neil Cole states, "For most of us, the rest of our lives are spent learning what it is we already have been given the moment we began the salvation process. How much more quickly we can set new believers on this journey if we also assume they have received all they need to live a godly life in Christ Jesus (2 Pet. 1:3; Eph. 1:3)."⁷⁹ Believers are given the Spirit and the Word. They must be able to walk in the Spirit and be proficient in the knowledge and application of the Word.

Genres, historical-cultural analysis, contextual analysis, lexical-syntactical analysis, and theological analysis must be taught in at least a general way to provide Christians with the basic tools necessary to read, understand, and apply the Bible.⁸⁰ Learning these skills are pertinent particularly because the Christian Scriptures travel to us from another time and another language. However, God has still communicated truth in the Scriptures in such a way that ordinary people can be expected to be able to read and understand them.

Training in handling God's Word should be supplied where it is lacking. Henrietta Mears in *What the Bible is All About* gives the following guidelines: "(1) Regard the Bible as One Book, One History, One Story; (A) Discover the Message; (B) Start with the Actual Book; (2) Make Time for Bible Reading; (3) Read a Book a Week; (4) Look for Purpose -- God's Plan

⁷⁹ Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 150.

⁸⁰ Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1981).

for Salvation; (5) Ask the Holy Spirit to Guide You; (6) Read Attentively; (7) Appreciate the Bible's Uniqueness."⁸¹

Donald Whitney buttresses this point by saying, "So when we go to the Bible, we should look primarily for what Jesus says to us in it, for what it tells us about Jesus, for how we are to respond to Jesus, for what we are to do for Jesus, and so forth. When we pray, we want to pray in Jesus' name (see John 14:13-14); that is, we should come in the righteousness of Jesus (and not our own) and pray what we believe Jesus would pray in our circumstances. Our perennial purpose for practicing any and all of the spiritual disciplines should be a Christ-centered purpose. Authentic Christian spirituality is about Jesus Christ."⁸²

Doing the hard work of learning how to read, understand, and apply the Bible is a necessary and life-giving component to every Christian. It is important in the context of a DNA group that God's Word is used primarily. It is the means specifically given by God for our growth and can be trusted. Supplemental curriculums can be helpful, but we must first be competent in wielding the sword of the Word of God.

Theological Foundations

Christianity is more than a set of doctrines; it is a way of life. It has often been said that the Christian walk is one of continual repentance and faith. While the description of this cycle is true, there are other aspects of the Christian walk that are consistent, rhythmic, and run contrary to the desires of the flesh. The three virtuous patterns that are dealt with in this theological foundation are 1) a speed of life that allows for prioritizing spiritual community and mission, 2)

⁸¹ Henrietta Mears, *What the Bible is All About* (Bethel, OH: Regal Books, 2007).

⁸² Donald Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2003), 27.

love for others that is expressed through difficult conversations in spite of the discomfort and risk it involves, and 3) proper knowledge of the Bible and the skill it takes to apply it to oneself and others.

The Speed of Love

In the opening pages of the Bible we find God together with those he had made in his image, “walking in the garden in the cool of the day.”⁸³ Although this verse comes after humanity’s first sin, the implication of the passage seems to clearly denote God’s “closeness and intimacy and fellowship.”⁸⁴ The very speed of God’s traveling in the garden gives clues to the necessary speed of love.

Under the Mosaic Covenant, the speed of God’s people was slowed by both holy festivals and Sabbaths.⁸⁵ During these times, Israel would remember what the Lord had done in the past and promised to do in the future.⁸⁶ The speed of the lives of God’s people was regulated in order to promote their love for Him. Commentator John Durham argues that keeping the sabbath is a living out of the special relationship God’s people enjoy with God.⁸⁷ Matthew Henry notes

⁸³ Gen 3:8, ESV.

⁸⁴ Randy Alcorn, “Is Genesis 3:8 Sufficient to Establish That God Was in the Habit of Visiting with Adam and Eve in the Garden?”, *Eternal Perspective Ministries*, March 29, 2010. <https://www.epm.org/resources/2010/Mar/29/gen-38-sufficient-establish-god-was-habit-visiting/>.

⁸⁵ Ex 12:14, ESV.

⁸⁶ Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1962), 61.

⁸⁷ John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 3, Exodus* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 413.

continuity with the New Testament in that “we must keep a feast in holy joy, continually delighting ourselves in Christ Jesus.”⁸⁸

In Jesus there is not only the fulfillment of the holy festivals and Sabbaths⁸⁹, but in the New Testament we see the continued regulation of life in such a way that sacrifice and risk for the sake of others necessitates a measured intentionality.⁹⁰ In the parable of the Good Samaritan an example is given of one who slows down to love his neighbor at the expense of his personal business.⁹¹

“Be still, and know that I am God.”⁹² Why would God specify stillness? An intentional slowness of speed serves the purpose of focusing similarly to fasting. The measured care people give to something or someone is a way of gauging value. In the same way that people are called to be still and contemplate the being of God, because they love him, so love for others must be reflected by a slowed, intentional use of time.

As the perfect incarnation of God and man, Jesus demonstrated this speed of love. Jesus went to his disciples to call them personally. He walked with them, talked with them, ate with them, and served with them. In short, Jesus lived a slow, methodical, and intentional life with them. And in this process Jesus loved them through discipleship. For God’s people to continue

⁸⁸ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1960), 83.

⁸⁹ Thomas Schriener, “Good-by and Hello: The Sabbath Command for New Covenant Believers,” in *Progressive Covenantalism*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 159.

⁹⁰ Thabiti Anyabwile, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Luke* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2018), 182.

⁹¹ Luke 10:25-37, ESV.

⁹² Ps 46:10, ESV.

the discipling work of Jesus, they must walk in his footsteps. Those footsteps reflect a gait, not of hurry and self-interest, but of margin, patience, and intentionality.

Telling Others the Truth in Love

People often do not confront sinful behaviors in those they care about, reasoning that they love them too much to hurt them. While there may be an element of truth to that thinking, it is often the case that neglecting to address negative thoughts or behaviors in others is rooted in selfishness. The sting of possible rebuke is found more distasteful than the possibility of bringing truth and help to another person's situation.

This underlying craving for one's own desire (including relational comfort) is a definitional problem with the lack of proper confrontation in love. People who come to terms with their true motivations can have "God's grace made real to them, and then learn how to make peace."⁹³ New Testament scholar Douglas Moo notes that the common thread running through James 3:13-4:2 (which speaks to cravings which create conflict) is *peace*.⁹⁴

The Bible itself declares that it is sufficient for such a task. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."⁹⁵ This passage makes clear that in those moments when reproof and correction is necessary, it is fact a good work when it is done in love.⁹⁶

⁹³ David Powlison, "Powlison on Lusts of the Flesh" an interview with Justin Taylor at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/powlison-on-lusts-of-flesh-question-4/>. March 28, 2007.

⁹⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 168.

⁹⁵ 2 Tim 3:16-17, ESV.

⁹⁶ 1 Cor 13:6, ESV.

In Matthew 5, Jesus makes clear that people's relationships with each other directly affects their relationship to God. That is why Jesus told those who had issues to remedy them before they offered their gift to God. When people are too selfish or timid to assist in these difficult situations, they are neglecting their duty as brothers or sisters and so allow another person to continue in a spiritually negative state. This passive neglect is an active sin. It is a sin of omission. Just as Jesus suffered relational hurt for the sake of humanity, so we are also called to consider others as better than ourselves.⁹⁷

A willingness to have difficult spiritual conversations with a brother or sister in Christ is not a purely altruistic endeavor. Health for one person in the body of Christ promotes health for the body as a whole. The Apostle Paul taught that we operate as one body with many members. Paul makes clear that members are to have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together.⁹⁸ Therefore, a willingness to address a difficult spiritual situation with one member of the body is an act of love to the entire body of Christ.

Equipped for Every Good Work

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”⁹⁹ This sure word from God cannot be said of any other written work. God has ordained that He would locate his power in the Spirit-enlivened writ of holy Scripture.

⁹⁷ Phil 2:3, ESV.

⁹⁸ 1 Cor 12:12-31, ESV.

⁹⁹ Heb 4:12, ESV.

However, even in a modern culture blessed by the bloodstained work of men like William Tyndale, who first translated the Bible into English, modern western culture suffers from biblical malnutrition. Much of the current lack of biblical skill does not come from intentional malfeasance. In an effort to speed up the process of biblical study and application, the American Christian landscape has been littered with various pre-made curricula. While some are worthwhile teaching tools, many are not. “It is no secret that Christ’s Church is not at all in good health in many places of the world. She has been languishing because she has been fed, as the current line has it, ‘junk food’; all kinds of artificial preservatives and all sorts of unnatural substitutes have been served up to her.”¹⁰⁰

Pre-made curricula should be a supplement at best. However, many have become so dependent on pre-digested and interpreted Bible passages, that they feel ill-equipped to do the work for themselves. This leaves many Christians unable to effectively utilize the book that is unlike any other book and which works in such a way as it never returns empty but accomplishes the purpose for which God sends it.¹⁰¹

Jesus consistently pointed his hearers back to the Scriptures with an expectation that they should know them. The religious establishment of Jesus’s day was replete with commentary and superfluous rules. However, Jesus demonstrated that the legalism of the Pharisees was an encumbrance on pure devotion to the word.¹⁰²

Time and time again, God’s people find God’s power in God’s Word. Professor Bruce Waltke gave his personal testimony of this truth. While originally only reading the Bible for

¹⁰⁰ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1981), 7-8.

¹⁰¹ Is 55:11, ESV.

¹⁰² Matt 23:23, ESV.

academic reasons, he found that God himself would powerfully illuminate the Scriptures to him through a prayerful seeking of that illumination. Waltke writes that at first his reading seemed much the same. “But soon,” he writes, “within three weeks of praying that prayer as I read, my heart began to burn within me. I started to see new things in Scripture. God began revealing to me how his Word should change my life. I developed a love for his teaching. God heard my prayer and began to speak to me through his Word.”¹⁰³

God works in a unique, primary, and powerful way through his word that he does not through other means. The “purpose of Bible study is not merely to get to know the Bible in some abstract or academic sense. The purpose of Bible study should be to get to know God.”¹⁰⁴ Study of God’s Word is a pursuit of the knowledge of God through the pure word that has flowed from him. We must be competent in usage of that divine revelation which was so specifically given by God and so sacrificially given to us in our native tongues by those Christians who labored to that end.

Theoretical Foundations

The attempt to find remedies to busyness, engaging in difficult conversations, and finding shortcuts to in-depth ideas are not relegated to the religious sphere. While in the secular world these three issues are not necessarily connected, they each have extensive amounts of history, related literature, and attempted solutions. The author will briefly mention approaches that have attempted to address these issues and compare them with the unique approach and motivation provided by a biblical framework and the missional community model.

¹⁰³ Bruce Waltke, *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?* (Gresham, OR: Vision House, 1995), 89.

¹⁰⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *Living by the Book: The Joy of Loving and Trusting God’s Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 57.

Proficiency and Efficiency

The problem of busyness and overscheduling is often addressed in terms of streamlining ways of thinking, working, and matching behaviors to desired goals. The issue of the objective value of the goals are often not addressed in secular work, but rather general principles are given to assist achieving whatever subjective priorities the individual may have.¹⁰⁵

Efficiency is seen as a key to proficiency. Being proficient requires making a distinction between “deep work” and “shallow work.” Deep work can be defined as “professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit. These efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate.”¹⁰⁶ Shallow work can be defined as, “nonsocially demanding, logistical-style tasks, often performed while distracted. These efforts tend to not create much new value in the world and are easy to replicate.”¹⁰⁷ The aim is to develop practices that allow for concentration on the deeper work. This is done through recognizing busyness as a proxy for productivity, adopting one of four major patterns of deep work scheduling, training your brain not to respond to stimuli from electronics and the internet, and scheduling every minute of the day.¹⁰⁸

Adaptive Scheduling

¹⁰⁵ David Allen, *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2015).

¹⁰⁶ Cal Newport, *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 3.

¹⁰⁷ Cal Newport, *Deep Work*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Cal Newport, *Deep Work*.

Many churches have tried to adapt to the ever-increasing time demands on their congregants by phasing out programming and seeking to streamline the church calendar to focus on primary goals. One casualty of traditional church programming has been the Sunday night service. These evening services have been dropping off, sometimes because of strategic programmatic decisions and other times due to simple lack of attendance.

The decline of the Sunday night service is not limited to any one denomination. Denominations across the board have seen a decline, even amongst denominations that are seeing numerical growth overall.¹⁰⁹ The general trend is seeing churches exchange a traditional Sunday night service for programs that focus on community and evangelism.¹¹⁰

It is debated whether the need to move away from traditional Sunday evening services comes from decline in interest or just a change in culture. Tom Rainer suggests that services grew during the agricultural phase of the nation's history, and during World War II, "many men and women worked seven-day weeks to meet the production needs of the war. The Sunday evening service allowed them to attend worship since they couldn't come on Sunday morning. Thus the service time grew in popularity."¹¹¹ It is possible that as the culture has changed in the last 70 years, and the evening service no longer provides the convenience it once did.

There is also now an increasing emphasis on family time. Rainer reports that many families say that one worship service on Sunday is sufficient for them, and their preference is for

¹⁰⁹ Matt Vande Bunte, "Sunday Night Services a Fading Tradition," *The Christian Century* 127, no. 21 (2010): 14.

¹¹⁰ Matt Vande Bunte, "Sunday Night Services a Fading Tradition," *The Christian Century* 127, no. 21 (2010): 14.

¹¹¹ Tom Rainer, *What Ever Happened to Sunday Evening Service*, accessed June 20, 2021. <https://churchanswers.com/blog/whatever-happened-sunday-evening-services>.

time with their family in the evening.¹¹² The move many churches have made in introducing small group ministries into this timeslot tap into this momentum to spend time with family and friends.

Positive results from churches that have implemented the missional community model show that a distinction needs to be made between time spent participating in church programming and meaningful discipleship amongst fellow disciples. True discipleship redeems the ordinary rhythms of life so that all of life is discipleship. This way of viewing expectations of church member's time commitments reallocates that resource to a more productive and lasting end which meets the original goal of the church.

The Impact of Gender on Busyness

Gender roles have been shown to have an impact on busyness.¹¹³ Kat Armstrong, executive director of Hendricks Center Leader Board, estimates that almost 80 percent of women over the age of 18 are working.¹¹⁴ Many women who work outside the home often find the time constraints of their work life compounded with the time requirements of their home life. Societal norms that historically kept housewives busy still remained even as those same women entered the workforce and began to compete for success in the business world. Fathers have become more involved in the life of the home over the years, but not enough to counter-balance the

¹¹² Tom Rainer, What Ever Happened to Sunday Evening Service, accessed June 20, 2021. <https://churchanswers.com/blog/whatever-happened-sunday-evening-services>.

¹¹³ Loehnen, Elise. "The Culture of Busyness". The Goop. Podcast audio, 2018. <https://podcasts.apple.com/in/podcast/the-culture-of-busyness/id1352546554?i=1000473852164>.

¹¹⁴ Darrell Bock and Mikel Del Rosario, "Faith, Vocation, and Women in the Workplace," *Bibliotheca sacra* 176, no. 702 (2019): 222.

increased load working mothers have borne.¹¹⁵ Christian women often look to church leaders to help them find methods of integrating their faith with their work.¹¹⁶

This difficulty is buoyed by the mentality of businesses who reward employees who “go above and beyond,” in terms of overtime and extra effort. This strenuous expectation plays against the need to be a primary caregiver in the lives of children. If this tension is not recognized and addressed within a marriage, the level of busyness can become overwhelming and cause important relationships and spiritual formation to suffer. This effect is compounded further by the job of managing the schedule of children, which often falls to the mother.¹¹⁷

The busyness that results from the expectations that arise from both work and home create a “stress contagion.” This is defined as a “spillover, in which the stresses experienced in either the work or home domain lead to stresses in the other domain. . . .”¹¹⁸ This stress can result in tension and arguments. Mothers can often feel overwhelmed and emotionally stressed as they struggle to establish “causal priority between home and work role stresses.”¹¹⁹ Mothers attempting to accomplish all their perceived daily tasks can develop a type of tunnel vision in which everything narrows, and they can only focus on the low value tasks right in front of

¹¹⁵ Loehnen, Elise. “The Culture of Busyness”. The Goop. Podcast audio, 2018.
<https://podcasts.apple.com/in/podcast/the-culture-of-busyness/id1352546554?i=1000473852164>.

¹¹⁶ Darrell Bock and Mikel Del Rosario, “Faith, Vocation, and Women in the Workplace,” *Bibliotheca sacra* 176, no. 702 (2019): 223.

¹¹⁷ Loehnen, Elise. “The Culture of Busyness”. The Goop. Podcast audio, 2018.
<https://podcasts.apple.com/in/podcast/the-culture-of-busyness/id1352546554?i=1000473852164>.

¹¹⁸ Niall Bolger and Anita DeLongis and Ronald C. Kessler, “The Contagion of Stress Across Multiple Roles,” *Journal of Marriage & Family*, vol. 51 (1989): 175.

¹¹⁹ Niall Bolger and Anita DeLongis and Ronald C. Kessler, “The Contagion of Stress Across Multiple Roles,” *Journal of Marriage & Family*, vol. 51 (1989): 176.

them.¹²⁰ The overwhelming confluence of stress and expectations have a negative impact on prioritizing spiritual formation that would create further demand on their time resources.

Counseling Difficult Cases

Secular counseling seeks to deal with difficult issues through use of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It assumes that the most foundational needs must be addressed before higher-order needs. The hierarchy begins with the basics of physiological needs and safety. Above the basic needs are the psychological needs of esteem, belongingness, and love. Finally, needs manifest in the area of self-actualization. Self-actualization is considered "achieving one's full potential, including creative activities."¹²¹

The person being counseled is asked to identify if current behaviors are addressing what they see as the need. The goal is "directly related to the behavior needing to be changed and [is] simple and measurable."¹²² However, if a person is resistant to change, this can cause a problem for therapists. Clifton Mitchell states that "Although most therapists have been trained extensively in theoretical approaches, few have had extensive training in dealing with resistance."¹²³ To deal with the resistance in this difficult conversation therapists work to learn new techniques to manage the interaction or attempt to better understand the world of the client

¹²⁰ Loehnen, Elise. "The Culture of Busyness". The Goop. Podcast audio, 2018. <https://podcasts.apple.com/in/podcast/the-culture-of-busyness/id1352546554?i=1000473852164>.

¹²¹ "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs," Simply Psychology, accessed June 14, 2021, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>.

¹²² Monique M. Santana, "Personal Theory of Brief Counseling in a High School Setting," *Georgia School Counselors Association Journal* 23, (2016): 72.

¹²³ "Managing Resistant Clients," *Counseling Today*, accessed June 14, 2021, <https://ct.counseling.org/2010/02/managing-resistant-clients/>.

in order to understand their resistance.¹²⁴ A choice can be offered to the person being counseled to continue down their current path or try a new one. Robert Wubbolding, a therapist in Cincinnati, states, “After connecting with the clients’ perceptions, their sense of external control or sense of being controlled, the counselor can proceed to inquire as to whose behavior the client can control, what choices are available and whether making a change is either possible or desirable.”¹²⁵ Mitchell reiterates, “Most therapists approach clients from the perspective of creating change. They would benefit themselves greatly if they would approach clients from the perspective of not creating resistance and let change occur as a natural result of the client exploring his or her own world.”¹²⁶

Much like the subjectivity that a secular approach takes to busyness and overscheduling, so here subjectivity drives the difficult counseling encounters. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs provides a secular framework, but behavior goals are largely individualistic and not tied to an objective worldview. Therefore a difficult conversation in a secular context is not connected to the moral framework of a religious community and therefore loses the goals and imperatives that come with that religious frame of reference.

In the Christian context, passages such as Matthew 18 call for difficult confrontations that are grounded in love for God and others. However, training on the methodology necessary to accomplish this task in everyday Christian life is lacking across the board. There is some

¹²⁴ “Managing Resistant Clients,” Counseling Today, accessed June 14, 2021, <https://ct.counseling.org/2010/02/managing-resistant-clients/>.

¹²⁵ “Managing Resistant Clients,” Counseling Today, accessed June 14, 2021, <https://ct.counseling.org/2010/02/managing-resistant-clients/>.

¹²⁶ “Managing Resistant Clients,” Counseling Today, accessed June 14, 2021, <https://ct.counseling.org/2010/02/managing-resistant-clients/>.

literature available in the area of Christian counseling¹²⁷, but implementation of these type of curricula in the teaching ministry of the local church is usually non-existent. Typical training that is given in this area is typically limited to pastoral training in seminaries. Even in pastoral counseling situations, difficult cases are often farmed out to professionals and little to no expectation for church members to be capable in this area exists.

The DNA Group in the Context of Missional Community

“Accountability groups” are a known quantity within church life. These groups often consist of approximately three to four people and are gender specific. However, the DNA groups in the Missional Community model are distinct from the traditional accountability group model in several ways. They are more biblically substantive in both form and function.

First, DNA groups are not independent groups within a community or even a local church. DNA groups are gender-specific groups of three people within the context of a missional community. A missional community is a small group (usually containing between twelve to twenty people) within a local church. It has covenanted together to gather weekly, live communally and transparently, and be on mission together to a target group in the community.

Typical accountability groups range from having no biblical or curricular focus, to having Bible memory as a centerpiece, or having a pre-made curriculum. However, DNA groups primarily use the Bible itself as a guide. This is expressed in the acronym DNA through the letter “D.” The letter “D” stands for the word “discover.” Each week the DNA group is reading, meditating, and praying through the same short passage of scripture. Each week the group gathers to discuss what they have discovered that week in the reading. The discovery is typically

¹²⁷ Stuart Scott and Heath Lambert, *Counseling the Hard Cases*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2012).

guided by questions such as “What does this passage show me about God, mankind, Jesus, and our mission?”

Traditional accountability groups contain a set list of questions which ask whether or not a participant has committed certain sins or fulfilled certain spiritual disciplines that week. However, the “N” in the acronym DNA stands for “Nurture.” Nurturing in this context refers to a form of biblical counseling. Members of the DNA group grow in the skill of learning to ask each other “heart” questions that get to the root of what they believe the Holy Spirit is teaching them through a specific passage. In this way they are encouraged not to quickly skim over any personal issues with a quick list of “yes or no” admissions, but they use questions to probe spiritual motivations and understanding. These difficult, but edifying conversations are regularly practiced and an expected part of participation in these groups.

The “A” in the acronym DNA stands for “Act.” There is accountability oversight to see that each person acts in obedient response to what they believe God has been teaching them in their Bible study and DNA counseling. Those who are involved in a DNA group have a higher degree of community by virtue of their common mission. Their time shared on mission provides opportunities to have accountability through spiritual growth being seen in action. The shared targeted mission of a missional community provides opportunity for fellow DNA members to remind each other of the encouragements and correction that they have offered to each other during their times together in the DNA group. There is authentic accountability within the context of mission.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter Three will describe the research design and methodology for the study of engagement in discipleship processes within the Green Acres missional community. The researcher's aim is to anticipate obstacles to engagement specifically within the DNA component of missional community life based on previous missional community experience. The interventions are intended to preemptively address the obstacles to engagement. The research design involves the same core group of participants both in the pre-survey and post-survey portions.

The primary focus of this qualitative phenomenological action research is focusing on the spiritual formation in the participants lives as seen through engagement in DNA groups.¹²⁸ Engagement in DNA groups were chosen as the subject of investigation for several reasons. The only failure in the researcher's previous iteration of a missional community group was failure in the women's DNA group. The other components of the missional community experience were successful. Even the multiple men's DNA groups were successful in the previous iteration. As a matter of fact, one of the men's DNA groups continued to meet independently even after the overall missional community activities ceased. Therefore investigation was made into the reasons behind the failure of the women's DNA group and serves as the starting point for the research in this project.

The other component of the missional community that may have otherwise served as subjects of investigation were the weekly gathering which is primarily used for developing relationships and as a teaching time, and the target group mission component. The target group mission component in the case of the previous missional community was a low-income

¹²⁸ Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), 20.

apartment complex in Clarkesville, Georgia. While there is certainly research that could be done on these other components (as noted in chapter five), the goal is to prevent failure of major discipleship aspects within a missional community context and therefore the women's DNA group failure was the most promising direction of study.

The missional community model is a case of irreducible complexity. There are three main components: weekly gathering, DNA groups, and mission to a target group. If any of the three components fail, the missional community suffers critical damage. If the weekly gatherings were not successful, then the participants would suffer relationally from lack of fellowship and also from lack of training in discipleship. The latter reason is especially significant because there is extensive training necessary for the creation and maintenance of a missional community group. There is training regarding the theological foundation, relational evangelism, implementation of spiritual gifts, redeeming rhythms of life for mission, etc. Even training for the other two components (DNA groups and mission to a target group) take place within the weekly missional community gathering.

On the other hand, if the mission to the target group were to fail, then the missional community would become too inwardly focused. They would have time for relationship building and the heart shepherding that occurs in DNA groups but would lose the "mission" focus of missional community and the name would be a misnomer. The modern church already largely consists of Sunday School classes that fit this unfortunate paradigm.

If the DNA component of missional communities fails, then while surface-level fellowship may occur, and mission may happen, hidden sin and lack of transparency would lead to either withdrawal from the group eventually or continuation for improper motives. The DNA component was chosen as the focus of this phenomenological action research because it is the

researcher's contention that the opportunity for the most dynamic spiritual growth is within the DNA group context. It is within the DNA group that an individual's personal spiritual struggles are not only revealed but addressed through methods of biblical counseling under the loving guidance of two fellow Christians. This environment does not allow for hiding and therefore causes natural spiritual growth through active individual engagement.

This qualitative research is both surveyed and interpreted through natural discipleship language that suits this paradigm. The model uses certain phrases and ideas that permeate the model's curriculum. These come primarily from the work of Jeff Vanderstelt¹²⁹ and the SOMA network of churches.¹³⁰ These include the following environments of discipleship: one-on-one, life in community, and life on mission. They also include the following rhythms of life used on mission: eating, celebrating, recreating, listening, story, and bless.

The quantitative aspect of the research involved assigning numerical values corresponding to survey responses. A Likert scale rated one through five is used for the ranking of responses. These are tallied in each of the three sections surveyed and percentages of increase or decrease are compared and analyzed. Chapter four contains an analysis of those results.

This qualitative phenomenological action research was focused on Green Acres missional community participants and asking Green Acres missional community participants survey questions in three different categories of spiritual development. There were questions regarding busyness, willingness to have difficult conversations, and biblical competency. These survey questions were intended to highlight the three likely obstacles participants would be encountering as they engage DNA groups. The survey process not only provided an opportunity

¹²⁹ Jeff Vanderstelt, *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

¹³⁰ "Soma", Soma Network of Church, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://wearesoma.com/>.

for the Green Acres missional community participants to evaluate themselves but also to experience preventative help in the specified areas. The goal of the research was to prevent DNA group failures due to lack of engagement and therefore to prevent missional community failure as a whole. The interventions allowed for group discussions and reflection on these three respective obstacles and individual and communal awareness of what otherwise could be subconscious or unrecognized frustrations. Completion of the pre-survey and post-survey took about 15 minutes respectively.

The survey questions were intentionally crafted to create a well-rounded but precise picture of the aspects of each of the three specified obstacles. The high-quality nature of the survey questions is regarded as more beneficial than a higher quantity of questions or participants.¹³¹ There were 11 survey participants in this project which falls squarely within the recommended range of 5 – 25 participants.¹³²

The survey given for the pretest was identical to the survey given for the posttest. The survey was divided into three sections. The first section was related to busyness / overscheduling; the second section was related to willingness to have a difficult conversation; the third section was related to biblical competency. Participants were not given a time limit to complete the survey and were allowed to remain anonymous in order to promote the most truthful responses.

Development of the statements of the survey began by deciding to use a Likert scale. Instead of using questions, declarative sentences were used. Each section had between four and

¹³¹ Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), 85.

¹³² John W. Creswell, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998).

five statements. Sentences were purposefully kept short, yet clear and meaningful. An attempt was made to give statements to be ranked that covered the perimeter of the topic. Sentences were carefully written in order to not be ambiguous.

The first section about busyness / overscheduling covered proactive intentionality of planning, prioritization of kingdom priorities in planning, cultural strains of children's extracurricular activities, and reactive adjustments to deficiencies. This section contained four total statements. Participants were asked to total the points under each score ranking. These questions addressed primarily the issue of awareness. Because busyness / overscheduling is so prevalent as a problem, oftentimes people do not take time to evaluate their current plans and behaviors.

The second section about willingness to have difficult conversations covered application of Christian worldview, hamartiology as it relates to biblical counseling, pneumatology as it relates to biblical counseling, the sufficiency of Scripture, and the use of prayer in sanctification. The section contained five total statements. Just as in section one, participants were asked to total the points under each score ranking. All of these declarative statements centered around the activity of the respondent in a biblical counseling (DNA group) scenarios. In order to rank themselves highly on the Likert scale, participants would have to be willing to act in ways that would sometimes require confronting sin which is by nature a difficult conversation.

The third section about biblical competency covered reading the Bible, meditation, hermeneutics, theology, anthropology, and life application. This section contained four total statements. As in the previous sections, participants were asked to total the points under each score ranking. All of the declarative statements in section three related to activities that are

necessary for biblical competency. The section is well rounded because it does not stop at probing surface level activities but engages critical thinking skills.

“Bloom’s taxonomy was designed with six levels to promote high-order thinking. The six levels were: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. (The taxonomy’s levels were later revised as remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, revising, and creating.)”¹³³ This third section of the survey particularly extended across Bloom’s taxonomy. The first statement about reading is on the knowledge level. Mediation relates to understanding / comprehension. The last statement directly relates to application (even using the term). The second questions about authorial intent relates to analysis. The third question requires synthesis in the theological categories of theology and anthropology.

Research Design

The impetus for the research done on the Green Acres missional community is the anecdotal evidence collected by the researcher over years of church leadership and ministry. This anecdotal evidence is supported by statistical analysis. The overall theme of the research is that the modern, individualistic approach to the Christian-life does not lead to effective levels of evangelism and discipleship.¹³⁴ Research shows that the majority of Christians have not shared how to become a Christian with anyone in the past six months.

¹³³ “Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in Education”, ThoughtCo., accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.thoughtco.com/higher-order-thinking-skills-hots-education-3111297>.

¹³⁴ “Evangelism More Prayed for Than Practiced by Churchgoers,” Lifeway Research, accessed December 12, 2021, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/04/23/evangelism-more-prayed-for-than-practiced-by-churchgoers/>.

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Churches that have investigated the amount of actual evangelism through processes like the Discipleship Pathway Assessment¹³⁶ have discovered that churchgoers have a desire to evangelize and engage in discipleship, but a stark gap exists between that expressed desire and real-world application.¹³⁷

The researcher believes that a failure exists, not primarily in the desire of the authentic Christian, but in the lack of a small-group mission component in the modern church. Current evangelistic opportunities are often seen as needing to occur reactively in the everyday life of the individual, rather than proactively in the life rhythms of a missional community. The researcher

¹³⁵ “Evangelism More Prayed for Than Practiced by Churchgoers,” Lifeway Research, accessed December 12, 2021, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/04/23/evangelism-more-prayed-for-than-practiced-by-churchgoers/>.

¹³⁶ Discipleship Pathway Assessment, accessed December 12, 2021, <http://discipleshippathwayassessment.com>.

¹³⁷ “Evangelism More Prayed for Than Practiced by Churchgoers,” Lifeway Research, accessed December 12, 2021, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/04/23/evangelism-more-prayed-for-than-practiced-by-churchgoers/>.

believes that the unrealistic nature of desire for community-impacting levels of evangelism coming from solely individual efforts affects even the desire to pray for opportunities. More than a quarter of those surveyed by Lifeway say they rarely or never pray for those opportunities.

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These low numbers that reference evangelism are part of a larger statistically negative movement among Southern Baptist Convention churches as shown by 2016 SBC statistics. Former Lifeway president Thom Rainer notes that “(t)hose included membership, average worship attendance, baptisms and missions giving.”¹³⁹ The rate of baptisms in particular have fallen eight of the last ten years investigated by the study.

¹³⁸ “Evangelism More Prayed for Than Practiced by Churchgoers,” Lifeway Research, accessed December 12, 2021, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/04/23/evangelism-more-prayed-for-than-practiced-by-churchgoers/>.

¹³⁹ “ACP: More Churches Reported: Baptisms Decline,” Baptist Press, accessed December 11, 2021, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/acp-more-churches-reported-baptisms-decline/>.

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¹⁴⁰ Southern Baptists look to build momentum despite baptism and worship declines, Lifeway Newsroom, accessed December 11, 2021, <https://blog.lifeway.com/newsroom/2016/06/07/southern-baptists-look-to-build-momentum-despite-baptism-and-worship-declines/>.

It is important to note that the ACP report notes an increase in churches. This is the result of new church plants. It is a known correlation that church plants are more active in the area of evangelism and discipleship. On average, Southern Baptist churches baptize 3.4 people per 100 resident members. However, church plants average 11.7 per 100.¹⁴¹ Church plants are numerically small and share the same momentum factor as missional communities. This momentum comes in part from group outreach as opposed to only individualistic mission. Thom Rainer notes, “People underestimate the importance of momentum. It only takes a few people in each church, being intentional about sharing their faith, for some new momentum to build.”¹⁴² Small groups, like missional communities, are indicative of the “few people” noted by Rainer who build momentum in a local church. Local churches continue that momentum to cause impact on a community level.

The research done on the Green Acres missional community was borne out of the researcher’s experience with his previous missional community. The researcher’s previous community was known as the Habersham Missional Community. The Habersham Missional Community existed for just under two years and successfully implemented all three categories of missional communities. Those three categories are:

1. Gathering weekly for discipleship teaching / training
2. DNA group meetings
3. Target group mission

The area of missional community life that was only partially successful was the DNA group that was comprised of women. The two DNA groups that were comprised of men

¹⁴¹ Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, *Viral Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 25.

¹⁴² “ACP: More Churches Reported: Baptisms Decline,” Baptist Press, accessed December 11, 2021, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/acp-more-churches-reported-baptisms-decline/>.

successfully engaged all participants. However, the researcher inquired into the problems experienced by the women in the missional community. The qualitative research was done through informal interviews and observational assessments. The three obstacles to engagement the researcher found among the women of the Habersham Missional Community are as follows:

1. Busyness and overscheduling. Overscheduling was the formal cause in the lack of attendance to DNA group meetings and was tangentially related to busyness generally insofar as busyness refers to a system of triaging tasks in a way that does not prioritize spiritual disciplines and development.
2. An unwillingness to have the difficult conversations necessary in an environment created specifically for authentic spiritual growth through both encouragement and loving correction. This was due in part to a stated unwillingness to endanger pleasant relations between participants that had an additional familial relationship component. While that particular instance of having a familial relationship in the Habersham Missional Community would be less likely to be the case in other DNA groups, it still presented an obstacle that has general ramifications for DNA groups as a whole.
3. A lack of biblical competency. The same DNA group that had difficulty with reasons 1 and 2 stated above also encountered the obstacle of inadequacy in using the Bible alone, apart from premade curricula, as the primary tool for DNA group meetings. Often the Bible passage would be read before and during the group's meeting time but there existed an inability to apply general hermeneutical methods to the biblical passage during the time of its writing and its application to modern life. This resulted in frustration and a diversion of conversation to trivial matters which ultimately were considered by the participants to be unworthy of their time.

These three obstacles led the researcher to the decision to address the obstacles within the Green Acres missional community in a preemptive fashion by performing an intervention for each obstacle early in the stages of DNA group meetings in the Green Acres missional community.

In order to develop a baseline for these three categories, the researcher used a survey method in the form of a Likert scale. The survey was given printed on paper, and participants recorded on the surveys with pencils. Each obstacle was separated in multiple statements that addressed the issue and was stated in a positive and declaratory form. Although the missional community is comprised of multiple married couples, each individual took the survey separately.

Instead of addressing busyness and overscheduling from a negative perspective, the researcher gave statements to inquire to what extent participants met positive standards of scheduling and prioritizing time. The positive statements approach the subject from various angles. The part of the survey labeled “Section #1,” gave the statements to the participants regarding busyness and overscheduling to rate on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. The ratings were as follows:

1. Not at All
2. Not Very Often
3. Occasionally
4. Almost Always
5. Always

The statements regarding busyness and overscheduling are as follows:

1. My weekly activity is generally the result of intentional planning.
2. I consider kingdom work as a category to be considered during my weekly scheduling.

3. My family's extracurricular activity schedule takes precedence in our weekly schedule.
4. When I discover regular neglect of discipleship activities in my schedule, I try to adjust my scheduling goals.

The part of the survey labeled "Section #2" addressed the concept of a willingness to have difficult conversations. These statements are made in a positive manner. Participants rated themselves on a Likert survey in the same way as they did in "Section #1." All of the statements in this section contain sentences that begin with, "When giving advice to another Christian. . . ." This phrase is important because it frames the context as that of one Christian counseling another Christian. This was put into place since addressing an unbeliever would necessitate a different approach. The statements regarding being willing to have difficult conversations are as follows:

1. When giving advice to another Christian, I help them apply the gospel as the primary lens through which the Christian heart is to function.
2. When giving advice to another Christian, I trace the sin I see revealed in their life back to their flesh's desire to operate in its default pattern and help them understand and confront it.
3. When giving advice to another Christian, I help them to not look to self-willpower for lasting change, but rather the Holy Spirit.
4. When giving advice to another Christian, I use the Scriptures as the sufficient source for the truth needed in their advancing in godliness.
5. When giving advice to another believer, I lead them to use prayer as a means for God to conform their mind to His will.

The part of the survey labeled “Section #3” addressed the concept of biblical competency. These statements are made in a positive manner. Participants rated themselves on a Likert survey in the same way as they did in “Section 1” and “Section 2.” The statements regarding biblical competency are as follows:

1. I read the Bible weekly and personally meditate upon what I read.
2. When reading a Bible passage for personal meditation, I attempt to discover the author’s original meaning to his original audience.
3. When reading a Bible passage for personal meditation, I consider what that passage reveals about who man is and who God is.
4. When reading a Bible passage for personal meditation, I consider how its basic principle(s) apply to everyday life.

Once the data for the pre-survey and post-survey were collected, the researcher recorded the data into digital form. The data on the pre-survey was compiled in such a way as to represent overall percentages for each question in each of the three sections. The same process was completed for the post-survey. The researcher then compared the percentage totals in the pre-survey and post-survey in order to analyze possible changes in the percentages due to the intervention process.

Research Methodology

The following were the steps in the methodology to facilitate the Green Acres Missional Community surveys of spiritual formation as they relate to obstacles to DNA engagement:

1. The selection of potential missional community participants

2. A series of classroom training sessions with potential missional community participants to be held at Green Acres Baptist Church. This was designed to be a series of eight lessons correlated to the eight chapters in *Designed to Lead* by Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck.¹⁴³ This series of classroom trainings would be an approximately eight-hour commitment. The training time included the following topics:
 - a. Missing Leadership in the Church
 - b. The Conviction for Leadership
 - c. Leadership in the Image of God
 - d. Leadership for the Kingdom of God
 - e. Theology of Culture
 - f. Transforming Culture
 - g. Discipleship and Leadership Development
 - h. Pipelines and Pathways
3. Missional community selection process. The researcher led an informational meeting in which the group that was newly trained in church leadership pathways learned about a future missional community pilot group.

¹⁴³ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016).



The informational meeting was held on Sunday, January 31st, 2021. It was held in the lower fellowship hall at Green Acres Baptist Church. A light meal was served, but childcare was not provided. Participants ate around rectangular tables for the meal, but then realigned seating so that they all faced the presenter and television. The meeting was co-led by pastor Dr. Cameron Ford and Charles Kelly. Dr. Ford summarized how the leadership pipeline study had led us up to the point of this informational meeting. The meeting was then turned over to the researcher who gave a presentation about missional communities. A PowerPoint was shown that explained the missional community model and cast a vision for its implementation at Green Acres Baptist Church. The informational meeting was attended by approximately twenty people. Participants were given a handout that they filled out with relevant information during the presentation. The first part of the presentation gave a theological foundation for this

model and the second half of the presentation dealt with its practical implementation. Some of those in attendance had previously attended the leadership pipeline class taught by Dr. Ford. Some of the informational meeting participants (particular the wives) had not previously been exposed to any of the relevant information. A portion of the originally trained group agreed to participate in the forming of the Green Acres missional community. A variety of factors caused the final number of permanent participants to be twelve adults.

4. The Green Acres missional community went through fourteen units of training. This training was based primarily on the work of Jeff Vanderstelt¹⁴⁴ and included the following topics:

- a. How to Form a Missional Community
- b. Disciple Making Environments
- c. Gospel Power
- d. Gospel Motivated Living
- e. Living from Your Gospel Identity
- f. Everyday Rhythms
- g. Hospitality in a Missional Community
- h. Spirit Dependence
- i. Spiritual Warfare
- j. Spiritual Gifts in a Missional Community
- k. DNA Group Training
- l. The Bible in a Missional Community

¹⁴⁴ Jeff Vanderstelt, *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

- m. Prayer in a Missional Community
 - n. Target Group Selection Criteria
5. DNA intensive training. The training consisted in covering the “discover, nurture, act” paradigm. The “discover” portion involves learning to read, pray, and meditate on the Scriptures as well as asking appropriate hermeneutical questions. Participants are to discover what the Holy Spirit is teaching them through the passage. The “nurture” portion is learning to do biblical counseling through leading questioning. During one DNA intensive training session, participants were given case studies and guided through the proper biblical nurture responses. The “act” portion is learning to hold each DNA participant accountable to action steps of obedience to what the Holy Spirit is teaching.
 6. Pre-Survey is administered. The researcher conducted a pre-survey with the missional community participants. All missional community participants are de facto participants in DNA groups and therefore qualified for the pre-survey. This pre-survey was conducted on a Sunday evening during the regularly scheduled meeting hours of the missional community.
 7. DNA grouping. The participants in the missional community were surveyed to determine possible meeting times for potential DNA groups. Participants were asked to list their top three choices for what day(s) and time(s) would best suit their schedule for meeting with a DNA group. Once all data was received, the researcher created four groups based primarily on scheduling preferences and secondarily on personality dynamics. There were four total DNA groups formed. Two of the groups were comprised of three men each and two of the groups were comprised of three women each.

8. DNA groups began meeting. All four DNA groups began meeting weekly.
9. Interventions began. After a period of three months, the intervention lessons were administered. The lessons were taught in the following order with each taking the place of one weekly lesson:
 - a. Busyness / Overscheduling
 - b. Difficult Conversations
 - c. Biblical Competency
10. Post-Survey was Administered. The post-survey was administered several weeks after the final intervention session. Some participants took the post-survey in a paper format, others via an online format. The survey took approximately fifteen minutes for the participants to complete. All surveys were completed and returned to the researcher for compilation of results and analysis.
11. Analysis and debriefing with missional community. The missional community discussed the results of the surveys and considered the impact and recommendations that came as a result of the project.

Intervention Presentations

The intervention came in the form of three teaching sessions approximately three months after DNA groups began meeting. Each teaching section reflected one of the three obstacles to DNA engagement. The presentations were in the form of a Microsoft PowerPoint. Missional community members had a paper version of the presentation and the ability to take notes during the lessons. The lessons were interactive and open for dialogue.

The intervention lesson on busyness and overscheduling was structured as follows:

1. Reflective questions. The four positive statements from Section 1 of the survey were restated as a question. For example, the statement “My regular activities happen as the result of intentional planning,” was given as “Do my regular activities happen as a result of intentional planning?” The missional community was given time to reflect on their individual answers.

2. Facts about busyness and overscheduling. The following series of pertinent facts about the negative effects of busyness and overscheduling were given:

- Overscheduling can result in anxiety because the central nervous system does not get a sufficient chance to calm down and relax.
- Internalizing stress can compromise the immune system.
- Burnout can lead to a lack of desire to engage in important discipleship work.
- Busyness / overscheduling can lead to a shortened attention span which works against the ability to pray and meditate on Scripture.
- Busyness / overscheduling can model misplaced priorities to children to the neglect of their future spiritual development.
- Ten symptoms of “hurried sickness”: irritability, hypersensitivity, restlessness, workaholism (or just nonstop activity), emotional numbness, out-of-order priorities, lack of care for your body, escapist behaviors, slippage of spiritual disciplines, and isolation.

These negative consequences covered personal health, personal discipleship, and parenting.

3. The spiritual dangers of busyness and overscheduling. The researcher presented three dangers of busyness to avoid as well as a discussion of the manifestations of pride involved in busyness based on the work of Dr. Kevin DeYoung.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy: A (Mercifully) Short Book About a (Really) Big Problem* (Wheaton: IL: Crossway, 2013).

4. Quotes from scholarship related to busyness and overscheduling. The researcher also provided relevant quotes from leading scholars on this topic. These quotes covered busyness as it relates to parenting,¹⁴⁶ being counterproductive,¹⁴⁷ physical health,¹⁴⁸ modeling Jesus,¹⁴⁹ systemizing tasks,¹⁵⁰ selflessness,¹⁵¹ and cyclic behavior.¹⁵²

5. Corrective truths related to busyness and overscheduling. Three corrective truths were offered in order to promote healthy time management and prioritization.¹⁵³

6. Galinsky survey. The “Ask the Children” survey by Ellen Galinsky was discussed. This survey demonstrated that what children want more than an increase in the quantity of time with parents is a decrease in the stress level of their parents. Children of overly busy parents are suffering from “secondhand stress” according to Galinsky.¹⁵⁴

7. Using MC / DNA groups to assist in a healthy balance. Application was made to missional community life with special reference to DNA groups. The group discussed how

¹⁴⁶ Dustin Willis and Aaron Coe, *Life on Mission: Joining the Everyday Mission of God* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 153.

¹⁴⁷ Cal Newport, *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 201.

¹⁴⁸ John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2019), 19, 22, 23, 94, 97.

¹⁴⁹ Larry Wayne and Charles H. Hummel, *Tyranny of the Urgent!* (Westmont, IL: IVP Press, 2013), 6, 10, 12-13, 14.

¹⁵⁰ David Allen, *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2015).

¹⁵¹ Matt Perman, *What's Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 28-29.

¹⁵² Gilles Lipovetsky, *Hyper-Modern Times* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005), 22.

¹⁵³ Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy: A (Mercifully) Short Book About a (Really) Big Problem* (Wheaton: IL: Crossway, 2013).

¹⁵⁴ Ellen Galinsky, *Ask the Children: The Breakthrough Study that Reveals How to Succeed at Work and Parenting* (New York City, NY: Harper Paperback, 2000).

DNA groups provide a regular, scheduled rhythm of healthy discipleship. DNA groups also are opportunities for participants to avail themselves of biblical teaching that focuses on increasingly worshipping Jesus in the area of life schedules. Finally, DNA groups are opportunities for two other Christians to speak wisdom into their weekly planning and life routines.

The intervention lesson on having a willingness to have difficult conversation was structured as follows:

1. Reflective questions. The four positive statements from Section 2 of the survey were restated as a question. For example, the statement “When giving advice to another Christian, I help them apply the gospel as the primary lens through which the Christian heart is to function,” was given as “When giving advice to another Christian, do you help them apply the gospel as the primary lens through which the Christian heart is to function?” The missional community was given time to reflect on their individual answers.

2. The following facts about engaging in difficult conversations were given:

- People are often hesitant to engage in difficult conversations because they do not want to deal with the relational consequences.
- Not engaging in the actual issues for the sake of pleasantness may appear loving, but that is superficial; actual love cares more for the person than maintaining pleasantness.
- Fear of engaging in difficult conversations creates relationships that are neither authentic nor constructive.
- People often avoid difficult conversations for four reasons:
 - They fear being disliked.
 - In order to avoid confrontation.
 - Being afraid of looking foolish.

- Being unsure you are the right person for the job.

A series of pertinent facts about the negative effects of not being willing to have difficult conversations were discussed. These facts covered relational consequences, superficial pleasantness, and inauthentic and non-constructive relationships.

3. Quotes from scholarship related to being willing to have difficult conversations. The researcher also provided relevant quotes from leading scholars on this topic. These quotes covered characteristics of biblical community,¹⁵⁵ self-awareness,¹⁵⁶ contra-individualism,¹⁵⁷ micro form of church life,¹⁵⁸ benefiting the corporate body,¹⁵⁹ obedience as discipleship structures,¹⁶⁰ administering discipline,¹⁶¹ spiritual maturity co-ops,¹⁶² false peace,¹⁶³ and emotional maturity.¹⁶⁴

4. Using MC / DNA groups to assist in healthy balance. A discussion was had about how DNA groups can assist in providing an environment for difficult conversations and

¹⁵⁵ Dustin Willis and Aaron Coe, *Life on Mission: Joining the Everyday Mission of God* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 87-88.

¹⁵⁶ Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 117.

¹⁵⁷ Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 151.

¹⁵⁸ Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 99.

¹⁵⁹ Adam McClendon and Matt Kimbrough, *Square One: Back to the Basics* (Little Elm, TX: eLectio Publishing, 2018), 129-130.

¹⁶⁰ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1988), 159.

¹⁶¹ Mark Dever, *9 Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004).

¹⁶² Thabiti Anyabwile, *What is a Healthy Church Member?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008).

¹⁶³ John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2019), 32.

¹⁶⁴ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017).

encouraging others to be willing to have difficult conversations by speaking the truth in love.¹⁶⁵ DNA groups have as a known, explicit guiding principle that we give each other permission to speak the truth in love. Because none of us are perfect, we should expect loving confrontation from others and expect to love others enough to have it with them. DNA groups are opportunities to engage in difficult conversations in such a way as participants are very transparent in that environment and can know each other's true motivation.

The intervention lesson on biblical competency was structured as follows:

1. Reflective questions. The four positive statements from Section 3 of the survey were restated as a question. For example, the statement "I read the Bible weekly and personally meditate upon what it says," was given as "Do you read the Bible weekly and personally meditate upon what it says?" The missional community was given time to reflect on their individual answers.

2. The following facts about biblical competency were given:

- According to the Gallup polling organization, 92% of American households have at least one Bible and 59% read it occasionally.
- 35% of Americans say they never read the Bible, which is up from 25% at the report's inception in 2011. Ten percent in nine years. 60% of Americans read the Bible less than five times per year.

A series of pertinent facts about the negative effects of not being biblically competent were discussed. These facts covered percentages of Americans that have at least once Bible and read it occasionally, percentage of Americans who never read the Bible and the change in those statistics over the last ten years.

¹⁶⁵ Eph 4:15, ESV.

3. Scriptural support for biblical competency. Various scriptural passages were given to demonstrate that Jesus expected that his followers would read the Scriptures, the power of God's Word, the work of God's Word, and necessary repentance for neglecting God's Word.

4. Understanding contextual analysis. An explanation was given for historical / cultural context, literary context, and narrative context using the explanations of NT Wright.¹⁶⁶ Time was spent discussing the idea of studying a passage from the era and community in which it was written. The three particular types of contexts covered by NT Wright were:

- Historical / Cultural Context – What is going on “in the background.”
 - In the Gospels, for example, it's helpful to understand the basics of what it was like to be a Jew in the 1st century under Roman oppression. When reading Paul's letters, a general understanding of the kinds of issues the early churches faced frames everything in a new light.
 - Community orientation (rather than individualism), the role and status of women, cultural norms of slavery and war, the Jewish themes of exodus, exile, Temple, Messiah, and more. These are all things to continually educate ourselves on and become aware of as we read.
- Literary Context – Playing by the author's rules.
 - The Bible is full of different types of literature, and as with all literature, the author has composed it with expectations for how it should be engaged. So it's helpful to understand the basic rules of Hebrew poetry. We must also understand the underlying purposes of apocalyptic literature found in Daniel and Revelation.

¹⁶⁶ N.T. Wright Online, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.ntwrightonline.org/>

If we know how ancient letters work, we notice that when Paul skips the traditional greeting at the beginning of Galatians, that is a sign he is disgruntled.

- Narrative Context – Knowing where we are in the story.
 - Some people may bristle at the use of “story” when referring to the Bible, as it can conjure up ideas of fairy tales. But it does the Bible a disservice if we view it simply as a rulebook, a guidebook, or, as some have said, Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth.
 - More than anything, the Bible is a library of books that come together to tell the big, beautiful story of God’s redemption of all things. It’s a story that moves and progresses as it goes along, with its center and turning point found in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.
 - Since things change as the story develops, it’s important to know where we are in the story. There are several frameworks that explain how the story is structured. One of them shows the Bible as a 4-Act Drama. Try reading with this framework in mind, always locating the passage within God’s grand story of restoration.

5. Community strengthens Bible engagement. A discussion was had over how when relational church engagement goes up, so does Scriptural engagement. Community engagement in Scripture reading allows us to gain insights from others. This opportunity keeps troubling passages from remaining unaddressed in our minds. Community involvement also allows us to draw from the experiences, knowledge, and applications of others in our community, as well as allowing the text the opportunity to mold and shape us as a community.

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6. Quotes from scholarship related to biblical competency. The researcher also provided relevant quotes from leading scholars on this topic.¹⁶⁸

7. Steps on how to apply the Bible in everyday life. An article from Conrad Mbewe was discussed, which covered what questions to consider in Bible reading. These questions covered truth about the Triune God, examples, commands, doctrinal adjustments, sin to forsake, promises to claim, and relation to Jesus.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ “Churchgoers Express Confidence and Confusion Over the Bible,” Lifeway Research, accessed, November 18, 2021, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2020/07/29/churchgoers-express-confidence-and-confusion-over-the-bible/>.

¹⁶⁸ Donald Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life: Spiritual Disciplines for the Overwhelmed* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2013).

¹⁶⁹ “How to Apply the Bible in Daily Life,” ESV Study Bible Online, accessed, November 18, 2021, <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/how-to-apply-the-bible-in-daily-life/>.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The focus of the qualitative phenomenological action research was to address obstacles to engagement in DNA groups in the GABC missional community. The obstacles addressed were those discovered by the researcher's involvement in his previous missional community. This was accomplished by initiating DNA groups in the GABC missional community and addressing the obstacles preemptively through intervention lessons. A presurvey and postsurvey were administered to assess changes in behaviors due to the intervention. These surveys consisted of three sections and addressed the three obstacles of busyness, difficult conversations, and biblical competency.

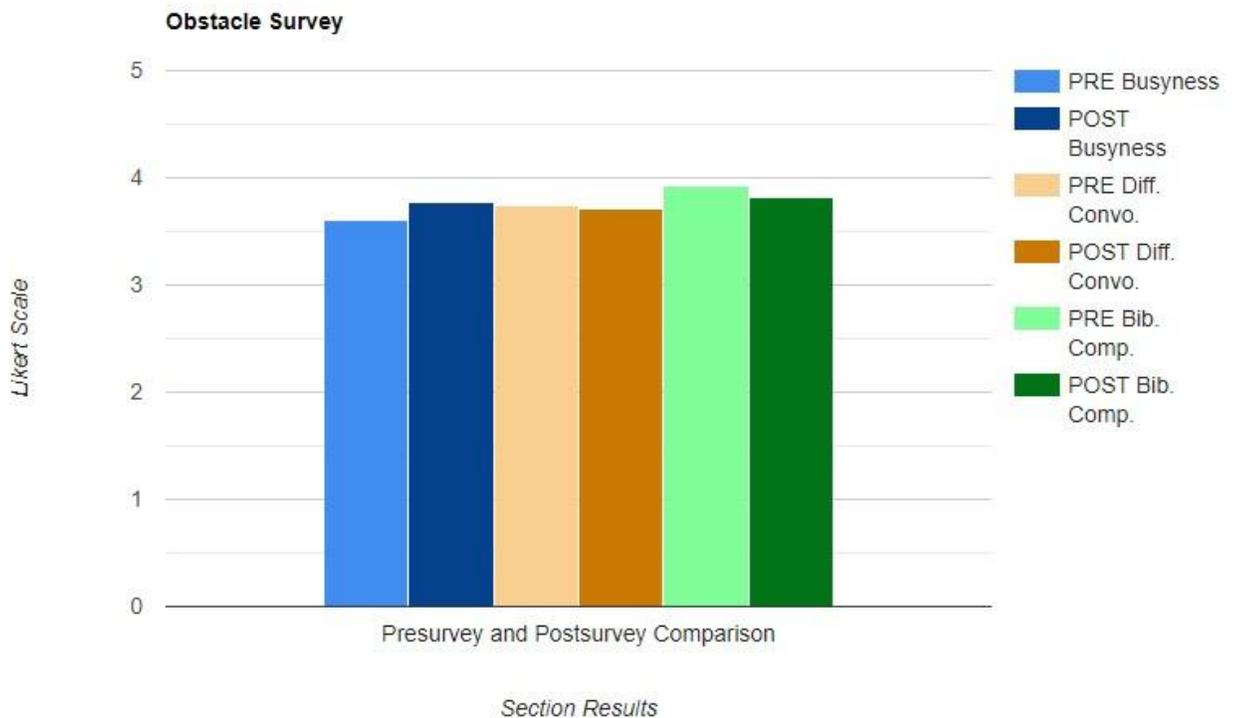
This project did not aim to eliminate these three obstacles entirely. The obstacles are too endemic to the human condition and pervasive in society to be eliminated in a single intervention project; however, the project aimed at lessening the obstacles to the point that they would no longer create a danger of DNA group failure through lack of engagement.

Review of the Survey Data

The presurvey was administered before DNA groups were formed, but after the GABC missional community was formed. The postsurvey was administered four months after the initiation of DNA groups and after all three interventions. The presurvey was administered on paper during a Sunday evening gathering of the missional community. Both the presurvey and postsurvey were completed anonymously. The researcher tracked surveys through anonymous numbers and letters. The postsurvey was conducted partly on paper surveys and partly online. The online surveys were identical to the paper surveys. The online surveys became necessary

due to scheduling difficulties and a desire to have all participants complete the postsurvey during the same period of time. Having the postsurvey completed by all participants during the same general time period prevented an additional variable of “time for implementation” from being introduced into the results.

The surveys were comprised of three sections. Each of these sections corresponded to either busyness / overscheduling, willingness to have difficult conversations, and biblical competency. A Likert scale ranging from one to five was used to by the participants to mark their level of agreement. The scores from the surveys were aggregated according to section. These scores were then averaged so that the section averages between the presurvey and postsurvey could be compared and analyzed. The bar chart below demonstrates the result of the surveys.

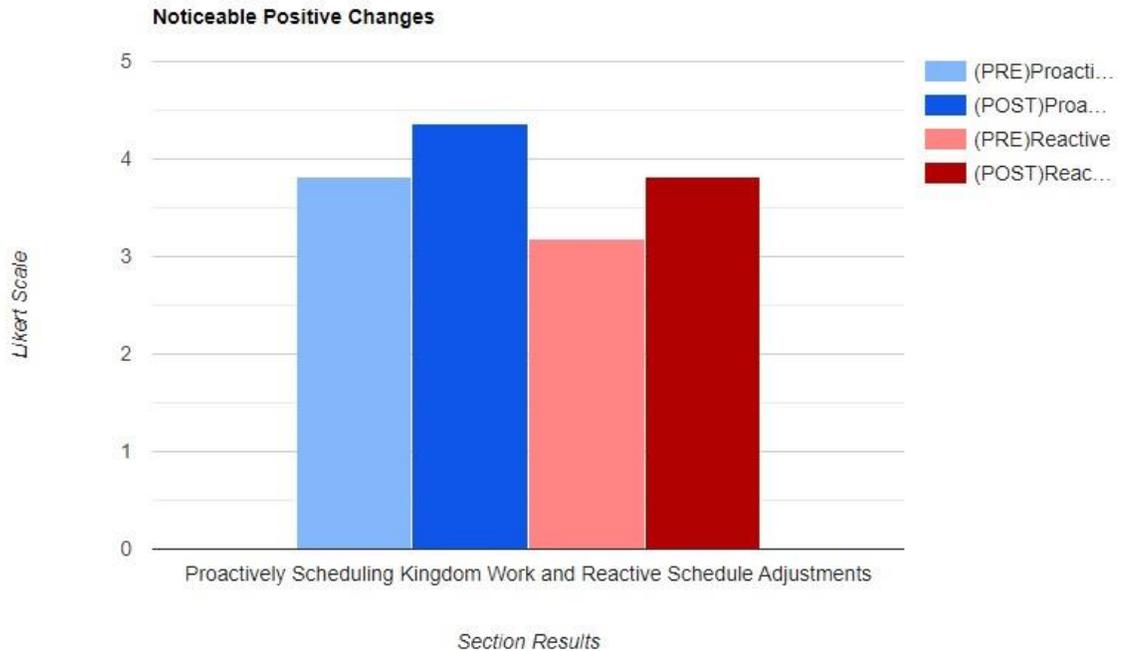


[Image – Created by Charles Kelly]

A comparison of the averages indicates that there was no substantial change in scores in any of the sections between the presurvey and post survey. The averages were so close that any difference is negligible and within the margin of error. When looked at as an entire survey, the presurvey scores average out to 3.760 and the postsurvey scores average out to 3.766.

Section #1 contained the statements on busyness and overscheduling. That section showed only a slight increase from 3.61 to 3.77. Section #1 showed the largest change of any of the three sections and the only positive change. Section #2 contained the statements on willingness to have a difficult conversation. The section #2 postsurvey saw a decrease in average score from 3.74 to 3.71. Section #3 contained the statements regarding biblical competency. The section #3 postsurvey saw a decrease in average score from 3.93 to 3.82.

A breakdown of the section score averages reveals that there were two particular statements on the survey found to have a somewhat noticeable positive increase. The first of these two statements refer to the proactive approach to scheduling. The second statement refers to the reactive aspect of adjusting personal scheduling when a deficiency is noticed. Both of these statements came from section #1 on busyness and overscheduling. The statement, “I consider kingdom work as a category to be considered during my weekly schedule,” increased from 3.82 on the presurvey to 4.36 on the postsurvey. The statement, “When I discover regular neglect of discipleship activities in my schedule, I try to adjust my scheduling goals,” increased from 3.18 to 3.82. The chart below demonstrates the result of these two noticeable improvements.



[Image – Created by Charles Kelly]

Moving from Information to Transformation

The comparison of pre-survey and post-survey results demonstrate negligible change because teaching is insufficient to create lasting change. Teaching promotes awareness and lays the groundwork for beneficial practice, but only through implementation in community does lasting transformation take place. This was especially true in this particular project because the participants were already Christians who affirmed the information presented in the intervention presentations. There was no need for a shift in paradigm, rather facilitation of new practices in community. The interventions lacked the practice component which therefore explains the lack of desired behavioral transformation.

Properly prioritizing kingdom work in scheduling, having difficult conversations, and biblical counseling are skill-based disciplines that are learned through experience. Student drivers have to study a driver’s manual before they take a driver’s test, but they would not

become good at driving until they had significant experience driving an actual car. In the same way, practice of the aforementioned disciplines needs to arise from actual life and community in order to have measurable change.

One element of change is in regard to remembering aspects of these skills. When people do something themselves, they remember better. For instance, the practical work of biblical counseling in DNA groups promotes experiential learning. While DNA participants may not remember the steps of the “discover-nurture-act” process through one lesson, they are more likely to remember them if they practice them weekly with others. This is why sports teams practice instead of reading a book, and it is why measurable change in discipleship practices comes through personal implementation. Practical work completes theory and provides motivation to press forward with the discipline.¹⁷⁰

This fact practically applied to the local church would result in an analysis of the percentage of discipleship training that is limited solely to classroom teaching. If the percentage of discipleship efforts in a local church are exhaustively educational, it could be expected that measurable change in behavior would mirror the negligible gains found in this research project. This is not to say that teaching should be precluded, but rather only the initial step in discipleship development.

Discipleship engagement suffers when the teaching component is not married to practical application, and this unhealthy balance can result from a deficiency in either direction. A behavioral approach that lacks proper teaching / training will result in poor performance at best and lack of engagement due to insecurity at worst. For instance, if a church promotes a “Who’s

¹⁷⁰ Manish Ramnani, “Theoretical Knowledge Vs Practical Application,” Vivekananda Education Society Institute of Management, accessed December 30, 2021. <https://www.vesim.ves.ac.in/vesimblog/student-blog/185-theoretical-knowledge-vs-practical-application.html>.

Your One?”¹⁷¹ campaign without training church members in evangelism and discipleship there would be a lack of efficiency in the results. On the other hand, a class on evangelism techniques without field experience would likely result in few change-of-life-patterns.

Reflective Transparency

The survey results demonstrated negligible change after the teaching interventions and a short time period; however, the effort was made within a missional community model that contains the elements necessary for eventual measurable change. The obstacles were addressed in presentations during the weekly gathering of the missional community, but these obstacles will also be incorporated into the DNA sessions for person reflection and the missional component going forward. These communal and missional elements make the likelihood of change over the long-term a likely result.

The last element in each intervention presentation was a challenge to each of the four DNA groups which comprise the missional community. The challenge was to use the lesson from the intervention as the topic for discussion in the next DNA meeting. The context of the DNA meeting would allow for participants to discuss their own thoughts and challenges related to busyness, willingness to have difficult conversations, and biblical competency. This discussion with the DNA group would end with the “act” component of the DNA model in which participants would agree to hold each other accountable to implement the interventions in the future. Because the post-survey was given soon after the last intervention, development of the necessary practices had not yet occurred. However, the DNA component provides the opportunity for the transparency necessary for honest reflection. Dealing transparently with the three obstacles comes both in the participant honestly assessing their own standing with these

¹⁷¹ “Who’s Your One?”, accessed December 30, 2021. <https://whosyourone.com/>.

obstacles, but also transparency in progressively addressing these obstacles together, in the view of community, and with the DNA group's encouragement and weekly exhortation.

Mission as a Change Agent

A critical element necessary for true measurable change would occur in the mission component. The missional community group has selected a local high school baseball team and its families as their target group. In the context of these more difficult relationships and demanding sacrifices, real-world application of principles given in the interventions would be necessary. The additional missional component will add to the schedules of the participants and will require them to further reevaluate their priorities. Participants will need to streamline their current schedule in order to build in time for baseball games, support team functions, and invest time into relationships built with families during the next year. Participants will necessarily have to implement and maintain the teachings given during the intervention presentations and developed further during DNA discussions.

The mission to the baseball team target group will also bring opportunities to have difficult conversations. The skill of speaking the truth in love will occur in two different categories. Firstly, as relationships are developed with members of the target group any evangelistic conversations will by nature involve confrontation of sin. This is a plainly difficult topic and will require missional community participants to be willing to disturb a newly formed superficial relational peace in order to facilitate an authentic spiritual peace with God. This is especially challenging in an evangelistic encounter because the person being evangelized may not share a worldview that readily accepts criticism or morality from other worldviews. However, this willingness to have difficult conversations in evangelistic encounters is part and parcel of being a witness of Christ in an often-hostile culture.

Secondly, there will be an opportunity to practice speaking the truth in love within difficult conversations amongst other members of the missional community. This inter-community aspect of having difficult conversations is a core tenet of Jeff Vanderstelt's model as it relates to environments of discipleship.¹⁷² The mission to a target group is difficult and during the course of the mission to the target group many issues of the heart will arise. People will be tempted to mis-prioritize their schedule, be angered when others are not shouldering the load, feel unappreciated, be treated rudely by others, etc. In these difficult real-world contexts the pressure of the mission exposes sin in the heart. Because of their previous training in missional community gatherings, participants understand that there is an expectation that sin being exposed on mission is a golden opportunity to speak the truth in love to one another and so grow as a disciple of Jesus.

Necessity as the Mother of Change

Thirdly, the mission component will create motivation to increase in biblical competency. A biblical example of this is found in the gospel of Mark when some of Jesus's disciples were unable to cast out certain demons and Jesus told them that these sorts of demons could only be cast out by prayer and fasting.¹⁷³ Whatever interest those disciples may have had in demonology, their interest was exponentially multiplied when they encountered difficult demons while on mission. In the same way, as the missional community confronts issues of worldview, racial issues, socio-economic barriers, fatherlessness, spiritual regeneration, gospel-centered financing of the mission, and a myriad of other issues that arise, the motivation to understand what

¹⁷² Jeff Vanderstelt, *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 116.

¹⁷³ Mark 9:14-29, ESV.

Scripture teaches on these topics will naturally emerge. This type of measurable change in biblical competency is not found in classroom-style teaching alone, but ultimately through the experiential learning that comes through mission.

The Role of the Body of Christ in Well-Rounded Spiritual Maturation

Another necessary component, beyond classroom-style teaching alone, that produces the well-rounded spiritual maturation necessary to overcome obstacles to engagement in discipleship is the work of the various spiritual gifts of the body of Christ as a whole. Jeff Vanderstelt refers to this as the “life in community” environment of discipleship.¹⁷⁴ This component emphasizes the insufficiency of one-on-one discipleship alone to develop a disciple. This would include one-on-one discipleship’s inability to develop a disciple capable of regularly overcoming obstacles to engaging in discipling themselves and others.

The intervention presentations in this project taught by the researcher were a demonstration of the use of the spiritual gift of teaching to edify the body. However, as the survey results demonstrate, the teaching gift alone is insufficient to affect measurable change, especially in the short term. However, this does not warrant disregarding the spiritual gift of teaching, but rather demonstrates the need for the varied spiritual gifts given to the church by Christ for the development of mature disciples.¹⁷⁵

A student engaged in discipleship begins to reflect their teacher. This axiom helps us to understand the shortcomings of using one-on-one discipleship alone. While there are times for one-on-one discipleship, exclusive use of this model leads to a student taking on not only the

¹⁷⁴ Jeff Vanderstelt, *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 103.

¹⁷⁵ Ephesians 4:8, ESV.

strengths of the teacher but the weaknesses as well. The only instance of one-on-one discipleship being sufficient was when that teacher was Jesus himself.

However, Jesus continues to make disciples today. In the Great Commission passage of Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus sent out many followers with a variety of spiritual gifts. It is important to note Jesus's closing remark that he would be with them. The full spectrum of spiritual gifts that were on display in perfection in Jesus are still available today through his body, the church. It is in the context of the community of Christ that Jesus, as the head, continues to make disciples. The solution to the shortcomings of one-on-one discipleship is discipleship in Christian community. Because a student becomes like their teacher, a well-rounded disciple must be disciplined by the full range of gifts reflected in the church body as a whole.

This does not mean that in order to be well-rounded a Christian must be personally known and disciplined by hundreds of people. The Apostle Paul did not have churches comprised of hundreds of people in view when speaking of the local church. The mega-church was not a part of Paul's lived experience. As a matter of fact, certain aspects of church life such as church discipline, make the most sense when approached from the smaller size ranges occurring during the life of Paul and the early church.¹⁷⁶ Much of the discipleship power of the early church was relational, and that level of relationship would have been possible in a smaller group. In the same way, the full range of spiritual gifts can often be found within a smaller group of ten to twenty people. This size range is congruent with the typical size of a standard missional community group which is reflected in the researcher's project.

¹⁷⁶ Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2012), 40.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This research contributes to the limited literature on how to address the obstacles of busyness / overscheduling, an unwillingness to have difficult conversations, and biblical incompetency in the context of Christian small groups. Addressing these issues, both preemptively and reactively, strengthens the engagement level and potential long-term success of small groups and DNA groups in particular. Because the missional community model works in any cultural context, the potential gains from research in this area could positively impact missions both locally and globally. Subsequent research could address best-practice models for both gathering data related to discipleship behavior and a more holistic approach to making meaningful improvement in participants' engagement in discipleship.

Locating this Project Among the Aims of Relevant Literature and Research

In a movement toward a more authentic spirituality that does not make the mistake of heterodoxy like the emergent church movement, yet reevaluates the scorecard for a church that reflects biblical goals, Reggie McNeal states that “a proper benchmark [of discipleship] is the number of people receiving life coaching, and the number of people debriefed in life experiences each week or month.”¹⁷⁷ This project sought to strengthen the small group unit called DNA groups which specifically provides for biblical counseling (what McNeal refers to as “life coaching”) and sharing the vulnerable parts of people’s everyday struggles as disciples seeking to increasingly worship Jesus in every area of life, be changed by the Spirit, and obey God’s Word.¹⁷⁸ While much ink has been spilt writing on maintaining attendance numbers, financial

¹⁷⁷ Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

¹⁷⁸ Jeff Vanderstelt, *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

giving, and church media, this project has sought address the heart of a model of discipleship that engenders authentic spiritual transformation and leads to missional action.

Cal Newport hit a nerve with his work on productivity in his best seller *Deep Work*.¹⁷⁹ The principles related to busyness and overscheduling apply not only to deep and high-value secular work, but also to foundational, highly relational aspects of Christian discipleship. This research project attempted to help participants recognize and acknowledge how even Christian activities can act as a proxy for discipleship.¹⁸⁰ In order to address a biblical justification for the researcher's approach, the first presentation in the intervention stage of this project endeavored to help participants evaluate their methods of daily scheduling in light of the Apostle Paul's first descriptor of love, which is patience.¹⁸¹ The initial intervention presented in this project reminded participants of their core values as Christians in relation to scheduling and sought to "achieve inner [spiritual] peace [by having their] schedule align with our values."¹⁸² John Mark Comer notes that this way of slowing down and "living into what really matters" is what Jesus called "abiding."¹⁸³ Participants in the intervention were presented with thematically chosen research and exhortations from the relevant literature in order to buttress the goals of the intervention.

Being a Christian enterprise, addressing obstacles to engagement in discipleship groups requires a theological foundation. Any obstacles to engagement in discipleship practices must

¹⁷⁹ Cal Newport, *Deep Work: Rules for Focuses Success in a Distracted World*, (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2016).

¹⁸⁰ Cal Newport, *Deep Work: Rules for Focuses Success in a Distracted World*, (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 64.

¹⁸¹ John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2019), 22.

¹⁸² John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 94.

¹⁸³ John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 94.

have their interventions grounded in Scriptural principles. This method was modeled in the researcher's current project. The intervention lessons were addressed through exegetical exposition, supported by theological interpretation and application. While statistical results from the project surveys were negligible, the case for addressing the three obstacles were made from a Scriptural basis.

Project participants had the assurance of knowing that our addressing obstacles to engagement from a Scriptural foundation guaranteed that they were not attempting psychoanalysis, behavioral analysis, or any other approach from a starting point of humanistic philosophy. This is an important consideration considering the warning against worldly philosophies in Colossians 2:8. That is not to discount the common grace of some secular thinking, but rather to start where God has spoken instead of where secular man begins.¹⁸⁴

As Gareth Weldon Icenogle demonstrates, humanity flourishes in smaller groups “where two, three or more persons come together for a common purpose and life together [as] affirmed in the New Testament,”¹⁸⁵ and these very small groups facilitate true growth only when superficiality is superseded by the hard work of transparent and sometimes difficult conversations. However, modern evangelical church culture has often become places where lack of genuine engagement results in members treating brief church functions as public appearances (not to mention the affect social media has had on superficiality and concern for reputation). This project supported the DNA subset of the missional community model which not only provides a context for living and communicating in a safe, transparent way but also provides

¹⁸⁴ David Powlison, *Seeing With New Eyes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003).

¹⁸⁵ Gareth Weldon Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 14.

training in biblical counseling. Inmate in the idea of biblical counseling is the directive to “confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”¹⁸⁶

Confession of sin is aided by fellow Christians lovingly addressing the issues revealed in DNA sessions through the method of leading questions and sometimes direct but loving reproof. This project aimed to weaken the modern tendency to avoid difficult conversations in order to maintain a false and superficial peace and instead engender an authentic peace with God and each other.¹⁸⁷

Bob Smietana of Lifeway Research notes that while Americans have a positive view of the Bible, many do not actually read it themselves. It is the contention of this research project that church members have been spoon fed premade curricula to the extent that they either never developed the skills, or those skills have atrophied, that are necessary to regularly use the Bible alone for spiritual formation and life application.¹⁸⁸ This project used research which shows the correlation between Bible reading and ways that pastors encourage their congregation to read the Bible. Most American Protestant pastors encourage Bible reading in traditional ways such as in sermons and providing free Bibles.

¹⁸⁶ James 5:15, ESV.

¹⁸⁷ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017).

¹⁸⁸ “Lifeway Research: Americans Are Fond of the Bible, Don’t Actually Read it,” Lifeway Research, accessed January 5, 2022, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2017/04/25/lifeway-research-americans-are-fond-of-the-bible-dont-actually-read-it/>.

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This project demonstrated that it is true that teaching and preaching alone will give negligible results in terms of measurable life pattern changes; however, it is contended by the researcher that in the context of this project the teaching element for addressing this obstacle is appropriately situated in a missional community context where measurable, meaningful changes in biblical competency can happen as a result of accountability in a DNA groups and missional application of those skills (as noted in chapter four).

¹⁸⁹ “Lifeway Research: Americans Are Fond of the Bible, Don’t Actually Read it,” Lifeway Research, accessed January 5, 2022, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2017/04/25/lifeway-research-americans-are-fond-of-the-bible-dont-actually-read-it/>.

Missional Communities as a Model for Overcoming Obstacles to Engagement

The underlying directive in discipleship is the Great Commission given by Jesus before his ascension.¹⁹⁰ At no time was this discipling mission done without a functioning implementation model. Even during the ministry of Jesus, disciples were sent two by two to every town and place he was about to visit.¹⁹¹ Form follows function and the goals of discipleship dictate what structures are best suited to the endeavor.

Daniel Denison and Gretchen Spreitzer argue that the form of an organization (or model) takes its shape based on the competing values of that organizational culture.¹⁹² The goals set the values and the values determine the shape of the model. There are multiple spectrums that affect a model. The spectrums addressed by Denison and Spreitzer were from centralization to decentralization, from maintenance to competitive position, from expansion to consolidation, and from maximization of output to development of human resources.¹⁹³

This has direct bearing on models of discipleship in churches and why this project was run using the missional community (cell group) model. Because attractional model churches value centralization (the pastor as leader), maintenance of system (labor for Sunday services), consolidation (of brand), and maximization of output (media content), they therefore focus on goal clarification, direction, decisiveness, stability, control, and continuity in order to maintain

¹⁹⁰ Matthew 28:16-20, ESV.

¹⁹¹ Luke 10:1, ESV.

¹⁹² Daniel Denison and Gretchen M. Spreitzer, "Organizational Culture and Organizational Development: A competing values approach," *Research in Organizational Change and Development* 5, no. 1 (1991): 1-21.

¹⁹³ Daniel Denison and Gretchen M. Spreitzer, "Organizational Culture and Organizational Development: A competing values approach," *Research in Organizational Change and Development* 5, no. 1 (1991): 1-21.

the focus of centralization. This model has a clear plan of discipleship; an example of this methodology would be Andy Stanley's five faith catalysts.¹⁹⁴

Great amounts of energy and resources are spent on research and development of other ecclesiastical models such as the attractional church model. The attractional church model, as evidenced by the name, focuses on what happens within the four walls of the church building. As the results of this project indicates, there will always be reduced results when the mode of discipleship centers around a teaching gift primarily. In fact, this mode of discipleship can increase in listener frustration and eventual burnout, creating an eventual post-Christian cultural environment. As Jared Wilson rightly notes, "A cognitive dissonance can result for those who hear a message all about what they should do to be more successful or victorious or happy or what-have-you, only to then hear the proposition that Jesus died for our sins. To hear a lengthy appeal to our abilities, culminating in an appeal to our utter inability, can cause spiritual whiplash."¹⁹⁵ While the aims of the attractional model are noble, the model is not best-suited for long-term, life pattern-altering, measurable change. This research project was founded on the assumption that models such as the attractional model are not the most efficient model in terms of discipleship development or creating measurable change in the categories established by this project's surveys. The DNA group focused on in this project is a subset of the missional community model (commonly referred to as a "cell group") and is a more worthy recipient of research time and energy.

¹⁹⁴ Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012).

¹⁹⁵ Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto Against the Status Quo*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 27.

Apart from a model similar to a missional community group (the cell group model), the experiential learning from group mission and DNA-level accountability is lacking. The attractional church does make room for personal ministry, but often this is oriented around the ministry of the individual¹⁹⁶ rather than small group oriented and therefore lacks communal power.

In contrast, the missional community (cell group) model focuses on decentralization (largely independent missional communities), expansion (of geographic mission impact), competitive position (over non-kingdom objectives), and development of human resources (development and exploitation of all spiritual gifts on mission).¹⁹⁷ This model is transparently more similar to the early church and even what is modeled in the book of Acts. It also provides opportunity for teaching in the missional community gathering combined with personal accountability in DNA groups, and experiential learning on mission to a target group. All of these elements combined most effectively cause measurable change in overcoming the obstacles addressed in this project.

The Direction of Future Research

The obstacles addressed by the researcher in this project, while valid, are limited in scope and only represent a microcosm of obstacles encountered by participants in DNA groups and other groups that are similar in nature. A more holistic approach to this research must begin with a more thorough investigation of the obstacles to engagement in DNA-style small groups.

¹⁹⁶ Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 128-129.

¹⁹⁷ Daniel Denison and Gretchen M. Spreitzer, "Organizational Culture and Organizational Development: A competing values approach," *Research in Organizational Change and Development* 5, no. 1 (1991): 1-21.

A more thorough investigation into these obstacles would include a longer and more detailed survey for participants that covers a myriad of reasons for lack of engagement. In addition to self-assessments, family surveys would be given so that those in the immediate family of the participants would have input as to why their family member is tempted to disengage. Pastors would also be surveyed because they would likely have experience with individual participants in terms of institutional engagement and lack thereof. Future research should also engage relevant surveys and studies done by other reputable organizations such as Focus on the Family¹⁹⁸, Lifeway Research¹⁹⁹, and Pew Research.²⁰⁰

Once more detailed data is obtained, the data must be funneled into core categories. These core categories would likely range in number from ten to fifteen and would create the more solid statistical and empirical foundation for a more holistic intervention. These core categories would likely reflect both behavioral habits and sociological contexts. Each of the core categories determined by a more holistic investigation would be addressed by biblical teaching, psychological and behavioral aids, practice on mission in community, coaching, and reflection in the DNA setting.

Research should also be broadened to consider the overcoming of obstacles to engagement in more foundational areas of discipleship like missional communities. The missional community model is a minority model in North American churches. Research should be done to assess cultural resistance to the missional community (cell group) model as a whole, which would be tied to the ability to use the sort of DNA groups assessed in this project. It is the

¹⁹⁸ Focus on the Family, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/>.

¹⁹⁹ Lifeway Research, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://lifewayresearch.com/>.

²⁰⁰ Pew Research Center, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/>.

researcher's assertion that resistance to a missional community model is likely to be related to stress of potential participants over prospective time requirements, dealing with uncomfortable issues in their own and others lives, and feelings of inadequacy. Other critical areas of resistance would need to be discovered through a broader investigation.

More research and future projects should be considered related to obstacles to engagement in using the missional community (cell group) model as a church planting strategy. The missional community model is focused on multiplication of groups and has an inherent pipeline for ministry leadership due to the constant need for developing missional community leaders within a local church. Missional communities also meet weekly which fulfills a common rhythm of the local church. In some areas, missional communities also practice communion together. This is a somewhat controversial topic because many believe communion is a sacrament / ordinance only to be practiced within an established local church. However, others (like Jeff Vanderstelt) see missional communities as appropriate places for practicing the ancient Christian ceremony. For those missional communities that move ahead with this ordinance, they are already one step closer to functioning as a local church. For these reasons, it is naturally equipped to serve a role in church planting.²⁰¹ The researcher speculates that the primary resistance to using missional communities as a local church planting method would be associated with territorialism. Also, most churches put any emphasis that they may have into promoting church planting internationally or in another region, and likely do not consider church planting in their own region because of the assumption that all people should attend the church in question. Many churches see outreach only as a method for growing the home church. This requires

²⁰¹ "Missional Communities and Their Role in Church Planting", Desiring God, accessed January 5, 2022, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/missional-communities-and-their-role-in-church-planting>.

correction and a willingness to place kingdom priorities above organizational priorities. Church plants have been shown to be highly effective in reaching nonbelievers²⁰² and the missional community model could supply trained groups to that end.

Cross-cultural application of the missional community and DNA group model is fertile ground for future research. Common obstacles to engagement in this model of discipleship do not necessarily translate tit-for-tat into another cultural context. For instance, the obstacle of busyness and overscheduling that was addressed in the current project would not apply in the same way to a slower paced, agrarian society. Cultures that are known to be more direct (perhaps even harsh) in everyday communications may not find unwillingness to have difficult conversations to be an issue. However, each culture will have unique challenges to overcome. The nature of the human condition may not guarantee a certain expression of a problem, but it does guarantee obstacles will be present in any culture.

Research should also be done regarding the level of commitment churches make to embracing a cell group model in comparison to levels of successful engagement in missional discipleship. Churches often fall into one of three main categories: churches who have small groups, churches made up of small groups, and churches who are small groups. An investigation should be made into the theory that churches that are more fully committed to the missional community model have members who are more ready and willing to embrace the challenge of obstacles that stand in the way of fulfilling the mission of the church. Do traditional church models have members that are more comfortable with the cultural status-quo and therefore show recalcitrancy in terms of embracing obstacles to missional discipleship? How closely do these models correlate to measurable, successful implementation of cell groups? This would be a

²⁰² “Why Plant Churches?”, Redeemer City to City, accessed January 5, 2022, <https://redeemercitytocity.com/articles-stories/why-plant-churches>.

worthy direction of research and may help pastors prepare their churches on a more fundamental, ecclesiastical level before trying to implement rigorous missional community ideas.

In a similar vein, research should be done regarding the comparison of convert growth to transfer growth in regard to success in implementing cell groups or missional ideology. In other words, are Christians who are more newly converted more eager to embrace changes that may seem too radical to life-long Christians? If so, is that an indicator of church plants being more capable in terms of implementing cell groups and missional ideology? Or does transfer growth of established Christians enable the mission because those particular transfers are likely to be arriving because they have heard of the authentic, mission-oriented nature of the church's small group ministry and therefore come ready to engage?

Finally, research and development of strategies related to missional communities, DNA groups, and mission to local target groups should be incorporated in seminary-level training. More training is needed on practical cell group theology and methodology. This type of cell group model has some cross-over with cross-cultural missions courses, but because God has called all his people to at least be missionaries where they are, the principles apply and are a great hope in the revitalization of the church in North America and the spreading of the gospel to the ends of the Earth.

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Appendix A: Discipleship Survey Section #1

Section #1:

Section #1	Always	Almost Always	Occasionally	Not Very Often	Not at All
	5	4	3	2	1
My weekly activity is generally the result of intentional planning.					
I consider kingdom work as a category to be considered during my weekly scheduling.					
My family's extracurricular activity schedule takes precedence in our weekly schedule.					
When I discover regular neglect of discipleship activities in my schedule, I try to adjust my scheduling goals.					
Add up each column and provide total:					

Appendix B: Discipleship Survey Section #2

Section #2	Always	Almost Always	Occasionally	Not Very Often	Not at All
	5	4	3	2	1
When giving advice to another Christian, I help them apply the gospel as the primary lens through which the Christian heart is to function.					
When giving advice to another Christian, I trace the sin I see revealed in their life back to their flesh's desire to operate in its default pattern and help them understand and confront it.					
When giving advice to another Christian, I help them to not look to self-willpower for lasting change, but rather the Holy Spirit.					
When giving advice to another Christian, I use the Scriptures as the sufficient source for the truth needed in their advancing in godliness.					
When giving advice to another believer, I lead them to use prayer as a means for God to conform their mind to His will.					
Add up each column and provide total:					

Appendix C: Discipleship Survey Section #3

Section #3	Always	Almost Always	Occasionally	Not Very Often	Not at All
	5	4	3	2	1
I read the Bible weekly and personally meditate upon what I read.					
When reading a Bible passage for personal meditation, I attempt to discover the author's original meaning to his original audience.					
When reading a Bible passage for personal meditation, I consider what that passage reveals about who man is and who God is.					
When reading a Bible passage for personal mediation, I consider how its basic principle(s) apply to everyday life.					
Add up each column and provide total:					

Appendix D: IRB Approval

Date: 1-15-2022

IRB #: IRB-FY20-21-503
Title: Small Group Discipleship Survey
Creation Date: 12-23-2020
End Date:
Status: **Approved**
Principal Investigator: Charles Kelly
Review Board: Research Ethics Office
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	No Human Subjects Research
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Key Study Contacts

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